

The Wars of the End Times

How many and when will they happen?

Every time a war breaks out in the Middle East, I receive a flurry of phone calls and email messages asking if it could be the War of Armageddon. This question is prompted by the fact that most people are familiar with only one end time war – the one that has been popularized in movies and novels as the "Battle of Armageddon."

The concept comes from the book of Revelation where it says that armies will gather in the end times at a place "which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon" (Revelation 16:16). This term literally means the Mount of Megiddo and refers to the ancient fortress of Megiddo that controlled the Valley of Jezreel. In English the word was transliterated as Armageddon, and the term came to be applied to the Valley of Jezreel which lies in front of Har-Magedon, running diagonally across Israel from Haifa to the Jordan River.



The Valley of Armageddon looking east from the top of Mount Carmel

Most people are surprised to discover that there is no reference in the book of Revelation, or any other place in the Bible to the "Valley of Armageddon," nor is there any reference to the "Battle of Armageddon" – but more about that later. People are even more surprised to learn that Bible prophecy reveals nine wars in the end times and that Armageddon relates to only one of these.

The Next Prophetic War

Most prophetic scholars have long believed that the next great end time war will be the War of Gog & Magog that is described in Ezekiel 38 and 39. This, for example is the stated position of Joel Rosenberg in his popular book, *Epicenter*.

This war will start when Russia invades Israel with certain specified allies, all of whom are Muslim nations today.

But I seriously doubt that the conflict described in Ezekiel 38 and 39 will be the next war of end time Bible prophecy. There are two reasons why I feel this way.

First, there is a condition for the war of Ezekiel 38 and 39 that has not been met. Three times in Ezekiel 38 – in verses 8, 11, and 14 – it states that the war described in that chapter will not occur until the people of Israel are living "securely" in "unwalled villages."

Israel is not living in security today. It is bombarded daily by missiles from Gaza, and it is constantly under the threat of missile attacks from Hezbollah in Lebanon. There is also the ever present threat of terrorist attacks, a threat that has forced Israel to construct a 400 mile long wall down the center of the country. In short, it is laughable today to even think of the Jewish people of Israel as living "securely" in "unwalled villages."

The second reason I doubt that the war of Ezekiel 38 and 39 will be the next end time war of Bible prophecy is because the nations mentioned in Ezekiel 38:5-6 as the allies of Russia do not include a single Arab state with a border adjacent to Israel. The nations identified are Persia (Iran), Cush (most likely modern day Sudan), Put (Libya and possibly Algeria and Tunisia), and two regions that lie within modern day Turkey (Gomer and Bethtogarmah). There is no mention of the nations that share a common border with Israel – namely, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and Gaza.



The Valley of Jezreel, also known as the Valley of Armageddon

Why are the nations located next to Israel not mentioned as allies of Russia? I believe the best explanation of this mystery is the one supplied by Bill Salus in his book, *Israelestine*. He proposes that the next end time prophetic war will be the one described in Psalm 83, a war between Israel and its neighbors. He believes this war will produce the conditions that are necessary for the war of Ezekiel 38 and 39, and I agree with that conclusion.

With that point clarified, let's now take an overview of the end time prophetic wars in their likely chronological sequence.

1. The War of Extermination — Psalm 83

The psalm states that the immediate neighbors of Israel will launch a war for the purpose of "wiping out Israel as a nation" (verse 4). The nations described as being a part of this nefarious effort are those with a common border with Israel today (verses 6-8). The rest of the psalm is a prayer for the victory of Israel (verses 9-18).

The outcome of the war is not stated, but we know from other scriptures that Israel will be victorious. For example, in Zechariah 12:6 we are told that in the end times Israel will be like "a firepot among pieces of wood and a flaming torch among sheaves, so they will consume on the right hand and on the left all the surrounding peoples..." Also, in Amos 9:15 we are told that once the Jews are re-established in their land, "they will not again be rooted out from their land."

Bill Salus believes this war will result in an overwhelming victory for Israel, resulting in great territorial expansion and enhanced national resources. It will also produce the security spoken of in Ezekiel 38.

2. The First War of Gog & Magog — Ezekiel 38 and 39

But the security provided by the Psalm 83 war will not last long. The Arab nations will turn to their natural ally, Russia, and cry out for help.

And the Russians will be very happy to respond, for they have always dreamed of taking the oil fields of the Middle East. They will, therefore, launch an invasion for the stated purpose of helping the Muslims destroy Israel, but their unstated agenda will be to use the Arab invitation as an excuse to expand their sovereignty over all the Middle East. This ulterior motive is described in Ezekiel 38:12 where it says the Russians will come "to capture spoil and to seize plunder."

The invading armies will be supernaturally destroyed by God "on the mountains of Israel" (Ezekiel 39:4). The Lord will accomplish this destruction through earthquakes, pestilence, hail storms, fire, brimstone, and battlefield confusion (Ezekiel 38:19- 22). Even the Jewish people will recognize that the victory belongs to the Lord, and many will open their hearts to the Lord (Ezekiel 38:23). In fact, this event could mark the occasion when the 144,000 Jews of Revelation 7:1-8 accept Yeshua as their Messiah and are sealed by the Lord for special service throughout the seven year period of the Tribulation.

The greatest mystery concerning this war is its timing. Most have placed it at the beginning of the Tribulation. Others delay its start to the middle of the

Tribulation. Increasingly in recent years, the tendency has been to place it before the beginning of the Tribulation.

The best discussion of timing that has yet been written can be found in Ron Rhodes' book, *Northern Storm Rising*. He concludes that it is most likely to occur 3 1/2 years prior to the Tribulation. One of his most important reasons for this conclusion is that Ezekiel 39:9 says the Jews will spend seven years burning the weapons captured in the war, and the book of Revelation says they will be run out of the land in the middle of the Tribulation (Revelation 12:13-17). Since the middle of the Tribulation will occur 3 1/2 years into that seven year period, that means the only way the Jews could spend seven years burning the weapons is for the war to start at least 3 1/2 years before the Tribulation begins. (Note: The "burning of weapons" could refer to captured nuclear fuel.)

Does this mean the wars of Psalm 83 and Ezekiel 38 and 39 must occur before the Rapture? Not at all. The Rapture could occur anytime before, during, or after these wars. Keep in mind that the Rapture is not what marks the beginning of the Tribulation. The Tribulation will begin when the Antichrist signs a security treaty with Israel (Daniel 9:27). There could be a period of several years between the Rapture and the beginning of the Tribulation.

3. The Conventional War of the Tribulation — Revelation 6

The book of Revelation states that a major world war will break out soon after the Tribulation begins. This war is described in Revelation 6.

Although the Antichrist will rise to world power in Europe through cunning, deception, and intrigue (Daniel 8:23), he will have to resort to military power to conquer the world. Asia, Africa, and South America have spent too long casting off the shackles of European colonialism for them to suddenly surrender their sovereignty peacefully to a new European dictator – regardless of how brilliant and charismatic he may be.

We are told in Revelation 13:7 that the Antichrist will ultimately achieve "authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation." This authority will be achieved through war. Revelation 6 records the outbreak of this world

war. It results in the death of one-fourth of humanity, or 1.5 billion in today's terms (Revelation 6:8).

The War of Psalm 83 results in the destruction of the inner ring of Muslim states around Israel. The War of Ezekiel 38 and 39 produces the defeat of the immediate outer ring of Muslim states.

But the vast majority of all Muslims live outside the Middle East, the largest Muslim nations being Indonesia (201 million), India (144 million), Pakistan (140 million), and Bangladesh (115 million). These nations are the ones who are most likely to produce the strongest resistance to a Western dictator, and they will be destroyed either in this war or the one that follows it.

In other words, I believe God is going to use the Antichrist as His hammer of wrath to destroy Islam.

But many other nations in the world will also have to be subdued, and that leads us to the next war of the end times.

4. The Nuclear War of the Tribulation — Revelation 8 & 9

At some point, the book of Revelation indicates that the conventional war will morph into a nuclear holocaust, resulting in the deaths of another one-third of Mankind, or another 1.5 billion people (Revelation 9:15). This means that in the first two wars of the Tribulation, more than one half of humanity will die.

A hint that the conventional war will become a nuclear one is found in Revelation 8:7 where it states that the escalation of the war will result in one-third of the earth being burned up. Another hint is found in Revelation 16:2 – 11 where we are told that "loathsome and malignant" sores will afflict people at the end of the Tribulation, something that would be a natural consequence of radiation from the use of nuclear weapons.

It could very well be that this nuclear holocaust could be what Jesus had in mind when He stated that in the end times men will faint from fear over the

expectation of the things coming upon the world, "for the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Luke 21:26).

This war is portrayed in the book of Revelation in chapters 8 – 9 as a series of "Trumpet Judgments."

5. The War in the Heavens — Revelation 12

The next end time war is totally different in nature from all the rest. It is a supernatural one that will occur in the heavens in the middle of the Tribulation. It is most likely prompted by an attempt of Satan to once again take the throne of God.

Satan and his angels are opposed in this war by Michael and his angels. Michael is an archangel who is pictured in the Hebrew Scriptures as the commander-in-chief of the armies of God (Daniel 10:13, 21 and 12:1). Michael and his angels prevail in this war, and Satan is cast down to earth. His access to God's throne is cut off (Revelation 12:9-10).

When this happens, Satan realizes that his time is short because he knows Bible prophecy (Revelation 12:12). In his rage, Satan decides to destroy the Jewish people, and this decision leads to the next war.

6. The War Against the Jews and the Saints — Revelation 12

Satan hates the Jews with a passion for several reasons:

1. They are the Chosen People of God.
2. God used them to provide the Scriptures to the world.
3. It was through them that the Messiah came.
4. God has promised that He will bring a great remnant of them to faith in His Son at the end of the Tribulation.

There is going to be another holocaust during the latter half of the Tribulation. When Satan is cast down to earth, he will possess the Antichrist (Revelation 13:2) and inspire him to annihilate all the Jews. This is the reason that Jesus referred to the last half of the Tribulation as "the great tribulation" (Matthew 24:21) – not

because this half will be worse than the first half, but because the wrath of Satan will be focused on the Jews.

Some of the Jews of Israel will flee to a place in the "wilderness" where they will be supernaturally protected by God (Revelation 12:13-14). Many believe this hiding place will be the ancient city of Petra, located inside a box canyon in modern Jordan. There is good reason for this assumption because Daniel 11:41 says the Antichrist will be prevented from conquering Jordan when it is part of an end time rebellion.

But Zechariah 13:8 indicates that two-thirds of the Jewish people will be killed by the Antichrist during this time, and Revelation 12:17 says the Antichrist will also war against the "offspring" of Israel – namely, those "who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus." I believe this is a reference to all those who accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior during the Tribulation, both Jews and Gentiles.

It is no wonder that Revelation 7:9-14 pictures a great multitude of martyrs in Heaven, so great that it cannot be counted. They are identified as "the ones who are coming out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14).

So the Antichrist will be very successful in his war against the Jews and the Saints, but he will fail in his ultimate goal of annihilating all the Jews. For we are told repeatedly throughout the Scriptures that a great remnant of the Jews will live to the end of the Tribulation at which time they will receive Yeshua as their Messiah. (See: Isaiah 10:20-23; Zechariah 12:10; Romans 9:27-28; and Romans 11:25-26.)

7. The Middle East Campaign of the Antichrist — Daniel 11

Daniel 11:40-45 describes a military campaign of the Antichrist in the Middle East that occurs at the end of the Tribulation.

These verses and related verses in Revelation could very well indicate that when the Antichrist becomes insanely obsessed with destroying the Jews and the

Saints, the nations of the world will see an opportunity to rebel against him. The nations in the Middle East will be led by the "king of the North" (most likely Syria) and the "king of the South" (Egypt). The Antichrist responds by invading "the Beautiful Land" and subduing all the area except Jordan.

But just as he seems to be completely victorious, he hears "rumors from the East and from the North" that deeply disturb him. He retreats with his armies to the area "between the seas" where "he will come to his end." The geographical description here of a location between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee corresponds to the Valley of Armageddon.

I believe the rumors that frighten him are, in part, the news that "the kings from the East" (Revelation 16:12) who are bringing huge armies from Asia have arrived at the Euphrates River and are ready to cross into Israel to challenge him. The rumors from the North could relate to a reconstituted rebellious army from China/Russia.

8. The Battle of Armageddon - Joel 3, Zechariah 14, and Revelation 19

It appears that just as the armies from the East and the North start arriving in the Valley of Armageddon to challenge the Antichrist, the Lord breaks from the heavens, returns to the Mount of Olives, speaks a supernatural word, and all the armies are instantly destroyed.

In other words, there really is no such thing as the "Battle of Armageddon." The armies are assembled to do battle, but the Lord annihilates all of them in a microsecond "with the breath of His mouth" (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

Joel 3:16 says the Lord will "roar from Zion" and "utter His voice from Jerusalem." Isaiah 10:16 says the result will be "a wasting disease." Zechariah 14:12 says it will be a plague that will cause the flesh of the soldiers "to rot while they stand on their feet." Their eyes will rot in their sockets and their tongues will rot in their mouths. It will be like the explosion of a neutron bomb.

9. The Second Battle of Gog & Magog — Revelation 20

Mercifully and joyfully, the "battle" of Armageddon will be followed by one thousand years of peace as the reign of Jesus from Jerusalem results in the world being filled with righteousness and justice (Isaiah 11:4-5,9). Swords will be beat into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, and "nation will not lift up sword against nation..." (Isaiah 2:4). All the money that is spent today on armaments will be spent on agricultural implements. The world will be flooded with agricultural abundance (Amos 9:13). There will be no homeless or hungry people. Every man will have his own vineyard and orchard (Micah 4:4).

Satan will be bound (Revelation 20:1-3). Sin and crime will be greatly reduced. But there will be seething rebellion in the hearts of many, if not most, that are born during that time.

This is hard for most people to understand. Why would there be resentment in the hearts of people in the midst of such a perfect reign of Jesus?

The initial population of the Millennium will be all those, both Jew and Gentile, who live to the end of the Tribulation and who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior. All others will be consigned to death when the Lord returns. So, the Millennium will begin with only believers. But they will begin to propagate, and since death will be curtailed and life spans will be greatly extended (Isaiah 65:20), the population of the world will grow exponentially.

Those born during this time will still have the old sin nature. They will desire all the things of the flesh – booze, drugs, gambling, and promiscuous sex. But they will see that any violation of the Law of God results in swift and certain justice. Immediate arrest will be followed by an immediate trial and an immediate judgment. There will be no appeal, for all judges will be Saints in glorified bodies who will make perfect decisions. So, the average person in the flesh will say, "I love you Jesus!" but he or she will do so with clinched teeth.

The Bible states repeatedly that Jesus will rule with "a rod of iron" (Psalm 2:9 and Revelation 2:26-27). And despite the fact that His reign will produce righteousness, fairness, and perfect justice (Isaiah 11:4-5), most of those living in

the flesh will deeply resent the fact that they cannot freely pursue their worldly lusts.

It is no wonder that when Satan is released at the end of the Lord's millennial reign (Revelation 20:7), the majority of those in the flesh will unite in one last rebellion against God that is pictured in Revelation 20:7-9. Led once again by Gog & Magog, this war is often confused with the war of Ezekiel 38 and 39. But the two are very different. The Ezekiel war pictures Russia coming against the nation of Israel with certain specified allies. In Revelation 20 Russia is portrayed as leading all the nations of the world against Jesus Christ.

History is going to end as it began. It started out with two people living in a perfect society, but deciding to rebel against their Creator. It ends with all of humanity living in a perfect society, and the majority making the same decision to rebel against God.

One of the many purposes of the Millennium is for God to prove that Mankind's inherent sin defect can be remedied only by the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

The religion of Satan has always been Humanism – the belief in Man. This philosophy teaches that Man is inherently good and is capable of perfection through education and social justice. Humanists therefore believe that if society can be perfected by supplying each person with a guaranteed job and income, Mankind will be transformed.

But the Bible teaches that Mankind is fatally flawed with a sin nature that makes people naturally evil (Jeremiah 17:9). And the Bible teaches that the only solution to the problem is the transformation of the Holy Spirit that begins when a person accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior.

God will prove this beyond doubt when He puts all of Mankind into a perfect society for one thousand years and Mankind responds in rebellion.

The Abolition of War

The Second War of Gog & Magog will be the final war of history. Following it, God will take the Redeemed off the earth and place them in the New Jerusalem He is now preparing. He will then consume the earth with fire to burn away the pollution of Satan's last revolt. Out of that fiery inferno will come new heavens and a new earth – this earth redeemed and perfected (2 Peter 3:10-13). He will then lower the Redeemed down to this earth inside the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2-7), and He will come to earth to live in their presence eternally (Revelation 22:1-4).

Eternal peace is coming. War is going to be gone forever. This hope of Mankind will not be achieved by diplomats. It will be a gift of God through Jesus Christ who died to redeem Mankind and all the Cosmos.

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