

# ***Armageddon at the Door***

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## **Chapter Seven**

### **All Eyes on the Euphrates**

For most of my life, family trips have been associated with Interstate 80, the major east-west highway that runs from New York City to San Francisco. I grew up in New York City and my aunt and uncle lived in Lincoln, Nebraska. So my earliest memories of childhood include traveling Interstate 80 and its predecessors from New Jersey through Pennsylvania and Ohio, on through Indiana, Illinois and Iowa, and eventually through Omaha, Nebraska, the final stretch to Lincoln. The Great Plains with their enormous skies were always fascinating to me as a child and they remain so to this day.

But my favorite part of the Great Plains is even further west than Lincoln, Nebraska. In early adulthood my wife and I moved to Andrews University in Michigan, not very far from Interstate 80 in northern Indiana. Over time much of the rest of my family and my wife's family moved to the Denver, Colorado area. So family vacations increasingly included trips down Interstate 80 past Lincoln to the turnoff in central Nebraska where Interstate 76 spurs off from I 80 to connect Nebraska with the Denver area. This stretch goes through my favorite part of the Great Plains, a hundred miles of rolling, treeless hills to the east of Denver. The sky is huge, there is hardly a trace of human habitation in sight (except, of course the concrete ribbon of

Interstate 76) and there is the sweet anticipation of the Rocky Mountains soon to come. As the car crests each of the rolling hills, my eyes search the horizon for the first trace of the great mountain wall known as the Front Range.

On a clear day, and there are many of those on the Great Plains, you can get the first glimpse of the high mountains around mile 100 (a hundred miles from Denver and perhaps 100 more to the snow-capped peaks of the Front Range). Their breathtaking vastness creeps up the horizon, becoming clearer and clearer, larger and larger as the miles go by. Even in summer, the top third of the mountain wall is graced with the sparkling whiteness of eternal snow. The rest of the mountain wall is dark grey to black in contrast. I love the mountains, and as I drive through eastern Colorado I can't wait to get close to them.

### **Seeing the Big Picture**

The New Testament is a lot like traveling through eastern Colorado. There are many beautiful things and yet there is the sense that the best is yet to come. Every so often you catch a brief glimpse of something way in the future. 2 Thessalonians 2 is one of those places. Some people call it The Little Apocalypse, because so much information about the end of the world is stuffed into such a small space (we visiting there briefly in Chapter Five). While Revelation gives us the big picture, there is so much fascinating detail that we may miss the forest for the trees. So before we explore the Battle of Armageddon, let's catch a glimpse of the big picture by reading 2 Thess 2:7-8 (ESV).

7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it

will do so until he is out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

This text tells us that there are two basic types of knowing in the time between the first and second advents of Jesus. And these two types of knowing come one after the other, in two historical phases. First of all there is the present time, which is a time of mystery, a time of restraint, in other words, a time of ambiguity. Things are not as clear as we would like. In the words of Paul, “We know in part. . . We prophesy in part. . . We see through a glass darkly” (based on 1 Cor 13:9-12). During this time of ambiguity, there is no clear distinction, for example, between good and evil. There are good people who do bad things, often unintentionally. There are evil people who from time to time do things that are amazingly good or beneficial to many. And there is no ideal nation. While some nations may have a more positive influence than others, we discover a lot of ambiguity when we get away from the siren songs of blind patriotism.

An example of this is Iraq under Saddam Hussein. Few would argue that the man was essentially evil in the cold-blooded way he dispatched family, friends and large numbers of people in rival ethnic groups and political factions. He self-servingly built huge palaces for himself while millions of his people went hungry. He sacrificed millions of lives, in Iraq, Iran and Kuwait, in the service of his unbridled military and political ambitions. Yet during his reign the seething hatreds among Sunni and Shiite, Arab and Kurd were kept under control. Children were free to play in the streets and everyday life was largely calm and peaceful. Is Iraq better

off now that Hussein is no longer in control? The answer to that question is more ambiguous than Westerners, or even most Iraqis, would like. That is what life in this present age is like.

I recently met a man who was the leader of the Adventist Church in Iraq under Saddam Hussein. He told me that Hussein was very favorable and kind to the church and its members. At one point they were suffering a great deal due to all crucial exams being given on Sabbath, with no exceptions allowed. This meant that members of the Adventist Church could not advance in school, could not qualify for the best jobs, and ultimately could not participate in government. Hussein himself ordered with his own signature that special accommodations be made for Adventists and others who worshiped on the Sabbath. Hussein's public persona was evil, yet he was capable in some circumstances of acts of concern and compassion for the disadvantaged. That is what life is like in the present age. It is an age of mystery and ambiguity.

During this time of ambiguity we need to avoid the temptation to believe that we have everything perfectly clear. A certain amount of humility is needed. But this can be difficult for many. Whenever I have question and answer sessions with church groups there are always people who want to know all about the difficult and obscure texts of the Bible. They want to know how to interpret the Seals and the Trumpets. They want clarity out of Daniel 11. And if I can't provide clarity for them, they are determined to provide it for themselves. They ask questions like, "According to the Bible, the secrets things belong to God (Deut 29:29). What are those secret things?" What are they?!? I have no idea! That's why the Bible calls them secret things! And I suspect that some of those secret things will always belong to God, simply

because God is God and we are limited in the amount we can understand.

But there is some hope for curiosity seekers. According to 2 Thess 2:7-8 there is a time of revelation coming, a time when good and evil will be clearly distinguished. That is what the Battle of Armageddon is all about. Revelation 16-17 unpacks the time of “revelation” in 2 Thessalonians 2. It describes as clearly as we can understand ahead of time, just what the final events will be like. The drama of the Battle of Armageddon breaks through the ambiguity, it unpacks many of the secret things. To the degree that human beings can understand the future, the picture comes into focus in the chapters we are about to explore together.

Beginning with Revelation 16:12 we get into the heart of the end-time battle. We will gain a considerable amount of clarity regarding the consummation of all things. The purpose of these texts is to show how the powers that oppose God and His people at the end of time will meet their end. They also help us understand how to stay true to God in the final tests to come. In order to understand the battle of Armageddon we begin with the sixth angel in a pivotal verse (Revelation 16:12). That verse introduces a brief summary of Armageddon (Revelation 16:12-21) that is expanded by a more detailed elaboration in the chapters that follow (Revelation 17-19).

Before I begin, let me say a word about one of my favorite professors, Han LaRondelle. Dr. LaRondelle was the teacher who most strongly inspired me to study Revelation and to particularly investigate the role of the Old Testament in the study of the book. He also encouraged me to read the work of Louis Were, an Adventist evangelist and mentor of his.

Although much of what follows in this chapter comes from my own textual work, I know that my debt to Dr. LaRondelle, in particular, is deep beyond measure. May he continue to live long and prosper!

### **How to See Deeply**

But while the Battle of Armageddon chapters are designed to bring a basic clarity to the mysteries of the End, the truths do not lie on the surface. These are extremely challenging texts that have been subject to a wide variety of interpretations in the past. So before we get deeply into these texts it would be helpful to quickly review the basic steps of interpretation that were laid out in the opening book of this series, *The Deep Things of God*. If you have not read this book, you will want to do so. It provides, in considerable detail, the tools and processes that allow the teachings of Revelation to emerge naturally from the text. The goal is to understand God's intent for the book rather than read our own ideas and concerns into the puzzling imagery of the text. I will summarize the interpretive strategy of the book briefly here.

There are four major steps involved in unpacking the symbolic visions of the Apocalypse. The first is like the strategy used in any other passage of the New Testament. I called it "basic exegesis." That means to carefully examine the words, the phrases, the grammar and the syntax of every verse in which you are interested. You use dictionaries, concordances and commentaries to assemble as much information about the text in its original setting as you can. These are all carefully compared with what can be learned about the history, culture and

setting of first century Asia Minor, the place to which the book was written.

But in Revelation you can understand perfectly well what the text is saying and still have no idea what the text means. For example, it is clear that the first trumpet (Rev 8:7) portrays an angel in heaven blowing a trumpet with the consequence that hail and fire, mixed with blood, are thrown to the earth, burning up a third of the earth, a third of the trees and all the green grass. There is no question as to what the text is saying. The issue is, what does the text mean?

That is where careful study of Revelation has exposed three further strategies for understanding texts like the first trumpet. You examine the text in light of the overall structure of the book, you examine the allusions and echos to the Old Testament in the text, and you discover the impact that the gospel has had in transforming Old Testament images in the light of what Christ has done for us. All three of these extended strategies will be needed in order to understand what is going on in Rev 16:12 (my translation):

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up in order that the way of the kings from the rising of the sun might be prepared.

### **The Euphrates River**

As with the first trumpet, the images are fairly plain on the surface. It is not hard to understand what the text says, but it is much more difficult to know what the text means. So we need to apply the more extensive four-step method summarized above.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the “bowl” in this text is probably a sanctuary image drawn from the Old Testament. But while this image is drawn from the sanctuary, in

Revelation the bowls cause major destruction to the earth and its people: sores, water turning to blood, rivers and springs turning to blood, and the sun scorching people with intense heat. By comparison with the previous plagues, the sixth plague seems like nothing. It is merely the drying up of one of the world's thousands of rivers. Not only so, the Euphrates River historically has been something of a seasonal river that dries up from time to time. But first impressions in Revelation are often far from the mark. There is much more below the surface of this text.

One of the distinguishing marks of the Euphrates River in ancient times was that it passed right through the center of Babylon, an ancient city that was the capital of an ancient empire. Babylon was something like Kansas City. There are two cities in two different states, divided only by the Missouri River. Although divided by the river and political barriers, Kansas City is one unified city for all practical purposes. So the mention of the Euphrates River in this text probably sets the table for the many mentions of Babylon in the passages to follow (Rev 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21). And whatever the Euphrates River means in this verse, its drying up prepares the way for the kings who come from the rising of the sun, whoever they are.

There are three crucial questions that come to mind as one strives to unpack the deeper meaning of Rev 16:12. 1) What does the Euphrates River mean in this text? Is it literally the Euphrates River in ancient Mesopotamia? Or is it a symbol of something else? 2) What is the drying up all about? Is that literal or symbolic? 3) Who are the kings from the rising of the sun? Are they specific world powers or something else?

We will be able to answer these three questions by applying the three extended



strategies noted above. (1) John explains the meaning of the Euphrates River in chapter 17, so the examining the larger context will be the key to understanding that image. (2) The secret of its drying up emerges, however, only from a careful examination of the Old Testament tradition of Babylon's fall in Jeremiah 50-51 and Isaiah 44-47. Understanding John's allusions to the Old Testament are often critical to correct interpretation. (3) The kings from the rising of the sun comes to clarity when one examines "rising sun" elsewhere in the New Testament. Revelation is a New Testament book and many aspects of the book can only be understood with reference to the other 26 books of the New Testament.

So let's take a look at how the larger structure of the book of Revelation clearly explains the significance of the Euphrates River in the text at hand. One of the seven bowl angels of Revelation 16 returns to explain something to John.

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters."

Rev 17:1

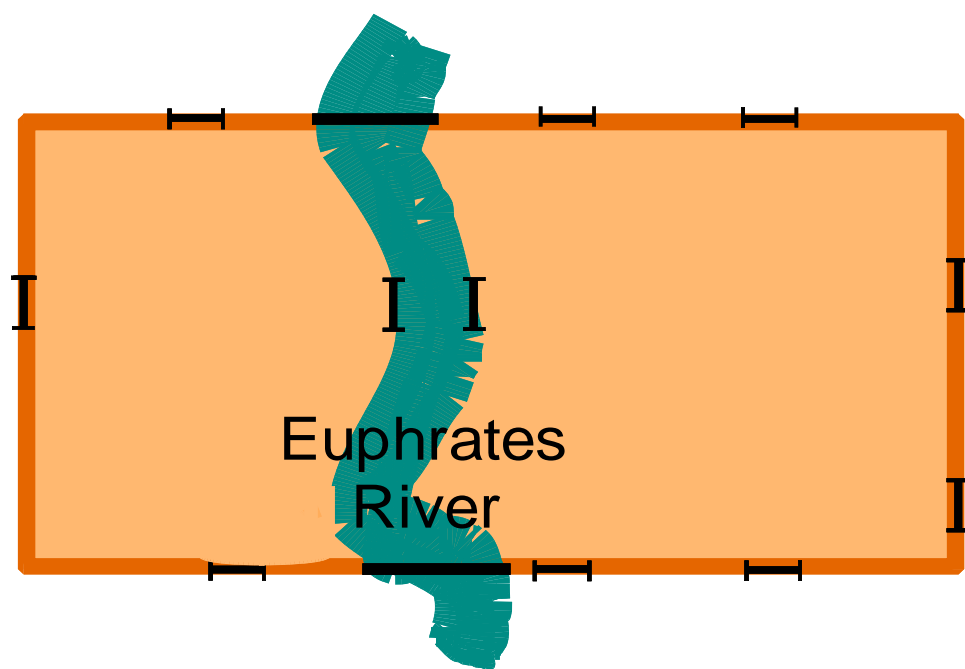
Clearly, this vision and what follows is intended to explain one of the seven bowl-plagues of chapter sixteen. But which one? Notice that the angel invites John to observe the punishment of "the great prostitute" who sits on **many waters**. So the bowl-plague being explained must have something to do with water. A quick survey of the seven last plagues in Revelation 16 reveals that three of the plagues have something to do with water. The second plague falls on the sea, the third plague falls on the rivers and springs of the earth, and the sixth plague falls on the Euphrates River. The crucial question is, which of those three plagues is in

view here? Chapter 17 will be an elaboration of that plague.

It helps to notice that the concept of “many waters” didn’t come out of thin air. It is found in Jer 51:12-13 (NIV): “Lift up a banner against the walls of Babylon! Reinforce the guard, station the watchmen, prepare an ambush! The LORD will carry out his purpose, his decree against the people of Babylon. ***You who live by many waters*** and are rich in treasures, your end has come, the time for you to be cut off.” What are the many waters that Babylon lives near? The water of the Euphrates River! This is confirmed when we discover the identity of the great prostitute in Rev 17:4-5 (ESV):

4 The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, . . . 5 And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations.”

The great prostitute is none other than Babylon the Great, the twin city on both banks of the Euphrates River! The two halves of Babylon were each about a square mile, looking something like the following:



If the great prostitute is Babylon then the “many waters” of verse 1 must be the Euphrates River. So it should be fairly obvious by now that the angel who comes to John at the beginning of Revelation seventeen is the sixth angel who had poured his bowl on the great river Euphrates. This same angel has returned to elaborate on the sixth plague.

In many parts of the Middle East, rainfall is minimal or non-existent. A place that has an abundance of water is truly worthy of notice. One such place is Egypt, where the Nile River’s massive flow is fed by the snow-capped mountains of northeast central Africa. The other such place is Mesopotamia (which means “between the rivers”), where the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers flow from the snow-capped mountains of Turkey and Iran. Dry places can have lots of fresh water if the rivers that pass through them are fed from places where the rain and snow are abundant.

But this still leaves open the question, What does the Euphrates River mean in this text? Is it literally the Euphrates River in ancient Mesopotamia? Or is it a symbol of something else? Interpreters have offered a number of different answers to these questions. Some have suggested that the Euphrates River represents. . . the Euphrates River! Duh! While this is certainly a possibility in any biblical text, I don’t think that is the correct interpretation here, as we will see.

Other interpreters have suggested that the Euphrates River represents the land or the territory through which the river flows. One problem with that view is that the territory through which the Euphrates River flows seems to have changed hands an awful lot in the course of

history. In the nineteenth century the entire length of the Euphrates River flowed through Turkey. Today most of the Euphrates River flows through territory called Iraq. For a time, some interpreters thought the Euphrates River represented Saddam Hussein, but that interpretation looks a bit dated now. Still others have branched out even further and suggested that the Euphrates River represents Middle Eastern oil. The drying up of the river would then represent a shortage of oil supplies.

All of these interpretations have been convincing to some people at one time or another. But let me ask you a question. If John himself provides the meaning of the Euphrates River in his outline of the vision, does it make sense to pursue any other interpretation than the one that John himself gives us? I think the answer to that question is obvious. So let's see what Revelation itself tells us about the Euphrates River.

The capstone of the angel's instruction to John is found in verse 15 (ESV): "And the angel said to me, 'The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, . . .'" Where have we heard this language before? This is a reference back to verse one! There the angel told John he would be shown a great prostitute who sits on many waters. So now in verse 15 the angel is about to explain the meaning of the Euphrates River! The waters which John saw in verse one "are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages."

It is now clear that the Euphrates River does not represent itself. Neither does it represent a single nation or the leader of a nation, like Saddam Hussein. It also does not represent a substance like Middle Eastern oil. In the book of Revelation the Euphrates River is

representative of the civil and secular powers of the entire world. All nations, all races, all ethnic groups, all language groups are represented. Euphrates River is a symbol of the political and military powers of the world that will give their support to end-time Babylon.

Babylon, by contrast, is something other than the political powers of this world. Prostitute Babylon is described in dress similar to that worn by the High Priest of Old Testament Israel (Rev 17:4-5; cf. Exod 28 and 39). She also suffers the fate of a priest's daughter for her prostitution (Rev 17:16; cf. Lev 21:9). So Prostitute Babylon clearly represents a religious power at the End that is hostile to the Lamb and to those who are with him (17:14).

Are you beginning to see that the sixth plague must be more significant than it appeared at first glance? After all, if we are dealing with the drying up of a river that is often dry in the late summer, the plague doesn't amount to much. But if the Euphrates River symbolizes the civil, secular and political powers of this world, the drying up of that Euphrates becomes a very major event in earth's history. The procedure we have just followed shows that the book of Revelation often interprets its own symbols, if are patient enough to search it with care.

When modern nations are working loosely together for a common cause we often call it an alliance (like N.A.T.O., for example). When a particular nation is powerful enough and determined enough to dominate others by force we call it an empire. At the end of time, the Euphrates River represents the power of many nations supporting the end-time empire of Babylon. What would the drying up of the Euphrates River mean then? Probably the nations' withdrawal of support for end-time Babylon. When end-time Babylon loses its support system

of nations it will fall. How Babylon falls at the end of time is clarified when we examine the Old Testament background the drying up of the Euphrates River.

### **The Drying Up of the Euphrates**

Let me remind you, if you have read *The Deep Things of God*, that the Book of Revelation parallels the Old Testament in two different ways. They are called allusions and echos. The purpose of an allusion is to point the reader to a specific passage of the Old Testament and to apply its significance to Revelation. In an allusion John intends the reader to recognize the connection between texts and to be aware of the larger context in the Old Testament. The Old Testament context helps explain the meaning of Revelation. A word, a phrase, a symbol can become a picture that replaces a thousand words. Recognizing an allusion opens fresh windows into the author's meaning. Missing the allusion leaves the author's meaning in doubt.

An echo, on the other hand, is not based on conscious intention. John may use the language of the Old Testament without being consciously aware of where in the Old Testament that language came from. An echo is a usage that is "in the air," people just pick it up from the environment in which they live. It would be particularly easy to echo the Old Testament if you grew up in a Jewish synagogue where you constantly heard the Old Testament quoted and referred to in various ways. It would be natural for you to use language from the Old Testament but you would not always be aware that the Old Testament was the source of the expressions

you were using.

The point here is that when the author of Revelation alludes to the Old Testament, the purpose is for the reader to incorporate the whole context of that passage into the narrative at hand. The “drying up the River Euphrates” is about more than just a simple description of a river during dry season. That phrase connects us with an entire narrative background from the Old Testament. In order to understand John’s vision you have to understand the narrative world in which he lived. To miss that world is to misunderstand and misuse the text.

In Revelation 16-18 there are multiple allusions to the Old Testament’s description of Babylon’s fall. The Old Testament story can be found in three places: Jeremiah 50-51; Isaiah 44-47; and Daniel 5. I want to call your attention particularly to Jeremiah 50 and 51. We will begin with Jer 50:33-34 (NIV):

This is what the LORD Almighty says: “The people of Israel are oppressed, and the people of Judah as well. All their captors hold them fast, refusing to let them go.

“Yet their Redeemer is strong; the LORD Almighty is his name. He will vigorously defend their cause so that he may bring rest to their land, but unrest to those who live in Babylon.”

This text makes it clear that Babylon’s fall was not an accident. It was part of the direct purpose of God. Babylon had become an oppressor of Israel and God desired to demonstrate His power to defend and deliver His people. At one time God had used Babylon to discipline and correct His people. But the Babylonians went too far in this role and became abusive. God may practice discipline but He does not approve of abuse and oppression. When Israel’s time of discipline was up (70 years of captivity), God intended to free them even if the Babylonians

wouldn't. God continues His indictment of the Babylonians:

“A sword against the Babylonians!” declares the LORD-- “against those who live in Babylon and against her **officials** and **wise men**! A sword against her **false prophets**! They will become fools. A sword against her **warriors**! They will be filled with terror.”  
Jer 50:35-36 (NIV)

In this text the Lord declares an attack against the Babylonians. But He does not leave the language general, He specifically targets Babylon's officials, her wise men, her false prophets and her warriors. What are we dealing with here? It is a listing of the people who make Babylon strong; her administrators, her thinkers, her religious leaders and her military personnel. A nation is no stronger than the quality of those who lead her and who fight for her. The prophecy continues:

A sword against her **horses and chariots** and all the foreigners in her **ranks**! They will become women. A sword against her **treasures**! They will be plundered.  
Jer 50:37 (NIV)

The previous verses talk about officials, wise men and warriors. Now this verse talks about horses and chariots, mercenary troops and treasures. What is this all about? Again this is a listing of the resources that make Babylon strong! Horses and chariots were like the tanks of the ancient world. Babylon's financial resources were also significant in her defense. With lots of treasure she could rent or lease the armies of other nations to fight for her. Babylon is only as strong as the resources of people and treasures that defend her. But there is one more resource that has not yet been listed:

A drought on her **waters**! They will dry up. For it is a land of idols, idols that will go mad with terror.  
Jer 50:38 (NIV)



What are the waters being dried up here? The waters of Babylon, the Euphrates River! You see, the Euphrates River was part of the defenses of ancient Babylon. It provided a moat around the city that made an attack against the walls almost impossible to carry out. But the Euphrates River was even more than this in Jer 50:38. It had become a symbol of all the resources that supported ancient Babylon. The Euphrates River not only represented the physical moat around the city, but all the warriors and officials and treasures that made Babylon strong. To dry up the Euphrates River meant Babylon's loss of all the resources that she needed to survive. God's judgment on Babylon was repeated in Jer 51:36-37 (NIV):

Therefore, this is what the LORD says: "See, I will defend your cause and avenge you; ***I will dry up her sea and make her springs dry.*** Babylon will be a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals, an object of horror and scorn, a place where no one lives."

Once again we see that the drying up of the Euphrates River is the triggering event that results in the destruction of ancient Babylon. When we remember the drying up of the Euphrates in Rev 16:12, we now realize that there is a whole narrative history lying behind that simple statement. When Revelation 17:15 interprets the Euphrates River as a symbol of the civil and secular powers of this world in support of end-time Babylon, it is using the Euphrates River in a way consistent with its usage in the Old Testament. Readers familiar with the Old Testament would find the interpretation of the Euphrates in Revelation quite consistent with its meaning in the past.

But there are a few more things to learn about the drying up of the Euphrates River and the fall of Babylon in the Old Testament. For these we turn to Isaiah 44, another great fall of

Babylon text.

This is what the LORD says-- your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the LORD, who has made all things, . . . ***who carries out the words of his servants and fulfills the predictions of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, "It shall be inhabited,"*** of the towns of Judah, "They shall be built," and of their ruins, "I will restore them," who says to ***the watery deep, "Be dry, and I will dry up your streams,"*** who says of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; ***he will say of Jerusalem, 'Let it be rebuilt,' and of the temple, 'Let its foundations be laid.'***"

Isa 44:24-28 (NIV)

The words "watery deep" and "I will dry up your streams" are further references to the drying up of the Euphrates River. So Isaiah 44 introduces another fall of Babylon passage. But there are two additional elements here that we did not find in Jeremiah 50-51. There is a mention of Cyrus, the king of Persia who would actually accomplish the conquest of Babylon. There is also a mention of the rebuilding of Jerusalem, God's ultimate purpose for Babylon's fall. Prophecy predicted both the fall of Babylon and the restoration of Jerusalem. These things happened in history because God said they would.

This mention of Jerusalem shows that prophecy has a spiritual purpose. The Bible does not depict God as particularly interested in the rise and fall of the nations as such. The ebb and flow of politics come into scriptural play only when the people of God and the cause of God are somehow affected. Babylon's fate becomes important when she hinders the work that God is trying to accomplish on this earth. Prophecies are given, not to satisfy our curiosity about political events, but to describe a just and caring God who delivers His oppressed people and rebuilds the places that matter to them. And He summons Cyrus to be His agent on earth.

This is what the LORD says to ***his anointed***, to ***Cyrus***, whose right hand I take

hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, **to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut.** . .

Isa 45:1 (NIV)

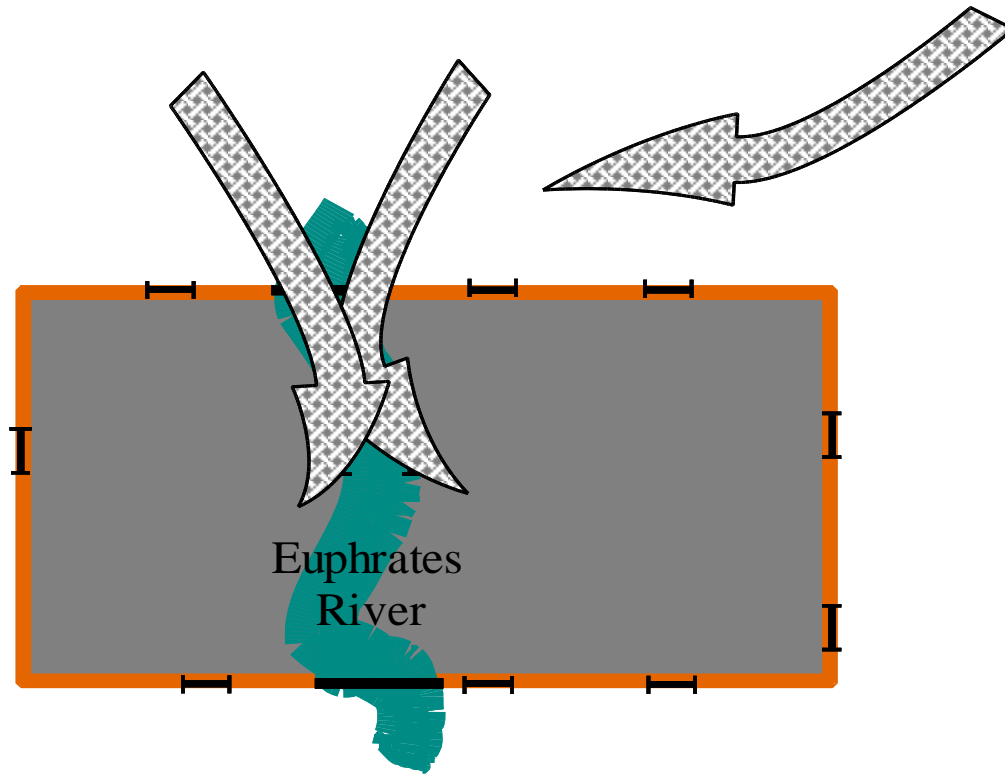
There are a couple of things I want you to notice about this verse. First of all, it tells us that the Lord Himself will see that the gates of Babylon are open when the armies of Cyrus arrive. While Cyrus may use engineering skills to divert the flow of the river so that his soldiers can march on the dry river bed, it still won't gain him entrance into the city unless the gates along the river bank are open. So a hundred years before it happens, God assures Cyrus that He is in control of the one part of the situation Cyrus can't control.

The other thing I want you to notice is that God calls Cyrus His "anointed." The Hebrew word for "anointed" is *meshiach*, from which we get the English word "Messiah." There are only two places in the Old Testament where the word "Messiah" is used for a future deliverer. One of these is generally understood as a prophecy of Jesus (Dan 9:25). The other is found here, a reference to Cyrus. God calls Cyrus, a pagan king, Messiah! This is truly amazing when you read up to verse 4 in the same chapter (NIV): "For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, **though you do not acknowledge me.**" Messiah Cyrus is not a believer, yet God graces him with a title of honor.

What is this title of honor that God bestows on Cyrus? It is clearly the term "Messiah" in verse one. God summons Cyrus by name a hundred years in advance and calls him Messiah, even though Cyrus does not acknowledge Him. He is a pagan king. He is an unbeliever. Yet God calls Cyrus Messiah. God is more open-minded than we are! If you and I were consulted about

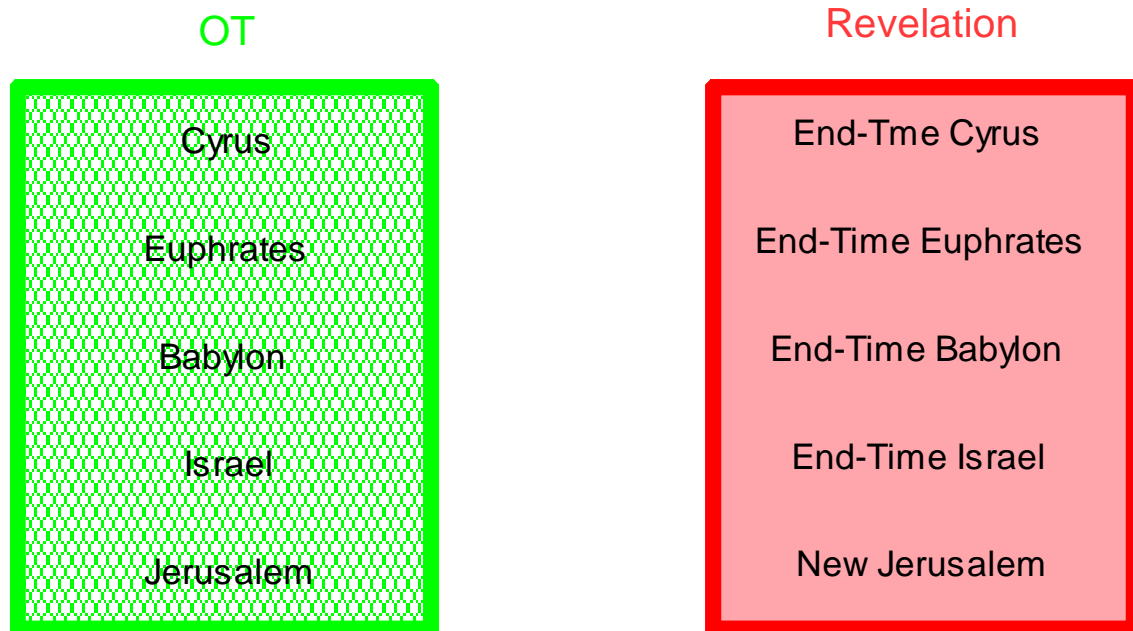
this decision we would object. *God has no business using such a term with regard to an unbeliever!* But He did! Why? Because Cyrus was the one He would use to deliver His people: “For the sake of Jacob my servant and Israel my chosen.” The title was appropriate because Cyrus would function as a type of the Messiah who would one day deliver God’s people from the bondage of this bleak existence. And let me just note in anticipation, Cyrus came to Babylon from the east! He came from Persia, modern-day Iran, which lies to the east of Iraq, the location of ancient Babylon.

Although the predictions were written 50 to 150 years before Cyrus came on the scene, the historical fulfillment was exact and is confirmed by ancient historians such as Herodotus and Thucydides. The armies of Cyrus came from the east, camped north of Babylon. His engineers excavated a depression in the nearby landscape and diverted the flow of the Euphrates River into that depression, allowing Cyrus’ soldiers to march under the river gates into the city. Timing the diversion to take advantage of a feast day inside the city, Cyrus’ soldiers discovered that drunken guards had left open the gates along the river bank. They poured into the city, conquering it and killing its ruler, Belshazzar (described in Daniel 5). In the months and years that followed Cyrus initiated a process in which the scattered remnant of Israel were encouraged to go back home and rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem. Cyrus’ attack is illustrated below:



Notice the total sequence once more: In Old Testament times, Cyrus, king of Persia, dried up the literal Euphrates River in order to conquer Babylon, to let Israel go free and to rebuild Jerusalem. This narrative clearly sets the foundation for the last portion of the Book of Revelation. In the Book of Revelation an end-time Cyrus (the “kings from the rising of the sun”) dries up the end-time River Euphrates, conquers end-time Babylon to deliver end-time Israel and build a New Jerusalem! The fundamental narrative substructure of the battle of Armageddon is grounded in the Old Testament story of Cyrus and Babylon’s fall. The conquest of Cyrus is, so to speak, a subtext for everything that happens in Revelation 16-22. To notice

this connection is to understand what is going on in the Battle of Armageddon. To miss this connection is to miss the point of these end-time events.



As mentioned before, Adventist interpreters and evangelists have made many helpful observations with regard to the understanding of Revelation and the final events of earth's history. But we have had a tendency to move so quickly from text to history that we often miss the fundamental story in the vision itself. This can keep us from understanding the full picture that God wants us to have. When we interpret Revelation on the basis of a full understanding of its background in the Old Testament many things that were mysterious before are cleared up.

## **Kings From the Rising of the Sun**

Coming back to Rev 16:12, we have learned from the context that the Euphrates River represents the civil and secular powers of this world (Rev 17:15). From the Old Testament we learned how the Euphrates River functioned as a symbol of the political, economic and military resources of Babylon (particularly Jer 50:33-38). In Rev 16:12 the water of the Euphrates River was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the sunrise. To understand the “kings from the sunrise” it is helpful to look at how the term “sunrise” is used throughout the New Testament.

When you turn to the New Testament, you learn that the term for “sunrise” is used in two different ways: 1) as a directional reference, and 2) as a symbol of Jesus Christ and the work that He is accomplishing. The term is used, first of all, in the birth narratives of Matthew. The wise men who brought gifts to the baby Jesus came from the “east” (Matt 2:1, 2, 9). So the term “sunrise” can simply mean “east.”

“Which way did you go?”

“Oh, I went toward the sunrise.”

Such usages are probably not theologically significant. But the second type of usage, the more symbolic one, is much more interesting. Around the time when John the Baptist was born, his father Zechariah sang a song of celebration, indicating that John would prepare the way for someone greater than he:

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the

forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby **the sunrise** shall visit us from on high. . .

Luke 1:76-78

This passage contains a clear reference to the first coming of Jesus. The term “sunrise” itself seems to be a title or name for the future Messiah. It is also applied to Jesus in Matthew 24:27, as the direction from which Jesus will come the second time. The term is also used in Revelation 7:2, where an angel--either Christ or His agent--ascends from the rising of the sun. So throughout the New Testament “sunrise” is used either as a directional term or as a reference to Christ, it is never used in a negative sense. So while the kings from the “east” in Rev 16:12 could merely indicate the direction from which the kings came, in light of the total picture it seems that they are related to Christ in some way.

But if that is the case, why are “the kings” in plural? In the original subtext, Cyrus is “the king” and to use the singular in Rev 16:12 would seem to make more sense. But the answer to the question is probably found in Rev 17:14 (ESV), where the nations of the world “will make war on the Lamb, and **the Lamb will conquer them**, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, **and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.**” In the final battle the Lamb is not alone, He is “king of kings,” there are many kings with Him. Who are these fellow kings? His called, chosen and faithful believers. These are the very ones called “kings and priests” earlier in the book (Rev 1:5; 5:9-10). So the “kings from the sunrise” are none other than Christ and his followers in the final battle of earth’s history. The drying up of the Euphrates River prepares the way for the final victory of Christ and His people at the end of time. In the end-time battle,



God's side is called the "kings from the east."

So the kings from the rising of the sun are actually an end-time confederacy of the saints (Rev 14:12) from every nation, tribe, language and people (Rev 14:6). They are named by many names in Revelation. They are the remnant (Rev 12:17), they are the 144,000 (Rev 7:4-9 and 14:1-5), they are the great multitude (Rev 7:9-12; 19:1-6), they are those who keep watch and hang onto their garments (Revelation 16:15), they are the called, chosen and faithful followers of Jesus (Rev 17:14) and they are, of course, the kings from the rising of the sun (Rev 16:12). The key to their victory in the final battle is the drying up of the Euphrates River.

### **A Battle for the Mind**

In the last days of earth's history, therefore, there will be a world-wide confederacy of the saints. All over the world, there will be people who are faithful to Jesus and on His side in the final crisis. They will worship Him and Him alone. They will probably not be tightly organized in any institutional sense. But they are clearly defined in terms of their behavior.

But what kind of battle is the Battle of Armageddon? What kind of role will the saints have in this battle? My study of the New Testament tells me that the Battle of Armageddon is not so much about tanks and planes and artillery as it is a battle for the mind of every human being on earth (Rev 14:7; 16:15). It is a battle between two trinities, each employing a trio of angels to persuade human beings to their side of the conflict (Rev 14:6-12; 16:13,14). Armageddon will be the conclusion of a war that has gone on throughout Christian history. The

clearest description of that war is found in the second letter of Paul to the Corinthians:

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.

2 Cor 10:3-4 (NIV)

What are the weapons of this world? In the Greek the phrase “weapons of the world” is literally “fleshly” weapons. What is a fleshly weapon? It is a weapon that tears you apart in a physical sense. AK-47 assault rifles are fleshly weapons. A-10 tank-killer aircraft are fleshly weapons. F-15 Screaming Eagles are fleshly weapons. M1A1 tanks are fleshly weapons. Paul is telling us that the kind of warfare the followers of Christ are involved with is not waged with fleshly weapons. The weapons of our spiritual warfare are different.

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

2 Cor 10:4-5 (NIV)

Have you had to struggle with your thoughts today? That’s what the battle of Armageddon is all about! It is a battle for the mind. A battle against false ideas, a battle against the power of the enemy, a battle for self-control. And in that battle God will have on His side people of every nation, language, tribe, and religious background, a world-wide confederacy of the saints.

The language of Revelation 16 and 17 is military language. This has led many people to assume that the great battle at the end of time will be World War III, a military engagement among the nations of the world on a scale never before seen. But first impressions are not

always accurate. The language of the Battle of Armageddon is military, the names and concepts are drawn from battles in the Old Testament, but the meaning is spiritual. Military language is utilized as a metaphor of the gospel.

Israel in the New Testament is a metaphor for the church, all those who take hold of the gospel and faithfully follow the path of Jesus. Cyrus becomes a symbol of Christ and His people. Babylon and the Euphrates River have become metaphors of the global enemies of God at the end of earth's history. In Revelation, things are not always what they seem.

That means that the great battle at the End will have extremely personal implications. Every person on earth will be brought to a decision in favor either of the true trinity or of the counterfeit. The most sobering aspect of the teaching of Revelation is its assertion that the decision cannot be put off forever. There will come a time when the angels will no longer hold back the winds, it will be too late to get sealed (Rev 7:1-3). It will be too late to hear the gospel mysteries proclaimed (Rev 10:7). There will be no more intercessor in the heavenly temple (Rev 15:5-8). The filthy and unjust remain filthy and unjust (Rev 22:11). And this close of human probation is consistently portrayed as happening **before** the End. From the human perspective, the destiny of every person on earth will be fixed, yet life will go on for a time. Most will not know when that awful hour takes place.

The biblical picture of the Battle of Armageddon, therefore, calls us all to accountability. Our decisions and our actions matter a great deal in the ultimate scheme of things. In the small everyday battles we have with our thoughts, we are practicing for the bigger battles to come.

The greatest battle for the Christian is a battle for the mind--to focus on the real priorities of life. The battle of Armageddon is about intellectual, emotional, and spiritual allegiance. The great task that Christians face now is to discipline our minds and control our thoughts in order to prepare to be on God's side in the final battle of earth's history.