

Series: Behold the Royal Lamb (a study in Revelation 19-20)

Sermon Text: 19:11-21 The Other Supper (See App for lesson, slides, and to ask questions)

I recently read about [a small protestant village](#) in the French mountains that became [an underground railroad](#) for Jewish people persecuted by Nazis. Led by the village pastor, they conducted a relentless 4-year campaign of non-violent resistance where they refused to fly the oppressors' flag while secretly hiding, feeding and preserving 3,500+ Jewish refugees. You can click links in our notes to learn more, but my point is that, with no army or bullets, they stood with unshakeable allegiance to a different King. The Nazis followed the ways of Babylon we've explored in Revelation--they ran Satan's playbook of deceit, intimidation and coercive force. In such situations, people understandably believe only 2 options exist: "*Fight fire with fire*" and "*If we can't beat them, join them.*" Jesus, however, seeks to persuade us of a 3rd way: The gospel of non-violent, peaceful resistance which outfits us in God's Armor and adorns our lives with the fruit of the Spirit! Having grown up in a Babylon-like world, we often dismiss this 3rd option **as fanciful and unrealistic, but** folks like our French ancestors and conductors of the Underground Railroad lend persuasive credibility to today's...

BIG IDEA: Believers Battle like the Lamb, not like Babylon.

Verses 1-10 began by deliberately contrasting the church and Babylon with a marriage metaphor that depicts the intimate harmony God seeks with creation. While odd for men, Revelation frames salvation as a love story where Jesus (the Lamb) is a groom who outfits the church as His bride to "*make herself ready*" for marriage. After a stunning "*first look*" at her in *19:1-10*, John learned more about the quality of our gown given **in verse 11**: *Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.* **An image of Jesus on a white horse** signaled hope to believers terrorized by the [triumphant white horses of Roman officers](#) who served the Beast and the Horns. In contrast, Christ is said to be totally *Faithful and True* (i.e., His righteous character is the basis for judgment, ensuring that creation is *justly* restored to *righteous* (right) relationships, as we saw in *19:2*. Now, I wonder, "*Does*

this text seem like Christ's 2nd coming to you?" Some say "yes", but texts like Acts 1:6-11 state that Jesus will return the same way he ascended back to heaven--on a **cloud**, not **a horse**. In fact, all Old or New Testament mentions of His return say **clouds**, never **horses** (cf. Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 24:30; Mark 14:62; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; Revelation 1:7). My point is that we often read our ideas into a text, although, this text could still inform us about "What happens when Jesus returns?", which is a question someone posted in our app that we all want to know.

We'll come back to that **after processing verse 12 which says: His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself** (some think this means "no human name can express what He is in Himself" (Gregg, 449). Regardless, it repeats the depiction of His **eyes** in **1:14** where we're also assured that Jesus **walks among the 7 lampstands** (a.k.a. **the 7 churches**). So, "What would that have meant to an oppressed audience in the 1st century or really any century?" **Verse 12 assures believers that:** 1) Jesus still walks with His churches to restore creation despite whatever monstrous, short-lived regimes pop up. 2) Christ's **many crowns** represent His global sovereignty over Satan's limited **crowns** depicted as political heads and horns in **Revelation 12 and 17**. 3) Faith lets us see the world through Christ's purifying **eyes of fire** which expose the spiritual warfare occurring behind all threats to peace.

Now, some of us grew up hearing versions of this text that read like Sci-Fi or an action movie where Jesus returns as a lethal military leader to physically slaughter millions of unbelievers in a literal valley. And to be fair, this was what Israel expected of Messiah! In my mind, Judas betrayed Jesus for not being and doing what He desired. The disciples, thus, reveal how we'll struggle to trust who Jesus is by trying to conform Him to our image. **Let's read how He differs in verses 13-16: He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.** Here, John

was quoting from a back-and-forth dialogue found in Isaiah 63:1–3 NLT: “*Who is this in royal robes, marching in great strength? ‘It is I, the LORD, announcing your salvation! It is I, the LORD, who has the power to save!’ Why are your clothes so red, as if you have been treading out grapes? ‘I have been treading the winepress alone; no one was there to help me. In my anger I have trampled my enemies as if they were grapes...Their blood has stained my clothes.’*” Ancient Judaism believed Messiah would enter the battlefield in clean white armor, charge His enemies, stomp them like grapes in a **winepress**, and emerge with a robe soaked in their **blood**. **The odd thing about John’s Revelation** is that Jesus rides out of heaven and shows up for battle in an already **blood-stained robe**! So, a discerning reader must ask: “Whose blood is that?” It seems reasonable to me that this is the blood He shed on the cross! Revelation, therefore, is correcting ancient misunderstandings of who Jesus is and how Jesus operates! While the winepress is quite real and something we should all want to avoid, the message here is that Jesus stepped into it on behalf of His enemies and emerged with stains from His own **blood**. Instead of letting creation be crushed by the consequences of our rebellion, **The Lamb** stepped into our world to ride against the dark powers with a robe stained in His own blood (i.e. At the cross, Jesus already won the war through willing, self-sacrificial death as a ransom for many).

Our text also presents us with **armies of heaven** adorned in the non-bloody wedding gowns they had previously received, connecting all this with the wedding supper in **19:1-10**. They simply **follow Jesus** who is the only one with a **sword** which oddly comes **out of His mouth**! Notice He’s also **called The Word of God**, as in chapter 1 of John’s gospel which said, “*The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.*” His only weapon, therefore, is the **sword of His mouth** (a.k.a. the Scriptures, God’s Word). Which suggests that this the only weapon anyone really needs, right? If we turn Jesus into an earthly warlord, we compromise His witness. If we think our King’s goal is to use the weapons of Babylon to eliminate His enemies, we’ll see that as permission to use Babylon's weapons against our enemies. But the Lamb does not conquer like the Empire but by the uncompromised power of His **faithful and true** character.

Let's wrap up by reading **verses 17-21** which gruesomely depicts a supper we can avoid by trusting the way of Jesus rather than the way of Babylon: *Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great." And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.* In his summary, Professor NT Wright (174-175) said: "Many in our own day are still oppressed by monstrous forces, and the local propaganda machines that promote their cause. Equally, many otherwise well-intentioned people are taken in by the lies and deceits which these systems continue to put out. Revelation 19 stands as a promise to the first, and a warning to the second. Once you understand who Jesus was and is, and the significance of the victory which he has won in his death, there can be no doubt about the final outcome. Monstrous regimes may come and go. Lies and deceits will continue to be spread. We must be on our guard. But the King of kings and Lord of lords will be victorious. In the meantime, there must be no compromise."

While apocalyptic poetry can feel lofty and odd, it unmasks a very grounded, everyday struggle: the immense pressure to conform to systems that seem successful but leave us broken. **Revelation 19** reveals 2 ways to live and their diametrically different destinies: We'll either feast with the Lamb and celebrate His grace, or we'll be consumed by the consequences of resisting His reality. The systems of Babylon are built on deception and power, but their end is a field of ruin. But we need not be afraid, nor employ the weapons of this world, if we believe our King has already won the war at the cross! Like those brave WWII villagers and Underground

Railroad conductors, Christ also calls us to a quiet, relentless rebellion of truth and love. While I hope we won't have to hide refugees from psychopaths, the world does need us to be safe havens. Wielding *The Lamb's sword* (God's Word) means courageously speaking clear, uncomfortable truths when the vulnerable could be exploit or deceived by corporate strategies. It means standing up when people made in God's image are marginalized, mistreated, or scapegoated. **In time, our church could also become known** as "*a place of righteousness among the nations*" like that mountain village was officially declared to be decades later. As said in the previous section, let's prepare for our marriage supper by putting on the fine linen of justice, kindness, and truth already granted to us by *The Lamb*. Let's pull our chairs up to His table, follow *the Rider on the white horse*, and live like the victory is already secure and that our *King of kings and Lord of lords* has the final word. And while we rejoice in the justice He will bring and the evils He will conquer, let's also pray for the conversion of unbelievers and seek to love them into the kingdom of God.

Sunday to Monday Connection: Our Big Idea today is that "Believers Battle like the Lamb, not like Babylon." Jesus, the victorious King, conquers not with the weapons of Babylon but through sacrificial love, unwavering truth, and faithfulness. Jesus' victory was secured long before the final battle, and He invites His followers to live as though that victory is already won.

- **Question:** 1) Where am I most tempted to adopt the world's way of handling conflict, success, or influence instead of Christ's? 2) What would it look like to trust that Jesus has already won the ultimate victory in a situation I'm currently facing? 3) How can my words, attitudes, or actions this week reflect the character of the Lamb rather than the values of Babylon?
- **Next Step:** As another gentle reminder, we don't have to fight our battles alone. One of the enemy's favorite tactics is isolation which makes us much more vulnerable to discouragement, temptation, and suffering. We all need godly friends--people who will walk with us through the highs and lows of life, encourage us when we're weary, lovingly speak truth when we need it, and help us keep going when we feel like giving up.
- **Note:** If you are not a Christ follower and would like to investigate further what all this might mean for you, please come talk with any of our leaders, or the person who brought you.

Takeaways to discuss with your people (in addition to the underlined questions above!):

Quotes related to this passage:

- **Minor dissent amongst Revelation readers:** Most Christians (except [*“fully realized” Preterists*](#)) have always anticipated Christ’s 2nd coming. While this text may depict the infamous Battle of Armageddon hinted at before bowl 7 in **16:16**, most [Historicist](#), Preterist, and [Symbolist](#) perspectives of Revelation think this depicts Christ’s ongoing victories achieved through the church by God’s Word since His resurrection. To be blunt, then, it’s mainly [Futurists](#) who see history ending with the armies of God and Satan in a bloody war at Armageddon, a perspective that didn’t exist until about 1900 AD. My point is that church history has overwhelmingly aligned with the perspective in this sermon.
- **Context:** “Revelation 19:1–10 constitutes a new vision, describing the result of Babylon’s downfall—the effusive praise of the righteous. God has overcome the wickedness of the world with great finality, so the most appropriate response is ‘Hallelujah!’ (19:1, 3, 4, 6). Although God’s reign has always been, in some sense, timeless, in another sense his cosmic reign reaches its fullness in the final destruction of all the forces of evil (19:11–21).” (Beale, 486)
- **Deception:** The verb *planaō* (“deceive”) plays a significant role in the New Testament and especially in Revelation, where it is translated in various ways: “deceive” (13:14; 20:3, 8, 10), “lead astray” (12:9; 18:23), “delude” (19:20), and “mislead” (2:20). Jesus repeatedly warns his followers not to be deceived by false prophets and false teaching (e.g., Mark 13:5–6; Matt. 24:4–5, 11, 24; Luke 21:8). Peter, James, and Paul also warn against the dangers of deception (e.g., 1 Pet. 2:25; 2 Pet. 2:15; James 1:16; 2:19; 1 Cor. 6:9; 2 Tim. 3:13; Titus 3:3). In his first letter, John cautions against the power of deception (1 John 1:8; 2:26; 3:7). In Revelation, the deceivers include Satan (12:9; 20:3, 8, 10), the false prophet (13:14; 19:20), Babylon (18:23), and Jezebel (2:20). Those who are deceived include the inhabitants of the earth (13:14), the nations (18:23; 20:3, 8, 10), the whole world (12:9), those who received the mark of the beast (19:20), and, on one occasion, those who claim to be believers (2:20). Richard Bauckham rightly concludes that “the most important contrast between the forces of evil and the army of the Lamb is the contrast between deceit and truth.” (Duvall, 235)
- **Revelation is resistance literature:** “One of the primary prophetic purposes of Revelation is to remind the church, both then and now, not to give in to the demands or practices of a system that is already judged by God and is about to come to its demise. But Revelation is not just a document that stands against something. Like all biblical prophecy, it promotes true worship of the one true God, expressed not merely in formal liturgy but also in faithful living, the practice of having no gods besides God. Put more positively, then, (it’s) a summons to first-commandment faithfulness, a call to faithful witness and worship in word and deed. In other words, its character as resistance literature is actually secondary to, and derivative of, its more fundamental character as worship literature, as a liturgical text.” (Gorman, 25)
- **Christ’s overcomes differently:** “Jesus himself spoke of victory—but it was not the victory one might expect, over the forces of Rome. Indeed, when

others wanted to fight Rome, he hinted strongly if strangely that this was missing the proper target. The true enemy was the dark power that stood behind Rome and all other pagan empires. Jesus spoke about fighting a battle with the real enemy, the Satan, the one who had led all humanity, Israel included, into rebellion against the creator God. And Jesus seems to have believed that the ultimate way to fight this true battle was by giving up his life. It is this that explains the military imagery of the present passage. Once more, this is symbolic language, truly pointing to a reality which lies beyond it. It would be as much a mistake to suppose (as some, sadly, have done) that this passage predicts, and legitimates in advance, an actual military battle between followers of Jesus and followers of other gods as it would be to suppose that the reality which corresponds to the monster that comes up from the sea is an actual physical creature with the heads, horns and so on described in chapter 12. The victory here is a victory over all pagan power, which means a victory over violence itself.” (Wright, 173)

- **His mysterious name:** “Though a number of names are assigned to Christ, as Faithful and True (v. 11) and the Word of God (v. 13), He possesses, additionally, a name written that no one knew except Himself (v. 12). To explain this statement, Swete writes: ‘Only the Son of God can understand the mystery of His own Being.’” (Gregg, 449)
- **King of Kings:** “Ancient Judaism continued to apply the title almost exclusively to God. Revelation applies the title consistently to Jesus (17:14; 19:16), the true Ruler over the earth’s other kings (1:5). That the name was written on Jesus’ thigh need not have puzzled ancient hearers; thus, commentators observe that the Greeks sometimes branded horses on their thighs and some wrote names on statues in Rome.” (Keener, 454-455)
- **The King’s Word:** “Mounce reminds us that ‘in Hebrew thought a word is not a lifeless sound but an active agent that achieves the intention of the one who speaks’ (e.g., Gen. 1; Heb. 4:12). In verse 16 Jesus wears a title on the part of his robe that falls across his thigh: ‘KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.’ This Old Testament title for God is now used of Christ to affirm his sovereignty over all competing earthly rulers, Caesar included (Deut. 10:17; Dan. 2:47; Zech. 14:9; 1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 1:5; 17:14).” (Duvall, 256-257)
- **Who the blood belongs to:** This could be the blood of the enemies’ armies (vv. 19, 21), Yeshua’s own blood shed on the execution-stake or the blood of martyred believers (6:9–10&N, 12:11&N). Most interpreters opt for the first. Stern, Re 19:13.
- **Christ’s reign:** “His robe is dipped in the blood of sacrifice, and his weapon is ‘the Word of God’ (19:13–15; compare Ephesians 6:17). This is a reference to Christ’s reign through the gospel. This is how he extends his kingdom and defeats his enemies (Revelation 19:16). Verse 15 picks up the language of Psalm 2, which describes God giving authority to his King to reign over the nations. Elsewhere, the New Testament sees Psalm 2 fulfilled in the resurrection and ascension. Here, Christ is accompanied by his army (Revelation 19:14), which is, as 17:14 makes clear, the missionary church. The risen Christ is given all authority over the nations, and so he sends forth

his disciples to call the nations to obedience to his teaching (Matthew 28:18–20; Revelation 2:26–27).” Chester, 153.

- **Birds feasting:** “The image of carrion birds feasting on the flesh of corpses killed in battle was a familiar one to ancient readers (1 Sam. 17:44–46; Jer. 16:4; Ezek. 29:5). Given common Greek views of one’s image enduring in the realm of departed spirits, the only fate worse than death itself was death followed by lack of burial, in which one’s remains are devoured by animals. Jewish literature also anticipated the wicked lying unburied in the end time, devoured by vultures and other animals (Sib. Or. 3.643–45). But most of Revelation’s first audience would recognize the clear and immediate source of the language of this passage: God invited beasts and birds to devour the flesh of the army that opposed him in Ezekiel 39:17–20... Revelation probably blends many horrifying images, demanding repentance without attention to chronological sequence. Thus, for example, in Ezekiel 38–39, the birds are invited to devour the slain after the rebellion of Gog and Magog; in Revelation 19–20, the sequence is reversed if one follows the order of the text. The nations are defeated in this battle (19:15; cf. 2 Thess. 1:9), yet some among the nations survive in 20:3, 8. The point here is not exact descriptions but the blending of various end-time details that invite obedience to God’s will.” (Keener, 455-456)
- **The long-awaited Messiah-Christ:** “In the Tanakh YHVH wars victoriously over his enemies (Isaiah 13, 31, 63:1–6; Ezekiel 38–39; Joel 4:9–21(3:9–21); Zechariah 14); here we see that it is through Yeshua the Messiah that he does this. Moreover, Yeshua’s work upon his return is not only to reward the righteous (vv. 6–10) but also to conquer and judge the wicked, as seen from Mt 13:41–42, 25:41–46; Ro 2:5–6, 8–9, 16; 1 Th 1:7–9, 2:8. The first time, God did not send his Son into the world to judge but to save (Yn 3:17); however, God has entrusted all judgment to the Son (Yn 5:22), and this takes place at his Second Coming. Stern, Re 19:11.
- **The 2 Suppers:** “John now uses Ezekiel’s prophesy against Gog (Ezek. 39:17–20) to depict the coming defeat of God’s enemies in terms of a feast. Everyone will participate in one of two eschatological feasts: the righteous joining in the wedding supper of the Lamb or the wicked becoming the feast at the great supper of God. God will judge the wicked from every social category (6:15; 13:16); social status or rank will not be enough to exempt the ungodly from judgment. Here and in verse 21 we see the destruction of all the wicked, not just the antichrist’s ‘army.’ They will later be pulled back from death to follow Satan in his final act of deception in 20:7–9... The evil forces are ‘gathered’ (synagō) to fight against Christ (16:14, 16; 19:19), but the epic battle never occurs. Jesus conquers simply by appearing and speaking words of judgment against his enemies (cf. the sharp sword of his word in 19:15). The Messiah’s army does not seem to participate in the actual combat.” (Duvall, 259)
- **No burial:** In Judaism, following biblical practice, the honored dead are buried. Not to be buried is a disgrace (see 2 Kings 9:34), and being torn apart by buzzards and dogs is the ultimate disgrace (note Yeshua’s figurative use of

this fact at Mt 24:28). Elijah prophesied about (Ahab), the king of the Northern Kingdom (Israel), and his wife (Jezebel) in 1 Kings 21:23–24...God fulfilled the prophecy in 2 Kings 9. Stern, Re 19:21.

Summary of the Interpretive Tension

Feature in Revelation 19	Futurist / Premillennial View (Second Coming)	Idealist / Amillennial View (Ongoing Spiritual Victory)
The Opened Heaven	A physical, visible, spatial return to earth.	A spiritual pulling back of the curtain to show who rules reality right now.
The Sword of the Mouth	The execution of physical death via divine command.	The lethal power of the Gospel to dismantle lies and convert or judge souls.
The Blood on the Robe	The blood of Christ's enemies (Isaiah 63 juice of the winepress).	The blood of Christ's own sacrifice at the cross, securing victory beforehand.
The Battle Outcome	The literal end of human history and geopolitical regimes.	The ongoing moral and spiritual bankruptcy of systems that oppose God's Word.

Summary of views on the "Battle" of Armageddon

Perspective	Is it a physical, military war?	When does it happen?	What is the "Sword of the Mouth"?
Futurist	Yes. A literal clash of armies.	The absolute end of the future Tribulation.	A lethal command that physically destroys human soldiers.
Idealist	No. It is a spiritual/theological conflict.	Continuously throughout the entire church age.	The power of the Gospel/Truth to convert or judge.
Preterist	No. It is a providential/historical shift.	Primarily fulfilled in the fall of Rome/paganism.	The spiritual authority of Christ over earthly rulers.
Historicist	No. It is a systemic political/religious collapse.	Progressively unfolded throughout European history.	The triumph of true biblical doctrine over false systems.

Summary of views on whether chapter 19 depicts the literal 2nd coming of Christ

Theological Perspective	Is Chapter 19 the literal Second Coming?	What does the Rider on the White Horse represent?
Futurist	Yes.	The literal, bodily, visible return of Jesus at the end of time to end human history.
Historicist	Yes.	The final event on the grand timeline of human history, wrapping up the church age.
Idealist	No.	A symbolic portrait of Christ's <i>current</i> spiritual rule and the power of the Gospel to conquer evil right now.
Preterist	No.	A symbolic portrait of Christ's historical victory over pagan Rome and the ancient systems that persecuted the early church.

End Time Views: To grasp how various viewpoints map out the *Battle of Armageddon*, it helps to realize that the word “*Armageddon*” is only mentioned ONCE in the entire Bible: **Revelation 16:16**. Because of this, interpreters who don’t see **Revelation 19** as a literal, final military conflict must explain: Where else is this “battle” mentioned? and What actually is it? Their answers depend on how they view the structure of Revelation. The non-futurist views (Idealism, Preterism, and Historicism) believe the book uses recapitulation (i.e. it tells the same story of the church age repeatedly from different angles, rather than moving in a straight timeline). Therefore, they argue the “*battle*” is pictured in multiple places under different symbolic imagery. Here is where the other three views believe Armageddon is mentioned, and what they believe it is:

1. The Idealist / Spiritualist View (Amillennialism)

- **Where it is mentioned:** Idealists believe Armageddon is mentioned or depicted in **Revelation 16:14–16** (the gathering of the nations), **Revelation 19:11–21** (the Rider on the white horse), and **Revelation 20:7–10** (the battle of Gog and Magog).
- **What they believe it is:** They believe these are all **the exact same spiritual reality** described with different apocalyptic metaphors. For the Idealist, Armageddon is **not** a localized military war in Israel. Instead, it represents the **cosmic, continuous, and ultimate clash between the Kingdom of God and the deceptive systems of the world throughout the entire church age.**
- **The Reality:** The "gathering of the kings" is the world’s systemic, ongoing cultural hostility toward Christ and His church. The "battle" is won whenever the truth of the Gospel dismantles demonic lies. When Revelation 19 shows

the enemy being slain by the *sword of the mouth*, the Idealist sees the ultimate victory of the Word of God over human ideologies.

2. The Preterist View (Postmillennialism / Partial Preterism)

- **Where it is mentioned:** Preterists generally believe that the events of "Armageddon" are strictly tied to the judgments outlined in the seals, trumpets, and bowls, which they argue took place in the first few centuries of the church—specifically culminating in **Revelation 11** (the fall of the city) and **Revelation 17–18** (the fall of Babylon).
- **What they believe it is:** Preterists believe Armageddon was a highly symbolic prophecy of **God's historical judgment on the ancient persecutors of the church—specifically First-Century Apostate Jerusalem (destroyed in 70 AD) and Pagan Rome.**
- **The Reality:** The Hebrew word *Har-Magedon* translates to "Mountain of Megiddo." Megiddo was a historic Old Testament battlefield where Israel's covenant-breaking kings suffered crushing defeats. Preterists argue that John used this name metaphorically to warn his 1st-century readers that God was about to bring a crushing historical defeat upon Jerusalem and Rome for "killing the prophets and the saints." For them, Armageddon is already in our rearview mirror; it was the dramatic collapse of the ancient world that allowed Christianity to rise and transform Western civilization.

3. The Historicist View

- **Where it is mentioned:** Historicists believe that the "battle" of Armageddon begins unfolding in **Revelation 16** (with the pouring out of the vial judgments) and reaches its institutional conclusion in **Revelation 18 and 19.**
- **What they believe it is:** Historicists believe Armageddon is **the gradual, providential dismantling of the corrupt political and religious monopolies of Europe** (specifically the Roman Catholic Papacy and the Ottoman Empire) that took place over centuries.
- **The Reality:** They do not look for literal tanks or soldiers. Instead, they map the "drying up of the Euphrates" (Rev 16:12) to the historical decline of the Ottoman Empire, and the "battle" to major historical shifts like the **Protestant Reformation** and the **French Revolution**, which broke the tyrannical grip of religious and imperial oppression over Europe. For the Historicist, Armageddon is God using history, geopolitical shifts, and the recovery of biblical truth to defeat institutional corruption.

The Shared Non-Futurist Conclusion: While these three views disagree on the exact historical timing, they all firmly agree on one vital point: **Armageddon is a battle won by the Lamb's methods, not Babylon's.** They reject the idea that Christians will ever pick up physical weaponry to slaughter unbelievers in a Middle Eastern valley. Whether Armageddon is viewed as an ongoing spiritual struggle (Idealism), a past historical judgment (Preterism), or a systemic societal shift (Historicism), the victory is always achieved through **the word of our testimony, the blood of the Lamb, and the uncompromised truth of God.**

Misuses of Armageddon, according to sources cited by Google Gemini

Historically, apocalyptic interpretations of Armageddon that recast the final battle as a mandate for human military participation have been powerfully leveraged to justify warfare. In mainstream Christian theology, the Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:16, 19:11–21) is understood as an exclusively divine intervention. The text explicitly states that the armies of heaven conquer by the “sharp sword” of Christ's mouth—meaning the spoken Word of God, not human weaponry. The saints are pictured as passive observers clothed in fine linen, not soldiers with swords. However, when historic movements have collapsed the timeline—blending the future spiritual victory of Christ with present geopolitical conflicts—they have turned Armageddon from a promise of divine rescue into a theological justification for human holy war. Historically, this justification has operated through three primary psychological and theological shifts:

1. **Chronological Imminence: The Time is Now.** For an Armageddon theory to justify immediate warfare, leaders must convince followers that they are no longer living in the ordinary church age but have crossed the threshold into the final apocalypse. This shifts Christian ethics from the peaceful mandates of the Sermon on the Mount to the violent mandates of cosmic execution. One example of this was **The Crusades (11th–13th Centuries)**: When Pope Urban II rallied Western Christendom to the First Crusade in 1095, it was heavily framed in apocalyptic terms. Popular preachers like Peter the Hermit convinced the masses that reclaiming Jerusalem was not merely a geopolitical dispute with Islamic empires, but the necessary trigger to clear the stage for Christ's final battle against the Antichrist. By framing their military campaigns as a literal precursor to the events of Revelation, killing the “infidel” was rebranded from a mortal sin into a righteous, purgative deed that actively prepared the world for the Kingdom of God.
2. **The Great Inversion: Human Weapons for Divine Judgments.** The most dangerous shift occurs when a movement decides that the Church is not merely the Bride waiting for the Groom, but the instrumental executioner tasked with weeding out the ungodly before Christ arrives. One example was: **The Münster Rebellion (1534–1535)**: During the radical fringes of the Protestant Reformation, an apocalyptic sect of Anabaptists led by Jan Matthys and Jan van Leiden seized control of the German city of Münster. Matthys declared that Münster was the “New Jerusalem” and that the day of cosmic judgment had arrived. Crucially, he preached that the elect were commanded by God to take up physical swords and violently exterminate the ungodly to purify the earth for Christ's return. Under this Armageddon theory, the sect abolished private property, instituted forced polygamy under pain of execution, and engaged in bloody warfare against the surrounding regional armies. They believed they were acting as the vanguard of Armageddon, executing the wrath of God with human artillery. The rebellion ended in a horrific massacre, serving as a permanent historical warning of what happens when human beings try to play the role of Christ's conquering heavenly armies.

3. **Cosmic Dualism: Dehumanizing the Enemy as The Beast.** In ordinary warfare, the enemy is recognized as a human adversary. But when a conflict is filtered through a corrupted view of Armageddon, the enemy is completely stripped of their humanity and recast as the literal, demonic “squad of the Antichrist.” If the people on the other side of the battlefield are viewed as the spiritual spawn of Babylon, diplomacy becomes impossible, and total annihilation is viewed as a religious duty. An example was The European Wars of Religion (16th–17th Centuries): During conflicts like the Thirty Years' War, both Catholic and Protestant factions frequently utilized apocalyptic propaganda. Monarchs and military commanders were routinely labeled as the “Beast” of Revelation or the “False Prophet.” By mapping the contemporary political landscape directly onto the final battle of Armageddon, soldiers were told they were not merely fighting for land or national borders; they were physically battling the forces of Satan himself. This cosmic dualism removed the ethical restraints of just-war theory and justified unprecedented levels of cruelty, civilian slaughter, and systemic devastation.

Historically, whenever an Armageddon theory demands that Christians take up physical weapons to fight unbelievers, it represents a complete hermeneutical failure. It takes the granted wardrobe of the Bride (the fine linen of righteous, loving, and just deeds) and swaps it for the blood-stained rags of Babylon (violence, coercion, and systemic slaughter). True biblical apocalypticism does not call the church to arms; it calls the church to faithfulness, reminding believers that vengeance belongs exclusively to the Sovereign Lamb, while our current calling is a quiet rebellion of love, justice, and enduring hope in the dark.

Considerations for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Single underlined sentences are for discussion, while key points are double underlined.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

- [5 Strategies for Reading Revelation](#) from the Bible Project (the first 17 minutes is GOLD!)
- [Heaven and Earth Theme](#) from the Bible Project
- [Other super helpful Revelation summaries](#) from the Bible Project
- [How Revelation mimics ancient Olympic games](#) by Marty Solomon

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