

Bowl 6 - Armageddon

Revelation 16:12-16

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Text

12 Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way for the kings from the sun's rising might be prepared. 13 And I saw three unclean spirits, like frogs, coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the Beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14 For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole inhabited earth, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. 15 ("Watch out, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who watches and guards his clothes, so that he not walk about naked and they see his shame.") 16 So he gathered them to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

Introduction - background info for this snapshot

We come now to a brief snapshot of the great battle of Armageddon. There are an enormous number of horrible books written about this battle. These books kill faith that that the Great Commission will ever be fulfilled because they give a depressing vision of history. But as we will see, the way this battle is placed, it was actually designed to give the church great faith.

And let me begin by reviewing some of the frustrations Satan had leading up to this battle. The great battle of Armageddon took place in AD 70 at Jerusalem. But there were a number of things that could easily have prevented this prophesied battle from taking place. I do not believe that Satan initially wanted it to take place initially, but he found it necessary if he was going to achieve his plans. Let me remind you of some of the pieces of the puzzle that we have already deduced from the book of Revelation, and why those pieces of the puzzle would have been very frustrating to Satan. He eventually thinks he is getting his way, but it is God who is getting His way all along.

We saw in chapter 12 that Satan was blind-sided by the Zealot rebellion in AD 66. Previously he had a well-oiled machine; a perfectly united Rome and Israel that had made a seven-year covenant to annihilate the church and to overturn God's prophecies. This globalist government had become the perfect killing machine for Christians. And for some years it looked like it was working. From AD 62-68 the church faced the greatest tribulation it had ever faced or will ever face, almost getting completely extinguished in other

parts of the empire and having two thirds of the Jewish church in Palestine wiped out. Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24 that if that seven-year tribulation was not cut short, all Christians would have been killed. And that tribulation was cut short in the rest of Rome by the death of Nero on June 9 of AD 68, but it was cut short much earlier in Israel - in AD 66.

What frustrated Satan's plans is that God allowed three factions of Jewish Zealots to create such trouble in Israel that Rome was forced to focus all of their energies into putting down that rebellion. Much to Satan's rage, the persecuted church of Israel managed to flee to Pella during this time, and God protected the church there, not allowing any demons to have access to that region. Instead, the land of Israel swallowed up most of Satan's fury as he sought to deal with the Zealot rebellion.

We saw that his first step was to get the demonic beast from the land and the demonic beast from the sea to work together to get their respective human armies to try to pacify the rebels. This would enable him to return to his plan. But amazingly, the rebels were not easily pacified. Against all expectations, these untrained rebels almost destroyed Cestius' well-trained Roman army, and Cestius had to flee in disgrace, barely escaping with his life, and with the shame of having the Jews capturing the Roman standard and eagle. That was an incredible blow to Rome's pride; something which Rome felt duty-bound to punish.

Then in chapter 13 we saw that Satan moved Nero to send several legions to the area. Again, the beast from the land (who controlled the Jewish leadership) was still trying to work with the beast from the sea (which controlled Rome). But we have already seen that God messed up the plans once again, bringing judgments on both Rome and Israel. Then Nero died in June of AD 68 and the Roman empire completely fell apart, with faction fighting against faction, countries rebelling, and Roman legions killing each other in a massive civil war that killed millions. Even one-world governments are not almighty. Satan's persecution machine was falling apart.

So Satan was forced to ignore the church for a while and to frantically try to restore his one-world-government. We saw that Satan had the beast (who had previously possessed Nero) possess Titus and control his father Vespasian, enabling both of them to do amazing miracles of healing the blind and the crippled and other miracles. This so impressed the troops, that they declared both Vespasian and Titus to be gods, and made them both Caesar at the same time. They were co-rulers. Of course, Vitellius at this point had claimed the throne in the capital city of Rome. So to restore order

in Rome, the legions had to leave Israel and fight their way into Rome.

Unfortunately for Satan, this gave the Zealot rebels time to arm themselves, entrench their positions, and train. The rebels had given the Beast from the land (in the words, the pro-Roman Jewish leaders) incredible trouble. They could not control them. So Satan's plans didn't go quite as smoothly as he had hoped. But by early AD 70 things were stable enough in the capital of Rome that Titus was able to leave and to begin rounding up the legions around the empire to march on Jerusalem once again. And that's where we pick up the story in verse 12:

I. Never forget that demons aren't the only ones active in this world (v. 12a)

Verse 12 says, "Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates..." I find that phrase encouraging. Though demons are very active in opposing God's people and opposing the church, and though demons often have great success because of our lack of faith, we should always keep in mind that demons aren't the only invisible forces at work in this world. It was not Satan who poured out the bowl on the Euphrates. He wasn't the one who dried up the river. God did. Though Satan may roar, God has him on a chain, and he can only do so much. This whole story is wrapped in packaging that makes it clear that God has planned every detail, including how demons would oppose him. God is sovereign. He is sovereign even over His enemies.

II. What Satan takes as a convenience (a dried up river enables huge armies to cross quickly) is actually another bowl of God's fury (v. 12b with v. 1)

And what Satan probably took as a wonderful opportunity (a completely dried up Euphrates River) was actually God's doing. It was God's fury being poured out. The Euphrates has always been considered the great barrier that kept the Parthians and other kingdoms from easily invading west and south. The historical hints that we have seem to indicate that an earthquake provided a dam for the Euphrates, and Satan took advantage of that, and in a remarkably short period of time supplemented Titus' armies with a massive number of armies from the east - from the sun's rising.

People have wondered how it was possible for the eastern armies to get to Jerusalem so quickly; you couldn't just swim across that river, and ferrying so many troops and horses would have normally taken a long time. The

Sibylline oracle 4:124 likens Titus to the revived Nero, who goes to the Euphrates and wielding a big spear he causes many myriads (πολλαις ἄμα μυριαδῶσιν) of soldiers to cross the Euphrates.

III. The amazing drying up of the Euphrates in early AD 70 (v. 12)

Verse 12 again:

Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way for the kings from the sun's rising might be prepared.

This is a deliberate reversal of what God had prophesied would happen under Cyrus before Israel's return to the land from Babylon in the Old Testament times. This is not the first time that the Euphrates River was dried up. Isaiah 44:26-28 says that God is the One...

Who says to Jerusalem, "You shall be inhabited," To the cities of Judah, "You shall be built," And I will raise up her waste places; 27 Who says to the deep, "Be dry! And I will dry up your rivers"; 28 Who says of Cyrus, "He is My shepherd, And he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," And to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid." "

Commentators are pretty united in saying that this Cyrus passage in Isaiah 44 forms a reverse background in Revelation 16:12. When I say "reverse" what I mean is that of the six prophecies that were fulfilled at the time of Cyrus, every one of them is reversed in AD 70. Let me give you the history of Cyrus first.

When king Cyrus came to the city of Babylon in 539 BC, it's walls were so huge that it was impregnable. The city was 60 miles around and surrounded by a wall 350 feet high and 87 feet across. Historians tell us that four full chariots could march abreast on top of the wall. Guards were constantly on watch as if they were guarding a prison wall. There was a 30 foot mote outside the wall that ran around the city. The city was considered to be virtually impregnable. It was believed that no military strategy could ever break through that wall. (And by the way, in terms of comparison, Jerusalem was considered to be impregnable as well.)

But Cyrus came up with a brilliant plan to conquer the city. The River Euphrates ran right under the walls of the city. So, unknown to its occupants, upstream he had his army engage in the herculean task of digging huge canals to divert the river temporarily so that they could march into the city under the walls on the dry river bed. Herodotus gives us many details about that amazing feat. And as soon as Cyrus conquered Babylon, he gave a decree that Israel could return to their homeland, could rebuild Jerusalem and their other cities, could rebuild their temple, and could carry back to

Jerusalem all the temple furniture, cups, and gold that had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar.

This prophecy in Revelation 16 reverses every feature of that story and says that the drying up of the Euphrates River would allow the kings in the region of the Euphrates to join Titus's massive army very quickly and the purpose was not to build the temple and city (as under Cyrus) but to destroy the temple and city, to decimate the countryside, to rob the temple treasurers, and to send Jews into exile. It would be the exact reversal of what Cyrus did. So Jerusalem is now being pictured as the new Babylon in need of destruction. So this is an incredibly beautiful and powerful symbol of what God was going to do.

But Premillennialists have insisted that there has never been a time in history when the huge river Euphrates has been dried up, therefore this must refer to something future to us.¹ For example, Dr. Olson says, "History has never documented the river Euphrates drying up..." He's wrong, but even if he was right, it would be irrelevant. History has never documented Israel crossing the Jordan River on dry land. It has never documented the Red Sea crossing. But we believe it because God's word records it. If it hadn't been for Heroditus, we wouldn't have know how Cyrus conquered the city of Babylon. Anyway, many Premillennialists claim that with the Anatolia dam constructed in 2010 we are experiencing the first time in human history when it is possible to see the drying up of the Euphrates.² That is simply not true. Let me point to a book that was written the year before that contradicts that statement. It is a 2009 book on Earthquakes that documents three times when earthquakes made the Euphrates River stop flowing completely. And when you see how massive the Euphrates River is (I've given two pictures of it in your outlines), that is astonishing.

Nicholas Ambraseys' book discusses an earthquake in AD 499 that had the following results. He said,

The hot spring at Abame (near Cermik, north of Suvarek, midway between the Tigris and the Euphrates) dried up for three days and the Euphrates stopped flowing and then overflowed its banks (John Eph. NA 462-463). This phenomenon Joshua says is due to the fact that 'whenever the earth is rent by earthquakes, it happens that the running waters in those places that are cleft are restrained from flowing, and are at times even turned into another direction...', an interesting observation that may refer to surface faulting (Josh.

1 See for example, Hugh Wesley Wilson, *The Rapture & the End Times Prophecies for Beginners*, (Holy Fire Publishing, www.ChristianPublish.com, 2014), p. 506; <https://sharperiron.org/forum/thread-problems-with-preterist-historicist-and-covenant-theology>

2 See Trumpeter's assertions in http://www.gracecentered.com/christian_forums/end-times-forum/why-preterism-is-false/

Styl. WR 23-26).³

Now keep that in mind - all it took is an earthquake to reverse the direction that the water flowed, and this ancient naturalist hints (with the word "whenever") that there had been previous times that the Euphrates had flown backwards because of earthquakes. Unfortunately, he doesn't give the dates of those previous times. But one of them may well have been the explanation for the quick crossing of the Euphrates in AD 70.

The modern book documents two later times when the Euphrates stopped flowing. It stopped flowing for three days and three nights in AD 529.⁴ and it stopped for an entire day once again in AD 810.⁵ All three of those times that the modern book documents seem to also be related to earthquakes, and the ancient author hints that it had happened previously. So it is simply not true to say that there is no historical evidence that the Euphrates has stopped flowing in the past. Now, we wouldn't have even know about those last three occurrences until that book was written in 2009, but those three still happened even before we knew they happened, right? The point is that silence in history is not a proof that something didn't happen, as any historian will tell you. But we know that there were unspecified times that the Euphrates had flowed backwards before the fourth century.

Sadly, most Preterists and Historicists are not aware of this kind of data, and so they repeat the refrain that this is purely figurative, or purely symbolic; that it is not historical. But again, we saw that the symbols of this book are

3 Nicholas Ambraseys, *Earthquakes in the Mediterranean and Middle East: A Multidisciplinary Study of Seismicity up to 1900*, (Cambridge University Press, Oct 22, 2009). Also see W. Wright (translator), *The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite*, composed in Syriac AD 507, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1882), pp. 23-25. The Talmud may refer to an earlier earthquake and blockage of the Euphrates that caused flooding in the areas affected by the dam: "When Rabbah and R. Joseph died, the rocks of the Euphrates kissed each other [in an earthquake]." Jacob Neusner, ed., *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*, Accordance Electronic ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 25B. <https://accordance.bible/link/read/T-BAV-EF#62167> Chabad.org states "On the day that Rav Joseph died, a great flood broke out near the River Euphrates, as similar natural changes had taken place at the death of other great Torah personalities."

http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/112297/jewish/Rav-Joseph.htm This would have occurred in the mid 4th century.

4 "In the year 841, the great river, the Euphrates, was blocked above the region of Claudia, hard against the land of the Cappadocians, near the township of Parusidin. In fact, a great mountain had shattered and tumbled down, and on account of the imposing height of the mountains there and their proximity to each other, it fell from one mountain to the next and blocked [the river]. [The blockage] lasted for three days and nights. The river flowed back from behind the blockage, towards Armenia: the land was submerged, the townships flooded, and great damage was sustained..."

5 Ambraseys, *Earthquakes...* Ibid. He says, "Michael the Syrian says that it was in Ab 1128 (August 817) that a violent earthquake in eastern Anatolia caused mountains to collapse and sources of water to dry up. He places these events at Agoursa, and adds that in the region of Claudias, a large mountain fell into the Euphrates River, damming it and stopping its flow for a day. The spring at Temain, he says, also dried up, and in many other places new springs appeared." Also see Witold Witakowski (translator), *Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre Chronicle, part III (Liverpool University Press, 1996), pp. 3-4.

rooted in history. I've already explained what it symbolized - the reversal of what God did through Cyrus in the Old Testament. And if the drying up of the Euphrates in the Old Testament was rooted in actual history, this one should be. And I believe this helps to explain why the armies were able to make it to Jerusalem in such a remarkably short period of time. It also perfectly dovetails with Zechariah 12 - and we will get to that later.

Verse 12 says that "its water was dried up, so that the way for the kings from the sun's rising might be prepared." God was preparing the kings for judgment on both Rome and Israel. Based on the outcome of AD 70, it appears that Satan's goal has remained the same - put down the rebellion so that Talmudism could unite with Rome in once again persecuting Christians.

But who were these kings from the east? There may be more, but the histories that we have emphasize two. Both Sohaemus and Antiochus ruled kingdoms in Eastern Turkey that would have been on the Eastern edge of the Roman Empire - from the sun's rising. King Sohaemus ruled the kingdom of Sophene, between Cappadocia and Armenia, while Antiochus was the king of Commagene. History tells us that these kings from the east offered their military and their leadership to aid Titus in the defeat of Jerusalem.⁶ Whether God miraculously stopped the river, or whether this was due to an earthquake like some other times I am not sure (because the histories only hint at it), but the fact that it was indeed dried up hugely sped up their crossing.

In addition to the large armies of these two kings from the sun's rising (in other words, from the east), were the legions of Titus stationed at the Euphrates, from whom three thousand soldiers were drawn. But God literally orchestrated it this way to show the fall of Jerusalem mirroring the ancient fall of Babylon; both cities having been captured after God dried up the Euphrates.

IV. Lessons in demonology

A. Demons are spirits (vv. 13a, 14a).

But I want to dive into some of the demonology that is highlighted in this passage. There are two facts about demons that are stated in the first phrase of verse 13: "And I saw three unclean spirits..." First, demons are spirits. That thought is repeated again in verse 14 where they are called demonic

⁶ Tacitus The Histories 2.81; and 5:1.

spirits⁷ or spirits who are demons (you can translate the genitive either way).⁸

Most theologians assume that this means that they do not have bodies; or at least do not have bodies like we do. Spirits are not limited by walls. Evil spirits can go anywhere that angels can go because they are after all fallen angels - unless of course they are barred from some place by God Himself. Just as an angel walked right through prison walls to free Peter, demons can go through prison walls. Our protection from demons is not physical, but is Jesus; it is only Jesus.

B. They are polluted with evil ("unclean"). They are variously called "unclean spirits" (Matt. 10:1; Mark 1:23; Lk. 11:24), "evil spirits" (Luke 7:21), wicked spirits (Luke 11:26; Matt. 12:45), "spiritual forces of wickedness" (Eph. 6:12). The term "evil spirits" is made synonymous with "demons" (Luke 8:2,29; 9:42; 1 Tim. 4:1)

Second, they are called "unclean spirits." In Luke 9:42, the word "unclean spirit" is used as a synonym for demon. And it seems to be a synonym for "unclean demon" (Luke 4:33), evil spirits" (Luke 7:21) and "wicked spirits" (Luke 11:26), and "spiritual forces of wickedness" (Eph. 6:12). So it may simply be a synonym for "evil spirit." But many people believe that while they have the same denotation, the terms do not have the same connotation. In other words, there may be a bit more to it than simply moral uncleanness. This may also speak to the fact that some delight in physical uncleanness and move the people they attach themselves to, to delight in filthy things, practices, and places. And you can see this in passages of Scripture like Luke 8:47 and 2 Pet. 2:1-2,10,13-14,18). And in that latter passage, the homosexuality being referred to was an unclean desire produced by unclean spirits.

But even in the moral realm, there are degrees of evil. Matthew 12:45 indicates that some unclean spirits are more wicked than others. So in demonology we know that there are degrees of evil, degrees of viciousness,

7 Some who favor this interpretation are Caird, G. B. A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine. Black's New Testament Commentaries, edited by Henry Chadwick. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966; Ladd, George Eldon. A Commentary of the Revelation of John. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972; Bratcher, Robert G. and Howard A. Hatton. A Handbook on The Revelation to John. New York: The United Bible Societies, 1993; Morris, Leon. The Book of Revelation, an Introduction and Commentary. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Revised Edition. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987. See also the following translations: CEV, NAB, NRSV, REB

8 Some who favor this interpretation are: Aune, David E. Revelation. Word Biblical Commentary, Vols. 52a and 52b, edited by Ralph p. Martin. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997 and 1998 and the New Living Translation.

and degrees of intelligence among demons. But they always move creation away from God's purity to impurity.

C. There is a hierarchy among demons:

Third, there is a hierarchy among demons. This is explicitly stated in Ephesians 6 and other passages, but it is hinted at here by three things:

Hierarchy and jurisdictions among Satan, Beast, and false prophet (v. 13)

First, commentators point out that there seems to be a descending order of authority from Satan, to the Beast, to the false prophet. In past sermons each of these demons had authority over regions, with Satan being the prince of the world, the Beast being the prince over Rome, and the false prophet being the prince over Israel.

Hierarchy between each of above and the frogs sent forth (v. 13)

But the very fact that these frogs are symbolized as coming out of the mouth of the three, shows that they are under the authority of each of those evil rulers and are commanded to go forth to do their job. I believe that the moment the demon prince sent a command to the frog in his control, the human possessed by the demon prince issued a command in the human arena. And we discussed the implications of this passage when we looked at the massive armies of demons in chapter 9 that accompanied the armies from the east.

They are organized into a kingdom (vv. 13-14)

Chapter 9 spoke of one hundred million demons (that's in the Majority Text) coming from the Euphrates, even more demons coming from Egypt and other locations under the demonic Beast's direct orders. And just as the humans that they lead were organized into kingdoms, the demons were organized into kingdoms under the one world government ruled by Satan. It says, these frog-like demons "go out to the kings of the whole inhabited earth, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." The word for "whole inhabited earth" is οἰκουμένη, which is defined in various dictionaries as referring to the Roman Empire as an administrative unit. It is never the whole planet. The term refers to an administrative structure. Demons appear to be structured around the world's political structures. That's the meaning of that term. So demons are in an administrative unit just as empires are in an administrative unit.

D. The frog-like demons have the ability to gather kings and armies (v. 14)

But verse 14 indicates that these frog-demons aren't just gathering demons like they did in chapter 9. We would expect that. But here they are gathering human armies for the human battle that will culminate in the destruction of the temple. That implies some influence in human lives.

So how do these frog-demons gather humans? Well, with other demonic help. Chapter 9 described in detail their hundred million other demonic helpers at the Euphrates River. The frogs no doubt are messengers who tell the demonic rulers in various regions what Satan's orders are, and those demonic rulers tell their underlings, who tell their underlings, so that in a very short period of time millions of demons can be at work influencing whoever needs to be influenced to make sure the human armies go on the march. Christ is quite explicit that Satan's demons are organized into a tightly functioning kingdom that he tries to keep from being divided.

Now, I don't think that Satan is always successful in keeping his kingdom from being divided. I think Frank Peretti's fiction stories, *This Present Darkness*, and *Piercing the Darkness* get at least that point right. Have you ever considered how hard it would be for Satan to keep a perfectly united kingdom? I think it would be enormously hard to keep trillions of demons who hate everybody and everything and who are intensely selfish and self-centered to be united in serving Satan. Over the last 6000 years these demons have become more and more depraved and wicked. The only two things that keep them united is Satan's enormous power and the fact that they have a common enemy composed of God and Christians. In any case, Ephesians 6:12 says that Satan's kingdom is organized into hierarchies of principalities, powers, rulers, and wicked hosts.

Another application is that we need to be in prayer for our soldiers. Because demons love to be involved with human armies, our soldiers need spiritual cover; they need protection. The presence of demons with human armies explains some of the unclean things that happen, as well as the irrational things, and the torture, rape, pillaging, and other destructive behaviors of armies down through history. It isn't just flesh and blood that is at war in Iraq, Pakistan, and other countries. There are demons at war too. Don't just think that Kim Jong-Un, the Chairman (or leader) of North Korea, is crazy. He's not crazy; he is governed by demons. We must consider the role of demons in politics. Some of the irrational things they do make perfect sense when you consider the demonic.

E. The frog-like demons can also perform true miracles (v. 14b)

But notice that these frog-like demons can also perform true miracles. I have no idea if the miracles attributed to North Korean leaders are fake or true, but demons can perform miracles. Verse 14 says, "they are demonic spirits, performing signs..." It doesn't say that they pretend to perform signs. They are actually performing signs.

The word for "signs" is a synonym for miracles - they are miracles intended to authenticate the claims of a person. That's why they are called "signs" - they point to something; they authenticate something. Of course, some signs are lying signs; they lead you in the wrong direction. And because some Christians don't believe that demons can perform miracles, they automatically trust anyone who can heal them or do other miracles for them. But that is naive in the highest degree.

The occult leaders of Pharaoh's court were able to turn their staffs into snakes just like Moses did, they were able to turn water into blood according to Exodus 7:14-25 and they were able to make frogs come up on the land just like Moses did according to Exodus 8:1-15. Speaking of the period leading up to Armageddon, Jesus said, "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24:24). It doesn't say they will pretend to. It says that they will "show great signs and wonders." Let me read Paul's description of the demon behind Titus. This is 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12

7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, 12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

He comes "with all power, signs, and lying wonders." Ancient historians speak of the miracles that Nero was able to perform. And we saw that when he died the demon was confined to the Abyss for a year. But then Revelation indicates that in AD 69 the demon beast was allowed to come back up out of the Abyss. And both Vespasian and Titus were obviously possessed. Titus was the one possessed by the Beast, but both of them were possessed by demons. Their personality changed and they were suddenly able to prophesy and to perform amazing miracles. In earlier chapters we looked at the

prophesies and the miracles performed by those who were possessed by this evil triumvirate of Satan, Beast, and False Prophet. From history I documented them making statue move and talk, fire falling from heaven, blind being healed, cripples being healed, lightning decapitating all statues of previous Caesars,⁹ and what Tacitus calls "many miracles" and "numerous signs and wonders."¹⁰ These are all documented in history by historians who were not known to be superstitious.

Being able to heal and do miracles is not a sign of spirituality. Let me repeat that: Being able to heal and do miracles is not a sign of spirituality. I know pastors who deny the inerrancy of Scripture, deny the justification by faith alone, and in other ways are heretics headed toward hell, but who can still do miracles. You don't need to be a true Christian to do miracles. Out in Ethiopia the witchdoctors were able to instantly curse a person with disease or even death; they were able to prophesy, speak in tongues, and heal the sick.

So the bottom line is that demons can perform miracles as well. Paul warned the Galatians about deceivers who had come into the church, and he didn't care how amazing these men were, or how good of a Christian they pretended to be, he said, "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed." 1 Corinthians 1:22 says, "Jews request a sign..." They were enamored with miracles, but they didn't follow the true Gospel. Jesus said, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." (Matt. 12:39) Don't ever underestimate the deceptive power of demons to make people prophesy, speak in tongues, or do miracles. Witchdoctors in Ethiopia did all three. We have heard them with our own ears speak in German and other languages that they had not learned. The only infallible thing in life that you can absolutely bank on is the Scripture. It is the test by which we should live.

Now, I am not saying that I don't believe in miracles. I do. God has performed miracles through me. But you shouldn't believe me because of miracles. You should be like the Bereans who didn't believe anything until they could see it in the Bible.

F. They have limits

But there is another lesson that I believe is equally important - though these

⁹ Suetonius Lives of the Twelve Caesars 7.1.

¹⁰ Tacitus, The Histories, 1, 10, translated by Kenneth Wellesley (New York: Penguin Books, 1975), pp. 263-264.

demons can be scary, they do have their limits. Let me share four limits on their power that are hinted at in these verses:

They are limited by God's sovereignty (v. 14d)

First, they are limited by God's sovereignty. The last phrase in verse 14 indicates that they are pawns in God's hands. They thought they were doing this to accomplish the restoration of the Jewish-Roman alliance and begin persecuting the church once again. And since they were successful in that goal, and since Jewish persecution of Christians began to once again be successful from AD 70-136, the demons might have assumed that they were winning this battle. They probably thought that this was a brilliant plan and that they were making forward progress. But God says the demons were allowed to do this "to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." This was going to be God's judgment day on Israel and God's judgment day on Rome. Sure, it may be that Satan treated all those bodies as cannon fodder. He doesn't care about people. He treats them as his pawns. But this passage indicates that even what Satan crowns about as a victory is actually serving God's purposes. I love the doctrine of God's sovereignty. It is such a comfort.

They are limited by Christ's coming in the skies (v. 15 with 12:7-17)

Second, they are limited by Christ's coming in the skies. Verse 15 says, "Watch out, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who watches and guards his clothes, so that he not walk about naked and they see his shame." All commentators take this as a parenthetical statement that interrupts the flow of the argument. Everybody is united on that. So he is interjecting a new idea to warn believers not to be present at this great battle of Armageddon. The only way believers could have avoided this disaster at Armageddon was to pay attention to the signs Christ had given in Matthew 24 and to have a grab bag packed and be ready to run the moment they saw Christ leading the armies of heaven on Passover of AD 66 (which is the next bowl, by the way).

We dealt with this warning in depth when we looked at the sixth seal, so I won't repeat what I said back then. But Jesus was very literally seen in the skies leading a vast army of angels with horses and fiery chariots. This was also the great battle that was reiterated in chapter 12, and I added a great deal of documentation for that battle with demons who were cast to the earth in AD 66. This visible coming of Jesus and great battles in the sky was recorded as being witnessed by many. It was recorded by a non-Christian

Jew by the name of Yosippon. It was recorded in Pseudo-Hegesippus, a history of that period. Even Josephus and Tacitus speak of eyewitness testimony to this coming.

But why does Jesus quickly interject these words into this discussion of the Battle of Armageddon, which occurs in AD 70? Another way of wording it is, "Why insert a brief mention of bowl 7 while discussing bowl 6?" And my answer is twofold. First, Christ's prophesied coming spans seven years of 66-73, and He was seen in AD 66, in 68 when Nero died, and in mid 70 when the temple was burned. But second, and probably more to the point here, if the Christians he was writing to were to avoid that Great Battle (Bowl 6), then the Christians would need to escape Jerusalem much earlier than bowl 6. They would need to escape Jerusalem in AD 66 when first Christ came and began His judgment of Israel. If they had waited at all, they would have been kept imprisoned in the city and the Jewish zealots would not have let them go. They had to leave on that day or they would have perished with the two prophets who stayed behind.

These words parallel the warning Jesus gave in Matthew 24:17-18, when He said this in connection with His coming in judgment:

Matt. 24:16 "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17 Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. 18 And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. 19 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 20 And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.

In both passages Jesus told them to watch out. In both passages He told them that He would be coming suddenly and unexpectedly and without warning - just a like a thief. In both passages Jesus told them that they had to be ready at an instant's notice to take action. In Matthew He told them that they wouldn't have time to get their clothes, and in this passage he tells them, "Blessed is the one who watches and guards his clothes." Though there is a spiritual lesson involved, the symbol is rooted in history - in literal clothing. He literally warned them to have grab bags ready at all times because they wouldn't even have time to pack. In Matthew 24 Jesus told them that even if they were napping on their rooftop that they shouldn't come down to get their clothing, and this warns that if they don't guard their clothes, they will have to run out naked. If you were in your pajamas you would have to flee in your pajamas. Any who stayed in Jerusalem to the last minute had to be ready to flee the moment they saw Christ coming with the armies in the sky and the moment they saw the armies of Cestius (which, which by the way, happened at the same time). The Battle of Armageddon was to be so horrendous that Christ quickly interjects that believers better take bowl 7

seriously if they are to avoid the consequences of bowl 6. Keep in mind our previous proofs that these bowls move backwards in time since this is the second half of the chiasm.

So why do I say that the demons are limited by this coming of Christ in AD 66? Chapter 12 tells us. It says that the woman, or the church,

was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. 15 So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. 16 But the land helped the woman, and the land opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. 17 And the dragon was enraged with the woman...

The land of Israel absorbed Satan's wrath against the church and God protected the church for the next three and a half years. He frustrated Satan.

They are limited by Christians who are on guard (v. 15; 1 John 5:18)

But of course, that assumes the next point: Demons are limited by Christians when they are on guard. It's not automatic. The first words of verse 15 say, "Watch out." If Christians had not heeded Christ's warnings in Matthew 24, they would have been stuck in the city, or if they had escaped, would have escaped without clothes and without a grab bag.

But of course, every historical event in this book is a symbol according to Revelation 1:1. He wasn't just concerned about their physical clothes; He wants them to be prepared with spiritual clothing to protect them from demons. So this preparedness in the physical world symbolizes the need to be prepared in the spiritual world lest demons take advantage of us.

1 John 5:19 tells us that the whole world lies in the lap of the wicked one, but the previous verse says that the wicked one cannot touch one who is born again if that Christian guards himself. We must be aware of demonic attack and guard ourselves through God's Word and the blood of the Christ. This is why Ephesians 4:27 warns us not to give opportunity to the devil, and why Ephesians 6:11 calls us to stand against the wiles of the devil, and why 1 Timothy 3:6 warns us not to put a novice into the office of elder lest he be unprepared and fall into the snare of the devil. So many Scriptures tell us to watch out. And any Christian who knows spiritual warfare and keeps himself confessed up and walking right with God is not able to be touched by Satan or his demons. The best they can do is work through people to oppose us. They can move other people to oppose us, slander us, etc.

They are limited by God's prophecies (v. 16)

And finally, these demons are limited by God's prophecies. No matter what Satan's plans might have been, God's plans completely overruled Satan's plans. Notice that verse 16 does not say, "so they gathered them to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon." Though the demons are indeed said to gather them in verse 14, ultimately it is God who gathers them. Verse 16 says, "So he [singular] gathered them to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon." The "he" here refers back either to the sixth angel or to God. Either way, it shows that God is moving forward His prophecies, and He even uses demons as his unwitting tools.

But what is Armageddon? People like to come up with all kinds of strange theories about it being a battle future to us. And you read their hundreds of failed historical events that they had said were going to be Armageddon, and it is embarrassing. There are books that brilliantly document this. My two favorites are *The Day and the Hour* by Francis Gumerlock¹¹ and *Last Days Madness* by Gary DeMar.¹² Both books point out how utterly foolish these Futurists really look, and what a bad testimony these failed interpretations are before a watching world. It makes the world question the truthfulness of the Scriptures. One popular writer of today has had four editions of his book on Armageddon. And the reason he has needed to have four editions is that each Middle East crisis that he said was going to be Armageddon proved to be false. So he had to update the book with another guess and a more recent crisis, and another, and another. And wierdly, each one is a best seller. The expression goes, "There's a sucker in every crowd." But based on how rich this guy has gotten from his failed prophetic interpretations, I've come to believe there is a crowd of suckers out there that will fall for any prophetic pronouncement. Futurism has a lot of egg on its face and it is time that people abandon futurism. I believe the text is quite clear. The Battle of Armageddon is not future to us. It was the battle of Titus' armies against Jerusalem in AD 70. Every detail fits.

And even the term "Armageddon" shows this. There is all kinds of speculation on on the meaning of that term. Some people try to make this Harmageddon, but John is quite explicit in his pronunciation. He says that Armageddon is the Hebrew pronunciation. I won't get into all the theories of what this word means. Some take it as cities of Megiddo, others as beautiful city, others as Mount of Megiddo (they would be the ones who would

11 Francis X. Gumerlock, *The Day and the Hour*, (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2000).

12 Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church*, (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999).

mispronounce it Harmageddon). And by the way, there is no Mount of Megiddo. Megiddo doesn't have a mount on it. But I think this is rather easily settled.

A recent study by J. Day¹³ has argued quite cogently on numerous exegetical grounds that the precise background for this word "Armageddon" is Zechariah 12:11. It is the only Old Testament text where the Hebrew spells "megiddo" as mēgiddôn rather than mēgiddô. Some argue that the Greek Septuagint has a couple of other places, but John is quite explicit here that "the place... is called in Hebrew Armageddon." It has to refer to a Hebrew text. And he gives a bunch of other other proofs that Zechariah 12:11 forms the background. G. K. Beale believes that Day's arguments are quite persuasive.¹⁴ Unfortunately, both see the Battle of Armageddon as being future to us. But that violates the context of both Revelation 16 and Zechariah 12.

Revelation has quoted Zechariah a number of times, and when I preached on Revelation 1:7 I proved that Zechariah 12 clearly refers to the first century. It is a time in history when each tribe of Israel is known and lives separately as separate tribes. That is no longer true today (since the tribes are no longer distinguishable), but it is absolutely mandated by the text of Zechariah 12. Indeed, Zechariah 12 makes clear that it is not just tribes who are separate at the time of Armageddon; it is a time when the descendants of David, Nathan, Levi, and Shimei are still distinguishable. That means it has to be first century. Premillennialists claim to be literal in their interpretation, but they don't take numerous clues like that literally - I do.

Likewise, verse 10 indicates that it happens after Pentecost when the Spirit was poured out. Going on into chapter 13 of Zechariah, that is the time when true prophets cease to exist and those that claim to be prophets will be executed as false prophets. According to that chapter, anybody who claims to be a prophet after AD 70 is automatically a false prophet. According to that chapter, that is also the time when two thirds of Jewish believers will be killed and one third will survive the Great Tribulation. Continuing into chapter 14, the Great Tribulation is followed by Jerusalem and temple being destroyed and half the unbelieving Jews going into captivity with the rest remaining in the city. So it has to be earlier than bowls 1-3, which is Bar

13 J. Day "The Origin of Armageddon: Revelation 16:16 as an Interpretation of Zechariah 12:11," in *Crossing the Boundaries: Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honour of Michael D. Goulder*, ed. S. E. Porter, P. Joyce, and D. E. Orton. Leiden: Brill, 1994, 315–26.

14 G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), xxxvii.

Kochba. No Jews remained in Jerusalem after Bar Kochba. So every detail of Zechariah has to be literally followed just like these bowls in Revelation do.

And Zechariah continues on to describe these bowl judgments exactly as we have described them. Bowls four and five are described in Zechariah 14:12, and bowls 1-3 are described in Zechariah 14:13-15.

But what is the most important feature of this reference to Zechariah, is that after Zechariah describes Mount Vesuvius' eruption, and plagues, and a massive second slaughter of Jews (clearly referring to the Bar Kochba rebellion in 132-136) Zechariah ends by describing a long period of time for the Christianization of the world until everyone is Christian and everything - even the horses bells are "HOLINESS TO THE LORD."

So Armageddon is clearly a reference to the last battle of Titus when he took Jerusalem and burned the temple. Every detail of this bowl six is clearly rooted in AD 70. Though Satan no doubt thought he was making progression, every detail of God's prophetic program was being perfectly fulfilled.

Conclusion

So let me end by reiterating the reasons why this vision on Armageddon is a faith builder rather than a faith crusher. We see angels once again involved in natural disasters - this one the damming of the Euphrates. They are involved in influencing kings, and we should pray for kings and for all that are in authority so that we might lead a quiet and peaceable life. Pray that God's angels would protect them. But demons are also involved with kings - an even greater reason to pray for our leaders. Demons are involved in war. They can do miracles. They move people like emperors and prophets. We need to be on guard against their wiles.

Yet we can be confident that demons are on a leash, so to speak. They can only do what God in His sovereignty allows. We need not fear them. Instead, this book calls us to realize that Armageddon was a turning point for this world, and that there would be non-stop growth of the church after Armageddon until the entire world is Christianized. That is the inescapable conclusion of Zechariah 12-14, which the word "Armageddon" comes from. Well, that means that far from the term "Armageddon" being a word to send chills down our spine, it is a word that shows that we can be more than conquerors through Christ who loved us and gave Himself for us. May we put off the faith-killing eschatology that has paralyzed the church of America

in the last century, and put on the faith-building Postmillennial eschatology of Revelation that was embraced by the greats of the past like George Whitefield, John & Charles Wesley, Charles Spurgeon, David Livingstone, William Carey, R. L. Dabney, Charles Hodge, and so many others. May it be so Lord Jesus. Amen.