



“The Battle of Armageddon”

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Few subjects in modern religious discussion have generated as much interest and speculation or have sold as many books as ‘the battle of Armageddon.’ We’re told that the events now unfolding on the world’s stage involving nations like Israel, Iran and Russia are all pointing to end times and that the so-called rapture of the church is about to take place. They tell us that within seven years of that time, massive armies will converge in the Holy Land at a site called Megiddo, where a bloody holocaust will take place ushering in a one thousand-year reign of King Jesus upon this earth from the city of Jerusalem.

Where does that doctrine come from? Does the Bible teach that there will be a carnal conflict called The Battle of Armageddon? Proponents of the theory point to **Revelation 16** as teaching this looming conflict of the ages.

Revelation 16:12-16 “And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto 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 come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.”

For the emphasis that has been put upon it, ironically, the word *Armageddon* is used only one time in the Greek New Testament, and that is at the end of our text passage. That is the only time the word is used in the New Testament. But entire books have been written and countless theological theories have been propounded upon this one verse in the Bible. In the Hebrew, it is called *Har-Meggiddon*, which literally means *the hill or mount of Megiddo*. It’s a reference to a famous battleground in ancient northern Israel near the Jezreel valley. It is a bit southwest of the Sea of Galilee, about halfway between

it and Caesarea, which is on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. It is not actually a mountain at all, but rather a plain about twenty miles long by almost fifteen miles wide.

There are several notable battles that took place there during Old Testament times. This is significant for us to remember. For example, it is where Jabin and the kings of Canaan were overthrown by Deborah and Barak (**Judges 4 and 5**). You may recall how God put together an army of three hundred men for Gideon to fight against over one hundred thousand Midianites in **Judges 6**. That famous battle took place here in Megiddo and it remains a famous battle in the history of Israel even in our minds today. Saul went up against the Philistines here and was defeated (**I Samuel 31:8**). And there were other very notable battles that took place there as well. So, not only was Armageddon well-known among the Jews; it was particularly known for the decisive conflicts that took place there throughout the centuries. Well, why would John see a conflict taking place here when he received the vision of the ages called *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*? What significance would Armageddon have in such a revelation in New Testament times?

First of all, the book of **Revelation** is all about a great conflict or struggle between the church and the forces of Satan and evil. **Revelation** is what is called an *apocalyptic* book; in other words, it's *a book of prophecy written in the form of signs and symbols*. The ancient Jews were very familiar with apocalyptic writing. It was nothing new to them as there were several apocalyptic messages in circulation back then, some inspired and others uninspired.

The book of **Daniel** is one example. The visions recorded in **Daniel** are full of symbolism and figurative language. It was written while he was exiled in Babylon during the captivity, and it was about the political and spiritual events that were to come over the next several centuries, culminating with the establishment of the kingdom of Christ on the Day of Pentecost and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish temple, all taking place in the first century several hundred years after Daniel wrote those things, but from our perspective two thousand years ago. It ultimately pointed forward to the emergence of Christ's reign from heaven after His death, resurrection and ascension, which all came into reality with the establishment of the church in the first century.

The truth that Daniel was conveying was robed in symbols and figures, and was not in literal, forthright language. The book of **Revelation** is written in the same way. Why? An apocalypse served two purposes: 1) to convey a message of hope to God's people in a time of darkness. That message being vividly illustrated with symbols and figures that the reader alone—particularly, the Jews-- would be familiar with, and 2) to keep that same message out of the wrong hands. Namely, in the case of **Revelation**, the pagan Roman Empire, which was at that time oppressing and persecuting the church.

The book of **Revelation** was most likely written in about A.D. 96, near the end of the reign of Roman Emperor Domitian, who unleashed an awful and bloody campaign of torture and death upon Christians who refused to denounce Christ and worship him, the Caesar, as Lord and God. The persecution of the Roman Empire would've seemed to those frightened Christians to have threatened the very annihilation of the church, thus tempting them to surrender their faith. So, it was written to them in a kind of code language that they, the believers, could understand, being familiar with the apocalyptic language, so that they would know that though the battle was raging and the times were very threatening and frightening, ultimately, they would be victorious over their enemies through Christ. It is a signal of victory given to them from heaven. In highly symbolic language, a series of events are unfolded in the book of **Revelation** and are repeated using various symbolic figures and patterns to convey and reinforce the message of hope and triumph to those very early believers.

In our text passage (**Revelation 16**) there is a picture given of seven bowls of God's wrath being poured out into the earth. These bowls of wrath are pictured in the form of plagues, as in plagues of blood, sores, fire and frogs. All of these symbols were merely telling the Christians that God's judgment was going to be poured out against their enemies who were presently assaulting, persecuting and threatening them. Ultimately, they would meet God's judgment and those enemies are pictured throughout **Revelation** as the dragon, the beast and their associates.

The sixth bowl that is poured out in this symbolic vision is described in **verses 13-16**.

Revelation 16:13-16 "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto 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 come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon."

It should be obvious to us that figurative language is being used throughout this passage. Surely, we are not to think that literal croaking, ribbeting, slimy frogs are going to come out of the mouths of literal beasts and dragons to do battle in Armageddon. Of course not. It's a symbol referring to the forces of cunning deception that were doing battle against the people of God at that time. John is simply saying that these evil and nefarious forces would face God's judgment. It is, likewise, a picture using symbols to show that all of this would culminate in the battle of Armageddon.

If frogs coming out of the mouths of dragons and so forth are symbols, why isn't the battle of Armageddon a symbol as well, instead of what many people today consider it as a literal, bloody conflict in a literal place in the Middle East? Someone answers, *because Armageddon is an actual place*. That's true, but there is also such a thing as frogs. Just because something exists literally, it doesn't mean that that thing can't be used as a symbol to illustrate a spiritual truth without the literal thing actually being involved. Remember, Megiddo was a famous place in Israel, known for its fierce and decisive conflicts. It was synonymous in the minds of people acquainted with the Old Testament with holy wars or battles involving the people of God.

We use literal places, known for their historical significance to illustrate present situations without having any literal connection to the place named. For example, have you ever heard someone say, *he met his Waterloo...*? What do they mean by that? If you remember your world history, back in 1815, the world dominance of the French Emperor Napoleon came to an end at the battle of Waterloo. The mighty Napoleon had returned to power earlier that year, just about three months before, and the states that opposed him began to mobilize their armies against him. On a Sunday in June of that year, Napoleon went up against two English armies and, through a surprising series of events, was defeated at Waterloo. He abdicated four days later and that was Napoleon's last battle. He was finished.

Today, we might refer to someone who seems to get away with something for a long time, but ultimately gets himself into a circumstance he can't get out of and is ultimately brought down as *finally meeting his Waterloo*. Do we mean that something happened over in Belgium in the city of Waterloo? That something in recent times occurred with that individual in some literal battle in Waterloo? Of course not. We all understand we are just using the well-known historical reference to Waterloo to illustrate that person's predicament.

That's what is taking place here in **Revelation 16:13-16**. John is not talking about a literal, bloody conflict yet to come in Megiddo in the Middle East in modern times. It is merely God's way of assuring the persecuted Christians of the first century, contextually, that Christ was going to do battle and win against their enemies. Of course, the opposition they were facing at that time DID come to an end. The things pictured in **Revelation** are like history in general; it tends to repeat itself and be cyclical in nature. The church will always face foes that arise in one form or another that seek to thwart the work of Christ. But the message of the book of **Revelation** is the same in every situation: right will win, wrong will lose. You can be assured of that. If you read the back of the book, you'll learn that the forces of right will win.

What was the Roman Empire? What is any and every force that vaunts itself at any time against Christ and the church? They are all the agents of Satan. Satan, of course, wants to destroy the kingdom of God. But listen to this passage from **Revelation**:

Revelation 12:7-12 "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time."

You see, friends, that's not literal language, but figurative, that is picturing the unfolding and ultimate end of a spiritual battle. Not a literal war fought on some earthly battlefield; it is a *spiritual* battle. Paul said this:

II Corinthians 10:3-5 "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;"

That's the kind of warfare that the New Testament concerns itself with—*spiritual* warfare. It's a battle of ideology, not one of flesh and blood.

So, where did this notion of a literal battle to take place in the future in Armageddon come from? It comes from the very popular doctrine of *dispensational premillennialism*. That is the doctrine of many if not most of the televangelists, popular religious authors, denominational preachers of today. It suggests Christ's reign and His kingdom are still to come; that when He comes again, it won't be to end the world, but to sit down upon the throne of David in Jerusalem and reign over an earthly kingdom of the Jews for a millennium, or one thousand years.

This doctrine does not date back to the apostles of the original church. Rather, to about the second or third century. It came *after* the apostolic age and essentially disappeared by the end of the third century, and reemerged in the 1800's when it was taught by a man named John Darby. It became a

mainstream doctrine due to the work of a man named C.I. Scofield. That name may sound familiar because he published his Scofield Study Bible, which if you read the study notes in that Bible it primarily promotes the doctrine of dispensational premillennialism.

The theory suggests that Jesus came to establish His kingdom in the first century among the Jews, but because the Jews rejected Him, he delayed the kingdom, instead establishing the church among the Gentiles and for the past two thousand years, Christ the bridegroom has been waiting and tarrying in heaven until the time is right for him to return. We're told that at some point in the very near future, He will invisibly, silently return and supposedly rapture the church out of the world, which will then commence a seven-year period of tribulation. During this seven years, the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem, even the sacrifices of the temple resuming. During the last part of this tribulation period, world forces will supposedly gather in Armageddon where this awful holocaust will take place. A battle like the world has never seen, at the end of which, the triumphant Jesus will be crowned King and will sit down on David's throne and rule the earth for a thousand years. After that time, the wicked dead will supposedly be raised and the final judgment will take place. So says the traditional premillennial doctrine.

But friend, it can't be true. The book of **Revelation** does not teach any of those things for several reasons:

1. Revelation was written contextually to first-century Christians to tell them of things which would "*shortly come to pass*" (**Revelation 1:1**).
2. The theory of premillennialism interprets literally a book that, by its very nature, is symbolic or figurative.
3. The rejection of Jesus by the Jews was not a surprise, as traditional premillennialism suggests. It wasn't unexpected by Christ when He came. It was prophesied a thousand years before. **Psalm 118:22 "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone."** That is a passage that Jesus said referred to Himself (**Matthew 21:42**).
4. Christ is not going to reign over a kingdom—He's reigning NOW over His kingdom. John said that He is *our brother in the kingdom* (**Revelation 1:9**). Paul said that we have been *translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son* (**Colossians 1:13**). That is not something off in the future. It is something that existed in the time of the apostle Paul.
5. When Jesus comes again, He is not going to begin His reign, but the opposite. He is going to hand it over to God the Father. **I Corinthians 15:24 "Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power."**
6. There will be no silent or invisible coming of Jesus. It will be both *seen and heard*. **I Thessalonians 4:16 "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first."**
7. The sacrifices of the temple will never be resumed. Christ offered the perfect sacrifice once and for all (**Hebrews 10:10**). And the genealogical records which allow for a Levitical priesthood to be in office in the temple were destroyed in the destruction of Jerusalem nearly two thousand years ago in A.D. 70.

Friends, this doctrine of the rapture and a literal, bloody conflict in Armageddon and a literal, earthly kingdom to come for a thousand years is a false and speculative doctrine. The reference to Armageddon

in the book of **Revelation** is merely a figure that refers to a spiritual conflict between the enemies of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Really, it takes place every time the cause of Christ goes to battle against the forces of sin and evil. Armageddon can even take place in *your* heart and in mine.

The wonderful point of the book of **Revelation** is to assure us that those on Christ's side are on the winning side of this great battle. There IS a war going on. There is a war being waged for your soul today. There is an Armageddon in which all of the forces of Satan are being hurled against you and me, but what a wonderful assurance has been given to us in **Revelation 12**.

Revelation 12:11 "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death."

We have the victory in this great Armageddon in Jesus Christ through obedience to the gospel by being in Christ. I hope today that if you're not on the winning side, you'll GET on the winning side.

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