

Countdown to Armageddon— Then What?

"And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them, to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." Revelation 16:16, 14

The Communist Bloc collapsed—and the cold war has seemingly ended. But the euphoria of peace was soon eclipsed by the Iraqi War. The greatest array of armed forces since World War II—representing a coalition of 28 nations—gathered together in the Middle East. What did this gathering portend?

Megiddo was the great battleground of Palestine, on which were fought many of the famous battles of Old Testament history. John in his symbolic book of Revelation represents the final battle between right and wrong, truth and error, as the Battle of Armageddon. Is this a symbolic battle? What significance is there in the literal gathering of the nations in such close proximity to the Mound of Megiddo?

Many expected a ground war scenario of chemical and nuclear warfare in which Iraq would "scud" Israel with chemical warheads. Israel would retaliate with nuclear bombs. The Arab nations would unite against Israel. Israel would soundly defeat her Arab foes and acquire more land. With Israel then dwelling in the peace posture suggested by Ezekiel 38:8, the stage would be set for the battle of battles—the invasion of Israel by "Gog of Magog [Russia]" and the allied armies of Ezekiel 38 & 39.

Russia Bears Watching

Whatever follows the Iraqi War, the Russian "bear" is up to its old tricks. Indications are that the makings for "Cold War" have broken out on another front. The alliance between the Communist Party conservatives and the army is thriving and gaining power as the bloody suppression of the Baltic Republics testified. Censorship is tightening. Domestic opponents of the regime are accused of treason in language all too reminiscent of the "bad old days." Red Army troops patrolling the streets of major cities are tightening control. Political liberals and advocates of economic reform are being dismissed. These ominous events appear to be the echoes of Shevardnadze's warning of "a coming dictator."

In foreign affairs, Russia is hedging on its troop withdrawal from Poland and East Germany. On the "Hot War" front, Russian military advisors are still in Iraq. A Soviet ship was caught with weapon parts destined for Iraq.

These alarming developments have been countered by the withholding of promised aid by the Western powers. The peace and arms control summit meeting was postponed.

The Countdown

The break in the Communist Bloc between Russia and her former satellites was a necessary prophetic shift. Poland, East Germany, Hungary, etc., will become a part of the "European Community" while Papacy attempts to revive the old "Holy Roman Empire" (Revelation 17:13-14; 13:14-17). [See NEW YORK TIMES, April 22, 1990, observations on this subject.]

The Battle of Armageddon will climax when the masses rise up and overthrow the soon-to-be-attempted church-state folly of Europe (Revelation 16:13-19).

Meanwhile, in the continuing "confederacy" of Psalms 83, Russia apparently will be a force among the Arab nations. Ezekiel 38:4-8 indicates that Russia's specific intention will then "turn" south to "Persia" (Iran), "Togarmah" (Turkey) and to "Libya" and "Ethiopia" (or Cush, parts of Africa) for an invasion "against the mountains of Israel."

The Mustering for Battle on the Home Fronts

Concurrent with the gathering of armies, an unprecedented "time of trouble" (Daniel 12:1) is mustering in the United States and around the whole world. Up to 15 million people die of starvation annually. There are 30 million refugees and 100 million homeless. Each day 40,000 babies die of starvation in Third world countries while Americans spend over \$900 million yearly feeding dogs and cats.

Pollution: Solid wastes, radio active and toxic chemical wastes are contaminating our rivers, lakes and oceans. Air pollutants from car exhaust and industry are killers. Deaths from respiratory diseases doubles every five years. Skin cancer caused by the depleted ozone layer is rapidly increasing. Acid rain is destroying our forests, which in turn is producing "global warming." This "greenhouse effect" could melt polar ice caps causing oceans to rise and wipe out hundreds of thousands of miles of densely populated coastal lands (affecting 2 billion people). Also, it would dramatically increase temperature variations. This would trigger life-threatening droughts and heat waves turning "breadbasket farmland" (like our Midwest) into barren desert. Severe food shortages would result.

Economic Chaos: The U.S. entered the 1990's with a staggering debt of \$663.7 billion and a perilous foreign trade imbalance. The S&L Associations waver on the verge of complete collapse. Even the commercial banks are in serious trouble. Insurance companies are failing while 1,300 companies claim bankruptcy per week. Accentuating all of these problems, add a recession, which is affecting not only businesses, but families.

One out of five Americans (44 million people) are living below the poverty line of \$9,435 yearly income. A third of Americans are "shelter poor." After paying for housing, they have nothing left for other necessities. Three million homeless wander the streets. Poverty drives people to desperation.

AIDS: Ten million people throughout the world are infected with AIDS. By AD 2000, the total number will reach 20 million. More than 3,000 new cases of AIDS are reported in the U.S. every month. An estimated one million Americans are infected. AIDS FAX (Vol. III, No. 1) claims ten million. Its death toll in the U.S. has been 83,000. By 1992 the cost of AIDS medical bills is likely to be \$7.5 billion. It is estimated that 20% of the hospitals in this country will financially fault and close by 2000 AD when the medical needs of AIDS patients will peak. Hospital beds will be filled with AIDS patients while people with regular medical needs stand in line to wait for a bed.

Armageddon: a Natural Consequence

Humankind has sown the seeds of sin and reaped "the time of trouble" which will finally knock them flat on their backs so that the only way man can look is up to God. Man's extremity will become God's opportunity.

God's side in the coming Battle of Armageddon is the side of the people. The frustrated, disillusioned masses—conscious of their weakness as compared with the establishment—will rise up in desperation. Normally the majority of the poor and middle class have no sympathy with anarchy but seek change by legislation or other peaceful methods.

On the other hand, wobbly governments will cling to some sort of stability offered by Christian churches and try to maintain the "status quo." The unlikely coalition between church and state in this very secular time will be a last-resort effort to preserve this old order of selfishness and greed. With this Battle erupts an "earthquake"—a shaking and rising up from beneath the crust of established society (Rev. 16:18).

The Final Battle

The final battle between Right and Wrong, Truth and Error, will occur in the Middle East. What is left of the weakened governments of earth will

focus their fury against Israel, "when Gog shall come against the land of Israel" (Ezekiel 38:16). The result of this Battle is stated clearly: "Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezekiel 38:23).

After Armageddon: God's Kingdom

Because Jesus died as "a ransom for all," all will have an opportunity to learn of God's love in His Kingdom. God's Kingdom will satisfy all the legitimate longings of humankind. Think of the parched drought belt of Africa where millions have starved to death. The climatic conditions of the Kingdom will cause all the earth to bring forth in abundance. (Isa. 35:1,7)

There will be no unemployment, fear of automation, inflation, depression or other economic problem. The Kingdom will assure equality and justice to all. The Psalmist said, "He [God] will defend the cause of the poor, deliver the needy and crush the oppressor." (Psalms 72:4; Isa. 9:7)

Our history is one of bloody war, but in God's Kingdom, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." (Isa. 2:4) Neither will there be any more crime and violence. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain [kingdom], for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah 11:9)

There will be no pollution or sickness, no crippling diseases. The blind will see; the deaf hear, and the crippled walk. Even the dead will be restored to life. (Isaiah 33:4; 35:5; Hosea 13:14)

Yes, the nations are mustering internally and internationally for Armageddon, but true Christians need not despair. They know by faith in the "sure word of prophecy" that Armageddon's chastening is the gateway into the Kingdom of God on earth.