

# THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON

## A SERMON

Preached on Lord's Day Morning January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1866

By Mister JAMES WELLS

At the Surrey Tabernacle, Wansey Street

Volume 8 Number 373

“And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.” Revelation 16:16

VERY much has been written and said upon the great battle of Armageddon. Some have placed it in one part of the world, and some in another; some have placed it one age, and some in another. I take the battle of Armageddon to mean nothing else, nothing less, nothing more, than, first, the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in the victory which he obtained; and then, secondly, the conflict between the spirit of God's truth and the spirit of error. You will at once see, therefore, that if this be the meaning it is a conflict that belongs to all ages and to all places; so that wherever the enemy gathers together against the people of God, which of course he has done, sometimes in one country, and sometimes in another, sometimes in one age, sometimes in another, wherever the enemy has gathered together against the truth, and consequently against the people of God, there is the Armageddon, there is the conflict; but we well know which way the conflict must go. I may just observe that the first syllable of this word Armageddon signifies a mountain, and therefore represents the people of God as abiding by the mount Zion, as abiding by that standing which the Lord has given them in a covenant ordered in all things and sure. And so, you will find in the 39th of Ezekiel, where Gog and Magog are spoken of, meaning the enemies of the gospel, it is said that they should fall upon the mountains of Israel. And so, it is in and by the mountain of God's love that we overcome, we are more than conquerors through him that loved us; it is in and by the mountain of his choice of us that we overcome; it is that that gives us the victory; it is in and by the achievement of the blest Redeemer that we overcome; “they overcame by the blood of the Lamb.” It is by the exceeding great and precious promises of the blessed God, he being faithful to those promises, that the saints in all ages have overcome. Now you find a little further back in this chapter that the sixth angel poured out the vial of God's wrath upon the great river Euphrates. To understand this, before I enter upon the subject, we must first clearly understand what is meant by the river Euphrates. This river, as you are aware, is a very ancient river, which ran through Babylonia, watering nearly all the plain of Babylon; so that Babylonia depended in a great measure, like Egypt upon the Nile, upon this river for its power and supply; and therefore, for this river to be dried up was to dry up the power of Babylonia. And you recollect that when the Israelites were delivered from Babylonish captivity the Lord is represented as drying up the river, turning the river aside; so that Babylon so lost its power that the Israelites escaped. The river Euphrates

here, then, I take simply to represent the power of the whole world. Some of the learned hold that the river Euphrates here mystically represents Mahometanism, and that Mahometanism shall dry up. Well, I have no objection to that view; but I must give it a broader meaning than that. If you go to the 7th of Daniel, you will find there four empires, and each empire represents the world; and therefore the Babylonish empire at large represents the world; and the power of the world shall be so cursed by the wrath of God, God will so subdue the enemy and so weaken them, that they shall not be able to deceive the people of God, nor to keep them back from that which the Lord has for them. This Euphrates, therefore, represents the whole sinful world in its power arrayed against the people of God. And we therefore, to make the matter clear, must go in the first place, this morning, to *the work of the Lord Jesus Christ*; secondly, to *the coming forth of the people of God out of the Babylon of this world*; and then, thirdly, the conflict into which they enter, and the victory they are sure to achieve.

I notice, then, first, *the work of the Lord Jesus Christ* in connection with this. Now the Savior is represented as passing through the sea; and I think the sea may mean several things. Take it first to mean the world; second, our sins; and third, the wrath of God. Now the Savior is represented as passing through this sea. Hence in the 10th of Zechariah it is said, "He shall pass through the sea with affliction." And so, he passed through this world with affliction; he was daily, by persecution and by various means, afflicted; his daily experience, if I may so speak, was an experience of affliction and of sorrow, and of grief, of tribulation; he thus passed through the sea with affliction. But then he passed through the sea of this world without committing any sin; he did no sin, neither was deceit or guile found in his mouth. And so, by passing without sin and obediently through this world, he has hereby overcome the world. Hence you know what he said about it; he says, "These things," concerning what I have done, "have I spoken unto you, that in me you should have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer," why? Be of good cheer, you will always overcome the world? No. Be of good cheer, you will always be holy and righteous, and take everything in perfect acquiescence with the will of God? No, the Savior knew we should do no such thing; for the Lord leads his people about the wilderness and makes them feel what poor creatures they are; and therefore, he places our comfort in this, that he has overcome the world. "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." And John takes up the note very beautifully, and said, "What is the victory that overcomes the world?" Why, he says, "our faith;" that is, our faith in Christ. Your conscience and the world may justly lay many faults and infirmities to your charge; but you are to plead, in opposition to that, the great truth that Jesus Christ conquered, that he has brought in everlasting righteousness, and that "I will go" on towards my heavenly home "in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of your righteousness, even of yours only." Then, second, he passed through, as it were, the sea of our sins. "He shall pass through the sea with affliction and shall smite the waves in the sea." And so, he passed through our sins, the sea of our sins; but our sins never moved him. They are perpetually moving us. That great and wonderful man of God, for a wonderful man of God he was, as to what grace had done for him, and as to the great revelations made to him, and as to his great devotion to God, and as to his great usefulness to the souls of men, yet that wonderful man of God said, "I have a law in my members bringing me into captivity to the law of sin." And then he had a thorn in the flesh; he sought that it might be taken away from him. And so, our sins do move us; they move us to unbelief; they move us to doubting and fearing; they move us to carnal mindedness; they move us in ten thousand ways that every Christian is more or less conscious of. But our sins could not get hold of the Savior; he never partook of the property of sin; sin was laid upon him, but,

“His life was pure, without a spot,  
And all his nature clean.”

So that our sins, weighty as they were, mighty as they were, for “the strength of sin is the law,” yet here the Savior took his stand, and was never moved; he conquered everything. And there is not a sin of your heart, nor a sin of your life that is past, nor a fault that may yet occur before you die, if you are thus brought to feel your need of his righteousness and of his conquest, there is not any one sin which he has not conquered. These faults do not so conquer us as to sever us from God’s truth, but they do so conquer us as to hinder us most terribly in the service of the Lord. Ah, how much, how very much carnal mindedness do some of us experience! what a burden is it! Well might the apostle say, “We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened.” Where then must be your plea? Jesus passed through this sea with deep affliction; he has conquered every sin, he has dried up everyone; they have all lost their power, and they are gone, virtually gone, and gone forever. Then, again, the sea represents God’s wrath. “Deep calls unto deep at the noise of your waterspouts; all your waves and your billows are gone over me.” He passed through that sea of wrath, but it could not move him; he stood firm. When he was on the cross there was no murmuring. How wonderful was his self-possession there! Several things to display his self-possession. See the composure with which he spoke when he said, “I thirst and when he prayed for his enemies, “Father, forgive them; they know not what they do;” and when he committed his mother unto John, the disciple; and when he granted the wonderful answer which he did to the prayer of the thief by his side; and when he knew that he had arrived at the end of the world, and the end of sin, and the end of wrath, he said, “It is finished.” Now, then, “he shall pass through the sea with affliction, and shall smite the waves in the sea.” Now we come down to matters of experience. This victory which the Savior has wrought the apostles were sent to preach; they were sent to preach his righteousness, his overcoming the world, and his being the end of the law; they were sent to preach his name, as having finished transgression, made an end of sin, and made reconciliation for iniquity; they were sent to preach him as having been made a curse for cursed man, for man is cursed by the fall, and Christ was made a curse, and now there is no more curse. “And the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the scepter of Egypt shall depart away.” Now, then, there was a time, let us come now down to experience before we come to this gathering together of the adversary to oppose the people of God, there was a time, I have already suggested we shall take the river Euphrates to represent the consolations and pleasures of the world, but the curse of God is in them all; and there was a time when this world was a river of pleasures to you, when you sought its streams of consolation, when you looked no further than this world, and thought if you could get as much of this world as you desired you should be a happy man. By-and-bye the Lord was pleased to convince you of the sinfulness of your state; he was pleased to make you feel the misery of your state; and now this Euphrates, this fruitful river (for the very word means fruitfulness), this world with its pleasures became dried up, it became a desert to you, and you turned away from it. Ah, you said, I want something better now; my guilty soul, my virtually damned soul, my imprisoned soul, my lost soul, I want something now that the Euphrates, the river, the pleasures of this world, cannot afford. The Euphrates is dried up; the angel has poured out the vial of God’s wrath upon your portion of the river. Ah, I look back at the time when the Lord thus turned my feet; and many, many times since, when I have looked at the vanities of the world, I have said to myself, Is it possible that there was a time when I was happy in those pleasures, happy in those so-called consolations; that there was a time when I was thus pursuing

those very waters that the serpent cast out of his mouth, and expected to find satisfaction there? But the angel, the messenger, the minister, has poured out the vial of God's wrath upon this Euphrates to me, and now all is dried up; the scene is changed; I want something different; I want something better; now my soul begins to thirst for God. Take the Euphrates thus to represent the world in its pleasures, and then take its being dried up in the relative sense first. There is a twofold sense, of course, in which the words must be taken; but let us take them first in this relative sense. You recollect one that chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. And now, mark, the Euphrates was thus dried up, all your self-righteousness, all those are included, are dried up, to prepare the way of the kings of the east, or as some of the learned render it, and rightly too, for that is a literal translation, to prepare the way of the kings of the sunrising. And who are these kings? Why, the soul that is born of God; the man that is born of God is a king; he is born of royal birth; he is born as a son of God; he is born to reign to all eternity. This world is now dried up to you in the sense I have stated; I do not mean the providential mercies of the Lord; I think what I have said you will clearly understand. And some of you that are young and are seeking the Lord, oh, what a mercy for you that, so early in your life, young as you are, you have, by the goodness and mercy of the Lord, found out the deadliness of the world's attractions and the world's pleasures, and that the Euphrates of this world is in this sense dried up to you, and that now you are seeking the river of God's mercy, now you are seeking the waters of everlasting life. Now, to prepare the way of the kings of the sunrising. God has commanded the light to shine into your minds, and you see the emptiness of the world; the Euphrates to you is dried up, the curse of heaven is there, to prepare the way, and to prepare you too. That is a most wonderful scripture in John, "To make ready a people prepared for the Lord." That is a wonderful experience to be brought into that state, made ready for the Lord, I fear very few of us are really ready in one sense; we are essentially, but we are not circumstantially. If the Lord were to come today, and say, Well, now, soul, are you ready to come home to glory? I think one would say, I wish to bury my father first; I wish to settle that account first; and I wish to make that matter straight first. I am afraid many of us, would have our excuses, unless the Lord brought a readiness with it; and then, if he were pleased to do that, that would detach us from all earthly things, and we should answer to the description of the apostle when he says, "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory," and, as it were, hardly know whether we are in the body or out of it; ready to depart and be with Christ, which is far better; Thus, then, I take the Euphrates to represent the world as dried up to the people of God. First, I take the Savior, as described in the 10th of Zechariah, to which I have referred, passing sinless and obediently through the sea of this world, through the sea of our sins, through the sea of God's wrath, and he was triumphant overall. Secondly, that the drying up of the Euphrates means that the world, error, all erroneous religions, false gospels, the curse of God is upon the whole; the whole are dried up; we are turned away from the whole, and brought to the fountain of living waters, where our needs shall be forever supplied.

There is one more thought, of course, suggested by the river Euphrates being dried up, which cannot, of course, be taken literally. That very river, that you read of in the 2nd of Genesis, has been pursuing its course with very little interruption from that day to this; the river still flows on just the same as it ever did, showing that you must not take it literally, nor can we conceive any spiritual good that would be obtained by drying up a river literally. But if it be taken in this figurative sense, to mean the pleasures and the religions of this world, then there is a deep and a solemn meaning that concerns us all, because there is not a pleasure in this world that will not run

dry. The false religions and the pleasures of this world must by-and-by be so dried up that each living and dying with no better hope than a worldly hope, dying in a false religion, must lift up his eyes in hell, and desire Lazarus to be sent that he may dip his finger in water to cool the sufferer's burning tongue. What a fearful destiny awaits those that live and die unacquainted with Christ, unacquainted with that eternal mercy that is by him, unacquainted with that light which is here called the light of the sunrising! To prepare the way of the kings of the sunrising. And was it not so? There seemed no way till the Lord dried up this world to us; then the way was at once prepared. We began to pray directly; we found the way to pray directly; we began to read the Bible directly; we began to seek after God and godliness directly; but not until that was done. This Euphrates, then, will mean two things, first, the pleasures of the world; secondly, the pleasures of a false religion; and both these must be dried up that the soul may be brought into a state of utter and entire destitution, and when brought thus far then we begin to thirst for the free grace river of the blessed God, and not before. Well, now, then, we have got a victory; the Savior has wrought a victory; the Lord enable us to live more and more in that victory, to dwell in it, and to walk in it, and the Lord in a twofold sense has dried up the Euphrates to us as to the world's pleasures and false religions; that we have been brought to utter destitution; and that now Jesus Christ is all and in all.

Now, then, said the adversary, I must oppose these people; and so "I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." I know not how to enter upon this solemn, solemn, solemn point. Oh, what millions of the human race are at this moment gathered by Satan into a spirit of active hostility to God's truth! Take Mahometanism; look at the millions there. Take Catholicism; look at the millions there. I will not go any further than that, lest I offend against any of the generation of the Lord's children, but surely you cannot be at a loss for the meaning of this. But take these systems now. I will analyze these spirits presently, for they are worthy of our attention. These systems are gathering people together; it is not with an intention to fight against God. Mahometanism, if I may personify the system, thinks that whatever it does it is doing God service. Catholicism, I mean Roman Catholicism, thinks it is doing God service; and all the other isms, be they who they may or what they may, that stand opposed to God's truth, think that they are doing God service. Oh, how astounded will they be ultimately, when the Savior shall come down the parting skies, and with a voice of thunder that shall shake the universe declare God's order of eternal salvation, which will bring him ultimately into collision with all false gospels. "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Blessed of my Father with all spiritual blessings, according as you were chosen in me before the world was. Blessed of my Father in sending me to be your substitute, your Savior, your surety, your advocate, your prophet, your priest, your king, your elder brother, your eternal all in all. Blessed of my Father in being brought out of a state of nature into this order of things. Why, says Mahometanism, that is just what we have all along hated, and held to be wrong. Why, says Catholicism, that is just what we have all along hated, and thought to be wrong. And how many other isms are there too? I will not name them, I must leave them, many things I must leave, that will say, That's just the very thing we thought to be wrong. Thus, then, these false spirits gather people together professedly to serve God, but it will prove at last that they are gathered together, not for, but against God. Perhaps before I analyze these it may be as well just to notice one great event. I am sure of it, that the Jews

really thought that in putting the Savior to death they were doing God service. Satan knew better, but poor sinners thought they were doing God service. Did not the prophecy of the high priest bear upon the very thing? He said, "You know nothing at all, but that it is expedient that one man dies for the people, that the whole nation perish not." And this he said, not because the Spirit of God led him, but to fulfil their annual custom that the high priest each year was to speak a prophecy; and so, he, being priest that year, prophesied, and that Christ should die, not for that nation only, but should gather together the children of God scattered abroad. Now do not be misled by the sound of the words; the meaning of that is this, this Jesus of Nazareth is so offensive to the God of heaven and earth, this Jesus of Nazareth is such a friend of publicans and sinners, he has a devil, and he is such a deceiver and such a blasphemer, that unless we put him to death the nation will perish; but if we put him to death our nation will be saved, and all that are now scattered abroad, and have been so many years, will be gathered together. We shall so please God in getting rid of him, that God will favor us as a nation, gather the others together, and we shall be saved. This is an awful thing, is it not? Therefore, they were gathered together, as they thought, to do God service. But Jerusalem was the Armageddon. After they had put the Savior to death, in came the Lord with his armies, the Roman armies; they were the eagles that extracted the life blood of the nation, destroyed them and scattered them. Thus, then, we need to pray to the Lord to guide us rightly. Many there are in our day who think they are on God's side; Satan is laughing at them, as it were, behind the scene and saying, There's a parcel of fools. They think that they are on God's side, and gathered together to do him service, whereas they are gathered together, as the Jews were, to be destroyed. Satan does indeed thus deceive the world. And thus, I think there is no difficulty in understanding that. You will always notice this, friends; all profess to be on the side of the Lord, and they say, Well, who is to know who is and who is not? None can know but they that are taught of God. They that are taught of God, and all their false hopes dried up, and Christ becomes their all in all, and they are brought into God's eternal counsels; they are the only people that are really and truly on the Lord's side.

Now, then, these spirits were very popular spirits, received in high quarters as well as in low. One came from "the mouth of the dragon." Now that is the spirit of tyranny. These three spirits are one in opposition to God's truth but differ in their form of operation. The spirit of tyranny; we have some evidence of it by the vast number of subterranean passages, caves, and hiding places round Rome, which were evidently made in very early ages of Christianity; and thousands of saints perished in these subterranean caves and passages where they labored to hide themselves. Now this was the spirit of the dragon, this is the tyranny, this is the murder; so that wherever Satan can act as a murderer he does. We have much to bless the Lord for that his power is in a great measure taken away in this respect, and we pray it may never be restored to him. But the spirit exists still; there is still this spirit, for enmity in the heart is murder, and if that enmity could come into operation, it would of course put the saints to death now as it ever has done. But in putting them to death did he conquer them? No, no. The apostle paradoxically said, "For your sake we are killed all the daylong." Well, then, you are conquered. Why, I am as to the flesh; but in all these things, killed as we are, we are more than conquerors; we shall go triumphantly home, appear arrayed in white robes, palms in our hands, and we shall die no more, but there live and be happy for ever. "And out of the mouth of the beast." Now I take the beast to mean the world, the whole world at large. So, in the first you have the murderous spirit of the devil, and in the next you have the spirit of the world. And what is the spirit of the world? Its loving spirit, what is it? Why, the very friendship of the world is enmity against God. What is the carnal mind? "The carnal mind is enmity

against God.” Thus, then, Satan as a murderous spirit has opposed the saints of God; secondly, as a worldly spirit. We live in a very singular day; we live in a day when, if a man steps far into the spirit of the gospel, and away from the spirit of the world, professors cry out and make a strange to do about it, lest the world should not think well of them, lest the world should cease to applaud them, lest the world should cease to admire them, and lest the world should some way turn their backs upon them. I believe that to be one of the elements of the late outcry against Rahab. Why, in the apostolic age they went so deep into eternal things, and they stood out so prominently in the liberty of the gospel, that they were so despised by the world that they were reckoned as offensive as the common sewerage of the sewers; for that is the meaning of the apostle when he says, “We are reckoned the offscouring of all things.” They were in their decision for God’s truth, in their decision for the unsearchable riches of his grace, as offensive to a carnal, especially to a Pharisaic professing world, as he there describes. But now it is all to please the world. A man said to me some time ago in the country, “All the people round me speak well of me, they all like me.” I said, “I am very sorry to hear it.” He said, “I am welcome in all the people’s houses.” “Very sorry to hear it.” “What for?” I said, “I think it is a bad sign; I do not think there is much vitality about you, nor much decision about you.” After that I met with a lover of the truth. “How are you getting on?” “We should get on much better if our friend was a little more heedless about the world, and a little more heedful about the diseased, weak, and hunted about sheep: get on better if he would be the same man in all places, but he seems to squeeze himself into all sorts of shapes according to the company he is in. He is like the chameleon, he seems to partake of all colors, and we can’t get on.” And the result was that he was obliged soon to get off. There is plenty of that; why, that is making friends with the beast; that is going into a league with the devil. Let us stand out decided for the victory the Savior has wrought, and for that liberty we have in Christ Jesus. Thus, then, here is the murderous spirit of Satan, and the spirit of the world. Then comes another, “and out of the mouth of the false prophet;” there is the delusive spirit. Now the false prophet there does not mean any one man, but it means any false gospel; let the man be who he may, let him belong to whatever denomination he may, if his testimony run counter to the heaven-taught experience of the child of God, if his testimony in any shape or form run counter to the perfection of Christ, or to the everlasting covenant, then that is the spirit of the false prophet. “And” said the apostle, said the Lord himself, “they shall deceive many; if it were possible, even the very elect.” Thus, then the Savior wrought the victory; thus, he dries up the world and false religions; thus, he brings us out from the murderous enmity against God which Satan has, brings us out from the carnal enmity against the truth which the world has; brings us out from the spirit of the false prophet. And these spirits are said to be unclean, because nothing but electing grace, electing sanctification, nothing but mediatorial sanctification, nothing but regenerative sanctification, nothing else can make a man clean, for all are unclean by nature, and for a man to be clean he must be one who is sanctified by God the Father, sanctified by the Savior, sanctified by the Holy Ghost, sanctified by the truth. Being thus sanctified, devoted to God, he is reckoned clean: “Call not you that common which God has cleansed.” And then these spirits are said to be the spirits of devils, or, as it might be rendered, the spirits of demons, mediatory gods. They go forth “working miracles,” better rendered, they go forth “working signs,” false signs. All the ceremonies of Catholicism are held to be signs of certain things pertaining to God; but they are false signs. Hence, when a Church of England minister sprinkles the infant, he does that as a sign of inward and spiritual grace; but it is a false sign. When they come to confirmation, they do also that as a sign, but it is a false sign. They give them the bread and the wine and leave them with the notion that it is eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Savior; and though that be a divine institution, yet being un-

scripturally ministered, it becomes a false sign. And so, all these religions set up false signs; they have seen false tokens and false visions. This is the work of these spirits.

“And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.” Now what does Armageddon mean? The learned, for whom I naturally entertain a very great respect, for their industry, ability, and usefulness, though at the same time I claim the right, as you yourselves will, of judging for myself upon these matters; the learned well observe that it is pretty evident that the word Armageddon refers to two circumstances in the Old Testament, the 10th of Joshua, and the 4th and 5th of Judges. There, at Makkedah, to which Armageddon refers according to the learned, the sun and the moon stood still when the people were gathered together against Israel; the sun and the moon stood still till the victory was complete; to point out the delightful truth that the Lord will abide by his people until the last enemy is conquered, namely, death, until the last foe is overcome, and they safely landed in a brighter and better world. But the enemy, when he gathered them together, they did not know that the God of the Israelites could make the sun and the moon stand still. We know what their gods can do; but they do not know what our God can do; there is the secret. 4th and 5th of Judges also; by the waters of Megiddo, see the accordance between Armageddon and Megiddo, there they gathered together against the Lord’s people, and they seemed in a very weak condition; so much so that Barak was afraid to go; he was not blessed at the time with that confidence in the God of the Hebrews that Deborah was. She was blessed with full confidence; she went forth at the head of the army, Barak with her. See how the Lord interposed; see how he overturned the armies of the aliens, see how he put them to flight, and hear good old Deborah sing what you that love the Savior’s name will sing to all eternity, “He has made me have dominion over the mighty;” and so he does us. “O my soul, you have trodden down strength. So, shall all your enemies perish; but let them that love you be as the sun when he goes forth in his might.

Thus, then, friends, I have not said one tenth of what I came here this morning within my mind. The fact is, I have entered only on the threshold of the subject. But, to tell the truth, I feel somewhat concerned about this book of Revelation, and I feel a sort of resolution that before I die, the people of God shall view this book in a different light from what it has been, and that they shall so read it as to understand it as easily as they do other books of the Bible. But if you look at the inferences to be drawn, does Satan gather together our sins against us, or circumstances against us, or people against us? Why, just look at Makkedah; look at Joshua; “Sun, stand you still upon Gibeon; and you, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon.” Let your prayer be, “Leave us not, neither forsake us, O God of our salvation.”