

## **Revelation Pt 35 Hardened Hearts & the Gathering for War**

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Revelation / Revelation 16:8–16

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# Introduction

### **Revelation 16:8–16** ESV

<sup>8</sup> The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire.

<sup>9</sup> They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.

<sup>10</sup> The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish

<sup>11</sup> and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> And I saw, 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, three unclean spirits like frogs.

<sup>14</sup> For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.

<sup>15</sup> (“Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”)

<sup>16</sup> And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

Last week we looked at the first three bowls. We saw the sea turn to blood. We saw the rivers and springs turn to blood. And we saw two voices, one from an angel, one from the altar, both saying the same thing: God is just.

This week, we move to bowls four, five, and six. And something shifts in the passage.

The first three bowls were about what God does. These next three bowls are about how people respond. And the response is shocking. Under intense, undeniable judgment, people know exactly who is sending these plagues. They know it's God. They say so. And instead of repenting, they curse Him.

Twice in this passage we read the same sentence: they did not repent.

That phrase is the heartbeat of this passage. And it raises a question we need to sit with: Why doesn't suffering produce repentance? Why does judgment sometimes harden people instead of breaking them?

We'll also see something else in these verses. Behind the scenes of all this political chaos and global suffering, demonic spirits are moving. They are going out to the kings of the earth, deceiving them, drawing them toward a final confrontation with God.

And right in the middle of all that darkness, Jesus speaks. One sentence. A warning and a blessing at the same time.

Let's work through it carefully.

## Verses 8–9: The Fourth Bowl – Scorching Heat

### **Revelation 16:8–9** ESV

<sup>8</sup> The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire.

<sup>9</sup> They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the

name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.

## **"It was allowed to scorch people with fire"**

The fourth bowl is poured on the sun. The sun, which God placed in the sky to give light and warmth and to sustain life, is now turned up. It scorches.

The phrase "it was allowed" is important. The Greek is *edothē*, a passive verb that typically signals divine permission in Revelation. God gives the sun this power. This is not a natural climate event. It's a directed act of judgment.

We saw the same language back in Revelation 6:4, where the rider on the red horse was "permitted to take peace from the earth." God is always the one giving permission. Even in judgment, He is in full control.

The word for "scorch" is *kaumatizō*, and it carries the idea of burning, searing heat. Intense and relentless. And the result is not damage to crops or land. The text says people were scorched. The judgment lands directly on human beings.

## **Old Testament background: The sun as blessing**

God's design for the sun was always blessing. In Genesis 1:14–16 (ESV), God made the two great lights to govern the day and the night. He called it good. In Psalm 19:4–6 (ESV), the psalmist celebrates the sun: "In them he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy."

The sun was a gift. And the people of the earth used that gift, along with every other gift God gave them, in the service of rebellion against Him.

So now the gift becomes judgment. The same sun that sustained their lives scorches them.

This is a consistent pattern in Revelation's judgment cycle. The things people trusted in, depended on, or worshiped are the very things that turn against them. The sea dies. The rivers run with blood. The sun burns. Creation is not neutral ground. It belongs to God, and when He acts, it acts with Him.

## **"They cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues"**

Here is the response. And it's critical to read it carefully.

They cursed God. But notice what they know first: they

know who is doing this. "God who had power over these plagues." They recognize the source. This is not blind suffering. This is not people confused about where the heat is coming from. They know it's God.

And they curse Him.

The Greek word for "cursed" is *blasphēmeō*. We get the English word "blaspheme" from it. It means to speak against, to revile, to dishonor. They revile the name of God to His face, in the middle of His judgment, knowing full well He is the one sending it.

## **"They did not repent and give him glory"**

This phrase stops the action. After describing the bowl and the response, John records what did not happen: repentance.

The word "repent" is *metanoēō* in Greek. It means to change the mind, to turn around, to think differently. And "give him glory" is the language of worship, of acknowledgment, of bowing the knee.

Neither happened.

This is a very sobering statement. These people are suffering. They know God is real. They know He has power. And they still will not turn to Him.

We sometimes assume that if people saw enough evidence, or felt enough pain, they would eventually come around. Revelation says that's not how the hardened heart works. The human heart, left to itself and given over to rebellion, will curse God rather than bow to Him, even under the most extreme circumstances.

Jesus said something close to this in Luke 16:31 (ESV), in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. When the rich man begged for Lazarus to be sent back to warn his brothers, Abraham said, "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone rises from the dead."

Evidence is not the problem. The heart is the problem.

This is what happens when men continually reject God. Their conscience is seared and their stony hearts are set against the Lord. They would rather die in judgment, cursing God, than to repent.

## Verses 10–11: The Fifth Bowl – Darkness on the Throne of the Beast

### **Revelation 16:10–11** ESV

<sup>10</sup> The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People

gnawed their tongues in anguish

<sup>11</sup> and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

## **"On the throne of the beast"**

The first four bowls were poured on the earth, the sea, the rivers, and the sun. This bowl is poured on a specific location: the throne of the beast.

This is targeted. It's not a general judgment on the world. It's a direct strike on the seat of power of the beast, the center of satanic governance over the earth.

We were introduced to the beast in Revelation 13. He rose from the sea, received authority from the dragon, and was given a throne of his own. The world worshiped him. His kingdom seemed unstoppable. Now the bowl falls directly on his throne.

## **"Its kingdom was plunged into darkness"**

The Greek word for "plunged into darkness" is *eskotōmenē*, meaning to be darkened, covered in shadow. The entire kingdom, not just its throne room, goes dark.

The Old Testament background here is the ninth plague in

Exodus 10:21–23 (ESV):

*"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.' So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the people of Israel had light where they lived."*

The darkness was so thick it could be felt. It was physical and suffocating. And God's people were not in it. They had light.

The connection in Revelation is the same. The darkness falls on the kingdom that chose the beast. And the contrast with God's people, who are sealed and protected, stands in the background.

## **Darkness as a spiritual sign**

Darkness in Scripture is almost always connected to the absence of God. God is light. In 1 John 1:5 (ESV) John writes, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." And in John 8:12 (ESV), Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

The beast's kingdom is dark because it chose to be. It rejected the light. It drove away the witnesses. It silenced the prophets. And now the darkness it chose settles over it completely. God simply gives it what it wanted.

Paul says something similar in Romans 1:24 (ESV):  
"Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity." The judgment of being given over to what you chose is one of the most serious forms of judgment in Scripture.

## **"People gnawed their tongues in anguish"**

The pain is so severe that people chew their own tongues. This is a physical description of extreme suffering, of something a person does when there is nothing else to hold on to and no relief in sight.

And notice: the sores from the first bowl are still present. Verse 11 mentions "their pain and sores." These judgments are not isolated events that come and go. They are cumulative. People are carrying the wounds of the first bowl while living under the darkness of the fifth.

## **"And cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores and did not repent of their deeds"**

The response is identical to verse 9. Cursing. No repentance.

But there's a slight difference in the wording here. In verse 9, they "did not repent and give him glory." Here, they "did not repent of their deeds."

The first response is about worship. The second is about behavior. Both are absent.

They will not worship God. And they will not stop doing what they've been doing. The deeds are the very behaviors that drew judgment in the first place. Idolatry. Violence. Wickedness. And under the fifth bowl, they continue.

This is what total hardness looks like. It's not ignorance. It's defiance. Knowing God is real, feeling His hand, and still refusing to change direction.

## **Application**

The fifth bowl teaches us something about the nature of sin. Sin, when it is practiced long enough and deliberately enough, becomes fixed. The more a person curses God, the easier it becomes. The more a person refuses to repent, the less their conscience responds to the call.

Hebrews 3:13 (ESV) warns, "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be

hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

Today is the day for repentance. Not because there's always a tomorrow, but because the longer we wait, the harder the heart becomes.

If you have been putting off dealing with something God has been speaking to you about, hear this passage as a warning. The window is open now. Don't wait until the window closes.

## Verse 12: The Sixth Bowl – The Euphrates Dried Up

### **Revelation 16:12** *ESV*

<sup>12</sup> 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.

## **The Euphrates as a boundary**

The Euphrates is one of the great rivers of the ancient world. It appears first in Genesis 2:14 as one of the four rivers flowing from Eden. In Genesis 15:18 (ESV), God said to Abraham, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates." It was the eastern boundary of the Promised Land.

For Israel, the Euphrates marked the edge of the known world. Beyond it lay Assyria, then Babylon, then Persia. The great empires that threatened, conquered, and exiled God's people all came from beyond the Euphrates.

When the sixth bowl dries it up, it removes the last natural barrier. The armies from the east have nothing standing between them and the land of Israel.

## **Old Testament background: Dried water as a path for God's purposes**

The drying up of water to prepare a path is a familiar pattern in Scripture.

In Exodus 14:21–22 (ESV), God drove back the Red Sea with a strong east wind, and Israel walked through on dry ground. In Joshua 3:15–17 (ESV), the Jordan River stopped flowing when the priests carrying the ark stepped into it, and Israel crossed on dry ground into the Promised Land.

Water drying up in Scripture means God is making a way for something to happen. Here, the Euphrates is dried up to make way for the kings from the east.

But unlike the Exodus and Jordan crossings, this is not Israel being delivered. This is the nations being drawn toward a

final confrontation. The path is opened, but not for salvation. The kings from the east are heading toward the place John calls Armageddon.

## **"To prepare the way for the kings from the east"**

The identity of "the kings from the east" has generated a lot of speculation. Some interpreters link it to literal Asian nations. Others see it as a broader symbol for all the hostile powers of the world being gathered together.

The Euphrates as a symbol of the boundary between God's people and their enemies is dried up, and enemies pour through. Not from one direction. From everywhere, as we see in verse 14, where these are described as "the kings of the whole world."

The point is not the geography. The point is the gathering. The world's powers are being assembled for a final battle.

## **Verses 13–14: Demonic Spirits Behind the Nations**

### **Revelation 16:13–14 ESV**

<sup>13</sup> And I saw, 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, three unclean spirits like frogs.

<sup>14</sup> For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.

## **The unholy trinity speaks**

We've met all three figures before.

The dragon is Satan (Revelation 12:9). The beast rose from the sea in Revelation 13:1 and was given authority by the dragon. The false prophet is the second beast from Revelation 13:11, who looked like a lamb but spoke like a dragon and performed signs to deceive the world into worshipping the first beast.

Three figures. Three mouths. Three unclean spirits.

This is a dark parody of the Trinity. Father, Son, and Spirit are the source of truth, life, and light. The dragon, the beast, and the false prophet are the source of deception, death, and darkness.

## **"Like frogs"**

The comparison to frogs is striking. Frogs were associated with the second plague in Exodus 8:1–15. They filled every

house, every bedroom, every bowl and kneading dish. They were everywhere, inescapable, and deeply unclean in the Jewish mind. Leviticus 11 classed them among unclean creatures.

The three spirits spread like that. Everywhere. Into every corner of the political world. Into the minds and decision-making of every king.

## **"Demonic spirits, performing signs"**

John tells us plainly what these spirits are: demonic. Not human propaganda. Not just political ideology. Demonic spirits using signs, miracles, and deception to move the nations.

This is important. Revelation is pulling back the curtain and showing us what is behind the surface of history and politics. World powers don't move entirely by their own will. There are spiritual forces working through them.

Paul said the same thing in Ephesians 6:12 (ESV): "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

The kings of the earth think they are making their own

decisions. They are being herded. The demonic spirits are out there, among the nations, performing signs and drawing every power toward the same point.

## **"To assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty"**

The phrase "the great day of God the Almighty" is loaded with Old Testament history.

The prophets spoke of a coming "Day of the LORD," a day when God would act decisively in history to judge the nations and vindicate His people.

Joel 2:11 (ESV) says, "The LORD utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful. For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome; who can endure it?"

Zephaniah 1:14–15 (ESV) says, "The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there. A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish."

The nations are being gathered for battle. But they are not gathering to defeat God. They are gathering for the day when God defeats them. The demonic spirits think they are orchestrating a rebellion. God is orchestrating a judgment.

# Application

Verses 13–14 remind us that the world is not just shaped by economics, politics, or human ambition. Spiritual forces are real and active. They work through human systems, through signs and wonders, through ideologies that demand ultimate loyalty.

This is why Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:13 (ESV) to "take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm."

The armor of God is not metaphor for self-improvement. It's the equipment for a real spiritual conflict. And the person who doesn't believe that conflict exists is the most vulnerable person in the room.

We need to pray with this in mind. We need to read the news with this in mind. Not with paranoia, but with the clear-eyed awareness that what we see is not all that is happening.

## Verse 15: Jesus Speaks – Stay Awake

### **Revelation 16:15** *ESV*

<sup>15</sup> ("Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!")

## **A sudden interruption**

The narrative stops. All the action pauses. The bowls, the demonic spirits, the gathering of nations, all of it pauses for one verse.

And Jesus speaks.

In the middle of the most intense global judgment scene in the book, Jesus turns and speaks directly to His people. It's as if He breaks through the narrative to address the reader personally.

The brackets in many Bible translations signal that this is a parenthetical statement. Not part of the main sequence. A personal word inserted into the middle of chaos.

## **"Behold, I am coming like a thief"**

This is not a new image. Jesus used it Himself in Matthew 24:43–44 (ESV): "But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

Paul used it in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 (ESV): "For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night."

And Jesus used it in the letters to the churches back in Revelation 3:3 (ESV), speaking to Sardis: "If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you."

The thief image is about the unexpectedness of the arrival. Not about secrecy or deception. The point is: you won't see it coming with enough warning to prepare in that moment. The preparation has to be done beforehand.

## **"Blessed is the one who stays awake"**

The word "blessed" is makarios. We know it from the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. It means genuinely happy, favored by God, in a good place. It's a pronouncement of blessing on a specific kind of person.

Who gets the blessing? The one who stays awake.

This is the same call that runs through the letters to the seven churches at the beginning of Revelation. Ephesus had lost her first love. Sardis had a reputation for being alive but was dead. Laodicea was lukewarm. All of them were in some form of spiritual sleep. And Jesus called them to wake up.

Here He does the same. In the middle of the most dramatic global judgment, He turns to His church and says: Stay awake.

## **"Keeping his garments on"**

In the ancient world, a soldier kept his clothes and weapons ready at all times. If an attack came in the night, he needed to be dressed and armed. A soldier found naked when the enemy arrived was humiliated and exposed.

But in Revelation, garments carry a deeper meaning. Back in Revelation 3:4–5 (ESV), Jesus told the church at Sardis: "Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments."

White garments in Revelation represent faithfulness, moral purity, and righteousness. Soiled garments represent compromise and spiritual unfaithfulness.

Keeping your garments on means staying faithful. Staying pure. Not compromising with the values of the world's system while the world drifts toward judgment.

## **"That he may not go about naked and be**

## **seen exposed"**

The opposite of being clothed and ready is being caught naked. Spiritually exposed. Having nothing to show when Christ arrives.

This connects to the warning in Matthew 25:1–13 about the ten virgins, five of whom had no oil when the bridegroom came. And to the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22:11–12 (ESV), where a man was found without a wedding garment: "He said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless."

Being spiritually unprepared at Christ's return is not a minor matter. The language of shame and exposure here is serious. Jesus is not giving a casual suggestion. He is giving a solemn warning wrapped in a blessing.

## **Application**

Verse 15 is the pastoral heart of this whole passage. While the bowls fall and the nations gather, Jesus has one word for His church: Stay awake and stay dressed.

What puts us to sleep spiritually? It's worth being honest about this. Sometimes it's comfort. When life is easy and going well, we drift. Sometimes it's entertainment. We can fill every quiet moment with something that crowds out

reflection, prayer, and the Word. Sometimes it's discouragement. The world around us looks like it's winning, and we lose the sense that faithfulness matters.

But Jesus says it does matter. The one who stays awake and keeps his garments on is blessed.

Practically, staying awake looks like:

Staying in the Word regularly. Not because you have to, but because you need it. The Word keeps your mind anchored in what is real while the world tells you something else.

Staying in prayer. Talking to God honestly about what you see, what you fear, and what you hope for.

Staying in community. Hebrews 10:24–25 (ESV) says, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

Staying in obedience. Doing what you know to do. Not waiting for a feeling. Faithfulness in small daily things is what keeps the garment clean.

## Verse 16: Armageddon

**Revelation 16:16** **ESV**

<sup>16</sup> And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

## **What is Armageddon?**

The word appears only once in the entire Bible, right here. The Hebrew behind it is Har-Megiddo, which most scholars understand as "mountain of Megiddo."

Megiddo was a city in the Jezreel Valley in northern Israel. It sat at a strategic pass controlling traffic between Egypt and Mesopotamia. It was one of the most contested pieces of land in the ancient Near East.

Major battles were fought there throughout Israel's history:

In Judges 4–5, Deborah and Barak defeated Sisera and his Canaanite forces near the Kishon River at the foot of Megiddo. In 2 Kings 23:29–30 (ESV), the godly king Josiah was killed there when he went out against Pharaoh Neco: "King Josiah went to meet him, and Pharaoh Neco killed him at Megiddo, as soon as he saw him."

Megiddo was where armies clashed. It was where fates were decided. It carried the weight of decisive, history-altering conflict.

## **More symbol than map coordinate**

It's worth being careful here about reading Armageddon as a precise geographical prediction. Revelation consistently uses Old Testament places and names as symbols for spiritual realities, not as GPS coordinates.

Scholars like G.K. Beale and Dennis Johnson have observed that "the mountain of Megiddo" is an unusual phrase because Megiddo was actually in a valley, not on a mountain. There was no literal mountain there. This suggests the name is carrying symbolic weight drawn from its history as a battlefield, not a geographical pointer to a specific location.

The point of Armageddon is not the place. The point is the gathering. All the powers of the world, led by demonic deception, assembled in defiance of God. And assembled, not to win, but to face the One they've been running from.

## **The battle is God's to fight**

We don't see the battle in chapter 16. The seventh bowl comes next, and then the extended vision of Babylon's fall in chapters 17–18. The actual outcome of this gathering is depicted in Revelation 19:11–21, where Christ appears on a white horse and the beast and false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire.

The kings of the earth gathered. And they lost.

This is consistent with the entire witness of Scripture. The nations may rage and the rulers may plot against God (Psalm 2:1–2 ESV), but the one enthroned in heaven laughs (Psalm 2:4 ESV). He is not threatened. He has not lost the initiative. His day is coming, and when it comes, it ends in one way.

## **Application**

The gathering at Armageddon is the end point of a long process of deception, hardening, and rebellion. The nations didn't wake up one morning and decide to fight God. They were led there, step by step, by demonic spirits who kept them from repenting, kept them cursing God, kept them pledging loyalty to the beast.

This is what a life built on the world's system looks like at the end. Not victory. A gathering for a battle you cannot win.

But there is another gathering in Revelation. In Revelation 19:9 (ESV), there is "the marriage supper of the Lamb." Those who are clothed in righteousness, who kept their garments on, who stayed awake, are gathered too. And that gathering ends very differently.

Two gatherings. Two destinations. Which one you're

heading toward depends on one thing: whose side you are on.

## Putting It Together: What These Bowls Reveal

Bowls four, five, and six show us three things we need to take seriously.

**The hardened heart is real.** Suffering does not automatically produce repentance. Pain does not automatically produce humility. Only God's grace, working through the gospel, can turn a heart of stone into a heart of flesh.

**Spiritual deception is operating behind human events.** The kings of the earth are being moved by demonic spirits performing signs. The world is not just shaped by economics and elections. There is a spiritual layer underneath, and Paul tells us to wrestle with it in prayer, in the Word, and in watchfulness.

**Jesus is present and speaking, even in the darkest moment.** Right in the middle of bowl judgments and demon-driven politics, Jesus inserts Himself. He speaks directly to His church. He says: I'm coming. Stay awake. Keep your garments on. You are blessed if you do.

That word from Christ in verse 15 is the pastoral word this passage wants to leave with us. Not fear. Not panic. Just faithfulness. Keep going. Stay dressed. Stay awake.

## Conclusion

Let me close with a question Jesus asked in Luke 18:8 (ESV): "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

It's a haunting question. The context is a parable about persistent prayer and the justice of God. Jesus finishes the parable with a promise that God will bring justice quickly for His chosen ones. And then He asks: When He comes, will He find people who actually believed it? Who actually kept praying, kept trusting, kept their garments on?

That's the question Revelation 16:15 is asking in its own way.

The bowls are falling. The nations are gathering. Demonic deception is active. The world is cursing God instead of repenting.

And Jesus turns to you and says: Stay awake. I'm coming.

Will He find you dressed and ready?

*Next week: The seventh bowl is poured out. "It is done." And we will take a long, hard look at who and what Babylon really is.*