

The Battle of Armageddon

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Introduction

Most recognize **Revelation 16:12-16** as the center or “proof” for the pre-millennial doctrine of the battle of Armageddon, or the great battle which will supposedly be fought in the valley of Megiddo. There are conflicting doctrines, even among pre-millennialist's concerning exactly *when* this battle will be fought, for those who believe in the pre-tribulation or post-tribulation “rapture.” Some believe that Jesus will come just before the great battle of Armageddon, while others believe He will come just as the battle reaches its climax. However, both believe that it is connected with the return of Jesus in final judgment. Since there is speculation concerning the coming of Christ, it is no wonder that there is speculation about the great battle of Armageddon. What is it? When was or will it be fought? Who will fight in it? Where will it be fought?

In order to answer these questions we need to set the stage so we can understand some things concerning “*the battle of that great day of God Almighty.*” Most of the problems of the false doctrines based upon the book of Revelation revolve around a literal interpretation of figurative terms. In this lesson we wish to show the two basic ways this passage is interpreted (literal and figurative), examine some of the false positions which are taught in connection with it; and expose the truth which it reveals in the hope that we can better understand it and answer those who teach false doctrines from it.

I. The Context

Revelation 16 sets forth the pouring out of the seven vials of God's wrath upon the earth (Vs 1). The seven trumpets found earlier in the book of Revelation deal with the warnings of God of the impending judgments to take place. Now, they are set forth as actually taking place. Of the basic time period and general events, we know this must be referring to those things which would “*shortly come to pass*” (1:1) and not extend beyond a relatively short period of time following the writing of this book. So, whether one takes the early date (AD 68) or the later date (AD 96) for the writing of the book of Revelation, we still must conclude that these judgments and plagues cannot refer to the end of time judgment, but the immediate judgment of God upon those who opposed and persecuted the saints at that time. Thus, we must reject any interpretation which leads us into a continuous historical or future fulfillment of these prophecies of John.

All of these signs were descriptive of the order of events which removed the evil forces of persecution from the path of the church and cleared the way for the expansion of the kingdom of God on earth. They also assured the saints of God of the ultimate victory which they would receive if they endured faithfully to the end, without bowing the knee to compromise with idolatry or false religion. They fit into the general theme of the book of Revelation which is victory if we are faithful and overcome (Revelation 2:10). In the end, God wins and those who are faithful to Him, will be with Him.

Revelation 16:12-16 relates the sixth of the seven vials of the seven plagues of God's wrath which were to be poured out upon the persecutors and enemies of the first century church. It pictures the sixth angel pouring out his vial upon the river Euphrates, the water of it being dried up so that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared (Vs 12). The Euphrates river is used symbolically in the book of Revelation to indicate a boundary or a barrier. In this vision, its waters represent a barrier or hindrance to the nations of the east to join in the battle of the great day (Vs 14).

In **Verses 13-14** John saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming from the mouth of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. It should come as no surprise that in this vision John sees unclean spirits like frogs at work in the world out of the mouths of these three. Frogs were considered unclean, loathsome, and a nuisance and distressing. Some believe that their croaking symbolizes confusion and this is what they symbolize out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. It should be clear that their purpose is to deceive and destroy with their words, as they work to gather all the nations against God and His church. Clearly they function as the spirits of false teachers. **Verse 14** clearly defines them as *"the spirits of devils, working miracles."* These were evil spirits operating through some agency (usually men, during the miraculous days of the church). The "miracles" which they worked were not true miracles, like those worked by Jesus and His apostles, but were pseudo-signs, which were designed to deceive. This is clear from the context, both immediate and remote. In **Revelation 13:13-14**, it is said that the false prophet (land beast), *"...doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live."* This shows that their purpose was to deceive by using pseudo-miracles.

Neither Satan nor his helpers can work a *bona fide* or true miracle, but they can produce lying wonders (2 Thessalonians 2:9). Since these spirits were of devils (demons) and came from the dragon, the beast and the false prophet, it should be clear that they were working for the devil. Satan, assisted by his two allies of the beast and the false prophet, is the prime instigator of this effort to gather all nations against God and His church. Thus, they could not have been working true miracles, but lying wonders designed to deceive.

The objective of these unclean spirits was to gather *“the kings of the earth and of the whole world...to the battle of that great day of God Almighty”* (Vs 19). This was accomplished by the influence of the Roman empire and the influence of paganism in the Roman empire. The battle referred to here is the same as that of **Verse 16** since that is the purpose of them being gathered together. The *“battle of that great day”* is judgment, but **not** the final judgment of God.

In **Verse 15**, in the midst of this vision of John of the impending battle of those who would war against God and His church, there is now injected a beatitude of warning and promise from the Lord to the saints. It is as if the Lord momentarily halts the vision and inserts this beatitude to strengthen and encourage the saints in the coming spiritual conflict in the battle of the great day of God Almighty. This is a blessing of the Lord in rewarding those who will watch and keep their garments. The verbs *“watcheth”* and *“keepeth”* are both in the present tense, which indicates continual action; i.e., “keep on watching” and “keep on keeping.” The word “watch” means to stay alert and faithful to the Lord, so the concept is to continue to stay alert and remain faithful to the Lord each day. There is a continual conflict between righteousness and evil which makes it necessary to watch daily, as Peter issued a similar warning to Christians in **1 Peter 5:8-9**.

This warning of Jesus was one of critical importance. It was not just one where they would be embarrassed if they did not keep their garments. Their spiritual lives depended upon keeping them! And as with these early saints, who were engaged in a struggle for their spiritual lives, our spiritual existence depends upon us putting on righteousness and the armor of God and being relentless in our battle for the truth and against error. We can do no less and preserve our spiritual lives! It is shameful to be spiritually naked, when God has provided us with spiritual clothing!

II. The Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:16)

Verse 16 connects back to **Verse 14**, following the parenthetical beatitude and warning of the Lord in **Verse 15**. The three unclean spirits (spirits of devils) went forth into the world to gather the kings of the earth to *“the battle of that great day of God Almighty.”* This verse simply tells us *where* they were gathered together to do battle and where the war would take place, it does not tell us about the battle or the results of it. That information comes in the following chapters, as the harlot/Babylon are destroyed (Revelation 17-18); the beast and the false prophet are destroyed (Revelation 19); Gog and Magog (heathenism) are destroyed and finally the devil along with death and hell are destroyed (Revelation 20).

The place which this passage does indicate as the battleground is called *“Armageddon”* in the KJV and *“Har-Magedon”* in the ASV. This name literally means, “Mount of Megiddo.” Megiddo was a strategic point in the protection of Israel and Judah, since it guarded the northern entrance to Israel. It was in this area that several decisive battles were fought, perhaps the most memorable being that of Deborah and Barak against Jabin and Sisera of the Canaanites, which was a decisive victory given to Israel by the Lord (Judges 4 & 5). It was in this valley of Esdraelon (Jezreel), *“west of the hill of Moreh,”* that Gideon's three hundred men defeated and drove out

the Midianites, which was another decisive battle won by the Lord's people as they followed His commandments (Judges 7:1).

In view of these physical battles of great historical significance which were fought at this location we see that Megiddo is a place where great battles were fought and decisive victories or defeats took place. This is the only passage that speaks of "Armageddon" in the Bible, although the idea of the battle, gathering for battle and going to war are also mentioned in **Revelation 17:14; 19:19-21** and **20:8-10**.

III. Two Views of the Battle

Generally, there are two views concerning this great battle. One is that it is a literal battle, fought with physical weapons. The other is that it is a figurative battle, fought with spiritual warfare. Much false doctrine has been written and spoken about the "battle of Armageddon" by those in the denominational world who believe that this will be a literal, physical battle which will take place surrounding the time of the final coming of the Lord. In order to have a better understanding of this great conflict we wish to examine some of things associated with it. Read the following Scripture references and ask yourself: Are these Literal or Figurative?

In viewing the battle and battlefield there are two different perspectives set forth in **Revelation: (1) The Lord's view** found in **Revelation 19:11-16**. This passage depicts the Lord, with eyes as a flame of fire and wearing many crowns sitting upon a white horse. He is dressed in a vesture dipped in blood and is going forth to make war with His armies from heaven following Him upon white horses, as they are clothed in fine, white linen. He is armed with a sharp sword (which goes out of his mouth) and a rod of iron and treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. He is called the King of kings and Lord of lords, as well as Faithful and True. His mission is to judge and make war in righteousness. Does this sound like literal or figurative language? Could this be talking about a literal, physical war to be fought in the Mount of Megiddo shortly before (or after) the Lord's final coming?

(2) The view of the armies of the enemies is found in **Revelation 16:14,16; 19:19-21 & 20:7-10. Revelation 19:19-21**. These passages depict the battle between the beast and the false prophet against the Lord. **Revelation 20:7-10** depicts the battle between Gog and Magog (heathenism), the devil against the Lord. Does this language sound like literal or figurative language? Could this refer to a literal, physical battle to take place in Mount Megiddo just before (or after) the final coming of the Lord?

The two views which are advanced concerning this battle and these passages are: **(1)** the literal interpretation: physical conflict and **(2)** the figurative interpretation: spiritual conflict. Both of these views cannot be correct. Look at each of them and determine which fits the Biblical context, both immediate (Revelation) and remote (New Testament), and harmonizes with the truth of God's Word.

1. **Literal interpretation: physical conflict.** This view interprets this battle as a literal war fought with literal weapons between God and literal world rulers in the literal area of Megiddo shortly before (or after) the Lord's final coming and the end of the world. Let us look at some of the things which have been written about this battle.

A. The battle of Armageddon in general terms:

1. "...we do well to think of John as foreseeing the **final** battle between God and the hostile world powers..." (Barclay, p.173).
2. "...Scripture...predict(s) a final terrible war among the world's nations over Israel, the battle of Armageddon, climaxed by the coming of the Lord to rule the earth...Revelation 16:14 (Cornell, p. 14).

B. The battle of Armageddon in specific terms:

1. "...Armageddon begins with the invasion of Israel by the Arabs and the Russian confederacy..." (Lindsey, p.167).
2. "It explicitly says that this force would fall 'in the open field,' so apparently this position enables the use of nuclear weapons" (Lindsey, p.161).
3. "...we have only two great spheres of power left to fight the final climactic battle of Armageddon: (the Russian confederacy) and the vast hordes of the Orient probably united under the Red Chinese war machine" (Lindsey, p.162).
4. "So here it is — the last great conflict. After the Antichrist assembles the forces of the rest of the whole 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" (Lindsey, p.165).

C. The carnage of the battle of Armageddon:

1. "(Armageddon) portends to be a slaughter such as this planet has never before experienced" (Jehovah's Witnesses, p.318). Jehovah's Witnesses believe unbelievers will be destroyed (annihilated) and the righteous will inherit the renovated earth.
2. "John predicts that so many people will be slaughtered in the conflict that blood will stand to the horses' bridles for a total distance of 200 miles northward and southward of Jerusalem (Revelation 14:20)." (Lindsey, p.167).
3. "What a deluge of blood they are to enter. 200 miles of blood — 6 foot deep and 10 miles wide (Revelation 14:20)." (Greene, p.398).

2. **Figurative interpretation: spiritual conflict.** This view looks at the battle as being a spiritual battle fought between the enemies of God's people and the righteous of God. It is

a representative battle which took place between the first century church and the enemies of the church in the form of the Roman state, false religions, apostate religions and heathenism. All of these were united as kings against the church in her spiritual conflicts with them. This does not rule out the present day application to all of us who struggle against the forces of wickedness in the same types and forms today. We must continue to fight the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:12).

A. The meaning of “signify.”

In **Revelation 1:1**, at the very beginning of this book, John wrote, *“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.”* The word “signified” is important, because it tells us *how* John received the revelation — in signs or in mostly figurative language. Time and time again highly figurative language is used in Revelation to communicate spiritual truths and foretell those things which were to “shortly come to pass.” Sometimes, the figures are explained, sometimes not, but we know they must be interpreted in the time period of the book.

Revelation 16 abounds in figurative language. Are we to understand the seven vials to be literal, physical vials which were literally and physically poured out on the physical earth, sea, rivers, the sun, the literal throne of the literal beast, the literal, physical Euphrates river and literally into the air? Of course not! Are we to understand that there was a literal, physical sore upon those who worshipped a literal, physical beast? That the sea and rivers turned to literal, physical blood? That the sun literally and physically scorched men? That the Euphrates river was literally and physically dried up? That literal kings from the east needed this to cross it. That literal, physical frogs came out of the mouth of a literal, physical dragon and a literal, physical beast?

Yet, right in the middle of all of this highly figurative language we are told that this must refer to a literal, physical battle between God (primarily Israel) and the hostile world powers. Who could believe it? Who would want to, except for those who wish to mix politics and the Bible.

B. The meaning of Armageddon.

If it is figurative what does Armageddon represent? Simply put, Megiddo or Armageddon signifies a “place of troops,” a “gathering.” John is simply saying the rulers and their armies would be gathered together to do battle. Satan, would be the wicked one to gather the wicked of the world together to fight and oppose the church and the righteous.

SATAN — (Revelation 12:3,9). John 8:41,44 speaks of Satan as a great red dragon and the Father of lies. He is the source of all opposition to God, Christ, the truth and the church. United under him are:

1. **THE STATE** — (Revelation 13:1-10; 17:7-12) — Rome under the beast.
2. **FALSE RELIGION** — (Revelation 13:11-18; 16:13; 19:20) — Idolatry, Emperor worship.
3. **APOSTATE RELIGION** — (Revelation 17-18) — Judaism, Gnosticism, Heretics.
4. **HEATHENISM** — (Revelation 20:8) — Gog and Magog, Paganism, Atheism, Humanism.

Beginning in **Revelation 12**, where the conflict between the church and Satan begins in visional form in this book, John introduces each of these enemies of the church. He describes them and characterizes them. He then shows that they will ultimately be defeated. Satan, with one or more of these enemies, fought against Christ and lost. Since then, he has been fighting the church, the body of Christ, and losing in the spiritual conflict with the righteous.

The enemies of the first century church epitomize the enemies of the church throughout time. In the first century, the state was Rome, she was destroyed. The harlot was apostate Judaism, she was destroyed. False religion and unbelievers take a variety of forms, each has been and will be defeated in the end by those who are righteous.

3. **Missing The Mark:** “To make Armageddon a carnal conflict is to miss the mark of such passages as **John 18:36**; **2 Corinthians 10:4-5**; **Ephesians 6:10-18**; **Hebrews 4:12...**” (Taylor, Bulletin).

John 18:36a — “*Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world:*” The kingdom of God is a spiritual, not physical kingdom.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5a — “*For the weapons of our warfare are **not carnal**, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;*”

Ephesians 6:10-12 — “*10. Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. 11. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12. For **we wrestle not against flesh and blood**, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against **spiritual wickedness in high places.***”

Hebrews 4:12 — “*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of **soul and spirit**, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the **thoughts and intents of the heart.***” The sword of the Spirit is our offensive weapon.

Conclusion

The battle of Armageddon represents the battle between the church and her enemies. In its primary fulfillment this battle was a spiritual conflict between the influence of Rome under the beast and the Jews as they tried to destroy the church and the influence of the Gospel of Christ. In that sense it has already been fought, and we do not have to concern ourselves with the false pre-millennial theories. There will be no battle fought at the final judgment day, for all will be over then and God will hand out the sentence and reward on that day.

However, in the present day application, the war between truth and error, righteousness and wickedness, good and evil still rages on. The warfare in which we must engage as soldiers of Christ is spiritual; it is not carnal. "...we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:11b). The devil has used and will use governments, ingrates, degenerates and the decadent to attempt to destroy God's people. Those who clothe themselves in the white robes of righteousness and fight the good fight of faith shall overcome and be with God eternally.

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