

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #142: THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON

By John Temples

Armageddon. One of those mysterious, sensational words that instill fear and wonder. “The Battle of Armageddon” is supposed to be the war to (literally) end all wars, a supposed final battle between earthly armies of God and forces of Satan, to be fought in the Middle East with unbelievable bloodshed and destruction.

WHAT—AND WHERE—IS ARMAGEDDON?

“Armageddon” is a Hebrew word meaning “hill of Megiddo.” It is a region in the Carmel mountain range overlooking the Valley of Jezreel. Many decisive battles were fought there in Biblical times (Judges 5:19, 6:33; 2 Samuel 4:4; 2 Kings 9:27).

Over the entire course of history, some 34 battles have been fought at Megiddo. Napoleon Bonaparte declared it as “the most natural battleground of the whole earth.” Even some modern-day battles have been fought there, with notable ones in 1918 and 1948.¹

The Bible, and particularly the book of Revelation, is full of place names used as symbols. Examples:

- Zion (Hebrews 12:22)--a symbol of the true church.
- Jerusalem (same reference)--a symbol of God’s spiritual city, heaven.
- Babylon (Revelation 17:5)--a symbol of a false church.
- Gehenna (the valley of Hinnom, just outside Jerusalem) is used as a symbol of hell in several Scriptures.

Because the battlefield of Megiddo was the location of so many battles, it also became a symbol of any decisive battle or notable defeat (like Napoleon’s Waterloo).

¹ <https://samsontours.com/stop/the-list-of-battles-fought-at-megiddo-176>

The purpose of this article is to discover the truth about “the Battle of Armageddon.” First, we will look at what MEN say about it. Then, we will see what the BIBLE says about it.

WHAT MAN SAYS ABOUT THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON—QUOTES FROM VARIOUS WRITERS AND PREACHERS

“Armageddon is the showdown between the Lord Jesus Christ and the Antichrist.”

“The [Battle of Armageddon] will start in 2007.² The Antichrist will stand in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem and declare that he is God. The Bible calls this the ‘abomination of desolation.’ Shortly after this, the Arab nations will unite against Israel. Egypt will lead Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan—every nation with a border with Israel—against it. Russia and its allies will join on the side of the Arabs. During the fight, the US and Russia will use nuclear weapons against each other. The war will leave two billion dead.”

“Armageddon according to the Bible is a battle. It’s a battle where God finally steps in and takes over the world and runs it the way it should have been run all along. It’s the start of a peaceful and bountiful time known by some as the Millennium. But certain things must happen first. The Bible tells us that the world will be run by a dictator heading up a worldwide government. This man (also known as the Antichrist) will rise to power on a wave of world euphoria, as he temporarily saves the world from its desperate economic, military, and political problems with a brilliant seven-year plan for world peace, economic stability, and religious freedom. Although most of the world will hail the Beast as a political savior, 3-½ years after the enactment of the seven-year covenant, he will revoke the peace pact and show his true colors. He will outlaw all religions, except the worship of himself, and proclaim himself savior. The Bible tells us that the Antichrist’s reign will last seven years, after which Jesus will return and Armageddon will take place.”

And who can forget Hal Lindsay’s 1977 best-selling book, “The Late Great Planet Earth”? Here are two quotes from that book:

² Oops, guess we missed it.

“So here it is—the last great conflict. After the Antichrist assembles the forces of the rest of the world together, they meet the onrushing charge of the kings of the east in a battle line which will extend throughout Israel with the vortex centered at the Valley of Megiddo.... The apostle John predicts that so many people will be slaughtered in the conflict that blood will stand to the horses’ bridles³ for a total distance of 200 miles northward and southward of Jerusalem.”

“As the battle of Armageddon reaches its awful climax and it appears that all life will be destroyed on earth—in this very moment Jesus Christ will return and save man from self-destruction.”

Wow! As destructive as this war will be (with “billions” dead), surely the Bible is full of details about it. So let’s now look at what the Scripture actually says.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON

First, if you’ll bear with me, I will list all the Bible verses that contain the phrase “Battle of Armageddon.” Well, actually there aren’t any.

Well, let’s look up all the Bible verses that mention earthly armies fighting a final, destructive battle. Sorry—none of those either.

Finally, let’s read all the verses that have the word “Armageddon” in them. There is only ONE: Revelation 16:16. Here is the text, beginning with verse 12:

“Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. ‘Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he

³ I’m still trying to figure out why horses are going to be used in a modern future war when tanks and airplanes are available.

walk naked and they see his shame.' And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon."

We said earlier that there is no Bible passage that speaks of earthly forces fighting a physical battle in Israel as the end of time approaches.

Revelation 16:14 does say that demonic forces will influence the kings of the earth and gather them for battle. However, this passage speaks only of a GATHERING for battle, not an actual war. The same holds true in other references in Revelation. Satan marshals earthly forces intent on the destruction of the church, but he is not successful. *In no passage is an actual battle said to occur.* The forces of Satan are simply vaporized by fire from heaven before they can inflict permanent harm on God's people (Revelation 20:9).

So, do you mean to tell me that modern preachers have constructed a frightening, elaborate, book-length scenario involving earthly armies fighting a world war in which billions of people die, and there is not one passage of Scripture that actually says so? Yes. This is truly an example of "making bricks without straw."

Revelation 16:12-16 is highly symbolic, but I believe we can make some sense out of it. We know who the dragon is—he is identified as Satan in Revelation 12:9. A beast in Revelation stands for any cruel government, empire, or institution. The false prophet obviously represents false religion. What we have here is the "unholy trinity"—The devil, pagan governments, and false religious institutions.

So what Revelation 16:12-16 is saying is that just before the end of time, Satan will attempt to array the enemies of the church, both political and ecclesiastical, against it to annihilate it. That is all the text says. It says nothing about what happens next.

Is there any other reference in Scripture to this "last stand" of Satan, in which he tries to use earthly institutions to destroy the church? Yes, we see another vision in Revelation 19 which likely describes the same situation. There, Christ is seen riding a white horse and leading an army

against the forces of evil. Aha! Isn't that Armageddon? No; at least not the Hal Lindsay version. Consider:

- The armies are heavenly armies, not earthly ones. Revelation 19:14 reads, "And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses." No mention of earthly armies. And there are those horses again! Why would any earthly army in modern times go into battle on horses??? All of this is highly figurative, and it is the height of folly to construct from it an elaborate scenario involving literal earthly armies in a literal battle at a literal earthly location.
- And did you notice that the heavenly armies are UNARMED? Verse 15 speaks of Christ wielding a sharp sword, but as far as the record goes, His armies carry no weapons. They go as spectators, not participants. Christ needs no earthly army to defeat Satan!
- One more thing: there is NO MENTION OF A BATTLE LOCATION in Revelation 19. Nothing to tie it to Megiddo or Armageddon.

The main reason we assert that Revelation 19 is covering the same ground as chapter 16 is the use of similar language. Revelation 19:19 sounds a lot like 16:13-16. It says, "And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army."

But the same result obtains in chapter 19 as in chapter 16: *There is no battle*, at least not one involving earthly armies. The outcome is never in doubt. Verse 19 speaks of the gathering together of armies, but the very next verses say: "Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh."

The order of events described in these verses is:

1. Satan attempts to marshal earthly political and religious forces in a last-gasp attempt to destroy the church.
2. But before Satan can fire a shot (as far as the record is concerned), Christ defeats him and all who serve him.
3. The armies of heaven follow Christ, but do not participate in the battle. (Again, notice that Revelation 19:21 says that the forces of Satan were killed by the sword of the rider on the horse, Christ. No mention of His armies being involved.)

There seems to be another description of the same scenario in Revelation 20:7-10, with the same results: “Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

In every one of these highly figurative passages, there is:

- No mention of a “battle of Armageddon.”
- No mention of earthly armies.
- No mention of armed participants of any kind, except for Christ; and His sword is symbolic or spiritual.
- No mention of an actual physical battle.
- No mention of an Antichrist, a world government, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Russia, Israel, or America.

What the Bible describes is not a nuclear holocaust involving earthly armies, but a spiritual “last stand” of Satan. To be sure, Satan will try to use earthly governments and institutions to defeat God’s people, but he has tried that before and failed (we’re talking about the Roman Empire, which, after two centuries of trying “brute force” to destroy Christianity, discarded paganism and became officially “Christian” during the reign of

Constantine). In spite of failure, however, he will try it again. But it will mark his final defeat.

CONCLUSION

“Armageddon” is a physical place name used as a symbol, like Zion, Babylon, Egypt, or Jerusalem. It represents a catastrophic conflict or defeat. The Bible uses the term only once (in Revelation 16:16) to describe “Satan’s last stand.” The “Battle of Armageddon” will not be a literal battle involving earthly armies; and according to the Bible, it will essentially be over before it starts. The Lord will simply destroy Satan and his allies with the breath of His mouth.

We close with some highly appropriate words by brother Wayne Jackson: “The dispensational/premillennial view of the Battle of Armageddon is totally false. It contains not the slightest support in the Scriptures. Rather. It is grounded upon a novel and relatively recent...scheme of theological suppositions. It is buttressed by an erroneous exegetical system which completely ignores the obvious symbolism of the book of Revelation and crudely literalizes its pictures. It is part and parcel of a doctrine that reflects in many ways upon the integrity of the word of God. We have nothing to fear of an impending political Armageddon. However, all who are out of Christ or who are unfaithful to the Bridegroom had best prepare against that awful day of spiritual Armageddon.”

The “Battle of Armageddon” is a product of overheated imaginations and misuse of highly figurative Scripture passages. Do not be deceived or dismayed by it.

–John Temples