

30.17

Revelation 16:16—Where Is Armageddon? A Biblical Detective Story

According to Revelation 16:16, a great and final cosmic battle will be fought between the forces of good and evil at a place called Armageddon (pronounced ahr´muh-ged´uhn). But locating this place is not a simple matter.

The word “Armageddon” is a transliteration into Greek of an unknown Hebrew word (*har magedon*). The NRSV actually renders it as Harmagedon, but almost all other English translations use Armageddon. There is, however, no place known to us that was called either Armageddon or Harmagedon.

It is usually recognized that the Hebrew words *har magedon* would mean Mount Magedon, but this is of little help, since no mountain by that name is known to us. For this reason, many scholars have thought there must have been some corruption of the biblical text over the years as it was being copied. Indeed, many variant readings for “Armageddon” are found in different manuscripts, as though some copyists were not completely sure what they should write. Thus a popular suggestion is that the text might have read *har megiddon* in the original manuscript, which we no longer possess, and that this was copied wrong at an early stage of transmission.

If the above suggestion is correct, then the expression could be translated Mount Megiddo. We are still not done, however, because we have no evidence elsewhere of any mountain by that name either. There was, however, a city named Megiddo—and the well-known Mount Carmel was only five miles northeast of that city. Maybe Mount Carmel was sometimes called Mount Megiddo by people who lived in that area.

So:

if our copies of the book of Revelation preserve a misspelling (*har magedon*) of a word that should have been written *har megiddon*, and

if Mount Megiddo was an alternative name for Mount Carmel known to the author and original readers of Revelation,

then the problem could be solved: the final battle will take place on or near Mount Carmel, near the city of Megiddo.

We may note that Megiddo was the site of many well-known ancient battles:

- Deborah and Barak versus the Canaanite king Sisera (Judg. 5:19; cf. 4:12–16)
- Jehu versus Ahaziah (2 Kings 9:27)
- Josiah versus Neco (2 Kings 23:29)

Mount Carmel (Megiddo?) was also the site of the contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:19–40). Accordingly, the site may have seemed an appropriate location for the ultimate conflict to occur.

It is also possible, however, that the term *har magedon* means something else. Some scholars have suggested it could mean “Mount of Assembly” or “His Fruitful Mountain,” in which case no specific location could ever be identified. Some scholars think that is the whole point: the reference is metaphorical and no literal spot on earth was ever intended.

All the same, tour buses stop outside the ancient city of Megiddo on a regular basis to let tourists snap photos of where guides assure them the world will some day come to an end.