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REVELATION

SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART 20

REVELATION 16:12-16

The Drying Up of Euphrates

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REVELATION SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART TWENTY

THE DRYING UP OF EUPHRATES

Revelation 16:12-16

“All the vials are poured out in behalf of the Church, for the destruction of her enemies and to prepare for her final victory”. (Hengstenberg)

The preservation and ultimate triumph of the Church and the destruction of her foes is the constant theme of the Book of Revelation, and must ever be kept before us as we explore its mysteries and seek to interpret its figures.

Both Historicism and Futurism have made sorry work of the chapter now before us because this principle has not been recognised. Turks and Saracens, or Russians and Chinese, have entered largely into the prophetic speculations, ignoring the fundamental spiritual nature of prophecy, and the place of the Church in the centre of the entire history of redemption.

In the Sixth Vial (chapter 16, verse 12) we are introduced first to “The Drying up of the Euphrates”.

“And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.”

The significance of the river Euphrates must be examined in the light of Old Testament scripture, if we are to arrive at right conclusions concerning its place in prophecy. A very great historical event affecting all subsequent world and divine history, took place thousands of years ago at the fall of Babylon, that great oppressor of the people of God. Babylon was built on the banks of the Euphrates. Indeed that great river flowed through the midst of Babylon and vessels from all over the world arrived there and discharged their cargoes onto the quays and wharfs which had been erected in the very heart of, the city. The taking of the city by Cyrus the Persian with scarcely a blow being struck is one of the most dramatic conquests in history. It was effected by a supreme stratagem which took the Babylonians by complete surprise. That stratagem was the complete drying up of

the river so as to admit of the advance of the invading army along its bed.

The fall of Babylon was the signal for the deliverance of the Jewish remnant from their long and languishing exile under their Babylonish conquerors. Under the benign Persian rule, the command for their release was promulgated, first by Cyrus the conqueror of Babylon and then by the great kings who succeeded him.

The relevance of this great deliverance of the Lord's people to the portion of the Book of Revelation now before us should require no great effort of proof. The sixth Vial is immediately followed by the seventh which relates to the destruction of Babylon, and the following two chapters, 17 and 18 are a prophetic enlargement of what is stated in brief in chapter 15. The drying up of Euphrates therefore must be taken in a prophetic sense, that is, a symbolic, to prepare the way for the final overthrow of the great Satanic oppression of the true Church of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

The vision of the sixth vial proceeds from that point to describe the last effort of Satan to deceive the nations and gather them together for the final desperate assault upon the kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ - a point to which we shall presently come when we have further enlarged upon the significance of Cyrus, the Persian conqueror, as the deliverer of the Lord's people, and his unique and historic stratagem in the drying up of the great river on which the city of Babylon stood.

NAMED 100 YEARS BEFORE HIS BIRTH

The place of Cyrus in prophecy is established beyond doubt by Isaiah the prophet, who more than a century before the event, gave the actual name of the conqueror - CYRUS. The name occurs in its Hebrew form of KORESH (rightly translated CYRUS in our English version). Isaiah 44, verse 28 to chap. 45, verse 4:

“That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.

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Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand' have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut;

I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron:

And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.

For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me."

The designation of Cyrus as "my Anointed" is of startling significance for in the Hebrew it is "my Messiah" and the Greek form of course is "Christ", both forms meaning "anointed".

We do not often have the pleasure of quoting the late Dr. C. I. Scofield but we do so at this point with gratitude. Dr. Scofield notes that this is "the only instance where the word Anointed (Messiah, or Christ), is applied to a gentile. This, with the designation 'My Shepherd' (48:28) also a messianic title, marks Cyrus as that startling exception, a gentile type of Christ".

There are of course other portions in this passage of Isaiah which likewise foreshadow the work of Christ. The figures of the destruction of kings, and the breaking in pieces of the gates of brass and the bars of iron, are primarily spoken of as the work of Christ the Eternal Son, as in Psalm 2, verse 9, and Psalm 107:16. To 'make the crooked places straight' has already been used by Isaiah in chapter 40, v.4, of the coming Messiah. The deliverance from the Babylonish captivity as foreseen by Isaiah becomes in itself a prophetic picture of the gospel deliverance of the spiritual Israel, the Church, with the conquering Cyrus (Christ) as the mystic Deliverer for whom the world had waited since the first prophecy in the Garden of Eden - the mystic Seed of the Woman who would bruise the head of the Serpent. See Genesis 3, v.15.

In the following chapters of Isaiah (46 and 47) the prophecy of Cyrus is crowned by a description of the destruction of Babylon. In Revelation 18, the pattern is worked out in identical fashion. Careful attention to the relevant chapters in Isaiah (as well as Jeremiah and Ezekiel) will show how clearly the fate of the Chaldean Babylon becomes the type of the mystic Babylon of the Apocalypse. The full Oxford references in the Authorised Version (Rev. 18), should make a fascinating and profitable study for those who wish to pursue this theme.

It will not be out of place at this stage to take a closer look at the historic facts of the overthrow of Babylon by Cyrus.

The history of Cyrus, his great campaign for the subjugation of Babylon, the nobility of his character, and the importance of his conquests, not only to all subsequent history, but most of all to the divine plan of redemption, ought to be studied by all who are concerned in the exposition of divine truth and the cultivation of the minds of youth.

ROLLIN'S ANCIENT HISTORY

For our information we go to the almost forgotten work of a great Christian historian, the Frenchman Charles Rollin. Rollin's most famous work, his "Ancient History" was published in the early part of the 18th century and it soon earned the distinction of an exquisite English translation, and the warm commendation of his friend Dr. Francis Atterbury, Lord Bishop of Rochester, dated December 26th 1731.

In his introduction, Rollin gives priority to his main concern, "The Utility of Profane History with regard to Religion". He writes, "Although profane history treats only of nations who had imbibed all the chimeras of superstitious worship, and abandoned themselves to all the irregularities of which human nature, after the fall of the first man, became capable, it nevertheless proclaims universally the greatness of the Almighty, his power, justice, and above all, the admirable wisdom with which his providence governs the universe".

He proceeds, "Nothing gives history a greater superiority to many other branches of literature, than to see in a manner imprinted in almost every page of it, the precious footsteps and shining proofs of this great truth, that God disposes of all events as supreme Lord and Sovereign; that he alone determines the fate of kings, and the duration of empires; and that he, for reasons inscrutable to all but himself, transfers the government of kingdoms from one nation to another."

Again he writes, "God only has fixed the fate of all empires, both with respect to his own people and the reign of his Son".

Our leading historians of today could not do better than sit for a season at the feet of this great and pious Frenchman and learn from him that the enigma of history, which they strive in vain to unravel, is simply expressed in the one line, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world". (Acts 15:18)

In the humbling, and eventual destruction of Babylon, we see this great divine principle at work, creating an example of the far-reaching effects of the holy wisdom of the Most High - an example which determines the course of the church's history, as again and yet again the same problem of tyranny and impiety arises and the Lord raises up deliverance for His people. The earthly Babylon which has long since passed away reappears in spiritual form (in the Book of Revelation).

This Apocalyptic Babylon, sitting on the Apocalyptic flood of its river Euphrates, goes through the same process of boastful pride and merciless dominion, until the doom which is written overtakes it. Its river dries up, so that the way of the kings of the East may be prepared.

Rollin tells us, "That which kindled the wrath of God against Babylon was, (1) Her insupportable pride; (2) Her inhuman cruelty towards the people of God; and (3) The sacrilegious impiety of her king.

(1) Her pride: She believed herself to be invincible. She said in her heart, I am the queen of nations and I shall remain so for ever. I shall never know barrenness or widowhood (Isaiah 47:7-8).

(2) Her cruelty: It is God Himself who complains of it. I was willing, says the Lord, to punish my people in such a manner as a father chastiseth his children. But Babylon and her prince have converted my paternal chastisement into such cruel and inhuman treatment as my clemency abhors. Their design has been to destroy: mine was to save. The banishment, they have turned into a severe bondage and captivity, and have shown no compassion (Isaiah 47:6).

(3) The sacrilegious impiety of her king: To the pride and cruelty of his predecessors, Belshazzar added an impiety that was peculiar to himself. He not only preferred his false divinities to the true and only God, but imagined himself likewise to have vanquished the Lord's power. To affront God he called for the golden vessels which had belonged to the holy temple of the Lord and used them at his feast for profane purposes. This was the provoking circumstance that brought down the wrath of God upon him (Daniel 5:1-4)."

Rollin proceeds to show how the Lord raised up the power of Media and Persia against the impious Belshazzar. "Make bright the arrows, gather the shield The Lord has raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes: for his device against Babylon to destroy it; because it is the vengeance of the Lord, the vengeance (of

his temple”. (Jeremiah 51:11)

See also Isaiah chapters 13, 44, and 45, Jeremiah 50, Psalm 137:8-9.

Rollin proceeds: “Cyrus, of whom the divine providence was to make use as an instrument for executing his designs of goodness and mercy towards his people, was mentioned in the scripture by his name more than 100 years before he was born. And that the world might not be surprised at the prodigious rapidity of his conquests, God was pleased to declare in very lofty and remarkable terms, that He Himself would be his guide; and that in all his expeditions He would lead him by the hand and would subdue all the princes of the earth before him (Isa. 45:1-4).

“God gives the signal to the commanders and to the troops to march again Babylon (Isa. 13:1-5).”

THE DRYING UP OF EUPHRATES PROPHESED

Rollin then proceeds to show the exact fulfillment of prophecy in the measures taken by Cyrus to overthrow the Babylonian power. “The city was to be attacked after a very extraordinary manner, in a way she did not at all expect. Jeremiah 50: 24 – ‘I have laid a snare for thee and thou art also taken, O Babylon, and thou wast not aware: thou art found and also caught, because thou hast striven against the Lord’.

“Babylon reckoned that the Euphrates alone was sufficient to render her impregnable, and triumphed in her being so advantageously situated, and defended by so deep a river. And yet that very river Euphrates shall be the cause of her ruin. By a stratagem of which there never had been an example before, nor has there been anything like it since, Cyrus shall divert the course of that river, she lay its channel dry, and by that means open for himself a passage into the city (Jer. 50:38; 51:36).

“She shall be taken in the night time, upon a day of feasting and rejoicing even while the inhabitants are at the table, thinking of nothing but eating and drinking (Jer. 51:32, 39, 57).

“The king shall be seized in an instant with an incredible terror and perturbation of mind (Isaiah 21:3-4). This is the condition Belshazzar was in when in the middle of the feast he saw a hand come out of the wall which wrote such characters upon it as none of his diviners could either read or explain; but more especially when

Daniel was called and declared to him that those characters were the sentence of his death (Daniel 5).

“It is God Himself who commands the princes of Persia and Media to advance and to enter bodily into the city when it was drowned in wine, and buried in sleep.”

THE TAKING OF BABYLON

It is now necessary to know how Cyrus planned the destruction of the impregnable city. Babylon was built on the great river Euphrates. Of immense extent, the city stretched on either side of the river, the Euphrates flowing through the centre where the shores were flanked with quays and warehouses to receive the trade which flowed in from all parts of the world. An immense and impregnable wall surrounded the whole city. The only access was by the river, and its quays and banks were likewise protected by great gates which forbade all access to the city from within. Cyrus had laboured long with his army to construct great ditches at either end of the city where the river entered and left. Not suspecting his real design the inhabitants watched with amusement the operations of the Persian army and mocked them from their impregnable walls, supposing that the plan was to invest the city and starve it into submission. They had provisions in store to maintain the city for no less than 20 years of siege, and were confident in their absolute security.

Cyrus, however, had not even told his own army what his plans were, lest by some means the secret should be revealed to those in the city. Only when the moment for action came, when his immense ditches were complete, did he issue his commands for the assault.

Rollin proceeds: “Cyrus, well-informed of the confusion which was occasioned by the royal festival, both in the palace and in the city, had posted a part of his troops on that side where the river entered the city, and another part on that side where it emerged, and had commanded the troops to enter the city that very night, by marching along the channel of the river, as soon as they found it fordable. At a given signal the great ditches were opened so that the waters of the river might flow into them. By this means the natural course of the great river was quickly emptied of its waters and the channel became dry. Then the two bodies of the army, above and below the city marched into the dry channel, the one commanded by Gobryas and the other by Gadates, and advanced towards each other without meeting any obstacle.

“The Lord, that Invisible Guide who had promised to open all the gates to Cyrus, made the general disorder and negligence of that riotous night subservient to His design, by the negligence of the inhabitants in not closing the gates leading down to the quays. The two armies penetrated to the heart of the city without opposition, and meeting together at the royal palace surprised the guards, and cut them to pieces. Some of those within the palace, opened the doors to know what noise it was they heard, and the soldiers rushed in and made themselves masters of the palace. Meeting the king who emerged sword in hand at the head of those guards whom he was able to muster, they killed the impious monarch on the spot and put all who attended him to the sword.

DARIUS THE MEDE

One minor point remains to be explained concerning Daniel’s statement, “In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Mede took the kingdom, being about three-score and two years old”.

This does not mean that Darius was in command of the victorious troops of Cyrus, but it has to do with the dual monarchy of the kingdom which was ‘the kingdom of the Medes and Persians’. Darius, an old man, was senior to Cyrus and administered the Median territory, whereas Cyrus occupied the Persian throne. As a gesture of honour, Cyrus presented the captured city to Darius, for thus is the meaning of the words, “Darius took the kingdom” - that is, he received the kingdom at the hands of Cyrus, by way of honour. Darius was in fact the uncle of Cyrus, and survived the taking of Babylon by some two years only.

The Speaker’s Bible (1876) notes, “The word in the original supports the opinion that he (Darius) received it from another. The use of the same word in Daniel 7:18 is the best illustration of it here. There, the saints of the Most High ‘take the kingdom’ either through the power of God or directly through His hands - by no act of their own”.

This account of the taking of Babylon is drawn by Rollin largely from the very full account given of the siege by the Greek military historian Xenophon, and of course, Herodotus.

“The taking of Babylon” Rollin continues, “put an end to the Babylonian empire, after a duration of 210 years from the beginning of the reign of Nabonassar.”

THE BIBLE AND BABYLON

Rollin then reminds us of yet another prediction concerning Babylon, “the most important and incredible of them all” namely that the ruin of Babylon should be so complete and absolute, that no vestige of it should remain, and that it should never again be rebuilt. We are referred to the prophecies contained in Isaiah 13:19-22, and chap. 14:23-24:

“And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.

It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there.

But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there.

And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged.”

“I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water: and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the Lord of hosts.

The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.”

All was literally fulfilled. The kings of Persia completed the ruin of it (says Rollin) by building a new city, Ctesiphon, on the Tigris, some distance toward the north, thus draining away the surviving inhabitants of Babylon. “As if they had all thought it their duty to reduce her to a state of solitude, though by indirect means and without using any violence; that it might the more manifestly appear to be the hand of God, rather than the hand of man, which brought about her destruction. Later the Greeks, who succeeded the Persians, built Seleucia, not far from Ctesiphon, thus completing the desolation of Babylon. In the course of time the mighty walls of Babylon fell through neglect and were claimed by the sands of the desert. The Euphrates, that used to run through the city, having no longer a free channel (on account of the diversion effected by Cyrus) took its course another

way so that in Theodoret's time there was but a very little stream of water left, which ran across the ruins, and not meeting with a descent or free passage, degenerated into a marsh.

“In the time of Alexander the Great the river having long before quitted its former channel through the outlets and canals which Cyrus had made, and these outlets being poorly stopped up, a great inundation resulted. Alexander, designing contrary to the decree of God, to fix the seat of his empire at Babylon, projected the bringing back of the Euphrates into its natural and former channel, and actually set his men to work. But the Almighty, who watched over the fulfilling of His prophecy, defeated this enterprise by the death of Alexander which happened soon after. After this the river formed an inaccessible pool over the place where the city had stood, according to the word of Isaiah, ‘I will make it pools of water’.
(Isa. 14:23)

“CONFUSION”

The curse which rests perpetually on the site of the wicked city of Babylon carries us back to its origin, for Babylon was Babel, the beginning of the empire of Nimrod, and the building of the tower whose top was to reach to heaven. There the Lord scattered the human race by confusing their tongues, and thus the name Babel, which means confusion, came into our language. The remains of the unfinished tower still remain some miles to the north of the site of Babylon. Known as Birs Nimroud (the Tower of Nimrod) these ruins are a standing memorial to the truth of the Bible. Alexander the Great, musing upon his conquests, planned to reconstruct the Tower of Babel and to complete the work which had been so violently interrupted in earlier ages. By that time, Alexander had lost his earlier ideals and shed his natural dignity and nobility of mind. While musing at Babylon on his plans the hand of God struck him down. In a disgraceful drunken carousal, at the age of 33, he fell a victim to alcoholic poisoning and died almost overnight.

The divine decree concerning Babel and Babylon may not be challenged. The Tower and the morass remain to testify the judgment and the sovereignty of God.

Rollin concludes, “God was not satisfied with causing all these alterations to be foretold, but, to give the greater assurance of their certainty, thought fit to seal the prediction of them by an oath – ‘The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass: and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.’

But if we should take this solemn oath in its full latitude, we must not confine it either to Babylon, or to its inhabitants, or to the princes who reigned therein. The malediction relates to the whole world; it is the general anathema pronounced against the wicked; it is the terrible decree by which the two cities of Babylon and Jerusalem shall be separated for ever, and an eternal divorce be put between the good and the wicked”.

EDEN - THE CRADLE OF THE HUMAN RACE

The importance of the Euphrates in Bible history must not be overlooked. It is the chief of the four streams described in Genesis 2, marking the location of the Garden of Eden. The exact location of Eden has been the subject of endless conjecture. Probably the universal Flood greatly altered the topography of that part of the world, but the four streams appear to have been identified as still existing. Euphrates is the greatest of the four. Hiddekel is now known as the Tigris whose confluence with Euphrates occurs just north of where the combined stream enters the Persian Gulf. The other two, Pison and Gihon are disputed, but many students believe that the two channels which unite the Tigris and the Euphrates just north of the confluence, in the region of Babylon, are indicated. Others believe that a region nearer to the sources of the Euphrates in the mountains of Ararat (Armenia) where the tributaries are exceedingly numerous, are indicated. No great issue depends upon the settlement of the dispute.

But that the river valleys in that part of the world were the cradle of the human race both before and after the Flood there can be no doubt. It was there that civilisation and history began. The earliest records of man show that, contrary to the atheistic evolutionism of modern science, man was always a civilised creature. The savage races existing today are not the light coming in but the light fast going out. Man appears suddenly upon the earth and at no longer date than about 6,000 years ago. And when he first appeared, he was an artist, a musician, an engineer, a poet, and a philosopher - and also a sinner, which the animal creation can never be. Man alone has, and always has had, a reasonable soul, an intellectual grasp of the facts of creation, and a capability of conquering and subduing all to himself. In less than 6,000 years, Man has captured the last secrets of the powers of creation, and has reached the point where, if the Deity does not intervene, he will so use and manipulate the secret powers of creation that he will destroy himself and the planet. As the Lord will never permit that, we may be entitled to surmise that man is reaching the end of his history and the next event could be JUDGMENT.

THE KINGS OF THE EAST

We return now to our study of what lies before us in the pouring out of the last two vials of Revelation 16. Having presented the facts which we believe have bearing upon the interpretation of the DRYING UP OF THE EUPHRATES, we are left with the task of elucidating the bearing which the history of the great river has upon our prophetic and spiritual Book.

The sixth vial was poured out upon the river Euphrates that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. We are not alone in believing that these 'kings of the East' are none other than the entire host of the believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, "the saints of the Most High".

At the birth of our Lord in Bethlehem "wise men from the east" came to render homage. These men were Magi - members of a priestly caste among the Medes - and there can be no reasonable doubt that they cherished the writings of Daniel who occupied so high a position in the service of the kings of Babylon and of Persia. Students of the mysterious 9th chapter of Daniel with its numbered calculation of the years which were to pass before the appearing of Messiah, these men were aware that the great event was due and they looked for a sign. Where else would they find it but in the skies? Being astronomers, they became aware of a great and new object which flared up in the night sky, and recognising the sign, set off upon their journey - not 'following the star' for that was not possible, but following the prophecy, they arrived, not at Bethlehem but at Herod's palace. It was only when the Jewish rabbis directed them to Bethlehem, that they again saw the star which first appeared to them in the east, and rejoicing at this confirmation of their journey, they soon covered the short distance to Bethlehem - short enough for 'the star' to 'go before them'. So do the heavenly bodies appear, moving with us as we move toward them. Bethlehem was not a large village, and they perceived their luminous guide, low in the sky, directly over the isolated cottage where the Child was to be found - not in the stable of course, because by the time they arrived the Child had already been taken to the temple at Jerusalem and the usual gifts offered for His safe birth. He was born in the stable not because Joseph was a poor man - he was not - but because, on account of the census, there was no room for them in the Inn. The lapse of several weeks or even months had given the family the opportunity of finding better lodging. This was the first intimation the authorities in Jerusalem had that something was afoot. The arrival of the distinguished visitors from Persia was an event of very considerable importance and notoriety, and was quickly followed by the massacre of the infants of Bethlehem and the surrounding area - too late to include the Son of Mary; being

warned they were already far on the road to Egypt.

THE WISEMEN REPRESENT THE GENTILE WORLD

But the visit of the Wise Men was an event of considerable prophetic import. They represented the gentile world, the “kings of the east” who in their countless multitudes were to come from every land and clime to do homage to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. They are the great host of the heavenly Cyrus, the Shepherd of the Lord, God’s anointed King.

Here then is another clue to the meaning of the words in Rev. 16:12. The river barrier was dried up to make way for the ever victorious march down the avenue of history, of that great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples and tongues, who come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, to obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

If there is any special fulfillment of Rev. 16 still to be realised it must have to do with the last phase of the onward march of the ‘kings of the east’. Babylon still exists - the mystic Babylon - but her doom is written. All false religion, all sensual substitutes for the faith and worship of our great Redeemer, ‘in spirit and in truth’ must be brought to shame, and all oppositions are in vain.

The kingship of believers, both in this world and in that which is to come, is a favourite theme in the Book of Revelation. Why should it mean something else here? In Rev. 1:6 John tells us that we have been made ‘kings and priests unto God’. The redeemed in heaven sing a new song to Him who has made them ‘kings and priests unto God’ (Rev. 5:10). Peter tells us we are a ‘royal priesthood’ (1 Pet. 2:9). Moreover, in apparent contrast with the term “kings of the East” John commonly describes earthly kings throughout Revelation as “the kings of the Earth”. (See Rev. 1:5, 6:15; 16:14, 17:2, 17:18, 18:3, 9, 19:19, 21:24.)

It will be observed that only two verses on from the reference to the ‘kings of the east’ (chap. 12:12), we have “the kings of the earth” in contrast (verse 14). A clear distinction appears to be made.

We are confirmed in our view by the comments in The Speaker’s Bible, which compares the words of our text with “the beautiful words of Isaiah 51:10-11 - He hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over. Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return and come with singing unto Zion”.

Canon Fausset, D.D. in his critical and expository Bible Cyclopaedia (1886), is wholly of the same opinion. He writes, “The kings of the east are the saints of Israel and of the gentiles accompanying the king of Israel in His glory as He comes into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east”.

- Ezekiel 43:4

See also Ezek. 43:2 – “The glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east.”

Again, to quote The Speaker’s Bible – “The conclusion then seems to be that the drying up of the Euphrates recalls the destruction of Babylon, the seat of the ungodly world power, by Cyrus, and that this destruction symbolises the judgment for which preparation is made under this (Sixth) Vial.”

CONNECTION WITH SIXTH TRUMPET

We may not pass from this verse without indicating its seeming connection with the Sixth Trumpet of chapter 9:13-21 - the Loosing of the Four Angels bound in the river Euphrates. There the Euphrates judgment was clearly a divine judgment upon the wicked who opposed the Word and the saints of the Lord (see chap. 9: 20-21). So here in chapter 16, the drying up of the Euphrates clearly is a figure taken from the history of the downfall of Babylon, the enemy and the oppressor of the people of God. Spiritually it must refer to that repeated judgment of God which always overtakes those powers who oppose the Word of God and who seek to destroy those who proclaim it. There is always a “last time”, and we may reasonably surmise that at this day we may not be far away from it. Indeed, there is every token that judgment is imminent. We shall have more to say about this when we come to chapter 20.

THE THREE FROGS

“And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.

For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.

And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.”

Though like all the figures in Revelation we deal here with an ever-repeating phenomenon in the invisible history of the world - the history behind history; yet the elements here symbolised are without doubt preparing the way for the final judgment of the world. The use of the term, “That great day of God Almighty” (v.14) warns us that we are here, in this verse, moving close to that ‘day of the Lord which cometh as a thief in the night’ spoken of by Paul in 1 Thess. 5:2. Two verses on, Paul adds, “Ye, brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief”.

The mention of the three frogs takes us back, as so much of the imagery in Trumpets and Vials has already taken us, to the Plagues of Egypt which broke the power of Pharaoh and brought about the deliverance of God’s people under Moses. The frog was an object of worship in Egypt.

Fausset tells us of one of the female deities worshipped in Egypt, as having a frog’s head, an old form of nature worship in Egypt, the frog being made the symbol of regeneration. “Seti, father of Rameses II is represented on the Egyptian monuments offering two vases of wine to an enshrined frog, with the inscription, “The sovereign lady of both worlds”. The plague of frogs therefore would be particularly odious to the Egyptians as an exposure of their disgusting worship of these creatures.

Frogs are never mentioned in Holy Scripture except in the account of the Egyptian plagues, in the references thereto in Psalms 78:45 and 105:30, and here in Revelation 16. It is not necessary to assign a variety of significations to the three frogs of the Sixth Vial however convenient these may seem. The figure rather indicates the combined powers of the Three Enemies of the Church (the Dragon, the Beast and the False Prophet), in their final assault upon the kingdom of Christ. Verse 14 tells us plainly that they are “the spirits of devils working miracles”.

We are immediately reminded of Paul’s warning of the antichristian heresy - the revealing of the Wicked One “whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish because they received not the love of the truth that they might

be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie” (2 Thess. 2: 9-11). There is also the threefold sin of Sodom – “Pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness”. (Ezek. 16: 49) - always the precursors of moral laxity and brazen impiety. The present state of Western civilisation might be seen coming into view.

Another significant triad is found in James 3:15, where the ‘wisdom’ which comes from beneath is described as “earthly, sensual, devilish” which could very reasonably be inserted here as the appropriate equivalent of the three apocalyptic frogs.

Frogs are used as the symbol of the loathsome and disgusting character of that final assault which is to be made (or for aught we know, is now being made) upon the Church as the representative of the divine and holy cause of God in the world. There is evidence enough in our day of the loathsome and disgusting character of the assault now mounted throughout the Western world to the subversion of every principle of decency and self-respect bequeathed to us by generations, even many centuries, of Christian faith and teaching. We cannot foresee any successful barrier now being laid to arrest the flood of immorality and open shame of our modern society.

The verse should warn us against any mistake as to who is the source of these scandalous subversions. It is Satan himself, throwing off all his old disguises, and coming out brazenly in his character as the Devil, the Evil One. Paul has warned us that we war not with flesh and blood but with the principalities and powers of the kingdom of Satan; “against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness (Margin, wicked spirits) in high places (margin, heavenly, that is spiritual and invisible places).” (Ephesians 6:12.) Behind all the temptations and oppositions which the Church and her members have to face, lies the malice of the Evil One. He is the only persecutor of the Church, the only mastermind behind the oppositions and subtle temptations which she and her children face. The rest are only his dupes and his agents. We war not with flesh and blood but with evil and subtle spiritual powers, and Paul warns us to take the armour of God that we may withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to be found still standing at the end of the day (see continuation in Eph. 6).

Here in the Sixth Vial therefore we are confronted with a releasing of the power of Satan of peculiar intensity and boldness, which has a special counterpart in that last deception described in Rev. 20 as “The Loosing of Satan”. The two passages are one, under parallel descriptions. If this be the case it could be that we have every

reason to think, from a careful appraisal of the unprecedented landslide to evil taking place in modern society, that we are approaching that great denouement of human history. If so we shall have to betake ourselves to Ephesians 6, which has its counterpart in the 15th verse of our chapter (Rev. 16) to which we shall presently come.

Before leaving verse 14 we should note that the devilish flood of evil proceeding as frogs from the mouths of the three enemies of the kingdom of Christ has a strategic design, namely, to gather the nations and their kings throughout all the earth, to the battle of the great day of God Almighty.

There seems to be a deliberate contrast here, with verse 12 where we have encountered 'the kings of the east'. This is an added confirmation of our view that the kings of v.12 and the kings of v.14 are representative of two entirely opposite orders, and that the kings of the east are in fact the people of God while "the kings of the earth and of the whole world" represent the worldly multitudes, deceived by Satan and following his banner.

According to Dr. I. Williams, the frogs "seem to imply the pouring forth of wickedness of every kind, from the devil and the world, and from that spiritual wickedness which usually attends on both".

The devil stands for himself as the source of all evil in creation. The Beast stands for the kingdom of this world, by which Satan organises his opposition to the kingdom of God. The False Prophet is the masquerade of the Christian Church which Satan has raised up as the counterfeit thereof. What we see is a combined and total effort of Satan to destroy the true Church now that he perceives that his time is drawing to its end. We are in the days of the Final Deception. On the spiritual nature of this conflict now pending, Hengstenberg writes, "Nothing is better fitted to solve the enigma of the world's history, or to stir us up to watchfulness and zeal, than the conviction that we have not to contend with flesh and blood but with evil spirits."

The 'miracles' which are attributed to the devils let loose in this last campaign of evil are not to be regarded as genuine. We are of the thorough opinion that miracles cannot be wrought by Satan. He is not permitted by God to usurp the powers of creation, which God has reserved for Himself, but he can and does deceive and blind the unwary and the unbelieving into believing that he has divine powers.

Lying wonders have been the stock-in-trade for many generations, of the Roman Catholic Church-and Protestantism's numerous sects have not been backward in our day in claiming to exercise miraculous powers. We make no charge against individuals who may be deceived into thinking they exercise these powers. We war not against them, but against the Father of Lies who deceives so many in our time, that miracles are being wrought.

But these are only the excrescences of the Satanic delusions. Satan's chief object is to deceive the nations of mankind and lead them in battle against the truth. We shall have more to say on this point when we come, in the permission of God, to chapter 20 of the Apocalypse.

A DIVINE "WHISPER"

The description of the events under the Sixth Vial has a remarkable interruption in verse 15 when the voice of Christ breaks into the prophecy with the words,

"Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame."

Dr. Williams finely says (we quote from the Speaker's Bible), "When the forces of good and evil are mustering for the last great conflict, in the midst of the sublime description, suddenly, for the pause and interval of one verse, the Spirit takes the believer aside and whispers - Behold I come as a thief"

"It is a word of consolation (adds the Speaker's Bible) amid the terrors which the mention of the GREAT DAY excites."

It is indeed a remarkable interposition of the voice of the Saviour Himself as His servant John is setting down the things which he was seeing. It recalls the saying of the Lord to His disciples, "Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh". (Matt. 24:42-44) The Lord repeats the warning to the church in Sardis (Rev. 3:3) – "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come to thee."

The word, spoken to professed believers, is a solemn warning not to be deceived by the subtlety of the Evil One, nor to relax one's vigilance over one's own soul. There were a few names 'even in Sardis' (which means 'soiled') who had not defiled their garments; these will walk with Him in white.... (Rev. 3: 3-9)

KEEPING OUR GARMENTS

How significant then is the ‘whisper’ of the Redeemer when describing the last subtle effort of Satanic deceit to destroy all who could be destroyed in the sphere of Christian profession. One of the marks of a true believer is surely his obedience to the warning to “watch ... and keep his garments”. To keep one’s garments, is an unusual expression, and it opens up another, otherwise baffling mystery, an event which took place at the arrest of the Lord in the Garden on the dark betrayal night. Recorded only by Mark (chap. 14:51-52) we are told of a certain young man, unnamed, who followed the soldiers as they were leading the Lord away. He had a linen cloth about his naked body, and the arresting party laid hold on him. He left the linen cloth in their hands and “fled from them naked”. Much speculation has raged about who this young man was. It is sufficient to state that he was intended to remain unknown, because what befell him was designed to be a solemn warning to the Church at all times. This young man represented the Jewish nation. Roused from slumber in a nearby farmhouse on the Mount of Olives (perhaps belonging to the owners of the garden of Gethsemane, which means ‘the olive press’) - the young man hastily drew a sheet about his naked body and went out to investigate. The attempt to seize him failed and he fled away naked. The only purpose of this record is to act as a warning to the Church. The young man saw the Shepherd of Israel bound and led away. He was one of the many in Israel who in unbelief knew not the time of visitation, and his flight in a naked state was designed as a prophetic symbol and warning to be ready to meet the Lord at anytime. The unreadiness of the Jewish people left them naked to their shame in the sight of heaven, and they were rejected. So it shall be at the end of the days. Those who are ready will go in with the Saviour to the Bridal Hall of heaven. Many, like the young man of Gethsemane, will find themselves naked, having no garment of salvation.

Hence the words of the Saviour in this remarkable ‘whisper’ which interjects into the description of the last effort of Satan before judgment, at the end of the days. Let those who profess Christ look to themselves and ‘keep their garments’ - lest they are found naked at the last, with an empty profession, unready to meet their Lord (see 2 Cor. 5:2-3).

It is however, a word of consolation to the sincere believer in the darkest hour before the eternal dawn. When things are at their blackest, when the hearts of all other men are failing them for fear of the things coming upon the earth – “Then, look up for your redemption draweth nigh. Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments....”

ARMAGEDDON

“And he (Satan) gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue, Armageddon.” v. 16

There the story ends for the time being. The vision goes straightway to the Last Vial of the Seventh Angel without telling us what happened at Armageddon. This seems to indicate that the full description of that last mysterious battle is reserved for the subsequent chapters. Meantime we make the following preliminary remarks.

What endless speeches have been made and books written and errors eagerly promulgated concerning Armageddon! Our hardworking and too much neglected scholar, Alexander Cruden, reminded us long ago in his Concordance (Section: The Significance of Proper Names), that Armageddon means, “The mountain of Megiddo, or, the mountain of the Gospel; otherwise the mountain of fruits, or of apples.” Well done Cruden! The chosen ground on which Satan does battle is the gospel territory. Unless he succeeds here he loses everywhere and succeeds nowhere.

The use of the term “Armageddon” (Gk. Harmageddon) should put us on our guard against easy solutions. The term is peculiar to John in Revelation. The OT allusions are to Megiddo, or (Zechariah) Megiddon, relating to the valley of, Esdraelon in northern Palestine. “The fact that St. John has employed a word not found in connection with any locality or historical event, of itself points to a figurative interpretation”. (Speaker’s Bible)
ARMAGEDDON is a SPIRITUAL, and not a military conflict.

To the extent to which John derives the name from Megiddo we are naturally drawn to the only three other places in the Bible where the term is significantly used - Judges 5:19; 2 Chron. 35:22; and Zechariah 12:11. The several other places in the OT are purely incidental, without prophetic significance.

The first of the three, Judges 5:19 has to do with the great victory obtained over the Canaanitish king Jabin, and his commander Sisera, by Deborah the prophetess and her captain Barak. The second, 2 Chron. 35:22 relates to the disastrous battle which good king Josiah fought against Pharaoh-Necho of Egypt when the latter, with no intention of interfering with Josiah, was on his way to fight against Carchemish in Syria. The third, that in Zech. 12, has to do with the rejection of Christ by the Jews, and His atoning death at Calvary.

There can be no shadow of doubt that the victory of Deborah and Barak over the overwhelming heathen might of Jabin and Sisera was prophetic of the invincible might of the Son of God against the tyranny of the Evil One. He achieves that victory by the power of the Word, and in her prophetic anthem of victory Deborah actually uses the word which later on in the psalms of David is used of Christ -

“Arise Barak and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam”.
(Judges 5:12)

See Psalm 68:18 – “Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men”

Ephesians 4:8 – “Wherefore he saith: When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.”

In Revelation Megiddo becomes Armageddon - a deliberate development of the name, to indicate the spiritual nature of the battle. Here under the Sixth Vial the forces of evil are assembled for the great gospel battle. The battle ground is spiritual. We war not with flesh and blood. Satan sees he has but a short time and raises up all his fury against the people of the Lord. He who leads captivity captive, the heavenly Barak, takes up the cause of His people and leads the hosts of heaven against the powers of darkness for the last time, the final glorious victory, against the combined forces of “the kings of the earth and of the whole world” (Rev. 16:14). The conflict is universal. The picture in Revelation defies any interpretation of a geographical battle. There is no place on earth where the armies of the whole world can assemble to destroy one little “camp of the saints” (see Rev. 20:9). Nor are we encouraged to believe that the Church as such will ever meet the combined forces of all the world’s nuclear powers, with all the latest armament of devilish science. The Church does not defend herself thus. Her armament is the armament of prayer and faith and the Word of God. By these she overcomes - and has always overcome.

Therefore Armageddon is a battle which is constantly being fought - though of course, there will always be a ‘last phase’ of an agelong battle. Cruden deserves to be heard on this point: ARMAGEDDON means The Mount of the Gospel.

DEATH OF JOSIAH PREFIGURES THE DEATH OF CHRIST

The failure of king Josiah at Megiddo is of high importance as it marks the true end of the Davidic monarchy, until the birth of Christ, the seed of David. Christ

mounted the throne by way of the Cross and the Grave, and His is an everlasting reign. “Of His kingdom there shall be no end”. (Luke 1:33)

There is another, and more poignant feature of King Josiah’s fatal battle on the field of Megiddo. It is probably true that his decision to oppose Necho was a profound mistake from the human angle, but that it was permitted by God for an all-wise purpose there can be no doubt. Israel (that is, Judea) was doomed anyway, and even a victory by Josiah would not have altered the judgment which was already gathering about the doomed nation. The effect of the reformation Josiah achieved in his kingdom could not delay the inevitable, for the apostasy under his two predecessors, Manasseh and Amon, had left a fatal mark.

Superficial exegesis sees only the folly of the good king in throwing away the fruits of his work by his ill-advised interference with Necho. Spiritual exegesis sees it far otherwise.

The responsibility of the sinful nation for the death of Josiah is well stated by Hengstenberg: “He died a victim, not so much to his own imprudence in going to war with the Egyptians, as to the sin of the nation. If this had not called down the vengeance of God, He would either have preserved him from the imprudence itself, or have averted its consequences.”

It was over the death of Josiah that Jeremiah composed his inspired “Lamentations”. Many years after this event the prophet Zechariah, foretelling the coming of Messiah - and His death at the hands of those to whom He came bringing salvation - writes,

“And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddo.” Zech. 12:10-11

Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddo appears to have been the actual place where the king received his mortal wound.

This statement of Zechariah (who prophesied in Jerusalem after the return from the 70 years exile, and nearly 150 years after the death of Josiah) relates prophetically to the death of Christ, and the consequence to Israel of His rejection by the

unbelieving nation. In a remarkable preceding verse, Zechariah writes, “In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble (abject, or fallen - see margin, AV) among them shall be as David, and the house of David as God, as the angel of the Lord before them. And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem”. (Verses 8 & 9) Jerusalem is the Church, “the heavenly Jerusalem”. (Hebrews 12:22-23)

These verses are capable only of a spiritual meaning. That the dwellers in Jerusalem should be as David means they shall all be kings (as John in Revelation 1:6 writes, “He hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father”). The house of David being ‘as God’ is a clear indication that the coming Messiah, of the line of David, will be none other than God Himself (in the Person of the only begotten, the Second Person of the glorious Trinity).

“As the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon” (v .11) therefore can relate to one event only, the death of the heavenly Josiah, our Saviour Jesus Christ, Son of David, and Son of God. His rejection and crucifixion exposed the nation to the full consequences of their unbelief, just as the death of Josiah marked their quick descent into apostasy and rebellion which brought upon them the Chaldean destruction. There can be no mistaking the force of the words of the prophet, “They shall look upon me whom they have pierced,” because the speaker is God the Lord. To escape the inevitable conclusion that He whom Israel rejected and impaled upon the tree at Calvary was none other than God, according to this remarkable prophecy of Zechariah, the Jewish theologians, daring not to interfere with the sacred text, have written outside it, as a marginal note, the words, “they shall look on him whom they have pierced” and taught the people that it is Gog and Magog who have pierced him. By adding one letter to the Hebrew for “Me” they have imposed the false reading “him”, teaching their pupils (says Hengstenberg) to copy what they find in the text, but to read what they have placed in the margin.

It is our business however, not to dwell overmuch on the rabbinical subterfuges, but to emphasise Zechariah’s message that the fate of the Jewish nation following the death of Josiah was the pattern of their fate six centuries later following the death of the heavenly Josiah, the true Messiah, Christ the Lord. If it be said that the case is different because the Jews did not reject Josiah whereas they did in fact reject Christ, this must be qualified as superficial. The people of Jerusalem and Judea did in fact reject Josiah, in spite of the great revival of true religion in Josiah’s day. The religious fervour of the nation as a whole soon became dead and

cold, as their rapid descent to apostasy as soon as the good king was dead, plainly indicates. Within a few short years the judgment of God, in the shape of the Babylonian woe, fell upon them.

Likewise did their successors refuse the testimony of the Saviour, and thus exposed themselves to the righteous judgment of God at the hands of the Romans.

That the mourning of Hadadrimmon was not a mourning unto repentance seems clear, not only from its result, but from the word given to John in Revelation 1:7 (clearly referring back to the verses in Zechariah) – “Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.”

Again, “Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”. (Matthew 24:10).

In short, the mourning and the wailing is not of repentance but of apprehension, when the One who was rejected and despised appears as Judge of all, in power and great glory.

The Saviour uttered to Israel that dread warning because of their unbelief, “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out”. (Luke 13:28)

Again, “Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”. (Matt. 24:30)

ARMAGEDDON - WHERE AND WHEN?

The prophetic Armageddon of Revelation therefore is neither “here” nor “there”. That which was geographical in the Old Testament only typifies inward and spiritual reality. The battleground of Armageddon is Gospel territory, as its name “The Mount of the Firstfruits” indicates.

The literalistic guesses of another huge battle in the Plain of Esdraelon between the Jews and the hosts of Gog and Magog (conveniently regarded as Russia or China, or both) with the chosen people acting as gravediggers for seven months afterwards (see Ezekiel 39:12) is deplorable in the extreme. But as the Sixth Vial in

this place goes into no details, we also must reserve our full treatment of Armageddon until we come to the 20th chapter of Revelation.

It is enough to state here that we believe the whole of the Apocalypse to be a spiritual Book, dealing with spiritual realities, and having at all times to do with the warfare and deliverance of the Church. Armageddon is oft-repeated, and is a continual feature of the history of the Church. Every generation is engaged in this warfare, and shares in its triumph over the embattled hosts of hell. There must be, of course, a last battle at the end of time. No-one can be sure that at any stage we are in that time, but all may be assured that the Last Battle is the Lord's and He must prevail till all His foes are made His footstool.

Just as the crossing of the Red Sea dry-shod, by the Children of Israel, and the total destruction of the Egyptian host, was one event in history, yet applies to the deliverance of all the Lord's people at all times, and in every generation, so the Battle of Armageddon is a token of that constant opposition of evil powers against which the Church in her successive generations down the centuries has to contend. It is all figured as one battle, because the Church is one, and the Book of Revelation -was given for the consolation of the Church as a whole, not for one generation of the Church, much less one generation of Israelites. The concept of time in Revelation is that it is always "at hand" and therefore blessed are they who read, hear, and keep the words of "this prophecy". (Revelation 1:3) There is no limitation, no exclusive unveiling which does not affect the Church as a whole.

We hope to enlarge upon this in relation to the present situation of the Church in what might well be considered, the end of the ages, but this must await the full explanation of "The Last Battle" as we find it in the 20th chapter.

Our 'Historicist' brethren down the ages have succeeded in apportioning all the judgments of Revelation, 'trumpets and vials' to their beloved chronology, and who is to say they are wholly wrong? Their failure lies in the apportioning of these judgments to isolated events of history instead of the history as a whole, in ever-recurring pattern. Most of all, they have been wrong, equally with our Futurist brethren, in regarding the Book of Revelation as a literal Book instead of, as it is, a spiritual unfolding of the history of the Church's warfare, past, present and to come according to the principles of that spiritual warfare described by Paul (already quoted) that we "war not against foes of flesh and blood but with spirit powers in the invisibility".