

Armageddon:

The End of the World?

by Jerold Aust

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hat does the Bible really say about Armageddon? It tells us that the last great battle of man's age will take place in the Middle East. The armies will gather at a place Scripture calls Armageddon. So, not surprisingly, Armageddon has come to portray our worst nightmare: the end of the world.

Some Bible scholars claim that Armageddon is predicted to terminate society as we know it. More-detailed speculations speak of it as a battle of cataclysmic proportions, possibly a nuclear war that will annihilate mankind. Even Ronald Reagan, the former U.S. president, spoke of Armageddon in such terms. That Armageddon is named in the Bible (Revelation 16:16) and that it serves as the prelude to "the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (verse 14) deserves our concern and attention.

The meaning of Armageddon

The word *Armageddon* can be traced to Megiddo, a significant fortified town in Palestine in ancient times. Most scholars think *Armageddon* comes from *harmegiddon*, meaning "hill of Megiddo." The area has quite a history. Excavations of Megiddo have revealed 20 layers of occupation dating from the fourth millennium B.C. to about 450 B.C. The site is about 18 miles south-southeast of the Port of Haifa in northern Israel and about 55 miles north of Jerusalem.

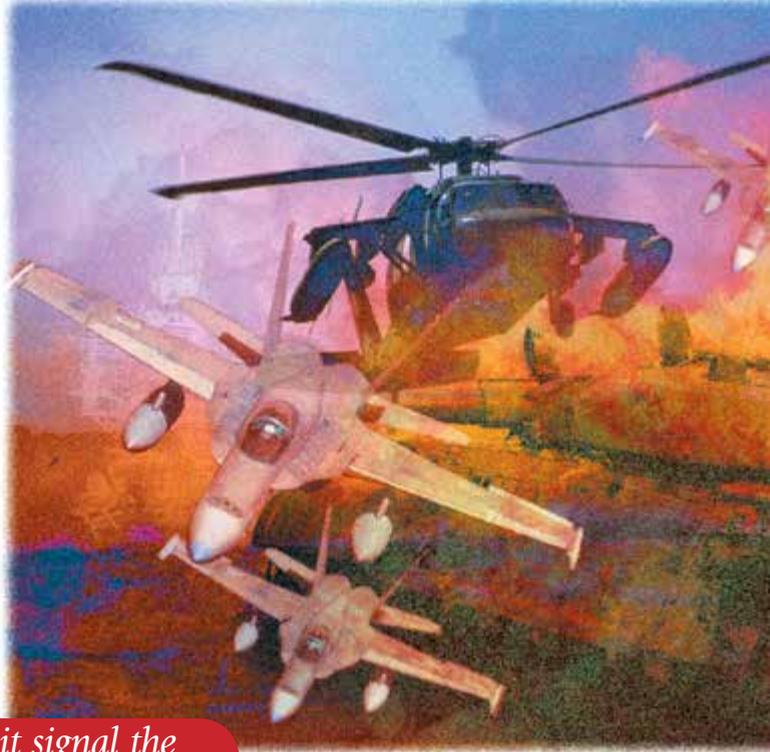
What is the biblical Armageddon? Does it signal the end of the world? When and where will it take place?

Megiddo's strategic location gave it greater importance than its size would suggest: a mere 13 acres within the city's ancient walls during the time of Solomon. Megiddo overlooked the narrow entrance to Israel's northern mountains from the Plain of Megiddo—also known as the Valley of Esdraelon, or Jezreel—a level expanse some 20 miles long and 14 miles wide.

Northern Palestine, especially the area of the Plain of Megiddo, was militarily important because it guarded part of the easiest route across the Fertile Crescent, which stretched from Mesopotamia to Egypt. Throughout ancient history, the great powers of Mesopotamia—Assyria and Babylon—contended with Egypt for control of this area.

The territory of the ancient kingdom of Israel was at the crossroads of three continents—Africa, Europe and Asia.

Bounded on the west by the Mediterranean Sea and on the east by the Arabian Desert, this relatively small area between sea and desert was the strategic land link between the three continents. So important, so desirable, so coveted was this



narrow land bridge that ancient armies frequently and regularly battled for control of it.

In modern times the Arabian Desert has been prized for its great oil reserves. In ancient times parts of the territory of Israel were coveted for their militarily crucial passes. Megiddo guarded one of those passes. More than 200 battles have been fought at or near there (Alan Johnson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1981, Vol. 12, p. 551). One scholar calls the area "the battle ground of the centuries" (Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1966, p. 89).

What about the future of Megiddo, or Armageddon? Does the Bible reveal anything about this strategically vital area?

Prophecy of Armageddon

Although Armageddon is mentioned in the book of Reve-

Famous Battles at Megiddo

Through the Valley of Jezreel many armies have marched and fought, from the days of Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III to Napoleon and, in this century, General Edmund H.H. Allenby. Allenby's decisive victory at Megiddo in 1918 forced the Turks to relinquish control of Palestine to the British. Thereafter he was often referred to as Allenby of Armageddon.

One of the earliest battles near Megiddo was between Thutmose III and a Canaanite coalition under the leadership of the king of Qadesh in 1482 B.C. (James B. Pritchard, Ed., *The Harper Atlas of the Bible*, Harper & Row, New York, 1987, p. 41). This battle displayed the tactical genius and daring of Thutmose III, who, rejecting his officers' cautious advice, decided to march his army single file through the narrow pass. His enemy was caught by surprise. The next day, at first light, Thutmose led a forceful charge in the center of the enemy's front line. The Canaanites broke and ran, and Megiddo was subsequently placed under siege. Six months later it capitulated (*ibid.*).

Deborah and Barak sang a song of praise to God (Judges 5), extolling Him for helping Israel defeat the Canaanite army and Sisera near Megiddo (verse 19). The battle area was at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo, and Scripture says the Canaanites were swept away by the suddenly swollen waters of the Kishon River (verses 19-21).

Gideon, a later hero of Israel, defeated the Midianites (Judges 7) in the Valley of Jezreel (Judges 6:33), also known as the Plain of Esdraelon, or Megiddo.

Two great Israelite disasters took place near Megiddo: the deaths of King Saul (1 Samuel 31:8) and King Josiah (2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Chronicles 35:22-24). Pharaoh-necho, leading his army from Egypt to Carchemish to battle the Babylonians, was confronted by Josiah, who was killed in the ensuing battle.

Under Tiglath-pileser III (ca. 745-727 B.C.), Megiddo became the capital of a province in the Assyrian Empire. Later the Romans stationed a legion at or near Megiddo, giving the name Legio to the general area. Legio became so well known that both Eusebius and Jerome used it as a point from which to measure distances to other regional locations.

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The death of King Saul and his armor-bearer after a disastrous defeat at the hands of the Philistines near Megiddo as depicted by the 19th-century artist Gustave Doré.

lation (“And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon” (Revelation 16:16), Scripture says nothing about armies actually attacking each other there. It does indicate, however, that armies assemble on the Plain of Megiddo, apparently using the large, level area as a staging ground to prepare for a great battle. But who is being gathered, who is gathering them, and for what purpose?

Those being gathered appear to be two political and military coalitions—“the kings of the earth and of the whole world” (verse 14) and “the kings from the east” (verse 12), from east of the Euphrates River. These leaders aren't necessarily “kings” as we use the word today; the original word means ruler, leader or commander. We might use descriptions like president, prime minister, chairman, chancellor or general to refer to such leaders today.

At that point in history, many heads of nations will have banded together to support the mighty “beast” power mentioned in Revelation 17. In describing this confederation of peoples, nations and rulers as a beast, God is likening this enormously powerful alliance to an animal driven by ungodly instincts and motivations.

Those comprising this alliance “are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast” (Revelation 17:12-13). The book of Revelation shows that demonic spirits performing miraculous signs will influence these leaders to gather “to the battle of that great day of God Almighty . . . to the place called Armageddon” (Revelation 16:13-16).

Why will the armies of these nations gather at Armageddon? Apparently these military powers will invade the Middle East for a showdown over who will control the world.

However, instead of fighting each other, they will turn on the returning Messiah, Jesus Christ, to fight Him!

We don't normally think of people actually daring to go to war against God. People war against other people. But the Bible reveals that men will actually try to fight the returning Jesus Christ. These end-time dictators and demagogues covet rulership of the world, and they hope to succeed through their immense armies and destructive weapons—weapons powerful enough to destroy all life from the planet.

God knows that, unless He sends Jesus Christ to intervene in human affairs at that critical juncture, “no living thing could survive” (Matthew 24:22, New English Bible, emphasis added throughout).

Satan and Armageddon

Behind the scenes another powerful leader

figures prominently in gathering the armies to Armageddon. Satan, as “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4), will have deceived all nations (Revelation 12:9). As the adversary of humanity (1 Peter 5:8), his avowed purpose is to deceive and destroy the human family. The massive armies that will arise in the end time will, to him, seem the ideal vehicle for accomplishing such incredible destruction (Isaiah 14:12, 17).

But what the nations won’t know, and Satan won’t accept, is that God *allows* him to deceive such arrogant leaders into thinking that this decisive battle will enable them to take control of the world!

God Himself will enter into battle with those deceived nations bent on destruction (Zechariah 14:1-3). God will prove that *He* is all powerful, not Satan nor those whom he deceives. And God will not allow man to completely destroy himself (Matthew 24:22).

With this background, we can better understand the purpose of Armageddon when we read how the armies will be gathered “to the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Revelation 16:14).

The prophet Zechariah also describes this climactic time: “Behold, the day of the LORD is coming . . . For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem . . . Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east” (Zechariah 14:1-4).

Military forces gather

The *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* offers another insight into Armageddon: “It is surprising that no one has suggested taking *magedon* as deriving from the secondary sense of the Hebrew *gadad* that means ‘to gather in troops or bands.’ The simple way in Hebrew to make a noun from a verb is to prefix a *ma* to the verbal form. Thus we have *maged*, ‘a place of gathering in troops,’ and the suffix *o*, meaning ‘his,’ yielding ‘his place of gathering troops.’ This is almost equivalent to the expressions in vs. 14, 16—‘to gather them (the kings and their armies) for the battle on the great day of God Almighty’—and would allude to the prophetic expectation of the gathering of the nations for judgment” (Johnson, p. 552).



Megiddo was at the crossroads of several ancient invasion and trade routes (indicated in blue) in ancient Israel. Megiddo overlooks the Plain of Megiddo, which Bible prophecy indicates will be the gathering place of massive armies just before Christ’s second coming. Those armies will fight the returning Jesus Christ near Jerusalem.

In Joel 3:9-10 God depicts these rulers and their preparation for invasion and warfare: “Proclaim this among the nations: ‘Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up [to Jerusalem, verses 12, 16, 17]. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, I am strong.’”

The prophecy indicates that the leaders will disrupt societal needs, converting facilities for manufacturing agricultural implements to produce armaments and munitions.

The armies will gather near Armageddon, almost filling the surrounding plain, and continue their deployment throughout other areas of the Holy

Land. But the actual battle will take place some 55 miles south of Armageddon, around Jerusalem.

In truth that great battle will not be much of a contest. God will allow the armies to gather at Armageddon so that, in the end, there will be no question that He rules supreme. By permitting Satan, his demons and deceived human leaders to stir up nations to pit their massive forces against Him, God will allow those armies who would resist Christ’s rule to close in on Jerusalem—only to be destroyed in their battle against Him.

Armageddon, therefore, becomes a symbol of a great battle, not between mighty nations and military alliances, but between the forces of good and evil. That

climactic battle will be fought at and around Jerusalem.

The battle is joined

The Bible describes that time of earth-shaking events as “the day of the LORD” (Isaiah 2:12; 13:6, 9; Jeremiah 46:10; Zechariah 14:1)—the time during which God will intervene in human affairs to put an end to man’s rebellion against Him.

Continuing the prophecy recorded in Joel, God says: “Let the nations be wakened, and come up [to Jerusalem] to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the

nized as humanity’s Savior and Deliverer, its King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 17:14; 19:16). Mankind will recognize the futility of rebellion against God.

The prophet Malachi also spoke of God’s supreme authority: “For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles [nations]; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts” (Malachi 1:11).

God will at last be acknowledged as

pain, destruction and untimely death. Sadly, there is simply no other way for mankind to learn its lesson. God must finally step in, intervening in human affairs to force peace on this foundering world (Revelation 19; Zechariah 14; Joel 3).

Christ will replace this world’s social, economic, political, educational and religious systems and build a world based on God’s ways (Daniel 2:44-45).

How to understand mankind’s future

God has given to mankind several annual festivals that unlock the mystery of our future. For example, the Feast of Trumpets foreshadows the return of Jesus Christ “with a great sound of a trumpet” to vanquish the armies gathered against Him (Matthew 24:30-31; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Revelation 11:15).

The symbolism of the Day of Atonement reveals that Christ will bind Satan, preventing him from influencing humanity (Revelation 20:1-3).

The Feast of Tabernacles depicts 1,000 years of peace and prosperity that will envelop the earth and its inhabitants (Revelation 20:4-5; Isaiah 11).

The Last Great Day signifies the time when all who didn’t know the true God will be resurrected to learn His truth and receive their opportunity for salvation (Revelation 20:11-12; Ezekiel 37).

Armageddon is not the end of the world. It’s a gathering place for enormous armies, God’s summons for deceived human leaders to enter into a decisive battle with Him at Jerusalem.

Rather than marking the annihilation of mankind, Armageddon is the preface to 1,000 years of peace and prosperity for all. Humanity will live on, for what begins at Armageddon establishes Christ as supreme ruler on earth and over all nations. The earth will then become immersed in peace and prosperity in the Kingdom of God. **GN**

RECOMMENDED READING

To learn more about the incredible future God has prophesied for humanity, request your free copies of the two booklets *The Gospel of the Kingdom* and *God’s Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.



The Plain of Megiddo, also known as the Valley of Esdraelon, or Jezreel, stretches into the distance in this view of northern Israel. The highlands of northern Israel are to the right. Megiddo historically controlled access to a vital pass through these mountains.

surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow—for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision” (Joel 3:12-14; compare with Revelation 14:15-19).

Jesus Christ will deal with these massive armies at His return: “Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations . . . He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God” (Revelation 19:15). Birds gather to feed on the remains of those who war against Jesus Christ (verses 17-18, 21).

Apparently the carnage isn’t limited to the area immediately around Jerusalem. Revelation 14:20 indicates that it will extend for some 200 miles.

Armageddon: prelude to peace

Jesus Christ will finally be recog-

Supreme Ruler of mankind. For millennia Satan—the god of this world—has palmed himself off as the god of mankind (2 Corinthians 4:4; 11:14). However, God has prophesied that one day He will fulfill His plan for mankind, for which He created the earth.

When this happens the human family will enjoy unprecedented peace and unparalleled prosperity on earth. This peace has been promised to mankind for thousands of years (2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 1:2; Isaiah 11:1-10).

Armageddon, while a symbol of the destruction of the forces of evil, is also a prelude to humanity’s salvation. It is then that human misrule will come to an end. At Armageddon the greedy, power-mad demagogues of that time will be gathered into one place so that Christ can put an end to the misery they have wrought on mankind.

Armageddon signals the end of fear,