

Athens, gave a depth of twenty fathoms of water and was protected by an immense mole".⁸

Understandably, Caesarea, with its double role as the imperial headquarters in Judea and an important port, was still playing a vital part in Jewish life and the hinterland generally. When, therefore, Festus made his enquiries as to what vessels were tied up in the harbour, he could be

reasonably assured that one boat at least would satisfy the requirement of transporting the prisoners westwards, towards Italy.

(To be continued)

8. Cambridge, 1924, p. 42.

Two-part article

Armageddon (1)

Geoff Henstock

Armageddon is one of those highly emotive names with which many people are very familiar but which often is misunderstood. We sometimes see Armageddon used in newspapers or in popular penny-dreadful novels and movies, but most people who use the name have only a vague idea of what it means. This two-part article explores the context of the only reference to it, in Revelation 16; then considers both the idea that it refers to a literal place and the idea that it is symbolic of the judgement of the nations; and finally expounds the Old Testament background to both ideas.

THE NAME Armageddon occurs only once in the Bible, in Revelation 16, within the context of the sixth vial. The vials are a series of visions about events leading up to the return of Christ. It is important that we note that Armageddon is part of the sixth vial, because Christ returns while the sixth vial is being worked out. Although the name Armageddon is used only once, however, the events to which it relates are discussed in many prophecies, and there are remarkable similarities between those prophecies and the things symbolised in this particular vial.

Kings of the east

Revelation 16:12 speaks of the drying up of the Euphrates. Since at least the days of Joseph Mede in the seventeenth century, this has been interpreted as relating to the drying up or contraction of the Ottoman Empire, which took place from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. God needed to shrink the Ottoman Empire so that "the way of

the kings of the east might be prepared". Who are these kings of the east?

Rotherham translates this phrase as "the kings who were from the rising of the sun". Young's Literal Translation renders it as "the kings who are from the rising of the sun". John Richter suggests, "the way of the kings from the rising of the sun". These translators are more accurate; they help us to see that the kings to whom the passage refers are Christ and the saints when Christ returns to establish God's Kingdom. The imagery links us to Christ, "the Sun of righteousness" who shall "arise with healing in his wings" when he returns to the earth (Mal. 4:2).

Several symbols—one vial

Each component of the sixth vial is significant, as is the juxtaposition of various symbols within the one vial. Brother L. G. Sargent in *The Christadelphian* drew attention to the fact that the froglike spirits of militant national self-determination had a particular relationship with the Ottoman Empire.¹ In fact, as recent world events testify, they continue to have an impact on the territory formerly occupied by that empire.

The Ottoman power had to be dried up so that the events ushering in the return of Christ could proceed. This is the subject matter of Revelation 16:13,14. Without going into the imagery in too much detail, this picture of the froglike spirits bringing instability into the world refers to the explosion of nationalism in the last two centu-

1. Vol. 78 (1941), p. 348.

ries, in particular in the Middle East, which has resulted in a flourishing of new nations, especially since World War 2.² This spirit was unleashed by the French Revolution, and the frogs suggest that connection with France. The frogs also have a secondary relevance to the vision; they seem to be emblematic of people asserting their rights and refusing to be downtrodden, such as occurred in the French Revolution.

In the closing days of World War 1, Vladimir Jabotinsky made this observation about the impending overthrow of the Ottoman Empire by the Young Turk movement:

“The few members of the Turkish intelligentsia who were lucky enough to get permission to go abroad, used to make their pilgrimage to Paris as to a kind of political Mecca . . . France is a strongly centralized country, uniform and ruled by a uniform system which is applied everywhere in the same way . . . It is a consequence of a past disease—of the excessive provincialism which divided and sterilized France before 1789 . . . The great Revolution had the task of amalgamating them all into one nation. That is why it insisted upon the principle of uniformity and centralization with such emphasis that even now the average French politician recognizes in them one of the main assets of freedom and progress. The Young Turks imbibed these ideas without any criticism or discrimination”.³

Sir Andrew Wingate, describing how the Balkan nations threw off the Turkish yoke, wrote: “The first hope of deliverance reached these tortured nationalities from the French Revolution, possibly through the Jews, whom the event awakened to a sense of coming liberation”.⁴ This quote is significant because it draws attention to the French Revolution as a factor in both the decline of Turkey and the development of Zionism.

This flourishing of new nations, in particular over the past sixty years, but really since the French Revolution, is also referred to in other prophecies. Luke 21:29,30 speaks of “all the trees . . . shoot[ing] forth”; and Joel 3:10 refers to “the weak” saying “I am strong”. Both of these prophecies speak of events in the last days that are centred in Israel.

Today the world generally believes all ethnic groups have an inalienable right to self-determination, a right to control their own destiny. The inevitable result of this has been the creation of many new states competing with one another and from time to time clashing with one another. This

has made the world inherently unstable, nowhere more so than in the Middle East.

Territories liberated from the Turk in the last two hundred years often have remained very unstable. Think of North Africa and the terrorism associated with Algeria and Libya. Think of the Balkans and the Caucasus region and the factious nature of politics in those regions. Think of Mesopotamia. Above all, think of the Holy Land and the tensions there—tensions rooted in the clash between Jewish nationalism, or Zionism, and the determination of the Palestinians to secure their own homeland.

The removal of the Ottoman overlord created this inherently unstable environment, which the prophecy shows is a prerequisite for the return of Christ. The destabilising spirit of Revelation 16:14 brings the nations of the world to “the battle of that great day of God Almighty”. It is clear that this battle and Armageddon are linked.

God gathers the nations

Revelation 16:15 is introduced parenthetically into the record. If we removed it, we could read straight from verse 14 to verse 16 and the passage would be meaningful: “For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty . . . And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon”.

Verse 16 follows on almost perfectly from verse 14, but not quite perfectly. In the AV and several other translations the pronouns are different. In verse 14 it says “they”, meaning the spirits, gather the nations, but verse 16 says “he” gathers them together. Some modern translations do not change the pronouns, and it appears that the text is not precise in this regard. Some translators choose to ignore the parenthesis and use the plural pronoun used in verse 14, whilst others derive a singular pronoun from the subject of verse 15, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ultimately it matters little. It is God Who directs the work of the froglike spirits to gather

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2. Chapter 10a of *The Apocalypse and History* provides an overview of how the Ottoman Empire dried up before the forces of nationalism.
 3. Vladimir Jabotinsky, *Turkey and the War*, T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., London, 1917, pp. 86-8.
 4. Sir Andrew Wingate, *Palestine, Mesopotamia, and the Jews*, Pickering & Inglis, London, no date, pp. 31-2.



View from the ruins of ancient Megiddo across the Valley of Jezreel to the Hill of Moreh, in front of which the Midianites encamped in the days of Gideon (Judg. 7:1). (Picture: HolyLandPhotos.org)

the nations “to the battle of that great day of God Almighty” in verse 14, and it is God Who gathers the nations to Armageddon in verse 16. What we are meant to understand from the structure of the sixth vial is that, while the events of the sixth vial are being worked out, but before they culminate in that “battle of that great day of God Almighty”, the Lord Jesus Christ returns to the earth. This means the saints are gathered to judgement and immortalised while the sixth vial is being worked out, and it is that force that goes forward to engage the nations at Armageddon. The froglike spirits create the unstable environment that is necessary, and when the nations gather together to invade Israel, God intervenes with Armageddon.

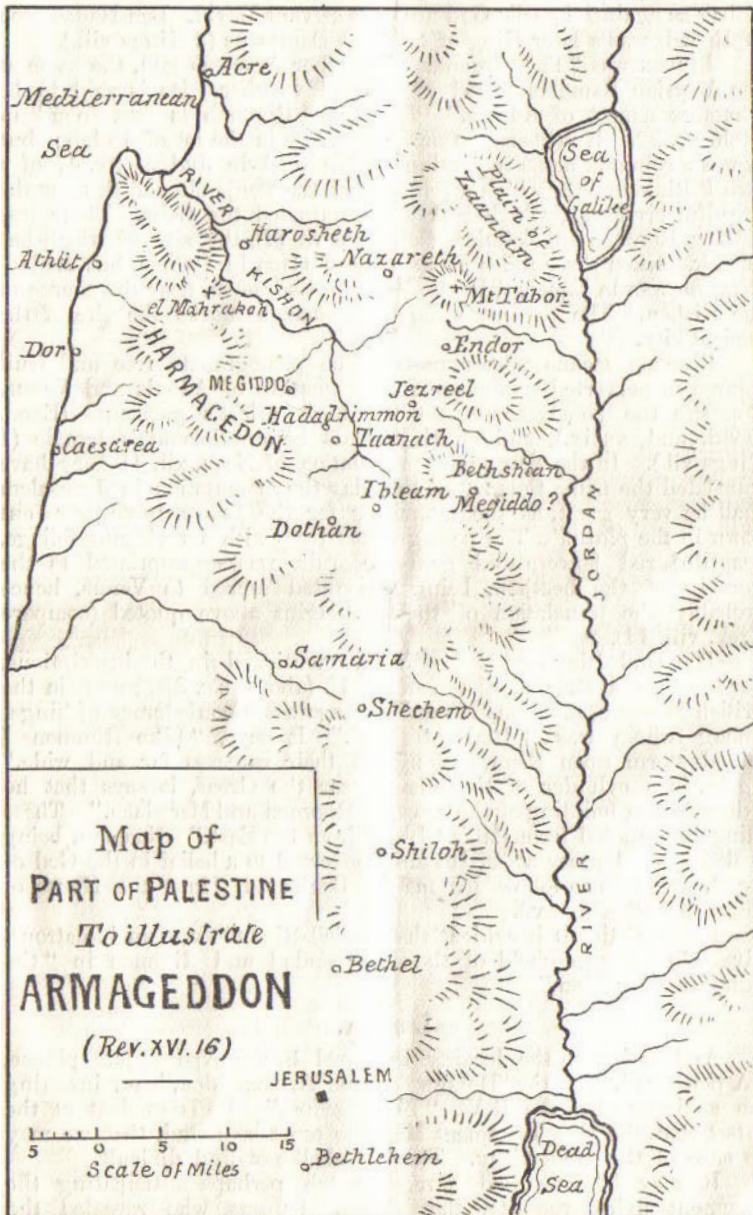
Armageddon a place

Verse 16 says Armageddon is a place, not an event. The battle of verse 14 is an event, or perhaps even a campaign, but Armageddon is a place. Where is Armageddon?

All we know from verse 16 is that it is a Hebrew name. If we were told something was to occur at a place with a Russian name you would automatically assume that it would take place in Russia. In this case, the fact the name is Hebrew suggests it is in Israel. That, of course, should be no surprise. We know that Israel is the primary focus of all the events associated with the return of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

Armageddon is not a place name easily located in Israel. In the RV, in Rotherham, and in the margin of Bullinger’s *Companion Bible*, the name Armageddon is rendered as Har-Magedon. Brother C. C. Walker in his pamphlet entitled *Armageddon* supports that rendering.⁵ Brother John Thomas also supports this form of the name in his last writing on the subject. In *The Christadelphian*,

5. C. C. Walker, *Armageddon*, (published 1904), p. 4.



does suggest a solution to the question of Armageddon's location. Brother Walker suggests Har-Magedon in Hebrew would translate as the mountain of Megiddo. The map in Brother Walker's pamphlet (reproduced left) suggests that Har-Magedon is the range of hills running southwest from Mount Carmel and to the south of the Kishon River. The plain to the north of this range, the Valley of Jezreel, is an area that throughout history has been the site of many decisive battles. It includes the site of Megiddo. Another Christadelphian writer, Brother F. G. Jannaway, also links Armageddon with the site of Megiddo.⁷

Brother Thomas, however, suggests that the name could be translated from the Hebrew as 'Mountain of Gideon'. Curiously, this suggestion and that of Brother Walker both point to the same general area. This area is associated in the Bible with conflicts that are types of the final triumph of Christ over the forces of the nations at Armageddon.

Divine intervention under the Judges

Judges 6:33 records that the Midianites established a camp in the Valley of Jezreel. Judges 7:1 says Gideon camped to the south of the Midianites. We know from verses 9-12

volume 9 (1872), there appears the text of a partially completed Bible Dictionary, the project on which he had been engaged when he died. One of the entries he had completed was on Armageddon, and he noted one early manuscript favoured the reading of Harmagedon (he favoured this different spelling).⁶ Possibly this is a reference to the Codex Sinaiticus that had recently been brought to light and which captured the interest of students at that time.

Whatever the facts about the manuscript, this version of the name has some support, and it

that Gideon was on the hill above the Midianite camp—that is, on the mountain of Gideon. God delivered the Midianites into Gideon's hand, but He did so in a way that made it clear that it was God Who secured the victory, not Gideon and his fellows. In Judges 7:2-7 God told Gideon to reduce his army to a number which would make it clear their victory was due to Divine power, not

6. *The Christadelphian*, Vol. 9 (1872), pp. 294-7.

7. F. G. Jannaway, *A Bible Student in Bible Lands*, p. 31.

human forces. This was to be, to use the language of Revelation, a "battle of God Almighty".

Gideon's surprise attack with his much-reduced force caused the Midianites to panic, and they fled. In verse 24 they headed for the Jordan, but in verse 25 their escape over Jordan was thwarted. Oreb and Zeeb, two of their leaders, were slaughtered and Israel was delivered. Gideon and his men and the men of Ephraim were required to do their part, but this was clearly a deliverance wrought by God.

Gideon's success was not the only Divine deliverance that occurred in this region in the days of the Judges. Earlier, the Israelites had been oppressed by the Canaanites, and in Judges 4 God used Deborah and Barak to deliver His people. In the song of Deborah in Judges 5 we have evidence that this was a Divine deliverance, that God fought and defeated the enemy: "The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money. They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength" (vv. 19-21).

Like the Midianites, Sisera and his men tried to flee, but, as in the case of Oreb and Zeeb, Sisera was killed. This was another Divinely orchestrated victory in the region of the Kishon River, near Megiddo, on the plain to the north of Har-Magedon.

And at the end of this song there is a remarkable link to the sixth vial: "So let all Thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years" (v. 31). When God intervenes, the enemies of His people perish. But those who love God do not perish. They are "as the sun when he goeth forth in his might". The NIV renders this, "like the sun when it rises in its strength". The RSV translates it as, "like the sun as he rises in his might". In the NEB we have, "like the sun rising in strength". The echo of this terminology in the phrase "the kings from the rising of the sun" in Revelation 16:12 (see above) is too strong to miss. These are events that are typical of the future deliverance of God's people in Armageddon.

Further evidence of that fact is provided by Psalm 83:9-18, where these two incidents are invoked as typical of the way in which God intervenes to deliver His people. The psalmist calls on God to deliver His people from their enemies as

He had in the days of the Judges, in these battles on the northern plains of Israel. And the objective in verse 18 is that men might know that the God of Israel is the supreme authority in the earth. That also is the objective of the events described in Ezekiel 38, Joel 3 and Revelation 16.

The prophets present Jerusalem as the focus of conflict at the time of the end (see, for instance, Zechariah 12:1-3). It would seem appropriate, therefore, that Armageddon, associated as it is with "the battle of that great day of God Almighty", should have some connection to Jerusalem. Having recognised the link between 'Harmagedon' and the area around Megiddo, Brother Thomas went on to describe the broader region the battle would involve: "Harmagedon, then, may be defined, as being bounded by the Mediterranean and the Sea of Chinnereth, or Tiberias, on the east and west; and extending to the mountain of the glory of the holy, which is Jerusalem; and therefore includes *the Valley of Jezreel, and the Valley of Jehoshaphat*".⁸

Armageddon rather than Har-Magedon

Whilst "Har-Magedon" is preferred by a few translations, most support the rendering of the AV and adopt "Armageddon". That name, when translated from Hebrew, gives a meaning suggestive of another line of thought altogether. The interesting thing, however, is that this second line leads to much the same conclusions as those which can be drawn from the alternative rendering.

It is generally accepted that the name Armageddon signifies 'a heap of sheaves in a valley for judgement'. This view is supported by a wide range of Christadelphian authors, including Brother Thomas in *Eureka*⁹ and Brother Harry Whittaker in his book on Revelation.¹⁰ Under this approach, which takes its cue from the idea of Revelation as a book of symbol, Armageddon is viewed as a place of Divine judgment, the place where God gathers the nations for judgement. This we shall explore in the second part of the article, God willing.

[\(To be concluded\)](#)

8. *Op. cit.*, p. 295. A similar description is given in *Exposition of Daniel*, p. 97.

9. John Thomas, *Eureka*, Vol. 3, pp. 603-4.

10. Harry Whittaker, *Revelation: A Biblical Approach*, p. 202.