

New series

The sixth vial and the world today (1)

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The sixth vial of Revelation 16:12-16 has been of special relevance for believers during the past two hundred years. It warns against spiritual uncleanness and exhorts us to watch. The decline of the Ottoman Empire was a sign to brethren and sisters that the prophecy was beginning to be fulfilled.

THE APOCALYPSE was written specifically for a different audience from that of the rest of Scripture. Most of the Old Testament, although it has much to teach the believer today, was written initially for the nation of Israel. Most of the New Testament was written initially for Israel or believers in the first century. Revelation is different; it was given to show to servants of the Lord Jesus Christ “things which must shortly come to pass” (1:1), that is, servants living from the time it was written until the Lord returns. It was written to give warnings and encouragement for those who were seeking the promised Kingdom.

The details for the believers living from the time the prophecy was given to the beginning of the fourth century were revealed as seals that were ‘loosed’ from the prophetic scroll. Details for believers living during the period from the fourth to the seventeenth centuries were revealed as the trumpets. These were blown by the angels that summoned armies to invade the Roman Empire. They also include the events foretold in chapters eleven and thirteen.

The sixth vial

The pouring out of the vials of the wrath of God is of particular importance for believers living from the eighteenth century until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is one part of the prophecy written specifically for believers living in the twenty-first century; this is the sixth vial (16:12-16). Seen in this light, there are just five verses out of over 31,000 verses of Scripture written specifically for believers today. Whilst it is

necessary to read all Scripture for our profit, these five verses are of particular importance today.

The sixth vial contains the following sections:

- 1 Drying up of the Euphrates;
- 2 “Unclean spirits like frogs” go forth “out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet”;
- 3 The nations are gathered to battle;
- 4 A warning for the saints;
- 5 Armageddon.

Before looking at these sections in detail, it will be noted that they contain a warning for the saints: “Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame” (v. 15). Part of that warning is to watch. The Greek word for “watcheth” is *grēgoreō*. *Thayer’s Lexicon* gives the following meaning: “to take heed lest through remission and indolence some destructive calamity suddenly overtake one”. The warning could hardly be stronger: to watch and pay special attention to the details of the sixth vial.

The sixth vial begins by setting the scene in the Middle East politically: “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” (v. 12). It then shows what will control human thinking before our Lord returns: “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” (v. 13). This “unclean” thinking must be avoided by the saints; it will gather the nations to the battle of the great day of God Almighty, and it will destroy them. It thus becomes clear why our Lord gave the warning specifically in the sixth vial.

The drying up of the Euphrates

The drying up of a river is a slow and gradual process. The symbol is therefore describing a slow and gradual process which has been taking place over a period of hundreds of years. As with all

symbols used in the prophecy, the Old Testament will provide the clues to interpreting the symbol. Isaiah describes the invasion of Assyria upon Israel in the following terms: "now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: and he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck" (8:7,8). Here the king of Assyria with his army is likened to a river overflowing its banks.

In Revelation 16 another nation had overflowed its banks, and the prophecy is describing the reverse process, that of the waters of the river receding. The nation in question was the Ottoman Turks. The prophecy earlier foretells, in the symbology of the sixth trumpet, how the Turks would "overflow" the banks of the River Euphrates: "And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed . . ." (9:13-15). The four angels were controlling four powers which were to bring about the collapse of the Roman Empire in the East, that is, the Byzantine Empire.

The final and most notable of these four was the Ottoman Turks. The expansion of this power resulted in the mighty Turkish Empire, which totally dominated the Middle East. While this situation existed it was evident the Lord Jesus Christ would not return, because prophecy required the nation of Israel to be back in their land surrounded by hostile Arab nations before the return of the Lord.

Revelation 16:12 states, "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 reason for the drying up of the Turkish power was to prepare "the way of the kings of the east

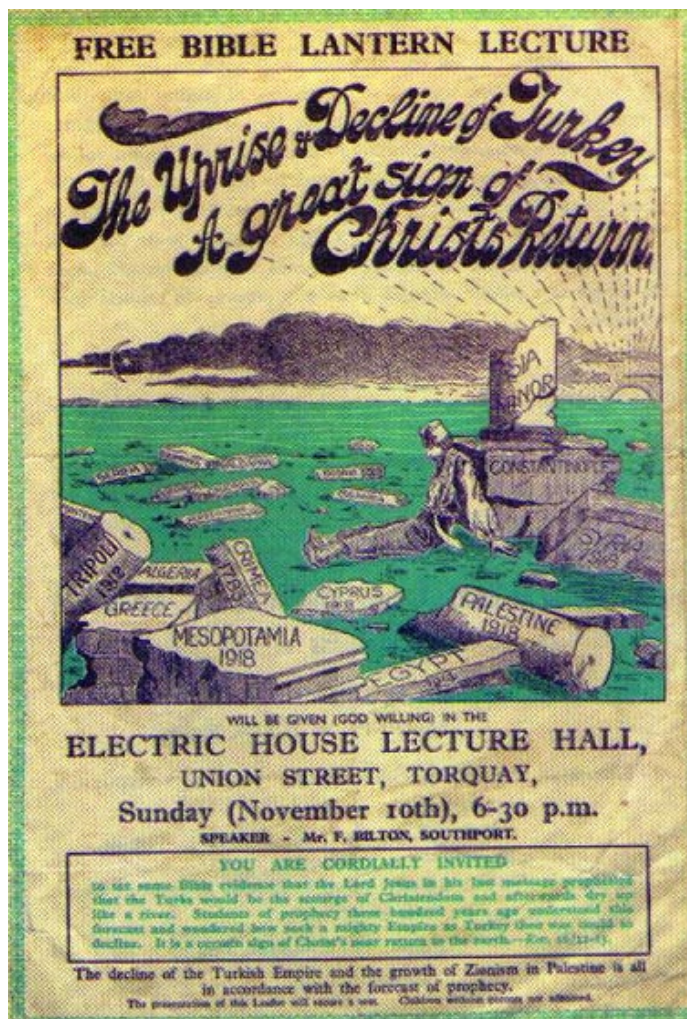


Fig. 1. A typical Christadelphian lecture of the early twentieth century, emphasising the significance of the fall of the Ottoman Empire as a sign of the times.

[RV, sunrising]", that is, Christ and the saints. Brethren in the early 1900s were 'watching' and saw the drying up of the Turkish power as a sure sign of Christ's return (see Fig. 1). This sign showed those brethren that the Divine plan was slowly but surely moving forward; it strengthened their faith and made the prophecy dynamic for them. The fact that they were watching resulted in them seeing a vision full of hope in a hopeless world. The next development in the sixth vial will do exactly the same for the believer today, and this will be considered in the next article, God willing.

[\(To be continued\)](#)