

## **Sermon 48: Revelation 16:12-21: The Seven Bowls: Part Two**

### **OUTLINE**

Armageddon

The end

### **INTRODUCTION**

The battle of Armageddon is a famous notion found in the portion we are considering today that has caught the imagination of many people. The typical picture that we have in our minds due to the popular dispensational teachers we have all heard is a picture of a confederation of nations united to wipe out Israel. In modern times countries like Iran with their nuclear program and their hate for Israel have been an apparent confirmation of this sort of notion. But I hope to show you that all our cinematic literalistic approach are wide of what actually intends to convey by this very encouraging portion. The message of the battle of Armageddon is the same in the words Christ said to Peter, that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church in Matt. 16:18. Christ forewarns us in His mercy that things are going to get more difficult towards the end, even hopeless. The devil will in the end be able to unite the world against the church. However, Christ will come a rescue us.

The portion that we have before us which talks about the battle of Armageddon is the only reference in the NT to that particular place, 16:16. This battle is mentioned several times in the book of Revelation. In 11:7 we have a very succinct account summarising the beast who rises up to kill the two witnesses who represent the church, 'And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them.' The portion before us, 16:12-16, adds more details with regards to the devil's influencing of the nations and it includes a call to faithfulness. This perspective is emphasizes the darkness lined up against the church and our responsibilities when it comes. In Rev. 19:19 we have another perspective on the battle but looming large over it all is the Rider on the White Horse who comes in unbeatable power and conquers the enemies of the church. And finally we understand Rev. 20:7-9, where Satan is released and no longer hindered from deceiving the nations, he influences the nations to one final united effort to wipe out the church which is overcome by the coming of Christ. We have 4 windows into this one event; each one is a puzzle piece which adds information to our picture. The first two emphasize the church as a victim, against great odds and our need for faithfulness in difficulty; the last two remind us of our conquering King, the inevitable victory and the end coming with the church being snatched from the jaws of defeat. Our portion paints for us a picture of the satanic conspiracy to wipe out the church.

### **Armageddon**

Our vision begins with a geographic location, v12, '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.' Remember that our method is not to read these visions as historical prophecy, they are in the apocalyptic genre and are using loaded theological symbols to make a point.

Just as Babylon is not literally Babylon but a symbol of idolatrous oppression, and just as Sodom and Egypt have been used to indicate a spiritual truth, 11:8, likewise the Euphrates is not a geographic clue to where things are going to happen. The River Euphrates was originally promised as the northern border of the promised land God would give to Israel Deut. 11:24. This was fulfilled in the conquests of David, but when Israel was disobedient it became the northern border from which northern armies of judgement would come to punish Israel. And just as the Nile became associated with the power of Egypt so the Euphrates became associated with Babylon.

If you get on line you will hear all sorts of forecasting about how water shortages in the Muslim world will result in them blaming Israel and an army of 200 million thirsty Muslims marching on Israel. This helps us to miss what the significance of the drying up of the Euphrates meant in the OT and the time of writing. In this vision it appears that the drying up of the Euphrates leads to the armies amassing against God's people. Please notice that once again the church is portrayed in Israelocentric terms. Just as the church was described as the trampled temple, now in this vision it is being portrayed in the familiar OT images of an invasion of Israel.

In the first century there was a great fear that the Parthians would invade the Roman Empire, the Euphrates was a natural deterrent to this happening. The drying up of the river would enable an invasion. But more familiar to the saints would be its significance from the OT. The drying up of the Euphrates was in fact how Cyrus invaded Babylon and conquered it. The drying up of the Babylon may mark the beginning of a crusade against God's people, but there is a sting in the tail, this is how God overcame Babylon, and even Egypt and Pharaoh. This is an ominous sign of judgement against Babylon not a wonderful way of attacking God's people.

The kings from the east are symbolic of the kings of the whole world mentioned in v14.

V13-14, '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.' We see in this picture the three enemies of Satan and the two beasts working together to unite the kings of the earth for battle against God's people. We are told that in the end times the man of lawlessness will be at work through lies and deceptions, 2 Thess. 2:7-11, 'For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, 10 and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, 12 in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.' We must remember that this is all under God's sovereign control.

In v15 we have the call for faithfulness, '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!")' we have been told of massive forces aligned against God's people, there will be much against us, we will have the enemy of force, deception and seduction all lined up to overcome us. But we must not give in; we must not entertain the notion of giving in even temporarily, for Jesus could return at any moment. Like a thief in the night we will be surprised and must be ready and watchful. We are warned to be awake, on watch, at our post, armed and ready to respond. We are not to be lulled to sleep. We are to be clothed with the garments of purity, holiness, and faithfulness.

Now there are several things we are told about this battle. We are told that it is a case of the world against the church. As from Eden and Cain and Abel we will see but in an intensified way the battle of the ages between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent in a final confrontation.

We are told that the battle is 'on the great day of God the Almighty.' This is the day of His coming, the day He comes to put away all His enemies, and to right all wrongs. The battle mentioned in these passages has the definite article expecting the readers to identify the battle of battles mentioned in passages such as Joel 2:11; Zeph 1:14; Zech 14:2-14.

We are told where the battle will take place, v16, 'And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.' This battle is said to be fought in a place called Har-magedon 16:16, the literal rendering of this is mount of Megiddo. If this is the case then a literal interpretation becomes problematic. 'Megiddo was itself an ancient city and Canaanite stronghold located on a plain in the southwest region of the valley of Jezreel or Es-draelon. Although situated on a tell (an artificial mound about 70 feet high; others say it was anywhere between 130-200 feet), it can hardly be regarded as a mountain! The valley of Megiddo was the strategic site of several (more than 200, according to some estimates) significant battles in history (see Judg. 4:6-16; 5:19; Judg. 7; 1 Sam. 29:1; 31:1-7; 2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Chron. 35:22-24). It makes sense that the vicinity would become a lasting symbol for the cosmic eschatological battle between good and evil.' Like Babylon and the Euphrates it is a symbol.

This battle is not a localised struggle for Israel but the final clash after the release of satan that will bring in the end. This is the same battle of Rev. 19 and 20. Amillennialists believe that there are three texts that describe Armageddon, the final battle where Jesus returns to earth with the hosts of heaven to destroy His enemies, 16:12-16; 19:17-21; 20:7-10. Each gives a unique perspective on the same event. Chapter 19 focuses on Christ's judgement on the beast, his followers and the false prophet; and chapter 20 on the judgement of satan; in chapter 16 the enemies are the kings, captains, mighty men and all other types of men. The parallel reading of the battles is further strengthened when we see that 19:17-18 uses imagery found in Ezek. 39:4, 17-20 which speaks of the battle against Gog and Magog, yet Gog and Magog are mentioned in the battle in 20:7-10. (some Dispensationalists continue to see Gog, the so called prince of Rosh as the leader of modern day Russia, that Meshech is a reference to Moscow, and Tubal is the province of Tobolsk. This has been shown to be false since 'Rosh' means head or chief but the word Russia derives from a Scandinavian word 'rus' introduced into Ukraine in the middle ages. And Meshech and Tubal have been attested as Mushku and Tabal areas in Turkey not Russia.)

There are also linguistic parallels between the three wars. We see the use of 'the war' in all three, using the definite article. We also see repeat phrases such as 'to gather them unto war' (16:14, 20:8). It is identical in the Greek 'sunagagein autous ein ton polemon.' Premillennialists see 16 and 19 as Armageddon but not 20, however the evidence points to a recapitulation of the same war. R Fowler White writes:

'If we are expected to interpret the revolts in Revelation 19 and 20 as different episodes in history, we would hardly expect John to describe them in language and imagery from the same episode in Ezekiel's prophecy. On the contrary, John's recapitulated use of Ezekiel 38-39 in both 19:17-21 and 20:7-10 establishes a prima facie case for us to understand 20:7-10 as a recapitulation of 19:17-21. If 20:7-10 is indeed a recapitulation of 19:17-21, then 20:7-10 narrates the demise of the dragon (Satan) at the second coming, while 19:17-21 narrates the demise of the beast and the false prophet at the second coming. Any other interpretation on how to relate these two judgement scenes, both of which are modelled on Ezekiel 38-39, will have to bear the burden of proof.'

Whatever the final confrontation looks like it will be worldwide, it will look hopeless for the church, we are to be faithful no matter what, and being informed by the other texts that speak of this same battle, it will end with the deliverance of God's people.

## **The end**

The seventh bowl moves to the end of all things, we are not given a sight of Christ but a series of images that show God judging the wicked.

V17, '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!"' just as Christ pronounced the end of judgement on the cross Christ announces the end of the war.

V18, '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.' The end comes with the visitation of God, the images here remind us of what the Israelites experienced when God descended upon Mount Sinai.

V19, '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.' There are four enemies that need to be judged in Revelation, the devil who will be judged in Rev. 20, the two beasts, Babylon, and those who bore the mark of the beast. Here we have the judgement upon Babylon and those with the mark. The next two chapters will go into greater depth on this single verse.

V20, 'And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found.' We have another indication that this is indeed the end time judgement because of the effects on the universe. This is very similar to 20:11.

V21, '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.' A tremendously severe plague of hail like poured out on the Egyptians is poured out.

What we take away from this verse is the preparation for a terrible conflict that is to come, and especially v15, that we remember He can come at any time, that we must be alert, and we must not be naked but clothed in holiness.