

*Charts: The Last Reciprocal War: Chart #18, The Bowls of Wrath: Chart #17,
Events Surrounding Christ's Return: Chart #20*

PREFACE

We are about to embark on what is without a doubt *the*—not just *one of the*, but *the* most dramatic, literally earth shattering series of events in the history of this world since Eden. This is not hyperbole, but prophetic fact. From here—the Sixth Bowl of wrath, which triggers Armageddon—until the start of the Millennium, events are let loose which will result in a literal, geographic reshaping of this globe.

And, of course, much more.

It all happens at lightning speed, one dramatic, convulsive event piled on top of another, often overlapping, all with ramifications that will echo into eternity.

SETTING THE STAGE <LOOK AT CHART #18>

We must begin by getting our bearings. What is the shape of things as we return to the narrative of the Bowls of Wrath, beginning with the Sixth Bowl? First, aside from Christ Jesus Himself,

Who are the key actors?

- The beast (Antichrist) and the false prophet
- The angels with the seven bowls
- Kings (armies) from the N, S, and E
- The people of Jerusalem and vicinity

Where are the key actors, and what are they doing?

- The beast is encamped in the vicinity of Megiddo in Israel. He, Antichrist, is almost certainly anticipating, and gearing up to meet, armies from the north and south and possibly east. *From the beast's perspective, he is preparing to fight men—not Christ.*

- Kings from the north and south are converging on Megiddo and what we today call Israel.

- To the beast it is but a rumor, but *we* know that kings from the east are advancing toward the River Euphrates—or perhaps encamped on its eastern shore, waiting to advance.

- The people in Jerusalem and the surrounding area—perhaps the entire nation of Israel and even beyond—are probably already under the gun, experiencing invasion and violence of all sorts. <Look at Chart #17>

Meanwhile, let us not forget that the world as a whole remains under the assault—the bombardment of the first five bowls of wrath.

- The first bowl released loathsome sores on all followers of the beast;
- the second turned all the seas to thick blood, killing everything in them;
- the third did the same to all fresh water on earth;
- the fourth bowl turned the sun into a fierce, scorching furnace upon the surface of the earth;
- and the fifth bowl extinguished the heavenly lights, casting the earth into darkness.

And now, on top of all that—war. And if you still require convincing that this is all about Israel, and God’s love for His chosen people, stay tuned. But, of course, we will see that this is not an earthly-defined love; God will ultimately save and exalt a remnant of His people—but not before putting them through even more trials. He is punishing the wicked, He is winnowing the chaff from the wheat, He is demonstrating His sovereign power—all to His glory. [We now return to Chapter Sixteen of the Revelation.](#)

V12: THE SIXTH BOWL

With the sixth angel we have the first recorded move toward the fateful “battle” of Armageddon.

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east.

Various opinions abound on just who these kings are that will benefit from the drying up of the Euphrates—Walvoord claims there are as many as fifty different interpretations. As is our way, we will take this to mean what it says: There will be Oriental kings from the “east” ([literally, the rising of the sun](#)) who will be coming at Antichrist, either independent of, or in league with, the kings from the north and south. Recall what we read in Daniel 11:44 :

“But rumors from the East and from the North will disturb him [[i.e., the beast](#)], and he will go forth with great wrath to destroy and annihilate many.”

Sidebar: Don’t get thrown off-track by the use of “kings” in this narrative.

For our purposes, just think nations, or even better in this context, armies.

God does not stop these armies from the east, but in fact paves the way for their approach. Why?

MacArthur: God’s drying up the Euphrates is not an act of kindness toward the kings of the east, but one of judgment. They and their armies will be entering a deadly trap.

There *may*—and I emphasize *may*—be a connection between the sixth bowl and the sixth trumpet in Chapter Nine (vv13-21).

Walvoord: The relationship between the drying up of the Euphrates and the battle that follows has sometimes been connected with the sixth trumpet in 9:13-21. In the sixth trumpet an army of 200 million men is loosed to slay a third part of men (9:15). This army is related to the Euphrates River even as the army of the kings of the East. Probably the best explanation is that the seven vials follow very rapidly after the trumpets and that the events such as a great invasion are pictured in their early stages in the sixth trumpet with a statement of their ultimate purpose that is actually realized in the sixth vial. The time sequence here may be in terms of days rather than months or years.

The reason I do not wholeheartedly endorse this is that, unless the Tribulation is scheduled for still thousands of years in the future, I question that Daniel 11:44 would say that the beast was hearing “rumors” from the East. We know from history that advances in science and technology do not always increase; at certain times in the history of man these things have been forgotten, causing the advance of society to roll backward, only to be rediscovered later. It is possible that if more thousands of years will pass before these days are played out, the technology of today will have been forgotten. If not, we can safely assume that Antichrist will be in possession of high definition images of those 200 million “horsemen” at the Euphrates; it won’t be just a “rumor”—at least before the darkness of the fifth bowl.

Earlier I said that, “From the beast’s perspective, he is preparing to fight men—not Christ.” After our study of Daniel 11:35-45, that seemed to be the only logical conclusion, that from an *earthly* perspective these armies were *first* gathered to fight each other, only later to turn *en masse* to fight Christ Jesus and His army of angels ([Matthew 24:30-31](#)). I was encouraged to learn that John Walvoord agrees with me.

Walvoord: Some have interpreted this as a gathering of forces in anticipation of the second coming of Christ. More probably, it reflects a conflict among the nations themselves in the latter portion of the great tribulation as the world empire so hastily put together begins to disintegrate. The armies of the world contending for honors on the battlefield at the very time of the second coming of Christ do all turn, however, and combine their efforts against Christ and His army from heaven when the glory of the second coming appears in the heavens. It will be the final challenge to divine sovereignty and power as the military might of the world of that day will be engaged in fighting on the very day that Christ returns.

This would also help us understand the prophecy of Zechariah 14, something that has puzzled me for some time. Thus in advance of Christ’s return we see much fighting between nations.

Huge armies are prosecuting another World War (only God knows whether this is WW3 or WW29) and the worst of it is in the Middle East, especially Israel, with a focus on Jerusalem. [Turn please to Zechariah 14](#). This important prophecy is set up in the final verses of Chapter Thirteen. [And if you are still looking at Chart #17, you may wish to switch to our new chart, #20: Events Surrounding Christ's Return.](#)

Read Zechariah 13:8-9.

Whether through the beast's purges or through the systematic plagues, two-thirds of Israel will have been killed for rejecting Christ, while one-third will be saved. But the Lord of hosts declares that though he has saved a remnant, He has reserved a last-minute baptism by fire, for further refining. Then the prophet details what this will look like—a passage that now makes sense to your humble teacher with the war set forth in Daniel 11.

Read Zechariah 14:1-3.

I can't help but think that this consists not just of Jerusalem being in the path of the battle, but also a last-minute belch of antisemitism by the remaining Goyim. Nothing has changed, even at this late date: the world as a system still hates Jews.

vv13-16

Verses 13-16 of Revelation 16 further the narrative in the guise of a parenthetical vision.

Read Revelation 16:13-14.

Haven't we all had dreams in which we see someone who looks nothing like anyone we know, but in the dream we just *know* that that is our wife or husband, or mother or father? Just so, here John is shown a vision in which two of our actors, with Satan—the dragon (Satan), the beast (Antichrist), and the false prophet (Anti-spirit)—spew forth “unclean spirits” presented, in the vision, as hideous frogs (*batrachoi*).

Though this fits into the narrative, I suggest it points backward to a point earlier in the Tribulation. Earlier in the Great Tribulation these spirits of demons (*daimonon*) would have been sent out as emissaries to work wonders, impressing the kings scattered about the world, and cause them to go to war. They don't know they are marching to their doom before the Lord; they think they will be fighting men.

Then we have a *literal* parenthesis in v15, voiced probably by Christ Himself or by Father God.

("Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.")

This verse speaks of the readiness of a soldier, who must sleep fully clothed so as to be ready for instant combat—but this is not speaking of literal clothing, but being clothed in *righteousness*. The prophet Isaiah spoke of it:

I will rejoice greatly in the LORD,
My soul will exult in my God;
For He has clothed me with garments of salvation,
He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness,
As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (Isaiah 61:10)

Your nakedness and shame will be that you are not clothed in the righteousness of Christ—to your doom.

Verse 16 snaps us back to our timeline:

And they [i.e., [the spirits of demons from v14](#)] gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon.

This last word is the Hebrew word for "Mount Megiddo" "Har" can mean mountain or hill country, which fits, for the Plain of Megiddo is surrounded by hill country. This passage (vv13-16) does raise the possibility that the demonic trilogy of Satan and the two beasts does indeed know that ultimately the battle will be against the Lord Himself. Certainly Satan—who knows Scripture better than any of us—is aware that the war will turn from men fighting each other to fighting Christ. I think it is an open question whether the two beasts realize this or not.

V17: THE SEVENTH BOWL

Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, "It is done."

The human mind struggles in vain to describe this moment. All attempts fall flat in the presence of a righteous, holy God delivering His final blow upon this fallen world. In a similar moment, when Christ Jesus was breathing His last upon the cross, He cried out, "It is finished!" That declaration announced the completion of the necessary sacrifice for sinful but repentant man to now to have a way, through Christ, to reach a holy God. It marked, at once, an end and a new beginning.

Now, in *this* moment, that same holy God declares, “It is done!” This is His final act of wrath, of vengeance against the *unrepentant*, those who refused to bow before the Lord Christ Jesus. There remains His final *judgment*, but this seventh bowl with its multiple contents marks the last blow of His out-poured wrath.

Yet, just as at the cross, that which is “done” marks another new beginning; this is the pivot-point between the old and the new, for it announces the return—the long-awaited return—of the Messiah to His creation. He *left* the earth as “the Lamb slain”; He will return as “a rod of iron” ([Psalm 2:9](#), [Revelation 12:5; 19:15](#)).

What Christ declared from the cross, using *teleo*, meant that he had completed or accomplished something. What God declares at the end of the Tribulation with, “It is done,” using just one Greek word—*Gegonen*—means “to come into being.” This marks the end of His wrath upon the earth, but it also marks the *birth* of something brand new: the reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years—or, as Alan Johnson translates it, “It has come to pass,” meaning, essentially, *What I promised, I have done*.

VV18-21: THE WORST OF HIS WRATH

In His eschatological discourse, Jesus foretold this moment in Matthew 24:29.

“But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”

Here is how John describes the same moment in v18:

And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty.

These are the final acts of God’s reshaping of the earth in preparation for Christ’s Millennial reign and, ultimately, being replaced by a *new* earth. Through the seals, the trumpets, and the first six bowls of wrath, heaven has dealt cataclysmic blows upon the earth, destroying trade, commerce, the natural world, and millions of lives. These, in the seventh bowl, are the last—and worst—of it. Part of this will be the falling of Babylon and all the cities of the world.

v19: The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.

The prophet Zechariah tells the story even better—and in his text we see an example of why it can be so difficult to determine a proper sequence to these events, for in Revelation the reshaping of the earth seems to happen *prior* to Christ’s return, while in Zechariah, it seems to be His return that *triggers most* of the geological shifts.

Read Zechariah 14:4-8, 10.

The city of Jerusalem, rather than being destroyed with the rest, will be elevated, and all the surrounding land reduced to a plain. The geological changes extend around the globe: ([Back to Revelation 16](#))

v20: And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.

Sidebar: MacArthur, citing Henry Morris, ascribes the disappearing of islands and mountains to God returning the earth to its antediluvian ([pre-Flood](#)) state, that is, “a gentle rolling topography of the world as originally created,” without “inaccessible, uninhabitable mountain ranges or deserts or ice caps.” While I do not dispute his description of the reshaped world in the eschaton, I am not sure I subscribe to his description of the world as originally created.

If we required further evidence of the finality and thoroughness of God’s wrath, here it is. It is not enough that humanity has been made to suffer every plague and onslaught of the seals, the trumpets, the bowls; it is not enough that the water has been poisoned, then turned to blood, and that the whole world lies in thick darkness; it is not enough that millions upon millions have been killed. No, the vengeful God of heaven is not yet finished with His retribution against stubborn, sin-possessed man.

v21a: And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men;

When we were studying the seven seals ([Chart #9](#)), I noted that the *sixth* seal represented a projection into the future of the Tribulation, something that would occur later. Well, here it is.

Read Revelation 6:12-14.

With icy projectiles weighing anywhere from 90 to 135 pounds (*talantiaios* [talen-tee-ay’-ous]) being thrown down to earth, after all that had come before, we see a good reason for the behavior of vv15-17.

Read Revelation 6:15-17.

Walvoord: Verse 21 records a great hail[storm] with every stone about the weight of a talent. Though the talent in different periods of history varied in weight, the reference here seems to be to the talent weighing about 100 pounds and representing all that a man could normally carry. Such a hail from heaven falling upon men would have a devastating effect and would destroy much that was still left standing by the earthquake. It is a judgment compared to that of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah but here extending over the entire earth.

Contrary to many commentators who seem surprised that this devastation does not bring about universal repentance, I think it makes perfect sense that unrepentant man would still shake his fist at the heavens and be even more obdurate than before.

v21b: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.

MacArthur: It is too late for these hardened sinners; they have sold their souls to Satan; they are totally committed to Antichrist's blasphemous, idolatrous, anti-God system. Children of wrath they are, catapulting into hell.

These “children of wrath” will probably not be aware that they themselves are a fulfillment of ancient prophecy.

Read Ezekiel 7:8-9.

While we are in the neighborhood, let's turn to the prophet Isaiah to announce the second coming of the Messiah—and note how this familiar passage (often erroneously read at Christmas) takes on a fresh reality, because of what we have learned in the Revelation and Zechariah.

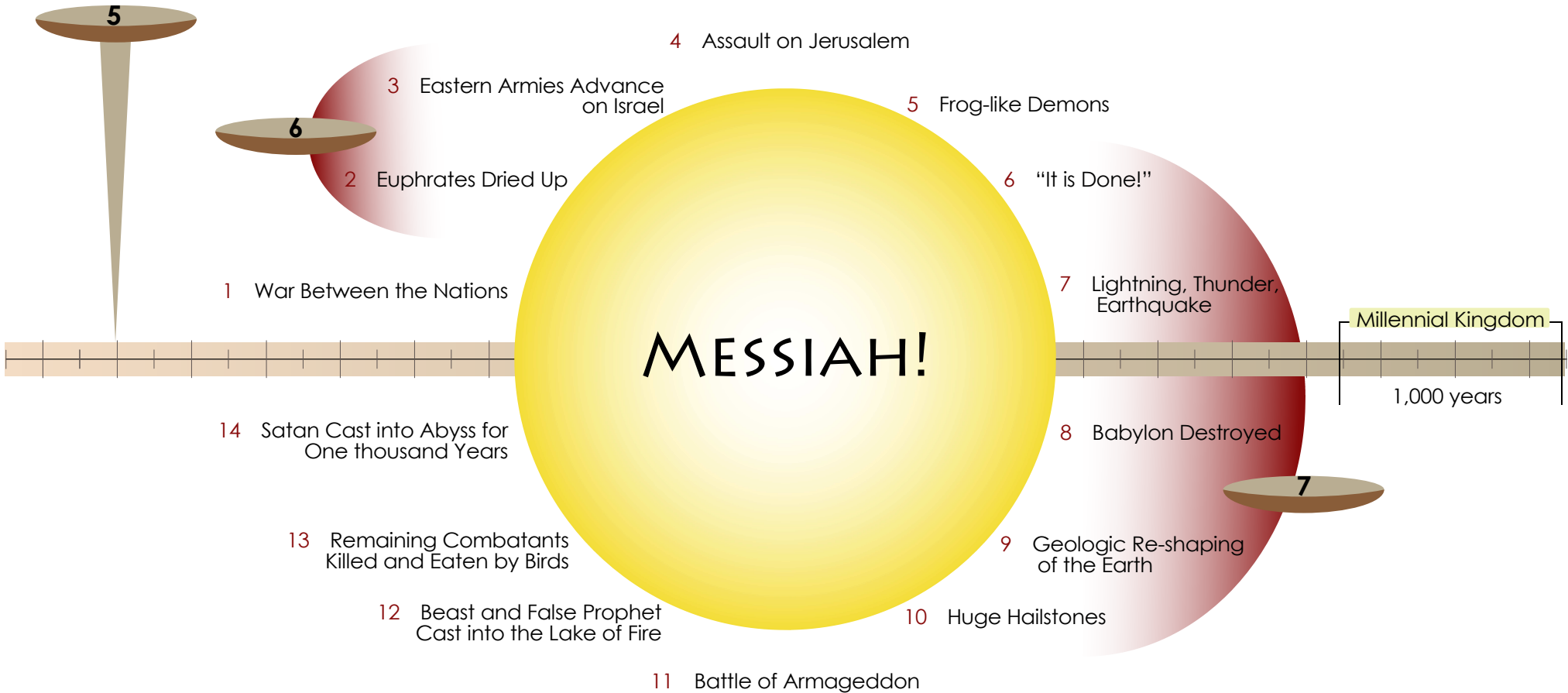
Read Isaiah 40:3-5.

We will stop here for now. In our next session we will see Christ Jesus return to this earth, the Battle of Armageddon, summary judgment executed upon the two beasts, all remaining combatants killed in a moment, and—not least—Satan bound in the abyss for one thousand years.

Don't miss it.

THE TRIBULATION

Events Surrounding Christ's Return



Footnotes

1
Daniel 11:36-45

2
Revelation 16:12

3
Daniel 11:44

4
Zechariah 14:1-2

5
Revelation 16:13-16

6
Revelation 16:17

7
Revelation 16:18-20

8
Revelation 16:19
Revelation 17-18

9
Zechariah 14:4-10

10
Revelation 16:21

11
Revelation 16:16
Revelation 19:11-21

12
Revelation 19:20

13
Revelation 19:21

14
Revelation 20:1-3

