

LET THE BIBLE SPEAK SERIES

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The Battle of Armageddon

Revelations 16:13-16

The battle of Armageddon is the most sensational aspect of dispensational pre-millennialism. The dispensationalist sees it as a great and terrible conflict, a bloody holocaust such as has never been seen before. The battle is to happen in our time, and will precede the visible coming of Christ.

I. Definitions

Pre-millennialism Teaches that Christ will return to earth before beginning a 1000 year reign from Jerusalem. The doctrine originated in the late second century and gradually disappeared in the third century, until its revival in relatively modern times.

Dispensationalism Teaches that God created the world in 6 days and on the 7th he rested, so all history is divided into 7 dispensations, the final one being the millennium. Dispensationalism was crystallized by John N. Darby (1800-1882) and popularized by C. I. Scofield.

II. Armageddon In The Dispensational Scheme

Chronological Development:

1. Christ, came to earth to set up His kingdom. But he was surprisingly rejected by the Jews. As an afterthought, he set up the Church instead.
2. Since returning to heaven, the bridegroom has "tarried" but "signs" (especially those in Mt.24) indicate his return is immanent.
3. The "first stage" of his coming will be "quiet" and "invisible" at which time the "living righteous" will be raptured and the dead saints resurrected.
4. This begins a seven-year "tribulation" period. During the first half--Solomon's temple will be rebuilt and the sacrifices of the Jewish law will be reactivated. During the last half--a bloody conflict will ensue which will be consummated by the battle of Armageddon.
5. Christ, then after the Armageddon victory, will begin His 1000 year reign on David's throne in Jerusalem, after which the wicked dead are raised. Then the judgment and eternity begins.

Review of these points:

1. The rejection of Christ is no surprise. Psalms 118:22 "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone." (Jesus applies to himself in Mt.21:42) Christ did

establish the kingdom. Jno.3:5 "Except a man be born again he cannot enter the kingdom of God..." Col.1:13 "delivered from power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His dear Son"

Rev. 1:9 John declared that he was our "...brother in the kingdom." The Church was no accident: Mt. 16:18---It was a part of God's eternal plan Eph. 3:10.

2. Christ did not know of the time of his coming. Hence there could be no signs Mt.24:36 (Hence there is nothing to indicate that Christ's return is eminent).

3. The coming of Christ will be both "visible" and "audible" 2Thess. 1:7.

1Thess. 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..."

Both the wicked and righteous will be raised at the same time Jno. 5:28-29 "the hour is coming when all they that are in their graves will hear his voice and come forth..."

4. No where in the bible is "tribulation" used in connection with a seven year period at the end of the age. The Law of Moses was "nailed to the cross" Col. 2:14. To reactivate the animal sacrifices would be foolish in the light of Christ's sacrifice. Heb. 10:10 we are told that he "died once for all..."

5. The carnal nature of dispensationalism's Armageddon is opposed to the spiritual nature of NT conflict. 2Cor. 10:4 "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal..." There is no evidence of a 1000 year reign, by Christ, upon the earth in the bible.

Hal Lindsey, an exponent of Dispensational Pre-millennialism, in his book *The Late Great Planet Earth*, says that the political indications suggest that likely Israel will soon be invaded by a confederation of "Arab-African forces headed by Egypt. When this happens, Russia and her allies will use such as an occasion to invade and conquer (for a short time) the Middle East. Subsequently, the Russians learn of the progressive mobilization of Oriental forces (under Red China) and Western European forces (under the Anti-Christ, a fuhrer-like dictator). She will prepare to fight but will be completely destroyed (probably in a nuclear attack) by western Europe (which is supposed to be the revived Roman Empire). Accordingly, this sets the stage for "the final climactic battle of Armageddon: the combined forces of the Western civilization under the leadership of the Roman dictator and the vast hordes of the Orient probably under the Red Chinese war machine. This mighty battle between the Oriental forces (with 200 million soldiers) and the armies of the Anti-Christ will occur "with the vortex centered at the Valley of Megiddo." So many will be killed that "blood will stand to the horses' bridles for a total distance of 200 miles northward and southward of Jerusalem." Lindsey claims that the war will spread over all the earth, destroying cities like London, Paris, New York etc. Finally, as the battle reaches its awful climax and it appears that all life will be destroyed on earth, in this very moment Christ will come and save man from self-extinction.

III. The Nature and Design of the Book of Revelation

Armageddon--Hebrew "Har-Magedon" found only once in the bible Rev.16:16. In order to determine the meaning of the word, we need to look at the character and purpose of the book of Revelation.

1. Revelation is highly symbolical
2. Christ "signified" the message by the angel unto John. Rev.1:1
3. Why did the Lord choose symbols to be vehicles of these truths?

A Twofold Purpose:

- (1) Designed to reveal, in a dramatic way, truths to those who were initiated in the significance of word pictures.
- (2) At the same time, these truths could be concealed from those who would abuse them if the message were clearly understood.

This symbolic terminology, also called apocalyptic language, was employed by inspired writers to convey messages of hope to Gods' people in time of danger. Any view of the book of Revelation that fails to recognize its highly symbolic nature; that seeks to liberalize its images is doomed to absolute failure.

IV. What Is Armageddon?

1. Rev.16 records the pouring out of 7 bowls of Gods' wrath into the earth.
2. The bowls are in the form of plagues i.e. (sores, blood, fire, frogs etc.).
3. They point us to God's judgment against the dragon, the beast, and their associates.
4. In connection with the 6th bowl, John writes in v. 13-16 (read)
5. Obviously there are figures employed here. John is not saying that literal frogs will come out of literal mouths of literal creatures to do battle on the literal plain of Megiddo.
6. The plain of Megiddo is approximately 20 miles long and 14 miles wide.
This is much too small to accommodate a battle of the magnitude (hundreds of millions of soldiers) demanded by the pre-millennial view.
7. What is Har-Megedon? Lit. "the hill of Megiddo."
The bible speaks of "Megiddo and its three heights" Josh.17:11
"Megiddo" and its towns" Judges 1:27
"the waters of Megiddo" Judg. 5:19
"the valley of Megiddo 2Chron.35:22
But no mention is made of Mount of Megiddo. In this area several significant battles were fought in OT times:
Deborah and Barak overthrew the kings of Canaan Judges 5:19
In this valley Gideon's three hundred men defeated the Midianites. Judges 6:33
Saul defeated by Philistines 1Sam.31:8
Ahaziah died of Jehu's arrows 2Kings 9:27
Pharaoh-Necho overthrew Josiah 2Kings 23:29-30

In view of these battles of historical significance we conclude that John used the word symbolically to describe a great decisive spiritual battle. The old battlefield becomes the symbol of this struggle. It is raised in meaning. It is a type, not a locality. This battle was between the army of Satan and the forces of God. A spiritual struggle, not a carnal one. A battle which would determine the fate of each side involved. Contextually the battle was fought and won by the Lord in the complete defeat of the Roman Empire and god-Caesar paganism behind which Rome threw its total power and the results are described in Rev.19:11-21. (Read)

v. 11---The battle of that great day of God Almighty, first introduced in (Revelation 16:12-16), portrayed the army of Satan as led by three devilish spirits that looked like frogs. Also on the devil's side were the beast, the pagan religion of the false prophet and those who displayed the mark of the beast. With such opposition, how could the people of God ever hope to win? This verse tells us that they are led by one mightier than all the combined forces of Satan. Christ, our leader and savior, on a white horse, coming in righteousness to judge and make war.

v. 14--tells us that he is followed by spiritual armies. "armies of heaven on white horses" these are not carnal armies (perhaps angels joined with faithful martyrs.)

v. 15--the power of judgment is His word. "Quick and powerful, sharper than any two edged sword" Heb. 4:12. He executes God's wrath against the nations as he treads out the winepress.

v. 17 declares that so certain is the victory of Christ over the false prophet and beast that an angel summons the birds of prey to come to the supper of the great God.

v. 19 depicts the impending battle, but no description of it is given. It is not a prolonged conflict. The forces of evil are simply outclassed.

v. 20 "the beast was taken" No match for the Divine warrior.

v. 21 "the rest" i.e. the proud, arrogant armies of the beast are now brought to nothing. The kingdom of God which Rome attempted to stamp out, still stands.

Here, we have the only description, inspiration has given us of the "battle of Armageddon." We must remember that the whole thrust of the Apocalypse is to assure God's people of that day, of the certainty of this victory, and to keep them from succumbing to the pressures of emperor worship. In Rev. 19:21 we are assured the Roman power and the paganism which supported it are now destroyed forever. In this defeat and destruction the destiny of all such powers that should ever arise to fight against God and his Kingdom are revealed. No person, no nation, no movement can successfully oppose God and be successful. While the specific reference here, was to a battle fought long ago, this is not to say that similar engagements of evil versus righteousness have not continued to occur. Satan has not ceased to exist. He continues to wage battle against the purposes of God. But this is God's guarantee of victory to the saints who lived then and to all who would come after them, even until the end of time. For anyone today to look for a physical military battle between human armies to be fought in northern Palestine at some future date is completely without scriptural support and foreign to the spirit and purpose of Revelation.