

“We needn’t think of Revelation in esoteric or futuristic terms. “

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“Armageddon”

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While preparing for our next podcast when we discuss the New Testament Book of Revelation, it struck me how Putin’s evil actions bring us near Armageddon. This isn’t said lightly, it’s backed by scholarship. Why? Every evil act is Armageddon. War ravages Ukraine. Gangster Putin, encouraged by shameless American throne-kissers, likely will round up Ukrainian journalists, opposition politicians, any dissenter, and follow form: execute them, exile them to concentration camps. I expect he will increase his repression of those voices inside Russia who oppose his ambitions. Tyrants dislike criticism. Tyrants crucify truth.

It’s not as if there is Russia anymore. There’s only despotic, pariah Putin. Russians, rise up! Cast off demagoguery! Goodbye ballet troupes, Aeroflot, soccer competitions.

Armageddon always is around the corner. To read the Book of Revelation literally requires reading it symbolically, allegorically. Dragons, Angels, Beasts, Scrolls, Seals, Bowls, Plagues, the Four Horsemen, the Lamb -- all are graphic images drawn from previous Hebrew writings. So too the word ‘Armageddon.’ To the Hebrews and their first century Christian kin, the word ‘Armageddon’, or more properly, Har-Megiddo, meaning fortress Megiddo, would conjure images comparable to Belgium’s Ardennes Forest or Virginia’s Civil War battlefields, decisive battles, battles that turn the tide of history, battles where empires rise or fall.

Megiddo and nearby Mount Carmel were sentinels for the Valley of Decision. Because of its location this valley was the site of numerous and perpetual battles. Most battles of the world are fought in the same location. Armies traveling through Israel always had to pass through this valley. It was where final stands were made, where chariots could attack.

The whole story of Revelation, written by a pastor to encourage his people, restates the same theme, like an intensifying fugue, where this oppressed, threatened, marginalized minority community must endure times of suffering, times for witness, times of injustice demanding sacrifice (is America so cowardly we cannot sacrifice for democracy?), times for faithfulness and sacred honor, and then emerge (as from a bloody birth) unto communal salvation, God abolishing war and injustice and death and sorrow, where love and truth abide forever and ever. Amen.

Revelation is a book of hope. It proclaims victory over evil. Evil, falsehood, can never stand. It may have its day, but it can never last, no more than darkness can hold back light. The kings and demons assemble, posture, and menace, but they are empty.

I’m reminded of that liberating scene in the 1994 TV mini-series called, “The Stand,” by Stephen King. The superflu has wiped out 99% of the world’s population. The survivors split between those who want to follow God and those who follow a demon in the persona of a fellow named Randall Flagg – decent Colorado versus decadent Las Vegas. It’s time for fear, hardship, suffering. Finally, the Godly ones receive a prophecy that four of them must go and stand before the evil one. Not to fight him, but to bear witness. They are captured. One of the four is an old professor, Glen Bateman. Randall Flagg does

his best to threaten him, tempt him, frighten him into serving him. Suddenly the professor starts laughing at him.

"You're nothing!" Glen says, wiping his streaming eyes and still chuckling. "Oh pardon me...it's just that we were all so frightened...we made such a business out of you...I'm laughing as much at our own foolishness as at your regrettable lack of substance..."

Armageddon is every day. Every day we have reasons to cower before Putinesque malice that postures and menaces us every day, urging us to despair, to fear, to give in and give up. We needn't think of Revelation in esoteric or futuristic terms.

Armageddon is painted by the author of Revelation as the cosmic final battle, but aren't they all? Aren't they each? Every day is the last day, every day is the day of the Lord, a decisive day. Armageddon is whenever victims fall victim to the selfish ambitions of others, the bad choices others have made that determine their fate. There always is a battle against evil deeds. When demons assemble, that is when we, trusting God, must stand.

If we teach our children anything, let it be commitment, let it be courage. Let it be an inner faith that conquers whatever a despotic, inhumane world throws at us. Above all, let the people be a people of hope.

You don't need a map of Israel to locate Armageddon. Armageddon is a battle always fought in the soul for the soul.