

Babylon and Armageddon



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 14:8; 16:19; Isa. 52:9; Rev. 18:1–10; 16:12–16; 1 Kings 18:1–40; 1 Cor. 15:1, 2.*

Memory Text: “On her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH” (*Revelation 17:5, NKJV*).

The book of Revelation, as we already have noted, comes filled with images and language taken directly from the Old Testament. For instance, the name Babylon appears six times in Revelation. But it is not talking about the ancient kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar, which had passed from world history hundreds of years earlier. Instead, John is using Old Testament imagery to express a truth. In this case, Babylon—a massive political and religious power that had oppressed God's people—now describes the massive religious and political powers that will seek to do the same in the end times.

Something similar happens with the word *Armageddon*. The word occurs only in Revelation, but it is based on a Hebrew phrase that seems to mean “Mount of Megiddo,” a reference to a location in ancient Israel. A great deal of speculation exists about Armageddon, with many people looking for a massive military battle to take place there, in Megiddo, near the end of the world.

This week, we will look at Babylon and Armageddon and seek to learn what the Bible is telling us with these images.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 23.*

The Wine of Her Wrath

Read Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21, the six references to Babylon in the book of Revelation. Keeping in mind the story of Babylon as it appeared in the Old Testament, what do these texts teach us about Babylon as it appears in the context of last-day events?

It has been said that the Bible is a tale of two cities, Jerusalem and Babylon. While Jerusalem stood for the city of God and His covenant people all through the Bible (*Ps. 102:21, Isa. 52:9, 65:19, Rev. 3:12*), Babylon has stood for oppression, violence, false religion, and outright rebellion against God.

Think, for instance, of the tower of Babel (*Gen. 11:9*). The Hebrew word for “Babel” is the same word for the kingdom of “Babylon.” In 1 Peter 5:13, Peter sends greetings from the church in “Babylon,” which generally is understood not to mean from the ruins of the old kingdom located in today’s Iraq but from Rome itself, soon to be the church’s oppressor. This is an interesting appellation in light of the book of Revelation and the role of Rome as presented in it.

Read Revelation 14:8 and 18:3. What do these texts reveal about the malevolent influence of Babylon on the world and on God’s people?

There is no question that the power that Babylon represents, as depicted in the book of Revelation, is a greatly corruptive influence that extends across the whole world. The phrase “the wine of the wrath of her fornication” (*Rev. 14:8*) is clearly a reference to false doctrine, false teaching, and corrupt practices as well as the end results that come from them. Babylon is a force for evil that has spread to “all nations” (*Rev. 18:3*). Hence, everyone needs to take heed lest he or she be corrupted, as well.

Look around at the world today; see the corruption, the confusion, the oppression. What should these things teach us about our need to be anchored in Jesus and in His Word?

Babylon Is Fallen

However corrupt and far-reaching the influence of Babylon has been in the world, the book of Revelation teaches that one day it will all end.

Read Revelation 18:1–10. What do these verses tell us about “Babylon the great”?

The second angel’s message (*Rev. 14:8*) about the fall of Babylon is repeated here, in Revelation 18:2. It is an expression of just how corrupt this entity has become.

“The Bible declares that before the coming of the Lord, Satan will work ‘with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness;’ and they that ‘received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved,’ will be left to receive ‘strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.’ 2 Thessalonians 2:9–11. Not until this condition shall be reached, and the union of the church with the world shall be fully accomplished throughout Christendom, will the fall of Babylon be complete. The change is a progressive one, and the perfect fulfillment of Revelation 14:8 is yet future.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 389, 390.

Whether that “perfect fulfillment” now has come, only God knows. But what we do know is that, according to these texts, spiritual Babylon will one day face the judgment of God because of her great evil. “For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities” (*Rev. 18:5*). This expression reflects language from the Old Testament about ancient Babylon, as well (*see Jer. 51:9*), and means that a time of judgment is sure to come.

Of course, this coming judgment shouldn’t be surprising. After all, Babylon of old faced judgment (*see Daniel 5*). Scripture in numerous places is very clear that one day everyone will have to answer for their deeds, including Babylon. How comforting to know that as Christians we have an Intercessor in that judgment who will stand for us (*1 John 2:1; Dan. 7:22*). Otherwise, our fate might not be much better than that of Babylon’s.

How can you take comfort in the promise that all the injustice and iniquity that seems to go unpunished now will face one day final retribution by God?

Armageddon

Although most people, including many Christians, don't know much about the book of Revelation, one image or word from it has reached popular culture: *Armageddon* (see *Rev. 16:16*). Even in secular culture the word has come to stand for a final struggle in which the fate of the earth hangs in the balance. Hollywood produced a movie called *Armageddon* about a giant asteroid poised to destroy the planet. To some degree, the idea of the world's end is in the minds of secular people, as well.

Many Christians who are familiar with the book of Revelation and believe in it see the battle of Armageddon as a literal military conflict in the Middle East near the end of the world. One version has a 200 million-man army from Asia sweeping into northern Israel. Others are fixated on the various military and political conflicts in that part of the world that will, in their understanding, set the stage for the final military battle of Armageddon in the area of Megiddo.

However, the Bible gives a totally different picture. Scripture presents Armageddon as the ultimate climax—not between squabbling nations, but between the two sides of the cosmic controversy. It's a religious struggle, not economic or political, however much economic and political factors might come into play.

Read Revelation 16:12–16. From these texts alone, what can we learn about Armageddon?

First, notice just how symbolic the language is here. Spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, the mouth of the beast, and the mouth of the false prophet (references to the powers of Revelation 13; the “false prophet” here must be a reference to the land beast of Revelation 13:11). The great controversy is seen here, too, as the “spirits of demons” (*Rev. 16:14, NKJV*) go out to battle on the “great day of God Almighty” (*Rev. 16:14*). In whatever manner Armageddon will unfold, it's a worldwide conflict between the forces of Christ and Satan. It is not a local battle in the area of Megiddo any more than Babylon in Revelation is talking about events in a corner of modern-day Iraq.

Read Revelation 16:15. How fascinating that in the midst of these events, Jesus encourages us with the gospel message, with both the promise of His coming and the need to be covered in His righteousness. How does this help us to understand the spiritual nature of the battle that we are in?

Armageddon and Mount Carmel: Part 1

What, though, is this great battle of Armageddon? First, the name seems to mean “Mountain of Megiddo.” However, there is no mountain in the area known as Megiddo, but Mount Carmel was located in the vicinity. So, some scholars have seen the phrase *Mountain of Megiddo* as a reference to Mount Carmel.

More to the point, Bible students have seen the story of Elijah and the false prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel as a symbol, a type to what is going to unfold in Revelation 13.

As seen yesterday, Revelation 16:13, with its reference to the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, points back to events in Revelation 13, the counterfeit trinity that we saw in week 9.

Issues in Revelation 13 start to come to a climax in verses 13 and 14, when the second beast performs supernatural acts, even making “fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men” (*Rev. 13:13*). These events then lead to the direct confrontation between God and Satan, as well as between those worshiping the true God and those worshiping the “image to the beast” (*Rev. 13:14*).

Read 1 Kings 18:1–18. What is happening in this story that reflects some of the issues that will unfold in the final events, as seen in the book of Revelation?

In many ways, what we see here is a stark portrayal of the great controversy. Elijah states the issue very plainly in verse 18: *people have forsaken God’s law and are worshiping and following false gods*. Has not this always been the issue, regardless of the endless forms and ways in which this evil has been manifested throughout history? We are either worshiping “Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*), or we are worshiping someone or something else. In Revelation 13, instead of worshiping the Lord, people are worshiping the beast and his image. There is no middle ground. We are either on the side of God or on the side of Satan. That’s how important the issues at stake are, now and especially in the battle of Armageddon, where, as we will see in the story on Mount Carmel, the distinction becomes very clear.

Armageddon and Mount Carmel: Part 2

Read 1 Kings 18:18–40. What happens, how does the story end, and (without pushing the parallels too far) how does this story reflect what will happen on a grander scale as the great controversy climaxes at the end of time?

The battle on Mount Carmel was between Elijah, prophet of God, and the hundreds of priests of Baal. (Notice how the evil outnumbered the good.) It was a test to demonstrate who is the true God—the God who created the heavens and the earth, or Baal, just another manifestation of “the dragon” and another means by which he seeks to deceive the world (*Rev. 12:9*).

The priests prayed to Baal to send fire to burn up their bull sacrifice. They shouted from morning to noon. “ ‘Cry aloud,’ ” taunted Elijah. “ ‘Perhaps he is sleeping.’ ” (*1 Kings 18:27, NKJV*). The priests worked themselves up into a frenzy. They slashed themselves with swords until the blood flowed freely. Weary and worn, they gave up at the time of the evening sacrifice.

Elijah’s sacrifice was soaked three times, and water overflowed the trenches. Elijah prayed a simple prayer to God. God instantly burned up everything, including the stone altar and soil beneath. The power of the true God in contrast to Baal was now unmistakable.

Read Revelation 16:13; 19:20, 21, and compare these texts with the fate of the false prophets of Baal. What do we see here?

Whatever remains unknown about Armageddon, at least for now, we know the outcome: destruction of the enemies of God and vindication for God and His saints.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1, 2. Although the immediate context is different from Armageddon, what is the point that Paul is making, and why is that so relevant for us to remember, especially in light of what the future holds? See also Revelation 16:15, in which the context is definitely Armageddon. What, together, do these texts tell us?

Further Thought: “In several places in the battle of Armageddon narrative the hideous creatures and the ugly events take the back stage for a moment and a glimpse of more personal truth appears. As we have seen, one of them is Revelation 16:15: ‘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’ (NIV). This text, coming right in the middle of the one place in the Bible that actually names Armageddon, echoes many New Testament passages about personal preparation for the return of Jesus and the events of the end.

“Another such text is Revelation 17:14: ‘These will make war with the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them, because [H]e is Lord of lords and King of kings—and those with [H]im are called and chosen and faithful’ (author’s translation). Here the great war at the end engages an army of people whose primary purpose is not to destroy others with weapons, but to be faithful to their divine calling and election. This is a very different kind of battle from the ones that nations and insurgent operations still fight today. As I have said repeatedly, the battle of Armageddon is a struggle for the mind. It is also a battle for the heart—a call to heartfelt allegiance to the Lamb that was slain (Rev. 5:9, 10, 12; 13:8).”—Jon Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door* (Hagerstown, Md.: Autumn House Publishing, a division of Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2008), p. 193.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How could you help someone who believes that many of the events depicted in the book of Revelation will take place in the literal places mentioned? What approaches could help him or her to see why this is a wrong way of interpreting the texts?
- 2 As we have seen, the influence of Babylon extends all over the world. What are some of the teachings of Babylon, and how can we learn to discern what those teachings are and how to avoid them?
- 3 In the Ellen G. White reference on Monday, she said, “Not until . . . the union of the church with the world shall be fully accomplished throughout Christendom, will the fall of Babylon be complete.” Think about the phrase “the union of the church with the world.” What powerful warning is here for us?

Miracle Book Sale

by KAMIL METZ

Helen Johnston abruptly realized as she walked down a street in Battle Creek, in the U.S. state of Michigan, that she had not prayed. So the student literature evangelist paused to seek God's guidance. It was summer 2015, and she was raising money for school.

As Helen (pictured below) headed to the next door, she heard a voice say, "A man will open the door, and he needs *The Great Controversy*."

Moments later, the house door opened. A man stood there.

Helen, following the practice of seeking to make friends first, offered a health book. Then she pulled out a copy of Ellen G. White's *The Great Controversy*.

The man was intrigued by the book. He wanted his own copy, but he couldn't afford it.

Helen felt certain that God wanted him to have the book, so she offered it for free. The man shook his head. Helen asked whether he had any spare change lying around the house. The man came back with a handful of coins, but it still was not enough. He gave Helen the money but still refused to take the book.

Disappointed, Helen turned to leave. She took a few steps and tripped. The coins scattered on the ground.

Helen quickly asked the man to hold the book. After collecting the coins, she began to walk away.

The man called out after her. "Your book," he said. "You forgot your book."

Helen looked back and smiled. "It's yours to keep," she said.

He returned her smile. "You win," he said.

An hour later, Helen found herself going door-to-door in a more affluent neighborhood. As she introduced herself and was about to say her name, the woman at the door interrupted her. "It's Helen, right?" she said.

Helen was startled. She had never seen the woman before.

"I am a Seventh-day Adventist," the woman said. "This morning as I was reading my Bible I was impressed by God that Helen would come to my door.



I also was impressed that I needed to write a check for \$20 because Helen would meet a man who needs *The Great Controversy* but would not have the money to buy it."

The woman pulled out a signed check made out to the sum of \$20. She only needed to add the name of the recipient. "Who do I make this check out to?" she said.

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The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Revelation 14:8*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Learn about the final battle that will oppose the camp of God to the camp of Babylon.

Feel: Appreciate the spiritual nature of the conflict and how it also concerns his or her personal life with God.

Do: Use God's equipment to resist and fight against the enemy and thus prepare for the ultimate conflict.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Battle of Armageddon

- Ⓐ What is the meaning of the Hebrew word *Armageddon*?
- Ⓑ When and where will the battle take place?
- Ⓒ What are the identities of the opposing armies?

II. Feel: The Spiritual Battle

- Ⓐ Why is this battle spiritual?
- Ⓑ How will this battle affect your personal life?
- Ⓒ How different will this spiritual battle be from your present spiritual battles?

III. Do: Prepare for the Battle.

- Ⓐ What spiritual weapons will you need in order to survive the battle?
- Ⓑ How will the idea of a literal battle distract from the real action?
- Ⓒ How should you prepare today for the future Armageddon?

► **Summary:** The battle of Armageddon is spiritual and will oppose all the forces of evil to the camp of the kingdom of God.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Ephesians 6:10–18*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: That the battle of Armageddon is spiritual does not mean that it will be less tough and real than actual military battles: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (*Eph. 6:12, NKJV*). For the first time in history, all the forces of evil will gather and will reveal more fully their real faces and real intentions. The spiritual battle has a cosmic scope. Our present daily struggles will be intensified.

Just for Teachers: This week’s lesson is a part of our initiation to the final battle of Armageddon. The challenge is, therefore, to inform and explain the scenario of this battle, having it in mind, while relating it to our present spiritual battles. Discuss the theme of the spiritual battle, the “great controversy” as depicted in the Scriptures. Present key texts in the Old Testament and the New Testament that refer to the spiritual battle (*Numbers 24; Daniel 10–11; Matt. 26:36–42, etc.*).

Opening Discussion: Many evangelical Christians believe in a literal battle of Armageddon that will take place in Israel and involve real armies. Discuss the various evangelical interpretations that are popular today.

Questions for Discussion: Why does a literal interpretation of Armageddon, which fits the evangelical perspective, contradict the spiritual view of the great controversy? What are the arguments against the literal interpretation of Armageddon?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: The story of the Tower of Babel has remained in the memory of the biblical prophets as a paradigm for the folly of human pride. Review that story (*Gen. 11:1–9*) with the class. Bring a picture of the ruins of the Great Ziggurat of Ur (near Ali Air Base in Iraq).

For John, Babel (or Babylon) represents the evil power that wants to take God’s place. The motif of Babylon, the Greek name for Babel, runs through the book of Revelation (it is used six times, the number

associated with Babylon) and reaches its climax in the prophecy of Armageddon. Like the builders of the Tower of Babel, the evil forces gather as one to unite against the heavenly King. The great encounter ends, as in the story of the Tower of Babel, with the descent of the God of heaven and the fall of spiritual Babylon. Its fall is told in terms that recall the fall of the ancient historical Babylon.

Bible Commentary

I. The Gathering of Babylon *(Review Revelation 16:16 and Daniel 11:43 with your class.)*

The book of Revelation refers to the last event of human history as a battle of gigantic proportions, one that “gathered . . . together” all the evil forces (*Rev. 16:16*), uniting the dragon and the two beasts (*Rev. 16:13; compare with 12:17; 13:1, 11; see our preceding lesson*). This triumvirate power drags behind them “the kings of the earth” (*Rev. 16:14, NKJV*). This camp is identified as “the great city” (*Rev. 16:19, NKJV*), a name that designates Babylon (*Rev. 14:8*).

The prophet Daniel had the same vision. In his prophecy of the kingdoms (represented by a human statue), he sees at the end a great gathering of the kings of the earth (*Dan. 2:43, 44*). The same scenario reappears in his prophecy of the “great war” (*Dan. 10:1, NIV*), which concludes here also with the gathering of all the forces of the north, united with the south (*Dan. 11:40*).

According to these prophecies, the last symptoms of human history will be characterized by movements of unity. It is not clear how these movements of unity will come about. It is interesting, however, that this scenario is beginning to be staged before our eyes: all the powers of the world strive for unity to make our world one on every level—one culture, religion, economy, political system, and military complex. More and more, we tend to speak the same language, dress the same way, sing the same songs, eat the same food, and even think and believe the same way. The world has never been so interrelated. It is becoming, more and more, “one global village.”

Consider This: What are the world institutions that suggest the trend of global unity? What world institutions are clearly indicative of the mentality of Babylon? What world institutions could receive our approval, and why? What is your personal experience of the “global village”?

II. The Battle of Babylon *(Review Daniel 2:35, 45; 11:45 with your class.)*

In both of his prophecies, Daniel places the gathering of the forces of evil in opposition to the holy heavenly mountain. Likewise, the book of

Revelation positions this ultimate gathering in opposition to the “temple of heaven” (*Rev. 16:17, NKJV*); that is, also on the holy mountain, as indicated in the prefix *har* (“mountain”) of the name of Armageddon. The word *Mageddon*, the ancient name of Megiddo, conveys the memory of many conflicts (*Judges 7; 2 Kings 10:11; 2 Kings 23:29, 30*). The prophecy concerns the heavenly Jerusalem and not the earthly Jerusalem of the modern state of Israel. It does not refer to military conflicts opposing earthly armies, and it has nothing to do with the Middle East conflict, as a number of evangelical Christians believe.

The battle of Armageddon is spiritual by nature, opposing two spiritual enemies—Babylon and the heavenly Jerusalem. The camp of Babylon is represented by the three beasts: the dragon, the sea beast, and the land beast. The latter power is now called with the new name “the false prophet,” a title that confirms his role as supporter of the earthly institution of the papacy (*Jer. 5:30, 31; 23:14*) and as deceiver (*Jer. 5:13, 23:16*). The prophecy specifies that these powers use paranormal methods, the “spirits of demons,” to seduce the “kings of the earth” (*Rev. 16:14, NKJV*).

Consider This: Look at a map to situate the city of Megiddo. How far is Mount Carmel from the city of Megiddo? How do you understand the fact that there is no Mount of Megiddo? What battles of Megiddo recorded in the Bible do you remember? Why, therefore, is it impossible to have the battle of Armageddon take place on the “mount,” or even in the valley of Megiddo?

III. The Fall of Babylon (*Review Daniel 2:35, 45; 11:45; and Revelation 16:17–21 with your class.*)

In the visions of Daniel, just as in the vision of John, the denouement is the same: God comes down and destroys all the gathered forces of evil. The author of the book of Revelation describes this destruction as a division of Babylon, which is called “the great city” (*Rev. 16:19; compare with 14:8, NKJV*). The “great gathering” has, then, been crushed, just as the great gathering of the united forces of the builders of Babel was divided by language and crushed (*Gen. 11:7, 8*).

The ancient story of the fall of the historical Babylon serves as a blueprint for the future fall of the spiritual Babylon. The waters of the Euphrates are “dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared” (*Rev. 16:12, NKJV*). The Bible relates the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus, in 539 B.C., to the drying up of the Euphrates: “Who says to the deep, ‘Be dry! And I will dry up your rivers’; who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure’ ” (*Isa. 44:27, 28, NKJV; Jer. 50:38*). Ancient historian Herodotus (484–425 B.C.) testifies to that strategy: “[Cyrus] posted his army at the place where the

river enters the city, and another part of it where the stream issues from the city, and bade his men enter the city by the channel of the Euphrates when they should see it to be fordable. . . . When this happened, the Persians who were posted with this intent made their way into Babylon by the channel of the Euphrates, which had now sunk about to the height of the middle of a man's thigh.”—*Herodotus I, Books I and II*, translated by A. D. Godley (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 239.

Opening Discussion: Note the style of the past tense of the phrase “Babylon is fallen” to refer to the future event of the fall of the spiritual Babylon.

Questions for Discussion:

- ❶ Why was the fall of Babylon so important for the Jews of that time? Who is the only pagan king who was called a messiah, and why?
- ❷ What are the parallels between the fall of historic Babylon and spiritual Babylon?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: The Bible often refers to a well-known past event to speak about an event that has yet to take place. Identify a few examples of that biblical practice in the Old Testament, as well as in the New.

Application Questions:

- ❶ What pedagogical lesson can be learned from this practice of referring to a well-known past event as a way to speak about an event that has not yet happened?
- ❷ Why does the biblical prophet use the past tense to speak about a future event? What other examples of this biblical practice do you know?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The media are full of references to Armageddon. List some of them in class.

Activities: If possible, select one example, such as a song, that illustrates the fascination in the media with Armageddon. Share it with the class and discuss the diverse reasons for this trend.