

assessment of what the international community had to do in response to the threat posed by Iran. He said that “a huge part of world opinion is frankly almost indifferent. It would be bizarre if it weren’t so deadly serious”. He then said, “We have in my view to wake up”. This language should take us straight away to Joel 3: “Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, *wake up* the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up” (v. 9). This prophecy shows that the call to “wake up” will go forth prior to

Armageddon. Mr Blair’s speech can be viewed in that context.

The Apostle Paul commanded his readers to put on “for an helmet, the hope of salvation” (1 Thess. 5:8). This hope is “the hope of Israel” (Acts 28:20), and “salvation is of the Jews” (Jno. 4:22). Yet, according to Mr Blair, the “two state solution . . . is Palestine’s only hope of salvation”. Although he is ignorant of the hope of Israel, his speech unwittingly shows that the time when the hope will come to pass is near.

## Armageddon (2)

Geoff Henstock

*In Part 1 of this article we looked at the context in Revelation 16 of the only reference in the Bible to ‘Armageddon’. We then looked at the two ideas of what it refers to: firstly that it is a literal place, and secondly that it is symbolic of the judgement of the nations. In the concluding part of the article we will look at the Old Testament background to both these ideas.*

**A**S WE SAW at the end of [Part 1](#) of this study, the word ‘Armageddon’ signifies ‘a heap of sheaves in a valley for judgement’. We would now like to explore in the Old Testament this idea of Armageddon being a symbol of God’s judgements on the nations, a concept for which there is considerable support. We will then look at what the Old Testament says about the geographical location of God’s judgements on the nations.

### Armageddon in the Old Testament

In references sprinkled throughout the prophets there is imagery and language similar to that of the sixth vial. The imagery used in Revelation has been drawn from these places. These include Isaiah 66:15-18, which is a clear statement that God will gather the nations to a terrible, Divinely inflicted judgement, and Zephaniah 3:8, where the prophet uses similarly graphic language about God gathering the nations for judgement.

In Ezekiel 38 God is presented as dragging the nations who invade Israel. They come down with the purpose of taking spoil (v. 13), but verse 4 is explicit about God’s role in the exercise: “and I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army,

horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armour, even a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords”. God puts hooks into their jaws and brings them forth. That God is the One bringing Gog to Israel is repeated in verse 16 and again in 39:2. This is reminiscent of Revelation 16:16, where

God gathers the nations to Armageddon.

Daniel 2 contains an element of the imagery of Revelation 16 in a chapter which is the foundation stone for understanding God’s prophetic plan with the nations. Even though the vision in Daniel 2 uses a different metaphor for its basis, there is a link to the imagery of Revelation 16: “Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth” (v. 35). A metal image pulverised by a rock would be reduced to metal filings. But, in a rare mixing of metaphors, the dust of this ground-up metallic image is transformed into the chaff of the threshing floor, taking up the image of grain being threshed in judgement.

Habakkuk 3:12-14 is another image of judgement at the time of the end that involves threshing and also involves Divine deliverance. Micah 4 takes up this imagery in more detail: “Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion. But they know not the thoughts of the LORD, neither understand they His counsel:

## Armageddon centred on Jerusalem

	Dan. 2	Dan. 11,12	Ezek. 38,39	Joel 3	Micah 4,5	Zeph. 3	Zech. 14	Rev. 16
<b>Last/latter days/ time of the end</b>	✓	✓	✓	📖	✓	📖	📖	📖
<b>Many/all nations</b>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Nations gathered to Israel/Jerusalem</b>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	📖
<b>Judgement of nations and leaders</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>God is exalted</b>	✓	📖	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	📖
<b>Nations likened to sheaves of wheat</b>	✓			✓	✓			✓
<b>Day of the Lord God Almighty</b>				✓		✓	✓	✓

📖 Implied by the context

✓ Specifically stated

for He shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor. Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion: for I will make thine horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass: and thou shalt beat in pieces many people: and I will consecrate their gain unto the LORD, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth" (vv. 11-13).

A similar picture using the same imagery is presented in Isaiah 41, where God speaks of intervening to deliver His people, and using them as instruments for the judgement of the nations:

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness. Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the LORD, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills

as chaff. Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the LORD, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel" (vv. 10-16).

### Armageddon in Joel 3

The concepts associated with the sixth seal are a recurring motif in the prophets, and this becomes especially obvious in Joel 3, a chapter laden with phraseology echoed by the sixth vial. Joel 3 describes an invasion of the land of Israel in the last days. In verse 2 God gathers all nations to judgement: "I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for My people and for My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted My land".

The AV says God brings them together to "plead with them there for My people". This might sound like He is negotiating with them on behalf of His people. In fact the word 'plead' in Hebrew is *shaphat*,<sup>1</sup> which means 'to judge, to pronounce sentence'. The same word is used in verse 12, where it says God will "judge all the heathen". There is a parallel use of the word in Ezekiel 38:22, where the AV reads, regarding

1. Strong 8199.

God's judgements, "I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood". The pleading in this context implies no negotiation. The NIV in Joel 3:2 captures the idea well when it says, "I will enter into judgment against them".

So, as in Ezekiel 38, Zephaniah 3, Isaiah 66 and Revelation 16, God brings the nations to the land of Israel for judgement. In Joel 3:9-11 there are further words that are echoed in the sixth vial: "Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up: beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong. Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye heathen, and gather yourselves together round about: thither cause Thy mighty ones to come down, O LORD".

Here are words that speak of political instability arising from people asserting their independence. Even little, weak nations, such as abound in the



**The Kidron Valley at Jerusalem, clearly too small for a great army to assemble**

(Picture: Tony Benson)

area formerly occupied by the Ottoman Empire, are seen to be arming themselves to the teeth to assert their authority. The prophet portrays a situation where war is imminent. In verse 1 it is Judah and Jerusalem that are at the heart of the conflict. And in verse 12 God intervenes to judge the nations: "Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about".

The nations are aroused and told to "come up". The phrase 'come up' is frequently used in Scripture of travelling to Jerusalem. As Israel's capital, and as the city that is at the heart of tensions in the Middle East, it is likely to be the focus of the

invaders' attention. But, curiously, they are told to come up to a valley; normally you would come up to a hill and go down to a valley.

### The Valley of Jehoshaphat

As in verse 2, the valley to which they are summoned is the Valley of Jehoshaphat. Where is this valley? An ancient tradition dating from the time of Eusebius in about the fourth century identifies the Valley of Jehoshaphat as the Kidron Valley between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. Brother Thomas favours that view,<sup>2</sup> but the source of the theory is 1,000 years after Joel wrote, and there are no contemporary records, in particular from within Scripture, which provide support to this view.

No doubt Eusebius or his contemporaries linked the name with Jerusalem because of other prophecies such as Daniel 11 and Zechariah 14 that speak of this final conflict being centred on Jerusalem. Whilst there is some logic in this assumption, there are several reasons for concluding that Joel did not intend to refer to a specific geographic spot. The name Jehoshaphat means 'the judgement of Yahweh'. Like the name Armageddon, it is almost certainly a symbolic place name. The prophet might well have used this form to remind his readers of Judah's remarkable deliverance from the invading armies of Ammon, Moab and Edom that occurred only about fifty years before in the days of King Jehoshaphat, as recorded in 2 Chronicles 20. In that chapter it is not clear where this deliverance was effected, although it might have been at Tekoa, so it is vain to try to pin it down to a specific valley such as the Kidron.\*

The name Jehoshaphat includes the word *shaphat* considered [above](#) and occurring in both verses 2 and 12, and this supports the conclusion that the name should be interpreted symbolically. Jehoshaphat is a play on words in these verses. Joel is referring to a general place of judgement

2. *Eureka*, Vol. 3, p. 603.

\* Links between the book of Joel, 2 Chronicles 20 and also Psalm 83 were explored in "Jehoshaphat in Psalm and prophecy", Edward Whittaker and Tony Benson, *The Testimony*, Sept. 1976, p. 335 and Oct. 1976, p. 387. These articles put forward the view that Joel was written at this time. Brother F. T. Pearce in *From Hosea to Zephaniah* (The Christadelphian, 1979), suggests Joel was written in the time of Jehoiada, thirty years after Jehoshaphat's deliverance as recorded in 2 Chronicles 20 (p. 21).—T.B.

rather than a specific valley. In any case, the vast host involved in this invasion would never fit into one valley in this region, and certainly not into the extremely tight Kidron Valley.

The parallels with the sixth vial are already quite strong, and they become stronger yet in verses 13 and 14: "Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the vats overflow; for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision".

Verse 13 speaks of the judgement of a vast multitude, and does so in terms of a harvest. In verse 14 the multitude are described as being in a "valley of decision". As the margin suggests, the Hebrew word carries the idea of a sharp implement, perhaps some kind of rasping tool used in the harvest. In Isaiah 28:27 this word is rendered as "threshing instrument". Whilst it can mean 'decision', this is the only place where it is so translated; probably the idea is more one of judgement or sentencing in this "day of the Lord". The multitude is, in the terms of Armageddon, sheaves gathered in a valley for threshing.

### Two harvests

Two harvests are contemplated here. The first harvest is of grain and the second harvest involves the crushing of grapes. The Septuagint speaks of plural sickles in this verse, not just one, perhaps indicating a sickle for each crop. These two harvests also link us to prophecies in Revelation of judgement at the time of the end. In Revelation 14 exactly the same two harvests are spoken about at the time of the end, and presented in the same order. The grain harvest is described in Revelation 14:14-16, whilst the grape harvest is described in verses 17-20.

This graphic language reinforces Joel's message of judgement. The harvest is ripe, and clearly it is a massive harvest. The blood covers 1,600 furlongs, or about 200 miles. No doubt this is designed to impress upon us the magnitude of the judgement. As Revelation is a book of symbols, the primary significance of 1,600 furlongs will not be literal, but it is also a curious fact that the closely settled area of Israel covers a distance of about 200 miles. Perhaps there is a hint that the judgement of God at the time of the end, the judgement to which Armageddon refers, will be evident across the length and breadth of Israel. If so, we might have a key concept that brings our strands of exegesis together.

### Local or national?

Ezekiel describes the extent of the invading army at the time of the end: "Thou shalt ascend and come like a storm, thou shalt be like a cloud to cover the land, thou, and all thy bands, and many people with thee" (38:9). The invader is focused on capturing Jerusalem, but almost certainly he would seek to subdue the whole nation. In Ezekiel 39 there also are several hints that the invading force will be dispersed throughout the land when it meets the Divine force that defeats it. For instance, in verses 4 and 5 the prophet speaks of the enemy falling in two distinct areas: the mountains of Israel and the open field. The number of slain is so great it takes seven months to bury them all (v. 12). The prophet goes on to note that all the people of the land are required to assist in this task (v. 13), suggesting that there are dead scattered throughout all the land.

The prophet Zechariah's vision of the judgements at the time of the end is also relevant. From Zechariah 12 we know that the conflict will be focused on Jerusalem, and there are very logical reasons why that would be so. Zechariah 14:2 says that the vast army that invades Israel initially appears to be successful. Consistent with Revelation 16, Zechariah 14:2 presents God as gathering the nations to battle. Zechariah tells us that Jerusalem is captured, while in Daniel 11:45 we are told that the invader actually establishes his headquarters in Jerusalem. The picture in Zechariah 14:2 is one of complete defeat for the Israeli forces.

The force that invades the Land at the time of the end will be a massive force with highly aggressive intentions. Israel's army, skilful as it is, will be no match for this mighty force and will be overwhelmed. It is then, when Israel is utterly unable to deliver itself, that God will intervene, as verse 3 says. Verse 3 makes it clear that this will not be the first time God has fought on behalf of His people; the prophet is almost certainly harking back to the days of the Judges.

Many prophets present complementary pictures of a great judgement of the nations at the time of the end. Jerusalem will be at the centre of this controversy, but it will not be possible to limit the battlefield to that small area. Such a limited battlefield would be unlikely from a military standpoint, and it would be inconsistent with the pictures the prophets present of the enemy coming to grief throughout the land. As in the days of the Judges, the enemy might concentrate its forces in one location but the battle can still range over a larger territory.

## Conclusion

So what is Armageddon? It is a symbolic name for the place of judgement on the nations when Christ returns to establish God's throne. The centre of at least the initial conflict will be Israel. The invader will cover the land, appear triumphant, but will meet his end through Divine intervention. In that day of the battle of God Almighty the people will be delivered by God as they were through Gideon and through Deborah and Barak. The nations will be brought as sheaves into a valley for judgement and the chaff will be dispersed to the winds.

And why should this matter to us? Is this all just an interesting theological by-path of no practical value to us? Certainly not! Principally there

are two reasons why this subject is important to us as the servants of God:

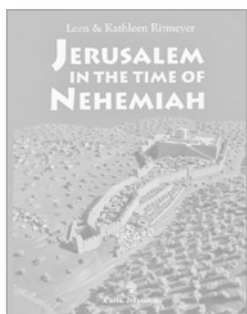
- 1 It gives us an insight as to God's estimation of the kingdom of men, and that should warn us against being seduced by the world around us;
- 2 The signs of the times give us every reason to expect that this day is near, and a clear picture of the judgements about to be unleashed will be a powerful stimulus to us to prepare for that great and terrible day before it is too late.

Let us, then, watch events as they unfold, encouraged that God is in control and that He will bring them to a climax soon when He intervenes to establish His Kingdom.

(Concluded)

# A look at Jerusalem after the exile

John Nicholls



## *Jerusalem in the Time of Nehemiah.*

Leen and Kathleen Ritmeyer (2005).

Published by Carta, Jerusalem.

Available from The Christadelphian, 404 Shaftmoor Lane, Birmingham, B28 8SZ.

**T**HIS BOOK is a companion to several other books on Biblical archaeology by Brother and Sister Ritmeyer.<sup>1</sup> It is another excellent book on Jerusalem by the authors, giving an up-to-date summary of the archaeology of the Persian period when the temple was rebuilt and Nehemiah repaired the walls of Jerusalem. The reviewer is not aware of any books covering this period, and even the splendid volume by Hershel Shanks<sup>2</sup> has little to say about this period of Jerusalem's history.

The book under review has a wealth of illustrations and information, and is a delight to read. It begins with a helpful summary of written sources for the time of Nehemiah, beginning, of course, with the Bible books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther and the contemporary prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Notes on the Darius Inscription in Behistan, Iran, and on Herodotus,

Xenophon and Diodorus Siculus follow. A history of the period follows, which draws together succinctly the Biblical accounts. There is then an imaginative reconstruction of the period as seen through the eyes of a fictitious character called Ashur, who lived in Tekoa and whose great goal was to play his full part in the rebuilding of the damaged walls of Jerusalem, unlike the nobles from the same area (Neh. 3:5).

The bulk of the book, however, appears under the heading of "An Archaeological Tour of Nehemiah's Jerusalem". This part begins with a large coloured map of the probable course of the wall and the position of the rebuilt temple. This map refers to the gates and parts of the wall, and also to the archaeologists who located them, some in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem after the Six-Day War in June 1967 when this area became part of the State of Israel.

An account then follows of Nehemiah's wall, following the sequence given in Nehemiah 3. Little details given in this chapter are discussed by the Ritmeyers. For example, the Sheep Gate was close to the temple, and its possible identity with

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1. *From Sinai to Jerusalem*, reviewed Dec. 2004, p. 467; *The Ritual of the Temple in the Time of Christ*, reviewed Jan. 2005, p. 12; *Jerusalem in the Year 30 A.D.*, reviewed Feb. 2006, p. 46.
  2. *Jerusalem: an Archaeological Biography*, Random House, 1995.