
three unclean spirits
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The book of Revelation is different from any other part of the Bible. As a prophetic history of the church of all the ages, it is quite largely a book of quotes. Someone has calculated that out of 404 verses, 276 are either directly quoted or paraphrased from the Old Testament Scriptures. It seems clearly evident that no one can properly understand this last book of the inspired canon unless he also has a close familiarity with the writings of Moses and the prophets.

This may account for the vast confusion that exists today over the meaning of John's apocalyptic beasts and symbolic horsemen. The so-called "New Testament" church bodies that view the Old Testament as only fulfillments of an antiquated past would certainly find no relevance in the writings of John the Revelator.

Paul wrote, "…*all* scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Since the New Testament had not yet been written, we can be certain that he was referring to the Old Testament Scriptures. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning," Paul declared in Romans 15:4.

These texts establish that the composite prophecies of Revelation are especially applicable to our own day and were inspired for our "doctrine," "learning," and "instruction in righteousness."

Just as the book of Genesis delineates the beginning of the great controversy between good and evil, the last book of the Bible describes the close of the conflict. This makes it one of the most

important books in the sacred Scriptures. It describes the kind of people God will take to heaven and how they become overcomers by the blood of the Lamb. It warns, also, against the final assaults that Satan will throw against the saints as the battle rages to its climax. What a document! And how the devil hates this book that exposes his origin, devices, and final destiny!

Can we logically expect Satan to attack these prophecies which lay open his deceptive plans and purposes? How has he done it? By introducing futurism, the adversary has struck a blow at the foundation of prophetic understanding. The biblical principle of historicism that establishes a "day for a year" has been rejected, and an unwarranted literalism has been applied to the great lines of prophecy laid out in Daniel and Revelation. Specifically, this type of confused hermeneutics has been utilized in the study of Armageddon and the king of the north. The symbolic portrayal of those events from the pen of the Revelator provides a key for correcting the error.

"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. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which 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. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon" (Revelation 16:12–16).

Armageddon—A Spiritual Battle

This is probably the key text in the Bible relating to the great world-ending struggle between Christ and Satan. Immediately, we can see that many symbols are brought to light in these verses. The beast, and dragon, and false prophet are not literal at all. And what can we say about the clothes described in verse 15? Why would this peculiar interruption take place in the midst of a description of Armageddon? These clothes are the garments of salvation and refer directly to the "fine linen" of that robe of righteousness described in Revelation 19:8.

From these verses also we notice that the coming of Jesus "as a thief' is related to the drying up of the river Euphrates and the appearing of the "kings of the east." And even the Battle of Armageddon is tied to these events. Do these phrases sound familiar? They should, because the same language is used in Isaiah 44:27 to describe the fall of ancient Babylon. Cyrus actually "dried up" the Euphrates River and thus delivered the literal Jews from Babylonian captivity. After referring to Cyrus as "the righteous man from the east" in Isaiah 41:2, Isaiah speaks of him as one who would "dry up thy rivers" and "open … the two leaved gates" (Isaiah 44:27, 28; 45:1).

Historians recognize these as references to the clever battle plan of King Cyrus to enter the city via the water gates through the wall, after the water had been diverted from its channel. Since the river flowed through the midst of Babylon, this ruse was a perfect means of access into the city while the drunken king partied with his military leaders.

Why is Revelation predicting a future drying up of Euphrates and an end-time deliverance of God's people? Hasn't this all been fulfilled in the days of Daniel the prophet? It has in its primary literal fulfillment, but John reveals that there is a secondary, symbolic application of those events. In the historical account, the literal Jews were freed from the literal Babylonians, but the book of Revelation pictures a spiritual Israel being saved from spiritual Babylon. Both rescues are made possible through the drying up of the Euphrates River, and both are accomplished by kings of the east.

Here we encounter an important principle of prophetic

interpretation. The immediate fulfillment is always literal and local, while the future prophetic fulfillment is always spiritual and worldwide. Thus, God's people in one instance are the nation of Israel, and in the later case are His faithful people of all nations and races; in other words, two Israels—one physical in the book of Daniel, and the other spiritual in the book of Revelation. Two drying ups—one literally in the past, and one symbolically in the future.

This leads us to the conclusion that the battle of Armageddon, as portrayed in Revelation, is not a literal battle between East and West, but the spiritual climax of the 6,000-year conflict between Christ and Satan. Here the great adversary is symbolized as making a final attack against the people of God to destroy them. Using a combination of earthly powers he will influence world governments to unite in a program to wipe out those who refuse to receive his mark of authority. Those who stand loyal to God's law in the face of overwhelming opposition will finally be condemned to death. This is what Armageddon is all about.

John tells us that water represents people. "The waters which thou sawest … are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues" (Revelation 17:15). The harlot woman who sits on the "many waters" is identified as the apostate religious system. Drying up of the water represents the drying up of support by those multitudes that had been deluded by the woman and her spiritual daughters. The Bible declares that they "shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate … and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire" (Revelation 17:16). Unfortunately, that awakening will come too late to reverse the fate of those who will have already been sealed in apostasy and error.

But who are the "kings of the east" in Revelation whose coming is preceded by these dramatic events? Whatever is symbolized here must follow on the heels of the three unclean spirits gathering the whole world to the Battle of Armageddon. Cyrus, king of the east, brought deliverance to Israel in the Old Testament, but who are the kings of the east in the book of Revelation who will save spiritual Israel from the wrath of spiritual Babylon?

The Scriptures describe only one rescue operation from the east

after that final gathering of the nations. “For as the lightening cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matthew 24:27). It is from that same direction that the sealing angel ascends to mark the saints for their deliverance. “And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God” (Revelation 7:2).

The prophet Ezekiel identifies the east as God’s special place of abode and operation. “And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east” (Ezekiel 43:2). These verses leave no doubt that the kings of the east symbolize the glorious intervention of Jesus and the armies of heaven in dealing with the warring factions of this earth. We note once more the inspired account of the opposing forces that will clash in this last encounter between good and evil. Revelation 16:12 speaks of the “kings of the east” and verse 14 describes the other side as “the kings of the earth.” What a contest! The great controversy reaches its final stages in this cosmic involvement of every soul who lives on planet earth.

What circumstances lead up to the gathering of all nations to this apocalyptic Armageddon? John gives a graphic account of it: “And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which 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. … And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon” (Revelation 16:13–16).

Three Spirits Like Frogs

Now we are prepared to identify the three major actors who will set the stage for this end-time holocaust. Time does not allow us to give the prophetic and historical background on each of the miracle-working trio who influence the earthly rulers to war against God. Suffice it to say that all three—the beast, dragon, and false prophet—are portrayed as being used by demonic power in their gathering of nations to the battle of Armageddon.

From the days of Martin Luther to the present, Bible commentators have recognized the papacy as the fulfillment of the score of biblical tests relating to the beast power. It was to rise among the nations of Western Europe, uprooting three tribes, speaking blasphemy, persecuting all opponents, ruling for 1,260 years, and finally receiving a deadly wound.

Only the papal system fulfills all of those characteristics so clearly delineated in both Daniel and Revelation. The deadly wound was given in 1798, at the end of an exact political reign of 1,260 years, and the pope was taken prisoner by French Revolutionary forces dispatched by Napoleon Bonaparte. This makes it clear that the modern papacy will indeed be one of the powerful catalysts that will bring on the ultimate threat against the remnant of the seed of the woman (Revelation 12:17).

The second force in the preparation for Armageddon will be the dragon. This is the symbol of satanic power in its most virulent and confrontational form. Certainly this would include every aspect of pagan worship, but specifically, it would also relate to the more respected elements of occultism, Spiritualism, and New Age, which have been adopted by many Christians today.

None can deny that churches of various persuasions have embraced the doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul, the very root and foundation of all attempts to communicate with the dead. Such a belief opens the door for almost every form of modern New Age deception, including Spiritualism and the mind sciences. Thus, a strong sympathetic chain has been forged between Christianity and paganism. Such a federation will be one of the major influences in stirring up the kings of the earth to battle against the remnant of the woman, and finally, against the armies of heaven. “And the dragon was wroth with the woman,

and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 12:17).

The third symbolic power that will prepare the world for the battle of that great day is described as the false prophet. He, like the others, causes miracles to be performed in order to effect a gathering of the nations to that last battle between Christ and Satan. Who is this false prophet? We find a clue in Revelation 19 that describes the disastrous outcome of the battle for the enemies of Christ. "And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that *wrought miracles* before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast" (v. 20).

This text describes how the false prophet works miracles in relation to those who receive the mark of the beast. Does the Bible identify the one who carries out these counterfeit miracles? In Revelation 13 we read, "And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. … And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth *by means of those miracles* which he had power to do in the sight of the beast. … And he causeth all, both small and great, … to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads" (vs. 11–16).

By putting these verses together we discover that the second beast of Revelation 13 is the false prophet who also works miracles and causes all to receive the mark. Even the nature of the miracles is detailed by John: "he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men" (v. 13). The description of this second beast establishes beyond question that the prophet is talking about Protestant America in its rise to world dominance. Note the significant reference to "coming up" as the first beast received its deadly wound. Was the United States rising to power in the very year the papacy went down? Indeed, in 1798 America was first recognized as a world power—the very year of the papal wound.

Contrary to the first beast rising out of the water, representing many people, the two-horned second beast came up out of the earth, signifying a place of no former civilization and peoples

(Revelation 13:11).

The absence of crowns on its two horns also indicates a peaceful democracy in contrast to the crowns on the horns of the first beast that symbolized monarchies or dictatorships. It is also interesting to note, in passing, that the miracles had to do with bringing fire from heaven. John added that the work of the false prophet was like frogs, going forth to deceive.

Frogs capture their prey with their tongues, and the false prophet bringing fire down from heaven sounds very much like a counterfeit Pentecost. These symbols may well indicate how pseudo-Christian concepts will form a link between paganism and apostate Protestantism. The false prophet, instead of representing the United States as a political entity only, would extend to the "image of the beast" and portray fallen, compromised Protestantism doing the work of the first beast, or Catholicism.

Church and State Unite

There is no question but that Satan has woven an age-long network pattern of pagan infiltration in both government and religion. It has been done so cleverly, over the ages, that few recognize how much common ground now exists in these powerful institutions. Sunday, the ancient day of licentious sun worship for every heathen culture, has been so artfully sanitized that it is now the accepted substitute for the biblical seventh-day Sabbath in both secular and religious settings. Incredibly, this has been accomplished while both church and state still give recognition to the moral nature of the Ten Commandments that declare unequivocally that "the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God" (Exodus 20:10).

Consider the ease with which government can now lend support to a rest day which they themselves recognize by closing up all official functions of their own operation on Sunday. Repeatedly, laws have been instituted and enforced to make it a crime to violate the supposed sanctity of a day dedicated originally to satanic sun worship. Amazing? Indeed, it is the most incredible religious fraud of the ages and one that only the prince of evil could have perpetrated.

Then, we must marvel again at the respectable status accorded to the New Age movement whose tentacles have extended equally through both religious and non-religious communities. Finally, the devil has been able to effect a revival of his most primitive approach to the human race. Through a variety of modern titles and high-sounding techniques, Satan is channeling his evil principles directly into the minds of millions today who cannot recognize that they are actually learning to worship Satan. All who subscribe to the pagan concept of a naturally immortal soul are vulnerable to the New Age appeal to communicate with these supposed "Spirit Masters."

Charismatic worshippers who have been conditioned by emotional and sensory manifestations stand in the greatest danger of being deceived by the New Age and Spiritualism appeal. Those who trust feeling as a valid test of true religion do not easily discern counterfeit gifts. Prophecy indicates that a counterfeit "tongues" could be one aspect of the three-fold

preparation for the final deception.

Coming back to the words of the prophet, we now see the tri-lateral approach that Satan will make to the kings of the earth to prepare them for their part in Armageddon. Every effort will be made by our great enemy to unite secular and religious powers to destroy the little remnant people which "keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 12:17).

Satan's wrath is especially aimed against the law of God. He hates it because it constitutes the foundation of God's government. He despises the saints who are repeatedly described in the book of Revelation as those who "keep the commandments of God" (Revelation 14:12; 12:17; 22:14).

Thus far we have discovered that the common ground of Spiritualism (im-mortal soul), counterfeit tongues, and New Age errors will cement an end-time alliance between apostate Protestantism, Catholicism, and secular governments—an alliance which will unite them against the unpopular minority who refuse the mark of the beast. Under the influence of this confederation the nations of the earth, following the example of the United States, will be led to issue a death decree against all who will not receive that mark.

Counterfeit Miracles and the Kings of the Earth

It is interesting, at this point, to observe how this grand objective of unified action will be accomplished by these diverse political and religious entities. Some have held that they will be drawn together by economic necessity, as related world finances experience simultaneous collapse. Without discounting this and other possible factors, we must recognize that the prophecy itself plainly bears witness to the primary role of demonic miracles as the basic bonding force pulling the nations together for the final action against God's people and His government. In other words, it seems less political than it does spiritual from the biblical viewpoint.

Right now we can only speculate about the nature of those signs and wonders that Satan will use to impress the kings of the earth. With the rising influence of Spiritualism in many religious bodies and the growing emphasis on miracles and emotional feeling as the criteria of truth, we can expect some grandiose display of demonic power that will capture the attention and interest of every country in the world. We know that the great deceiver will impersonate the coming of Jesus in some spectacular manner, and no one should doubt that such miraculous displays could make intellectual believers and cooperators out of Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists, Communists, or any other strain of national or religious identity.

And don't discount the providential influences that will be operating on the other side—God's side—to prepare for the final events of the great controversy. Even though Satan is the temporary prince of this world, God still has oversight of the rise and fall of nations. A divine destiny is even now influencing the political processes and pressures in which certain relationships are being established between countries.

The most atheistic observers have counted the rapid fall of international communism as an incredible development very close to a miracle. And almost everyone describes the lightning victory of the allied forces over Saddam Hussein as an unbelievable, impossible accomplishment. How could such a war be fought with

so few casualties on one side? Yet in each of these recent cataclysmic actions—the fall of communism and the United States victory over Iraq—the results have been to place America in a center-stage position of influence over all the other nations. This is exactly what is demanded by the prophecy of Revelation 13. This country will "deceive them that dwell on the earth … And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads" (Revelation 13:14–16).

Another shocking activity of the second beast of Revelation 13 apparently is produced after it loses its lamblike quality and begins to speak as a dragon. John wrote, "And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed" (Revelation 13:12).

As we have already discovered, the deadly wound was given to the papacy in 1798, and it has been in the process of healing since 1929 when the Vatican was established as a political state once again. According to this prophecy, the United States will begin to exercise a similar religious intolerance as the Catholic Church and will use her influence to cause people allover the world to give spiritual allegiance to that church.

If this scenario seemed far-fetched and unlikely at some time in the past, it certainly is not that way today. The growing political influence of Pope John Paul II in world affairs is a phenomenon of the very recent past. The United States has appointed an official representative to the head of that church state, and some amazing concessions have been made to accommodate the pope in his pilgrimage visits to this and other countries.

A very significant statement appeared in the August 13, 1990, issue of *U.S. News and World Report* magazine. "Pope John Paul II discusses world affairs on the telephone with George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev at least once a week, according to Professor Malachi Martin, a Roman Catholic theologian and Vatican insider. … Martin says the Pope offers the President informed analyses prepared by the Vatican's intelligence network about developments in Eastern Europe and his personal assessments of the new leaders there as well as in the Soviet Union."

Such an unseemly alliance between papal churchmen and the heads of nations is certainly a violation of the traditional American concept of separation of church and state. But it fits in perfectly with the prophetic scenario of final events. Many students of prophecy found it difficult to believe that Catholicism could ever regain her powerful political clout after the "deadly wound" experience of the eighteenth century. It was felt that Communist totalitarianism would always be around to limit the expansionistic aims of the papacy. The two giant opposing forces were perceived as a necessary balance against each other so that neither could gain authoritarian superiority.

Now all that has changed. It is generally recognized that the Pope played a significant role in the collapse of international communism. The recent book *The Keys of This Blood*, written just before the iron curtain began its rapid dissolution, describes the obsessive determination of the present Pope to bring the entire world order under the spiritual domination of the so-called Holy See of Rome. The author describes the concentrated focus of the papal attack on the communistic system, long recognized as the greatest obstacle to the Church's goal.

If time allowed, we could study the prophecy of Daniel 11 where the precise victory of the king of the North (Catholicism) over the king of the South (Atheistic communism) is clearly predicted. For three tense, dramatic days in August 1991, the world held its breath as the Russian coup appeared to reverse the prophetic agenda for the little time remaining. Now, the road seems to be wide open for the Catholic power to fulfill its particular role, along with the dragon and the false prophet.

Beginning with verse 40, we read the account of a mighty struggle taking place at the time of the end between these two contending forces. The identity of these symbolic kings can be established by comparing a few texts. In Isaiah 30:6, 7 the land of Egypt is identified as "of the south." John the Revelator refers to France's period of atheism around 1798 as that "which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt" (Revelation 11:8). Thus, we find the land of the Pharaohs connected to atheism. Indeed, it was the king of Egypt who made the proud boast, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" (Exodus 5:2).

As Daniel describes the continuing conflict between the king of the north and king of the south, we are made aware that his symbol of Egypt has come to represent not just the arrogant spirit of that large country south of Israel but last-day atheism in whatever form it is manifest. Communism is the virulent form that atheism has assumed for the past many years, and much of Daniel 11 is describing the life and death clash of communism with its great foe, the king of the north.

But who is this antagonist from the north who finally gains the ascendancy over the powers of atheism? Here are some texts that show beyond question that the primary application of this symbol was to Babylon. “Toward the north by the river Euphrates,” “in the north country by the river Euphrates,” “all the families of the north … and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon” (Jeremiah 46:6; 46:10; 25:9).

The literal city of Babylon was built right over the Euphrates River, but there is another future, spiritual application of Babylon revealed in the book of Revelation. The very last part of Daniel 11 also deals with the symbolic king of the north, or spiritual Babylon. Many phrases in this chapter give positive evidence that this power is the papacy. For instance: it shall “pollute the sanctuary,” “take away the daily sacrifice,” “magnify himself above all,” and “corrupt with flatteries” (Daniel 11:31, 32).

Now consider the high drama of this prediction in Daniel 11:40. “And at the time of the end shall the king of the south push at him: and the king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind, … and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over.”

How significant it is that *Newsweek* magazine on December 25, 1989, trumpeted the news of the fall of communism in these words, “Days of the Whirlwind.” Commentary after commentary gave credit to the Pope for bringing down Gorbachev and the iron grip of atheism on Eastern Europe. The prophecy said it would be “like a whirlwind” and that is exactly how the media reported it.

Bible students have long debated how the whole world could be influenced to wonder after the beast, and also how the kings of the earth could be drawn into that final encounter between good and evil. Now we can see how the greatest barrier has been

removed, and the three unclean spirits are working through the beast, dragon, and false prophet to involve every soul in that "battle of the great day of God."

What an age to be alive! Excitement mounts as we ride the crest of towering events that sweep us toward the grand climax of history—the coming of Jesus. We need to be constantly aware of the fast-breaking signs that point to His return, but our preparation for that moment in time involves more than knowledge. Only the pure in heart will see God and live in His presence. A total commitment of heart, mind, and body is the greatest need of every living soul.

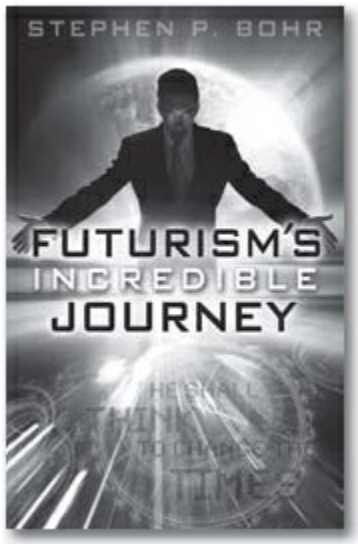
While the angels of Revelation hold the four winds of strife from blowing on the earth, and the glory of God gathers in the eastern skies, a final invitation is beginning to confront every man, woman, and child on this crumbling planet. "Come out of her, my people" is the call of the hour. God is gathering His faithful ones, who love Him supremely, to Mount Zion, the place of safety and salvation. The three unclean spirits are gathering the forces of apostate religion and compromising governments to the great day of battle. Today we stand in the valley of decision.

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