

BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson 35 - Chapter 16 Continued

As we continue to examine Revelation chapter 16 today, we find that through the first 9 verses, 4 of the Bowl Judgments have been announced and poured out. They have so far been aimed at 3 of the so-called "4 elements" of nature. The 4 elements of nature (earth, water, fire, and air) that was thought to be the fundamental make up of all material objects, along with a 5th element called "ether" that was believed to be the substance of the heavens and the spiritual world, formed the basis of what could loosely be called science in John's era. And of these elements, the first 4 Bowl Judgments have attacked 3 of them: earth, water, and fire (the sun). By the time all 7 Bowl Judgments have been poured out all 4 elements will have been dealt with.

Do not think that the Bible is attempting to teach us this debunked Greek theory of nature. Rather John is merely recording his vision as presented to him. And, his vision is given to him in terms that he and others of his day can best understand relative to the time and culture in which they lived. Thus in the end, God's intended meaning is essentially the same for John as it is for us of the 21st century. It is that every aspect of the world we live in....everything that forms the basis of planet earth and the life that lives on it... and even things beyond the earth that are essential to life.... are being afflicted. Yet we simply must not miss this: in the end it all boils down to God's wrath addressing one thing; wicked humanity. It is humanity that is the subject of His wrath.... evil, rebellious humanity. By afflicting the planet, He is judging mankind. Let's talk about that, and I'm giving you notice I'll be a bit preachy today!

This amazingly unique planet that we live upon (science calls it the Goldilocks planet) was created by God for the purpose of providing the "just right" conditions for the human race to live and thrive. Genesis chapter 1 makes it clear that God created the heavens and the earth, and that He prepared the earth as the ideal habitation for humanity by first establishing all the essentials for our care in exactly the right form, in sufficient quantities that we might ever need. The ratio of dry land to the oceans; the abundance of fresh water; the variety and scope of edible plant life; the wondrous creatures that live in those waters and others that thrive on the dry land, many of which provide meat for our tables; the moderate climate and the way that weather cycles work for our good; the moon that has so much to do with the exact tilt of the earth that gives us seasons and drives our oceans' tides; and the sun that gives us warmth and provides nearly unlimited energy that living things convert to food and to new cells.... new life... all these things were meant to see to the needs of humans. And yet the Bible also makes it clear that the ultimate purpose for humans is to glorify God and we accomplish this through our worship and obedience to Him. While I could quote you numerous passages as evidence for this fact, one has (for me) always been the best summation for the purpose of our existence. In the words of King Solomon:

CJB Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 ¹³ *Here is the final conclusion, now that you have heard*

everything: fear God, and keep his mitzvot; this is what being human is all about.

¹⁴ For God will bring to judgment everything we do, including every secret, whether good or bad...

There exists a segment of humanity that does not glorify God.... apparently the largest part. Therefore this segment of humanity has not achieved its purpose for existing and so is worthy only to have their existence terminated. This is the process that we are following in the Book of Revelation. Listen to Paul in his typical uncompromising language:

^{CJB} Romans 1:20-25 ²⁰ For ever since the creation of the universe his invisible qualities- both his eternal power and his divine nature- have been clearly seen, because they can be understood from what he has made. Therefore, they have no excuse; ²¹ because, although they know who God is, they do not glorify him as God or thank him. On the contrary, they have become futile in their thinking; and their undiscerning hearts have become darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they have become fools!

²³ In fact, they have exchanged the glory of the immortal God for mere images, like a mortal human being, or like birds, animals or reptiles! ²⁴ This is why God has given them up to the vileness of their hearts' lusts, to the shameful misuse of each other's bodies. ²⁵ They have exchanged the truth of God for falsehood, by worshipping and serving created things, rather than the Creator- praised be he for ever. Amen.

So as we see in John's Apocalypse, God is systematically separating the entire human population of the world who glorify God from those who don't. He is saving the redeemed and destroying the unredeemable. And the unredeemable are defined as those who would rather worship and serve created things than the Creator. And because everyone on earth can visibly see God's divine nature at work in the marvelous creation that surrounds them then those who refuse to know God have no excuse for their choice. Therefore even though ocean life is being destroyed and the sustenance provided on the dry land is being decimated by the Bowl Judgments, and the essential Sun that we must have for life is being turned into a fiery furnace to torment mankind, and the fresh water that keeps us alive has now been turned into a blood-like liquid, it is not that God is angry with these created things; it is that He is angry with the created humans that have been given every opportunity to understand their true purpose but reject it. One by one He is taking a wrecking ball to the marvelous things that He had created so that mankind could live and thrive; it is in this way He is judging mankind.

But now in verse 10 God shifts His attention to the leaders of rebellious humanity; the Devil and his human henchmen. Let's re-read that portion of Revelation chapter 16.

RE-READ REVELATION CHAPTER 16:10 - end

The 5th Bowl Judgment has as its target the kingdom of the Beast. Who is the Beast? It is the Anti-Christ. The Kingdom of the Beast is people, just as the Kingdom of God is people. The Beast's Kingdom is unrepentant mankind. It is those who chose to wear the mark of the Beast that unequivocally identifies them as Satan's followers. The 5th Bowl is said to be poured out

specifically on the "throne" of the Beast. So the idea is that the sovereignty claimed by the Anti-Christ is being challenged as he is attacked by the Lord. Suddenly the invincible Beast that has awed the world and gained billions of followers either through its miracles and wonders or by coercion looks vulnerable. Nothing he can do can stop God's onslaught.

It is said in verse 10 that the Beast's kingdom became dark. The Greek word being translated into the English dark or darkened or darkness (depending on your translation) is **skotoo** and indeed some variation of the word dark is what is meant. However the word dark was regularly used as a metaphor (just as we use it today) that meant blind or evil or something that negatively affects the mind. Clearly that is the use of the word here, as the previous Bowl Judgment (the 4th) stokes the fires of the Sun to unprecedented levels that will make the earth far brighter and hotter rather than darker.

The rather standard interpretation of this passage is that perhaps the earth is visibly darker due to the smoke that is arising from the Abyss. Another line of thought is that darkness signifies the eclipse of the Beast's power. Another quite popular view is that it is referring to the dimming of the economic and political power of End Times Rome. I don't accept any of these because they are purely allegorical. Rather, since especially the Bowl Judgments have many similarities to the plagues that God punished Egypt with, then we need to think in terms of the plague of darkness that He inflicted upon the Pharaoh's Kingdom in Exodus chapter 10.

CJB Exodus 10:21-23 ²¹ ADONAI said to Moshe, "Reach out your hand toward the sky, and there will be darkness over the land of Egypt, darkness so thick it can be felt!"

²² Moshe reached out his hand toward the sky, and there was a thick darkness in the entire land of Egypt for three days. ²³ People couldn't see each other, and no one went anywhere for three days. But all the people of Isra'el had light in their homes

When we put on the mind of a Jew, like John, and we think in Hebrew thought, then we realize that the concept of darkness he has in mind comes from the Hebrew word **chosek** (**chosek** is the word used for darkness in the Exodus passage). So **chosek** means darkness, but not like the darkness of nighttime (there is a separate Hebrew word for that: **layil**). **Layil** simply means the opposite of daytime. If we enter a room with no windows and the lights are turned off, that is **layil**. However **chosek** is inherently negative; it is a term that denotes a spiritual deception or blindness. In many contexts (like here in Revelation 16:10) evil is inherent in its meaning. Thus the Kingdom of the Anti-Christ has just been hit with spiritual darkness to blind the souls of those kingdom members to God's truth. They could no longer repent and choose God because the capability to see the truth has been taken from them by God. Just as God sealed the 144,000 witnesses He sent back to earth to protect them from deception and darkness, the members of the Kingdom of the Beast have just been "sealed" (so to speak) from being able to discern truth. All hope is gone for them.

The second half of verse 10 speaks of the people gnawing their tongues in pain. This is a separate statement from the first half of this verse; that is, it is not so directly associated to their spiritual darkness. Rather, as the beginning of verse 11 explains, this regards actual physical pain and agony of being tormented with the lack of nearly everything that is needed to

survive. This term, gnawed, is in Greek *massaomai*. It is used in this same context in Job 30:3 and this gives us a better understanding of the intent.

^{CJB} Job 30:1-4 ***1 "But now those younger than I hold me in derision, men whose fathers I wouldn't even have put with the dogs that guarded my sheep.² What use to me was the strength in their hands? All their vigor had left them.³ Worn out by want and hunger, they gnaw the dry ground in the gloom of waste and desolation.⁴ They pluck saltwort and bitter leaves; these, with broom tree roots, are their food.***

So to gnaw the tongue means that they are in physical anguish and mental depression because of great physical need. And yet what is their response to their problems? They curse God and refuse to turn from their sinful deeds. "To turn" exactly defines the concept of repentance. Repentance doesn't mean that one says, "I'm sorry". Repentance means to actively turn from one path in order to go on another and different path. And why would the people of the Beast's Kingdom do such an illogical, irrational thing as to curse the God who holds complete sway over all these calamities that are destroying their lives? Because these folks are under spiritual darkness: *chosek*. They can do nothing other than to shake their fists defiantly at the Lord of the Universe. Again this reminds us of the Egyptian plagues when the Pharaoh, and in some cases his court advisors, did the same. Only in Exodus this act was called a hardening of the heart. Even when Moses brought disastrous plagues down upon Egypt unless the king of Egypt changed his mind and his ways (meaning to repent), the Pharaoh was unable to repent because God Himself had further hardened Pharaoh's already hardened heart because the Pharaoh had already been destined for eternal punishment. So this is precisely the way we are to understand the situation here in Revelation 16.

To summarize: as of the 5th Bowl Judgment, humanity has been judged through the destruction of the oceans, the devastation of the land, the pollution of the drinking water, the impossible-to-bear heat of the Sun, and now their misdirected trust in their Anti-Messiah to be able to save them has been destroyed. The effects are global. And the eternal fate of those who have taken on the mark of the Beast and thereby hitching their futures to the Beast and His Kingdom, have reached the point of no return. And now comes the 6th Bowl Judgment.

The 6th Bowl is poured out upon the Euphrates River, allowing some portion of its 1800 mile length to dry up in order for the forces of evil, a huge army, to cross over it. The leaders of this army are said to be the kings of the east. Throughout history rivers have always been serious barriers to the transport of goods and people and could be very problematic for armies (and in many cases it remains so). Rivers were also typically used to define boundaries of territories and nations. In the Bible, nations to the north and east above the boundary of the Euphrates were usually considered to be enemies of God's people and at times were labeled as "kings of the east". In the Bible the direction East always has great significance. The Temple in Jerusalem faces East. The Garden of Eden was in the East part of the Land of Eden. The Messiah will enter the Eastern Gate of the Temple when He returns. The most important tribes of Israel camped on the Eastern side of the Wilderness Tabernacle during the exodus. And yet as often in the Bible as East is the divine direction, we also find great tribulation coming from the East as in Genesis when some kings coming from the East in Abraham's day kidnapped Lot and Abraham had to rescue him and fight them off.

The drying up of waters from rivers or even seas is spoken of in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Zechariah. In fact, God's wrath that resulted from these halted flows of water were the subject. Conversely, we find God drying up waters to aid His chosen people. He dried up the waters of the Red Sea for the Israelites to escape the Egyptians. He dried up the Jordan River so that the Joshua-led exodus people could cross into Canaan without getting their feet wet. Here in Revelation 16, God dries up the Euphrates to open a pathway for the kings of the east to bring their armies out into the open so that God can slaughter them all. When studying God's Word, and especially when trying to discern unfilled prophecy, we will usually find that the best course of action is to consider God's already established patterns (how He addressed matters in the past) as the basis for how He will fulfill what He ordains for the future. And following this God-pattern of drying up waters, since the Lord long ago had made a way for the destruction of Babylon by drying up the Euphrates in order for Cyrus's forces to cross over and attack Babylon (according to Herodotus), so now in Revelation God's target is the destruction of the armies of Babylon the Great and it follows that we would find God drying up the Euphrates River once again to provide a pathway for armies to cross over and go into battle. It seems that the drying up of the Euphrates will be an irresistible lure to the nations to gather their armies in order to attack the last hold-outs who defy the Beast by refusing to take on his mark.

Next, in verse 13, John says he sees 3 unclean spirits that looked like frogs (looked *like* frogs; not that they WERE frogs). First off, since these are not actual frogs instead they personify falsehood and deception, which, since they are sins, are unclean. Notice again the connection to the plague of frogs in Exodus. Second, frogs are considered to be ritually unclean according to the Law of Moses as they are animals that swarm. And we see these unclean frogs emerge from the mouths of the Dragon (Satan), the Beast (the Anti-Christ) and the False Prophet..... the unholy triumvirate. So essentially since the mouth is the portal of speech, and speech can destroy or it can build-up, then the idea is that these 3 speak lies and deceptions to get people to do Satan's bidding. I think it is instructive to notice that False Prophets are, in the Bible, nearly always in relation to either Israel or to followers of Christ. That is, it is lies and deceptions within the body of Believers and God worshippers that are mostly being spoken about. Clearly, then, the False Prophet will try to influence those who believe in some sort of god system and since we are heavily warned about this, then their primary targets must be Christianity and Judaism; people who worship the God of the Bible. What this must mean is that the False Prophet will influence the leaders of Christianity and Judaism to adopt false doctrines and beliefs within their ranks. One can only imagine that such false doctrines will be especially pleasing to the people; for who adopts doctrines that are a turn-off? This shouldn't be hard for us to imagine because from the earliest times doctrines.... whether called traditions, customs, or faith pillars.... have been created to draw people towards some particular person whether he is a teacher, leader, or holy man. There is nothing wrong with doctrines that correctly summarize and explain the teachings and commands of God's Word. However too many doctrines are agenda driven or simply taught by those who are themselves deceived and don't realize that they are part of a long range plan by Satan to win over God's people in the End Times by teaching them falsehoods.

CJB Matthew 15:7-9 ⁷ You hypocrites! Yesha'yahu was right when he prophesied about you,

⁸ 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from me. ⁹ Their worship of me is useless, because they teach man-made rules as if they were doctrines.'"

It seems as though every era introduces some new generation of biblical error, and very soon these errors become unquestionable pillars of that faith that are nearly impossible to reverse. While I don't want to take the analogy too far, it might help us to be more diligent in testing our own faith doctrines against what the Word of God actually says, when we have a rather unsavory mental picture of unclean frogs coming out of the mouths of pastors, priests, Bible teachers, and seminary professors as representative of the lies and deceit that are sometimes taught instead of the truth of the Holy Scriptures. I'm not speaking of innocent error, which happens to anyone who teaches most anything. I'm speaking of religious leaders being first and foremost beholden to groups and sects and dedicated to their lists of rules (and sometimes substantial pay checks) rather than living and teaching God's ways as presented in the Word.

The point is this: open your eyes and look around you. Like most things in this world, new realities seem to change and evolve slowly, nearly invisibly, until a tipping point is reached overnight. I'm talking about the classic frog-in -the-kettle proverb. Over time Jews were unwelcome to a greater and greater degree in Europe, but they grew used to it until one day a tipping point was reached and the Holocaust erupted. Islamic groups around the world have been warlike and troublesome since the inception of Islam in the 6th century. But in modern times, their attacks among one another and upon various Eastern Christian groups seemed distant and unconnected to our lives until Sept. 11, 2001. Who knew anything about Islam prior to that? But Islamic terrorism didn't just suddenly begin that year when it had never before existed; rather it's long simmering existence and its hideous nature suddenly burst into our Western consciousness through our TV screens in but one day.

It will, I predict, be the same concerning the False Prophet of Revelation that will have such great evil influence within the world of religion and especially within Christianity and Judaism. We are far along the journey whereby the Church easily accepts new and modernized doctrines if they sound good to our minds, uphold our wants and desires, and fit well with the demands of an ever-changing secular society. A mere 40 years ago no one could have imagined a Christian denomination, let alone several, that blesses and legitimizes homosexual behavior (which God labels in both the Old and New Testaments as abomination), let alone performing homosexual marriages and ordaining homosexual ministers, all in the name of Christian love. But now it is in vogue, and churches that do NOT accept this false doctrine are considered as lacking in love..... by the churches that do.

The Interfaith Movement is ever-growing with their basic doctrine that all religions and their holy books are created equal. So it is arrogant and not loving for Believers in Christ or for Jews to think that the Bible is any better than the Koran. And therefore Allah is really just another name for the God of the Bible. And that Islamic values (such as Sharia Law) are just as good and worthy as biblical values. I have no doubt that the stage is already set for the Anti-Christ and the False Prophet to appear and quickly gain traction because Christianity and Judaism are already well primed for it due to centuries of false teachings, dimming interest in God's

Word, and the lax attitudes that result. We'll just look up one day and some wildly popular religious figure that's burst onto the scene will align himself with a fast rising political figure and together begin to call for a new global unity in both government and religion. Suddenly, overnight, the world will understand that everything has changed and that this change has been in progress for quite some time. Our biblical compasses were long ago tampered with and even set aside in favor of doctrines of convenience and acceptance by the world. The Anti-Christ and the False Prophet are not going to have to work very hard to win people over; people are already yearning for it.

Not only that, says verse 14, but these 3 demonic "frog" spirits will be able to work jaw-dropping miracles that include convincing government leaders the world over that had never had a thought of working together, so as to form a joint allied fighting force the likes of which the world has never known. The point is made that the entire inhabited world will commit troops to the battle and that this battle has to do with the Great Day of God. Naturally that is not what the huge army is going to call this; rather the Great Day of God is but a biblical description of a time when God and the wicked of the earth will do battle (like the battle that already occurred in Heaven as we saw in Revelation 12). And just like in Revelation 12, the Lord will win and evil will be vanquished; the ending has already been written. The suddenness of the battle, however, will startle the world and so worshippers of the God of Israel are warned to be ready so that, of all the people on our planet, we will NOT be caught unaware. And then in verse 16, for the first time, we hear about Armageddon.

Actually, the word Armageddon is an English-ized version of the Greek. But in Hebrew it is highly likely that the word is **Har Megiddo**, which means hill of Megiddo. Megiddo can be visited today and it has been an occupied city for millennia. In recent times it is only a tel; a mound. It is an archeological site that consists of about 25 layers of civilization. That is, one city is built, destroyed, and then another city is built upon it often using the rubble of the destroyed city. Each build, destruction, and then rebuild is called a layer or a strata. On and on for centuries goes this same cycle of destruction and rebuilding. So Megiddo, in cross section, looks like a huge layer cake, but with 25 layers. The reason this place is important is because of the strategic nature of its location that can view, and defend, the enormous breadbasket of Israel called the Jezreel Valley.

It is usually said that here at Armageddon the armies of the kings of the east will do battle with God. However, I don't find that a satisfying answer. In no way do I find it credible that this vast combined army thinks that they are coming for some kind of a Science Fiction or spiritual experience where they war against ghost-like souls of martyred Christians and even against winged angels. The reason for their coming is to battle somebody for a very specific geopolitical reason. I have no doubt that "somebody" is the remnant of Israel. It is going to be a battle of real people against real people; at least to the human mind and eye it will be.

We must always keep in view that Israel is at the center of God's plans, and that Israel is God's set apart people and nation and Jerusalem is His holy city. So, Israel is where the action is, and shall remain, right through the End Times. That is the context of John's Apocalypse and it will also be the context of the Battle of Armageddon. While I will not speculate as to the exact cause or the moment of the tipping point into conflict that sets off this war to end all wars,

clearly it will have something to do with the nation of Israel and whoever allies themselves with Israel, standing defiantly against the rest of the world that has given itself over to the government of the Anti-Christ. It will be a war between those who refuse to bow down and give allegiance to the Anti-Christ against those who have. And, it will look like a slam dunk for the world's armies because they will outnumber Israel's forces thousands to one. Boy are they in for a surprise.

So much of what has been said and taught concerning Armageddon is comic book-like and can be hard to come to grips with. So I want to tell you a short story that says just how feasible such a scenario is as presented in Revelation. In 1973 the venerable Golda Meir was the Prime Minister of Israel. On October 6th of that year, the combined armies of the Arab League launched a surprise attack on Israel on the day of Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year for Jews. The Israeli Jews were woefully unprepared, their military underfunded, and they were on the verge of being overrun and pushed into the Sea. Richard Nixon was in the White House at that time and Henry Kissinger was his primary advisor on international matters.

When it looked as though there was no hope for Israel to win and survive, Golda called together her cabinet and discussed the unthinkable. By this time Israel had developed a nuclear bomb. They didn't have many; that info is classified and it may have been as few as one or two. But here lies the crux of the story. Golda and her cabinet decided that if they were about to be completely overrun, and the State of Israel would no longer exist, that they would use their atom bomb (or bombs) on the most populated Arab targets they could manage killing as many Arab Muslims as possible. They knew this would not help them win, and they knew it would likely start WWIII. Early on, not grasping the gravity of the situation, Nixon had refused to help Israel. But in 4 or 5 days, with the Arabs taking ground quickly, Golda called Nixon and again asked for immediate help and said that Israel would use the atom bomb if losing became inevitable. Nixon shifted his stance, and began airlifting military supplies to Israel.

Had the Israelis used the bomb, many Jews would no doubt have been killed in reprisal as a result of their action; the government would likely be immediately executed by the enemy if not tried as war criminals in Europe and hung there. But, this time Israel was not going to march like lambs into the ovens, they determined. If they had to go as a people and as a viable nation, then much of the world would go with them because without doubt the nuclear conflagration would spread.

The intervention of the USA turned the tide and a series of absolute miracles happened that allowed Israel to push out the Arab attackers and win, so that terrible option that was no more than hours away never happened. My intent of telling you this story is this: when the End Times arrives, the only Israeli Jews and those standing with them that are determined to face this unstoppable army of the Beast of Revelation 16 will probably mostly consist of Believers. It will be people who know God's Word and so refused to take on the mark of the Beast. People who know their death is a certainty. And so even knowing they stand utterly no chance against the overwhelming forces of the Anti-Christ, Israel and their only remaining friends, Believers, will fight trusting in what we will soon read in Revelation; that Messiah is going to show up and win an otherwise un-winnable war, even though there will also be great loss of life. And the still remaining non-Believing Jews? They are not going to go as lambs into the ovens.... ever

again.

The content of John's Armageddon vision was probably not imaginable to John in his era. Today, frighteningly, it is; and in fact the mindset of the many Israelis I know from my many years of visiting Israel is not much different than Golda Meir's.

We'll finish up chapter 16 and the 7th Bowl Judgment next time.