

## Revelation Bible Study #40

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Revelation 16:8-16

**8** The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. **9** They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.

**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 **11** and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

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

### Introduction

The first three bowls of wrath which were poured out had a clear connection with the Exodus, being identical with some of the plagues which were inflicted on the Egyptians. The next three take something of a departure from this theme so as to emphasize the stiff-necked nature of humanity and the dramatic turn which history takes upon itself. The Apostle's point is that the nonbelievers shall not repent, nor even *care* to repent, until it is too late. This central message, repeated in the preceding bowls before discussion of Armageddon, is the key to understanding the message.

### Vs.8-9

**8** The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. **9** They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.

The seventh plague on Egypt was hail and fire falling from the sky.<sup>1</sup> Since the damned are under a sentence of *burning* for their refusal to believe, no hail is provided with the fourth bowl's plague. Only fire remains as a precursor to their ultimate fate in the lake of fire. But when the hail and fire pelted Egypt, Pharaoh had a moment of clarity by which he granted the Israelites a departure; it was only short while before he changed his mind and hardened his heart once more. Unlike Pharaoh, the people scorched by this plague respond immediately by cursing the Name of God all the more, making them *worse* than Egypt's ruler.

We ought not be surprised by the ugly reaction of the world to this plague. There is a kind of earthly logic being portrayed here, understandable despite its illegitimacy. If a policeman warns a thief that he must stop stealing, even if the thief is not stealing anything of his the message is clear and true; nonetheless, if the policeman who warned the thief then strikes the thief with a baton, the thief will perceive the policeman to be an *enemy*. So it is with the nonbelievers. They hear the warnings from God that come from the Church and the angels, but do not perceive that this world belongs to God and

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 9: 13-35

has God's Law imposed on it. To them, the plagues and suffering which are inflicted on them do not mean that they are called to repentance; instead they simply perceive God to be a *bully* that hurts them for no discernible reason. A man might be caught in a prostitution sting, end up in jail, and in the end he is likely to curse the judge and the law because he “wasn't hurting anyone;” so it is with the nonbelieving world, which despises God because they disbelieve any sort of accountability to Him.

### **Vs.10-11**

**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 **11** and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

The ninth plague inflicted on Egypt was darkness, while the Israelites had light.<sup>2</sup> Here, the darkness is inflicted on the beast which comes from the water, the world system that is here presented as a “new Egypt” the way the Church is the new Israel. Thus it is the same people being inflicted who were inflicted with the boils – their religious leaders being unable to stand before the truth. Now they are inflicted with a kind of spiritual darkness that brings about great confusion, while the Church is spared from this affliction. After all, Solomon remarks that the wise man “has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness;”<sup>3</sup> only now, on account of this plague, the nonbeliever is shown to be the fool – but not only shown, also *made* foolish since their illegitimate religions provide them with nothing!

### **Vs.12-16**

**12** 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. **13** 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. **14** 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. **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!”) **16** And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

The Battle of Armageddon is easily misunderstood, for it is easy to perceive it as a single future event just before Judgment Day. Let us not forget that St. John is still discussing a matter of *signs*,<sup>4</sup> keeping us from seeing it in either a preterist or futurist view if we want to maintain hermeneutic consistency. This is especially important since the Apostle spends so little time discussing it that virtually no details are given regarding any such battle – because none is shown happening in the text!

The Euphrates is likely connected to an earlier prophecy which speaks of angels bound there until they are released to slaughter a third of mankind.<sup>5</sup> There too it is referred to as the “great river Euphrates,” connecting it to the promises given to Abraham and the conquest of Canaan.<sup>6</sup> This connects the passage typologically to the *conquest* of Canaan, which means that the kings from the east are gathered, possibly not for battle but for conversion. They come before the deceptive frogs are unleashed, suggesting many from the East convert (which historically has been the case at least in terms of the Near East).

The arrival of frogs recalls the second plague before the Exodus,<sup>7</sup> only this time they are made

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2 Exodus 10:21-29

3 Ecclesiastes 2:14

4 Revelation 15:1

5 Revelation 9:13-15

6 Genesis 15:18, Joshua 1:1-5

7 Exodus 8:1-15

to come from the devil, world, and false teachers. The spiritual landscape of the nonbelievers is depicted as being so decrepit that they produce their *own* plagues with which to further afflict themselves. This is seemingly in response to the way being made for the “kings of the east” to be brought to the land of conquest; a historicist reading of the text would point to the rise of arch-heresies like islam as an example of disbelief being shored up in the Near East. Nevertheless, such things have happened multiple times in history, especially in the East – as with the various ruinations of Christian movements in China and Japan. These deceptive spirits lead astray masses of people and turn them against God, hence being brought *together*.

One must be careful to note that these kings and nations are assembled for the *purpose* of battle. St. John is not saying that one *actually occurs*. While indeed there is a longstanding *conflict* between the hellbound and the saints, the Day of the Lord seems to interrupt what *would* be a true global total war as depicted in futurist literature. We can tell as much because Christ interjects that He comes *as a thief in the night*, which pre-empts any possibility of an event by which people can point and say “this is the definitive sign of the End.” Christ is concurring with St. Paul's characterization of the Parousia,<sup>8</sup> which is in harmony with His own previous characterization of it as sudden and unexpected.<sup>9</sup> If anything, the Armageddon narrative is best understood as the battle *that will not be*, since men will be proclaiming peace and safety before Christ returns for Judgment.

The Hebrew phrase translated “Armageddon” is pronounced (by virtue of the Koine apostrophe mark) “Har Megiddon.” With “har” meaning mountain<sup>10</sup> and “megiddo” meaning a gathering,<sup>11</sup> quite literally translates to “Mount of Assembly.”<sup>12</sup> Since the only mountain mentioned in Revelation thus far is the Heavenly mount Zion, this suggests that all of humanity is gathered and prepared for what will become Judgment Day. The passages which follow describe it as such, with a final, glorious defeat of evil.

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8 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

9 Matthew 24:36-44

10 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/2022.htm>

11 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/4023.htm>

12 <https://biblehub.com/greek/717.htm>