

# Armageddon

Assembling on the Mount of Assembly

**Revelation 16:10** The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish

<sup>11</sup> and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

<sup>12</sup> The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east.

<sup>13</sup> And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs.

<sup>14</sup> For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.

<sup>15</sup> ("Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!")

<sup>16</sup> And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

<sup>17</sup> The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!"

<sup>18</sup> And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake.

<sup>19</sup> The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath.

<sup>20</sup> And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found.

<sup>21</sup> And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.

(Rev 16:10-21)

# Human Nature and the Future

Most religions have in their mythos or prophecies a final conflict that resolves [the problem of evil](#). All deal with the natural *and supernatural* worlds. Certain Buddhist prophecies, borrowing from a Hindu original (the returned god Vishnu riding a white horse and carrying a sword like a comet), take the birthplace Vishnu, the mythical Tibetan city of [Shambhala](#), and predict that fierce warriors will rise at the end of time after the world has declined so far into darkness and will emancipate humanity, restore the planet, and men will be purified and pursue enlightenment. For the Norse, it is [Ragnarök](#), a series of events that culminate in a great battle that was foretold uncounted ages ago that will lead to the deaths of Odin, Thor, Freyr, Himdallr, Loki, and will result in the submersion of the world in water. After this the world will resurface, renewed and pristine and ready to be repopulated. Professor Tolkien, rooted in the Sagas, embedded the idea into Middle Earth. Though it is unclear if the following prophecy is official Tolkien canon, it is worth hearing it to get the flavor. It speaks of [Dagor Dagorath](#), the “Final Battle.”

Thus spoke Mandos in prophecy, when the Valar sat in judgement in Valinor and the rumour of his word was whispered among all the Elves of the West. When the world is old and the Powers have grown weary, Morgoth, the Black Foe of the World, seeing that the guard sleepeth, shall come back through the Door of the Night out of the Timeless Void; and all shall be darkness, for the sun he will turn to black, and the moon will no longer shed his light. But the Host of Valinor shall descend upon him as a searing flame, white and terrible. Then shall the Last Battle be gathered on the fields of Valinor. In that day, Tulkas shall strive with Morgoth, and on his right hand shall be Eönwë, and on his left Túrin Turambar, son of Húrin, returning from the Doom of Men at the ending of the world; and the black sword of Túrin shall deal unto Morgoth his death and final end; and so shall the Children of Húrin and all fallen Men be avenged.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, Tolkien was also deeply Roman Catholic, and so even if borrowing from the Sagas, he was perhaps even more influenced by the Final Battle of Christianity: **Armageddon**,

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<sup>1</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, "The Second Prophecy of Mandos," *The Quenta Silmarillion*, in *The Shaping of Middle-earth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), 165. For an interesting essay on Tolkien's Eschatology see Kristine Larsen, "While the World Lasted": Eschatology in Tolkien's 1930s Writings," *Journal of Tolkien Research* 7.1 Article 4 (2019): <https://scholar.valpo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1133&context=journaloftolkienresearch>.

the great final terrible conflict that strikes fear into the heart of many.

That **fear causes people to not want to be here** when the Final Battle takes place. This in turn has at least been part of what spawned a radical new theology in church history around 200 years ago. They call it **The Rapture**. We've briefly mentioned the Rapture in earlier chapters of Revelation. It is the view of many Evangelical, Fundamentalist, and Charismatic Christians that Jesus is going to take believers up into the air, usually prior to the Final Conflict. There are several proof-texts for this belief, and one of them ("**like a thief**") appears in our passage, right in the middle of sixth trumpet, where we get a description of Armageddon.

Of course, like everything else in Christianity, as **C. S. Lewis** has told us, we should expect that if it true, everyone would have some inkling of that truth and would carry that through into their own religious realms. But, as it always is at the key point, Christianity is utterly unique in its claims about this great Final Battle. It is at this point incompatible with other religions. It creates an either/or. Either Christianity is right as is, or it is wrong. It behooves us all to pay attention to its story and its warnings for us

today. For in this word, God speaks to us about [Armageddon](#).

## The Sixth and Seventh Bowls: Context and Structure

Last time, we looked at Revelation 15-16 with its introduction to and pouring out of the [seven bowls of God's wrath](#). These two chapters form the [fifth of the seven cycles](#) of the book. Those cycles take us on various journeys of history between the First and Second Comings and they usually [end with a last conflict](#) that has been played out in [dress rehearsals](#) throughout the last 2,000 years, with perhaps the most important being what happened to Jerusalem and its temple in 70 AD.

As we looked at the whole of these two chapters last time and saw that theologically they teach that [God is decreating the world](#) after the fashion of the plagues of Egypt and the original creation,<sup>2</sup> today I want to focus in on [the last three of the bowls](#). I do this because unlike the

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<sup>2</sup> I found a new source that takes the 10 plagues farther, connecting it to more of the Exodus story than the Ten. See [J. Massyngaerde Ford](#), "The Structure and Meaning of Revelation 16," *The Expository Times* 98 (1987): 327-31 . <https://sci-hub.do/10.1177%2F001452468709801103>. Another I've not run across is worth noting here. [Charles H. Giblin](#), "Structural and Thematic Correlations in the Theology of Revelation 16-22," *Biblica* 55.4 (1974): 487-504. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/42613466?seq=8#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/42613466?seq=8#metadata_info_tab_contents).

first four bowls which are poured out on the earth and people in particular, in these **the beast** returns to the forefront.

Also, unlike the beginning of the chapter in which no structure can be easily seen (the whole chapter, roughly, can be seen as a chiasm of the first-seventh angels), there appears to be a structure that links together the fifth through seventh bowls.

- A. **Fifth angel** pours out bowl upon **the throne** of the beast (10).
- B. People cursed the God of **heaven** (11)
- C. **Sixth angel** pours his bowl on the Euphrates, kings come from the east, they **assemble** for battle on the Great Day (12-14)
- D. Behold, I come like a thief, blessed is the one awake and dressed (15)**
- C'. They **assembled** at the place in Hebrew called Armageddon (16)
- B'. **The seventh** angel pours out his bowl into **the air** (17a)
- A'. A loud voice from the [heavenly] temple **throne** says, "It is done!" (17b)

Seeing this structure will greatly aid us in answering the questions I want to ask today which are, **what and where is Armageddon**, how are we supposed to understand **Jesus coming "like a thief,"** and what, if anything, are we supposed to do with this information?

# Armageddon



Aerial view of Tel Megiddo



First, what is Armageddon and where and when does it take place? The **popular understanding** is that Armageddon refers to **the great plain of Jezreel** (below right) surrounding the ancient city of Megiddo in northern Israel, about 25 miles southeast of the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee (left). This seems like a great candidate, not only because of the name, but because many



great battles of the past were fought here. It was here that Deborah and Barak defeated the Canaanites (**Jdg 5:19**); Kings Ahaziah and Josiah were both killed here in battle (**2Kg 9:27; 23:29**), the latter being greatly mourned for many days (**2Chr 35:24-25**). Furthermore, **Zechariah 12:11**, a passage that is often on John's mind in Revelation, is the only time in the OT that Megiddo

is spelled with a final “n” thus creating a link between **Megiddon** and **Armageddon**.

But there is one serious problem with this idea, and it has no good explanation that I’ve read. I alluded to it a moment ago. Listen to the verse in Zechariah. “**On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo**” (**Zech 12:11**). It calls Megiddo a “**plain**” and rightly so.<sup>3</sup> The problem is, everyone agrees that Armageddon necessitates *a mountain*. But there is no mountain here. Megiddo itself is located on **a tell**, a very small man-made mound that accumulates after centuries of occupation. **But a tell is not a mountain**. This problem has caused commentators to say, “**The cryptic nature of the reference has thus far defeated all attempts at a final answer.**”<sup>4</sup> I believe this seriously overstates the case.

Let’s notice the verse, “**They assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon**” (**Rev 16:16**). John is writing in Greek. But for some reason, he wants us to know

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<sup>3</sup> A second issue here applies to some Dispensationalists who believe the parallel is the sixth trumpet’s (literarily, they are correct, thought that doesn’t exactly match a chronological reading of the book), releasing four angels bound at the Euphrates (**Rev 9:14**), prepared for this very hour to kill a third of mankind (**15**), will lead 200,000,000 troops into this plain (**16**). Good luck with that.

<sup>4</sup> **Robert H. Mounce**, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 302.

that this is a **Hebrew** term. John does this quite often in his books:

Verse	First Half	Second Half
John 5:2	Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool...	... in Aramaic called Bethesda.
John 19:13	He brought Jesus to the place called The Stone Pavement...	... in Aramaic Gabbatha.
John 19:16	He went to the place called The Place of the Skull...	... in Aramaic is called Golgotha.
John 20:16	... which means Teacher.	in Aramaic, “Rabboni!”...
Rev 9:11	They have as king over them the angel of the abyss...	... in Hebrew is Abaddon.
Rev 16:16	They assembled at the place...	... in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

What’s the point of doing so here? There are at least three.

**First** the easy one. The Hebrew word for **a mountain** is *har*. Since there is no letter “h” in Greek, it drops off and becomes “ar-” (with an apostrophe before the “h” as a rough breathing mark for the “h” sound: Ἀρμαγεδών). No one disputes this point.

**Second**, we have the second half of the word which in Greek is *magedon*. This gives us a translation “**Mount of Magedon**.” The question is, what is this word? Most have

assumed that it is our town Megiddo. But as we have seen, there is no Mount Megiddo(n).

To figure out the actual meaning, we need to understand something about the Hebrew. Hebrew has no vowels, only consonants. If we were to write this out in Hebrew, we would have **h-r-m-g-d-n**. The “n” is simply an affirmative, that is the letter nun added to the end of a verb (*mgd*) to create a noun. So the “n” can drop off. This leaves us with what is *mgd*? Those three letters form the verb “**to be precious, noble, to present as a gift.**” But that’s of no help at all.

Just here, we need to know something else about these languages. John’s Armageddon is written *in Greek*, not Hebrew. But the Greek letter “g” (**Gamma**) actually **transliterates** not one but **two Hebrew letters** (Gimel and Ayin), not one (Gimel). Knowing this, some have derived the word not from Mem-Gimel-Dalet (*m-g-d*) but Mem-Ayin-Dalet (*m-‘-d*). In English, this word is *moed*. Is there a Mount Moed?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For these see **Charles C. Torrey**, “Armageddon,” *HTR* 31.3 (1938): 237-48; **Meredith G. Kline**, *God, Heaven and Har Mageddon: A Covenantal Tale of Cosmos and Telos* (Eugene, OR: Wipf&Stock, 2006), 51-57; **Michael S. Heiser**, *The Unseen Realm* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 368-75.

## Armageddon =?

Ἀρμαγεδών = *h-ḡ-r-m-ḡ-g-e-d-ḡ-n* (no vowels in Hebrew)

*h r m ḡ d ḡ* (Gimel becomes Ayin; Nun drops off)

*m ḡ d*

*h r m ḡ d* = בהר־מועד (Isa 14:13) = **Mount of Assembly**

To discover the answer, we have to go to Isaiah 14 and the famous story of the supernatural creature Lucifer (Helel ben-Shachar; Shining One son of Dawn). In the story, The Shining One is cut down to the ground because he cut *the nations* low (Isa 14:12) and said in his heart that he would ascend above the stars of God, where he would set his throne on high and sit “*on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north*” (13).

There are several things to notice here. First, notice that this is called the **Mount of Assembly**. Now recall that in **John 16:16** “*they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.*” Finding the word “assembly” in both passages is not an accident. In fact, “mount of assembly” in Hebrew is Har Moed, precisely what we were looking for. If this is correct, we could translate it this way, “*They assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called The Mount of Assembly.*”

Now, a mt. of assembly is language for **the divine council**. The divine council, by definition, necessitates that supernatural

beings are present, which of course we see here in Isaiah 14. This is why we see Satan and God and Stars and thrones all here. This puts Armageddon into the realm of the supernatural first and only the natural (an actual physical war) second.

There is supernatural geography taking place here. To see it better, let's turn to a second point. This is the word "north." In Hebrew, this is the word *tsaphon*. In Canaanite religion, there is a mountain of the North, Mt. Tsaphon, and it is the home of the god Baal. Curiously, there is a Mt. Zaphon in the Bible, but it is associated with Mt. Zion in Jerusalem. It is God's home. God is greater than Baal. God created Baal! Psalm 48 says, "Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised in the city of our God! *His holy mountain*, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth, *Mount Zion*, in the far north (*tsaphon*), the city of the great King (Ps 48:1-2). Two verses later, "Behold, *the kings assembled*; they came on together, as soon as they saw it, they were astounded; they were in panic; they took to flight" (4). Three ideas here (assembly, north, nations) are also found together as in Isaiah.

But let's also look again at Zechariah. It says, "On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo" (Zech 12:11). It is clear that the final battle in Zechariah takes place

in Jerusalem, not in the plains of Megiddo. Megiddo is used *as an illustration* of the mourning that will take place in Jerusalem (as the beloved king Josiah was killed there and the people mourned). But it now seems clear that Zechariah is playing with ideas that we are seeing link Megiddo-Moed to Jerusalem. To put it another way, we could say that the mourning in the plain of Megiddo will be matched by the mourning on Mount Zion (perhaps physical), the Mount of Assembly in the North (supernatural) on the great and terrible day. Something terrible is going to happen not just to men, but in the divine council as well.

It is into this that we have a **third point** where we are introduced to the beast in ch. 16. Like Isaiah, we will see that “**the beast**” and **Babylon** and the **nations** are also found here. As the beast shows you, there is something deeply satanic going on. That is what we should expect. But to see all three, we need to go back to the fifth bowl and move forward from there.

“**The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast.**” There’s our **first connection**. Lucifer, the great Leviathan Beast, sought to set his **throne** above the throne of God. Now, the angel is pouring out his bowl on this beast’s **throne**. For him it is just as we saw with the peoples in the

earlier bowl plagues. It is precisely what he deserves. An eye for an eye, exactly as justice demands. No more, no less.

When this bowl is poured, Satan's kingdom is “**plunged into darkness**” (10), just like his satanically inspired kingdom Egypt before it. The plague is horrible. Satan's **Dark Kingdom** becomes filled with **darkness from heaven**. Eye for an eye. Again, the punishment fits the crime. This causes the people gnaw their tongues in anguish and curse the God of heaven for their pain and sores. But they do not repent of their deeds (10-11).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> **Going Deeper.** **The Wisdom of Solomon 17** has an entire chapter expositing why they gnawed their tongues. Thinking about the darkness of Egypt we read, “**For great are thy judgments, and cannot be expressed: therefore unnurtured souls have erred. For when unrighteous men thought to oppress the holy nation; they being shut up in their houses, the prisoners of darkness, and fettered with the bonds of a long night, lay [there] exiled from the eternal providence. For while they supposed to lie hid in their secret sins, they were scattered under a dark veil of forgetfulness, being horribly astonished, and troubled with [strange] apparitions. For neither might the corner that held them keep them from fear: but noises [as of waters] falling down sounded about them, and sad visions appeared unto them with heavy countenances.**

**No power of the fire might give them light: neither could the bright flames of the stars endure to lighten that horrible night. Only there appeared, unto them a fire kindled of itself, very dreadful: for being much terrified, they thought the things which they saw to be worse than the sight they saw not. As for the illusions of art magic, they were put down, and their vaunting in wisdom was reproved with disgrace. For they, that promised to drive away terrors and troubles from a sick soul, were sick themselves of fear, worthy to be laughed at.**

**For though no terrible thing did fear them; yet being scared with beasts that passed by, and hissing of serpents, they died for fear, denying that they saw the air, which could of no side be avoided.**

**For wickedness, condemned by her own witness, is very timorous, and being pressed with conscience, always forecasteth grievous things. For fear is nothing else but a betraying of the succours which reason offereth. And the expectation from within, being less, counteth the ignorance more than the cause which bringeth the torment. But they sleeping the same sleep that night, which was indeed intolerable, and which came upon them out of the bottoms of inevitable hell, were partly vexed with monstrous apparitions, and partly fainted, their heart failing them: for a sudden fear, and not looked for, came upon them. So then whosoever there fell down was straitly**

And so God pours out a sixth bowl. The sixth is poured out on the great river Euphrates. This is connected to the sixth trumpet which is also about the Euphrates (see n. 1). This river is mentioned all the way back in Eden (Gen 2:14) and is the source of life for Babylon far to the east. But it also is so long that it is marked out as the eastern boundary of the Promised Land (Gen 15:18). In a kind of anti-Red Sea parallel, its water is dried up. This prepares the way “for the kings from the east.” This is imagery associated with things from the great giants of old (Gen 14:1ff.; Dt 4:47) to the hordes of Assyria and Babylon and even Rome, which from the perspective of an Israelite watching an invader come would have seen them arrive from the east.

This Satanic (beast) and demonic (giant) imagery now combine to create two triads. First we have three mouths: the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet—the anti-Trinity of Revelation 13. Out of these mouths in turn come

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kept, shut up in a prison without iron bars. For whether he were husbandman, or shepherd, or a labourer in the field, he was overtaken, and endured that necessity, which could not be avoided: for they were all bound with one chain of darkness.

Whether it were a whistling wind, or a melodious noise of birds among the spreading branches, or a pleasing fall of water running violently, or a terrible sound of stones cast down, or a running that could not be seen of skipping beasts, or a roaring voice of most savage wild beasts, or a rebounding echo from the hollow mountains: these things made them to swoon for fear. For the whole world shined with clear light, and none were hindered in their labour: over them only was spread a heavy night, an image of that darkness which should afterward receive them: but yet were they unto themselves more grievous than the darkness.”

“three unclean spirits like frogs” (Rev 16:13). They are not literal frogs, but “demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty” (14). We are in the supernatural world yet again.

In the law, frogs are unclean creatures and given that this is all associated with mouths, they are loud creatures that croak out meaningless nonsense. In the plagues of Egypt, the Egyptian magicians were only able to duplicate two of them. One was frogs, hence deception. The goddess Heqt was depicted as a frog in Egypt and that plague was partly God showing his superiority over her. However, she was the goddess of resurrection and in Revelation 13, the people are deceived by the beast’s supposed resurrection (13:1-5).<sup>7</sup>

The attack is on the kings of the whole world. It isn’t just one king, but all of them. These parallel the kings of the east (we saw the kings in the Psalm):

- A. The kings from the east (12)
- B. Three: mouth of the dragon, mouth of the beast, mouth of the false prophet (13a)
- B’. Three: unclean spirits like frogs (13b)
- A’. Go abroad to the kings of the whole world (14)

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<sup>7</sup> On all this see G. K. Beale and David H. Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 342-43.

They are deceived by the beast to follow him and to do his bidding. In this case, it is to prepare for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. In the Bible, there are many Days of the LORD. Many are already past. At least one is yet future. **When is this day?** I'll address that question in a moment, when we come to the center of the structure.

For now, we are still trying to see that the beast, the nations, and Babylon, things all associated with Satan in Isaiah 14 are also here. The parallel to assembling them for battle on the great day (**Rev 16:14**) is assembling them at Armageddon (**16**). Our center is therefore **vs. 16** (see larger chiasm above). Immediately after reading about Armageddon (which parallels at least two passages we will see later in Revelation 19 and 20), we get **the seventh angel** pouring out his bowl. Since the **air and heaven** and the **two thrones** also parallel parts of the fifth and sixth bowls, it seems to me that the seventh bowl is the climactic event of a great ending to Armageddon in this portion of the book. They all go together.

“**The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, ‘It is done!’**” (**17**). These words echo our Lord's on the cross when he said, “**It is finished**” (**John 19:30**). But of

course, this is the difference between two very different comings.

As this bowl is poured out, we get a picture of Mt. Sinai. “There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder” (17). Then, also matching the crucifixion, there is an earthquake (Matt 27:54). But this is a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake (18). Theologically speaking, this quake means that God has come in final judgment.

It says, “The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell” (19). Here we have our link to the nations directly, which was implied by the kings of the earth. Then, “God remembered Babylon the great,” thus completing our three ideas found in Isaiah 14 which links us both to natural and the supernatural evil. Vs. 19 finishes the cup of wine ideas that we saw back in ch. 14. God made her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath, which we have seen is made up of the blood of the martyrs. To God, their blood is a precious sacrifice and priceless vintage that brings them near to him. But to Babylon, that same sacrifice becomes the source of its ultimate doom.

The imagery that comes next is rooted to the prophets of old who used it of great and terrible wars. “Every island

fled away, and no mountains were to be found” (20). In a literalistic way of reading this, we think the earth is no more. But, of course, how could that be if in the next verse, “Great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe” (21). How can there still be people if all the islands and mountains are totally destroyed?

Because it is symbolism. Islands represent the Gentile nations (Ps 72:10; Ps 97:1; Isa 11:11). Mountains represent the kingdoms of the earth (Isa 2:2; Jer 51:25; Ezek 35:3; Dan 2:35, 45; Zech 4:7). And this fits. God is destroying the nations and their Beast. The hail is an image from the 10 plagues, but this hail is exaggerated to show you how terrible this judgment is. It can't be literal, because 100 lb. hail stones that hit people will not leave them cursing God. It will leave them splattered at the bottom of a 100 ft. crater.

Finally, it is important to return to the idea of the mount of assembly, this divine council, which we have seen takes place on the mountain in the north—that is Mount Zion, is taking place against Babylon. But in Revelation, Babylon is simply another term for fallen humanity (like Jerusalem, Sodom, Egypt, and the City with Seven Hills). Judgment

begins first in Jerusalem, and moves outward to the ends of the earth. As we will see in ch. 20, this battle which takes place here against the fallen Babylon/Jerusalem (Augustine's City of Man) is paralleled by the nations assembling against heavenly Jerusalem (Augustine's City of God, Jesus's church, which we have seen many times in this book). That's what Armageddon ultimate is. A satanically inspired deception to attack God and his church; God judging both Satan and mankind with judgment that fits the crime.

What we are seeing in all this is that the Battle of Armageddon is **both natural and supernatural**. The divine council in heaven is crumbling, even as its city powers on earth are destroyed. The kingdom of God will not be defeated. We will look at this in even more detail when we come to the parallels in later chapters. But it is important to see this now because it has great implications for how the passage applies to us today, that is, assuming that it even does, which is a big assumption, given **The Rapture**. Therefore, I want to address this theological idea before answering the question of relevance.

## **“Like a Thief”**

The Rapture is a doctrine supported by a few proof texts, and the one related to it today is found in the very

center of these three bowls of judgment. “Behold, I am coming like a thief.” I’ll come back to the fact that Jesus said this very thing earlier in the book a bit later (Rev 3:3), because it is vital. For now, understand that this is one of the most commonly quoted statements of our Lord in the NT.

Peter quotes it saying, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed” (2Pe 3:10). Curiously, even though the same apocalyptic language of earth fleeing away on the Day of the Lord is found in both passages, Preterists like Gentry who say that Revelation 16 is about 70 AD only, say that Peter is talking about the end of the physical universe.<sup>8</sup> Paul uses this language too, “You yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night” (1Thess 5:2).

Both get it from Jesus in the Gospels. In Matthew 24, the great Olivet Discourse about the future, our Lord says, “But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be

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<sup>8</sup> Gentry, 2:714.

broken into” (Matt 24:43). We’ve seen this discourse before in Revelation. Recall that it arises because the Apostles ask the question, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matt 24:1).

My view is that what they believed was **one question** was actually **two** and Jesus therefore answers two questions. In the first, “**When will these things be,**” Jesus answers the question of the **fall of Jerusalem** which took place in 70 AD. With exacting precision, he warns the Christians of exactly what to look for so that they will not be caught off guard when the enemy finally attacks the city. It worked so well that nearly all of them left Jerusalem just prior to the final assault, while a million Jews stayed behind and were slaughtered.

But Jesus separates this question from a second, “**What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?**” In this, Jesus is not addressing merely the end of the old covenant, which was symbolically destroyed in 70 AD (though it had already been legally nullified in his death), he is addressing The End. This section about “**a thief**” comes in this *second phase* of his sermon. Now, things are obviously blurry between these two questions, and there are things

that certainly would have helped the Christians in 70 AD even if it is technically about The End, and this would be one of them. Therefore, I would argue that when Paul and Peter and John use it, they might have a near referent in mind, but there must also be one far away, still in our own future. The End of all things has not yet come to pass.

So what does it mean, “A thief in the night?” In Dispensationalism, because it is talking about the Rapture, it means that Christians cannot be caught off guard, by definition. *All Christians* are Raptured. Therefore, Jesus is not coming like a thief to them. He is coming like a thief to non-Christians. They get this from the verses right before this. “Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left” (40-41). To be taken is to be raptured, they teach. They find parallel thinking in Paul’s use of the term. “You are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief ... For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Th 5:4, 9). If this is true, then basically, Christians do not need to worry or even think or even, frankly, know about Armageddon. Only non-Christians do.

But is this really what Jesus means? What is the image of a thief coming in the night? Certainly, it is one of **someone sneaking in to plunder you**. But who is Jesus talking to in **Revelation 16:15**? Is he not talking to *professing Christians*? “Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!” How can unbelievers keep their garments on or stay awake? It doesn’t work to say that in Matthew Jesus is talking about the Rapture, but here he is talking to Jews after Christians have already been raptured. Every time this language is used, it is of the same event. There is no secret second Rapture anymore than there is a First one. All there is the Glorious Loud Trumpet Blast Public Return of Jesus Christ at the end of the age. It’s called the **Second Coming**. As we will see in Chs. 19 and 20, this terrible battle of Armageddon ends with Christ saving his church gloriously as he judges satan—the beast, the false prophet, and the evil kingdoms of this world in final destruction.

But **what about one person being left** and another being taken? Notice, Jesus doesn’t say *what they are taken for*. They could be taken ... *as plunder* to become slaves because an evil army has entered the land (**Matt 24:17-18**; **Jer 6:11**; etc.). If

this is true, then it is exactly the opposite of Rapture theology. The one watching was left behind, because he hid. The one not watching, pretending everything was fine and no enemy was on the way, was captured.

But **what about not suffering God's wrath?** Did not Jesus suffer God's wrath and die on a cross? When Paul uses that language, he is talking about **final salvation**, not temporal judgment. The warning in both places to stay awake and keep your garments on is so that you may escape final judgment through faith in the Coming Judge of the Earth. And perhaps, if you are watching, you can escape temporal judgment as well. But keeping your garments on means you **keep believing in Jesus**, you do not disbelieve, think the whole thing is, like they thought in the days just before the Flood, a bunch of religious nonsense and therefore break faith with God and live whoever you want.

Let's remember that **Jesus has used this very language already in Revelation**. It was to the fifth church, the church at Sardis, the dead church. The language is nearly identical. **"I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up..." (Rev 3:1-2)**. That's what he says here. **"The one who stays awake."** **"If you will not wake**

up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you” (3). Why would he come against his people? It is because they are not at the end of the day his people. “You have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments...” (4). Again, that’s similar language. “Keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed.” Those whose garments are clean and worn are those who heed Christ’s words, trust in his death, resurrection, ascension, and Second Coming, who keep watch over their souls and the souls of their loved ones, who stay awake, who warn others, who obey their Lord’s wishes, keep his law, repent when they fall, and get back up and continue to watch.

## Watch and Assemble

This is the message **right in the middle of Armageddon!** That’s how the structure helps us today. On either side of this, the kings and armies are assembling for battle. They are surrounding the church, as they do in Revelation 20. But here, that perspective remains hidden. The more important point is that Jesus is coming to judge the living and the dead. Armageddon is his battle!

Let's remind ourselves one more time of **what the people have done**. They have **followed Satan** by not trusting in Jesus, thereby **receiving the mark of the beast**. This leads them by default to worship the image of the beast and commit **idolatry** as they refuse to bow their knee to the Living King Jesus (**Rev 16:2**). As God's judgment's come as a just **eye-for-an-eye** wake-up call for what they deserve (**6**), they feel the wrath but "**did not repent and give him glory**" (**9**). So more comes. Still, they "**did not repent of their deeds**" (**11**) and turn to Christ who is every merciful and kind, who will not snuff out a smoldering wick or break a break an already bruised reed. **He welcomes all who come to him** in their recognition of his Lordship and their own rebellion to worship the Creator as they should. He turns none away.

But at the end of the day, there is a time coming when that will be it. As I said, all world religions understand this. Even atheists do in their apocalyptic visions of a future world destroyed by man. This day will see the final judgment of Satan and those who have followed him ... consciously or simply as unconscious slaves because they walk about in the darkness of his kingdom unable to see the light of Christ.

I want you to understand how Armageddon **shakes the very foundations of the earth itself**. This is more than some mere physical battle. This is the supernatural foe of foes breaking in for one last assault on God and his Kingdom. The deception of those days among men will be like the days before the Flood came and they will be made to do his bidding to put an end to goodness and truth once-for-all. But God stands ready, seeing it all before hand, ordaining it all to come to pass. And **his Christ is coming in judgment with 10,000 angels with him**. His people must stand the ready for that Day as if today were their last. And if they do, they will be avenged and things will be set right.

The pagans have many parts of this correct. They **see and know the evil**, at least some of it to some degree. They realize **a final battle** is coming. It's in the movies we watch, the signs we drive by, the air we breath. They know it is between **good and evil**, even if they pervert those two 180 degrees. They understand **men and gods** (angels) are involved. They comprehend that it means **destruction for a great many** and **salvation for a few**. There is something deep inside of us that yearns to believe that justice will come like Turin slaying Morgoth, like the vengeful gods getting their

just desserts, like the Perfect City standing up for light against darkness.

But this is more than a story. It is *his-story*. What they do not understand is that the Living God *has come to them*, now, in the Day of *Salvation*, before the Final Battle. He offers to all life eternal. He does this not through Vishnu or Thor, but through Jesus the King of king and Lord of lords and God of gods.

Fall before him now in faith knowing that even were you to live to see Armageddon (and who knows, you might), your victory is assured because your eternal judgment was met in the death of Christ which takes away your sins. Come to the better Assembly, the Assembly of the Firstborn—to his church (Heb 12:23), his beloved Bride, surrounded by the assembly of the holy ones in the skies (Ps 89:5-6). Praise him in the assembly of the godly (Ps 149:1). In the great assembly bless the LORD (Ps 26:12). That assembly will endure, because the steadfast love of the LORD endures forever in the assembly of his people. Our Lord himself tells you at the end of John 16, “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33).

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