

Hamastan and Fatahland

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The coup by Hamas in Gaza and the control of the West Bank by Fatah has seemingly separated these two areas into distinct entities. This reflects their separate roles in prophecy.

IN ISAIAH 11 the setting up of the Kingdom when Christ returns is described: "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD [Yahweh], as the waters cover the sea. And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious" (vv. 9,10).

Concerning this time it is written of the Jews: "The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim. But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west; they shall spoil them of the east together: they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them" (vv. 13,14). These verses show that when Christ is established as King in Zion then the "Philistines" will be conquered.

"The shoulders of the Philistines"

The Hebrew word translated "shoulders" can refer to the border of a land. For example, it is used in this sense in Numbers 34:11: "and the border shall descend, and shall reach unto *the side* of the sea of Chinnereth eastward". To "fly upon the shoulders" may indicate a swift attack against the borders. Perhaps there is a sense also that the land of the Philistines will be a springboard for the saints as they head out west to establish the Kingdom, as when a bird lands on a person's shoulder before flying on.

Today, the land of the ancient Philistines is the Gaza Strip, occupied by the Palestinians. At the time of writing (17 June) the followers of Hamas have taken control of the Gaza Strip using military force, ousting the supporters of Fatah. Meanwhile Fatah, including President Mahmoud Abbas, has the ascendancy in the West Bank. The decoupling of these two areas is important because they have different roles in prophecy at the time of the end. The West Bank, "the mountains of Israel"

(Ezek. 38:8), will have Jews resident in its area when Gog attacks, but the Gaza Strip, "the coasts of Palestine" (Joel 3:4), will be occupied by enemies of Israel who will be complicit with Gog's treatment of the Jews.

As the Hamas offensive began there was in fact a very literal sense in which Israel was flying upon the shoulders of the Gaza Strip. As the reporter Uzi Mahnaimi stated: "almost every minute of it [the uprising] had been monitored by drones and signals intelligence".¹ Some argue that a military offensive by Israel against "the shoulders" of Gaza will be necessary. A former chief of staff in the Israeli army, Brigadier-General Moshe Yaalon, has commented: "Going into Gaza is inevitable . . . No one will do the job for us, we should prepare for a land attack in Gaza, and the question is not if but how and when".² According to Mahnaimi, the Israeli army has built a replica of a refugee camp in the Negev desert which is being used to train soldiers for an attack on Gaza. Such an attack would not be for occupation but to destroy the military capability of Hamas, particularly with regard to firing rockets and sending suicide bombers.

Another possibility is that Israel will simply cut off Gaza from outside support in the hope that this will weaken its threat. According to the analyst Charles Levinson, the American strategy is to bolster Fatah in the West Bank, and "Gaza, meanwhile, would be further cut off from the world. Israel if it chooses, could close all crossings into and out of the strip to imports and exports. It could cut off electricity and water, although it has promised not to. America believes that, as Gaza reels and the West Bank thrives, Palestinians will realise that their best interests lie with the secular Fatah, and Hamas will become a spent force".³

When Gog attacks, we know that Israel will be "dwell[ing] safely" (Ezek. 38:8). Clearly this situation does not exist at present. According to

1. Mahnaimi, U. (2007), "After Hamas's bloody triumph, showdown with Israel looms", *Sunday Times*, 17 June, pp. 22-23.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Levinson, C. (2007), "Analysis", *Sunday Telegraph*, 17 June, p. 27.

Mahnaimi, the victory of Hamas in Gaza “has left the Jewish state at its most vulnerable for three decades”.⁴ The danger faced by Israel is not simply Hamas. Hamas is supported by Iran, and there is also the threat from Hizbullah in Lebanon and from the Syrians. How Israel will come to “dwell safely” remains to be seen. It may involve military action against Gaza and other areas, but any peace that derives from this would be temporary, and such action would not constitute a fulfilment of the prophecy in Isaiah 11.

Recipe for Armageddon

Niall Fergusson, a Professor of History at Harvard University, provides a bleak assessment of the crisis in the Middle East.⁵ He says that the next peace plan for the Middle East will need to be a four-state solution involving Israel and what he calls Hamastan, Fatahland and Hizbullahstan. The fact that commentators are already referring to Gaza and the West Bank as Hamastan and Fatahland (it is not just Fergusson who uses these names) shows the speed of events. As God says in Isaiah: “I the LORD [Yahweh] will hasten it in his time” (60:22).

Professor Fergusson also highlights Kurdistan and the potential intervention by Turkey as another potential flashpoint, together with events in Iraq. He makes a parallel between the Middle East and Eastern Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. Just as the conditions in Europe led to two World Wars, so the Middle East looks like causing the next World War. He identifies a number of factors which are combining to create a spiral towards a global conflict. He mentions “ethnic disintegration, economic volatility and an empire [America] in decline” as important

factors. In addition he lists high Muslim birth rates, wealth from oil and gas and the prospect of Iran possessing nuclear weapons. He calls all of this “a recipe for Armageddon”.

Of course, his use of the term Armageddon does not reflect a Scriptural analysis. Yet the location of Armageddon we know to be in Israel, and it is interesting to see the way he concludes that the next world war will be centred in the Middle East.

Conclusion

Events in the Middle East are certainly moving fast. Whether or not ‘Hamastan’ and ‘Fatahland’ emerge as distinct entities remains to be seen. However, what is happening in the Middle East is certainly a sign that Armageddon is near. When that time comes, judgements will be carried out and Christ and the saints will truly “fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west”. But in their wake peace will follow between the nations and warring factions: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den” (Isa. 11:6-8).

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4. Mahnaimi, U. (2007), “Iran’s long game sets stage for war”, *Sunday Times*, 17 June, p. 23.
 5. Fergusson, N. (2007), “This is a recipe for Armageddon—and we must lower the heat”, *Sunday Telegraph*, 17 June, p. 23.

Your Letters



The real delusion

Among the notable people at the recent Hay literary festival was Richard Dawkins, author of the book *The God Delusion*. During an interview he was asked why he had written the book now. (Dawkins says he has been an atheist since he was sixteen, becoming so after reading Darwin’s *Origin of Species*.)

Dawkins said it was because “he cared for the truth”. Whatever the interviewer’s reasons for questioning his motives is not the real issue here. Of real importance is the statement that he “cared for the truth”. What irony! This is what the Bible is all about. This is what we care about more than anything else in the world!

There is further irony. It is found in the specific wording of his book, *The God Delusion*. The real