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## ***Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation***

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### **Revelation 16:12-21: “The Final Bowls of God’s Wrath”**

**General idea:** Now, the rest of the judgment bowls are poured out. The sixth angel pours his out upon the Euphrates River and it dries up, giving an open passage for the armies of the east to march on. Then, evil spirits come from the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, and instigate war. These are the ones who manipulated the political powers of the earth to battle against the Lord, thinking they could prevent judgment with their feeble military might and pride. Now, Jesus Himself speaks, saying, *I will come like a thief, unexpectedly. Be blessed all those who hold to faith and watch for Me and not defile themselves with the filth of sin or expose themselves to the evil manipulators or find themselves ashamed of their faith in Me.*

The nations gather for war at *Armageddon*. Then, the seventh angel pours out his bowl into the air and shouting that it is all finished. Thunder and lightening, earthquakes, and a great hail storm rumble far greater than ever before in history. The city of Babylon is split into three pieces and falls to rubble for its sin. The judgments continue as mountains collapse and islands disappear into the deep. What do the people and armies do? The people remain defiant and wicked, and instead of repenting as they had each time before, they curse God!

**Vs. 12-21, Contexts:** This passage closes the cycle of judgments, and the imagery tells how the world is set-up for the Second Coming of Christ (Is. 51:17-22; Jer. 25:15-29; Lam. 4:21; Ezek. 23:31-34; Hab. 2:16; 2 Pet. 3:9-15; 1 John 2:28; Rev. 3:1-6; 14:10; 15:1; 16:19)! In contrast, this is also about how God cares for His faithful and vindicates us from those who do evil and oppress us. These images are not meant to terrify us, but to show us how God works; then, we can beware and defend ourselves by exercising the precepts found in this letter as the early church did prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

God's is totally fair! His judgments are pure and righteous; there is no fault or wrong with Him or His plan. Those who sin do so willfully, and when they refuse His grace and redemption they get what they want—His judgment (Psalm 97:2). Humanity has no right or argument to accuse or fight against God. Yet, within His judgments are His love and promises for those who are faithful; His love even extends in Judgment by giving the wicked what they want—separation from Him and His goodness. This is a call for the wicked to take heed and repent—or else. This is also a call for us to be ready for His glorious and wondrous return!

### **Word and Phrase Meanings:**

- *Euphrates* was a symbol for defeat like Napoleon's great defeat at Waterloo, and an image of drying up as the Red Sea did. This was the border of Rome to Parthian;

where Armenia was located was also the border. If something disrupted the flow, such as drought or catastrophe, great armies could cross easily; if not, it was a slow, audacious crossing, on rafts. This was the area where Cyrus and the Persians conquered Babylon in 536 B.C. and set the stage for the Jews' second exodus back to the Promised Land. Cyrus diverted the flow of the river so his armies could cross. This maneuver was considered an impossibility and hence, the place was not guarded. The Babylonians were surprised—*caught with their pants down*—as Cyrus sneaked into the great city where the river flowed partly underground. David did something similar when he conquered Jerusalem (Ex. 14:21-22; Josh. 3:9-17; 4:22-24; 2 Sam. 5:1-8; Rev. 9:14; 17:15-18:24).

- *Was dried up to prepare* refers to no delay—easy passage for an army in contrast to the Euphrates which was also a symbol for difficulty. This also is an image of the exodus and restoration as the parting of the Red Sea or the Jews leaving their Babylonian captivity and returning to Israel. It is an image of restoration for the faithful and military oppression for the wicked.
- *Kings from the East*. Most assume this means invaders from anywhere east of Israel, and it well could be. Others see this as "fallen angels" However, for a first century Jew, this clearly meant the Parthians who were the most feared enemy of Rome and directly in their path was the province of Asia Minor and the churches there.
- *Three evil spirits/devils* gives an image from the apocalyptic book, *2 Baruch*, and tells of demons that cause havoc prior to the end of days. It refers to demons and how they can be God's agents to do His bidding and judgment (James 2:19).
- *Frogs* were images of evil or what is bad and wrong, as they are "unclean" animals, and also an allusion to the plagues of Egypt. Popular thinking then was Nero would be reincarnated as a frog for his sins. This can also mean deception that tricks people to seek evil and not good (Ex. 8:5-7; Lev 11:10; Luke 10:18-19; apocalyptic book *War Scroll* from the Dead Sea Scrolls; 4 Ezra).
- *Miraculous signs* refers to deception and false prophets (Deut. 13:1-3; Matt. 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:9; Rev 19:20)
- *Kings of the whole world*. Perhaps a different set of people from kings of the east; these are the armies who seek to wage war even against God (1 Sam. 8:4-18; Rev. 6:15; 19:11-21).
- *Great day of God* means God's judgment will be complete and perfect and not have any social class or economic barriers to it. God vindicates us! It is judgment time for those people who are unjust and evil oppressors (Rev. 13:13; 19:11-21).
- *Gather/assemble them for the battle*. This was a metaphor for Judgment. The nations of earth actually think they can battle God! It is a scene for the evils of the

world to fight against God metaphorically as we all do from time to time, or to the extreme of cursing God till you die. This is also an image of God confronting the forces of evil, the battle against of good versus evil, our personal battle of sin. This is also, in context to the Seven Churches, our personalities, ways, pride, and agendas converging and conflicting for the battle for the Church—His ways or ours in our lust for command and control of His Church. This, of course, is also the reference to a future, perhaps, actual eschatological battle, that is prepared for and staged just before Christ returns (Ex. 15:2; Is. 43:9; Joel 3:2-11; Zeph. 3:8; Ezek. Chaps 38-39; Rev. 2:10-13; 6:12-17; 17:13-14; 19:11-21; 20:7-10).

- *Great day of God Almighty day of the Lord.* *Almighty* refers to God's omnipotence and His "All," as in supremacy and preeminence. As a phrase, this was also a metaphor for Judgment (Amos 5:18-20; 2 Cor. 6:18; 1 Thess. 5:2).
- *Come like a thief.* A popular image of the last days, this refers to being prepared because one does not know when such things will come about. What are we to prepare with? Philipians 1 tells us, by faith and maturity! It is not by infighting and speculation!
- *Stays awake* means that the guards, at their post, protected people, but could not if they fell asleep.
- *Keeps his clothes with him* means vigilance and preparedness, and a representation of shame. Most people in that culture slept in the nude when it was warm, but would be horrified to be seen that way in public; to run out of your house naked would be great shame, even if chasing a thief (Gen 3:7; Is. 47:3; Ezek. 16:37; Hab. 2:16; Eph. 6; Rev. 3:3, 18).
- *They gathered.* This theme is deeply rooted in Old Testament prophecy; God will gather them to judgment for their own self destruction. This is also a reinforcement that God is the head of the armies (1 Sam. 17:45; Is. 13:4; Jer. 50:29; Joel 3:2-11; Zeph. 3:8; Zech. 12:3; 14:2).
- *Armageddon.* This is the only place in scripture that this term occurs. Today, this is a popular image of a great climatic battle—WW III and the end of all things. It means extreme conflict and judgment, a representation of the overthrow of Satan and evil by God; thus, it is not necessarily a geographic reference. In the first century, it was a Hebrew transliteration (Har-Magedon) meaning "the gathering place of the crowd" for the "mount of Megiddo," which was actually a plain near Jerusalem's southern border, with a small up-rise that was a lookout and later became a fort. This was significant in ancient times as it was the key intersection for a small corridor that was the main road near the coast as an alternative to a more difficult road through the mountains and desert. It was also the "Road to Damascus." This was the key junction of trade among Egypt, Europe, Mesopotamia, and the rest of the East and Africa, all coming through this narrow passageway. This mount overlooks the valley of Jezreel, called the "Plane of Esdraelon" in John's time, where massive armies

would converge and battle it out, as they did when the Barbarians and others engaged Rome's interests in Israel. Thus, this image was well known and experienced. This is a key military outpost; whomever controlled this mount controlled the valley and thus controlled trade and wealth of the then known world! This is an image of command and control! Who has command of you and your church? Is it pride, trends, and agendas, or is it God and His preeminence? This was the prime message to the Seven Churches (Judges 5:19; 6:33; 1 Sam. 31; 2 Kings 9:27; 2 Chron. 35:20 -25; Is. 24; Joel 3:2; Zech. 12:8-14; Rev. 13:1; 17:1-9; 19:11-21)!

- *Into the air.* In context, this perhaps means a “theophany,” an explicit manifestation of God, or, at the very least, a reference to God's Glory (Ex. 19:16; Rev. 4:5).
- *It is done.* References John 19:30.
- *Earthquake.... every island fled away.* An image of the end of the age. But, those in Christ the ROCK will not be shaken (Matt. 7:24-25; Heb. 12:26-28; Rev. 6:12-14; 11:13; 20:11).
- *God remembered Babylon.* This is not of favor, rather of vindication and wrath. This is God's response to the cries of the oppressed. This image is the key metaphor associated with Christ's Second Coming (Psalm 137:7; Is. 51:22-23; Rev. 14:9-10; 19:11-21).
- *Mountains could not be found.* This means the incredible, vast devastation and the end of the world as we know it. These people deserved their just reward—extreme punishment (Ex. 7:22; Rev. 16:9).
- *Huge hailstones.* Such a catastrophe causes total devastation like ordnance shells. This delays the plans of man and the battle of Armageddon has to wait for another time (Ex. 9:24-27; Is. 28:17; Ezek. 38:17-23; Rev. 6:12-17; 7:1-3; 19:11-21).
- *Hundred pounds/talent* refers to being very heavy, causing great upheaval and disaster.

### **Thoughts and Applications:**

Have you ever considered that God suffers from our sins? And, in the midst of our sin, He is patient? Yet, one day, His patience will come to its fruition; His judgments, which will be honorable and blameless, will come about. Remember that *God's wrath* refers to the judgment that is coming; it will be a reality (Is. 65:2; Joel 2:11; Mal. 3:2). This is something we Christians need not fear as Christ covers our sin for us (Zeph. 1:14-18; Nahum. 1:6; Mal. 3:2; Rom. 1:18; 3:9-23; 6:23; 2 Pet. 3:9-15; Rev. 19:15). God loves holiness and love, and both produce justice. He hates sin and discord. Without love expressed in holiness, there can be no justice or hope for the righteous and faithful. There is hope and assurance when our trust is in Christ and His righteousness. He is

our hope, even when the very foundations of the universe are collapsing around and under us. When our hope is in Christ, nothing can shake us (Luke 12:32-34; 1 Cor. 7:29-31; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Heb. 12:25-29; Rev. 6:16).

Remember this very important point: sin and wrong desires, factions, and immorality bring us only “darkness.” Darkness refers to having no peace, contentment, or happiness; chasing evils and pleasure, even our wants, only leaves us destitute of what is really important. This can be in a family, in a nation, in the world, and even in the Church. Thus, a defiant heart will only bring pain, chaos, strife, disillusionment, dysfunction, discouragement, distress, and grief. So, who wants that? Remember, He will equip us with what He requires for us to live a triumphant, purpose-filled life (Is. 57:15-21; 59:1-21; 59:15-18; 65:1-15)!

### **The Four Prevailing Views**

**The Preterist view:** They see this passage as the preparation of defeat for Jerusalem and/or Rome. *Euphrates* is a historical reference to being conquered by surprise (the way Cyrus conquered Babylon), and as a metaphor to show how God will bring judgment when we are not expecting it, either to Jerusalem in 70 A.D. or the fall of Rome. They also see this as fulfilling Daniel’s vision and the beginning of the Kingdom of God. The troops that took siege of Jerusalem, according to Josephus, came from the region of the Euphrates. *Frogs* are seen as unclean and represent unclean Jerusalem or the allies of the Roman armies, why God destroyed it, and who he used. *Kings of the earth* and *Armageddon* are seen as symbolic for God being “pregnant” with judgment and ready to give birth to it as Elijah demonstrated near the same location when he defeated the false prophets on Mt. Carmel. Others see it as the destruction of Jerusalem or Rome. *Come like a thief* is seen as surprise as the Jewish and/or Rome leadership led to their doom (Matt. 16:28). *It is done* is the anticipation and finality of Jerusalem or Rome. Babylon is often associated as Rome by the Early Church, hence the reason for this position along with Matt 16 and 24. Some in this camp see this as Jerusalem because of the apostasy. *Hundred pounds* is seen as the siege engines that Rome used.

**The Futurist view:** They see this passage as the antichrist causing World War III and the details to this battle of *Armageddon* which they see as taking place (even though Scripture may tell us otherwise). They see God removing the *Euphrates* so Russia and China can attack Israel. *Kings of the earth/east* is seen as the literal attack of the Orient and/or China, or the Middle East collectively, and the rise of a new world order—a singular, oppressive government. *Frogs* are seen as modern war machines. (What would a tank look like to John?) This is correlated to Daniel 11: 40-45. *Come like a thief* is seen as a post-tribulation rapture or the coming of Christ. The *seventh bowl* is seen as the destruction of Satan and his minion. The *Earthquakes* are seen as nuclear war or a literal earthquake beyond measure. *Babylon* is seen as having been rebuilt and then destroyed, or the evil, spiritual, religious system under judgment. *Hail* is seen as literal or military ordnances.

**The Idealist view:** They see this passage as the fears of the Seven Churches for the pending Parthian invasion. Others see this as Nero's suicide and the upheavals that occurred for the early Church that led to the escalation of persecution until Rome was Christianized and finally judged. Others at that time saw this as Nero coming back for vindication to the Church (*Nero Redivivus* myth). Others see this as the fall of Rome by the invasion of the Barbarians for the western kingdom and the Parthian invasion for the eastern kingdom. *Euphrates* symbolizes obstruction and how it will be removed fugitively. *Kings of the earth/east* is seen as our fight against God, our ways versus His Way. *Come like a thief* is seen as Christ returning and how unexpected it will be. *Armageddon* and the rest of the imagery is a representation of slaughter as in the judgments of God upon the wicked who refuse to repent.

**The Historicist view:** They see this passage as the Turks invading former Rome and the preceding southern European powers. *Euphrates* was a symbol for Turks and Muslim invaders from the fall of Rome until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Others see this as God's judgment on the corrupt papacy in the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The *river* being dried up is their power coming to an end and the rise of the Reformation. Others see this as the decline of the power of the Turks in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. *Frogs* and *demons* are seen as the wars and turmoil of the 18<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe. *Armageddon* is seen as a symbol for conflict such as "The Great War," WW I and/or our spiritual conflicts. They agree with the futurists that the *seventh bowl* has not been poured out yet. This is the final, climatic end of humanity and its fight against God. Others see it as a future conflict with Russia and the west, because another name for Russia is "Gog;" or, it could be the conflicts of the papal kingdoms, the Holy Roman Empire of past. *Earthquakes* and the other imagery are seen as man's political powers and kingdoms clashing and coming to an end before Christ's return. *Babylon*, in this view, is seen as Catholic Rome; *splitting into three* is seen as the final end of the papacy.

***The Essential Inductive Questions*** (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

***Additional Questions:***

1. Of all the plagues that have been listed, which ones do you fear the most: boils, drought, heat, hail, earthquakes, disease, darkness, or something else? How would you deal with them?
2. This passage testifies to the readiness of Christ's return. The question is, are you ready? What does it mean to be ready? What do you need to do to prepare for Him?
3. How have you or do you seek to battle God, by thought or inaction? What about factions in your church? When we come against one another, are we actually battling God?
4. What did you think *Armageddon* or *I will come like a thief* were about prior to studying Revelation? What do you think now?
5. Have you ever considered that God suffers because of our sins? And, in the midst of our sin that He is patient?
6. In your experience, how have you seen a defiant heart bring pain, chaos, strife, disillusionment, dysfunction, discouragement, distress, and grief? So, who wants that?
7. What have you done to receive Him and remain faithful?
8. Why do these people remain defiant and wicked instead of repenting? How do you think they will curse God?
9. What does it mean to not defile yourselves with the filth of sin or be exposed to evil and manipulators? How do Christians find themselves being ashamed of their faith in Christ?
10. This people who refuse to repent or seek Christ are in a battle of command and control! How do you think so?
11. How do you feel that these images are not meant to terrify us, but show us how God works so we can beware and defend ourselves? So, how can you defend yourself or prepare?
12. What can you do to better hold to your faith and watch for Christ without being sucked into the latest theories and fads of His return?

*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9*