

Beyond the News

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Peace for Jews and Palestinians

By Peter Eng

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In light of the recent breakdown in peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, it is good to pause and ask if peace is possible.

The Issue

When peace talks were about to begin, I told my children ruefully that regardless of the skill of Hillary Clinton there will be no breakthrough this time around. This is because the dynamics are not right. The pieces are not in place. American President Bush moved one piece in place by advocating a Palestinian State. But he made the mistake of calling for elections which brought in Hamas. Hamas is not interested in a negotiated peace. That piece is out of place. The Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is interested in a negotiated peace, but Hamas controls Gaza while Abbas controls only the West Bank. Talks with Abbas will not yield anything because he is not able to speak for Gaza. Abbas is in an extraordinarily weak position.

At the political level, peace between Israel and a warring neighbor, or peace between the Jews and the Palestinians, is possible only when: (1) Israel is governed by a strong conservative party

[true at this point with Benjamin Netanyahu]; (2) the Palestinians are governed by a strong conservative Palestinian government [not true at this point with Abbas who is weak]; (3) a willingness to make compromises for a negotiated peace towards a two-state solution possible [not true for Hamas]

It is rightly observed that a liberal Israeli government will not get the support of Jews if peace is brokered because the Jews will believe he has given away too much. The same is true of the Palestinians. Abbas is extremely weak. He is not able to reign in Palestinian militants in Gaza. This means he has nothing to offer Israel. It is no wonder Israel refuses to extend the building moratorium in the West Bank. The only Palestinians who are able to make peace are the Hamas. But they are not willing. There has to be a willingness on the part of the majority of Palestinian militants to make peace. There will always be a group of Jews or Palestinians who think they have given away too much for peace. This is why the strong conservative leaders of both sides are ideal in making peace, for they minimize such sentiment. People are more likely to believe that their hawks got the best possible deal rather than their doves.

An example of this is the peace between Israel and Egypt. This was effected by Anwar Sadat who fought a war against Israel, and Menachem Begin who is a well known Jewish hawk. Hawks can gain support from their own people in peace deals better than doves. Similarly, doves can gain better support from their own people for war than hawks.

Until the Jews and the Palestinians have the political conditions for peace, it is unlikely that any other nation in the world can broker a peace deal for them. It is no fault of America that this round of diplomacy failed. It doesn't matter who

is in power in America: Democrat or a Republican. America can only facilitate peace negotiations, not create peace.

The above serves as a [segue](#) to what the Bible has to say about peace for Israel. Folks ask me what the Bible has to say about peace between Jews and Palestinians. There is an answer. It is both simple and complex. The simple answer is: *there is nothing in the Bible that would disqualify peace between the Jews and the Palestinians.* But one interpretation of one popular view may disallow such a peace.

Two essential considerations when you are formulating a worldview on whether there can be peace between the Jews and the Palestinians: (1) your view of the End Times; and (2) your understanding of the Battle of Armageddon where the nations will (or had) fought against the Jews.

Views of the End Times

There are four main views of the End Times: (1) Historical Pre-Millennialism; (2) Dispensational Pre-Millennialism, (3) A-millennialism and (4) Post-millennialism. There is no need to explicate all of them, except to point out that the most popular view is #2, Dispensational Pre-millennialism (DPM); and the issue at hand is the identity of Israel. DPM argues that God's promises to Israel that were not (yet) fulfilled at the first coming of Christ will be fulfilled in the future at the Second Coming. In the meantime time, we live in the "Church Age," an [interregnum](#) in God's plan. National Israel is the Kingdom of God; the Church *is not* the Kingdom of God.

All the other views see God's promises to Israel fulfilled in some or all aspects in the Church. They argue that the Church *is* the Kingdom of God and the promises given to Abraham are fulfilled by the true/spiritual Israel, that is, the Church. They do not necessarily deny the role of Israel as a nation in the End Times, but would look at the passages individually to determine whether they refer to national Israel or to the Church. They do not see a mutually exclusive distinction between Israel and the Church. For instance, the promises to Israel have been transferred to the Church, Israel is no longer the chosen nation, and the Church is God's chosen nation; or the Church partakes of the blessings of Israel by our inclusion into true Israel or grafted into Israel and thence become children of

Abraham spiritually. When you regard the Church as Israel in some way, then the prophecies about Israel take on a different light. The conflicts between the nations and Israel in prophecy are now conflicts between the nations and the Church.

Reasoning from Interpretation

The reasoning for the DPM concerning peace between Jews and Palestinians is as follows:

1. The antagonists in the great Battle of Armageddon (Kings from the East) would not make peace with Israel. Israel's peace treaties with the non-participants, and failure at peace with the participants signal a step closer to that day.
2. Though the Palestinians would not be considered among the Kings from the East, they would be the reason for the war.

Looking at the Text

According to DPM, there will be a great battle at Megiddo, better know as the Battle of Armageddon ([Rev 16:16](#)). Israel will fight a huge opposing army, and that army is identified as the "kings from the East" ([Rev 16:12](#)). This has led many to think it refers to China. Some consider this to be both Russia and China.

I think some caution is in place. Western interpreters are very comfortable identifying Russia and China because it does not involve them. They forget that two verses later, it says, "they go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them for battle on the day of the Lord" ([Rev 16:14](#)). The whole world would be engaged in Armageddon, with the Kings of the East playing a special role.

Some Christians from China agree that the kings from the East include China, but argue that the Chinese will be marching to defend rather than attack Israel. Again nationalism comes into play.

A more proper reading from this view would be that the whole world will be at war against Israel, including the western nations. But there is a special mention of the "kings from the East" and the drying up of the Euphrates River in preparation for this war ([Rev 16:12](#)).

Of course, if we take "world" to mean the social world of that time, it would be the Roman

Empire. (e.g. [Luke 2:1](#), the whole world was to register. This referred to the Roman Empire.) And the more likely reference for “kings from the East” would be Persia which was in a standoff with Rome. And the prophecy could mean that the traditional adversaries, Rome and Persia would wage this war as allies.

Persia included the ancient territories of Assyria, Babylon and Media, and is sometimes called “Parthia.” In [Matthew 2](#), the magi from the East were traditionally understood to be from Persia. This would be modern day Iran, and possibly Iraq.

Geographically, the kings from the East can refer to leaders of any territory east of the Jordan River. Let’s observe who is east of the Jordan River today. Immediately due east is the Kingdom of Jordan. This is followed by Arabia, then Iraq and Iran, followed by the central Asian countries, followed by China, then Japan, then America, then Europe, and then back to Israel.

The traditional enemies of Israel from the east, during the writing of Revelation, would be Persia—the country of origin of the Magi.

The desert of Arabia lies between Israel and Persia, and people travelling from Persia would ordinarily travel along the Fertile Crescent, moving northwest then south, to get to Israel. Consequently, invasions from the eastern portion of the Fertile Crescent would invariably come from the north through Syria. It is more likely that the “east” here refers to Persia (now Iran). Naming China is quite odd if one looks at the map. To arrive at China, we have to ignore Arabia, Persia (Iran); then the central Asian countries (the ones ending with “[tan](#),” before coming to China. Of course, the reason behind it is the belief that this army would number 200 million literally ([Rev 9:16](#)). So interpreters simply look for a country due east that has such a manpower base. There is no biblical merit in identifying China other than the perceived need to make it fit the literal reading of 200 million and fit it with a possible nation. All the nations due east, between Israel and China, are quite capable of creating a literal 200 million strong army.

Why do western interpreters bring Russia into the picture when it is northeast? I suppose they are the Evil Empire, and we might as well throw

them in for good measure. Why not bring India into the mix when India is southeast?

A common reference to support Russia is Ezekiel’s mention of Gog-Magog ([Ezekiel 38-39](#)). One popular view identifies this enemy as Russia (it used to be the Soviet Union; I am not sure what they do with the eastern European nations now). Again, it is easy for western views to identify their national adversaries as biblical adversaries. The Bible tells us Gog is the king of Magog. The two most likely interpretations are: (1) It refers to ma-gog in Hebrew, meaning the land of Gog; so whoever he may be, his country will be involved in a war against Israel. (2) It refers to a group of people called Magog. This would refer to the descendants of Magog, who was a son of Japheth ([Gen 10:2](#)). The sons of Japheth were traditionally understood to be the forebears of the Europeans. So Magog is European. Is Russia Asian or European? Are the real enemies western Europeans?

Moreover, Ezekiel’s prophecy might not be about the future but the past (for Ezekiel). A possible historical reference for Ezekiel would be to “Guges” (Greek), or Gu-gu (Assyrian) king of Lydia (i.e. in Asia Minor in the 7th century BC). Josephus, the Jewish historians, identifies Magog as the people who lived north of the Black Sea. There are many other views!

I am no expert and I think it is better for me to reserve judgment. I am more inclined to think that Ezekiel’s prophecy has its own historical context. Ezekiel is asked to set his face against Gog of Magog; suggesting that he knew these entities; and it is questionable if he was thinking of Russia or China. These prophecies are set in the larger context of Israel in exile. While some prophecies may refer to our current situation, they have to first refer to the context of the Babylonian exile. Interpreters who skip that step, and look for what it means today without looking for what it meant in Ezekiel’s day, can do serious injury to the meaning of the text.

In short, I am saying, “I don’t know and many who think they know may also not know.”

Palestinians

The Palestinians are not clearly identified in Scripture. The Bible also does not give us the political reason for Armageddon. So we don’t know if the Palestinians will indeed be the reason. In the past, I was told the reason for

Armageddon will be the mineral wealth in the Dead Sea. Of course, it can also be the geopolitical strategic value of Israel. But all these reasons assume an innocent Israel. Perhaps it is because of Israel's nuclear arsenal, or Israel's provocation.

Christians must not make Jews our allies and regard Israel's neighbors as our enemies. Jesus died for all sinners. Jesus was rejected by many of his own people and the Gospel went out to the different nations of the world.

When we narrowly limit God's chosen people to Israel, to the exclusion of the Church, we forget our most fundamental calling to bring the good news to all people. There are many Christians among Palestinians, Iraqis, and Iranians. Too many Christians become entangled by their own presuppositions that certain nations make up the Evil Empire, and so take up arms against them rather than bear the Gospel to them.

There may be times when warfare is necessary, but it is not on account of one interpretation of the End Times.

Who knows what role the Palestinians might play? Perhaps, they may become allies with Israel to fight off the invading horde that will come from the north?

Is all of the Battle of Armageddon literal? If we take all the verses literally, we have problems. The hills and the plain around Megiddo cannot accommodate an army of 200 million. Neither ancient nor modern warfare can accommodate a literal 200 million soldiers in the land of Israel, not to talk about a small part of Israel. The number has to be either an expression for a huge army or else it has symbolic value. In addition, it is hard to see how modern warfare is fought using only an army just like an ancient pitch battle. What about the air and sea battles?

All these issues are based only on the DPM position. This means that even if you are a DPMist, there is really nothing to disqualify peace between the Jews and Palestinians. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem ([Psalm 122:6](#)), for peace between the Jews and the Palestinians. Peace for the Jews does not have to come at the expense of peace for Palestinians. Nothing in Scripture demands it.

The only reason possible reason why Palestinians may be relevant to Armageddon is that they may

be the motivation for war against Israel. But this is by no means certain. In fact, I think it unlikely that the Muslim Nations, or China, or any nation will go to war in the interests of the Palestinians. A nation goes to war for its own national interest. Speaking in simple terms, and without [prevarication](#), I would suggest that if we have a literal war by the whole world against Israel, and the Palestinians were the reason, then it makes sense for Israel to destroy the Palestinians and thus remove the reason for war against them.

Apart from the supposition that the Palestinians are the reason for war by the kings of the East and the whole world (unlikely proposition), there is no reason biblical or prophetic reason why Israel cannot have peace with the Palestinians.

Irrelevant

We return to the broader view of the subject. Most Christians are not even aware that many Christian scholars view Armageddon to be in the past. I have not decided on this, but I think it should not be ignored, and Christians should not be ignorant about it.

Some arguments for a historic view of the battle of Armageddon are:

(1) This prophecy is limited to just a few verses in Revelation ([16:12-21](#)) and does not suggest a cataclysmic final battle.

(2) The gathering of troops is at Megiddo and the actual battle was in the "great city" which is identified as Jerusalem ([Rev 11:8](#)). The battle is the battle over Jerusalem. Historically, this happened in AD 70 when Rome destroyed Jerusalem.

(3) One telling detail is weight of the hailstones being one "talent" ([Rev 16:21](#)). Josephus, the Jewish historian tells us that Jerusalem was pummeled by the Romans with catapults hurling stones of one "talent" (*Jewish Wars*, 3.7.9). This refers to stones about 100 pounds in weight. The size of these projectiles is singled out for mention by both John and Josephus probably on account of their large size.

(4) We must not miss John's view which is religious and not military. He does not call them catapult stone, but "hailstones," ascribing the quality of divine judgment to the fall of Jerusalem.

If it is true that the Battle of Armageddon refers to the terrible destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, all the speculations about how Middle East politics might unfold in our day, based on Armageddon, are totally irrelevant.

Conclusion

I have generally refrained from commenting about the End Times because I do not know enough to render a firm opinion from which I will not easily retract. But I am also concerned with what may be the misplaced confidence of some. The futuristic interpretation of DPM ignores aspects of what seems to be already fulfilled. At the same time, those who view these events as past seem to ignore those aspects not (yet) fulfilled. For instance, if John were writing only about the past (fall of Jerusalem in AD 70), why would he bring in details about things that did not happen? I am thinking in particular, of the drying of Euphrates and the kings from the East. While the kings from the East would most likely refer to Persians, there is no known record of Persian involvement in the battle against Israel in AD 67-70 leading to the fall of Jerusalem. There is also no significant record of Roman Legions moving from the eastern frontier to join forces with General Vespasian and Titus who were waging this war.

I am increasingly impressed by the historical data that are emerging that identify the historical aspects in Revelation. If more and more of the descriptions in Revelation are shown to be historically grounded, it becomes harder to ignore the historical references. At this point, the most popular view of the End Times is more interested in the sensational possible parallels between Revelation and current events. But that is clearly a wrong way to approach a text if our first priority is to uncover its meaning.

Assuming there are both historical and future aspects in Revelation, it becomes more critical that we first locate the historical details and then ask how the historical is projected into the future. When John deliberately ignores the historical, it suggests to us that those aspects may point to the future. For instance, if we can conclusively say that Euphrates was never dried up in any historical sense and the kings from the East never marched against Jerusalem in AD 70, then we would be justified to think in futuristic terms. At this point in time, I believe we just don't have enough information to make that determination.

This article may have taken a long detour to answer a question about peace between Jews and Palestinians in biblical prophecy and present day reality, but I know of no other way. This because the question has many assumptions based on one view of the End Times. The Christian public deserves to know there are other views to the End Times apart from DPM. The Christian public should also know about the historical details embedded in Revelation before deciding that it is all about the future.

There may be no future Armageddon. If there will be one, Palestinians are not featured as the enemies, and are not likely to be the reason for Armageddon.

So my take of peace between Jews and Palestinians is: *Why not?*

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Also read: [Palestinian Statehood](#)



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Rev. Peter Eng is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.