

The Kings from the East

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The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet.

They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

"Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon." (Rev 16:12-16)

I have received several questions about the kings from the East mentioned in these verses. Some commentators teach the kings from the East will be Chinese invaders that will cross the Euphrates River and attack Israel during the Great Tribulation.

I disagree and believe the Bible reveals a much better answer. Before we study these verses, a few words about the setting surrounding this event are necessary. The sixth angel's bowl, mentioned in verse 12, is one of seven bowls (or vials, KJV) which are also called the seven *last* plagues. (Rev 15:1) These events are judgments from God that fall exclusively on those individuals who receive the mark of the beast. (Rev 14:10; 18:4; 15:1) God Himself executes the seven last plagues upon the wicked for two reasons.

First, God will repay the wicked for the horrible and cruel things they have done to His innocent children during the seven *first* plagues or seven trumpets. (Heb 10:30; Rev 6:9-11; 16:4-7; 18:6,7) Second, God will use this drama to expose what sinners will do when *forced* to recognize His sovereign rule.

I teach that the seven last plagues occur during a period of 75 days. This span of time is calculated by subtracting the 1,260 days of testimony given by the Two Witnesses (a time of mercy) from the total duration of the Great Tribulation, which is 1,335 days. (Rev 11:3; Dan 12:11,12)

I believe the sixth bowl begins about 30 days into the seven last plagues, leaving about 45 days until the Second Coming. In other words, when the devil and the ten kings *set up* the "abomination that causes desolation" on the 1,290th day (Dan 12:11), God responds by sending the sixth bowl. The abomination that causes desolation will be a universal death decree directed at all of the saints. (Rev 13:15) It will be issued by the Antichrist and endorsed by the ten kings that rule over the Earth. (Rev 17:13)

THE Antichrist will be none other than the devil himself, embodied in flesh and masquerading as

God. The distinction between those who worship the Lamb and those who submit to the demands of the lamb-like beast will be very sharp.

The focal point of the sixth plague is the great Euphrates River. Today, this river runs out of Turkey through Syria and into Iraq. Consequently, many interpreters of prophecy want to geographically place the fulfillment of this plague near this river. While this may appear to be an appropriate interpretation on the surface, it skews the meaning because it is taken out of context. The flooding and drying up of the river Euphrates has a much larger significance. (Isa 8:6-10; 19:4-7)

This phrase "the drying up of the river Euphrates" is used in the Bible to refer to the removal of a natural barrier. (See Isa 11:15; 19:4-7) Today, the significance of rivers as natural barriers does not mean as much, since we have airplanes, boats and bridges. However, when Revelation was written, a wide and deep river was a strong defense.

You may recall that the northern boundary of Israel was to be the Euphrates River. (Gen 15:18) This river was to serve as a natural, protective boundary for God's people as long as they were faithful to Him. God set the boundary there because it helped to thwart Israel's northern enemies.

When Israel rejected God and fell into apostasy, nations from *the North* forded the river and captured or destroyed the tribes of Israel. In fact, in 722 B.C., 10 tribes in Israel were destroyed by the Assyrian king, Shalmaneser V, who was said to have crossed the Euphrates "in his sandals." The phrase "drying up of the river" used in Revelation is consistent with Old Testament language. However, there is one major difference in Revelation – it is God who comes *out of the north* (Job 37:22) and "crosses the river" to deal with His enemies, the devil and the ten kings of Earth.

I need to explain about God coming out of the North, when in fact, He comes out of the East! In ancient times, the source of *divine punishment* always came out of the North. For example, when God punished Israel for their sins, the Babylonians are said to have come out of the North when in reality, they came from the East! (Jer 25:9)

When Egypt was punished for its sins, punishment came from the North. (Jer 26:24) When God punished the Babylonians for their sins, their ruin (via the Medes and the Persians) came out of the North. (Jer 50:9) Notice how the Old Testament describes *divine destruction* coming out of the North. (Jer 1:14)

The reader should know that the river Euphrates is located *in the North*. (Jer 46:6,10) So, the drying up of the river Euphrates prepares the way for divine punishment to come from the North! This is why Job 37:22 says God will come from the North – the origin of divine judgment.

The Euphrates River dries up to make way for the kings from the "East." (The literal Greek translation is "from the direction of the rising of the Sun.") Revelation 16:12 then, takes on a profound and powerful meaning: When the devil makes his move to destroy the people of God with a universal death decree, God responds by imposing an even more deadly threat upon the

devil and His military forces. The "drying up of the great river Euphrates" means that God Himself has crossed over the river and He *visibly* advances to rescue His people around the world from destruction.

This is "the sign of the Son of Man" that will be seen in the Heavens! (Matt 24:30) The approaching kings from the East are the Father and the Son. They are coming *together* to gather up the righteous and destroy the wicked! (Matt 26:64; Rev 6:16; 19:11-21)

What are the three frogs mentioned in Rev 16:13? The actual Greek text written by John goes like this: "And I saw out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, – spirits – three – unclean like frogs." There is no room for confusion here.

John clearly identifies the three spirits as three demons. **"They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty."** (Rev 16:14)

To appreciate John's language describing this plague, you must understand the meaning of the preceding plague. During the fifth plague, God unmasks the devil. He will show the whole world that its glorious miracle working leader is the devil incarnate. The leaders of the world will understand that they have been betrayed and their demise sealed by the sign of the approaching King of kings. As the sixth plague gets under way, Jesus thunders words of encouragement from Heaven to His awaiting followers – He is coming! (Rev 16:15)

The devil understands the end has come, and in one final display of power, sends his highest ranking demons to call upon the ten kings of Earth one last time. These demons will explain to the kings that they must prepare to battle God Almighty because He is approaching Earth to rescue the saints. Remember, the wicked blame the saints for the grievous, seven last plagues falling on them. Therefore, to defeat God's rescue, all of the saints must be killed before the Kings from the East arrive.

To convince the ten kings that they have a "fighting chance," the three demons will demonstrate incredible miracles and wonders. Their demonic show of "supernatural power" will lead the kings to think they have a chance to save themselves. If they destroy the saints, perhaps they can even destroy God Almighty if they unite with the devil and his forces. What jaded logic is this? Sin has reached its climax: Sinners would destroy God if they could! John says the demons were unclean *like frogs*. This statement proves to be paradoxical.

In ancient times, pagan nations regarded frogs as sacred spirits. From John's Jewish perspective, however, frogs were unclean creatures, unfit for human consumption. John compares the three demons with unclean frogs because the world's desperate leaders will regard the three demons as "divine spirits" sent from the Antichrist's throne.

In reality, however, they are evil, vile and unclean. The stage has been set. The kings of Earth will join with the lamb-like beast and his demons to declare war against the Lamb and His angels.

"Then they [the demons] **gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.**" Again, the place mentioned here, like the river Euphrates, is not geographical. This is a worldwide episode. The word Armageddon is composed of two Greek words that mean the Mountain of Megiddo. (There is no such geographical location on Earth.)

However, Old Testament parallel language puts the finishing touch on the meaning of this passage. The plains of Megiddo were regarded in ancient times as the battlefield of kings. Megiddo served as the battleground for many battles between nations from the North (such as Assyria) and the South (such as Egypt). The Bible informs us that King Ahaziah died there, and King Josiah was also killed there by Pharaoh Neco. (Jdg 5:19; 2 Kgs 9:27; 23:29)

The term Armageddon alludes to the following outcome: God's actions will cause the ten kings of the world to unite in battle at the battlefield of kings. No options remain. They must deal with God Almighty who descends in clouds of glory. Armageddon will be a mountain-top summit for a military showdown. John describes this encounter as a sharp sword coming out of the mouth of Jesus that kills the wicked. (Rev 19:15-21)

Incidentally, the mouth that calls the righteous dead to life (1 Ths 4:16-17) is the same mouth that commands the wicked to die.

Jesus speaks to the saints (this is one of the seven thunders) during the sixth bowl saying: **"Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed."** These words will be wonderful to hear within the context of that time.

They mean: "Do not be discouraged my children by the threat and advances of your enemies. I will arrive before they get to you! My authority and appearing will be deadly to my enemies, so keep looking to the East. Do not lose your faith and hope now, and be embarrassed when I arrive."