

Sermon – 02/12/2007 am

Darkness and Demons – Bowls 5 & 6

Study Text: Revelation 16:10–16

Have you been out to the country lately? Maybe you are planning a holiday there soon – not in a town but out on a farm or in the bush. One thing you will notice is how dark it is a night. If you wake up in the night you cannot even see your hand in front of your face. If you try to move about you will trip over something or bump into the wall. Imagine what it would be like if such darkness continued for three days. Imagine what it would be like if such darkness continued for ever.

Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, kept rejecting Moses' requests to let the people go into the desert and worship God. The penultimate plague which God sent upon the land of Egypt was darkness for three days. They did not see one another *nor did any rise from his place for three days* (Exodus 10:23). No one could move about, no one could work and no one could prepare food. The darkness was oppressive and people started to go mad. Pharaoh called Moses and said he could go and serve the Lord.

Speaking of the wicked, Jesus said they will be cast into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12, 22:13, 25:30).

Fifth Bowl

The bowl judgments which come on the great day of divine judgment reflect the plagues God poured out on Egypt in the time of Moses. John saw the water turned into blood and sores break out on those having the mark of the beast. The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast and his kingdom was filled with darkness; *and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain* (16:10).

The kingdoms of this world are currently in the hands of Satan. The beast or Satan is on the throne ruling in the kingdoms of men. He is the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2), he is the ruler of the darkness of this age (John 12: 31). Christ's message to the church at Pergamum was that Satan had his throne in their city (2:13).

Satan's rule is referred to as darkness. He has blinded earth dwellers to the truth. Satan binds people in spiritual darkness. People are not unhappy in this bondage for their deeds are evil. They prefer darkness to the light for their deeds are evil (John 3:19). If the people love darkness then in 'giving them up' God gives them total darkness. The kingdom of Satan becomes total darkness. There will be no light at all when God judges the kingdoms of this world.

With the fifth trumpet you will remember Satan came up out of the abyss. The sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke – and the plague of locusts that came out of the smoke (9:2). And further back with the sixth seal the sun became black (6:12). It seems the sun will give a final burst of intense heat in the 4th bowl and then burn up completely with the 5th bowl.

This darkness caused great anguish and torment to the worshippers of the beast. In pain they kept biting their tongues. They could not sleep as they kept looking for the dawn. But dawn never comes. Jesus spoke of this coming perpetual night when no one can work (John 9:4).

This pervasive and oppressive darkness brought great agony, but the wicked did not repent of their deeds. They continued in their wicked ways, in their idolatry and immorality, as detailed in the plague of the 6th trumpet (9:20, 21). In their agony they actually cursed God. They were like Job's wife. As Job sat on the dunghill scratching his sores his wife told him to curse God and die.

Tragically this is the reaction of many to suffering. They will not repent. They will not bow the knee to Jesus, the only one who can save them from death. They grit their teeth; they bite their tongue, and press on into the darkness of death.

Sixth Bowl

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 (16:12).

Some years ago when Iran declared war on Iraq a friend of ours pointed to this verse about the Euphrates being dried up. This was the beginning of the end he said. Soon Israel will be invaded and it will be Armageddon. Many hold to a literal understanding of this apocalyptic prophecy about the Euphrates and Armageddon.

We have come across the Euphrates previously in Revelation. The 6th trumpet saw the release for four angels *bound at the great river Euphrates (9:14)*. A great horde surged forward to kill one third of humanity. Back in the Old Testament the Euphrates features in the book of Daniel. Babylon was situated on this river. It served as a natural barrier to invasion from the east. However Cyrus was able to divert this river and capture Babylon. Belshazzar was slain and the mighty but idolatrous kingdom of Babylon fell (Daniel 5:30).

At the same time Israel was restored. The exile was over as told by Isaiah (Isaiah 44:27, 28). This picture is not unlike that of the Red Sea. When God dried up the sea his people were saved and his enemies destroyed.

In Revelation Babylon represents the worldly system. In the time of John Rome was referred to as Babylon. Just as God dried up the waters and destroyed Babylon so he will again dry up the waters and destroy the present day or future 'Babylons'. Note that in the next chapter the great harlot sits on many waters (17:1). These are interpreted as *peoples, multitudes...and nations (17:15)*.

Interlude

With the seal judgments and the trumpet judgments there was an interlude between the 6th and the last judgment. This interlude included a vision of the sealed saints, their suffering and their salvation. It included a mention of war/battle with the beast attacking the two witnesses (11:7). Verses 13-16 can be seen as an interlude also, an interlude between the 6th and 7th bowls.

The evil trinity appears again – the dragon or Satan, the Beast of the sea or satanic government and the Beast of the earth or satanic religion. The Beast of the earth is called the false prophet. Like a false prophet he performed great signs but does them to deceive the earth dwellers (13:14).

John saw *unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet (16:13)*. Frogs were regarded as unclean creatures under Old Testament law.

Moreover, the second plague on Egypt was frogs (Exodus 8). We do not see a lot of frogs these days, although there are plenty of cane toads up north. Having frogs or toads in your breakfast bowl and in your bed would not be pleasant.

The croaking noise made by frogs may be alluded to in this vision. These unclean spirits, or spirits of demons, went out to all the kings of the earth (16:14). They performed signs, and probably made a lot of noise and false promises to get the kings to gather together for the great battle – or what will be the great slaughter. This battle will be *in the great day of Almighty God* (16:14). They will combine forces to fight against Almighty God. Such is the power of demonic deception that people can think they can fight against God.

Pharaoh thought he could fight against God. Nebuchadnezzar thought he could fight against God. God kept telling them they must acknowledge him as the Most High God who rules in the kingdom of men, but they would not listen. Power corrupts. Power blinds men to the truth. Pride leads people to oppose God, to exalt themselves against God and blaspheme his holy name. A proud heart is a very dangerous thing. Satan is well aware of this and delights to stir up that sinful pride.

They gathered them at the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon (16:16). If people today know anything about the book of Revelation they know about the Millennium and Armageddon. But Armageddon occurs only here in the whole book. What are we to understand by Armageddon? In Hebrew it means mount (*har*) Meggido. Megiddo was a fortress city at the foot of Mt Carmel and on the edge of the valley of Jezreel in northern Israel. This was the site of many battles including that of Deborah and Barak in the time of the Judges. The name Megiddo became symbolic of every battle in which the people of God engaged, and of God's mighty deliverance.

Many take this literally as they do the reference to the Euphrates and even Babylon. Such people hold that after the seven year tribulation the Jews, who will have rebuilt the temple, will be attacked from the north and that Christ will suddenly appear to rescue the Jews. They hold that in this battle of Armageddon blood will literally flow to the depth of the horses bridle (14:20).

The outcome of this battle will be revealed in later visions (19:19f, 20:8f). But the battle is never described in detail for it has already been won. It was won by Jesus when he died on the cross (John 12:31, 16). There is no indication of a protracted war between the followers of Satan and the saints of God – or even the Jews. The battle is going on now for we live in the last days. Satan is very active now for he knows his time is short. He is not waiting for the outcome of the battle of Armageddon for he knows it will mean his final demise – even if he does not let on.

In this interlude is a brief message of comfort for the saints. Some put this verse in brackets but it is a feature consistent with the other interludes. Jesus often spoke of his coming again like a thief. He told parables about being ready and not slacking off. *Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments* (16:15). We have a saying about not being 'caught with your pants down'. That is the message of this verse – in a spiritual sense of course. Do not drop your guard against the attacks of the devil. He is like a lion prowling about seeking whom he may devour. Stand dressed in the armour of God, ready to repel any and every attack of the evil one.

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