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## CHAPTER 39

# Worship at the Epicenter

## Megiddo

Few locations retain their geographic significance for more than a thousand years. One infamous battlefield renowned for its reputation extends from the ancient past to the end of the future. It asserts prophetic destiny with apocalyptic intrigue. Poised to attract and accommodate both worshiper and warrior, this ancient epicenter awaits an ingathering of world leaders presumably for an epic conflict.

Earthquakes exert maximum destruction at their epicenter, directly above the point where they originate. The word epicenter literally means “above center”. Beyond seismology, it signifies the focal point of something ominous, difficult, or unstable, and more generally as the center of attention.

When Christ came to Earth the first time, a star appeared to guide Magi *“from the east”* to His residence.<sup>1</sup> Before Christ’s second coming, John saw an angel pour a Sixth Bowl of Wrath on the river Euphrates to prepare the way for kings *“from the east”* (literally, from the rising of the sun).<sup>2</sup> While Magi travelled from the east to worship Jesus at Bethlehem, John saw *“kings of the whole world”* gathering at Tel Megiddo (aka, Armageddon) for *“the war of the great day of God, the Al-*

<sup>1</sup> Mat 2:1

<sup>2</sup> Rev 16:12

*mighty*".<sup>3</sup> Mathew describes the prophetically guided Magi, worshipping and offering gifts. John describes the demonically recruited kings, gathering with an intention for war.<sup>4</sup> Since John's narrative describes neither an army nor battle associated with this gathering, perhaps the outcome remains open to an additional influence.

### **Jonah's Prophetic Declaration Changed the Stated Outcome**

Acting on His desire for redemption and restoration, God commanded Jonah to prophesy judgement and assert wrath by announcing definitively, "*Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown*".<sup>5</sup> Since the wicked residents of Nineveh responded with repentance, this city was neither overthrown nor destroyed. The words prophesied by Jonah did not coincide with the stated outcome; they inspired a response that deterred destruction. Our Heavenly Father desires even the most notorious sinners to become legendary responders to His mercy and grace. He affectionately seeks transformed worshipers gathering to make His praise glorious—instead of resentful warriors gathering to make war.

### **Daniel Facilitated the Outcome of Jeremiah's Prophecy**

When Daniel understood that Jeremiah's 70-year desolation prophecy neared completion, he prayed exhaustively with proactive fasting, confession, and repentance—for himself and his people. He wrote:

*I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. (Dan 9:2-3 NAS)*

At the beginning of Daniel's "*pleas for mercy*", God sent Gabriel to convey angelic revelation and promote informed agreement regarding Jerusalem's future and the coming "*Anointed One*".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Rev 16:14 NAS

<sup>4</sup> Rev 16:16

<sup>5</sup> Jonah 3:4

<sup>6</sup> Daniel 9:22-27 ESV

*He instructed me and said to me, “Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, a word went out, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed. Therefore, consider the word and understand the vision... (Daniel 9:22-23 NIV)*

Before world leaders gather for battle at Megiddo, worshipers should consider seizing the initiative, as Daniel did, by assembling to show our Heavenly Father what He seeks—worshipers who worship Him in spirit and truth.<sup>7</sup> Equipped with informed assurance, worshipers influence the spiritual climate with confession, prayers, and proclamations—conveyed with highest praise and radical reverence.

### **Megiddo’s Historical Context**

Three continents converge at one focal point in the Middle East. According to theologian NT Wright, the importance of “this epicenter” swells out of proportion to its size.<sup>8</sup> For generations, explorers, merchants, invaders, and religious leaders have leveraged their influence on this land. In “The New Testament and the People of God”, Wright asserts, “Every forty-four years out of the last four thousand, on average, an army has marched through it”.<sup>9</sup> This fiercely contested region maintains a prominent global focus.

By comparison, the city of Jerusalem (southeast of the Valley of Megiddo) has been fought over 16 times, besieged 23 times, destroyed twice, and captured and recaptured 44 times.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout history, Africans, Asians, and Europeans have fought to control the Valley of Megiddo in northern Israel. Megiddo literally

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<sup>7</sup> John 4:23-24

<sup>8</sup> N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Wikipedia “Timeline of Jerusalem” accessed 11-3-2017

means place of crowds or where multitudes gather.<sup>11</sup> According to the “Catholic Encyclopedia”, it means to “collect in crowd”.<sup>12</sup> The word Megiddo comes from the Hebrew verb *gadad*, which means to gather in crowds or troops, to attack, invade, penetrate, or cut.<sup>13</sup>

Commonly called the Jezreel Valley, Megiddo goes by other names. The Plain of Esdraelon denotes the Koine Greek rendering of Jezreel, which means God sows, or may God make fruitful.<sup>14</sup> The word Armageddon comes from the Hebrew *har mägiddô*, which means Tel or Mount Megiddo.

In Revelation 16:16, translators for the New King James Version, English Standard Version, and New International Version render *har mägiddô* as “Armageddon” while the New American Standard Version uses “Har Magedon” instead.

### **Three Noteworthy Sites Associated with Megiddo**

- The Valley of Megiddo
- Tel Megiddo—Armageddon
- An Ancient Church discovered at Megiddo Prison

### **The Valley of Megiddo**

The oval shape of this fertile plain stretches 33 km (20 mi) from the slopes of Mount Carmel in the northwest to the town of Jenin in the southeast.<sup>15</sup> At its widest point, this valley spans 22 km (14 mi) across. Mount Tabor marks its northeastern border.

Mount Carmel is a coastal range overlooking the Mediterranean Sea in northwest Israel. It is 26 km (16 miles) long, 7 km (4-5 miles) wide, and 550 m (1,800 ft) above sea level. Carmel means vineyards of God.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://m.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/revelation/revelation-16/revelation-16-16.html>; Brown-Driver-Briggs (Old Testament Hebrew-English Lexicon); Strong's (Hebrew & Chaldee Dictionary of the Old Testament)

<sup>12</sup> <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/Hebrew>. (accessed 8-7-07)  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09526a.htm> (accessed 8-7-07)

<sup>13</sup> <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/Hebrew> (accessed 8-7-07)

<sup>14</sup> <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/Hebrew> and [www.Britannica.com](http://www.Britannica.com) (accessed 8-6-07)

<sup>15</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org> (accessed 5-6-07)

Elijah confronted the priests of Baal on this mountain. During the late 12<sup>th</sup> Century, the Carmelite religious order established their monastery there with a focus on contemplative prayer. Their motto is, “With zeal have I been zealous for the Lord God of hosts”.<sup>16</sup>

The Mediterranean seaport city of Haifa occupies the western slopes of Carmel. Its citywide population approached 290,000 in 2020, which ranks third-largest in Israel; its total urban population ranks second with over 1.1 million.<sup>17</sup> The northern slope of Haifa houses administrative buildings for the Bahá'í Faith World Center with the Shrine of the Báb. This Shrine is the most visited tourist attraction in Haifa. Bahá'í is a monotheistic religion emphasizing: “the unity of God, that there is only one God who is the source of all creation; the unity of religion, that all major religions have the same spiritual source and come from the same God; and the unity of humanity, that all humans have been created equal”.<sup>18</sup>

Afula is the largest modern settlement in the Megiddo Valley.<sup>19</sup> Due to its strategic location between Jenin and Nazareth, some refer to it as the Capital of the Valley. Nearby ruins from a 10<sup>th</sup> century crusader castle, probably belonged to the Knights Templar. Jenin is a major Palestinian city and agricultural center within the West Bank.

At the eastern end of the Megiddo Valley, Mount Tabor marks the boarder of Lower Galilee directly north of the West Bank. Its summit rises 562 m (1,843 ft) above sea level just 17 km (11 miles) west of the Sea of Galilee.<sup>20</sup> Israel’s Judge Deborah and her military commander Barak defeated Sisera and the Canaanites in this valley near Mount Tabor.<sup>21</sup> Gideon also conquered the Midianites in this valley.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carmelites> (accessed 6-13-13)

<sup>17</sup> <https://populationstat.com/israel/haifa> (accessed 11-17-2020)

<sup>18</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bah%C3%A1%27%C3%AD\\_Faith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bah%C3%A1%27%C3%AD_Faith) (accessed 8-14-14)

<sup>19</sup> Wikipedia, (accessed 8-6-07)

<sup>20</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org> (accessed 8-7-07)

<sup>21</sup> Judges 4-5

<sup>22</sup> Judges 6-8

Though established in 1949, Kibbutz Megiddo officially ceased operations as a communal Jewish settlement. It retains a restructured presence in the North District of Israel near Megiddo Junction between highway 65 (from Hadera to Afula) and highway 66 (from Haifa south to Samaria).

### **Tel Megiddo—Armageddon**

Armageddon is now an archeological mound that occupies the southern edge of the Megiddo valley. The word Armageddon literally means Mount Megiddo or Tel Megiddo. A tel is a hill composed of layers of rubble built up from the sediment of previous cities. Jeremiah refers to this ancient practice in a prophecy:

*"Thus says the LORD: Behold, I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob and have compassion on his dwellings; the city shall be rebuilt on its mound, and the palace shall stand where it used to be. (Jeremiah 30:18 ESV)*

Recognizing the historical significance of this archeological site, the Israeli government established Tel Megiddo as a National Park with an adjoining museum. UNESCO designated it as a World Heritage site in 2005. Tel Megiddo is situated about 110 km (70 miles) northwest of Jerusalem and 48 km (30 miles) south-east of Haifa off Route 66 between Megiddo junction and Yokne'am junction. A McDonald's restaurant serves half-pound hamburgers where Route 66 intersects Route 65.

The remains of at least 20 cities dwell within this expansive 21-meter (70-ft) mound. Its 10-acre summit crowns a much larger support base, which holds 26 layers of ruins.



The ancient city of Megiddo occupied the southwest corner of the valley beside freshwater springs. Overlooking the Eiron River, this city once secured the western en-

trance of Musmus Pass. This narrow pass in the Wadi Arah offered the most direct route to the Mediterranean Sea through the Carmel Ridge. Also known as the Eron pass at Wadi Arah (Arabic) or Nahal `Iron (Hebrew). Wadi means valley or dry gorge in Arabic. Joining the plains with the seaboard, it served as a central route through the mountains. Musmus Pass led directly to Megiddo from the Via Maris, thereby establishing its strategic value.

The Latin name Via Maris comes from the Vulgate translation of Matthew 4:15. It means “Way of the Sea”. Isaiah 9:1 renders it in Hebrew, Derech HaYam. Following the Mediterranean Coast, the Via Maris was one of the most important transportation routes between continents. Accessible from the Mediterranean Sea, it intersected two other major land routes (the Ridge Route and the King's Highway).

Megiddo acted as a gatekeeper between Egypt and the south and the northern empires of Phœnecia, Mesopotamia, Anatolia of Asia Minor, and Assyria (i.e., modern day Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria). Caravans traveling from Africa to Europe and from Asia to Africa all passed through Megiddo. Consequently, this city controlled the primary route that connected the continents from both land and sea. Whoever commanded this city, regulated access to the surrounding nations. Because of its unique location, Megiddo and its environs hosted numerous decisive battles throughout history.

According to “History of Megiddo” by Tel Aviv University,

Megiddo is widely regarded as the most important biblical period sites in Israel. Surrounded by mighty fortifications, outfitted with sophisticated water installations, and adorned with impressive palaces and temples, Megiddo was the queen of cities of Canaan and Israel.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The History of Megiddo, Tel Aviv University, <http://megiddo.tau.ac.il/history.html> (accessed 7-30-11)

Israel's first king, Saul, committed suicide in this valley shortly after Philistine forces killed his three sons in battle, including Jonathan.<sup>24</sup> From a tower in Jezreel, two Eunuchs threw Jezebel, Israel's most wicked queen, to her death.<sup>25</sup>

During numerous invasions, intercontinental armies had to capture, destroy, or negotiate with the city of Megiddo. Realizing its strategic importance, King Solomon strengthened its defensive posture. He conscripted slave labor to build massive walls and a heavily fortified gate.<sup>26</sup>

### **An Ancient Church discovered in Megiddo Prison**

While preparing for the expansion of a high-security prison a few hundred meters south of Tel-Megiddo, excavations revealed ruins dating back to the early 3rd century CE. Israeli archaeologist Yotam Tepper of Tel-Aviv University determined that the mosaic floor discovered in 2005 by prison inmate Ramil Razilo likely belonged to a clandestine church or a house of prayer within a private residence.<sup>27</sup> The 54 square meter (580 sq ft) foundation preserves one of the oldest, if not the oldest church gathering site ever discovered.<sup>28</sup> Roman coins and Greek inscriptions point to a time when the Roman Empire still persecuted Christians.

### **The Three Named "Battles of Megiddo"**

This site represents "the earliest battle for which there is known to be a surviving detailed account".<sup>29</sup> Presently, it holds claim to "the first battle with a remembered name" with two others following.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> 1 Samuel 31:1-8

<sup>25</sup> 2 Kings 9:30-37

<sup>26</sup> 1 Kings 9:15 ESV

<sup>27</sup> Yotam Tepper, Leah Di Segni A Christian Prayer Hall of the Third Century CE at Kefar 'Othnay (Legio): Excavations at the Megiddo Prison 2005

The Expository Times, E Adams, The Ancient Church at Megiddo: The Discovery and an Assessment of its Significance, 2008

<sup>28</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Megiddo\\_church\\_%28Israel%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Megiddo_church_%28Israel%29)

<sup>29</sup> Wikipedia (accessed 8-6-07) confirmed by historical references

<sup>30</sup> An Encyclopedia of Battles, David Eggenberger, General Publishing Co., Toronto, 1985, p. 271-272)

1. Egyptian Pharaoh Tutmose III fought a Canaanite coalition in 1478 BCE
2. Egypt fought Judah under King Josiah in 609 BCE
3. Allied troops fought Ottoman forces during WWI in 1918

Campaign records from Pharaoh Thutmose III state repeatedly that, “The capture of Megiddo is the capture of a thousand towns.”

The Valley of Megiddo may have hosted more internationally decisive battles than any other place on earth. According to an article published in “Biblical Archeology”, it:

“is one of the most famous battlegrounds in the world. Historians believe that more battles were fought at this location than anywhere else on earth.”<sup>31</sup>

Historian Eric Cline confirms this reputation with four-thousand years of historical support. He cites this location as “ground zero for battles that determined the very course of civilization.”<sup>32</sup> Paraphrasing the immortal words of Sir Winston Churchill, he states, “never in the field of human conflict have so many fought so often over so little space!”<sup>33</sup>

Cline maintains that:

The area of the Jezreel Valley can be compared to the meeting place of two tectonic plates, where the stress and strain frequently results in cataclysmic, earthshaking events of immense magnitude, whose reverberations are felt far away, both geographically and temporally. What is it about this area that prompts such a continuous state of warfare?<sup>34</sup>

Napoleon Bonaparte stood at Megiddo before his failed offensive to conquer the East and rebuild the Roman Empire. Observing this plain, he declared, “All the armies of the world could maneuver their forces

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<sup>31</sup> Biblical Archeology (accessed 5-20-07)

<http://www.bibarch.com/ArchaeologicalSites/Megiddo.htm>

<sup>32</sup> Cline, The Battles of Armageddon, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Cline, The Battles of Armageddon p. 2

<sup>34</sup> Cline, The Battles of Armageddon, p. 186.

on this vast plain.”<sup>35</sup> While executing the Egyptian campaign of 1798 and 1799 Napoleon described this valley as the world's perfect battlefield.<sup>36</sup> He said, “There is no place in the whole world more suited for war than this.... [It is] the most natural battleground of the whole earth.”<sup>37</sup>

Viewing this spacious plain in 1878, British Lieutenant H. H. Kitchener said, “... it is impossible not to remember that this is the greatest battlefield of the world....”<sup>38</sup> He elaborates by saying that the territory surrounding Megiddo:

“has seen more fighting and bloodshed over an extended period of time than virtually any other spot on earth—during the past four thousand years, at least thirty-four battles have been fought in this small valley.”<sup>39</sup>

Before passing through this territory in virtually any direction, armies from invading empires mustered their troops in the Megiddo Valley. According to Cline, “nearly every invading force from 2350 BCE to 2000 CE has fought a battle in the Megiddo Valley.”<sup>40</sup> Egyptians, Canaanites, ancient Israelites, Midianites, Amalekites, Philistines, Hasmonaeans, Greeks, Romans, Assyrians, Persians, Muslims, Crusaders, Mamlukes, Mongols, French, Ottomans, British, Australians, Germans, Arabs, and modern Israelis were among the warriors.

According to Cline,

“There is something about this valley, a geographical *je ne sais quoi* [a quality that eludes description], that seems to bring great conquerors together through time in a way that no other circumstance has or can.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> <http://philologos.org/bpr/files/a005.htm> (accessed 8-7-07)

<sup>36</sup> <http://newsblaze.com/story/20070806154520payn.nb> (accessed 8-7-07)

<sup>37</sup> Eric H. Cline, *The Battles of Armageddon: Megiddo and the Jezreel Valley from the Bronze Age to the Nuclear Age*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> Cline, *The Battles of Armageddon*, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Cline, *The Battles of Armageddon*, p. 7

<sup>40</sup> Cline, *The Battles of Armageddon*, p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> Cline, *The Battles of Armageddon*, p. 186

In 67 CE, Roman forces assembled at Armageddon before one of their military assaults on Jerusalem. Preterists cite this event to support their eschatological view surmising that prophecy concerning the "end times" has been fulfilled.

During World War I, the British Commonwealth paid a costly price to defeat Islam in this region, which ultimately prepared the way for Israel to reconvene as a nation. Long after the Crusades, British troops battled the Ottoman Turks on this very site. Their Palestine campaign resulted in more than 550,000 British fatalities, 90 percent of which were non-battle related.<sup>42</sup>

General Allenby considered the plan of attack approved by the British Imperial War Cabinet too limited and unambitious. He called the allied strategy "a sound scheme enough, but not a bold one."<sup>43</sup> Despite misgivings by his advisors, Allenby implemented what pundits later called a daring and grandiose conquest.

Allenby patterned his battle plan after an intrepid tactic used by Egyptian King Tutmose III nearly 3400 years earlier.<sup>44</sup> In a surprise attack through the dark and narrow Musmus Pass, Allenby defeated the Ottoman forces. He gained control of the Holy Land after just thirty-six hours of fighting and very few casualties on either side.

Had Allenby taken routes into the valley, which are more conventional, the seventh and eighth Turkish Armies would have been waiting for him. According to Cline, this battle "may have been the turning point of the entire war in the Middle East."<sup>45</sup> When the Allied force reached Nazareth so quickly, the German commander, Liman von Sanders "reportedly fled in his pajamas, narrowly escaping capture."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> An Encyclopedia of Battles, David Eggenberger, General Publishing Co., Toronto, 1985, p. 271-272)

<sup>43</sup> Cline, The Battles of Armageddon, p. 14-15.

<sup>44</sup> Cline, The Battles of Armageddon, p. 14-15.

<sup>45</sup> Cline, The Battles of Armageddon, p. 11

<sup>46</sup> Cline, The Battles of Armageddon, p. 14

## First Papal Visit on Record

In 1964, Pope Paul VI participated in the first papal visit on record to the Holy Land of Israel. During his brief eleven-hour stay, Pope Paul met with Israel's president, Zalman Shazar, and prime minister, Levi Eshkol.<sup>47</sup> Tel Megiddo hosted this historic gathering between Jews and Christians, possibly because of its shared historical significance.

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.officialcatholicdirectory.com/special-feature-article/papal-visits-to-the-holy-land.html> (accessed 7-30-11)