

The Battle Of Armageddon

It seems that every time the country has a recession, premillennial speculations go on the upswing. The opposite is true for periods of prosperity: premillennial speculations decrease. When these speculations begin to circulate, people want to connect biblical events to events in the Middle East. I have heard it said that whenever someone sneezes in the Middle East, someone in America thinks it is the end of the world!

One of the events we have heard the most about is the battle of Armageddon. Revelation 16:16 says, "*And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.*" This is supposedly the one final battle after the seven year tribulation period and before Christ sets up His earthly throne in Jerusalem to rule for one thousand years. Most premillennial theories revolve around two major events in Revelation: the battle of Armageddon in chapter 16 and the millennium in chapter 20.

In Hebrew, Har-Magedon literally means "Mount Megedon" or "Megiddo." The figure is based on Megiddo and its famous battlefield. Megiddo is on the southern edge of the valley of Jezreel, now called Esdraelon. This valley or plain is somewhat triangular and is no more than twenty by fifteen miles in size. Megiddo was in the territory of Manasseh (Joshua 12:21; 17:11; Judges 1:27). Megiddo was a Canaanite stronghold and Israelite forces under Deborah and Barak annihilated the army of Sisera in a battle by Megiddo (Judges 5:19). Saul and Jonathan were killed at Megiddo (1 Samuel 31:1-6). Ahaziah was killed by Jehu at Megiddo (2 Kings 9:27). Josiah was killed by Egyptian archers at Megiddo (2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Chronicles 35:20-27). Incidentally, all of Judah and Jerusalem, including the prophet Jeremiah, mourned for Josiah. By the time of Zechariah this mourning had become typical of national grief (Zechariah 12:11). Thus, Megiddo fitly symbolized the worldwide distress of righteousness and evil engaged in deadly combat. Megiddo overlooks the only pass through this mountain range and therefore controls the flow of traffic, both commercial and military, between Egypt, Asia, and Mesopotamia. It was also the route by which the armies of antiquity marched. Thutmose III of Egypt fought the Syrian forces in 1468 B.C. and urged his army to seize it, "for the capturing of Megiddo is the capturing of a thousand towns! Capture ye firmly, firmly!"

Because of its strategic importance, it has been the sight of more decisive battles than any other spot. Six important battles are listed in the Old Testament as taking place on the Plain of Megiddo, some of which were previously mentioned. Consequently, "Megiddo" may be used symbolically, just as Jerusalem, Mt. Zion, Mt. Sinai, Valley of Hinnom, Babylon, and Egypt are sometimes used. I believe that "Armageddon," as used in Revelation 16:16, is symbolic, and that this battle is not a physical "sword and spear" or "gun and bomb" battle.

The book of Revelation is a book of signs and symbols. The very first verse of the book reads, *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John."* Please note that everything in Revelation would shortly come to pass and that the things revealed were "signified," which meant that they were denoted by symbols. We must interpret the signs and determine the message intended for whom it was written and its meaning for us today.

The battle of Armageddon, then, has come to refer symbolically to a scene, or time, or fact of a decisive battle. Compare our modern-day sayings such as "Remember the Alamo" or "Remember Pearl Harbor" or "Waterloo." The city of Waterloo has come to symbolically refer to the scene, time, or fact of defeat. We say of someone today, "he met his Waterloo," and people who know little or nothing about Napoleon or his defeat at Waterloo understand that we mean that he finally come to his defeat. The term "Armageddon" is used in a similar fashion.

The figure is employed not for the literal, physical location of Armageddon, but for the battle imagery for which the place was famous. People today desperately want it to be literal. In Revelation, the "battle of Armageddon" is the figurative term describing the symbolic overthrow of all the forces of evil by the might and power of God. In the context of the final chapters of Revelation, "Armageddon" represents the complete defeat of the Roman Empire and paganism behind which Rome threw its total power (19:11-21). If we say this is a physical battle between human armies, we violate the purpose of Revelation. As far as practical application is concerned, "Armageddon" is any decisive battle between good and evil or between right and wrong. Whenever Christians fight a spiritual battle and win, they have fought the "battle of Armageddon."

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