

THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF ARMAGEDDON

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With regard to the study of unfulfilled prophecy in Scripture, most Christians seem to realize the need for and the indispensability of a responsible hermeneutic as the guideline for applying prophecy to our modern time. They agree that such a hermeneutic must be derived from Holy Scripture itself and should not be construed from any dogmatic philosophical or religious a priori. Our hermeneutic seems to be nowhere of such crucial importance as in the application of the final holy war in John's Apocalypse, popularly rendered as "Armageddon" (Rev 16:16).

The fact that basically conflicting interpretations of Armageddon are found among orthodox Christians, even within the same denomination, shows that a more concerted theological effort is needed to arrive at a basic unity of understanding among Christians. How can we expect politicians and the secular world to know what "Armageddon" means in the Bible if we ourselves are confused about the matter at issue?

The purpose of this study is to investigate the meaning of "Armageddon" in Rev 16:16 from a Biblical perspective—that is, from both the immediate context and also from its Hebrew types or prefigurations in the OT.

I. THE STRUCTURAL AND THEMATIC CORRELATIONS OF ARMAGEDDON WITHIN JOHN'S APOCALYPSE

Rev 16:16 reads in the *NIV*: "Then they [the spirits of demons, v 14] gathered the kings together in the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon."

Our first observation is that this prophetic statement concludes a vision that belongs to the judgment series of the seven last plagues (Revelation 16). The Armageddon vision is described as follows:

Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are the spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty (Rev 16:13-14 *NIV*).

From this literary context it appears that the Armageddon war is motivated by demonic spirits who come forth from three apocalyptic bodies, described symbolically as the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. The rise of this satanic trinity was presented earlier in the Apocalypse in chaps. 12-13 and its activity and destiny are developed further in chaps. 17-20. This structural interrelation-

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ship within Revelation 12-20 indicates already that Armageddon in chap. 16 must be related to and interpreted by the total structure of chaps. 12-20.

The common misunderstanding of "Armageddon" seems to be that this predicted war—which involves "the kings of the whole world" (*tēs oikoumenēs holēs*)—only means a devastating strategic world war among the nations themselves, between west and east, resulting in worldwide nuclear annihilation. John's Apocalypse, however, brings a fundamentally different concept of Armageddon by continually stressing the religious-moral nature and the cosmic dimension of this universal war. Demonic spirits proceed from apostate religious bodies to gather the state powers in a worldwide union of rebellion against God and his Christ by first outlawing and then persecuting and executing the people of God, the faithful messianic people. God's people are at the very center of Armageddon, and they are therefore in this setting encouraged to endure faithfully till the end: "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed" (Rev 16:15).

Revelation 12-20 presents "Armageddon" as "a final conflict between the forces of Satan and the people of God" (W. S. LaSor) as the finale of all the previous encounters of God and evil powers in salvation history. The great controversy between heaven and earth began, according to Genesis, with the initiative of the ancient serpent in paradise when he deceived the woman. The agelong war continued when the ancient serpent-dragon directed his war against the symbolic woman and her Messiah: "The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born" (Rev 12:4 NIV).

After the Messiah was enthroned in heaven as the ruler of all nations (12:5) the dragon intensified his warfare all the more fiercely against the messianic remnant: "Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went to make war with the rest of her offspring—those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (Rev 12:17 NIV).

This satanic battle against the faithful remnant of Christ is unfolded in its final showdown in 13:15-17; 16:13-16; 17:12-14; 19:11-21 and is called the battle of "Armageddon" on the great day of God Almighty.

It deserves special stress that "Armageddon" must be interpreted as an integral part of the larger unit of the seven last plagues (Revelation 16). Those plagues all originate in the throne room of God in the heavenly temple and are presented liturgically as the supernatural manifestations of God's holy wrath in answer to the martyrs' cry of 6:9. The seven plagues are poured out from heaven as divine curses or judgments—reminiscent of the sevenfold punishments of apostate Israel in Leviticus 26—and therefore "emanate not from human, but divine sources."²

The Apocalypse pictures the outpouring of God's wrath as the divine reaction and holy response to the wrath of Babylon—in other words, as God's holy justice. In the vision of the three angels, the second announces: "Babylon is fallen, is

¹W. S. LaSor, *The Truth About Armageddon* (Harper, 1983) 146.

²J. M. Ford, *Revelation* (AB; Doubleday, 1975) 269.

fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (Rev 14:8 *NKJV*).

Whoever drinks the wine of Babylon's wrath is held responsible by God. Such a person is held guilty of false accusation and prosecution of the true saints (17:1, 2, 6) and must therefore "also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation" (14:10 *NKJV*). This imagery borrows from Isa 51:17-23 where Yahweh announces: "I will put it [the cup of my wrath] into the hands of your tormentors" (v 23). Thus the Apocalypse warns all men to be awake to the religious issues of Church-state relations pertaining to the commandments of God and urges everyone to make the right decision with regard to worshipping God and his Christ only (see Rev 14:6-11). Adela Y. Collins even states: "The implication [of the last plagues] is that all who do not actively resist the beast are its accomplices."³

A faithful remnant is called out of Babylon, however, in this time of trouble and religious persecution: "This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus" (14:12 *NIV*).

This is the religious-moral issue at stake in the apocalyptic war against the Christian saints. If the enemy of God and Christ is symbolized by the name Babylon (14:8; 17:5; 18:2), then by the same token the faithful Christians may be viewed as the Israel of God. The final outcome of this conflict between this universal Babylon and this universal Israel is called Armageddon, denoting the destruction of Babylon as the "Mountain of Slaughter"⁴ (16:16-21).

Exegetes have observed that the description of the sixth plague—the sudden drying up of the great river Euphrates (16:12)—merely announces the final preparation of the political powers for the actual battle of Armageddon. The Armageddon clash itself is therefore expected to occur during the seventh plague. But all we hear is that Babylon the great collapses and is destroyed (16:19). Armageddon and the destruction of universal Babylon are therefore identical. We may then recognize in the sixth and seventh plagues two consecutive stages of Armageddon, described symbolically as the preliminary drying up of the great river Euphrates and the subsequent fall of Babylon the great. The Armageddon war of 16:13-16 is structurally and thematically related to the subsequent chaps. 17-19 by way of further clarification and elaboration. The angelic discourses of 17:1-19:10 have been called appropriately "the Babylon appendix" (A. Y. Collins) or an "appended interlude" (E. S. Fiorenza) to Revelation 16. This means that the symbolic imagery of the sixth and seventh plagues—climaxing in Armageddon—is explained further by an angel of God. In fact one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls of wrath introduces chap. 17 with an explicit statement that he comes to explain in more detail the fall or destruction of Babylon—that is, Armageddon: "One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me,

³A. Y. Collins, *The Apocalypse* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1983) 111.

⁴The LXX transcribes the Hebrew name Megiddo usually as *Maged(d)ō*. On one occasion (Zech 12:11) the Hebrew name is not transcribed but seemingly translated into *ekkoptomenou* ("one being cut down"). This translation of the LXX would suggest that the Jewish translators did not see Hebrew *mō'ēd* ("assembly") but rather the verb *gādad* ("to cut down") as the root of Megiddo. Etymologically *Har Mageddon* means "the mountain of destruction/slaughter."

'Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters'" (Rev 17:1).

This means that the reason why Babylon is destroyed by God's effective wrath is now presented: "I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus" (17:6). The following chapter explains further that God will respond by applying his ancient law of retribution and of malicious witness to Babylon: "Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup" (18:6; cf. 18:20; Gen 9:5; Deut 19:19). God's verdict is "to render against Babylon the judgment that she, the malicious false witness, had rendered against God's people."⁵

One thing has become overwhelmingly plain from the contextual relationship of "Armageddon": It denotes the destruction of Babylon and is effected by God's holy wrath in retaliation for Babylon's unholy war against the saints of God and Jesus Christ. No wonder that the apocalyptic imagery of Christ as the Lamb at this stage shifts to his role as the King-Judge and Divine Warrior in order to engage himself in the last holy war. Armageddon is explained in 17:14; 19:11-21 as the cosmic-universal clash between the armies of heaven—led by Christ as the King of kings—and the forces of universal Babylon, in which the satanic trinity (16:13-14) has united all the kings of the whole world in rebellion against God.

"They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

... I saw heaven standing open, and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one but he himself knows. . . . The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. . . . On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

... Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army (17:14; 19:11-12, 14, 16, 19).

II. ARMAGEDDON AS ANTITYPE OF ISRAEL'S HOLY WARS

It is obvious to all students of John's Apocalypse that Christ's portrayal as the cosmic Warrior in Revelation 19 is described in an impressive mosaic of OT imagery and terminology. This familiar symbolism teaches, apparently, that John's theme of Armageddon needs to be interpreted in fundamental harmony and continuity with the OT revelation of Israel's holy wars. The visions of Revelation 12-19 allude to many acts of divine judgment and deliverance in Israel's history as well as to Israel's eschatological promises of the messianic triumph

⁵K. A. Strand, "Two Aspects of Babylon's Judgment Portrayed in Revelation 18," *AUSS* 20 (1982) 53-60.

over all his enemies. Our purpose is not to enumerate statistically all the possible types of prefigurations of Armageddon in the OT holy wars. Our concern here is of a hermeneutical nature. How do Egypt's defeat at the Reed Sea in Moses' time and then Babylon's fall in Daniel's time relate as types to Armageddon in the Apocalypse? Not the historical events in isolation of salvation history, but these events in their theological interpretation by Israel's faith in the OT need to be properly analyzed. We concentrate in this respect on Egypt and Babylon because the seven last plagues in Revelation 16 allude to these two archenemies of ancient Israel for their structural composition that climaxes in Armageddon. Basically speaking, the first five plagues of Revelation 16 borrow from the exodus event under Moses, while the last two apocalyptic plagues refer back to the historic fall of Babylon when its Euphrates' waters were suddenly diverted by Cyrus. We need to ask what the matter at issue was in both national defeats, who actually were the opposing parties, and how God intervened by the execution of his covenant faithfulness and for what purpose.

1. *Yahweh's Victory over Egypt.* Egypt became Israel's first deadly enemy (see Exodus 2). When the Israelites cried out to God in their slavery, he "remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob" (Exod 2:24). God's remembrance was effective in that he sent Moses and then ten plagues in order to end the persecution and to set Israel free as his firstborn son to worship him (4:22-23). When Pharaoh refused, God applied the principle of retaliation: "So I will kill your firstborn son" (4:23). The first lesson that can be learned here is that God identifies himself with his covenant people when they appeal to him in their need, and he acts as their sovereign Redeemer. The enemy of this Israel becomes the enemy of Israel's God. The war against a God-trusting Israel becomes theologically the war against Israel's God. Thus God's covenant with Israel and her patriarchs is the matter at issue. The opposing parties are Egypt and her gods and magicians on the one hand, and Yahweh, Moses and believing Israel on the other hand. The manifestation of divine faithfulness came by way of ten supernatural plagues, which caused an initial redemption of Israel. When Pharaoh changed his mind and pursued Israel with six hundred war chariots, Israel was terrified but "cried out to the LORD" (14:10). Then Moses spoke: "The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still" (v 14). God then manifested himself in a protecting theophany by means of "the pillar of fire and cloud" between Israel and her enemy (vv 19, 20, 24). And God "drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land" (v 21). The way of deliverance became, however, the way of destruction for Egypt's army. God "threw it into confusion" (v 24) and made the wheels of their chariots jam so that the Egyptians began to acknowledge that "the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt" (v 25).

Gerhard von Rad concludes from the last words of this narrative (14:30) that "only believers could participate in the old holy war."⁶ The victory at the sea was considered by Moses and Miriam as the triumph of Yahweh as divine Warrior and as the foundation of Israel as the people of Yahweh (15:1, 3, 21; 29:45-46). The book of Psalms exalts this exodus event as the sign of God's covenant loyalty

⁶G. von Rad, *Der Heilige Krieg im alten Israel* (Göttingen, 1969) 47.

(Ps 136:10-15), and Isaiah stresses continually that the first exodus salvation was the prototype for Israel's future liberation from Babylon (Isa 11:10-12; 43:16-19; 51:10-11; 52:1-12; 63:11-19).⁷ As Millard C. Lind observes: "Thus the exodus rather than the conquest or judges provides the fundamental paradigm of holy war in the Old Testament."⁸

It is noteworthy that the song of Moses itself views Yahweh's victory at the Reed Sea as the archetype or prophetic type that will be fulfilled again and again in the later wars of Yahweh (see Exod 15:14-16).⁹ N. Lohfink has indicated in his form-critical study of this cultic song of Moses that "the literal meaning of it requires a typological application" because God reveals here by its structure that he wants to act in this way for Israel "always and everywhere."¹⁰

Finally, the song of Moses climaxes with the proclamation of the kingship or rulership of Yahweh (15:18). The divine Warrior becomes Yahweh the King, who reigns over Israel and the nations.

In summary, the essence of Israel's first holy war was that it received cosmic meaning because Yahweh identified himself with his faithful covenant people through a saving theophany. Terrifying changes occurred in the natural world and in the cosmos (Exodus 1-14). The purpose of Yahweh's victory was to deliver Israel, the glorification of his name in the song of Moses, and the worship of his people (Exodus 15). Even the enemies in their panic acknowledged Yahweh's loyalty to Israel in his battle against Pharaoh (14:14).

If the exodus of Israel—and by extension the conquest of Canaan by holy wars—constitutes the ordained type of God's redemptive acts for all salvation history, its essential features should be part of Armageddon on the final day of God Almighty as the completion and consummation of all God's wars. Von Rad seems to have established that Israel's later concept of the day of Yahweh had its origin in the early holy wars of Yahweh on behalf of faithful Israel.¹¹ In this respect one vital aspect must be stressed: that the day of Yahweh will also be the war of Yahweh against an apostate and impenitent Israel whose cultic worship is no longer acceptable to God (Am 5:18-27; Zech 14:1-4). This religious-spiritual discrimination within Israel only reaffirms all the more the basic premise that the day of the Lord is the day of salvation for the faithful remnant of Israel (see Joel 2:32; Hab 2:4; Zeph 3:8-13; Zech 12:10-12; Dan 12:1-2). The prophets deliberately extended their eschatological perspective of the day of the Lord to cosmic-universal proportions (Isaiah 13; 24; 34; 63; Zeph 1:2-3; Zech 14:9; Pss 2; 24; 46).

In the Apocalypse of John all the books of the OT seem to meet and end. Especially the exodus and holy war motifs are blended by John into a new, crea-

⁷See H. LaRondelle, "The Sensus Plenior of Israel's Restoration Promises: The NT Typology of Israel's Exodi from Egypt and Babylon" (paper read at ETS annual meeting in Toronto, 1981) 8.

⁸M. C. Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1980) 46.

⁹S. R. Smend, *Yahweh War and Tribal Confederation* (Abingdon, 1970) 111.

¹⁰N. Lohfink, *De Actualiteit van het OT* (Hilversum: P. Brand, 1966) 118, 116; see also Lind, *Yahweh* 50.

¹¹G. von Rad, "The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh," *JSS* 41 (1959) 97-108.

tive apocalyptic outlook that has its unifying and transforming center in Christ as the Lamb of God (28 times). The key to this Christocentric interpretation of the OT types and prophecies lies in the inaugural vision of the risen Christ. This presents Christ as our High Priest who is ministering among the seven lampstands of the heavenly temple, which are said to be the seven churches (Rev 1:13, 20). Here is offered the clue to understand the Hebrew imagery of the whole book of Revelation as fulfilled in Christ and his universal Church. Already the prescript stated that Christ has freed us from our sins "and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father" (1:6; cf. Exod 19:6). The history of the Church of Christ is meant to be the fulfillment and consummation of Israel's history of redemption. This forbids any effort to apply the gospel sense of the Hebrew names and geographic places again according to their old-covenant ethnic and local restrictions.

The day of Yahweh will be fulfilled in the day of the Son of Man, the holy war of Yahweh is transformed into the war of Christ as King of kings, the wrath of Yahweh manifests itself as the wrath of the Lamb (Rev 6:14-17; 14:14-10; 19:11-21). The song of Moses will be sung again, but in the higher key of the song of the Lamb (Rev 15:2-3). The nature of John's use of typology in the Apocalypse can be characterized as the consummation of the NT Christological and ecclesiological applications.¹²

The last Bible book reveals that "by divine design the OT realities are advance-presentations of corresponding (but absolutely 'escalated') NT realities."¹³ The Apocalypse has a clear kerygmatic intention: to assure the faithful messianic people that the God of Israel will dramatically consummate the salvation history of his covenant people with a final exodus redemption. On that day of God Almighty, Christ will manifest himself in a theophany as the holy Warrior-King and Judge before all the nations. Then he will vindicate his messianic remnant, while "the beast and the false prophet" and their followers will perish by his triumphant Christophany (Rev 19:11-21).

2. *The Fall of Babylon in Type and Antitype (Armageddon).* The imagery of the fall of Babylon as the consequence of the sudden drying up of its Euphrates waters in Rev 16:12, 19 is an undeniable allusion to a major event in Israel's salvation history. The neo-Babylonian empire, as described in the books of Daniel and Jeremiah, was Israel's archenemy. John introduces Babylon into his apocalyptic outlook solely because of her opposition to Jerusalem, the city of God. Babylon can be defined theologically only by its relation to (1) the God of Israel and his way of salvation in the sanctuary and to (2) his faithful covenant people. In the OT, Babylon destroyed the temple of God in Jerusalem, trampled on its religious truth, blasphemed the name of Yahweh, and oppressed unto death the Israel of God (Daniel 1-6). These seem to be the theological essentials of Babylon that remain unchanged in its apocalyptic antitype (Rev 14:8; 17:1-6; 18:1-8). Babylon's rebellion against God's authority operated in two dimensions: vertically

¹²See H. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1983), chap. 4.

¹³R. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture* (Andrews University Sem. Doct. Diss. Series 2, 1981) 396-397.

against Yahweh's sovereign and saving will, and horizontally against Yahweh's covenant people and their cultic worship. Babylon was at war on a double front: against the God of Israel, and against the Israel of God.

The same hatred that inspired Babylon of old will motivate apocalyptic Babylon. But now God is inseparably united with the risen Christ. Modern Babylon must therefore be defined Christologically and ecclesiologically.¹⁴ The new Jerusalem is explicitly called the bride or "wife of the Lamb" (Rev 21:9), while "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (21:11). Only those may enter it "whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (21:17). The center of command is emphatically "the throne of God and of the Lamb" (22:1, 3). Christ is honored with the full divine prerogatives (22:13).

Apocalyptic Babylon directs its blasphemy and hatred against both God and his Christ (12:5) and against the faithful Church (12:6-12). Babylon attacks and enslaves the universal Church and poisons her teachings of the way of salvation and worship (14:6-7; 17:4; 14:8).

The thrust of the message of hope in the Apocalypse is that God will judge Babylon finally once and for all and vindicate the true Israel of God with a glorious rescue. The perspective of the future fall of Babylon is based on the fall of ancient Babylon as its ordained type. The theological essentials remain the same, while the ethnic and geographic restrictions are removed by giving them cosmic-universal proportions. As Yahweh's judgment fell suddenly on ancient Babylon (Isa 47:9, 11; Jer 51:8), so will Christ now cause his judgment to come suddenly on universal Babylon, the antichrist kingdom (Rev 18:8, 10, 19). The apocalyptic fall of Babylon will be much more devastating and infinitely more spectacular than its type. It will be Armageddon for Babylon.

The full impact of this typological relationship can only be felt if one takes a close look at the original plot as described by the prophets Isaiah (chaps. 41; 44-47) and Jeremiah (chaps. 50-51), together with its historical fulfillment (Daniel 5; the narratives of Xenophon and Herodotus). Careful attention needs to be given to the manner in which Babylon actually fell, in surprising accuracy to prophecy. Cyrus the Persian army general came indeed from the east in God's providence (Isa 41:2, 25) and took Babylon "without battle"¹⁵ because he surprised the city by diverting the waterflow of its Euphrates. This took place in literal fulfillment of prophecy (Isa 44:27-28; Jer 51:13, 36; 50:38). Yahweh would even "open doors before him so that the gates will not be shut" (Isa 45:2). The redemptive motivation of it all was stressed, however—"for the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen" (45:4)—as well as the divine purpose: "He [Cyrus] will rebuild my city and set my exiles free" (45:13) and restore the temple (44:28). God bestowed on Cyrus therefore the honorable titles of "anointed one" and "my shepherd" (45:1; 44:28), titles that elevate Cyrus' acts of judgment on Babylon and of redemption for Israel (see Ezra 1:1-4) to be a dramatic theological type of the Messiah's holy war against apocalyptic Babylon. Already in the type it was Yahweh himself who spoke to the Euphrates: "Be dry, and I will dry up your stream" (Isa 44:27). Cyrus was only Yahweh's agent in God's judgment on Babylon.

¹⁴See LaRondelle, *The Israel of God*, chaps. 5; 7.

¹⁵ANET 306.

Just as Yahweh and his covenant people were at the center of the fall of Babylon, so Christ and his covenant people—the faithful Church—stand at the center of the fall of modern Babylon and of the last holy war, Armageddon. It is necessary to define precisely the theological position of each participant in the ancient fall of Babylon in connection with Yahweh before we can determine the corresponding function of each participant in the apocalyptic fall of Babylon (Armageddon) in connection with Christ. (1) Babylon functioned as the enemy of the Lord and as the oppressor of Israel. (2) The Euphrates was an integral part of Babylon, supporting and protecting it as a wall, thus likewise hostile to Israel. (3) The drying up of the Euphrates indicated God's judgment on Babylon, causing its sudden downfall. It stood therefore for the preparation of Israel's deliverance. (4) Cyrus and his allied kings of the Medes and the Persians (Jer 50:41; 51:11, 28) came as the predicted kings from the east to Babylon to fulfill God's purpose. They were the enemies of Babylon and the deliverers of Israel. Cyrus is "anointed" by the Lord to defeat Babylon and to set Israel free. (5) Daniel and the Israel of God in Babylon constitute the repentant, faithful covenant people of God.

These theological characterizations can be called the essentials of the fall of Babylon. In the Apocalypse, Babylon represents the archenemy of Christ and of his Church. Now both Babylon and Israel are universal, their territorial scope is worldwide. The gospel is explicitly sent out "to every nation, tribe, language and people" (Rev 14:6). The fourfold emphasis stresses its universal radius. The subsequent announcement that Babylon the great is fallen is founded on the fact that she has "made all nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries" (14:8). The whole world has finally come under her spell (13:3-4, 7). In harmony with this worldwide range of Babylon, inspiration gives also to Babylon's river Euphrates an explicitly universal application: "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages" (17:15). Those who insist that the "Euphrates" represents only the people that live in the actual geographic location of the Euphrates are bound to follow the same interpretation with "Babylon," "Israel," "Mount Zion," etc. Such fail, however, to grasp the Christocentric structure of Biblical typology. The gospel of Jesus Christ delivers us from the restrictions of ethnic and geographic literalism for the messianic era. The angel's interpretation of the Euphrates in Revelation 17 serves to guard us against a relapse into the Middle-East application of Babylon's river.

Whenever God dried up a literal river or a "flood" of enemies in Israel's history—like the Reed Sea or the Jordan River, or the flood of invading Euphrates people (Isa 8:7-8)—it always signified a providential judgment on the enemies of God's people. The drying up of Babylon's great river during the future sixth plague (Rev 16:12) will be no exception.

This judgment is set in motion when the political rulers and multitudes of all nations will suddenly realize God's verdict on religious Babylon and unitedly withdraw their support from Babylon. They will even reverse their loyal support dramatically into active hate, into such a hostility that they will completely destroy Babylon. This is the sudden dissolution of Babylon that in God's providence destroys Babylon. It seems to be the essence of Revelation 17—a chapter designed especially to explain the sixth and seventh plagues—to emphasize that this surprising and sudden shift from loyal support to hate between the political

arm of Babylon and its religious organization is God's own verdict (17:17).

The surprise will be that God will bring about the self-destruction of Babylon by way of her own supporters. The Euphrates waters—the persecuting multitudes, 17:15—will suddenly be caused to dry up, to withdraw their support. The beast with ten horns will suddenly become the harlot's hater—instead of her illicit lover—and will destroy her completely (17:16). But this sudden reversal of the unholy union will only occur at the "hour" when the attack is made by a united Babylon on the faithful messianic remnant (see 17:14; 12:17; 18:5).

When Cyrus had dried up the waters of the Euphrates, the way was prepared for all the kings from the east to enter the capital and to take over her world government. Thus the handwriting on Belshazzar's banquet hall was fulfilled: "Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians" (Dan 5:28). Prophecy did not yet find its complete and exhaustive consummation when Cyrus overthrew ancient Babylon and with Israel's subsequent return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-5).

The apocalyptic features of the cosmic signs and the everlasting destruction of Babylon will be fulfilled only when the Messiah himself comes in his divine glory as the Holy Warrior to overthrow the last Babylon on earth when her crimes against the Israel of God have piled up to heaven (see Rev 18:5).

The fact that Christ will bring divine judgment from the heavenly temple on modern world-Babylon (Revelation 15-19) is not just a striking analogy with Cyrus' victorious overthrow of ancient Babylon. More than a "correspondence" of redemptive work, Christ's final mission is to fulfill Israel's types and prophecies of redemption from Babylon on a universal scale and in cosmic glory. His coming will no longer be from any earthly place but straight from the heavenly throne of God—that is, from the astronomical or cosmic east. This will be the greatest theophanic glory the world has ever seen, the most splendid liberation of the Israel of God ever experienced.

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. . . .

The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean (Rev 19:11, 14).

III. WHAT SIGNIFICANCE MAY BE ATTACHED TO THE NAME ARMAGEDDON?

It is possible that John had the Hebrew name Megiddo in mind when he created the mysterious apocalyptic name *Har Magedon* in 16:16. The solution to the riddle of this cryptic symbolism lies not, however, in an uncertain etymology.¹⁶

The remark of J. R. A. Sheriffs—representative of others—seems to point in the right direction: "If it is symbolic, geographical exactness is unimportant. . . . The 'mountains of Israel' witness Gog's defeat in Ezek xxxix. 1, 4. This may be in the writer's mind."¹⁷

¹⁶See J. Jeremias, "*Har Magedon* (*Apc 16, 16*)," in *ZNW* 31 (1932) 73-77; "*Har Magedon*," *TDNT* 1.

¹⁷J. R. A. Sheriffs in *The New Bible Dictionary* (ed. J. D. Douglas) 505.

It is apparent that Rev 20:8-11 was influenced by Ezekiel 38-39. But also Rev 19:17-18 draws clearly from Ezek 39:17-20. Others point to the song of Deborah in Judges 5 for John's taproot of Armageddon, because Barak defeated the Canaanites near "the waters of Megiddo" (v 19) with providential help (vv 20-21). The real name of these "waters" was the "river Kishon" (v 21), flowing by or near Megiddo.

William H. Shea concludes that by analogy the "mountain of Megiddo" should be identified with Mount Carmel that lies near Megiddo as well. This provides him with an intriguing analysis of the spiritual battle between Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18).¹⁸ He views the apostate king Ahab and Jezebel as the representatives of apostate religion, and her false prophets as the prototypes of the apocalyptic trinity of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet (Rev 16:13-14). Elijah—who came from Gilead in the east—settles the showdown by fire from heaven, while the impenitent prophets were put to the sword in the Kishon valley (1 Kings 18:40).

In the battle of Armageddon, Christ will bring victory in a similar way: by fire over the beast and false prophet (Rev 19:20), and by the sword over their followers (v 21; see also v 15).

¹⁸W. H. Shea, "The Location and Significance of Armageddon in Rev 16:16," *AUSS* 18/2 (1980) 157-162.