

• *Armageddon – a popular image of the end of the world*

• *Bible picture language – a great battle*

**Some basic facts**

• *Ar – mountain*  
 • *Mageddon – a small town*

• *Easy route for invading armies to enter Israel*

• *Many famous battles in this area*

**What is 'the battle of Armageddon'?**

• *A mistaken interpretation of Daniel 9*

• *Picture language taken from Ezekiel 38-39*

• *A symbol*

• *A picture of a time when there will be very fierce conflict between the world and the church*

Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. There are all sorts of strange ideas around concerning 'Armageddon'. There are movie-films called *Armageddon*; novels are written with 'Armageddon' in their titles. In a time of economic decline people speak of 'a financial Armageddon'. People who are convinced the world will not last much longer talk of the 'countdown to Armageddon'. The word comes from **Revelation 16:6**, which tells us that at some time in the future a period of great conflict against God's people will arise. It is put to us in the picture language of the Bible as a great battle. God allows his enemies one last massive attempt to destroy his kingdom but actually it takes them to their own final destruction.

Let us begin with some basic facts. The word *Ar* or *Har* is Hebrew for 'mountain' or 'hilly countryside' (although actually the area has no hills!). *Mageddon* is the town Megiddo, in the south-west part of the Valley of Jezreel. The area around it formed a piece of flat land between the easily travelled coastal plain and the road to Damascus in Aram.

There have been some famous battles in this area. The Valley of Jezreel is in fact an easy route by which to enter into Israel to attack it. The strategic plain of Megiddo in the Valley of Jezreel and Esdraelon was an essential crossing point for armies avoiding the difficult mountains as they tried to get into the heart of Israel<sup>1</sup>. Many great conquerors have crossed the land at this point. The area concerned is about fourteen miles wide and twenty miles long. Napoleon called it 'the most natural battlefield of the whole earth'. It was via this plain that the Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III crossed the land in 1483BC and fought a battle at Megiddo. Barak defeated the armies of Canaan<sup>2</sup> in the same area. Gideon met the Midianites there<sup>3</sup>. The Philistines and the Israelites fought there more than once<sup>4</sup>, and it was there that Saul lost his life<sup>5</sup>. The famous godly king Josiah was fatally wounded there in a battle with an Egyptian Pharaoh<sup>6</sup>. The Roman emperor and army used this natural corridor when attacking Jerusalem forty years after the crucifixion of Christ. So did the Crusaders in the Middle Ages. The British army-commander General Allenby used it when he defeated the Turkish armies in 1917.

What is 'the battle of Armageddon'? Some believe that the Lord Jesus Christ will return to earth in two stages with a seven-year gap between the two stages. The idea comes from an unlikely interpretation of Daniel 9:24-27. The theory is that the 'battle of Armageddon' comes into human history towards the end of the seven years. But the seven-year theory is based on one of the most difficult passages of the Bible, and one should surely not base an entire system of interpretation on one verse that is difficult to interpret! That particular interpretation of Daniel 9 is – I believe – certainly mistaken.<sup>a</sup>

What we have here is symbolism and picture-language. There are in fact no mountains in the Valley of Jezreel. But in picture-language taken from Ezekiel 38-39 a great battle against the people of God takes place in 'the mountains of Israel'<sup>1</sup>. We have here a picture put together from the many famous battles at Megiddo combined with the idea of a battle being fought on a large area of high ground. Actually the Valley of Jezreel is not high ground, but this ought to confirm that what we have here is picture-language and symbolism.

This is John's way – and Jesus' way – of picturing a time when there will be very fierce conflict between the world and the church. We have this idea in Daniel, in Ezekiel 38-39, in Revelation 19:19 and 20:9, and elsewhere. 'Armageddon' is not some nuclear war in Israel. It is rather a picture of a worldwide conflict between sin and righteousness, between Jesus and his church (on the one side) and Satan and the forces of wickedness (on the other side). The church does not use literal weapons. The weapons of our warfare are spiritual. Elsewhere the picture language is different and the battle takes

<sup>1</sup> Judges 5:19; 6:33; 2 Chronicles 35:22; Zechariah 12:11

<sup>2</sup> Judges 5:19

<sup>3</sup> Judges 7

<sup>4</sup> 1 Samuel 29:1

<sup>5</sup> 1 Samuel 31

<sup>6</sup> 2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Chronicles 35:22-24

<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel 38:8, 21; 39:2, 4, 17

• *Not a nuclear war in Israel*  
 • *But a picture of worldwide conflict between Jesus and His church versus Satan and the forces of wickedness*

• *Elsewhere different picture language points to the same conflict*

**Some conclusions**

1. *Satan is always wanting to destroy the church*

2. *One day God will allow Satan a time to oppress the church*

3. *It will not last very long and it will not succeed*

• *The nations of the world must be reached*

• *Jesus must reign until He has put all enemies beneath His feet*

place not at Megiddo but at Jerusalem. That is picture-language as well! If you take the pictures literally you have a lot of contradictions! The 'mountains' of Megiddo have never existed! The nearest mountain is Mount Carmel. Elijah fought a great battle against false prophets there. Perhaps Mount Carmel is made part of John's picture-language as well – but it is picture-language.

One day the battle that took place in the days of Barak and Deborah will be repeated – but spiritually not militarily. 'The kings came, and they fought. At that time the kings of Canaan fought at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo', says Judges 5:19. But the 'battle at Megiddo' did not crush God's ancient people in the days of the judges. 'They took away no silver or possessions of Israel'<sup>1</sup>. God was in control and even the stars and the rivers were against his enemies. 'The stars fought from heaven . . . The Kishon river swept Sisera's men away . . . March on, my soul, with strength!'<sup>2</sup>.

So we must draw some conclusions.

1. **Satan is always wanting to destroy the church.** If he can crush God's people by persecution, he will do so. If he can deceive them by false religion, he will do so. His longing is to do both!

2. Just as God allowed Satan a time to oppress Job, so **one day God will allow Satan a time to oppress the church.** Actually it will be part of the punishment of the world's sin. What happens is again the judgement of God. The picture in Revelation is of an angel pouring out a bowl of **God's** wrath; it leads to Satan's having what he wants for a short period.

3. **It will not last very long and it will not succeed.** Powerful enemies will come. 'The kings came, and they fought . . . by the waters of Megiddo'<sup>1</sup>. But at ancient Megiddo the mighty force that opposed God's people was utterly defeated. It will happen again. Jesus goes on reigning. Satan will have his 'little season'<sup>2</sup>. If this period of great opposition is close to the time of the coming of Jesus, then it is not here just yet. A day of triumph has to come first. The nations of the world must be reached. The gospel-age is not going to be a failure; it is going to be a success. But Satan is seeking even **now** to oppose the church ('The mystery of lawlessness is already operating'<sup>3</sup>. We go on resisting. One day God will give him a little bit

of permission – but it will be (to use picture-language) an angel pouring out a bowl of wrath. The church will come through it and survive. Jesus must reign until he has put all enemies beneath his feet – including the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. Everything that opposes God will be thrown into the lake of fire. The church of Jesus Christ that does the will of God will (as 1 John 2:17 puts it) 'remain for ever'.

**Note**

a. See M.A. Eaton, *Daniel*, Preaching Through the Bible (IBTB, 2009), chapter 24 'Seventy Sevens' (Daniel 9:11–27).

<sup>1</sup> Judges 5:19

<sup>2</sup> Judges 5:20-21

<sup>1</sup> Judges 5:19

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 20:3

<sup>3</sup> 2 Thess. 2:7



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