

Sermon outline and notes:

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Revelation 9, 16, & 19 (read 16:12-16) “Signs of the End Times: Look to the East”

Intro. Toward the end of that Scripture text Jesus says in v.15, “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.” Jesus uses the prophetic present tense, “I am coming.” His return is so certain that it is spoken as though He were already on the way! Likewise, He told the church of Sardis in Revelation 3:3, “Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.” You never know when a thief may break into your home. Even so, Jesus said in Mark 13:32-33, “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.” [See also Luke 21:36].

Yet how do we watch for our Lord’s return? The primary way is by watching for the signs that point to the soon return of Christ. So far in this series I have shared at least 10 signs of the end times that I found in the book of Revelation. It is clear to me that all these signs point to the soon return of Christ. Tonight’s message is the final one in this series and I will give you three more signs that could easily be fulfilled within the next 10 years or so. One of the signs could even be fulfilled at any time. So by the time I finish tonight’s message, I will have covered a significant majority of the signs of the times that I gave on the list of signs that I made available to you. More copies are on the usher table.

The first sign of the end times that we will look at tonight is:

I. THE DRYING OF THE EUPHRATES RIVER

We read about this in chapter 16, v.12, “Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared.” How is it that the great river will be dried up? Of course, it may seem likely that since it occurs after the 6th bowl of judgment is poured out on it, it will simply be a supernatural miracle of God. God is certainly capable of doing such a thing. He held back the waters of the Red Sea for Israel, and they passed through on dry land.

Yet even present conditions make the drying up of the great river Euphrates quite possible. This year, rainfall in southern Turkey where the Euphrates begins was the lowest in 30 years, and it flows into Syria where they are facing their worst drought in 70 years.¹ Furthermore, geography has given Turkey control of more than 90% of the water that flows into the Euphrates. On January 13th, 1990 the *Indianapolis Star* carried the headline, “Turkey will cut off flow of Euphrates for one month.” The article stated that a huge reservoir had been built by Turkey. While filling up the reservoir, the flow of the Euphrates would be stopped for one month and a concrete plug for a diversion channel built. These things have now been done. With this newly built dam, Turkey has the ability to stop the Euphrates River at will! Furthermore, Turkey has reportedly broken its 1987 agreement with Syria and Iraq to ensure a minimum flow of 500 cubic meters per second of the Euphrates River to Syria, 60% of which goes on to Iraq.

¹ <https://www.israel365news.com/199585/euphrates-river-begins-to-dry-up-a-prophecy-of-jeremiah-watch/>

Instead, it is letting less than 200 cubic meters through to Syria, also affecting hydroelectric power (opendemocracy.net/). As a result, this is how the Euphrates looks today. What little water remains could be diverted by Turkey and dried up completely. So the stage is set for the fulfillment of this prophecy of Rev. 16:12.

The last of v.12 gives the purpose, “that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.” In ancient times the Euphrates was a formidable barrier to an invading force from the east, and for centuries it has been the dividing line between east and west. Yet armies and equipment will soon be able to pass over what had been such a great, wide river.

The way for this great Oriental invasion has also been paved by a road constructed from China through the Himalayas of Kashmir to Pakistan (called the Karakoram Highway). It was completed in 1986. India lodged a protest in the United Nations, calling this “a threat to peace in Asia.”

So it is exciting to see one more prophecy ready to be fulfilled when God the Father is ready for the return of His Son.

A second sign of the end times is the:

II. DEVELOPMENT OF A GREAT EASTERN ARMY

Turn to Revelation 9:14-21, where this is especially mentioned. There we read that this great Eastern Army will be:

A. Inspired by Demons - We read in vv.14-15 that a voice said “to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, ‘Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.’ So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind.” The fact that the 4 angels were bound probably indicates that they were fallen angels who could not carry out their evil desires until they were released. These demons are bent on bringing death and destruction to humanity (Jn. 10:10a), but God has bound them up to this time to prevent them from their deed of destruction. Notice that our Sovereign God is in control of the timetable of the events in this prophecy. A specific “hour and day and month and year” has been predetermined by God the Father.

They will not act alone. Instead, they will incite the formation of an extremely large military force from the East. Some speculate that the army described here will go on the attack to seek to overthrow the brief rule of antichrist, who will probably be a western leader.

Next, we see from our text that the demons will influence eastern leaders to build:

B. The Largest Army Ever – V.16 says, “Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.” At one time a human army of this size seemed impossible. In John’s day, there were not 200,000,000 in the whole world! But I believe there is a clue here about this army that makes such an army possible. As we see in v.14, this army seems to come from beyond the Euphrates. China has a large enough population to field such an army theoretically. They have 1.4 billion people. Currently their military is made up of 2.8 million people, two times the military of the United States. India (2.6 million), North Korea (1.3 million) and Pakistan (1.1 million) also have large armies. The number in the Greek text literally says two ten thousand [of] ten thousand. It uses the largest number in the Greek language, which can simply refer to an innumerable multitude. Only in our day is it even possible to have an army this large! Consider this: during the American Civil War, over 10% of

the population served in the war. If 10% of the population of China were to serve in the military, their army would be 140,000,000! Given extraordinary circumstances, I could see how that number could increase to 200,000,000, especially if other nations from the East join forces.

There is one more factor in the fulfillment of this prophecy which is a sign of the end times. No nation could field such a massive military without also becoming an economic superpower. China could overtake the United States' economy in 10 years or less, and our politicians, business leaders and consumers are helping them do it!

Furthermore, we read that this army will be:

C. Very Deadly – We read in vv.17-19, “And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone. By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed — by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm.” War horses were feared in John's day, but having heads of “lions” and “tails like serpents, having heads” make them all the more fearful. Evidently, each tail had a serpent's head. No horse today fits the description of vv.17-19. Surely these horse-like creatures represent something else, couched in what is clearly apocalyptic and symbolic language. Lions and serpents are both deadly. What we see here could be a primitive description of modern mechanical warfare. Out of their mouths would come a variety of colors, fiery red, smoky blue, and sulphureous yellow. John could be attempting to describe modern missiles from the front and rear of infantry assault vehicles. The main point is that John is trying to convey that this army will be deadly and destructive. As we see in v.15, one-third of mankind that is still live at this point in the tribulation will die as a result of this killer army. Whatever the weapons that are used, they must be capable of inflicting massive casualties. Nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons are capable of such massive death tolls. Even with the widespread destruction of WWII where tens of millions of people died, we never came close to having 1/3 of the earth's population killed. Never since Noah has such a substantial proportion of the earth's population come under God's righteous judgment.

Just as God used ungodly and powerful nations to execute judgment in the Old Testament, even so what we read here is something similar, where God uses these armies as tools of judgment against an unrepentant and unbelieving world. One other main point is the fact that only in the modern era could these prophecies be fulfilled.

If you are not a Christian and you are alive during this terrible time and you just survived a brief world war where 1/3 of the population died, what would you do? You would think that everyone would be crowding around the prayer alters in places of worship begging for mercy from God. But instead we read about:

D. The Response to Such Destruction – Look at vv.20-21, “But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.” I wish that such judgment would bring men to repentance. That could well be the merciful intention of God. Yet as we see here, like Pharaoh of old, people only become hardened in unrepentance and unbelief as they face the plagues of the Great Tribulation. Instead, Romans

2:4 says, “the goodness of God leads you to repentance.” More people are truly won to Christ by preaching and demonstrating the love of God than the wrath of God.

Tuesday night Cheryl and I saw the movie, “Sabina: Tortured for Christ.” It describes the Holocaust against Jews in Poland and how she and her husband helped to rescue Jews and others. Sabina became a Christian after her husband was converted. Her family were Jews who were rounded up and later put to death. A member of the death squad that rounded them up ended up living with a neighbor of Sabina. Her husband invited him over and began to witness to him. He did warn him of the righteous judgment of God. Yet what ultimately led to the conversion of that murderer, who claimed to be an atheist, was this: he said I will prove to you that God is real. My wife is resting beyond that door in our bedroom. I’m going to go tell her that the man who helped murder her family is outside the door. I will tell you what she will do. She will come out and express her love and forgiveness for you. Sure enough, after she was told that man who helped murder her family was in the family room, she came out and hugged that man, even kissed that man, and expressed her forgiveness. Only a loving God with such incredible capacity for forgiveness, could cause her to do that. He broke down in tears and was converted that very night.

I find it interesting that John lists some of the major sins of the last days that people will not repent of. The sins listed in v.21 are becoming increasingly common in our day, and will increase all the more in the last days. These are additional signs of the times. They will not repent of their:

1. False Religion - In the last days men will worship the antichrist and his image, follow his false prophet, and participate in occultic practices. Even in this modern age where atheism seems to be on the rise, people cannot live long in a religious vacuum. If they turn from Christ, most will embrace false religion, especially when it seems everyone else is doing it. They will also not repent of:

2. Murder - Violent murder will become more common in the end times, as we noted in Rev. 6:4. Terrorist will murder many people. Gun violence in the streets of our major cities will escalate even more, especially as police officers are vilified and defunded. Abortion is also most likely included here. We are heading in the direction of putting the elderly to death when they reach the point of being bed-ridden, or even too expensive to care for. When a society turns from the true God, the sanctity of life is discarded.

3. Sorceries - This (*pharmakeia*) normally refers to the use of magic potions and charms in incantations and degraded occultic practices, which would use hallucinatory drugs. In the last few years we have seen the greatest turning to witchcraft, Satan worship, and occultism since the days of Ancient Rome! However, the word *pharmakeia* could also refer to the sin of drug abuse. Isn’t that a widespread problem today? Many states have legalized marijuana. Twenty million Americans reported smoking marijuana in the last year. Millions are hooked on Fentanyl and other opioids which are pouring across our southern border. Alcohol is also a commonly abused drug.² We have become a drug-crazed society and there is little to no repentance.

4. Immorality - The world is in a headlong plunge downward to the immorality of Sodom and Gomorrah and, unfortunately, to their same judgment as well! Immorality, and even Sodomy, is now commonly portrayed on network television. There has been a major shift,

² The pharmaceutical industry has gained tremendous influence over our national healthcare, supported by the authority of the government. The pandemic has made that very clear. Instead of focusing on what promotes good health, drugs are prescribed as a quick remedy for just about everything.

especially among younger adults. Most not only practice sex outside of marriage, but they now accept homosexuality as an acceptable alternate lifestyle. A 2021 Arizona Christian University study found that about 30% of millennials identify as gay or transgender! That goes up to 39% of 18-24 year olds. You are called a hater just for saying that such activities are sinful.

5. Theft – The last of v.21 says they did not repent of “their thefts.” We are living in a materialistic society, and people are often willing to resort to theft to obtain material things. Ask any owner or manager in retail, and they will tell you how bold people are today in reference to stealing. In the last 18 months we have seen mass looting of stores and brazen theft from stores, especially since liberal prosecutors won’t even prosecute them! Drug abuse has compounded the problem of theft. A drug addict will steal from their own mother, and grandmother. Add to that cyber and telemarketing theft, which has become all-too common. Far too many people have no morals regarding the sin of stealing.

Did you notice something interesting about this list? It was written 2,000 years ago and yet it is as up-to-date as today’s newspaper. Man is still basically the same, and that is why the Bible is still as relevant as ever. This statement of widespread unrepentance is also included to declare God just in His dealings with humanity during the Great Tribulation. 1/3 of humanity will die due to their sin and unrepentance, just from one of the judgments of God.

Finally, the last sign of the end times that we will talk about tonight is:

III. A BUILDUP OF ARMIES FOR A FINAL BATTLE

This would include western armies as well. Yet consider this: After World War II and the establishment of the United Nations, there was a hope that the nations would significantly reduce their arms, especially nuclear arms. The United Nations building in New York even has a sculpture with the following scripture verse from Isaiah 2:4, “They shall beat their swords into plowshares. And their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation. Neither shall they learn war any more.” Yet has the UN reached that goal? No! The military-industrial complex is one of the largest moneymaking businesses on the planet. According to the prophecies of Revelation, there will be a buildup of armaments and armies in the last days, culminating in the battle of Armageddon. Now let’s see what the book of Revelation has to say about this buildup of military forces in the last days.

A. The Antichrist Will Build a Great Military - We read in chapter 13, v.4, “... they worshiped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?’” As the antichrist gains control of more and more nations, he will also control and build a great military power; so much so that people will say, “Who is able to make war with him?”

B. Many Nations Will Participate - Look at chapter 16, v.14, “For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.” This, along with the battles described in chapter 9, could well go down in history as World War III. It is called “the battle of that great day of God Almighty” because this is the ultimate fulfillment of the Day of the Lord prophecies, when God will manifest His overwhelming power and glory in judging the ungodly and delivering His people. The main explanation given for the willingness of so many nations to engage in this great battle is the work of demonic spirits, and probably the false prophet himself, performing miraculous signs. The nations will imagine that they are working out their own

schemes and plans as they march toward Armageddon, but they are simply going forth to fulfill God's will.

Yet chapter 19, v.19 gives another motive, perhaps the primary one, for gathering for this great battle. There it says, "And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him that sat on the horse, and against His army." That is a reference to Jesus as He prepares to return in Judgment. Psalm 2 predicts that the nations will unite "against the LORD and against His Christ." Jesus said in Matthew 24:30, "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven...." Evidently, the world will see the Son of Man and His heavenly hosts in the sky (Rev. 1:7). When this happens, these armies of earth forget their differences and join in battle against the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Science fiction writers have imagined invading forces against our planet from other planets and galaxies deep in space. They have depicted a terrified world suddenly united in a common cause in the face of a threat from the far reaches of the galaxy. The Star Wars generation will be primed for such a final conflict.

Well, there is going to be an invasion, not from outer space, but from upper space, from heaven. The antichrist and his false prophet will remind the nations of his great and even supernatural power and convince them that they can take on the invaders.

C. Israel Is the Place of the Battle - We read in chapter 16, v.16, "And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon." This is the only place in the Bible where "Armageddon" is mentioned by that name. It means "the hill or city of Megiddo," which is situated at the edge of a very large valley plain in northern Israel, the Jezreel Valley.

Now imagine the scene. The heavens have opened to reveal the Lord and His armies of saints and angels. Also gathered on earth are millions of apprehensive soldiers, waiting for the attack! Everything Satan can muster to throw against God is here for one climatic showdown. Now who do you think is going to win? Well, according to the book of Revelation.

D. Jesus Will Utterly Defeat This Army - We read in chapter 19, vv.20-21, "Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh." Out of the millions in the opposing army, 2 are singled out for special defeat and judgment. Jesus makes a bee-line for the blasphemous, loud-mouthed antichrist, who is stricken where he stands. The false prophet, the miracle-working windbag from the pit is punctured. The pair of them are bundled up and hurled headlong into the lake of fire. Then the Lord turns His attention to the armies who gathered in support of the antichrist. They will be slain in an instant. This is one battle where there will be no survivors. Evidently millions will die at the battle of Armageddon. Likewise, Zechariah 14:3-4 says, "Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations as when he fought in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives...." Then birds of prey will then gorge themselves on their flesh. Jesus said in Matthew 24:28, "For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together." Likewise, Rev. 19:17 says to the birds, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God...."

Conclusion: Will such a severe judgment on the part of Christ be justified? It is certainly out of line with the modern views of God, which state that God is only love and tolerance. However, it is right in line with the Word of God! Rev. 19:11 specifically says, "...in righteousness He judges and makes war." The world was given every opportunity to repent, but as we have seen, they refused to do so. Instead of embracing God's Messiah, they embraced and followed the antichrist. There comes a point when God must act in judgment and justice. Otherwise, God would be portrayed as powerless in the face of evil. Then, after Jesus is victorious at Armageddon, He will establish a wonderful kingdom on earth and you can be a part of it. "Even so, come Lord Jesus!"

Jesus is coming again as Judge. But dear friend, you can settle your case out of court if you will meet the judge in His chambers called Calvary. You can get a free pardon, a permanent stay of execution, be declared not guilty of all charges against you now and forevermore. The choice is up to you.

Sources: Steve Felker (notes from sermon manuscripts of Rev. 9:1-21; 16:12-21; 19:11-21); W. A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962-1966); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2021; George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972); Hal Lindsey, *There's a New World Coming* (Santa Ana, CA: Vision House Publishers, 1973); Dr. James Merritt (notes from his sermons on Rev. 9:1-12; 16:1-21); Page Patterson, *The New American Commentary: Revelation* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2012); John Philips, *Exploring Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1974); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1966). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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