**Acre, Megiddo, Armageddon and**

**The Battle with the Forces of Lawlessness**

Pastor Emeritus Joe Fuiten, February 22, 2017

In one corner of modern Haifa is an ancient city that has gone by the name of Acco, Akko, St. Jean d’Acre, Acre, or Ptolemais. As a place related to the Jezreel Valley it is important with lots of history. As a biblical place it would be a minor leaguer. The sum of it is Acts 21:7-9 “*We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for a day. 8 Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. 9 He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied*.” That there were believers there in the New Testament period is not surprising given the significance of the city as a stopping off places for other cities. It was in a strategic position at the intersection of principal land and sea routes (the Via Maris and the Esdraelon-Jezreel highway). Its natural harbor is the western entrance to the valley of Jezreel or Esdraelon.

Here is a condensed version of its history. The city was founded by the Canaanites and later inhabited by the Phoenicians. It had a long list of conquerors including Thutmose III, Seti I, and Ramses II, all from Egypt. Assyrians who captured the city included Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal. Queen Cleopatra of Egypt had it for a time.

 Assigned to the tribe of Asher, it was never occupied by the early Hebrews (as noted in Judges 1:31).

 Alexander the Great conquered it and, in 331 B.C. the Ptolemies changed its name to Ptolemais, the name of the city when the Apostle Paul visited the church there. From Ptolemais Titus Flavius Vespasianus launched his attack on Galilee.

 It had political importance as a seaport to Decapolis and Arabia. The ancient travel routes going north and south as well as routes east were through Acco.

 The Arabs restored its old name, which was adapted by the Franks into Acre. It was taken by Phillip Augustus, King of France, and King Richard I of England in 1191 as part of the Crusades. The Crusader population was about 30,000 people making it about the same size as Jerusalem and Tyre. Acre was the capital of the Crusader Kingdom for about 100 years. Its power was in the hands of various orders of Knights, including the Knights Templars, the Teutonic Knights, the Order of St. Lazarus, and the Hospitallers.

 A Moslem traveler in 1185 described it as follows: “*It is the focus of ships and caravans, and the meeting place of Moslem and Christian merchants from all regions. Its roads and streets are choked by the press of men, so that it is hard to put foot to the ground. Unbelief and unpiousness there burn fiercely, and pigs (Christians) and crosses abound. It stinks and is filthy, being full of refuse and excrement. The Franks ravished it from Muslim hands and the eyes of Islam were swollen with weeping for it*.”

 Along with Acre, the Moslems retook the coastal cities and destroyed them, blocking the harbors to keep the Crusaders out. Nearly 100,000 Crusaders died in the fierce struggle for the city between 1189 and 1191. With the final fall of Acre into the hands of the Mamluks in 1291, the coast of the country was deserted and remained so until the 19th Century.

 In 1799 Napoleon attacked the city, but when his own cannons, captured at sea, were turned on him, he retreated into Syria. The hill east of the city is named Napoleon Hill in his honor. Had he taken this city his conquest of the Turks would have been complete. His intention was to declare Palestine as the State of Israel and give it to the Jews. His failure to take the city stopped his dream for Palestine.

 In 1832 it was taken from the Turkish sultan by the ruler of Egypt. British and Austrian fleets bombarded it in 1840 and returned it to the Sultan. Acre would remain in Muslim hands until the end of WWI and the defeat of the Ottomans. The British Mandate would remain in force in the area until after WWII.

Akko is being restored as the only model Crusader town in the Holy Land. One other claim it makes is that glass was invented there. I found several pieces of glass at nearby Dor which go back into history a long ways. The glass had been ground into small beads that the rising and falling of the seas over the centuries. I turned some of the pieces into jewels for a pendant for my mother and earrings for my daughters and wife.

The city in the Jezreel Valley that is most compelling is **Megiddo** because it gave its name to that epic battle of Armageddon.

 Probably no city on earth has seen more of war than Megiddo, nor will any other city see more bloodshed in the future. Megiddo watches over the trade routes and valley that will host the future Armageddon. On this tell, excavations have uncovered no less than twenty cities built one atop the other, as wave after wave of wars have destroyed this city. From 4,000 B.C. onward it has been an important city overlooking the Jezreel Valley in Northern Israel. From the hill on which Megiddo is located, there is a commanding view of the valley which is also known as the Valley of Armageddon in Revelation 16:16. Indeed, “Armageddon,” means “mountain of Megiddo.”

 The strategic location of this city is the principle reason why it has been the center of so much fighting. Through this valley the ancient caravans traveled from Egypt and Africa to Phoenicia, Assyria, Babylon, and later, Persia. Megiddo marks the site where the northern route joined the eastern route. The Arah Pass connects the valley with the coastal plain is to the southwest. From this city one has a commanding view of the valley and anyone who might try to pass by. Once called “Megiddon,” meaning “place of troops,” it has become synonymous with war.

 Armies arriving by sea landed at Akko and moved inland, up this valley into Central Palestine. Armies from the east followed the main route ending here. The “Kings of the East” of Revelation 16 will follow the route of so many previous eastern armies and end up in this same valley.

 When Joshua entered the area, it had its own King, whom Joshua killed as recorded in Joshua 12:21. Judges 1:27 describes it as one of the cities Israel was unable to take during the period of the Judges. The ruins give evidence of a huge fire, but the city was again rebuilt, possibly by Saul. Solomon saw the strategic importance of the city and made it one of three fortified cities in Israel (1 Kings 9:15). It is described as one of his Royal chariot cities. The city survived until about 815 B.C. when it was again destroyed, possibly by Hazael of Syria (2 Kings 13:3-7).

 2 Kings 23:29 tells us that King Josiah of Judah was killed by the troops of Pharoah-Necho in the valley below (see also Zechariah 12:11). 2 Chronicles 35 tells the story of his death and the mourning for Josiah. King Ahazian, King of Judah, also died in battle here as recorded in 2 Kings 9:27. Modern opinion is that the city’s famous water system dates to the time of King Ahab.

 The Roman sixth legion was stationed there at the hamlet known as el Lejjun.

 The last city to exist at Megiddo was an unwalled city of residential character. It ceased to exist as a city early in the fourth century B.C.

 Megiddo is important because of its connection to the final battle described in Revelation 16:12-16. “*The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. 13 Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14 They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. 15 "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." 16 Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.”*

 I would like for the major part of our biblical discussion to come from 2 Thessalonians 2 where it discusses the events prior to the coming of the Lord particularly as it relates to lawlessness. Lawlessness is fundamentally an opposition to the rule of Christ on the earth, an opposition to obeying all that Christ commanded. That contest is the last battle against Christ and his rule and it is directly tied to battles about sexuality and whether Christ should rule on the earth.

 *“Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered[[1]](#footnote-1) to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come.”*

 By way of historical background, a report had apparently been circulating in Thessalonica that the day of the Lord was already present. It was at hand. This had caused alarm among the Christians there. Paul set their minds at ease by explaining to them the conditions under which the coming of the Lord would occur. His plan was that this information would convince them that the great “gathering” of God’s people had not already occurred. The last book and earlier chapters have added details that are still important to us today.

 We can learn some important facts from this discussion. First, **the Lord is coming.** We can look forward to the coming of the Lord. Christians in every ago have hoped for that day. To miss it would be terrible.

Second, **there is going to be a gathering of God’s people to him**. There is going to be a huge Assembly of the people of God and God will be the one gathering his people. I think this is the rapture. It could be the gathering of the people to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, but I think this is the upward movement at the time of the Rapture.

 Third, **this event is also called the day of the Lord**. In this passage, Paul is not writing to distinguish between what leads up to the Rapture and what leads to the descent of Jesus to the earth. It is not a subject he has in mind at this point. If we want his description of the rapture, we would have to go back a couple of pages to the book of 1 Thessalonians where we have the most complete description in the entire Bible

 Here we just want to accept that he is writing to them to let them know that it had not already occurred, nor were they in the middle of it right then.

 The next verses show that rebellion or falling away from the truth along with lawlessness will precede the Day of the Lord. “*3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion[[2]](#footnote-2) occurs and the man of lawlessness[[3]](#footnote-3) is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. 4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.*

**Don’t be deceived by any means or in any way.** What Paul is pointing to are the three things that will happen on the earth before the day of the Lord.

First, there is **a falling away from the truth**. Literally, the word is *apostasia*. What God has said in the Bible will cease to be the measure of truth. What God said about creation will be changed into evolution; what he said about people being created in his image will be changed into all nature is equal with people not being different from animals; when God said Jesus is the one and only Son of God will be changed into many sons of God; when Jesus said he was the only way to heaven will be replaced with the acceptance of many religions and ways to God; when God says marriage is between a man and a woman will be changed into justifying homosexuality saying “love is love.”

Second, **every person will want to define truth for themselves**. We call this post-modernism. Its visible manifestation today is around discrimination. In the Bible the description of lawlessness is specifically related to sexual morals and even more particularly to homosexual issues. The Apostle Peter said it like this: *“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)--if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.[[4]](#footnote-4)*

We know that Sodom’s sin was homosexuality and not primarily inhospitality as some try to argue. Jude 7 is clear enough about that. “…*Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire*.” Further, inhospitality was not a capital crime while homosexuality was punishable by death in Israel (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13). God did not ignore the capital crime of homosexuality while leveling two cities for inhospitality which is nowhere listed as a serious offense.

Defining truth for ourselves instead of following God’s truth is a classic form of lawlessness and we see it everywhere in the modern world. It is also the chaos that will pave the way for a strongman to be revealed who will enforce world order.

These ideas are the tentacles of the rebellion against God. At this moment, you can only see the tentacles, not the main body. The day will come when you will see the person who embodies these values. You will be seeing the anti-Christ. At that time, all so-called freedom of thought will disappear. Rebels want to throw off the rule of Christ but will inadvertently take on the rule of the anti-Christ. The person who screams out that they want to be free has no idea who will ultimately answer the call. They have no idea that their demand to be free of all restraint is the invitation to be enslaved.

If I could take this idea of lawlessness one step further. The Bible is clear that government should be obeyed. However, when the government doesn’t obey the law we have an entirely different problem and lawlessness is taken to a new level. For example, any time a policeman is found to be corrupt it is big news. It is also why recent efforts around immigration and sanctuary cities, circumventing existing law, are a very serious matter both politically and spiritually. When those charged with enforcing the law become law-breakers it takes lawlessness to a dangerous new level. One of the key ideas in America’s founding was that everyone from the King on down was required to obey the same law without exception. For John Lock in “On Civil Government” the universal duty to obey the law was one of the four key principles of liberty. Failing to enforce laws is just another name for lawlessness.

In Seattle we have a particularly festering problem of lawlessness. Seattle has declared itself a sanctuary city refusing to enforce federal laws relating to immigration. Last week a Seattle City Councilwoman urged the Seattle police not to enforce the law against anti-Trump protesters. That is, let the protesters have free-reign of the city to do whatever they want. When the police are removed out of law-enforcement the anti-Christ is running the show. That councilwoman is a kind of anti-Christ figure as are all of those who advocate against the law.

The problem of the government not enforcing the law has been dealt with in Christian history. The tone was set by Emperor Flavius Theodosius (347 -395), also called Theodosius I and Theodosius the Great, the last Emperor to rule both the Eastern and Western Roman Empire. He was the one who made Nicaean Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. His first effort against paganism was in 381 when he reiterated Constantine's ban on sacrifice. In 384 he prohibited the reading of sheep intestines and other forms of fortune telling. Unlike earlier anti-pagan prohibitions, he made non-enforcement of the law by Magistrates into a crime itself. This I think is the correct response. Either change the law or enforce it. When government says it will not enforce the law it delegitimizes its own authority and sets the stage for absolute lawlessness of the type the “man of lawlessness” will embody. From lawlessness it is a very short step to claiming to be God.

Finally, the **anti-Christ will do exactly that, setting himself up as truth** and proclaiming himself to be god. To set himself up in God’s temple, is to be himself in the place of God, defining truth. We sometimes see this as an actual event related to a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. I do see it that way and as one argument why a Jewish Temple will be rebuilt on Temple Mount. However, it could just as easily be the content of what is preached in God’s temples or for that matter, in the Temples of Law and Justice.

The stage is being set for the final step. The increasing intellectual chaos will pave the way for a new intellectual order led by the anti-Christ himself. This in turn precedes the return of Christ.

In light of this scripture, I believe three things are in order for the Christian. First, **we should anticipate the coming of the Lord**. All that Paul has said on this subject relates to the coming of the Lord and it is “already at work.” When we see these things happening we should look up because it won’t be long now. Second, we should **look to the scripture**. It is the place where God has revealed his will and his purposes. Third, we should “***contend for the faith*** *that was once for all entrusted to the saints.*” (Jude 3-4) Jude warned against “*godless men who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality*…” Rebellion comes from those who were once in the faith but rebel against it with a new message. The anti-Christ wants to change the definition of love and grace to allow disobedience to God’s law. This will be the defining battle of this generation.

*5 Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? 6 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless[[5]](#footnote-5) one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.[[6]](#footnote-6)*

The Thessalonians apparently knew what I do not. What is holding back the secret power of lawlessness? Paul does not indulge our curiosity. Never at a loss for explanation, all sorts of speculative answers have been offered.

Tertullian, around 200 AD, believed so much in this idea of the chaos out of which the anti-Christ would emerge, that he felt the Roman Empire was the thing which prevented the anti-Christ from coming. In his view, when the empire would split into the kingdoms which followed it, then the anti-Christ would be revealed. “*What obstacle is there but the Roman state, the falling away of which, by being scattered into ten kingdoms, shall introduce Antichrist upon (its own ruins)?”*[[7]](#footnote-7) He certainly understood Daniel’s prophecy of emerging lawlessness. In time he understood that lawlessness would be summarized in one person, but reflected all through the world. Certainly Rome was about law and held the world together. If Rome (or law) ceased to exist in any meaningful way, then lawlessness would obviously be everywhere and the way of Christ would be at hand. I like what Tertullian had to say because it has merit but we cannot say for certain. His view reflects the understanding that law serves the work of God but lawlessness is an alien force.

Today, there are a variety of answers. Some think it is the Holy Spirit, the prayers of the church, the godly influence of Christians, some divine decree, or even Michael the Archangel. I don’t know exactly what Paul had in mind here, but I do think that battling against lawlessness and for the reign of Christ is the principle activity of the church in the days ahead. Every aspect of discipleship is about the rule of Christ. The message of evangelism is more than forgiveness of sins and eternal life. It is about joining the kingdom of God and declaring that Jesus is lord and king.

The one good thing about this lawlessness is that it precedes the Coming of the Lord. You have to love the description of the lawless one “*whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.”*  I am looking forward to that day!!!

In the meantime, we have considerably more detail about how things will ultimate go. “*9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of* ***counterfeit*** *miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of* ***evil that deceives*** *those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion[[8]](#footnote-8) so that they will believe the lie[[9]](#footnote-9) 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.*

 The coming of the lawless one is connected to the coming of Jesus. The conflict between lawlessness and the reign of God’s kingdom will be resolved at the battle of Armageddon within view of Megiddo.

1. Episunagoge. a complete collection; especially a Christian meeting for worship: [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Apostasia. defection from truth or "apostasy": KJV-- falling away, forsake. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. anomia (an-om-ee'-ah); illegality, i.e. violation of law or wickedness: KJV-- iniquity, transgress (-ion of) the law, unrighteousness. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 2 Pet 2:4-9 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. anomos (an'-om-os); lawless, i.e. (negatively) not subject to (the Jewish) law; (by implication, a Gentile), or (positively) wicked: KJV-- without law, lawless, transgressor, unlawful, wicked. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. parousia (par-oo-see'-ah); a being near, i.e. advent (often, return; specifically, of Christ to punish Jerusalem, or finally the wicked); (by implication) physically, aspect: KJV-- coming, presence. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., “On the Resurrection of the Flesh,” Ante-Nicene Fathers; Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian; vol 3 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994) 563. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. plane; fraudulence; subjectively, a straying from orthodoxy or piety: KJV-- deceit, to deceive, delusion, error. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. pseudos (psyoo'-dos); a falsehood: KJV-- lie, lying. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)