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Armageddon

By Bryan Hodge

“And they gathered together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon” (Revelation 16:16).

John saw an unholy alliance, an axis of evil gathered for war. This axis of evil consisted of three evil forces: (1) The dragon (16:13), which is defined as the Devil (12:9). (2) The beast (16:13), which represents a corrupt and persecuting government, particularly Rome (13:1-10; 19:19 cf. Daniel 7 cf. Daniel 2). (3) The false prophet (16:13), which represents false religion, particularly either the cult of emperor worship, or the corrupt Roman church (13:11-18 cf. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10).

Three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouths of the dragon, beast, and false prophet (16:13). Frogs reminds one of how Pharaoh's magicians produced frogs imitating Aaron (Exodus 8). Perhaps this refers to false propaganda, and counter speech to God's will.

(H)ar Maggedon literally means hill(s) or mountain(s) of Megiddo(n). The plains of Esdraelon, also known as the plains of Megiddo to the area, was a valley approximately 20 miles long and 14 miles wide which was surrounded by hills and mountains and containing a small hill named Megiddo. Baker's Bible Atlas says of this area, “(It served as the key to the defense of the Jordan Valley (from the S) and the coastal plain (from the N)” (p. 306). Due to its strategic location, it was the scene of many famous battles in Israelite history. (1) It was here that God gave Deborah and Barak victory the Canaanite commander Sisera (Judges 4-5). Sisera forces included 900 chariots of iron (Judges 4:13). “Not a shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel” (Judges 5:8). God's people faced a powerful foe, an over-whelming force; Yet, God gave them victory. (2) It was here that God gave Gideon's small force of 300 victory over the multitudes of Midianites (Judges 7). Megiddo was a famous battlefield much like Gettysburg or Vicksburg.

The axis of evil was in war against The King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and his army (19:11-16). The beast and false prophet were defeated (19:17-21). Finally, the devil, himself, was also defeated (20:1-10).

Does this refer to a literal physical warfare, and a battlefield? Here are some reasons not to understand this as literal: (1) The book of Revelation is a signified book (Revelation 1:1).). (2) Many details are acknowledged, even by Armageddon literalist as figurative. The dragon, beast, and frogs are understood as figurative language (16:13). I know of none who thinks that Jesus fights this battle on a literal white horse with a literal two-edged sword wielded from his mouth (19:15, 21).

Why take Armageddon as literal?

Many places in the Revelation record are understood to be figurative. Babylon, Egypt, Sodom (14:8; 11:8) are so understood. Why should Armageddon be understood as literal? (4) Wayne Jackson notes, “The use of geographical points to emphasize spiritual truths is a common biblical phenomenon... Take, for example, the word ‘hell’ (Greek, gehenna)... which was the valley of Hinnom... the city dump” (The Armageddon Hysteria, Christian Courier, April 1991). (5) The literal hill of Megiddo, located within the plains of Esdraelon, or even the entire plains seems much too small for over two hundred million to gather (cf. 9:16), as some are anticipating.

The great message – The early Christians had many opponents. The devil was against them. Earthly governments were sometimes against them. False religions were set against them. However, these opponents would ultimately be defeated. The victory belongs to the one called King of Kings and Lord of Lords. In this context Christians are urged to stay faithful. Jesus says, “I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments” (16:15). Cf. Watch Matthew 24:42; 25:13; cf. garments James 1:27; Revelation 3:5; 3:18; 7:13-14; 19:7-8.