

“REVELATION: DOES IT DESCRIBE OUR DAYS?” SERIES

#15: “Chapters 15-16

INTRO:

Chapters 15 and 16 describe once more the church age. Previously, we have seen:

- In chapters 1-3 the focus is on the establishment of churches, lampstands in a dark world.
- Chapters 4-7 see the church age from the standpoint of the constant persecution of the church by the world.
- Chapters 8-11 show us the wrath of God upon the world as He offers people opportunities and motivation to repent.
- Chapters 12-14 reveal that the conflict between the church and the world is really a battle between Christ and Satan.
- Now, in chapters 15-16, we see that God brings judgment upon the unrepentant world, but it's not the *final* judgment. There is still time to repent.

Hendriksen has this to say:

*“Whenever in history the wicked fail to repent in answer to the initial and partial manifestation of God’s anger in judgments, the **final** effusion of wrath follows. **Final**, though not **complete** until the judgment day. These plagues are the **last**. They leave no more opportunity for repentance. When the wicked, often warned by the trumpets of judgment, continue to harden their hearts, death finally plunges them into the hands of an angry God. But even before they die, they may have crossed the deadline, the line between God’s patience and his wrath (Ex. 10:27; Matt. 12:32; Rom. 1:24; 1 John 5:16).*

*“Hence, throughout the history of the world, God’s final wrath again and again reveals itself: now it strikes this one; then another. It is poured out upon the impenitent (9:21; 16:9). Thus, a very definite connective link is established between the vision of the trumpets (chapters 8-11) and that of the bowls (chapters 15-16). Trumpets **warn**; bowls are **poured out**. Yet, the connection between chapters 12-14 and chapters 15-16 is just as close. These impenitents are the men who receive the mark of the beast (16:2; 13:16). They worship the dragon and are the friends of the two beasts and of the harlot, Babylon.*

“Thus conceived, we notice that the vision of the bowls of wrath runs parallel with all the others and like them, covers the entire dispensation” (pp. 189-190).

So, the events that follow the opening of the seven seals, the sounding of the seven trumpets, the plagues of the seven angels, and the seven bowls of wrath are all happening now and have been happening the entire church age. However, the pouring out of the bowls of wrath become more pronounced as we approach the final day of judgment.

In chapter 15...

...JOHN SEES SEVEN ANGELS WITH SEVEN PLAGUES.

God keeps showing John visions – visions of what the church age would be like – visions of what the world would do to the church and to individual Christians – visions of the battle between Christ and Satan – visions that all culminate in a victorious church and a perishing world.

Chapter 15's vision is that of seven angels with seven plagues. ***“Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished”*** (v. 1).

These ***“plagues”*** immediately take us back to the ten plagues of Egypt, which I think they were intended to do. Those ten plagues were the representation of God's patience warnings becoming wrathful judgment. The message here, that has been sent to wicked people throughout the church age, is that there comes a time when their hearts are so hardened that God gives up on them, essentially saying, “To hell with you.”

But what could these ***“plagues”*** be? The word in Greek is PLEGE, defined as “a stripe or wound” and used metaphorically of a calamity. So, a “plague” is anything falling into the category of a “calamity.”

But before the seven angels pour out their bowls of wrath, John is shown the victorious church:

Verses 2-8: ***2 And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. 3 And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,***

***“Great and amazing are your deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways,
O King of the nations!
4 Who will not fear, O Lord,
and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come
and worship you,
for your righteous acts have been revealed.”***

5 After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, 6 and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. 7 And one

of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, ⁸ and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

Hendriksen comments here:

“The apostle is going to tell us about these seven angels with their bowls of wrath. But before he does so he shows us the Church Triumphant after the last day. After all these bowls of wrath will have been emptied, what is this company of victors going to say? John beholds a sea. On the seashore stands a victorious multitude. They are playing their harps and singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb. Clearly, this vision is based on the story of the drowning of Pharaoh’s host in the Red Sea. Then also a victorious people stood by the sea and sang the song of deliverance and victory:

‘I will sing to Jehovah, for he has triumphed gloriously: the horse and the rider he has thrown into the sea’ (Exodus 14:15).

“This victory over the Egyptians was a foreshadowing of the victory of all God’s redeemed over the beast, his image, his number. Hence, the song which the Church Triumphant is singing is called the song of Moses and of the Lamb. In both cases, it was the Lamb who gave the victory. Moses was simply doing God’s will and is therefore called God’s servant.

*“Observe, however, that the sea which John beholds is of **glass** mingled with **fire**: it symbolizes God’s **transparent** righteousness revealed in judgments upon the wicked” (p.192).*

In verses 5-8 the vision is of the holy of holies in the tabernacle (or temple) in heaven. The seven angels are coming from there, meaning that their bowls of wrath are from God. The sanctuary is filled with smoke, which symbolizes the ultimate anger of God.

Hendriksen comments:

“Throughout history, especially during this entire new dispensation, God is using every department of the universe to punish the wicked and impentitent persecutors of his people. Whoever refuses to be warned by the trumpets of judgment is ‘destroyed’ by the bowls of wrath. For one individual a certain calamity may be a trumpet of judgment, while for someone else that same event may be a bowl of wrath. . . For believers in Christ, the afflictions of the flesh are never bowls of wrath (Rom. 8:28). Hence, we read that this plague affected only those who had the mark of the beast (13:15-17)” (p. 194).

In chapter 16...

...THE SEVEN ANGELS POUR OUT THEIR BOWLS OF WRATH UPON THE EARTH.

Verse 2: ***“So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.”***

Remember the boils of the sixth plague that God brought upon Egypt? What could be the meaning here? The ***“painful sores”*** of the Egyptians were literally “painful sores.” Here, they’re used allegorically. But what are they allegories of? Could they represent sickness and disease of various kinds? I believe they do.

Verse 3: ***“The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died that was in the sea.”***

“The sea” is often used in Scripture to represent all forces of evil and world governments in general. If that’s its use here, then it’s saying that governments collapse and evil itself dies.

Verses 4-7: ***“The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, ‘Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!’***

And I heard the altar saying, ‘Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments.’

All the sources of fresh water become blood. And the angel in charge of the waters says, ***“For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!”*** It is actually the souls of martyrs under the altar (from chapters 6 and 8) that respond with ***“Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments.”*** What is this part of the vision telling us? Those who gave their lives rather than give up the faith will finally be avenged!

Verses 8-9: ***“The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. 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.”***

Picture it. What John sees is the sun closer to the earth than the 93 million miles, on average, it is now. A little closer, and all living things would heat up and die; a little farther, and the earth would become an ice ball. We’re seeing God’s *final* judgment here. Talk about your “hell on earth” – here it is!

But this represents God’s final attempt, all during the church age, at getting people to repent and give glory to Him. When the wicked impenitent are hit with the

“scorching heat of God’s wrath,” instead of repenting, they would rather curse God and die.

Verses 10-11: ***“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 and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.”***

What’s the meaning here? Well, I believe ***“the throne of the beast”*** to be the various centers of anti-Christian governments during the church age. Once, it was Rome; then the Ottoman Empire and others. I think we need to include England and the U.S.A. Even though they were once strong Christian-based governments, they are now becoming post-Christian and even anti-Christian. They are in the darkness of immorality and all other sins. They are in the anguish of the pain that is the consequence of their sins and unwillingness to repent and turn to God.

Verses 12-16: ***“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. 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. 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. (“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!”) And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.”***

So, the “grand finale” has come. The church age must end sometime. And here it is. The Euphrates River represents all the wicked world throughout the church age. Its drying up to prepare the way for the kings of the east represents the conditions on earth becoming such that the kingdom of God can finally be eradicated or defeated by the forces of evil. The three unclean spirits, frog-like to represent their repulsiveness, represent the lies that come from Satan, anti-Christian governments, and anti-Christian religion. These lies are believed by world leaders, who prepare to make their final assault on the people of God. This final assault is represented by “the battle of Armageddon.”

Hear Hendriksen on Armageddon:

“Now, in order to arrive at the correct interpretation of this battle, let us begin by briefly reviewing the O.T. story in which this symbol is probably rooted. We find it in Judges 4:5. Israel is in misery again. This time, King Jabin, the Canaanite, is, is the oppressor. The spoilers go out to ravage the fields and plunder the crops of the Israelites. So numerous are these spoilers that the Israelites go in hiding and are afraid to appear on the highways (Judges 5:6). But can they not wage war and drive out these Canaanites? Wage war? Ah, you do not understand king Jabin and General Sisera are

strong. They have nine hundred chariots of iron! And Israel? It has not even a spear or a shield (Judges 5:8). Must the people perish?

“In the highlands of Ephraim dwells Deborah (Judges 5:8). Ask her whether Israel can defeat King Jabin and General Sisera. She will answer: ‘No, Israel cannot, but Jehovah can...and will!’ One day she tells Barak, the judge, ‘Up, for this is the day in which Jehovah is to deliver Sisera into your power. Is it not Jehovah who has gone forth in front of you?’ A battle is fought. Where? At Megiddo (Judges 5:19). In this battle Israel’s foe is routed. Jehovah himself defeated Israel’s foes. ‘Bless thou, my soul, the might of Jehovah’ (Judges 3:21). ‘From heaven fought the stars; from the courses they fought against Sisera.’

“Hence, Har-Magedon is the symbol of every battle in which when the need is greatest and believers are oppressed, the lord suddenly reveals his power in the interest of his distressed people and defeats the enemy” (p. 196).

So, what we have here, while a picture of what has happened in the past and all during the church age, is the final battle between good and evil, God and Satan. Christ’s church can’t win the battle, but God can...and does.

Verses 17-21: ***“The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.***

Here, we see the final judgment. Hendriksen comments:

“The final and complete exposure of God’s wrath, so long restrained, has come: the judgment day has arrived. Hence, in the picture the apostle sees flashes of lightning. He hears the rumblings and peals of thunder. He witnesses an earthquake, the greatest of all time. The great city, Babylon, is broken into three pieces; it falls apart. Thus, the entire antichristian empire, viewed as a center of seduction, the whole kingdom of the world, falls apart, is destroyed. Its cities and nations are ruined. In this great day of judgment, it becomes evident that, after all, God has not forgotten the sins of Babylon. His anger, so long pent up, now fully explodes. The world receives the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath” (p. 198).

IN CLOSING;

In chapters 17-19, we will see another of the seven pictures of the church age that were shown to John in a vision.