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ARMAGEDDON

The Final Battle For Your Heart

GARY KENT



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**Editors: Irene Relihan, Dorothy Pansare, Natalee
McLean, Jade Cherry**
Graphic Designer: Kate Browning

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ARMAGEDDON

THE FINAL BATTLE FOR YOUR HEART

Armageddon: it's just a word—not even an English word—but it's rich with meaning for English-speaking people. We use it to describe disasters and catastrophes of apocalyptic proportions. Newsreaders have used it to describe the horrors of war. Movie producers have used it to describe what might happen if a giant meteor were to collide with the earth. It has even been used in the context of professional wrestling to describe the ultimate grudge match.

But all these falls far short of the Biblical message of this term. In Revelation, the apostle John used it to describe the battle of all battles. With tensions rising in the Middle East, many Bible scholars are wondering: are we sitting poised on the eve of Armageddon?

The word “Armageddon” is derived from the original Hebrew “Har-Megiddo” which literally means “the mountain of Megiddo”. That probably sounds a little confusing at first, as Megiddo is actually a valley, and a small one at that, being only about fifty-two square kilometres. However, its strategic location between three key mountain peaks means that, as a piece of literal real estate, this valley has seen more action than almost any other place on earth.

To the northeast of Megiddo stands Mount Tabor, which some have suggested is the place where Jesus was transfigured (see Matthew 17:1-9). To the south lies Mount Gilboa, where King Saul and his son Jonathan died tragically

in battle (1 Samuel 31:1-13). And across the valley to the northwest is Mount Carmel, where the prophet Elijah defeated the priests of Baal (1 Kings 18:19-40).

Perhaps the main reason for Megiddo's involvement in so many memorable events was its location as a major intersection of the ancient world. At the valley of Megiddo, travellers were faced with the decision of whether to take a road north into Europe, south into Egypt or east into Asia Minor. Because the roads all converged in and around the valley of Megiddo, it became the place where the armies of the ancient world met and some of the bloodiest battles were fought.

For example, the book of Judges, Chapter Four, records how the Israelite army, led by Deborah and Barak, defeated the Canaanite army of Sisera at nearby Mount Tabor. Not only does this stand as a literal, military victory, this battle also has spiritual significance. It shows that God can give us victory over the evil forces that tempt us to

sin, just as He gave Deborah and Barak power to defeat Sisera's vast army (2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:10-18).

Another good example of a decisive spiritual battle fought in the valley of Megiddo took place over on the eastern edge of the valley, in a little place called Endor, just south of Mount Tabor. There, in the face of a possible military defeat at the hands of the Philistines, King Saul decided to consult a spirit medium for advice (1 Samuel 28:3-25).

The result of this disastrous visit was both a military and a spiritual catastrophe for Israel. Not only had the leader of God's chosen people reached the zenith of apostasy by doing something expressly forbidden in scripture, but the very next day, at Mount Gilboa, his forces were wiped out and he was killed on the battlefield (Leviticus 19:31; 1 Samuel 31:1-13). While Deborah and Barak's obedience to God gave them victory over their enemies, Saul's

army was defeated because its leader had turned away from God. The outcome of the literal battle fought at Megiddo was dependent on the battle fought in the heart of Saul.

But perhaps the most momentous battle associated with Megiddo happened on Mount Carmel, where Elijah challenged the priests of Baal to a showdown. At this time, almost all of God's people, including the royal family, were worshipping the chief national god of the Canaanites. Because of this, God's prophet Elijah assembled the Israelites at Mount Carmel. There, he challenged the priests of Baal to invoke their god to send fire from heaven to consume their sacrifice. At that pivotal moment in history, Elijah, overlooking the valley of Megiddo, brought Israel to the point of decision about whom they would serve. We read about his challenge in 1 Kings 18:21:

And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the

LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him". But the people answered him not a word.

And so, the contest began. The priests of Baal built an altar and sang and danced and cut themselves all day long, desperately looking for some way to light a fire on their altar. But, closely watched by Elijah, they were unable to do so. Gladly would the devils whom they worshipped have helped them by kindling the fire, but they were restrained by God's power (1 Corinthians 10:20; Psalm 104:9). At last, weary, faint and confused, the cries of Baal's priests fell silent. Now it was Elijah's turn. He uttered a short, simple prayer, and God sent fire from heaven, fire so powerful that it destroyed not only the sacrifice, but the altar and the water in the surrounding trench (1 Kings 18:30-38).

That Mount Carmel battle was one of the most decisive moments in sacred history. It was a call to a wandering people to take their stand for God. For the eight hundred and fifty Israelites

who had been serving as prophets of Baal, it was their last opportunity to choose (1 Kings 18:19, 40).

All through history, Megiddo has been the site of decisive battles. On its surrounding mountains, decisions with eternal consequences have been made; some for good, others for evil. The history of Megiddo is the key to understanding the Battle of Armageddon in Revelation. With this background in mind, let's look at the passage about it:

Revelation 16:12 *Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. 13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14 For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them*

to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. 15 “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame”. 16 And they gathered them together to the place called in the Hebrew, Armageddon.

This passage of scripture has been the subject of a lot of speculation. Because the word “Armageddon” is derived from the word “Megiddo”, and because this passage talks about “the battle of the great day of God Almighty”, a lot of Bible students think that John is describing a literal, physical battle that will take place in the valley of Megiddo just before Jesus returns.

Some prominent Christian writers, for example, have described the possibility of the Russians invading Israel on behalf of the Arab states, or a massive army of millions coming from the east, perhaps from China, and marching across the Euphrates River on their way to join the war in the valley of Megiddo.

With tensions continuing to rise in the Middle East, these and similar scenarios can seem plausible. Common to most interpretations is the idea that Revelation 16:12-16 primarily describes a physical battle located in the literal valley of Megiddo.

But to properly understand the Bible, we need to compare Scripture verses with one another (Acts 17:11; 1 Corinthians 2:13; Peter 1:19-21). The introduction to the book of Revelation tells us that the messages in this particular Bible book are “signified”, which means they are written in symbols (Revelation 1:1). This matches what we find in Revelation. While there’s no doubt that Chapter Sixteen talks about a battle in the context of the great day of God Almighty, John spends more time talking about spiritual issues than military ones. For example, he talks about unclean spirits and demons working miracles. He also talks about the dragon, which Revelation 12:9 tells us is a symbolic representation of the devil. A false prophet is mentioned, and so is the

beast who demands worship.

Think about the history of Megiddo and the symbolic language of Revelation. Weigh all the evidence and ask yourself, “What message is John trying to get across? Is this passage about the seen, or the unseen? the momentary or the eternal?”

Students of the book of Revelation have estimated that about two-thirds of the language of Revelation has been borrowed, or even quoted directly, from other parts of the Bible. Revelation is especially related to the book of Daniel. For example, Revelation 13:1-2 describes a mysterious beast coming out of the sea, which is a composite of four beasts in Daniel 7. Revelation 13:14, 15 foretells a situation in which people will be forced to worship an image or face certain death. This reminds us of the story of Daniel 3, when King Nebuchadnezzar tried to force everyone in his empire to worship a golden image or be thrown into a fiery furnace.

To understand these parts of Revelation, we need to compare them with the parallel passages in other books of the Bible.

The story of Armageddon in Revelation 16 also needs to be studied in this way. Revelation 16:12-16 uses Old Testament places and events as symbols for its message. Let's look at these one by one.

First, John describes the Euphrates River drying up to make way for the kings of the east. What is the significance of the Euphrates River?

The Euphrates River is introduced in Genesis as one of the rivers in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:14), but most significant to its use in Revelation 16 is the fact that the Euphrates River ran right through the ancient city of Babylon. This river was one of Babylon's best military defences, because nobody needed to leave the city to get water. If an army surrounded the city, the people had enough water and food to survive

for years. Coupled with its massive walls, so wide that two four-horse chariots could pass one another, the Euphrates River made Babylon seem a completely impenetrable fortress.

Babylon's greatest strength, however, was also its greatest weakness. People couldn't go over the wall, or through it, but they could conceivably go under it. And that's exactly how Babylon fell. Cyrus, general of the Persian army, decided to use the Euphrates River as the centrepiece of his strategic plan for Babylon's overthrow. He ordered his men to dig channels on each side until the river dropped low enough to create a virtual highway into the city. Once inside, there was only one last obstacle: a pair of walls that ran the length of the river with locked gates in them.

In Daniel 5 we read the description of what was going on inside the city on the night Cyrus drained the river. Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, was throwing a blasphemous

party in the belief that Babylon could never fall.

Despite the army from the east parked in his back yard, Belshazzar really believed that Babylon could never be conquered. To emphasise his point, he had his servants bring out some of the most important spoils of Babylonian victories, including the vessels from God's temple in Jerusalem.

Although Belshazzar knew about his grandfather's faith in God, he was determined to choose his own way (Daniel 5:18-22). Although he knew about the wisdom and power of the God of heaven, he placed his faith in false teachings and his own accomplishments (Daniel 5:1-8, 23). In that moment, while everybody was drinking and making a mockery of sacred things, God sent a startling reminder that Cyrus the Persian was about to overthrow the city. We read about it in Daniel 5:5, 6:

In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand

appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened, and his knees knocked against each other.

A supernatural hand wrote just four words on the wall: *MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN*.

When none of the king's astrologers could read the writing or tell him what it meant, the queen, Belshazzar's grandmother, suggested that Daniel be sent for (Daniel 5:10-12). Reminding Belshazzar of his grandfather's encounter with God, Daniel interpreted the writing: "Numbered, numbered, you are weighed in the balances and found wanting. Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and the Persians" (Daniel 5:26-28).

Belshazzar thought he was invincible, but that night, God showed him that human

accomplishments cannot last forever (Isaiah 40:8). Ultimately, a time of accountability will come to all.

In the book of Isaiah, written well over a century earlier, was a warning that Belshazzar might have heeded. Had he read that book, he would have seen that God had predicted the fall of Babylon in graphic detail, right down to the draining of the Euphrates River. Cyrus was even called by name.

Isaiah 44:27 *Who says to the deep, 'Be dry! And I will dry up your rivers';* **28** *Who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure' ...* **45:1** *Thus says the LORD to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held- to subdue nations before him and loose the armor of kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut.*

On that fateful night, everybody in Babylon was drunk. As a result, the guards forgot to lock the

leaved gates along the river. So when Cyrus marched his armies into the city on the dried-up bed of the Euphrates, they easily entered the unlocked gates. Great Babylon fell to the armies of the east (Isaiah 13:1-22; Daniel 5:30, 31).

It's this story that John is reminding us of in Revelation 16, when he talks about the Battle of Armageddon. Notice the components of the story: the Euphrates River is dried up, the armies from the east march into the city, and Babylon falls. Those are precisely the same events depicted in the story of Armageddon. Let's read it carefully one more time:

Revelation 16:12 *Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared....* **19** *Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nation's fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.*

It can be easy to get caught up in the events we see on Earth from day to day, and miss the true message of the Bible. The Battle of Armageddon involves much more than two or three nations fighting a physical battle in the literal valley of Megiddo. Revelation 16 contains a warning that time will not last forever. Like ancient, literal Babylon, one day soon modern, spiritual Babylon is going to fall.

God will not allow pain, sorrow and death to continue indefinitely. The cries of the world today wring His tender heart (Isaiah 63:9). God longs to bring all suffering to an end, forever. He is only waiting because He isn't willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). Today, He is calling on you to make a decision before it is too late. And that, in fact, is the meaning of the Battle of Armageddon. The wording of verse 16 shows that John is very deliberate about choosing the word Armageddon:

Revelation 16:16 *And they gathered*

them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

Although the book of Revelation is written in Greek, here John reverts to Hebrew for just a moment. He says that God gathers everybody together into a place called “in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon”. As we noted earlier, the word Armageddon in Hebrew is Har-Megiddon, which literally means the “Mountain of Megiddo”. And the dominant mountain of Megiddo is Mount Carmel, where the prophet Elijah gathered all Israel, and called upon each person to make an important choice. Would they make a total commitment to God, or would they only profess to serve Him, while continuing to worship idols?

The story of Armageddon in Revelation 16 brings that moment, that decision, into the life of each person living on Earth today. This passage tells us that everyone must make a choice. The Battle of Armageddon will not be won by literal

weapons of war. It is a spiritual battle that will be fought in every heart. In the Bible, God poses the same question to us today as did Elijah to the Israelites on Mount Carmel: “Will you commit your life to Me completely?” There was once a journalist working in his hotel room in Chicago, when he heard a terrible noise in the hallway. When he opened the door to find out what it was, he found people fleeing for their lives because of a fire in the building. He closed his door and called his editor.

“You’re not going to believe this”, he said. “But I’m on the eighteenth floor of a burning hotel, and we’re going to get the story of a lifetime!” “You fool!” said the editor. “Get out of that building, or you’ll die.”

“Don’t worry, I’ve got my escape all planned”, the reporter said.

There was no talking him out of it, so the editor started to take notes as the journalist described

what it was like to listen to people trying to get out of the building. Finally, the journalist decided it was time to make his own escape.

He opened his door and crawled down the hallway, only to discover that his route of escape had been cut off. He crawled back to his room and started to panic. He opened his window and screamed for help.

A fireman on the sidewalk heard him and looked up. He couldn't believe that anybody was still in the building when there had been so many early warnings for everybody to get out. "You're going to have to jump!" he called, spreading a net to break the journalist's fall.

The man climbed onto the window sill and took a deep breath. He closed his eyes and jumped. Missing the net, he plunged to his doom.

Some people think they have their escape route from sin all planned out, but God says the time

to decide is now.

The Battle of Armageddon represents God's final call to every heart to serve Him. The opportunity for each person to choose, symbolised by the prophetic mountain of Megiddo, has been made possible because of another choice made on another mountain over two thousand years ago. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus bowed in Gethsemane, weighted down as He felt the guilt of the world's sins pressing upon His soul, separating Him from the light of His Father's presence (Matthew 26:37, 38; Isaiah 59:2). In anguish He prayed, "*O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me*" (Matthew 26:39). His humanity shrank from that last, crowning sacrifice. But in that moment, He saw the history of the human race. He saw our helplessness, the certainty of our doom, and His decision was made. He would save the world at any cost to Himself. His final prayer breathed the ultimate submission: "*Your will be done*" (Matthew 26:42).

Today, the hand that was nailed to Calvary's cross is knocking at the door of your heart. That voice is pleading for entrance, longing to give you the gift of eternal life. Events on Earth tell us that our planet's end is near. The writing is on the wall, all heaven is watching, and the prophetic clock is racing toward midnight. Jesus, the King of the East, is coming and Babylon will fall. At this moment, will you decide to be ready for Him? The choice is yours.

NOTES

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Australia

0481 315 101

info@tij.tv

The Incredible Journey

GPO Box 274

Sydney NSW 2001

New Zealand

020 422 2042

infonz@tij.tv

The Incredible Journey

PO Box 76673

Manukau, Auckland 2241



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Pastor Gary Kent is Speaker for **The Incredible Journey** ministry. He has produced and presented numerous documentaries on subjects including the Bible, Bible prophecy, world events and natural health. His passion is to share the good news of Jesus' imminent return.

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Australia
0481 315 101
info@tij.tv

New Zealand
020 422 2042
infonz@tij.tv