

God's Gracious Covenant With Israel: The Foundation For Worldwide National Covenanting #11

Revelation 16:12-16
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We continue this Lord's Day to consider from the Scripture some prophesied events that shall precede and shall follow the bringing into the Visible Church "the fullness of the nations" and "the fullness of Israel" as a Christian Nation. The salvation of the nations and the salvation of Israel as a Christian Nation are the two events that we have noted are prophesied to occur in Romans 11:25-26 (with "the fullness of the nations" preceding "the fullness of Israel"). Moving then from those two events prophesied by Paul, we further considered three texts from the Prophet Zechariah (Zechariah 13:7-9; Zechariah 12 [the entire chapter]; and Zechariah 14:1-11) which helped to fill in some more information surrounding the time when Christ shall mightily bring the nations of this world into covenant with Himself and shall restore Israel unto Himself as a Christian nation in renewing her covenant with Him. By way of review and summary from our texts in Zechariah, we noted the following prophesied events would surround God's unprecedented Gospel work within the nations of the world and in Israel.

1. The nations of the world will conspire with the papal antichrist as a confederation to subdue and crush an apostate Israel that is dwelling in the Land and that has taken a course contrary to the will of that one world confederation.
2. This attack against Israel (as a judgment of God against Israel for her unbelief while she is yet the enemy of God in her unconverted state) will issue in a victory for the confederation.
3. Many in Israel will be cut off (either by death or by deportation), while a smaller group will yet remain in the Land.

4. During this period of subjugation and deportation (perhaps weeks or months) Christ will bring that part of Israel that remains in the Land “through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is MY PEOPLE: and they shall say, The LORD is MY GOD” (Zechariah 13:9). Through the almighty power of the Holy Spirit, He will turn the heart of Israel (within the Land) to embrace Jesus Christ as He is freely offered in the Gospel at which time Israel will “look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son. . . . In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem. . . . And the land shall mourn, every family apart” (Zechariah 12:10-12).

5. God will wondrously intervene and deliver Israel from her enemies.

6. Israel as a Christian Nation will then dwell safely in the Land from that point as the “living waters” of the Gospel flow from her to the whole world.

7. The Lord Jesus Christ will reign as King over all the kingdoms of the earth and all the kingdoms of the earth will engage in covenant with Him in one faith, doctrine, worship, and Church government.

8. It was finally noted that these events could not have been fully realized at the time of Antiochus when Syria defeated Israel (167 b.c.), for the prophecies in Zechariah occur in the age of the New Covenant of Jesus Christ; nor could the events prophesied by Zechariah have been fully realized at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem (70 a.d.), for the city of Jerusalem is not destroyed in Zechariah 14:2 and those left in Jerusalem after the greater part have been cut off from the city shall turn in faith to Christ and shall be rescued from their oppressors, whereas Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 a.d. with no remnant left in it to turn to the Lord nor to be rescued from the Romans after the dispersion.

But in concluding that sermon, there were certain questions that needed further clarification. For instance: If “the fullness of the Gentile nations” precedes “the fullness of Israel” (as taught in Romans 11:25-26), when do the Gentile nations come to Christ since they are the very ones attacking Israel when the Lord comes in might to defend Israel and Israel is converted? If the evangelical graces of faith and repentance are granted as the first stage of salvation to Israel that yet dwells in the Land, when shall “all Israel” be saved?

I. Let us first seek to connect events occurring in Revelation 16:12-16 with events occurring in Zechariah 12-14.

A. The Battle of Armageddon identified in Revelation 16:16 is, I believe, the same battle that is described in Zechariah 14 in which the Lord wondrously intervenes on behalf of Israel that is still left in the Land.

B. Just as John identifies the battle of Armageddon as “the great day of God Almighty” (Revelation 16:14), so Zechariah declares in chapter 14:1, “Behold, the day of the LORD cometh.”

C. Just as John notes that the battle of Armageddon will involve “the kings of the earth and of the whole world” (Revelation 16:14), so likewise the Lord states through Zechariah, “For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle. . . . Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations (Zechariah 14:2-3). Other places in Scripture which detail the same events are Joel 3 and Revelation 19 (which I encourage you to consider as well at your leisure).

D. Just as the battle in Zechariah 14 occurs in the Land of Israel wherein the Lord goes forth to fight against His enemies (as indicated by the graphic and figurative language of Christ’s feet standing on “the

Mount of Olives”), so likewise the battle referred to in Revelation 16:16 as “Armageddon” apparently occurs in Israel for it is a Hebrew name which many scholars take to mean “the Mount of Megiddo”, a city of Israel in biblical times.

II. Before this Battle of Armageddon occurs in Revelation 16:16, there is judgment brought against “the great river Euphrates” (Revelation 16:12).

A. It is prophesied that before the battle of Armageddon an amazing event shall occur: namely, the drying up of the water of the great river Euphrates. To what does this refer?

1. We find the original drying up of the Euphrates to refer to that time when the Medes and the Persians diverted the Euphrates River from flowing through Babylon so that they might enter the impregnable city of Babylon by way of the conduit through which the River flowed (Isaiah 44:26-28; Jeremiah 50:35-41). In drying up the Euphrates, Babylon was destroyed, and Cyrus, ruler of the Medes and Persians, restored a believing and repentant Israel back into their Land (Jeremiah 51:35-45; Ezra 1:1-4). The Lord here in Revelation 16:12 uses that very imagery which in the Old Testament referred to the Euphrates River being dried up so that Israel might be delivered out of exile and restored to her land. I submit that the Lord is likewise prophesying in Revelation 16:12 the drying up of another people and nations who have become the tormentors and oppressors of Israel, and likewise this drying up of the Euphrates River will result in Israel (as a believing and repentant Christian people that is dispersed) being restored to their Land (in fulfillment of many Old Testament prophecies, such as Jeremiah 23:5-8 and Ezekiel 37:21-28). And it is my contention that when this second stage of Israel’s salvation is realized, then it may be said that “all Israel” shall be saved (in fulfillment of Romans 11:26). The first stage is the salvation of that part

of Israel that is left in the Land after her defeat by the worldwide confederation. The second stage is the salvation of that part of Israel that is dispersed and shall return in faith and repentance to the Land after the Lord defeats the beast and his international coalition at the battle of Armageddon.

2. I mentioned that this drying up of the water of “the great river Euphrates” in Revelation 16:12 refers to a yet future drying up of Israel’s persecutors and oppressors (like that of old). In order to clarify that point, let us turn to the only other place in the Book of Revelation where the phrase, “the great river Euphrates”, is used (Revelation 9:14). There, however, the Euphrates River is not dried up and destroyed, but is rather used to depict an aggressive and cruel movement and advancement of people beyond its own river banks to overrun the land. Thus, in consistency with the language used, the people signified by the Euphrates River overflowing its banks and conquering the third part of the Roman Empire in Revelation 9:14-21, are the same people signified by the Euphrates River that is dried up and destroyed in Revelation 16:12.

a. Bagdad became the center and capital of Islam and was historically known as Bagdad by the Euphrates. From that city near the Euphrates, swarms and hordes of followers of Mohammed swept over the banks of the Euphrates and attacked and conquered most of the Eastern Roman Empire and threatened the very existence of the Western Roman Empire as well. Thus, the Euphrates River did historically become a very apt symbol for the aggressive and numerous people of Islam. Since the Reformation, this has been the classic Protestant interpretation of the reference to the Euphrates River in Revelation 9:14ff. I regret that I cannot elaborate more on this point and that I must leave so much unsaid about the interpretation of the Book of Revelation as a whole, and a description of the Divine judgments brought against a pagan Rome in the seal judgments, brought against an apostatizing Christian Rome in the

trumpet judgments, and brought against a Papal Rome in the vial judgments.

b. As we then move back to consider what is prophesied in Revelation 16:12 concerning the drying up of the waters of the Euphrates, I submit we hear some glorious news from the Lord that portends a future day when Islam will not hold sway over the people of the world as it presently does. For before that part of Israel that is dispersed shall be restored to the Land in faith and obedience to Jesus Christ and His Gospel, Islam will be dealt a deathly blow. How this will occur, I do not know (perhaps by some significant battle with Israel which would parallel its overflowing its banks in Revelation 9:14ff). Again speculating, but if it is some significant battle with Israel that diminishes certain nations of Islam to a significant degree, perhaps it is that very stroke by Israel against these Islamic nations that shall bring the worldwide confederation against Israel at the Battle of Armageddon. Just as Islam overflowed its banks and spread throughout the Eastern part of Roman Empire (in Romans 9:14), so likewise shall Islam be diminished, restricted, and smitten—its influence in the world having been dealt a deathly blow.

c. Revelation 16:12 goes on to give a stated purpose for the drying up of the waters of the Euphrates River: “that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.” Some Christian expositors have interpreted “the kings of the east” to be the dispersed Jews who in becoming Christians have become “kings” reigning with Christ the King of kings. As an example of one Reformed divine, consider the words of James Durham in his Commentary on Revelation 16:12.

By these kings of the East, we understand the Jews, who being converted unto the faith of Christ, are not only Kings, as all other Christians are, Chap. 1:7, but it seemeth that especially they, when the scripture speaketh of their conversion, are called Kings [he cites and expounds Isaiah 24:21-23].

Other Christian teachers have understood “the kings of the east” to be those rulers in the east who have come to embrace Christ. It would appear that these “kings of the east” distinguished from “the kings of the earth and of the whole world” in Revelation 16:14 that are gathered to the battle of Armageddon. In fact, we find it prophesied that kings and princes shall bring Israel upon their shoulders to the Land of Israel (Isaiah 49:22-23; Isaiah 60:3-6,9-10). In either case (whether the “kings of the east” refer to Israel or whether they refer to those converted kings who bring dispersed Israel back into the Land), this would seem to be the place in the Book of Revelation where the restoration of that Israel that is dispersed and has come to Christ best fits.

d. However, it should be noted that the text does not state that “the kings of the east” shall at that time actually leave their kingdoms in the east to bring dispersed Israel back into the Land. Rather the text states that when the Euphrates is dried up i.e. when these Islamic nations are greatly diminished that its purpose shall be that “that the way of kings of the east might be PREPARED” rather than the way actually traveled at that point in time. For I would submit that once these Islamic nations are diminished (perhaps by Israel while in her unconverted state), the dragon, the papal beast and the papal false prophet will soon after gather “the kings of the earth and of the whole world” to war against Israel (which according to Zechariah 14:2 will in the first stage of that war issue forth in the defeat and dispersion of many in Israel at which time that Israel that is in the Land will come to Christ, and which according to according to Zechariah 14:3-4 and Revelation 16:16 will bring about the final stage of Armageddon which will issue in the miraculous victory of a converted Israel over the worldwide confederation).

B. But the restoration of Israel that was and has been dispersed cannot yet occur because “the fullness of the nations” has not yet come

into the Visible Church. Only after “the fullness of the nations” has come in will the dispersed of Israel be converted and restored to the Land (“and so all Israel shall be saved” Romans 11:26). So how do the very nations that have gathered to battle Israel (in Zechariah 12-14; Joel 3; Revelation 16:16) come to Christ in their fullness or full number? I would submit in the follow way.

1. Because the battle of Armageddon will issue in such a miraculous and crushing defeat for the worldwide confederation, those from the confederation who remain alive from that battle will be brought by Christ and His Gospel to acknowledge their sin in following that papal antichrist rather than following Christ, and these converted Gentiles will return to their nations to proclaim the Gospel and the mighty works of Christ that they have witnessed. In so doing, the Holy Spirit will be mightily and abundantly poured out upon the nations of the world so that “the fullness of the nations” will be brought into the Visible Church.

2. At which time the dispersed of Israel in the nations of the world will hear and receive the Gospel and testimony of God’s covenant grace and love from these converted nations. Then will “the kings of the east” actually make their way to the Land of Israel (whether “the kings of the east” are dispersed Israel or whether “the kings of the east” are the Gentile rulers who carry the dispersed Israel upon the shoulders and bring them back into their land in a believing state). And so by this means, the fullness of the Gentiles will come into the Visible Church and all Israel shall be saved.

3. To corroborate this prophetic scenario, turn with me to Isaiah 66:15-21. In verses 12-13, the Lord portrays how a redeemed Israel shall be loved and cared for by redeemed Gentile nations. But then beginning with verse 15, the Lord recounts the manner or events by which this glorious salvation shall be brought to both the Gentile nations and to Israel as a nation. In verse 15, the Lord speaks of a time of great judgment upon the nations of the world in which He shall come, riding

upon His chariot and in His whirlwind “to plead with all flesh.” And what will be the result of this great judgment? “And the slain of the LORD [i.e. the slain by the LORD—GLP] shall be many” (Isaiah 66:16). In other words, the Lord will gather the nations to the battle of Armageddon against Israel, and will go forth and smite many within this worldwide confederation in that battle. Verse 18 not only reiterates the battle between the Lord and all the nations, but emphasizes that the Lord has gathered them and brought them to the battle that they might witness His glory in miraculously destroying His enemies and in miraculously saving Israel as a nation (both spiritually and physically). Although many within the coalition of the papal antichrist are slain (as we saw in verse 16), the Lord will make His judgment upon the nations and His deliverance of believing Israel a covenant sign of God’s love for Israel to those Gentiles that are not slain among the coalition of antichrist. Of those Gentiles who escape death and witness the sign of God’s covenant love for Israel, Christ will draw them unto Himself in covenant love as they trust in the righteousness of the Seed of Abraham (the Lord Jesus Christ): “and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations” (Isaiah 66:19). These faithful witnesses will declare Christ’s glory among the Gentiles or nations (Isaiah 66:19). This testimony of those who escaped alive from the battle of Armageddon and went forth as powerful and mighty missionaries to their own nations will see their kingdoms in their national capacity come to Christ by means of the Gospel and the witness borne by these powerful witnesses. Thus, will the fullness of the Gentiles come into the Visible Church. Scattered Israel shall then embrace Christ by faith and will repent of her hatred of Christ, due to the Gospel that is preached to her by the nations that have come to Christ, and due to the sign of Christ’s covenant love for Israel in judging the nations and in saving Israel from her sin and from her enemies (as we see in Isaiah 66:20). I would submit that this will be the actual time when “the kings of the east” make their way to the Land.

C. Let us then summarize the order of events that seem to be prophesied from the various passages of Scripture we have considered over the past couple sermons.

1. Certain nations of Islam are significantly diminished of power and might (perhaps due to an attack by Israel while yet in her unbelieving state). This minimizing of power in these Islamic nations PREPARES the way for the kings of the east (although the kings of the east do not immediately set out on their journey at that time).

2. Israel in her unbelieving state as the enemy of God (Romans 11:28) is attacked by a worldwide confederation of nations who are seduced and misled by antichrist.

3. The first stage of the battle of Armageddon issues forth in victory for the coalition forces of antichrist and the defeat of Israel. A greater portion of Israel is cut off, either by death or dispersion among the nations (especially the nations of the east).

4. Those Jews left in Israel turn from their sin and cry out to Christ to save them (this is the first stage of their conversion and restoration). The Lord miraculously intervenes for them and destroys the coalition of antichrist (this is the second and final stage of Armageddon).

5. From the ranks of those Gentiles that are not slain in the battle of Armageddon, the Lord saves them as they behold the covenant love of Christ for Israel through the Gospel and through His miraculous deliverance of Israel. The Lord sends these faithful witnesses as missionaries back to their own nations whose testimony bears national fruit in bringing the nations to Christ. These nations covenant with Christ on the basis of biblical and historical testimony of Christ's covenant with Israel and Israel's covenant with Christ.

6. The nations now converted teach and preach the Gospel and covenant love of Christ to Israel that is dispersed (and Israel that is dispersed no doubt hears the Gospel and the testimony of God's

covenant love from Israel that is in the Land and that has already been converted to Christ). Israel that is dispersed is likewise converted to Christ and is brought upon the shoulders of the Gentile nations back to her own land (this is second and final stage of Israel's conversion and restoration). All Israel is now saved subsequent to the fullness of the nations.

7. The salvation of Israel is like a resurrection for the whole world. Christ reigns from heaven over the world in prospering His Church in uniformity of doctrine, worship, discipline and government.

8. I close by reading portions of Psalm 83 which I submit may be the very prayer that Israel in the Land will utter unto Christ in faith and repentance as the confederation of nations come against her. And note how the defeat of these nations ultimately intends that God's glory might be displayed in these very nations seeking the Lord's name Psalm 83:16-18). Out of the ashes of destruction, the Lord will bring these very nations to know that JEHOVAH alone is most high over all the earth. May we likewise understand that the trials, afflictions, defeats as God's beloved people are not an end in themselves, but are rather the means God uses to turn us to Christ and to exalt Himself in glorious ways we could not have imagined. God delights to take a seemingly defeated Israel (whose army consists of only 300 as it were) and to turn it into a rout of the enemy. This God will do for His covenant people of Israel in future days in order to glorify His own covenant righteousness and covenant love for undeserving sinners.

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