

Will you be in the Lord's Great Army?

"The Lord shall utter his voice before his army my great army the earth shall quake before them, the heavens shall tremble." Joel 2:11, 25, 10

Whose army would you rather be in if you had to choose? How could you go wrong by being in this army? What will be expected of the soldiers? What will be the results of this apocalyptic tour of duty? Who signs you up? Is this only for men? Who is the enemy? What happens to the casualties? Can this army lose?

No army of the Lord could lose-or fail of His intended purpose for it. The Prophet Joel graphically portrays four divisions of this army that "executeth his word: for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?" (Joel 2:11) The army is described as four units: "the palmerworm," "the locust," "the cankerworm" and "the caterpillar" (Joel 1:4; 2:25). Is this prophecy about literal locusts before which "the earth shall quake...the heavens shall tremble"? How could the literal heavens tremble because of plagues of insects?

In Scripture "earth" represents the existing social order, while the "heavens" depict the spiritual or ecclesiastical order of things. Another prophet describes a similar universal trauma: "I will shake the heavens and the earth; and I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen..." (Haggai 2:20,21) This army under the Lord's providence will overthrow the kingdoms of the nations ("earth") as well as false spiritual leadership ("heavens"). Just as apostate Israel suffered deserved punishment when its civil and religious ruling powers were destroyed, so too will apostate so-called Christian nations at the end of this age.

Where is This Army?

But where is there such an army ready for the great and very terrible "day of the Lord"? Just as Jesus is portrayed as a lamb for his guileless innocence and Satan as a roaring lion for his pouncing fierceness, these plagues of insects represent a relentless, devastating "army" of people bent on destruction. "The land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them" (Joel 2:3). Could this be an army of Christians doing the Lord's bidding? Hardly-rather than being a "great" army of the Lord, Christians are described as a "little flock" (Luke 12:32). Their only weapon is Truth.

In the past, God used the forces of godless peoples to bring judgments against His people. In the period of the Judges of Israel, numerous times He brought the peoples from the surrounding nations (such as the Moabites and the Ammonites) to inflict his punishments. He called Assyria, "the rod of mine anger." These instruments of judgment, of course, were always willing instruments-often too willing. God dealt with them subsequently.

Do any of earth's armies today fit Joel's prophetic description? This army is highly disciplined: "...They do not press one another, every one on his beaten track do they go forward; and they pass through between warlike weapons, and change not their purpose." (Joel 2:7,8 Leeser). Is it the Russian army? Perhaps a European army? Or is it the army of the United States or one from Asia?

True, there is always the possibility of an army turning its power against its own governmental authorities instead of upholding and preserving them. In order to quell the popular uprising in Tiananmen Square in China, in 1989, the local divisions of the army were purposely not brought in. Divisions from remote areas were pressed into service to preserve the status quo. The government was careful not to use local troops who might have shown sympathy for local, peaceful protesters. But elsewhere that is exactly what happened. Eastern European troops did balk and support the people instead of the governments. The result toppled governments, but it could have been anarchy.

The Lord's Great Army, in fact, is mustering all over the world, in the Christian world as well as in the non-Christian world. The Lord's Great Army is not disciplined in the usual sense of the word, but only in the sense that its collective purpose is riveted on one objective: destroy the ruling powers of the "heavens" and "earth." It is the army of discontents, discouraged and dissatisfied common folk. Many "attacks" on society have been made in the recent past with more or less success. After World Wars I and II, a variety of socialistic governments promising more benefits to the common man came to power on the ruins of most European monarchies. Socialist programs in democratic societies have met with limited success and many more problems. Most recently, communistic socialism's collapse has opened the door of frustration which could lead to anarchy.

Waves of Travail

The "day of God's wrath" is a progressive trouble, in waves, described in Scripture also as "travail upon a woman with child." (I Thessalonians 5:1-3) The "locusts" of Joel seem to assault in four "waves." What the first does not accomplish, the second does, and what the second does not, the third does....and so on.

In the climactic assault of God's judgments as portrayed in Revelation, it appears that the religious part of Christendom (which is called "Babylon") falls before the civil/secular part. This is obvious because the "kings" and "merchants" who supported Babylon are very upset that the religious part is collapsed: "The kings of earth...shall bewail her...when they shall see the smoke of her burning...and the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her" (Rev. 18:9-11). Jeremiah too indicts Babylon-Christendom in his prophecy even mentioning, "The Lord Almighty has sworn by his own life that he will bring many men to attack Babylonia like a swarm of locusts, and they will shout with victory" (Jeremiah 51:14). Yes, God's greatest judgments lay against the Christian nations because of their greater responsibility. And He will use His Great Army.

The Final Blast

But while the trouble and distress of this day of the Lord will be first and specially upon the Christian nations-and later upon all nations-the final blast will be upon Israel. The Prophet Ezekiel describes (38 & 39) the "army" of "Gog," "even a great company with bucklers and shields" coming against vulnerable Israel which is dwelling in "unwalled villages." The armies representing the collapsing governments of earth will come to take a "spoil" of Israel. But when God fights for Israel an insurrection will dissolve the enemies of Israel into anarchy and thereby complete universal destruction of earth's governments. The ultimate result is that God "will be known in the eyes of many nations" and God's spirit poured upon the house of Israel (Ezekiel 39:29). The prophet in Zechariah (14:1-3) depicts "all nations" gathered against Jerusalem. After God fights for Israel and delivers them, the ironic twist is that peoples from those same nations will then have to go to Jerusalem for instruction and help if they want God's favor and wish to prosper (Zech. 14:16; Isa. 2:2,3). "At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it...neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart" (Jeremiah 3:17).

God's Disarmament Program

Psalms 46 describes this revolutionary, anarchistic "army" by yet another figure, that is, a roaring "sea." The Christian is not to fear when he or she sees these events fomenting: "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea...the nations raged, the kings were moved; he uttered his voice, the earth melted..." (Psalm 46:2-6) Again the thought is not literal mountains and sea. In fact, the text interprets itself by explaining that the "sea" is the raging peoples of the nations and that "mountains" are "kingdoms." Notice the two prophecies are parallel in description: In the Joel prophecy when God "shall utter his voice before his army," a "desolate wilderness" results. In the Psalm 46 prophecy, when "He uttered his voice, the earth melted," and also "desolations" result.

The Christians are "glad" (Psalm 46:4), but not because they will be snatched out of the whole mess-rather because they know what lies beyond the "desolations." God will establish his own "peace process" when "He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth." He will set up his own disarmament program. The same "heathen" that raged will exalt God: "Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen; I will be exalted in the earth." As for the damage done by the "locusts," a period of restoration will follow. And instead of a few Christians in the world's population having God's spirit as sons and daughters, God's spirit will be poured upon "all flesh."

God's ultimate goal in using His Great Army, of course, is not just the destruction of governments and religious society. The purpose is to prepare for His Kingdom and the blessing of all the families of the earth. "Yet once...I will shake the heavens and the earth...I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come...and in this place will I give peace" (Haggai 2:6-9).

What do the discontented, discouraged and distraught of the earth really desire? Peace, healthy bodies, a loving environment, meaningful lives and equal opportunities to grow and develop. Whether they know it or not, they are waiting for God's Kingdom on earth. Christians rather than being part of this discontented "army" clamoring for redress from the inequalities and the injustices of society-are asked to be patient and wait on the Lord's time (James 5:1-8). And that time is very soon when Christians, as the "sons of God" (Rom. 8:19-22), will be able to stop the waiting and the groaning and bless the people who were once part of such a Great Army.

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