

Revelation Sixteen

Vial Six: Gathering the Kings of the Earth to Armageddon [vv.12-16]

v.12. The **sixth angel poured out his vial** on the **great river Euphrates**. As noted under the sixth trumpet (cf. 9.14), the river Euphrates has a long, illustrious Biblical history. It is named as one of the original rivers of Eden (Genesis 2.14) and formed the eastern border of the land promised by God to Abram (Genesis 15.18). The Euphrates is one of the two main rivers in the Tigris-Euphrates river system. It is the longest river in south-west Asia, spanning 1,740 miles (2,800 km). The area between



the rivers is the ancient Mesopotamia, generally reckoned to be the cradle of civilisation and where tradition places the garden of Eden. The Euphrates was a natural obstacle against invasion, separating Israel from her two chief enemies, Assyria, and Babylon. As the sixth angel pours out his vial, the **water** of the Euphrates was **dried up**. In 2021, the Iraqi Ministry of Water Resources reported that the Euphrates could dry out by 2040 due to climate change, drought and dams built along the river to provide irrigation and hydroelectric power – but the ‘drying’ of this verse is not caused by human activity! God Himself evaporates the river, perhaps through the agency of the scorching sun (vv.8-9) or a strong wind such as at the Red Sea (cf. Exodus 14.21). The Psalmist says, “He rebuked the Red Sea also, and it was dried up,” (Psalm 106.9). Alternatively, God may use miraculous means like at Jordan (Joshua 3.13, 15-17). Interestingly, Isaiah mentions the drying of the Euphrates to provide a highway to regather the faithful remnant of Israel from the east (cf. Isaiah 11.15-16, NET).

The purpose of drying the Euphrates is to **prepare the way** of the **kings of the east**. Given the earlier mention of the Euphrates (9.14), many commentators link these kings with the army of 200 million horsemen under the sixth trumpet. But this is an entirely distinct judgment, and it has been shown (see notes) that this is an army of demons, not men. The kings come from the east, or “from the rising of the sun” [JND], which in Scripture always refers to Persia or Mesopotamia (Assyria and Babylonia). It is therefore likely that this is a westwards movement of some of the ten kings confederate with the beast (17.12) who will join with the “kings of the earth and of the whole world” to gather for the final assize at Armageddon (v.14). Some commentators (including Jim Allen) prefer to see a reference to armies from places like China or Japan to “launch an attack on the rule of a Beast they have come to fear and to hate”. If this is true, the wrong river has dried up! The *Tigris* would need to be removed to facilitate an attack on the headquarters of the beast at Babylon.

v.13. John sees **three unclean spirits like frogs** come out of the **mouth** of the dragon, beast and false prophet. The unclean spirits are demons (v.14) that look like frogs. Frogs were ritually unclean animals that were an abomination to Israel (Leviticus 11.10-11). They were also unclean and loathsome to the Persians and Egyptians too. These demons come out of the mouths of the counterfeit trinity to symbolise a Satanic official decree (summons) to the kings of the earth to gather for Armageddon (v.14). The **dragon** is Satan (12.9); the **beast** is the first beast of Revelation 13 (vv.1-10) – the Antichrist; the **false prophet** (so called here for the first time, cf. 19.20; 20.10) is the second beast of Revelation 13 (vv.11-18), the religious head of the new world order, and arch-deceiver and propagandist on behalf of the Antichrist. Together they are the counterfeit trinity.

v.14. The Satanic summons will be accompanied by the three demonic spirits **working miracles** (signs) to ensure the kings cooperate in assembling their armies. No doubt deceptive messages and miracles, in the spirit of the false prophet himself (cf. 13.13-14), will persuade kings to mobilise their forces even though they will be thirsty, scorched and covered in sores. The occasion is reminiscent of the deceiving spirit that lured Ahab into battle (1 Kings 22.19-22). Though the immediate agents of persuasion are the demons, ultimately God is at work behind the scenes, “*For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled,*” (Revelation 17.17). The **kings of the earth** and of **the whole world** are likely those of the ten-nation confederacy who have relinquished their power and authority to the Antichrist (cf. 17.12-14, 17). This statement is broader in scope than merely the “kings of the east” suggesting the final conflict is a worldwide movement of armies gathering in defiance against the rule of Christ – “these shall make war with the Lamb” (17.14). This is also the fulfilment of Psalm 2, “*The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their*

bands asunder, And cast away their cords from us,” (vv.2-3). If the human purpose of their **gathering** is not explicitly stated here, the divine purpose is plain – to gather the nations for the **battle of that great day of God Almighty**.

Why they gather is a point of discussion. Some suggest these kings are antagonistic towards the beast and are seeking to free themselves from his despotic reign. But Hitchcock notes, *“The problem is that the nations of the world are gathered to Armageddon by demonic spirits. It seems strange that demonic spirits from the unholy trinity of the end times would gather the armies of the world to fight against their own kingdom.”* It would make more sense if these armies gathered for the express purpose of defying God and Christ (as per Psalm 2 above). Perhaps a decree will be issued from the capital city of Babylon to order the allies of the Antichrist to gather their armies together for a final campaign to eradicate the Jews (cf. 12.17). What better way to attack God than to seek to make one final all-out assault on the “apple of His eye” (Zechariah 2.8), His beloved people Israel. Again Hitchcock says, *“Satan is the source of all anti-Semitism because he knows that God has promised to send Jesus, the Messiah, to rule and reign from Jerusalem and sit on David’s throne to rule over David’s kingdom. If Satan can eliminate the Jews, then he can thwart God’s promise from becoming fulfilled.”* The **battle** [*polemos*] is better translated ‘war’ or ‘campaign’, indeed, the conflict will stretch over a 200-mile distance and include several stages or events. It is the **great day of God Almighty** because divine purpose is about to be accomplished. The age-long conflict which began in Genesis 3.15 will climax in the decisive establishment of God’s rule on earth (11.17; 15.3; 19.6, 15). His almighty (omnipotent) power will be manifested as all His enemies are vanquished.



v.15. This verse is a parenthetical message of comfort and encouragement to the saints. It is probably an appeal to every believer living in the tribulation, especially those who are in the very last days, to remain morally watchful and alert in light of the Lord’s imminent return to earth. **Behold, I come as a thief** is a metaphor which describes the return of Christ to unbelievers. For them, especially the armies gathered at Armageddon, Christ will come suddenly and unexpectedly like a thief (cf. 3.3; 1 Thessalonians 5.2). Believers, on the other hand, are alert and expectant. The Lord Jesus pronounces a **blessing** (the second beatitude of the book) on the one who **watcheth** [*grēgoreō*] and **keepeth his garments**. The single article describes one class of person – the one watching *is* the one keeping his garments. To ‘watch’ is to stay awake – like alert soldiers on duty through the night. This is a call to faith *in* and faithfulness *to* the coming Christ – demonstrated by righteous conduct (cf. Matthew 24.42-46, 49; Luke 18.8). The metaphor of **keeping** one’s **garments** derives from an ancient custom where any guard (or soldier) found asleep on duty was beaten and stripped of his clothes which were set on fire. This left him to **walk naked** so the **shame** (disgrace) of his failure would be evident to all.

v.16. The connective **and** resumes from v.14 to identify the place to which the world’s armies will be gathered. There is some discussion as to whether **“he gathered them together”** [AV] or **“they gathered them together”** [RV] is the correct MSS reading. If the plural, then the demons are the agents of gathering (as per v.14). If the singular, then God is the Agent of gathering. Indeed, Zechariah says, **“I [Jehovah] will gather all nations to Jerusalem to battle,”** (14.2).

The place of gathering is **called**, in the **Hebrew tongue**, **Armageddon** [*Harmagedōn*]. The term *Har Megidōn* literally means ‘mount’ or ‘hill-country’ of Megiddo. Megiddo was built on a hill overlooking the Valley of Jezreel (or plain of Esdraelon). This valley is about 10 miles wide and 35 miles long. The area is no stranger to warfare and famous Biblical events such as Deborah and Barak’s battle with the Canaanites (Judges 4) as well as Gideon’s battle with the Midianites (Judges 7). Saul was slain on Mount Gilboa at the eastern end of the valley (1 Samuel 31.8) and Josiah was slain at Megiddo in the Egyptian invasion of 2 Kings 23.29-30 (cf. 2 Chronicles 35.22).

The Valley of Jezreel is not large enough to contain the armies of the world, but it will act as an assembly point. The conflict itself will cover a much larger area, even 200 miles from north to south through the land of Israel (cf. 14.20). For example, Joel speaks of **“the valley of Jehoshaphat”**, probably another title for the Kidron Valley on the east side of Jerusalem (Joel 3.2, 12). **Jerusalem** itself will be the centre of conflict (Zechariah 12.2-11; 14.2). There is also clear mention of **Bozrah** in

Edom (modern day Jordan), near the city of Petra (Isaiah 34.1-6; 63.1-3). Hitchcock says, “After his descent to the Mount of Olives [and deliverance of Jerusalem], Christ will lead his army down to Edom to rescue the hiding Jewish remnant there. When he returns from Edom, his clothes will be stained red and his sword drenched with blood.” The Armageddon campaign is therefore described by Scripture as extending the whole length of Israel, from the Valley of Jezreel in the north, down through Jerusalem to Edom in the south.

Vial Seven: Destruction of Babylon [vv.17-21]

v.17. The **seventh angel** pours his vial **into the air** (the earth’s atmosphere) creating an apocalyptic storm of thunder and lightning (v.18) as well as “great hail” falling from the sky (v.21). This last plague appears to be the most pervasive of all, not restricted to mere land, sea or rivers, but affecting the whole atmospheric envelope of the earth. It is as if God is cleansing the former domain of Satan and his demon hosts. The **great voice out of the temple of heaven** has already been heard and identified as the voice of God (v.1). It is now qualified as also proceeding from the **throne** – the place of divine administration and authority. “**It is done**” [*gegonen*] is in the perfect tense meaning, ‘It is now done and will remain done,’ (cf. 21.6). This is a likely reference to the sevenfold outpouring of God’s wrath in the vials that has now reached its conclusion (cf. 15.1; 16.1). **v.18.** The voice from the throne seems to trigger an apocalyptic storm and earthquake like no other. John says, there were **voices** (roaring sounds), and **thunders** and **lightnings** and a **great earthquake**. Each of the three series of judgments in Revelation end with incredible cosmic and seismic disturbances (cf. 8.5; 11.19). The seventh *seal* introduces a series of such disturbances which continue and intensify under the sixth *trumpet*, reaching full climax here in the seventh *vial*. Thomas says, “These disturbances signal that the end has arrived, not just the end of the bowl series, but also the end of the seal and trumpet series too.” The **great earthquake** [*megas seismos*] seems to eclipse all those that have gone before (cf. 6.12; 11.13). The strong language emphasises its severity, “a tremendous earthquake – an earthquake unequalled since humanity has been on the earth, so tremendous was that earthquake,” [NET]. The phrase **so mighty** [*tēlikoutos*] translates a Greek word only used x4 in the NT including Hebrews 2.3 – this earthquake is as mighty as the “so great salvation” we have in Christ! As foretold by Haggai (cf. Isaiah 13.13; 24.19-20; Joel 3.16; Nahum 1.5-6), God is shaking the earth. Haggai says, “*For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land*” before the Desire of all nations comes (2.6-7). It seems that the shaking is so severe that it will renovate and reconfigure the earth in preparation for the kingdom (cf. v.20).

v.19. The earthquake causes **the great city** to be **divided into three parts**. The only city identified as ‘the great city’ in Revelation is Jerusalem (cf. 11.8) – the religious centre of the beast. That there will be great seismic activity in Jerusalem at this time is confirmed by Zechariah (14.4). It is somewhat miraculous that this city does not **fall** (collapse) as the **cities of the nations** but is rather **divided into three parts**. God has yet a purpose for this city above all other cities. There is a possible link to Ezekiel 5 where Ezekiel divides Jerusalem into three symbolic parts to illustrate the fearful future of the city’s inhabitants as divine discipline for their sins. A third would die from disease and famine, a third would be slaughtered by the enemy, and a third would be scattered among the nations (v.12). Here, however, the language is likely physical. Jerusalem will be literally split into three parts, “beginning a series of geophysical alterations to the city and its surrounding region that will conclude when the Lord Jesus Christ returns,” (MacArthur). One of the **cities of the nations** is **great Babylon** – the political and commercial centre of the beast. Babylon seems to be mentioned as a specific (and the greatest) example of the cities of the nations. Babylon now comes in **remembrance before God**, a Hebrew idiom describing readiness to take action (cf. Genesis 8.1) – she will now receive the judgment she deserves in the form of **the cup of the wine of the fierceness** [*thymos*] **of his wrath** [*orgē*]. This fearful cup of judgment contains wine, which in turn symbolises the undiluted vehement fury [*thymos*] and settled indignation [*orgē*] of God (cf. 14.10). Babylon is about to face God’s wrath in full measure, of which the earthquake was just the beginning. Further stages in Babylon’s downfall will be described in later chapters (17.16; 18.8; 19.18-21).

v.20. The seismic shaking of the great earthquake is so severe it will appear as if the planet is splitting apart. **Every island fled away** (vanished), and no **mountains** could be **found** completing the process that began during the sixth seal (6.12-14). Major geographical and topographical changes will prepare the earth for the millennial reign of Christ. Zechariah 14.4-10 describes these changes in detail. MacArthur says, “*The Mount of Olives will split in two, and a new valley running east and west will be created (v.4). A spring of water will flow year-round from Jerusalem to the Mediterranean and Dead Seas (v.8), causing the desert to blossom like a rose (cf. Isaiah 35.1). Jerusalem will be elevated, and the surrounding region flattened into a plain (v.10).*” Isaiah says, “*Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain,*” (40.4). Henry Morris believes the gentle rolling topography of the world as originally created will be restored. This will leave Jerusalem as the highest point on earth – a fitting place for Christ to reign. *Micah 4.1: “But in the last days it shall come to pass, That the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, And it shall be exalted above the hills; And people shall flow unto it.”* **v.21.** The apocalyptic storm produces **great hail** as well as thunder and lightning (v.18). Each hailstone was **about the weight of a talent** – a measure which varied somewhat in weight in the ancient world but ranged from about 65-90lbs

(30-40kg). A talent described the most weight a normal man could carry. The hailstones fell on ‘the **men**’ which men **blasphemed God because of the plague of hail** which was so **exceedingly great**. The definite article is used to describe ‘the men’ suggesting they are the same men which bore the mark of the beast and worshipped his image (v.2). Still these hardened sinners defiantly refuse to repent, continuing in their contemptuous slander of God.

The Battle of that Great Day of God Almighty [Armageddon]	
Key Passages	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Psalm 2 2. Isaiah 34.1-15 3. Isaiah 63.1-6 4. Joel 3.1-17 5. Zechariah 12.1-9 6. Zechariah 14.1-15 7. Malachi 4.1-5 8. Revelation 14.14-20 9. Revelation 16.12-16 10. Revelation 19.19-21
Key Names	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Day of the Lord’s Vengeance (Isaiah 34.8) 2. The Winepress of God’s Wrath (Isaiah 63.2; Joel 3.13; Revelation 14.19-20) 3. The Harvest (Joel 3.13; Revelation 14.15-16) 4. The Day of Judgment (Malachi 4.1) 5. The Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord (Malachi 4.5) 6. The Great Day of God Almighty (Revelation 16.14)
Location	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Armageddon (Revelation 16.16) 2. The Valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3.2, 12) 3. Jerusalem (Zechariah 12.2-3; 14.2, 4) 4. Bozrah in Edom (Isaiah 34.1-6; 63.1-3)
The Enemy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kings and rulers of the earth (Psalm 2.2) 2. Nations of the earth (Zech. 12.3; 14.2) 3. Kings of the east (Revelation 16.12) 4. Kings of the earth and of the whole world (Revelation 16.14) 5. Kings, captains and mighty men (Revelation 19.18) 6. Beast, kings of the earth and their armies (Revelation 19.19) 7. All men, both free and bond, small and great (Revelation 19.18)
God’s Army	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All the saints (Zechariah 14.5) 2. Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords (19.11-13, 16) 3. Armies of heaven (Revelation 19.14) 4. The Lord Jesus with His mighty angels (2 Thessalonians 1.7)

A Possible Sequence of Prophetic Events at the Second Advent

- **Phase 1.** The Euphrates River dries up, preparing the way for the kings of the east (Revelation 16.12).
- **Phase 2.** The Antichrist’s allies assemble at Armageddon to annihilate the Jews once and for all.
- **Phase 3.** The armies attack Jerusalem, and it falls (Zechariah 14.1-3).
- **Phase 4.** Jesus Christ returns personally to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14.4).
- **Phase 5.** Christ destroys the armies gathered at Armageddon and against Jerusalem in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3.9-17; Zechariah 12.1-9; Zechariah 14.3; 2 Thessalonians 2.8; Revelation 16.16; 19.19-21).
- **Phase 6.** Christ descends upon Bozrah/Edom to deliver the Jewish remnant (Isaiah 34.1-7; 63.1-5; Joel 3.19).
- **Phase 7.** The national regeneration of Israel (Joel 2.28-32; Zechariah 12.10; 13.7-9; Romans 11.25-27).