

Lesson # 53 The Sixth Bowl Judgment Revelation 16: 12-16

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Revelation 16: 12-16 (ESV)

¹²The 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. ¹³And 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. ¹⁴For 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. ¹⁵("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!") ¹⁶And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

I. The Drying Up of the Euphrates v. 12

This 6th Bowl Judgment is really a prescription for what is finally described in Rev. 19:21-21 – the final battle, the battle of Armageddon. The first stage of that preparation is the drying up of the Euphrates River, and notice that it is water that dries up, not blood, so the effects of the 3rd Bowl have now dissipated.

This river is called ‘the great river’ in Rev. 9:14 and was earlier involved as the geographic location of the 4 demons in the 6th Trumpet that unleashed a 200 million strong horde of demonic horsemen to terrorize and kill people. This river has as its’ source the mountains of Ararat in modern day Turkey, and flows some 1,800 miles to the Persian Gulf. During the 4th Bowl Judgment, the intense heat of the sun would have melted much of the snow cap & glacial ice on Ararat’s summits, thus intensifying the flow of water in the Euphrates, which John MacArthur postulates may wipe out many bridges, making the reason for this aspect of the judgment necessary and sensible. ①

Throughout history, this river has created a natural boundary between the west and east in that region. It formed the eastern boundary of Solomon’s kingdom, & the NE limit of the land promised to Abraham in Gen. 15:18. It varies from 3 yards to 1,200 yards wide and from 10 to 30 feet deep, so fording it with an army on foot or on horseback would be a formidable task. Due to the widespread destruction described thus far in Revelation, it is entirely plausible that little if any modern technology has survived with which to make modern war. This battle is headed west, from the east towards Israel.

This drying up of the great river is said “to prepare the way for the kings of the east.” So we know the direction the attack is coming from and to. It is an assembly of nations, because “kings” is plural. As we have already observed, it is very unlikely that this mustering is the army described in Ezekiel 38-39, although some try to make a case for that – cf. Lesson # 41.

We are not told here how strong this army led by these kings is. There were 200 million (probably demonic) in Rev. 9:16, but no number is given here. The number is likely significant however, and could amount to almost the total remainder of the wicked (at least the ones on that continent) left alive at this point.

At any rate, the river is somehow dried up and access to the west is now possible with this barrier gone. Although this looks very attractive and fortunate to the Antichrist & False Prophet who lead this army (Rev. 19:19-20) and the other kings, God supernaturally (as He did in Ex. 14:23-28) dries up the water to allow this army to pass through. However, whereas their intention is to make war (Rev. 19:19) against God & His saints in Israel, God is using their own sin blinded hatred of God to gather them together where their destruction is simple and easily demonstrated.

II. The 3 Frog-Like Spirits vv. 13-14

Just as the Pharisees and Scribes hurried among the crowds gathered as Jesus was on trial before Pilate to inspire them to cry out for Jesus' crucifixion, and to release Barabbas, there is an influence at work here as well. John describes ugly demonic activity which becomes an impetus for the armies to gather and to advance against Israel. Why Israel? Where else does man go to fight against God? Attack Israel and God will show up to fight, and Satan knows it. Although Antichrist controls Jerusalem and Babylon, he also leads the world. Man couldn't get the Tower of Babel to reach heaven and now this army – no matter how huge – could gather and advance against God's people remnant of people, but how do they intend to reach and destroy God? This is the folly of sin riddled brains! ②

The source of these odd, frog-like demonic spirits is from Satan, Antichrist & the False Prophet – the unholy trinity – out of their mouths. Now, this is not a literal spewing out of their mouths but more likely has to do with their spoken authority to empower these demons to accomplish the task.

Do they look like frogs? Not likely, but their character is slimy, vile and reptilian; cold-blooded and unclean (which frogs are described as in Lev. 11:10,41). They have a delusive influence which reminds us of the demons' lying spirits who draw King Ahab into battle and his death in **I KGS 22:19-22**. These 3 demons will likely have more than persuasive powers – they will be able to perform signs and wonders to convince the skeptical of their powers, so the people will believe they have a chance of success.

According to **Rev. 17:12-14**, there will be 10 nations involved in this battle, and they allow themselves to be placed under the headship of Antichrist for a short time, and as a result of the demonic influence, they are said to be of one mind. Their intention is likely to put an end to the judgments, not seeing that they

themselves are the object of the final judgment. Notice **Joel 3:2,9-13; Zech. 14:2-3; Psalm 2:1-4**. Little do they know that all their plotting and scheming & preparation for war, along with the fortuitous drying up of the river barrier, spells not their victory, but their ultimate demise. There will be no battle, simply a gathering with intent, followed by consummate and wholesale destruction by Jesus Christ in Rev. 19.

III. I Come Like a Thief

v. 15

This seems like an odd verse to be interjected here in the text. It almost seems out of place and in fact has been placed in parentheses to show it as a sort of commentary by John of what he has just recorded. It appears that this is a verse of encouragement placed here by the Holy Spirit so that those who are believers and desperately hanging on to the end, trying to stay alive until Jesus returns – will be bolstered up and reminded that Jesus' return is just around the corner!

This phrase or at least the gist of it with Christ coming as a thief, is also found in other passages – **Matt. 24:43; LK 12:39** – One whose coming will overtake those who are not careful to watch for Him. The church at Sardis was also warned – **Rev. 3:3** – to wake up from their spiritual deadness or he would come like a thief, and in II Pet. 3:10 & I Thess. 5:2,4, the Day of the Lord is said to come like a thief.

A popular evangelistic movie of the 70's (part of a series of 3) was entitled, "Thief in the Night", and played off of this phrase as referring to the Rapture, but that is not what is in sight here. This has nothing to do with the Rapture. It may be a final warning to those who would gather against God, but the blessing that follows (the 3rd of 7 'beatitudes' in Revelation[Ⓢ]) is more of a message to the saints to persevere, to stand strong, to stay awake because He is coming soon – it is days away. "Blessed is the one who stays awake" – II Tim. 4:8; Titus 3:11-13. An important perspective can be gleaned from **Matt. 24:36-51; 25: 1-13 & 14-30**. Be ready – live righteously – be watching for Him.

③

Only those who keep their garments on, who cover their nakedness – and by this meant spiritual nakedness – will be prepared rather than ashamed at His coming. Notice **Rom. 13:14**; and **I JN 2:28**; and **Eph. 6:10-18**. This passage in Ephesians, so true of our daily need to battle against the forces of evil will be especially appropriate as Christ's return is imminent and Satan's last gasp is in full bloom. We cannot do it on our own – that is tantamount to being naked and walking about in shame. Rather, we are to be clothed in the righteousness of our Saviour, which is imputed to us when we are saved.

IV. Armageddon / The Gathering

v. 16

After this (verse interlude, John brings us back to the description of events). "They (the demons) assembled them (the armies) at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon". Har-Magedon" in Hebrew means Mt. Megiddo, but there

is no known mountain called this specifically, but this can mean “hill country”, and probably refers to the hills surrounding the Plain of Megiddo, 60 miles north of Jerusalem. ④

This plain has been the site of many battles (200 plus) over the course of history and the nearby Plain of Esdralon (or the Valley of Jezreel) has been involved as well. These plains will be the focus of this final battle, which will cover the entire length of Israel as far south as Bozrah (Ias. 63:1). The battle will not last long, and the resultant slaughter of the wicked armies will result in what Rev. 14:18-20 describes – 200 miles of blood splattered 4 feet high! The victory of Christ comes as He returns to rescue His remnant – Rev. 17:14; 19:15-21; 17:16-17.

This preparation as the 6th Bowl paves the way for the 7th and final Bowl, which brings that last judgment and the return of Jesus Christ to earth.

I think the battle of Armageddon is probably the most misunderstood aspect of the end times prophecies. The media and numerous books tend to see it as a battle that could occur anytime and will start the action which results in the end of the world. Some of this confusion for theologians arises from placing Ezekiel 38-39 in the position of Armageddon as described here, but I do not believe that Ezekiel passage is describing this battle.

Now that we've seen the battle in its' biblical context, we realize that it stands at the very edge, at the very end of the Tribulation and Christ's return will quell this final rebellion with the “sword of His mouth” – IOW, with a word! ④

Next lesson – Lesson # 54 Rev. 16:17-21 The Seventh Bowl

④ The other 6 are: 1:3; 14:13; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14