

DECEMBER 25

Merry Christmas! Everyone thinks of peace and silence when they celebrate Christmas. Even if they don't believe in Jesus, they think of peace. They like the festive atmosphere, and they like the day off of work. It really is too bad that they don't get what is going on. Jesus' second coming will have peace and silence only after the dust has settled, and that is putting it lightly. Today I was reading about Jesus evading arrest in the temple around Hanukkah (around Dec. 25th, just months before His sacrifice), and later saying to some Pharisees who were trying to scare Him in Luke 13:34-35, *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"*

The offer of peace comes and goes. People still miss Him this Christmas, although the offer is being made today. Until a person is thirsty, they will not come to the waters. Until they are so needy that they cry out, "I need you" (or, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord), they will not welcome the message or the Messiah. As disciples, we bring this message of His coming and His offer into the harvest; and those who are thirsty come to the waters and find peace.

Zechariah 8

The time of these messages is still the occasion noted at the beginning of chapter 7. The people had come to Zechariah and asked him if they still needed to fast for Jerusalem. To understand everything God is saying be sure to underline, *Thus says the Lord of Hosts.*

Vs. 1-8 We have a "before and after" scenario here. Verses 1-2 have His wrath against the nations (wait until you read the chapter in Revelation today), but the rest of the verses describe peace and security, with God dwelling in their midst. For Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the other leaders who have had to deal with opposition from within and without, this vision of the future of Jerusalem made their efforts worthwhile.

Vs. 1-3 Once again, notice God's care for Zion. Let *Him* punish Jerusalem and Israel if He must, but a wise nation would make peace with these people and bless that city.

Vs. 4-5 This is what God has planned for the people of that future city.

Vs. 6-8 At the Lord's second coming He will gather all of Israel that is scattered all over the world.

Vs. 9-13 The beginning and the end of this section says, *let your hands be strong*. Even though God would bless that present remnant, the generation and remnant they were working for was the future Israel that would be saved and be honored by God at the second coming of Christ. We know enough from Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi to know that this present generation did not honor the Lord. But that shouldn't discourage them, because God has told them of the future and of His future blessing to the nation. God has given us all of this information for the same purpose, to make our hands strong as we follow Christ now in the harvest.

Vs. 14-17 If they had obeyed God, they would have experienced more blessing. When we get to Malachi it will look very sad. Malachi reads like the 1 Corinthians of the OT. Still, as evidence of God's deep patience and faithfulness, there will be a remnant of Israel that will serve Him in the Tribulation and be a testimony to the earth in the Millennial Kingdom.

Vs. 18-19 Instead of Israel commemorating their sad and tragic past by these fasts they imposed upon themselves, God will turn their fasts into feasts. Notice the last sentence and the *therefore*. What do you think the *therefore* is there for?

Vs. 20-23 This is their testimony to the nations in the Millennial Kingdom. For an interesting connection to this, read Isaiah 55. In Isaiah 55 God tells Israel how He will make this prophecy possible.

Revelation 16

As I've mentioned before, the only people who will really understand what is happening in the Tribulation, particularly the timing of events we're reading about here, will be those who are believing and going through the Tribulation. It will give them hope knowing what events follow what events. It will help them hang on in faith and hope. One of the challenges in what we'll read today is that the seals are very similar to the trumpets. Some think they are the same thing and others only put some time between them. I think there is a space of two years or more between the trumpets and the seals. I think the interlude in the judgments has been used by God to allow mankind to accept or reject Him. Their rejection has been shown in killing God's followers and then following the antichrist. Receiving that mark was a terrible idea. I think God gave the earth this interval of "calm" to give people a sense of false security. They might have thought, "The worst is over, we survived and now who cares about all that scary "God" stuff?" If that is the case, the similarity of the bowls to the trumpets will let people know that God was behind these plagues. The intensity of these bowls will be 100 times worse than the trumpets and they come because the world is killing God's followers.

Vs. 1-2 The loud voice in this case intensifies the burning wrath of God. Notice the wording of Zechariah 8:2. How poetic that the only people affected by this will be those who received the mark of the beast. This will be a worldwide plague of pain. And, it will give God's people a break from being pursued. Just think, all the police and soldiers and politicians of the world will have the mark and be hurting. During the Tribulation, those who are reading this will understand that the bowls of God's judgment are underway. They will know exactly when this judgment has begun. That's pretty cool, I'd say.

V. 3 The second trumpet killed a third of the fish. This second bowl kills *all* marine life. God can make more fish later, but for now, the oceans are totally dead. Also, the blood of a corpse looks black, not red.

Vs. 4-7 The fresh water will be turned to blood. Notice that this judgment shows that all of these are in response to the people of the earth having killed those who follow Christ. Note that the altar doesn't really speak. Under the altar are the martyrs whose blood was spilled out for Christ.

Vs. 8-9 Everyone was happy that the sky finally began to clear up, but wait, the ozone is gone! Whatever the problem is, people are burning up, worldwide. Even a sunscreen rating of 835 isn't helping here. Notice that there is a connection here to the plagues of Egypt in that people know it is God, but they do not repent. It doesn't say that God hardened their hearts because, like Pharaoh, their hearts were already hard.

Vs. 10-11 When God brought darkness to Egypt, it didn't affect the Jews (Ex. 10:23). That means this will only affect those nations that follow the antichrist. It's hard to find your painkillers when you can't see. This is also poetic justice for following Satan and ignoring God. They wanted darkness and they got darkness. And again, they fail to repent. Apparently they had that chance.

Vs. 12-16 Now, the Euphrates was already dried up once. My guess is that through the power of the antichrist and the false prophet (beasts 1 & 2) the water was restored to the river and a treaty of peace was made with China. This time, it appears that the Euphrates is dry for good and the forces opposed to the antichrist get mad. And guess what, because they don't follow the antichrist, they can see and can march on toward him.

There is a question here that we can't answer, but one that is good to consider. Why are these armies assembling at Armageddon? We know the Lord is bringing them there for the day of

judgment, but Satan is also calling them there. Satan knows that they couldn't be victorious against Jesus, any more than they could be successful against Satan's own spiritual power. If Satan is rational at that moment, the only thing I can imagine is that he is bringing mankind there to be damned by God. I think that makes him happy, but it might also be that God allows some nations to resist Satan, the antichrist, and the false prophet. As we will see in the next chapters, "Babylon" never submitted to the antichrist and will pay a price for that. Nothing makes you lose your mind more than being the bully on the block and having someone mock you. It could be that these spirits that go out are spiritually inciting the nations who oppose the antichrist to come and duke it out so that Satan can destroy them. This option would be my guess.

V. 15 is Jesus' note to the entire seven-year judgment, that it will begin without warning. This period of time will be so devastating that it will be worth it to be ready. You won't want to live through that time nor be present at this last war. The reason I think Jesus is referring to the entire seven years is that by the time you get to this time period of the Tribulation, those who believe will be able to know that the time of His return is very near. When the war at Armageddon begins, you could almost set your watch. On the other hand, this is also a wake-up call for any followers at that time who have given up hope or are overwhelmed by the sorrow and hardship. Jesus often said, "He who endures to the end will be saved." "Saved" means they will be kept from despair and damage.

Vs. 17-21 Not only is this a great earthquake, 793 on the Richter scale, but the earth is also leveled and the islands cease to exist. One note here is that it says that at the time of the Millennial Kingdom, Jerusalem will be the only mountain in that area. That must mean that Jerusalem is spared some of the devastation. It also means that the plain of Armageddon just became broader and flatter. This might be why it says in Zechariah that Jesus will have to rebuild the temple and why the city won't have any walls. But beyond Israel, every city on earth will be destroyed. That will definitely slow down local governments trying to find the followers of Jesus. Then there is a sound and light show and 100-pound hail. Even in Texas that would be considered big. Again, it looks like this hailstorm is worldwide. I'll bet the insurance companies have ceased to exist by this time. So, how can you curse God knowing He did this, and not repent? But hey, we can do anything. We are Man.

I think there will be some length of time in here. It will take time in this newly and completely devastated world to rally troops to Israel. And now too, we'll have an interlude because a city (nation?) of the world has been completely destroyed and the earth will mourn.

Psalm 144

Vs. 1-2 I wonder if David wrote this after a battle. In the heat of fighting, having narrowly missed many swords and arrows, and having defeated so many who came against him, David is now able to think about what happened. Reflecting back he realizes it was God who saved him and who gave him those unique moments when he prevailed. In 2 Samuel 8 it mentions that David's battles were not only with the "neighbors" but with other nations further north that were called out by Syria to fight against David. David was actually fighting against the "nations."

Vs. 3-4 We all need real moments like this. What are we that God is so interested in us?

Vs. 5-8 As we are seeing in Zechariah and in Revelation, God's creative power also works in humbling the pride and rebellion of men.

Vs. 9-11 Outside of The Psalms and one reference in Isaiah, the only other "new songs" are in Revelation 5:9 and 14:3. These foreigners may have been those mentioned in 2 Samuel 8.

Vs. 12-15 David's desire for the peace of the nation will be granted in the future where Christ will reign and where David himself will be the leader of Israel under Him.

It is interesting that one of the things David thinks about is God's steadfast love. God had anointed David as a young teen and told him through Samuel that he would someday be king. David was probably amazed that he was still alive. There was only one thing to which he could attribute this: the steadfast love of the Lord.

As disciples, God has promised us fruit, spiritual joy and abundance in following Christ. But, we've got to keep following and pressing forward in the harvest. And when it comes, we'll say, like David, that it was totally the Lord and our fruit was the result of His steadfast, faithful love, just as He had promised.

Proverbs 30:29-31

We've just seen that God makes things. He made the "small & wise" in the last proverbs. Today, God made it naturally so, that these can't help but look stately and proud. It is His doing. Tomorrow comes the lesson.