

What Does God's Word Say About...

Battle of Armageddon

Armageddon is mentioned in Revelation 16:16. In the New American Standard Bible verse 16 reads, "And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon." Har-Magedon literally means the "Mount of Megiddo" which would suggest the imagery of the rising presence of an impending battle of particular relevance to Megiddo. Armageddon [Har-Magedon] refers to the plain of Megiddo, a large valley in which many historic Old Testament battles were fought by the Israelites.

The Hebrews of the first century recognized any reference to Megiddo as a place where countless hundreds of thousands of their countrymen lost their lives in numerous battles over centuries of time in conflicts that often decided their fate on earth (2 Chron. 35:20-24; Judges 5:19-20; 1 Samuel 31:1-6; Judges 7:1; 2 Kings 9:27; Daniel 11:21-35).

To understand the battle of Armageddon [Har-Magedon], we must bear in mind that the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation directly to the churches of Asia Minor in the latter half of the first century. This book was written in symbolic language as Revelation 1:1-2 states. "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it [symbolized it] by His angel to His bond-servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw." The term Armageddon is therefore symbolic and has no reference to a literal, physical battle occurring in the future between the forces of Christ and the forces of Satan. Any view of the book of Revelation that fails to recognize its highly symbolic nature and seeks to literalize its images, is doomed to absolute failure. For example, if we take Revelation 16:13-16 literally, then we have three unclean spirits that look like frogs that will come out of a dragon's mouth leading the kings of the earth and all the people of the world into a great battle. When we consider that the plain of Megiddo is approximately 20 miles long by 14 miles wide, it is too small to accommodate a battle of the magnitude [hundreds of millions of soldiers] demanded by modern day false teachers.

At the time of the writing of the book of Revelation the Lord's church was undergoing some of the most severe organized persecution it would face in all the Christian age. Christianity in the first century to the fourth century was outlawed by the Roman Empire. The Roman Emperors demanded to be worshipped as a god on earth under their rule and any who refused became enemies of the Imperial Roman Empire. Violators were ostracized from society, forbidden to buy, sell or participate in any kind of government program. Not only was it illegal for a Christian to buy or sell within the empire, it was illegal for Roman citizens loyal to the Emperor to sell or buy from them. All commerce with Christians who refused to worship the Emperor was forbidden by the state (Revelation 2:9-10, 12-13).

The book of Revelation was a book of comfort, exhortation and hope to a severely oppressed group of God's people. It is only logical that they would be able to understand John's letter. They would know that the Battle of Armageddon was a spiritual battle between good and evil. They would be familiar enough with the Old Testament's physical battles which many of their brethren had suffered on the plain of Megiddo.

Is the Battle of Armageddon a literal battle, fought between the Lord's people and the forces of darkness, on a literal battlefield, with literal weapons of war? Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses" (2 Cor. 10:3-4). The only scripturally approved offensive weapons of the soldiers of Christ are described in Ephesians 6:13-17. "Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything to stand firm. Stand firm, therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God." So therefore, the Battle of Armageddon is a spiritual war that has been fought from the cross to the present day and until the time Christ returns.

Christians are not fighting against flesh and blood, "but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places [spiritual world]" (Eph. 6:12). This is the true definition of the battle of Armageddon !