

## Revelation 16:12-16 – The Great Day of God the Almighty

She knew she was dying. And she was scared. She wasn't ready. One of her neighbours, who is here this morning, bumped into her and invited her to our new home group Bible study. And so she came. So we studied the Bible and applied what we learned. And this dear, dying lady found out that the one thing God requires of her is her absolute trust. In her fear of dying, for this independent, self-made woman, it was hard to learn to put her destiny completely in the hands of Jesus. But she did. She started seeing places all over the New Testament calling for people to believe, have faith in Christ. And one afternoon in Gordon and Noreen's living room, she got angry. She got angry that in all the churches she had attended her whole life, no pastor had told her that we can only be saved by a faith in Jesus that gives up on how good we can be and relies only on His ability to save. Once she saw clearly what the Bible says, she was angry none of her pastors had taught her about that. They had never helped her get ready to die. But finally, thank God, she was ready.

This passage in Revelation 16:12-16, the is about the pouring out of the sixth bowl of the wrath of God. *And it teaches us that God is getting ready, we need to get ready, and most people are not ready to face God.* The 6 seals, the 6 trumpets, the first 5 bowls so far, all happened in order. And the way they were fulfilled has brought us step by step up to modern times—from the end of the first century when John wrote this. (The fifth bowl happened when the Pope's lands and kingdom around Rome were taken away, his royalty snuffed out and extinguished. Like the plague of darkness in ancient Egypt, when Egyptians stayed indoors, the Roman Popes retreated inside the Vatican for 59 years in protest.<sup>1</sup> Until 1929.) During that same period of time, the sixth bowl happened.

### *God is getting ready*

[read v12] First, God's wrath is poured out on a river, then the river dries up, and when that happens, verse 12 tells us, God is preparing for something.

God's wrath is poured out on a river. Was God angry with a river? No of course not. Look: what is in these bowls (see 16:1)? John's readers would not have forgotten that at the beginning of the book, Jesus interpreted "stars" as "messengers" and "lampstands" as individual churches—likewise God does not keep His wrath in containers and bowls, nor does this predict a literal angel will dump divine anger on a river in the Middle East. Here, the river stands for something—and the symbol is a clue to the identity of a an obstacle. It was preventing a lot of God's chosen people from coming to Him. And God does not take that sitting down. He was angry. Jesus got angry about that sort of thing: If someone got between Jesus and one of the little children seeking Him, He said "it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea!" (Lk 17:2) Well that's what this river had done. That's why the sixth angel poured out God's wrath on a river.

But God's not angry with the literal Euphrates River. Notice that verse 12 says it dries up to prepare the way. Why would the river have to dry up? So people could cross it, right? Again, this was not the case with the literal Euphrates, so it confirms it is a symbol for something. The Euphrates is the largest River in the whole Turkey, Syria, Iraq region, and though it never used to run dry, it never kept people from where they wanted to go. When the armies of ancient Persia headed west to conquer the city of Sardis, they built a bridge. They had the technology. They even built pontoon bridges to cross the sea channel near ancient Troy in the war against the Greeks!<sup>ii</sup> They did not need to wait for the Euphrates to dry up even in ancient times. But in modern times, Turkey and Syria built dams along the Euphrates that choke off the water supply down-river in Iraq. There are places where sadly it is easy to cross on foot.<sup>iii</sup> God does not need to supernaturally dry up this mighty river to prepare for whoever is coming. So again, God's not angry with the literal river Euphrates. So in verse 12, what does the Euphrates stand for?

The prophets of Israel used rivers as a symbol in their prophecies. Can you tell me where is the Nile River? See? Most of you identify it with Egypt! That's why Jeremiah used the Nile River as a symbol for the Egyptian Empire (Jer 46:7-8); Isaiah used the flooding Euphrates River as a symbol for the rise and spread of the Assyrian Empire (Isa 8:7-8); so Revelation used the same Euphrates River, in the sixth trumpet in chapter 9, about a much later time, as a symbol for the rise of the Turkish Ottoman Empire, the largest most powerful Muslim Empire in history. For centuries, the Euphrates has been identified with that Turkish empire. In chapter 9, the sign of the Euphrates River pointed to the rise of the Ottoman Empire, and in chapter 16:12, when God shows John, in this vision, the sixth angel pouring a bowl full of wrath on the River Euphrates *to dry it up*-- it predicted that the power of the mighty Ottoman Empire would start evaporating, wither, dry up. And it happened that way. Because God was angry that the mightiest Muslim empire in history was keeping so many people from coming to Jesus. Not just by spreading Islam but even by murdering Christians. They are guilty of two genocides: 300,000 Assyrians; 1.5 million Armenians—many of them Christians.<sup>iv</sup>

The river dried up. In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, people began describing the Ottoman Empire as "the sick man of Europe."<sup>v</sup> The empire was diseased, decaying, drying up from the inside. It had ruled for more than 500 years. It conquered the eastern third of the Roman Empire in 1453.<sup>vi</sup> It held the city of Jerusalem in its grasp for 400 years until the British liberated Jerusalem on December 11, 1917, at the end of WWI.<sup>vii</sup> By that time, however, the Ottoman Empire was already weak. It had been decaying and declining internally for a long time. Just like verse 12 says, God's wrath, poured out on the Ottoman Empire did not end it suddenly. It "dried up. Until only a shadow remained: the country, Turkey. But as long as that empire had the power it stood in the way of another group of people whom God planned to save.

Back to verse 12, it says God did all this "to prepare the way..." I want to focus on those words. The original readers John was writing this book of Revelation for spoke the language it was written in and the words in verse 12, "prepare the road of the kings..." would strike their ears as more physical, real-life—it's a road, not an abstract idea. In fact this is almost exactly how they

people used to refer to the ancient government highway.<sup>viii</sup> They called it “the road of the king.” When we interpret this, we need to take into account how the original audience would understand this. One of the original 7 churches addressed in Revelation 3 is the church in the city of Sardis. And one of the most famous things about Sardis was that after it was conquered by the Persian Empire, the king ordered that a 2700km road be built, a highway, connecting the capital in modern Iran with Sardis. That road was called “The Royal Road” or “The Road of the King,” named for the King of Persia.<sup>ix</sup> That famous road ran from Iran up the Tigris River through modern Iraq, through north-east Syria, into Turkey and all the way across to Sardis, near modern Izmir across the Aegean Sea from Athens.<sup>x</sup> But in verse 12 it’s not the “road of the king” but “of the kings.” Because after Persia, other empires and other kings, like those of Greece and Rome and Parthia, controlled this road. This road of the Persian King changed the course of history, influencing the rise and fall of many future kings and empires. By the time John wrote Revelation that road had been owned by many kingdoms—the road of the kings. So back in verse 12, God’s wrath dried up the Ottoman Empire to prepare “the road of the kings.” But what for?

I’m going to read a prophecy from Isaiah, and I want you to notice who is going to travel the metaphorical “highway from Assyria” [read Isa 11:16, then 2-16].<sup>xi xii</sup> In verse 12, this description of preparing the “road” from the east, across the Euphrates, is a straight-up reference to God bringing the remnant of Israel back from Assyria. But, like in Isaiah 11, the exiles in Assyria were *just one of the places from where God returned His people*. The prophecy, then, in Rev 16:12 represents the wider regathering of Israel under the reference of the “highway from Assyria;” the “Royal Road from the East.” This is one of the great themes of Bible prophecy, of many of the prophets of Israel. Moses prophesied, “If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers.” (Deu 30:4-5 ESV). Jeremiah declares, “Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.” (Jer 23:3 ESV) Ezekiel announces, “Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them to their own land.” (Eze 37:21 ESV) Isaiah predicts, “In that day from the river Euphrates to the Brook of Egypt the LORD will thresh out the grain, and you will be gleaned one by one, O people of Israel.” (Isa 27:12 ESV) These passages are the tip of the iceberg. But does the Lord keep His promises?

Since the collapse and drying up of the Ottoman Empire, more than 3.5 million of the remnant of Israel have returned to the land of their ancestors.<sup>xiii</sup> [read footnote] Today, nearly half of all the Jews in the world already live in Israel and moved their AFTER the drying up of the symbolic Euphrates River.<sup>xiv</sup> God dried up the Muslim, Ottoman Empire, then God brought His lost people home, and soon God will save them. The regathering of Israel is as sure as the second coming of Christ. Those prophecies also predict Israel repenting and receiving the Messiah; Paul predicts a

nation-wide conversion to faith in Jesus (Rom 11:23, 25-27). And Zechariah predicted, about that end-time, [read Zech 12:10]. And if the past hundred years have witnessed the regathering come to pass while the world watches, you can be sure salvation is coming to Israel soon, and you can be sure Jesus Himself is also coming soon. Because He promised.

### *We need to be ready*

Another thing God's Word predicted is that the nations of the world will try to stop what God is doing [read Psa 2:1-6] The spiritual forces of evil continue to do what they've always done: keep the world from discovering the truth about God. [read vv13-14] You can see that these are different deceiving spirits—from the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the second beast—the false prophet; probably spreading ideas, beliefs, and philosophies that turn peoples hearts away from God and against God. At this time I can't be more specific than that. But the impact of the ideas spread around the world by the devil and his demons is obvious—it's obvious in what it makes people do in verse 14—and it's obvious in the deeply held convictions we see around the world today in hearts and minds that see the Lord not as a Saviour but as a Captor, a Tyrant, and faith in Jesus as a prison. These frog-like spirits, literal or not, come from the mouths of God's enemies: Notice the spiritual lies are spoken from evil mouths, deceive people around the world, and lead them to destruction It's the opposite of how God saves sinners. They attempt to thwart and prevent the Holy Spirit from reaching people's ears with the Word God has spoken, to believe in the Saviour God sent, and be ready for His coming, to be saved, to live. When that day comes, God's Word is clear, there is going to be a battle. But the outcome is also sure: Jesus Christ will have the victory (we will see that later on in chapter 19). So whose side are you on? For the Lord or against Him? Are you sure? Can those who spend time with you tell whose side you're on? What do they see of Jesus when they watch you?

[read v15] Jesus is coming soon and promises if we remain vigilant in faith, it will be worth it. When Jesus says, "I am coming" and then compares it to "a thief" He means His coming will be sudden and widely unexpected. You will recognize some of these words, in the Lord's letter to the church in Sardis, where He said, "Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you." (Rev 3:3 ESV) And it will now sound familiar that Jesus warned the church in Laodicea, "...You say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. (Rev 3:17-19 ESV) Because in verse 15 Jesus combines both of those messages for all of us, everyone who thinks he or she is already a Christian, and for every one of you whose resolve is weakening, who is becoming weary, who is growing discouraged in your loyalty and love for God. Wake up. Repent. Believe. Be ready.

*Most people won't be ready to face God*

[read v16] At the end of Revelation 15 there was a prophecy that pictured the coming Day of the Lord as if God threw the nations like grapes into a great winepress to be trampled, the winepress of the wrath of God—and Rev 15:20 says, [read]. It just so happens that 1600 stadia is about the length of the State of Israel. Here in verse 16, we read that this battle will take place in Israel, at the place in Hebrew called, “Har Megiddo” the valley beside the Mountain of Megiddo. It’s a real place. Just south of the place where Jesus grew up—another real place called Nazareth. Another thing that’s real is that the Lord has already gathered millions of the remnant of Israel back home to their land. Ever since the former Muslim empire at the Euphrates River dried up. But another thing that’s real is that the United Nations and the European Union seem Hell-bent on stacking the deck against Israel. And people whose hearts and minds are alienated from God, who refuse to listen to the Word of His Mouth, are listening instead to other voices, other spirits, and the rulers of nations will not stand for what God is doing. They will try to stop Him. And they will probably do it in the name of democracy and so-called human rights. But Jesus does not tolerate people who put His children in eternal danger, who prevent His children from coming to Him to be saved. The Lord and His Anointed, however, will not be stopped. God is getting ready to come and to save. We need to be ready. Most people are not prepared to face God. My friends, we need to pray for them like we’ve never prayed before.

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<sup>i</sup> See Exodus 10:22-23. Also see “Prisoner in the Vatican,” Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prisoner\_in\_the\_Vatican]. Accessed February 22, 2020.

<sup>ii</sup> “Xerxes’ Pontoon Bridges,” Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xerxes%27\_Pontoon\_Bridges]. Accessed February 21, 2020.

<sup>iii</sup> “Iraq Suffers as the Euphrates River Dwindles,” New York Times: July 13, 2019 [https://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/14/world/middleeast/14euphrates.html]. Accessed February 21, 2020.

<sup>iv</sup> “Genocides in History,” Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genocides\_in\_history#late\_Ottoman\_genocides]. Accessed February 22, 2020.

<sup>v</sup> “Sick Man of Europe,” Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sick\_man\_of\_Europe]. Accessed February 22, 2020.

<sup>vi</sup> I refer to the eastern Empire as “the third” part of the Roman Empire because in the symbolism, for example, of the fourth seal, the target was on one of the four parts of the Roman Empire, under the Tetrarchy introduced by Diocletian; of the first four trumpets, it was one of the three then existing divisions of the Empire after the death of Constantine; likewise under the sixth trumpet, the target was the last remaining of those three historic divisions of the empire, the Byzantine Kingdom.

<sup>vii</sup> “Battle of Jerusalem,” Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\_of\_Jerusalem]. Accessed February 21, 2020.

<sup>viii</sup> The word for “way” is also translated “road” [Aune, Dr. David. Revelation 6-16, Volume 52B (Word Biblical Commentary) . Zondervan. Kindle Edition]. These two nouns, “road” and “kingdom” or “king” frequently describe a national or government highway:

“ὁδός means a. from Hom. on (as a place) the “way” or “street” in its many possible forms, e.g., the narrow path trodden by those who have gone before, or the broad roads made for traffic, on which chariots can travel..., troops can march (the common βασιλική ὁδός is usually a road for armies), and processions can be held (ἰόντες τὴν ἱερὴν ὁδόν, Hdt., 6, 34, of the pilgrims’ road to Delphi). ... The sense of way or street is also attested ... In the pap. the sense “way” or “road” is predominant; there are many instances of βασιλική ὁδός, δημοσία ὁδός (national road) (both from the 3rd cent. B.C. on), πεδιακή ὁδός (footpath) (from the 1st cent. A.D. on), cf. also πεζὴ ὁδός, P. Tebt.,

5, 29 (2nd. cent. B.C.)” [Michaelis, TDNT, s.v. “ὁδός, ὁδηγός, ὁδηγέω, μεθοδία, εἴσοδος, ἔξοδος, διέξοδος, εὐσοδία,” V:42. [https://accordance.bible/link/read/TDNT\\_Complete#19583](https://accordance.bible/link/read/TDNT_Complete#19583)]

<sup>x</sup> “Sardis,” Wikipedia [[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sardis#Target\\_of\\_conquest](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sardis#Target_of_conquest)], Accessed February 21, 2020.

And see, *The Persian Empire: A Historical Encyclopedia* [2 volumes]: A Historical Encyclopedia (Empires of the World) by Mehrdad Kia, pp127f.

<sup>x</sup> See map: [[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b3/Map\\_achaemenid\\_empire\\_en.png](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b3/Map_achaemenid_empire_en.png)]. Accessed February 21, 2020.

<sup>xi</sup> To clarify, I am not saying the remnant of Israel or of the Jews is what John means here by “the kings from the east.” For a couple of reasons, I don’t think John meant readers to fixate on “kings from the east” at all, but to see the emphasis on a) the road of the kings, and secondly b) that it leads traffic from the east. Because a) there is no such group as the “kings” who rule “the east”; b) “of the kings” modifies “the road” (the road of the kings, i.e. The Royal Road) and is not the noun controlling “of the east” or lit. “of the dawn of the sun”). But rather, the road is prepared for an expected mass migration, the prophetic regathering of Israel.

<sup>xii</sup> Collins, Barton, and others see this differently. They see the “kings” as those Muslim states established during the partition of Palestine by the British after WWI. They could be correct, but because of how the original readers would understand “road of the kings” my interpretation offered above seems more likely. Historicist scholars of the past, while they anticipated the regathering of the Jews, they are somewhat divided about whether “kings from the east” refers to the Jews, or to God’s enemies. My suggestion (above) better appeals to what the original audience would understand. But my view of the empire symbolized here by the Euphrates is commonly held by many historicist, Reformation, and Puritan interpreters.

<sup>xiii</sup> 3,620,586 [1882-2012] subtracting 62,500 [before 1918] = 3,558,086. See “Aliyah” Wikipedia [<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aliyah#Statistics>], Accessed February 20, 2020.

- From 1882 to WWI, about 75,000 Jews returned to Israel, mainly from Russia and Yemen.
- **In the four years between 1919 and 1923** another 40,000 returned from Eastern Europe after WWI
- In the next 5 years another 82,000 migrated from Europe
- In the 10 years that followed, 250,000 Jews returned
- From then to the end of WWII, at least 110,000 returned from Europe
- In 3 1/2 years from '48 to '53, 688,000 returned from post-Holocaust Europe and Muslim countries, almost 250,000 in 1949 alone.
- In those years, more than 200,000 came from lands east of the Euphrates River (246,460 from “Asia” subtracting 34,699 from Turkey)
- From '48 to the end of the '70s about 900,000 returned from Muslim nations
- Since 1991 about 1,000,000 Jews returned to Israel from the former USSR.
- After the 2014 Russian invasion of Ukraine, immigration to Israel spiked, more than 11,000 returned from former USSR countries just in 2014.
- In 2014, about 6,000 Jews returned from France. The increase of hatred toward Jews and the decline of the economy are causing that number to rise to an est. 10,000 in 2015, and experts expect that in the next 10 years that number up to 250,000 Jews will leave France for Israel.

<sup>xiv</sup> “Aliyah,” Wikipedia [<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aliyah>]. Accessed February 21, 2020.