

Treading through the Winepress . . .

by

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THE sequence of events at the second coming of Christ have given rise to all sorts of interpretation and speculation. Indeed, the entire subject has always been one that we so eagerly wish to fathom, yet seems to be so deeply entrenched in mystery. Even the Apostles wanted to know what the exact events were leading to the return of Christ (Matt. 24:3).

It is obvious from their writings that they originally believed that Christ would return in their generation---no doubt based on Christ's own statement that that generation would not pass "till all things were fulfilled" (Matt. 24:34).

Much of prophetic writing is couched in terminology that appears to be figurative and not to be taken literal. But some interpreters will take some things literal that others say you can't. Who is to say what is to be taken literal and what can not be?

At the end of this age when God intervenes in world affairs Revelation describes Christ as "treading through the winepress" (Rev. 19:15) and that He and his holy angels will be riding white horses (v. 11, 14), and that the blood from the battle will flow up to the horse's bridles (v. 20). Is all this just symbolism or is it to be taken literally? Will Christ literally be galloping down the literal "Valley of Jehoshaphat" on a white steed with a horse Calvary of angelic beings behind him against tanks and modern warfare armor? Would not that be something?

Now we can see that the phrase "treading through the winepress" is symbolic of treading through the blood bath, isn't it? Or should we take even that to a literal interpretation and say that He must stomp through some winery?

What about Matthew 24:27, 30: “For as the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. . . .Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.” Will Christ be on his Charger when we see Him? Will He literally look like a bolt of lightning? Or is that just an analogy? It is because people view things differently on what is to be taken literal and what is not that often leads to far different interpretations. In one sense of the word, it makes little difference if the events described are symbolic or literal because there is still a spiritual message that underlies the text.

One of the best ways to approach prophetic understanding is to use the principle of using past Biblical events to help explain what is going to happen in the future? Indeed, this is a principle that the Biblical writers themselves said that we are to use. Paul says: "Now all these things happened unto them for examples [or types, if you please]: and they were written for our admonition [instruction] upon whom the ends of the world [ages] are come" (I Cor 10:11).

Notice Isaiah, “What shall happen?” asks God. He answers by saying: ‘Let them show the FORMER THINGS, what they be, that we may consider them [those former things], and know the LATTER END of them; or declare us things for to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter’ ” (Isa 41:22, 23). Paul taught that the beginning of the Exodus with the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites was an example of Christian baptism in his day (I Cor 10:2). It typified the leading by the true Jesus (Joshua) of his people into the Kingdom of God — the real “Land of Canaan” that was promised to Abraham (Heb 4:8-11). If this is so then maybe we should look closely at the events of when ancient Israel entered the Promised Land to help us interpret what will come in the future.

What happened at the last year of the Exodus? After Israel left Kadesh-Barnea (Num 20:22) they came to Edom, then Moab and then Ammon, and then to the death of Moses and his burial in Mount Nebo opposite Jericho. This is followed by Joshua [a type of Jesus] leading the children of Israel across Jordan into the Promised Land. It is interesting that the first group of people that Israel encountered was Edom. Edom is the subject of Christ’s wrath when He returns (Isa 34:6). The judgment occurs at the end time for we see the heavens retreat as a scroll and the stars fall (v. 34). At the time of the Exodus, the Edomites refused to let Israel go through their territory — though Israel offered to pay for all food and water (Num 20:18-21). This began the animosity of Israel with Edom and they became known as “the people of my curse” (Isa 34:5).

Very few good words are spoken of Edom in the Bible. Obadaiah devotes his entire little book to the destruction of Edom. Isaiah says that there will be a “great slaughter in the land of Idumea [Edom]” (v. 6). If this is so then why have not prophetic interpreters not spoken of a great battle that occurs between Christ and Edom before He touches his feet on top of Mount of Olives outside of Jerusalem? From Isaiah 34 we see that the divine judgment that will occur on the world nations will take place in EDOM! Verse 2 says “For the indignation of the Lord is upon ALL NATIONS, and His fury upon all their armies: He has utterly destroyed them, He has delivered them into the slaughter!”

You hear much about the “Battle of Armageddon” but nothing about the great battle that occurs in Edom. And the reality is that there is no such thing as a “Battle of Armageddon.” The Book of Revelation simply says that the armies of the world will gather themselves together at Armageddon (located about 70 miles northwest of Jerusalem), but the battle will not be performed there (Rev 16:14, 16). Joel talks about the time when God will “gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there. . .” (Joel 3:2). Again, he says: “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. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats 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.” (Vs. 12-14).

The valley of Jehoshaphat is south of Jerusalem, extending from the western part of the Dead Sea all the way south to the Gulf of Aqaba. The valley of Jezreel, where Megiddo lies, is some 70 miles north of Jerusalem. The valley of Jehoshaphat lies along side of the ancient nation of Edom. The very celestial disturbances witnessed in Isa. 34:4 are those in Joel 3:15. This is when the prophets predicted the time when the Lord God, in all His glory, comes from the area of Edom “treading through the winepress.”

“Who is this?” , Isaiah asks, “That comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah [Edom's capital]? This that is glorious in his apparel, traveling in the greatness of his strength? . . . I have trodden the winepress alone . . . and blood shall be sprinkled on my garments . . . for the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come” (Isa 63:14).

The judgment of Christ on Edom, in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, is actually the first event that Christ personally conducts upon His return to Earth. This all occurs prior to the time He goes to Jerusalem, battles with the encircling armies there and touches His feet on the Mount of Olives. The description of Christ and His angels riding horses in Rev. 19:11, 14 reveals how His feet are soaked in blood without them actually touching the ground. Yet, there are other intervening events that should be understood.

Jesus said that when He returns to Jerusalem it will be from the direction of the East (Matt. 24:27) in relation to the Olivet ridge where He addressed His disciples. His approach will be from the area of Jericho. It is just east of Jericho, and across the Jordan River, where Moses died and was given a secret burial (Deut 34:16). Returning to the route that the Israelites took at the Exodus, after their encounter with Edom they went to the King's Highway in Moab and turned north to Mount Nebo which over-looked the Promised Land opposite Jericho (Deut 34:1-6). If Jesus follows this same route to the place where Moses is buried, then Mount Nebo might just be the staging area where Moses and Elijah rise out of their graves first and then the resurrection of the righteous dead along with those who are changed in a twinkling of an eye. The angels gather the Spirit composed Saints from around the world and from that spot the whole assembly proceeds westward in the air to approach Jerusalem from the East.

Now notice Luke 17. In verse 24 Jesus says: “For as the lightning, that lights out of one part under heaven, shines to the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of

man be in His day.” The context here is the return of Jesus Christ “in His day” — not in the generation that He was then addressing. In verse 25 He says: “But first He must suffer many things, and be rejected of THIS generation.” Jesus then talked about the unexpectedness of His coming by a reference to Noah. The next thing He mentions is a long reference to Lot, the nephew of Abraham. Right after stating the example of Lot, Jesus then said that some people would be in bed, others grinding, and others in the field (vs. 34-36) — and that from each group there would be some taken somewhere. (Notice that this all occurs at the same time — at Christ’s coming as the lightning — not 7 or 3½ years earlier!) The disciples asked: “Where Lord?” “And He [Christ] said unto them, wherever the body is, there will the eagles be gathered together.”

Jesus’ enigmatic answer must be understood in the entire context of what He was addressing. Jesus was not just alluding to historical facts about Lot, Abraham, etc., for nothing. Correct biblical interpretation involves paying attention to what this great teacher was trying to convey. Jesus had taken five verses to relate about the experiences of Lot and his escape from the destruction of Sodom. Lot fled Sodom to a small village east of the Dead Sea called Zoar and then he went “up to the mountain” (Gen 19:17, 30). This mountain must have been prominent for it did not need identification to the disciples that he was addressing. If Christ told His disciples to pay heed to the example of Lot in regard to circumstances involving the Second Advent, then it is important for us to determine the identification of this mountain. Can this be done? Let’s see.

The cities of the plain where Lot lived were in the northern parts around the Dead Sea region, not in the south. This is right in the vicinity of where Moses was buried on Mount Nebo. There was no person in the Old Testament more important than Moses. God hid his exact burial place so that people would not retreat to his sepulchre to worship him. Satan wanted to make known to the world where Moses’ body was buried, but Michael the archangel stepped in (Jude 9) and secured the command of God regarding its secrecy (Deut 32:49). The one significant “dead body” of all the Old Testament was Moses and he is buried somewhere on Mount Nebo. And Jesus said that where the body [of Moses] is, is where there will be a great gathering — as if on eagle’s wings. It appears that the resurrected saints are what are referred to in this passage, and that they will be carried there to this spot after the “first resurrection.”

Notice further that Mt. Nebo is where Elijah also ended his career and it is the exact area where Lot went to, in order to escape the burning fires of Sodom. The last official act of Elijah while he was on earth was to lead his successor Elishah from Bethel eastwards to the Jordan River, then to cross the Jordan dry shod by a miracle — similar to the miracle when the Israelites crossed into the Holy Land under Joshua? Elijah’s departure was in the direction of Moses’ burial spot. He was then taken up by a whirlwind into a cloud (II Kings 2:11). [Though we later hear of Elijah (II Chron 21:12). it is no doubt symbolic that Elijah’s mission on earth was completed on the east side of Jordan, opposite Jericho near the burial place of Moses.] The completion of both Moses’ and Elijah’s careers was in the same area. The lifting of Elijah into the clouds may be a type of the way the resurrected saints will be gathered to meet the Lord in the air (I Thess 4:17).

When Christ gave a vision of his Second Advent to three of his disciples, they noticed two personages standing in glory with Christ. One was Moses and the other was

Elijah (Matt 16:27, 28 to 17:9). Moses, who was the most important individual in the entire Old Testament period, may be the very first individual to be resurrected right over the very spot that he was buried. Then we have Elijah, who may also have been buried in that area. The so-called “transfiguration” was in reality a vision (Matt 17:9) which may be showing the first two resurrections in the “first resurrection” which could be Moses and Elijah. This vision shows Jesus in His glorified appearance addressing these two individuals in preparation to the gathering of the spirit born children of God that is about to take place right there. The last prophecy in the Old Testament, in Malachi the fourth chapter, refers to Moses and Elijah in the same context. Moses, the great lawgiver and organizer, and Elijah, who was prophesied to turn the hearts of the children back to the fathers. Christ may be apprising Moses and Elijah as to what is happening and giving them instructions in preparation to the meeting of the Saints in the air.

The resurrected saints from around the world will gather together east of Jerusalem. Christ shall take them with Him to Jerusalem from the east. He then descends to stand on the Mount of Olives — “and his feet shall stand in that day on the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east” (Zech 14:4). He returns exactly as the angel in Acts 1:11 prophesied, in the same manner as He left to the very spot that His feet last touched the earth nearly 2000 years before. “And His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it to the south. . . And the Lord my God shall come and all of the saints with thee” (Zech 14:4). Luke records Jesus’ prophecy: “And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall BE SHAKEN. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Luke 21:25-27).

Meanwhile, “Jerusalem is compassed with armies” (Luke 21:20) for the final battle. The massive army of nations that assembled in the valley of Jezreel far to the north, in the area of Megiddo, has moved its way south for an encirclement around Jerusalem. They move in two or most likely three columns of armed forces in a southerly direction. One column will take the coastal route southward as did the ancient Assyrians in the time of Hezekiah (Isaiah 36 through 39). The main column will thrust south through Samaria on the Central highland route to Jerusalem. A third column will travel eastwards to the Jordan Valley and then head south to Jericho and around the Dead Sea into the area of Edom with the intention of joining up with the coastal forces to accomplish a complete encirclement of Jerusalem. But the forces of the eastern flank have already been devastated in the Battle of Edom by the time Jesus sets foot on the Mount of Olives. Just before this is the time of the great gathering of Jesus, Moses, Elijah, and those of the first resurrection. As this is occurring, the coastal troops move in and take half of the city of Jerusalem (Zech 14:2). This leaves the main column heading south through the central area to close in and take the city. The main column is headed by one that Isaiah calls “the Assyrian” (Isa. 10:5-34).

The two chapters of Ezekiel 38 and 39 describe Gog and Magog. Many modern interpreters have identified this as a thrust of Russian and Mongolian troops. Yet it

appears that this is really describing this same movement of troops within these columns, since Jesus will meet with and deal with these same troops at His second advent (Ezek 38:20). Isaiah picks up the story of the final battle when the “Assyrian” and his forces reach Aiath (Ai) about ten miles north of Jerusalem (Isa 10:28). From there they go to Michmash, then Geba, then Gibeah, and finally to Nob — the northern hill just opposite Jerusalem, where the central part of the city can first be seen. At that spot, “the Assyrian” shakes his fist in defiance at the Son of David now in Jerusalem with his angels and resurrected saints. “The Assyrian” is about to war against Christ, but in a moment he is slain (Isa 10:32, Isa 11:4). “With the breath of his lips shall he [Immanuel] slay the wicked [one]” (Isa. 10:34). The Apostle Paul referred to this very same event: “And then shall that Wicked [one] be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit [breath] of his mouth” (2 Thess. 2:8). His entire army is then vaporized (Zech. 14:12).

Thus ends the final conflict of the nations of this world and the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdoms of Christ (Rev. 11:15). “And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and He shall rule them with a rod of iron; and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God” (Rev 19:15).

It’s all beginning to come together now. It’s all still right there in the Bible for anyone to read and understand. Everything seems to fit and fall into place after all. The return of Jesus to this earth, in which all eyes will see, is yet to occur. And when it does, it will not be a little lord Jesus in a manger, nor a dead Christ on a cross, but a world wide invasion of the Living Messiah and his resurrected saints who will rule this entire earth for a thousand years. And after that, well, that’s still another story.

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