



*A Ministry of the
Church of God (Seventh Day)*

The Battle of ARMAGEDDON



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The film industry attracts large audiences with its end-of-the-world fantasies. Viewers squirm in their seats as disaster threatens to extinguish life on earth. Special effects create illusions of doom worse than modern warfare!

Screen-watchers may console themselves by thinking, *It's only a movie!* But a real-life event is on its way, with greater attention-grabbing power than either movie or TV can portray. That event is called the Battle of Armageddon, and believers often speculate whether world conflicts in the daily news may lead directly to it. Battles in or around the Holy Land easily arouse expectations of the end of the age.

Armageddon is mentioned by name only once in the Bible — Revelation 16:16: "And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon." The awful and awesome tenor of that place is described in verse 14: "For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of the great day of God Almighty."

The word *Armageddon* incorporates the Hebrew name *Megiddo* and refers to the plains of Esdraelon (or Jezreel), a geographic area of Palestine stretching from Haifa toward Nazareth, north of the Carmel mountain range. So Armageddon is both the name of a place and the name of a battle to be fought there.

The most definitive of all wars, the Battle of Armageddon spans the end of this age and the beginning of the earthly reign of Je-

sus Christ. This conclusion is gathered from the events pictured in Revelation 16:12-16:

Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he that watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame." And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

Various battles in the Mideast and the area of the Euphrates River have caused wild speculation that Armageddon may be upon us. False alarms usually lull the wary into complacency and erode the faith of others. We should always be aware of the possibilities, while diligently continuing our service to the Lord.

The combat of Revelation 16 will at some point be joined in the valley of Megiddo. This battle at Armageddon may be a lead-up to the ultimate war for control of Jerusalem. Or, considering its proximity to the contested Holy City (only about fifty miles apart), it could be just a phase of the same ultimate struggle. We can see this more clearly by introducing other texts that most students of prophecy recognize as parallel

to the Armageddon of Revelation 16. Like Zechariah 14.

Previous Prophet, Same Story

Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem . . . (Zechariah 14:1, 2a).

Zechariah's prophecy indicates that Jerusalem will be the focus of the last great battle of this age. That's why wars in the Middle East involving Israel often trigger supposition that the Battle of Armageddon is at hand. Both Zechariah and John (Revelation 16:14b) predict that all nations will be gathered to this battle — the whole earth! Does this mean *every nation* will send an army to engage in the battle? Would nations like Liberia, New Zealand, or Guyana become involved?

Probably not. The United Nations (UN) already sends peacekeeping forces around the world, and what the UN does is regarded as "all nations." It may be in this sense that God will gather all nations against Jerusalem. However, some specific nations are mentioned as participating in this conflict, as we shall soon see.

The central idea that Zechariah develops as he describes the war for Jerusalem is that a climactic battle will be in progress when the great day of the Lord comes and Christ suddenly returns:

Behold, the day of the Lord is coming. . . . For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be

taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle (Zechariah 14:1-3).

Though various nations have battled over Jerusalem since the days of Zechariah, no such worldwide involvement has ever occurred, and certainly none of them ever ended as Zechariah says this battle will terminate:

Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall remove toward the north and half of it toward the south. . . . Thus the Lord my God will come, and all the saints with You (14:3-5).

The prophecy of Zechariah 14 confirms the Armageddon scenario of Revelation 16 and connects it solidly with the second coming of Christ to earth. Now we turn to another Old Testament prophet who foresees a similar time, place, and event. This time, Ezekiel.

Battle of the Great Day of God Almighty

Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of

Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out. . . . Persia, Ethiopia and Libya are with them . . . Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah from the far north and all its troops — many people are with you” (Ezekiel 38:3-6).

In Ezekiel 38 and 39 the prophet describes a tremendous end-time war and identifies some of the nations and peoples involved. This great war was to occur *after* Israel’s restoration as a nation (v. 8), which happened in 1948. Through Ezekiel, God reveals the intentions of those nations who oppose Israel in the latter years:

You will say, “I will go up against a land of unwallled villages; I will go to a peaceful people, who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates” – to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out your hand against the waste places that are again inhabited, and against a people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell in the midst of the land (Ezekiel 38:11, 12).

If this refers to the climactic end-time battle, as we understand, then Israel will be at rest, dwelling safely and not focused on her defenses. That is not quite the current picture for Israel and her Islamic neighbors. What could bring about such a change? These prophecies may develop gradually under the guidance of the United Nations (or the United States?), with an appearance of peace being achieved just prior to the time of the prophecies of Ezekiel, Zechariah, and John. Students of prophecy associ-

ate this lull in hostilities with Paul's words at a later time:

But concerning the times and seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3).

Our understanding suggests that when the United Nations thinks the Middle East has finally been placated, when there is peace and safety, suddenly the peace will not hold. The nations Ezekiel 38 names, and others allied with them, will descend on Palestine and against Israel for their own gain, as verses 9-17 describe.

Some oppose the idea that these events are yet future, because the prophet speaks of horses and horsemen, shields, helmets, and swords — not the kind of weapons and armor used in modern times. Ezekiel had no knowledge of modern warfare and so described the battle with the terms and methods then used. Similarly, the book of Revelation is replete with *horsemen*, and Jesus is seen as returning astride a horse, as was the custom of kings and mighty men:

Now I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war (19:11).

Such language is symbolic, as are many other end-time prophecies.

Nations of the East

We have sampled three primary texts from which we build our ideas of Armageddon, the last great battle before Christ's return: Ezekiel 38, Zechariah 14, and Revelation 16. Many Bible students have surmised that the main character in this grim world drama to come may be Russia, likely called Gog in Ezekiel's prophecy. (Gog and his descendants first settled in the general territory now known as Russia.) Some question this interpretation in view of Russia's diminished sphere of influence following the fall of the Soviet Union. Alignment of powers can change quickly, however, and recent events show Russia again on the rise.

If this traditional identification is correct, Russia and her allied nations would advance toward Palestine and the battlefields of Armageddon, while other great powers would come from the east to take an active part in this last great conflict:

Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared (Revelation 16:12).

In Revelation 17:15, water represents peoples, multitudes, and nations. Thus the meaning could be that nations bordering the Euphrates will be unable to impede an invasion of armies of kings from further east, or of "the sun-rising," as they come to "the battle of the great day of God Almighty." Because of this prophecy, Bible students closely watch the international relations of eastern powers to see when

they may begin military action against the Middle East.

When the hordes from Asia poured into the Roman Empire during the fourth and fifth centuries AD, effectively terminating the empire's power by their divisiveness, these prophecies of the kings of the east were thought to refer to them, and with good reason. But the time was not right.

When the kings of the east enter the fray, it will result in a great conflict, for Ezekiel 38:13 speaks of nations or powers that will challenge the spoiling (looting) of Israel:

Sheba, Dedan, the merchants of Tarshish, and all their young lions will say to you, "Have you come to take plunder? Have you gathered your army to take booty, to carry away silver and gold, to take away livestock and goods, to take great plunder?"

Ancient Sheba and Dedan refer to what is now southern Arabia. These countries and the land Ezekiel speaks of, represented by the "young lions," are said to question the invading armies from the east, but they do not seem to offer anything other than verbal resistance.

Only God knows when current events will finally pertain to the prophetic drying up of the waters of the Euphrates to usher in the Battle of Armageddon and "the battle of that great day of God Almighty." This battle will be terminated by the action of our God, whose "fury comes up in His face" against those who have rejected Him and have opposed Him throughout history. When God has determined that wickedness is no longer to be tolerated, then "Our God shall

come, and shall not keep silent; a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous all around Him" (Psalm 50:3).

The Lord has a reason for the Battle of Armageddon: It is to terminate the reign of wicked rulers and begin the reign of Christ with those who believe and obey Him. The Battle of Armageddon is a time of judgment, a time of establishing the rule of righteousness, a time when the children of God receive their inheritance and the children of Satan lose their power.

What is the Message for Us?

Conflicts in the Middle East have occurred for centuries, and it seems that they come more often as time marches along. Students of the Bible are admonished by Jesus to remain aware of such events:

Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather: for the sky is red'; and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times" (Matthew 16:1-3).

We don't want to be classified as hypocrites. Rather, we want to give serious study to understanding where we are in the chain of human events. This is a time to remain alert, anticipating in hope the return of our Lord.

Throughout Matthew 24 and Luke 21,

the Savior speaks of the end of the age being filled with wars, international conflicts, famines, pestilences, persecutions, false prophets, and false messiahs. In 2 Timothy 3:1-5 Paul describes the last days as being perilous and gives the reasons for this condition:

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

These immoral conditions accurately describe the time we live in. Apparently the end of this age is not far off!

Paul, like Jesus, indicates that Christians have enough information to recognize what is going on when the Day arrives. We are “not in darkness” and should be wide awake to what is happening in our times.

But you, brethren, are not in darkness so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all the sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to

wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:6-9).

For those who trust Christ and are walking in faith and love toward Him and others, the Battle of Armageddon is more than an awful time of terror. It is an awesome and terrific time when all the good promises of God in favor of His people will come true!



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