

Premillennialism

The Battle Of Armageddon

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Introduction

The word “Armageddon” only appears in Revelation 16:16. It is described as the rallying-place of the Kings of the whole world, who led by the unclean spirits issuing from the mouth of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet, assemble for “the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.” The battle of Armageddon is anticipated in Revelation chapter Sixteen but is not fought until chapter Nineteen. First the stage is set for a decisive conflict between Christ and the evil powers persecuting the infant church (Rev. 16:13-16). Then the outcome of the great battle of Armageddon is described wherein the Son of God is victorious over the forces of evil (Rev. 19:11-21).

The Battle of Armageddon is the source of much sensational speculation. The far-fetched views and misconceptions which people have on this subject are truly amazing to consider. Much of the problem lies with the false system of Premillennialism. It teaches that a universal war will soon take place among the nations of the world, and the final, catastrophic battle of that war will occur on the plains of Megiddo in northern Palestine. The battle described in Revelation is viewed as a literal battle, a bloody holocaust such as the world has never known. It is argued that conflicts are now developing that will lead to Armageddon. It supposedly will take place after the seven years of tribulation, and just before the second advent of Christ. Does all this harmonize with the Bible? Is it Scriptural? In a word, “No.”

We Must Note The Definition Of The Word Itself

Armageddon is the combination of two Hebrew words: *har* [mountain] and *Megiddo* [a place in Manasseh]. Thus *Har-Magedon* refers to the “Mountain of Megiddo.”

- Thomas defines Ἄρμαγεδών [Harmagedōn] as of Hebrew origin, a compound of *har* [mountain, hill, hill country] and *Megiddo* [a place in Manasseh], meaning “Har-Magedon, a mountain of uncertain location” [717].
- BDAG say it refers to “Armageddon, a mythical place-name, said to be Hebrew in Rev. 16:16; it has been identified with Megiddo and Jerusalem, but its interpretation is beset with difficulties that have not yet been surmounted.”ⁱ

Where exactly is Har-Magedon, the mountain of Megiddo? Actually, there is no literal Mt. Megiddo. The reference is either to the mountains that were near the town of Megiddo, or possibly to the large mound of the city itself. “The fact that the tell of Megiddo was about 70 feet high in John’s day, and was in the vicinity of Carmel Range, justifies the use of Hebrew *har*, used loosely in the Old Testament for ‘hill’ and ‘hill country.’”ⁱ

The city of Megiddo, which means “a place of troops,” was located in the Carmel Mountain range in north central Palestine, overlooking the Plain of Jezreel. This valley, also known as the Plain of Esdraelon, was some twenty miles long and six miles wide. Megiddo was situated on a major highway that linked Egypt and Mesopotamia. All major north-south traffic running through Palestine passed by Megiddo, making it a strategic military stronghold.

Megiddo has been the sight of extensive archaeological work. The first city, built at this site around 3500 B.C., was surrounded by a massive wall that was originally thirteen feet thick and later was buttressed to twice that size. A brick wall and gate dating from 1880 B.C. have also been uncovered. Thutmose III of Egypt captured the city in 1468 B.C., and held it for a brief time.ⁱⁱ

Megiddo was controlled by the Canaanites until they were defeated by the invading Israelites. Megiddo is first mentioned in the Old Testament in the account of the 31 kings conquered by Joshua (Josh. 12:21). When the land of Canaan was divided among the twelve tribes of Israel, Megiddo was awarded to Manasseh. However, the Israelites were unable to completely drive out the native inhabitants (Josh. 17:11-12; Judg. 1:27). Nonetheless, in time the Israelites subdued and possessed the city (1 Chron. 7:28-29).

The city was included in the fifth administrative district of Solomon (1 Kings 4:12). During his reign, Megiddo was reconstructed as a military stronghold. Along with Hazor, Gezer, Lower Beth Horon, Baalath, and Tamar, Megiddo was fortified and established as a chariot city for the armies of King Solomon (1 Kings 9:15-19; 10:26-29).

We Must Note The Symbolism Of Names & Places

Waterloo

A place can become symbolic because of some historical event with which it is associated. For example, many are familiar with the saying, “He met his Waterloo!” Waterloo was a small town in central Belgium where Napoleon was finally defeated in 1815. The expression has come to represent a disastrous defeat.

The Alamo

Consider the words “Remember the Alamo!” In that battle, a small group of men stood bravely against impossible odds. This small mission in San Antonio represents the spirit of courage and sacrifice, and is a proud part of the heritage of Texas.

Megiddo

So it is with Megiddo. Many important battles in Old Testament times were fought in and around Megiddo. It was the scene of so many decisive battles, that it came to stand for battle itself. “These low hills around Megiddo, with their outlook over the plain of Esdraelon, have witnessed perhaps a greater number of bloody encounters than have ever stained a like area of the world’s surface.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Over the long history of Israel, Megiddo was the scene of never-to-be forgotten conflicts. It was famous for two great victories. Here Deborah and Barak overthrew Sisera and the army of the

Canaanites (Judg. 4:1-24; 5:19-21). Against overwhelming odds, Gideon and his 300 defeated the Midianites (Judg. 6:33-35; 7:1-25). It was also famous for two great disasters. Here wicked King Saul, who had been rejected by God, was defeated by the Philistines (1 Sam. 31:1-7). Later, King Josiah was killed when he tried to prevent Pharaoh-Necho of Egypt from going to the aid of Assyria (2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Chron. 35:20-24).

In the Jewish mind, Megiddo was a place of great slaughter and represented God's terrible judgment upon the wicked. Thomas says Armageddon refers to "a mountain of uncertain location." BDAG say Armageddon refers to "a mythical place-name, said to be Hebrew in Rev. 16:16; it has been identified with Megiddo and Jerusalem, but its interpretation is beset with difficulties that have not yet been surmounted." Similarly, Joseph Henry Thayer describes Armageddon as the "proper name of an imaginary place." Over time Armageddon has become a poetic expression for terrible and decisive conflict. It represents the place where those who oppose Christ will be destroyed with a slaughter like those who defied God's will in ancient days.

We Must Note Its Significance In The Book Of Revelation

What is the message of Revelation when it speaks of the battle of Armageddon? This book was written during a time of severe and widespread persecution. Christianity appeared to be on the brink of extinction. This was an hour of desperate need. John wrote in order to reassure disciples that the forces of evil would be completely overthrown and the cause of Christ would triumph victorious. The Book of Revelation is a message of victory.

- Thomas defines νικᾶω [nikaō] as derived from *nikē* [victory], meaning "conquer, prevail" [3528].
- BDAG say it means to "(1) to win in the face of obstacles, be victor, conquer, overcome, prevail; (2) to overcome someone, vanquish, overcome;(3) to surpass in ability, outstrip, excel."

The Greek word *nikaō* occurs a total of 28x in the NT, of which 17 are found in the Book of Revelation (Luke 11:22; John 16:33; Rom. 3:4; 12:21 [2x]; 1 John 2:13, 14; 4:4 [2x]; 5:5; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21 [2x]; 5:5; 6:2 [2x]; 11:7; 12:11; 13:7; 15:2; 17:14; 21:7).

John wrote concerning things that would "shortly come to pass" (Rev. 1:1; 22:6). Those who take a futuristic and literal interpretation of Revelation fail to grasp the true message of the book. No interpretation of the book as a whole or this battle in particular can have any significance unless it has application to those first century saints to whom the book was addressed.

Revelation is an apocalyptic book, filled with signs, visions, and highly symbolic language. Any interpretation that seeks to literalize its images is doomed to absolute failure. This is the cardinal sin of the Premillennialists. Those who would view Armageddon literally are very selective in their approach. The context speaks of three frogs, a great red dragon, a sea beast, and an earth beast. If one expects a literal battle, he should expect the army to be headed by three frogs. Both figures are symbolic; neither is literal. There is no reason for making one literal and the other symbolic. If the battle is literal, why not the other symbols as well?

The context speaks of God pouring out his wrath upon the evil forces that opposed the early church. The first angel poured out his bowl on the earth and men were afflicted with grievous

sores. The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and the waters turned to blood and everything died. The third angel poured out his bowl upon the rivers and streams, with similar effect. The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it scorched men with fire. The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast; the kingdom was darkened, and men gnawed their tongues in pain. The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the Euphrates and it dried up; the way was now prepared for the enemies of the north to make war against the empire. At this point, an interlude occurs in Rev. 16:13-16. The forces of evil gathered together to fight against God at the place called “Har-Magedon.” Then finally, the seventh angel poured out his bowl on the air. As a result there was thunder, lightning, earthquakes and hailstones. Then a voice proclaimed, “It is done!”

What is the Biblical meaning? There is a fundamental message that is being set forth: Even though all the forces of evil might be gathered together as one in their conflict against God, they will be overwhelmed by His decisive and unrelenting judgment. Early Christians were being persecuted by the Roman Empire. The book of Revelation affirms that Christ would come to the aid of his people. Armageddon thus is a vivid symbolic representation of Christ’s victory over the forces of evil. The cause of righteousness would triumph over the beast, the false prophet, and their allies. The idolatrous religion and godless government of Rome would fall, but Christianity would continue to grow and prosper. This message of victory is not only the overriding theme of Revelation, but is also echoed in Daniel’s prophecy (Dan. 2:31-45).

By using the figure of Armageddon, the apostle John does not refer to any particular locality. Ultimately, Armageddon cannot be located on the maps of the earth; its geographical location is unimportant. In the Book of Revelation, the battle of Armageddon represents the decisive conflict between good and evil. It symbolizes occasions when righteousness and evil are engaged in deadly combat. However strong the forces of darkness may appear, and however hopeless the righteous may feel, God will ultimately win the victory! How comforting this message must have been to those early Christians who were suffering under the heavy-handed Roman Empire. The whole thrust of the Apocalypse is to assure the saints of this victory, and to exhort them to avoid compromising with error.

Conclusion

Let us never forget that we are at war with Satan and his forces (Eph. 6:11-17). We must fight the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 1:18; 6:12), offering a militant defense of the truth (Jude 3). Rome was the evil force when John wrote Revelation, but the principle is timeless. God and his cause will be victorious in the end! The battle will be fierce, the foe is frightening, but victory is ours if we will only remain faithful (1 John 5:4; Rev. 2:10). Ultimately all wickedness and evil will be overthrown by the great power of the Almighty God (Rev. 20:10-15).

ⁱ *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. D. Douglas, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), s.v. “Har-Magedon.”

ⁱⁱ *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, ed. Merrill F. Unger & R.K. Harrison, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988). s.v. “Megiddo.”

ⁱⁱⁱ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1915 ed., s.v. “Har-Magedon.”