

ARTICLE ABSTRACT

“HAR-MAGEDON” ACCORDING TO THE HEBREW IN THE SETTING OF THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES OF REVELATION 16

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In Rev 15 we find an advance statement which is a summary of the sign of the seven plagues that are set forth in chap. 16. The accumulated wrath of God is to burst upon the world in a final explosion of divine recompense. Inasmuch as the seven plagues are the great outblast of this pent-up anger and are so terrible in their effects, the events that will occur subsequent to the plagues are described before the details of the plagues themselves are disclosed. Seven angels, “other” (*allo*) than the seven angels of the Presence referred to in Rev 8:2, are the ministrants to pour out these plagues. The number seven is perhaps an indication of the complete nature of the judgment. Rev 15:4 concludes with the following words:

... because all the nations shall come and shall do obeisance before thee, because thy righteous decisions have been revealed.

The word I have translated “decisions” is a *-ma* word, the Greek suffix that denotes results. So this word may apply to acts or verdicts, but not to demands. It is not the righteous demands of God that will cause the nations to make obeisance to Him, but either His righteous acts or His righteous decisions. The whole universe will ultimately acknowledge the righteousness of all of God’s acts and formal verdicts.

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As part of the final events of the sixth and seventh plagues of Rev 16 we have Ἀρμαγεδών, reflecting Hebrew *Har-Magedon*. The apostle John saw three unclean spirits in the form of frogs (v. 13) whose specific task it is to assemble the nations “of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of the great day of God Almighty” (v. 14). This mobilization is to be at a place which has a compound Hebrew name composed of two words (v. 16). The first word presents no difficulty; it is the Hebrew word *har*, meaning mountain, hill, elevation, hill-country, the very opposite of a plain, valley, or flat lands. Commentators have been greatly troubled, as a Mount Magedon does not appear in any other place in the Scriptures, neither is there mention of any such mountain in any other ancient literature, as far as we know. The Valley of Megiddo is found, but not Mount Magedon, nor Mount Megiddo, for that matter, and it is a mountain that the Hebrew demands. There are vital reasons that preclude Megiddo as the Magedon of Har-Magedon. One is that Megiddo is a valley or plain.² It is more than difficult to have faith in the long arguments built up by some in an endeavor to convince us that Har-Magedon is a valley, a plain.

To return to our text in Rev 16, we note whose battle Har-Magedon is (v. 14):

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.³

Several verses in Ezek 39 (2, 4, 17) speak of the destruction of the wicked as being consummated on “the mountains of Israel.” Mountains here refer to the modern Jebel-el-Tur, which is not a single peak, but a ridge with several crowns or crests, the highest of which rises to 2,723 feet above sea level. Joel 2:23 gives a suggestion that Mount Zion with Jerusalem may be the place of deliverance for the righteous. Amos 1:2 is still more definite: “The Lord will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem.” Zech 14:1-4 also suggests that the Lord’s battle is to be fought from the region of Mount Zion. Likewise Ezek 11:23: “And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain

²The following texts provide OT witness concerning Megiddo as to its location and physical geography: Judg 1:27; 5:19; 1 Kgs 4:12; 9:15; 2 Kgs 9:27; 23:29-30; 1 Chron 7:29; 2 Chron 35:22.

³Cf. Isa 42:13; 30:30; Ezek 39:2, 4, 17.

which is on the east side of the city.” The mountain on the east side of the city is the Mount of Olives. Joel 3:9-16 speaks of the nations assembling, and of war in the “valley of Jehoshaphat” (v. 12); “The Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem” (v. 16).

With this background, John could scarcely think of any other place than Jerusalem, the sanctuary of Yahweh on His holy mountain, as the locale from which the wicked are to be finally destroyed. What John says in the book of Revelation of Har-Magedon as the scene of the destruction of the wicked fits in perfectly with the teachings of the OT prophets. Har-Magedon, for John, could have no connection with the Valley of Megiddo.

I suggest that we cut loose from any further consideration of the valley of Megiddo and that we look for the Hebrew root-word to go with “mountain,” as demanded by Rev 16:16, that will fit the problem of a gathering of all nations, not to fight one another nor to fight God with tanks, submarines, and planes, but rather to come into Yahweh’s Presence to meet the administering of the final judgment at the second coming of Christ.

The Hebrew verb *yāʿad*, “to appoint a time or place,” occurs 29 times in the OT,⁴ with the meanings of “assembling,” “meeting,” “gathering together” for judgment. This verb root fits in with Har-Magedon in respect both to root and to meaning: the nations are to *be gathered* by evil spirits into God’s Presence.

The next step is to see if the noun of that root would fit (for Magedon is a noun form), and if it was used in the way demanded by the Hebrew expression Har-Magedon. Hebrew grammars list under preformatives of nouns, *mem*, the principal uses of which are instrumental and local. Among the illustrations is *môʿed*, “an appointed place of assembly,” which is, I believe, the definition that fits Rev 16:16. It is used nearly 200 times in the OT.⁵

The Mount of Assembly is further identified in Isa 14:13 by the expression “in the recesses of the north.” With the disintegration of the tabernacle of the wilderness, and the building of the temple-sanctuary in the holy city, the Hebrew expression that had become permanent for the tabernacle, or tent of meeting, could not fail to

⁴Typical instances are: Num 10:3-4; 14:35; 16:11; 27:3; Josh 11:5; 2 Sam 20:5; 1 Kgs 8:5; 2 Chron 5:6; Job 9:19; Ps 48:4(5); Jer 50:44; 49:19.

⁵See Isa 14:13, the only place where it is with *har*; and many others with *ʾohel*, “tent or tabernacle [of meeting or assembly].”

become attached to the temple and the mountain ridge upon which it is built. Holding now in mind the complete descriptive concept of the "Mount of Assembly in the sides of the north," we notice Ps 48:2:

Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion,
on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.

God's dwelling place, the Temple, did lie on the north (northeast) of the city, with the city lying on the south side of the ridge.

The Hebrew should be written *Har Mō^ced*.⁶ The translator no doubt recognized the word *har*, mountain, but was not able to recognize *mō^ced*, so he transliterated the whole expression, and it appears in the Greek NT with addition of *ōn*, as Ἀρμαγεδών. This again has been transliterated from Greek as Armageddon, with the *h* left off and an additional *d* added, no doubt due to the translators' obsession with Megiddo. So Har-Magedon is not the *battle* of the Lord, but the *locality* of the battle, the place from which Christ will destroy the wicked, the "Mount of Assembly," that is, Mount Zion.

⁶Note added by Leona G. Running: From Semitic linguistics studies we know that Proto-Semitic *ghayin*, a very harsh guttural, fell together in Hebrew with *ayin*, a less harsh sound, and both were transliterated in Greek times by *gamma*, as demonstrated by the names Gaza and Gomorrah, both of which begin with *ayin* but originally had the harsher sound. (Also with *g* in Egyptian and in Arabic.) Thus there is ample linguistic support for the *g* in Armageddon, but not for the double *d*. The latter is due to confusion with Megiddo (Mageddo[n] in the LXX), but the word in Rev 16:16 has one *d*.

The Yale scholar Charles C. Torrey published an illuminating comment in *HTR* 31 (1938): 247-248: "The only Greek consonant which could represent the Hebrew *ayin* is *gamma*; and it was much used in transliteration, without regard to the question of etymology, as is now well known. Indeed, it was especially likely to be employed in cases where the interpreter did not know the meaning of the word before him. Thus in 1 Chron 4:9 the cautious translator Theodotion renders the problematic עכב (the result of text-corruption) by γαβης; in 2:47, 49 חשש by Σαχαφ; in 1 Sam 9:4 the Lagarde text has Σεγαλειμ for מעליש, etc. It is not necessary to multiply illustrations. The *gamma* in μαγεδ certainly represents the Hebrew guttural. The choice of the vowel *epsilon* for the second syllable may have been made simply for the sake of variety; but it seems more likely that it was occasioned by familiarity with the name Μαγεδδω(ν) which occurs a dozen times in the Greek.

"... The phrase in 16:16... was in fact an occult designation of the battleground, the holy mountains about Jerusalem; on which, according to the author of this Apocalypse, as well as to every other exponent of Jewish eschatology, the hosts of heaven were destined to overthrow the heathen armies at the end of the present age."