

marking the southern limit of Phoenician territory. Each side set up a pyre of wood with a cut up bullock on it, and the challenge set by Elijah was: “call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD [Yahweh]: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God” (vv. 23,24). Baal was depicted in the Ugaritic texts as sending flashes of lightning to the earth, so if he existed he should have had no problem in sending a bolt of lightning to ignite the bullock on its pyre on his own sacred mountain.

But the lightning did not come, despite hours of frenzied pleading from Baal’s adherents. Ugaritic texts speak of Baal as journeying, or dreaming in sleep, or hunting; hence the mocking words of Elijah: “Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked” (v. 27). (Yahweh, of course, was far above such earthly pursuits, and it was inconceivable that He should ever be unaware of anything going on in the earth.) Then the prophets of Baal “cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them” (v. 28), a practice apparently derived from a story in Ugaritic mythology of how at one point Baal died, and his father El cut himself in mourning.

After making it more difficult for his bullock to be devoured by fire, by soaking it thoroughly with water, Elijah then called but once upon Yahweh to show Himself as the true God, and obtained an immediate and complete response. Notice the contrasts in the incident:

- Baal’s bullock was dry, Yahweh’s was soaking wet
- The confrontation took place on Baal’s home ground of Mount Carmel, not at Yahweh’s temple in Jerusalem
- There were 450 prophets of Baal and but one prophet of Yahweh
- Baal’s adherents danced frenziedly for hours, calling repeatedly upon him; Yahweh’s representative had but to call on Him once in simple, calm words to get a response.

At the end of his open ministry, if not the end of his life, Elijah was caught up into heaven in a whirlwind. Here was a final vindication of Elijah as Yahweh’s true prophet, for Baal was depicted as riding on the storm clouds. Yet despite the various indications in his ministry that Yahweh was the one true God, Baal worship continued, and was only eradicated when Jehu savagely exterminated the house of Ahab and wiped out the worship of Baal from its central position in Israel.

Thoughts on the last two vials (1)

Ralph Green

THE SEVEN VIALS of Revelation 16 are said to be “the seven last plagues” in which, in their pouring, “is filled up the wrath of God” (15:1) as judgements on an evil and ungodly world. Vials 1 to 5 describe events which were fulfilled some time ago in history, but vials 6 and 7 have to do with the comparatively recent past, the present, and events that lie immediately ahead.

The great River Euphrates

The sixth vial opens with the words: “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” (16:12). This links with the sixth trumpet of chapter 9, which describes four angels bound at the River Euphrates (v. 14). These consisted of the various Turkish and Mongol peoples, and when they were loosed (v. 15) they

moved westwards with great slaughter against the Eastern Roman Empire. The people who made up the final phase, the Ottoman Turks, established an empire that eventually extended from Austria to the Euphrates valley.

The drying up of the Euphrates represents the decline of this Ottoman power. It lost its European territories little by little, and finally, during the First World War (1914-18), it lost Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia. In 1917 General Allenby, leading the British forces against the Turks in Palestine, routed the major part of the Turkish army. By this resounding victory the Turkish Empire came to its end. The Turks were able to retain only their home base in Asia Minor.

With regard to the Holy Land, the Turks took no interest in the welfare of those living there. It has been said that at one time they allowed thieves to run rampant, looting and destroying

Jewish homes.¹ Under their occupation the land became desolate, but it was not in God's purpose to allow it to remain so indefinitely, so the Turks had to be removed.

It is worth noting that during the decline of the Turkish power, which caused it to be called 'the sick man of Europe', the European nations were trying to maintain a reasonable balance of power in the Middle East. Russia sought more than once to take possession of the Turkish capital, Istanbul (previously called Constantinople), but was prevented by the other European powers from doing so.

"The way of the kings of the east"

The reason given for the drying up of the Euphrates is "that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared" (Rev. 16:12). It is generally agreed that "the kings of the east" represent the redeemed kings and priests who are to be exalted to this high honour by Christ when he returns to establish his Kingdom.

But how was the way to be prepared? There is no hint as to how this would be done, but the exciting developments at the time the Turkish power dried up give us the answer. At the time when the Turkish power was removed from the Holy Land the British Government published the well-known Balfour Declaration. This began with the words, "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object . . .".

The preparation of the way required a substantial immigration of Jews to build up a sizeable nation by the time of Jesus Christ's return. Since 1917 this immigration has been continuous, though not without fluctuations. When the British mandate to administer Palestine ended, war broke out between Jews and Arabs, during which the State of Israel was declared in May 1948. Since then the Jews have had to fight at least five wars with their Muslim neighbours. Although these wars have hindered immigration, the Jewish population in Israel has been increasing all the time and now stands at around five million.

The three unclean spirits

We are next introduced to "three unclean spirits like frogs" coming "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). It

is said in the next verse that they "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". The frog element has been identified with France and French influence in politics and the affairs of European nations during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The most outstanding events of the last century from a political point of view were the two great wars, in which Germany was involved. She started both and lost both in fulfilment of the twice-stated prediction, "The beast . . . shall . . . go into perdition" (17:8; cf. v. 11). Both wars, however, served to advance the cause of Jewish immigration into Palestine.

There have been many changes in the political scene in Europe and the Middle East since Brother John Thomas wrote *Eureka* in the 1860s. What we are now seeing in the opening years of the twenty-first century is a Palestinian state emerging alongside the State of Israel and being made subject to numerous restrictions by the Israelis in pursuit of peace. Israel has allowed this Palestinian state to be formed on a 'land for peace' basis.

A major problem is the claim by Palestinians to have Jerusalem as their capital, a claim to which Israel could never agree. This agreement will most likely lead to a 'holy war', in which the Palestinians will be supported by the oil-rich Muslim nations.

Unclean spirits

How does this view of the present political scenario square with Revelation 16:13? If the members of the United Nations security council seek to coerce Israel into making unacceptable concessions in favour of the Palestinians, their policy would be unclean, in the sense of being unholy, immoral and unjust, since this would involve attempting to reverse God's plan of regathering His people, after centuries of dispersion, in preparation for His Kingdom. The Jews have been seeking a homeland in the land of their forefathers, with the God of heaven supporting them. Any policy in opposition to this movement is unclean.

To fulfil this prophecy, it is possible that Russia, the latter-day dragon, will, with an eye to being seen as the champion of the Muslim

1. *Insight Cityguides: Jerusalem*, 1988, APA Publications, p. 48.

nations, demand that Israel give up more of her hard-won land. Germany, leading the enlarged European Union, the modern beast, will follow suit for a similar reason; and the pope, anxious to get the Christian 'holy places' out of the hands of the Jews, would add his blessing to the use of any force against Israel that may be agreed upon.

Concerning these unclean spirits, Brother Thomas says: "The prophecy seems to require 'a simultaneous going forth' of all the three demon-spirits to the kings of the earth and of the whole habitable: to convene them contemporaneously to encounter some great and urgent danger, that threatens, if not overcome, to subvert and destroy all their 'legitimate interests' ". He goes on to write particularly of the pope's involvement at that time: "When the crisis is formed, the Prophet of the Great City will be in high feather, exerting himself in the presence of the Beast, with all the spiritual influence he possesses over the millions of Antichristendom, to induce them to join in the crusade preached, as the grand rally of 'the earth and the whole habitable' against the great and pressing terror of the situation".² The policy of the United Nations against Israel, then, will inevitably lead them unwittingly to a confrontation with God Almighty.

The Lord Jesus comes

The process of gathering the nations to "the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (v. 14) under the sixth vial leads on to the events of the seventh vial. However, another event is introduced in verse 15: "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame". The Lord Jesus reveals himself at this point. Although he has much to do when he comes, these responsibilities are detailed in other sections of Revelation, to which we hope to refer later. The announcement in verse 15 indicates the time when his servants can expect him to return. When he comes, he comes as a thief, completely unexpected by the world at large, but not so by us, who "are not in darkness, that that day should overtake [us] as a thief" (1 Thess. 5:4).

Jesus takes this opportunity to add a word of encouragement for those who are watching the direction of their daily walk towards his Kingdom. To keep our garments is to preserve the uprightness of our calling. Having been bap-

tized into Christ, we have "put on" Christ, like a garment (Gal. 3:27), and now have to "keep [ourselves] unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1:27).

The gathering to Armageddon

The next verse in Revelation 16 reads: "And He gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon" (v. 16). It is clear from the use of the word "He" here that it is God, through the Lord Jesus Christ, Who takes control for His own purpose of the direction of the call to war.

The first engagement in this war may commence with an invasion against the disputed city of Jerusalem by the surrounding Muslim armies. During the past decades it has been Israel's Muslim neighbours who have begun or provoked all the previous wars with her. As before, Israel will have no option but to fight for her very existence. It seems reasonable to link verse 16 with Zechariah 14:2: "I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city". Here Israel's forces are said to be able to hold out in half of the city, the other half having been rounded up for deportation and removed as prisoners of war from the area of operation.

It is at this stage that the Lord Jesus enters the fray to rescue both his people and his city, for verse 3 reads: "Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle". Another description of this invasion is given in Isaiah's prophecy: "According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies . . . When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him. And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob" (59:18-20).

Whatever strategy the enemy will employ to achieve an initial success, their capture of part of Jerusalem may only last a few weeks before the Lord Jesus comes to turn the tide of war. These dramatic events could well be seen as the first battle of "that great day of God Almighty". The Greek word for "battle" here is more often translated 'war'. This means that not just one but a

2. *Eureka*, 1912 edition, Vol. 3, p. 581.

series of battles will be fought by the Lord Jesus to bring the whole world into subjection.

Armageddon is a Hebrew word which means 'a heap of sheaves [ready for threshing] in a valley of judgement'. This should be understood in a symbolic sense, and is so used in a similar context in Joel's prophecy: "Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about. Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great" (3:12,13).

The Valley of Jehoshaphat

The Valley of Jehoshaphat is mentioned earlier in Joel 3: "I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for My people and for My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted My land" (v. 2). It could well be that by using this name God is directing our attention here to what happened in the days of Jehoshaphat as a type of what He will do on a much greater scale when Jesus returns.

2 Chronicles 20 recounts how, when a huge army was raised by the Moabites, Ammonites and those of Mount Seir against Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah, God intervened and wrought an astonishing victory. One Jahaziel, acting as God's spokesman, gave guidance to Jehoshaphat. Here are some extracts from the chapter:

"[Jahaziel said] Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. To morrow go ye down against them . . . ye shall find them at the end of the brook . . . stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem . . . And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshipping the LORD" (vv. 15-18).

We are even told that singers were appointed to go out before the army: "[Jehoshaphat] appointed singers . . . to say, Praise the LORD; for His mercy endureth for ever. And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten" (vv. 21,22). The result

was utter chaos within the ranks of the enemy, so that "every one helped to destroy another" (v. 23).

It is noteworthy that verse 22 says that "the LORD set ambushments" against these invaders. If these ambushments were of God then would they not have been carried out by the angels? Note also that the enemy was located "at the end of the brook", which would obviously have been in a valley, so it was in a valley where the battle would have taken place.

Thus it can be seen that, because several features in this great event correspond with those in Joel's prophecy, the term 'valley of Jehoshaphat' could have been used to indicate that the incident recorded in 2 Chronicles 20 is a type of the deliverance of Israel to take place when the Lord Jesus comes again.

The angelic hosts

In the passages from Revelation, Isaiah and Zechariah quoted above, no mention is made of the Lord Jesus being accompanied by angels when he returns. However, the Lord Jesus reveals that they do accompany him. In his Mount Olivet Prophecy he says: "they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Mt. 24:30). The "clouds of heaven" spoken of here must refer to the angelic host, which in the next verse are said to be sent "with a great sound of a trumpet, [to] gather together his elect . . . from one end of heaven to the other". The "elect" are the saints, who are to be gathered together for judgement to be given their rewards.

The Apostle Paul also refers to these angels in 2 Thessalonians 1: "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God" (vv. 7,8). It seems clear that in this dramatic intervention of the Lord Jesus, when the battle against Jerusalem is at its height, the angels will assist him to rid Jerusalem, the "burdensome stone" (Zech. 12:3), of these evil invaders. A peaceful environment having been restored, the Lord Jesus will be able to reveal himself to his people as their King and Lord. When the shock of learning the identity of their Messiah has died down, they will seek to be reconciled with him they have for so long rejected (v. 10). We hope to discuss this reconciliation in the next article.

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