

WHO WILL CONTEND WITH ME by K. R. Blades

This article was originally published several years ago at the time of the Gulf War. Though that conflict is not now raging, the matters dealt with in this article are as timely now as they were then.

The issue of fighting and war is something that is naturally on our minds at this time in view of the conflict that exists in the Persian Gulf area. The actions of Iraq's leader have provoked an angry response on the part of some of his neighboring nations along with others in the world and this has led to a direct military challenge to his aggressive acts. The present war and fighting are the normal consequences of such an action as this, which "throws down the gauntlet," so to speak, and waits to see whether there will be any who will contest the action and rise up to oppose it. There were many who have risen up to oppose Iraq's actions, and now the battle is on to settle the matter.

Wars and fighting among men and nations are a part of "the course of this world." They have existed since the entrance of sin into this world and God's scattering of the nations, and they will continue to be so through out this dispensation of God's longsuffering and grace. It will not be until AFTER God ends this present dispensation of His grace, and then resumes and fulfills His program and dealings with the nation of Israel, that "the course of this world" will be stopped and men won't "learn war anymore." As God set forth to Israel through the prophet Isaiah,...

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: NATION SHALL NOT LIFT UP SWORD AGAINST NATION, NEITHER SHALL THEY LEARN WAR ANY MORE." (Isaiah 2:2-4)

It will only be when God resumes and fulfills His program with Israel that wars and fighting among the nations will cease. As long as God continues to administer this present dispensation of Gentile grace, and His program and dealings with Israel remains in abeyance, wars and fighting will be a natural and expected part of "the course of this world."

It is interesting to note in connection with the issue of war and fighting that the Bible speaks of the fighting of two very special battles. One has already taken place and the other is yet to come. What makes them very special and distinct from others is the fact that in both cases it is God Himself Who 'throws down the gauntlet' and utters the challenge "Who will contend with Me?" Also in both cases God utters the challenge especially to Satan and his cohorts. The battle that has already taken place is the battle that was fought by the Lord Jesus Christ when He hung upon the cross of Calvary. The battle that is yet to come is the

battle that the Lord will fight in "the valley of Jehoshaphat" in the day of His wrath.

THE BATTLE ON THE CROSS

We understand, appreciate, and rejoice in the fact that when the Lord Jesus Christ died upon the cross He died in payment for our sins as our substitute redeemer. God the Father, according to the riches of His grace unto us and out of His great love for us, set forth His Son as a propitiation for our sins. Jesus Christ satisfied God's justice in connection with our sins, bearing and suffering the wages of our sins upon Himself in our place so that we could have forgiveness of sins and be justified before God. As Paul says in Romans 3:24 25,...

“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood.....to declare, *I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*” (Romans 3:24 25)

However, our Lord not only suffered at the hands of God's justice as the propitiation for our sins, He also suffered at the hands of Satan as He hung on that cross. With Satan the cross served as a battle field on which the Lord contended with Satan as Israel's redeemer and as the covenanted Son of David and the promised Son of Man. The Lord contended with Satan over God's plan and purpose for repossessing the earth from Satan's usurped dominion, and over His use of Israel as the covenanted means for accomplishing it.

When the Lord came into this world He came as Israel's "horn of salvation." He came as the covenanted Son of David and the Son of Man who would be Israel's Redeemer, Deliverer, Avenger, King and Blessor. He would provide for Israel to be what God had covenanted for them to be, and He would reign in Israel's kingdom as "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" over this earth. And Israel needed a "horn of salvation." For, as the prophets described, the nation was sinful and defiled, and had gotten itself in the grip of "the hand of *him that was stronger than he*" and were the "captives of the mighty." Satan was the strong man who held Israel captive. He was in control of the nation and on their own they could not extricate themselves from his grip.

As the Son of David and the Son of Man, the Lord was tempted by Satan at the very outset of His ministry to Israel. But as Matthew 4 and Luke 4 record, the Lord did not succumb to Satan's temptations. Instead, He vindicated Himself as God's prophesied perfect servant and perfect man. In so doing He qualified Himself to be Israel's redeemer and to take the rightful dominion of the earth unto Himself. But the 'battle royal' was yet to take place. It was on the cross of Calvary, "Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull," where Satan's strength as the one who "had the power of death" would be encountered. It was on the cross that the strategic battle would take place.

To human eyes, the Lord's crucifixion looked like defeat. But to the Lord it looked entirely different. To Him the cross was planned for. He had prepared for it. A battle was to be entered into on that cross, and He knew it. Listen to the prophet Isaiah as he foretold the words and actions of Israel's Messiah in connection with His functioning as their Redeemer and Saviour.

"The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheek to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me; therefore

shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. *He is near that justifieth me; who will contend with me? let us stand together: who is mine adversary? let him come near unto me. Behold, the Lord God will help me; who is he that shall condemn me? lo, they all shall wax old as a garment; the moth shall eat them up.*" (Isaiah 50:5 9)

The Lord Jesus Christ as Israel's Messiah, as Jehovah's perfect servant, would have His 'ear opened' unto the word of God and would not rebel like Israel did. He would function perfectly and do only those things that pleased God. In Him God would be "well pleased." But not only that, the Lord would function perfectly as Israel's Redeemer and Saviour. He would cast Himself completely and confidently upon His Father's wisdom, trustworthiness, and help. He knew Israel's redemption involved a battle with the "adversary." He knew it involved submitting Himself to the onslaught of the vehement hatred of the one whose desire it was to consume Him in the power of death. He knew it was Satan's only hope and that He would have to engage him in the arena of his strength. However, He also knew and was fully persuaded that "the Lord God will help me" and that He was "near that justifieth me." Therefore He "set his face like a flint" and in functioning as Israel's Redeemer He Himself 'threw down the gauntlet' to His "adversary" and bellowed out the challenge,...

"WHO WILL CONTEND WITH ME? LET US STAND TOGETHER: WHO IS MINE ADVERSARY? LET HIM COME NEAR UNTO ME?" (Isaiah 50:8)

And "come near" unto Him the "adversary" did. As the Lord declared at the time at which He was betrayed unto death,...

"When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and THE POWER OF DARKNESS." (Luke 22:53)

And as David declared in the 22nd Psalm when prophesying about Christ's death,...

"They part my garments among them, and cast lots for my vesture. But be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from THE LION'S MOUTH: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns." (Psalm 22:18 21)

The Lord uttered the challenge to His adversary and He took him on in battle upon the cross. They *stood together*, not as friends but as combatants. Satan was there, not to observe but to tear into the Lord like a devouring lion. As the Son of David and the Son of Man the Lord contended with Satan, and He did it in the very arena in which Satan could employ his greatest strength, the power of death. Through death the Lord entered into Satan's stronghold and took the battle for dominion of the earth right to him. And as Peter declared to Israel on the day of Pentecost, the Lord emerged victorious from the battle.

"Whom (Christ) God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance....For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right

hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:24 28; 34 36)

The victory of Israel's Messiah that David spoke of and looked forward to, Peter proclaims to the "house of Israel" God successfully achieved in raising up Christ from the dead and exalting Him at His right hand. The Lord Jesus Christ emerged victorious from the battle on the cross and so doing was exalted by the Father and given the right and power to execute God's day of wrath and establish the "kingdom of heaven" on this earth in fulfillment of the Davidic and Abrahamic covenants. The Lord Himself testified to this when He declared to His apostles before His ascension back to the Father that "all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." The Lord announced to His apostles His capability and right to now execute what the Davidic covenant called for concerning fully vanquishing Israel's enemies, delivering the nation from the one "stronger than he," restoring the kingdom to them, glorifying them, and fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant. The Lord had uttered the challenge to His "adversary" and successfully took him on in battle on his own turf. The strategic battle for the dominion of the earth was fought and won by David's Son and Lord!

BUT THERE'S MORE TO THAT BATTLE , A "MYSTERY"

As the opening chapters of the book of Acts record, after the extension of God's mercy to Israel was fulfilled, the Lord Jesus Christ did not begin to execute His day of wrath and "make His enemies His footstool" as had been expected. Instead, as is described in Acts 9, the Lord Jesus Christ did something completely unprophesied and unexpected. He came back from heaven and raised up a brand new apostle , Paul. To Paul God revealed that He was temporarily setting aside His program with Israel and that He was ushering in a 'dispensation of Gentile grace' in accordance with a purpose He has in Christ that He had kept "hid in Himself" and was a "mystery" not made known in ages and generations past. The "mystery of Christ" pertains to the forming of a "new creation" in Christ, the church the body of Christ. Through it God is providing for the reconciliation of the heavenly places unto Himself and the destruction of Satan's usurped domination of that realm as well. With the revelation of the mystery God has now made known His plans for the repossession of both realms of creation. He has now made known His plans for destroying Satan's usurped domination in both the heavenly places and the earth. And the thing that has made this possible is the battle victory Christ won on the cross when He challenged His "adversary" to "come near unto me" and fight.

In I Corinthians 2 the apostle Paul talks about this "hidden wisdom of God" in the cross of Christ, which God has now made known. As he says,...

"Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that are come to nought: but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." (I Corinthians 2:6 8)

The cross of the Lord Jesus Christ is the master stroke of God's genius. What appeared from all outward appearances to be weakness and foolishness on God's part, God has now revealed and shown to be wisdom and genius beyond compare. Instead of God being taken in, He Himself "took the wise in his own craftiness." In crucifying the Lord Jesus Christ, Satan and his "princes of this world" not only entered into a battle from which they

emerged losers of the dominion of this world, but they also, in accordance with the "hidden wisdom of God," entered a battle from which they emerged losers of the dominion of the heavenly places. As Paul teaches in Ephesians and Colossians, in accordance with the "wisdom of God" the cross of Christ was also a battle ground that had the heavenly places and their dominion at stake.

"And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all." (Ephesians 1:19 23)

"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence. For it pleased *the Father* that in him should all fullness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, *I say*, whether *they be* things in earth, or things in heaven." (Colossians 1:18 20)

"And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it (i.e. the cross)." (Colossians 2:15)

God, in accordance with His "manifold wisdom," provided through the cross of Christ for His Son to be "Head of all principality and power." He provided for the making of a "new creation" in Christ in which the members of it are made fit to be heirs with Christ in His heavenly dominion. Through the genius of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, God "spoiled principalities and powers." He "triumphed over them." He provided for the reconciliation of all principalities and powers unto Himself. The Lord, in accordance with His "hidden wisdom," took the wise in their own craftiness. Through the battle on the cross He provided for the destruction of Satan's entire usurped dominion, both the earth and the heavenly places. The Lord uttered the challenge to His "adversary" on the cross, and as Paul declared in I Corinthians 2:8, had Satan and his cohorts known what God was keeping secret, "THEY WOULD NOT HAVE CRUCIFIED THE LORD OF GLORY." Oh, the incredible wisdom of God that lay behind the words of that challenge, "WHO WILL CONTEND WITH ME?"

THE BATTLE YET TO COME

As was stated in the opening of this article, there is another very special battle spoken of in the Scriptures in which God will once again "throw down the gauntlet," so to speak, and utter a challenge to come and contend with Him. This battle will be the one the Lord fights after this present dispensation of Gentile grace is concluded and God resumes His program and dealings with the nation of Israel on this earth. In the day when the Lord executes His wrath, "makes His enemies His footstool," delivers His nation from their oppressors, and avenges His name and His cause with Israel upon the nations; in that day the Lord will,...