

Unlocking Revelation

The Seven Last Plagues and Armageddon

As we near the end of the book of Revelation, we find the entire earth divided into two groups of people. Chapters 15 and 16 bring to view these two groups. The first have “gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name” (Revelation 15:2). These understand the character of God. They see Him as a God of love. They praise Him even as His “judgments are made manifest” (Revelation 15:4). The second group of people are those who have “the mark of the beast” and worship his image (see Revelation 16:2). Though many of this group may profess to be followers of Christ, they do not know Him (see Matthew 7:21-23). Christ calls them *workers of iniquity*. They blaspheme “the name of God” as His judgments are made manifest (see Revelation 16:9).

The Wrath of God

Revelation 15 opens with a picture of “seven angels having the seven last plagues” (Revelation 15:1). These plagues are called the “last plagues” because “in them is filled up the wrath of God” (Revelation 15:1). What is the wrath of God? Is it some extraordinary punishment concocted by God to somehow get even with those who disobeyed Him? Is God’s wrath arbitrary and vindictive?

While God plays an active roll in the punishment of the wicked, the Bible describes the wrath of God as the consequences of sin rather than an arbitrary punishment for sin. We reap what we sow (see Galatians 6:7). Speaking of God’s wrath against the unrighteous, the apostle Paul says, “God gave them

up” to their lusts (see Romans 1:18, 24). And again Paul describes those who despise the “goodness and forbearance and longsuffering” of God as treasuring up wrath to themselves for “the day of wrath and revelation of the right-eous judgment of God” (Romans 2:4, 5).

“The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). We earn those wages and even demand them to be paid to us by refusing the “gift of God” (Romans 6:23). If we persist in a course of sin, God will honor our choice. He will not, cannot, force us to be saved. The true Source of all life, God will finally give us up to the consequences of our own stubborn decision. Yet today He still pleads, “repent and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye” (Ezekiel 18:30, 32).

The Temple was Filled With Smoke

The introduction to the seven last plagues begins with a picture of the angels of God coming out of the temple in heaven (see Revelation 15:6). They are dressed in “pure and white linen” which represents the righteousness of their actions. They are “girded with golden girdles” representing the divine sanction of their work. As soon as they receive the “golden vials full of the wrath of God” the temple is filled with smoke (see Revelation 15:7, 8). From this point no man is “able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues have been poured out (see Revelation 15:8).

The lesson here is significant. It points to the close

thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High” (Isaiah 14:13, 14). Satan’s heart is set in opposition to God. It covets the place of God. This is the same desire as the “man of sin” (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4). And Satan works to put this thought into the hearts and minds of every human being. As he did with Adam and Eve in the garden, Satan tries to convince us that we are “gods” (Genesis 3:5). He works in myriads of forms—false religions, the new age movement, spiritualism, and so on. Like the frogs which came upon Egypt, his evil spirits are everywhere promoting another Jesus, another spirit and another gospel (see 2 Corinthians 11:4).

Our only safety is to let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery [something to be grasped onto] to be equal with God:... but humbled Himself and was made in the fashion of man (see Philippians 2:5-8).

The battle of Armageddon is a battle for our minds. Satan wants to come into our hearts and exalt self. God wants to come into our hearts and take selfishness out. The battle of Armageddon is the battle for the “mount of the congregation.” It is a battle for our allegiance and worship. It is a battle for us!

In Closing

Beyond the apparent manifestation of misery and destruction which comes as a result of sin, the seven last plagues hold a valuable message for each one of

us. The first plague, which brings sores upon the bodies of those who receive the mark of the beast, teaches that we can find physical security only in Christ. “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul,” says Christ, “but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

The second and third plagues, which destroy the sea and fresh water supplies, teach us that we find economic security in Christ. “Take no thought, saying, what shall we eat; or, what shall we drink: or, wherewithal shall we be clothed? . . . But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:31, 33).

The fourth and fifth plagues, which bring the scorching sun and painful darkness, teach us that we find religious security in Christ. In John 12:35 Jesus, who is the light of the world, said, “Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.”

The sixth and seventh plagues bring destruction to the powers and kingdoms of this world. They teach us that there is eternal security only in Christ. Again Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me” (John 14:6). Those who have given themselves to Christ have nothing to fear from these plagues (see Psalm 91).

The battle of Armageddon, placed as an interlude right in the midst of the plagues, outlines the real conflict taking place upon this earth between Christ and Satan and our relationship to it. May we each one stand with Jesus Christ who is our only security for tomorrow. Amen.



of Christ's mediation in the heavenly sanctuary in our behalf. By this time every man, woman, and child has made a choice for or against Christ. Mediation will not cease in heaven until God sees that the final choices have been made. When we come to the place in earth's history when another hour, day, week, month or year would make no difference for or against our decision to accept the gift of salvation, then Christ's intercession in heaven ceases. It is no longer necessary. All who would accept salvation, have done so. Those who would not, never will. Only then will probation close, the end will come and the seven last plagues be poured out (see 2 Peter 3:9; Matthew 24:14).

Pour Out the Vials

Revelation 16 opens with a command from the temple to "pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth" (Revelation 16:1). As the first angel pours out his vial, a "noisome and grievous sore" falls upon those who have the "mark of the beast" and who worship "his image" (Revelation 16:2). Disease and suffering, sickness and pain were never part of God's plan for mankind (see 3 John 2). Satan is the author of all sorrow. God's purpose, as manifest in Christ, is to heal us of all our diseases, to save, not "to destroy" (Luke 9:56). Satan is a thief and a robber. His only object is "to steal, and to kill, and to destroy" (John 10:10).

This first plague brings physical suffering to those who have rejected the salvation of God. It points them to their own choice of Satan, the originator of all pain and suffering. It also reminds them of the physical suffering they have helped to bring upon God's faithful people under the enforcement of the mark of the beast.

The Second and Third Vials

The second and third vials are poured out upon the sea, rivers and fountains of water (see Revelation 16:3, 4). The waters become as blood even "as the blood of a dead man" (Revelation 16:3). Whether this is literal or not, one thing is sure—the blood of a dead man is lifeless. Once the blood stops receiving oxygen and nutrients, it becomes polluted and foul. This will be the condition of large portions of the earth's waters during the seven last plagues. The consequences of sin will be fully seen in nature. "Every living soul died in the sea" (Revelation 16:3). This pollution of our waters will bring economic devastation to the world. Commerce and trade will

be affected. Fresh water will become a precious commodity. Even our rains will be hazardous, devastating our food supply. The world begins reaping what it has sown (see Galatians 6:7). Even now we see the tokens of the coming calamities. Pollution and famine encircle the earth.

Remember also that those who received the mark of the beast confederated together to bring an economic boycott against God's commandment-keeping people (see Revelation 13:15-17; 14:9-12). Those who followed the Bible and refused to worship according to the dictates of men were not allowed to buy or sell and their lives were threatened. Now God allows the same economic restraint to come back upon them. The golden rule of the Bible is "whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12). It is at this juncture between the third and fourth plagues that an angel declares, "Thou art righteous, O Lord . . . because Thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and Thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy" (Revelation 16:5, 6). As terrible as these plagues are, how sad to realize that those who receive them are worthy of them.

Some insight into their worthiness is found in Revelation 18. Here we also find mentioned the judgments or plagues that are to come upon Babylon (see Revelation 18:8, 10). In the remaining verses we find a description of the complete economic collapse of this great city while the merchants of the entire earth look on in terror (see Revelation 18:11-19).

The Fourth and Fifth Vials

The fourth angel pours "out his vial upon the sun" and "men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give Him glory" (Revelation 16:8, 9). The world has followed the antichrist and given honor to Sunday as Sabbath whose origin is in sun worship. Despite the warning of the third angel's message to fear God and give glory to Him by worshiping according to the day He instituted at the creation of the world, multitudes give honor to the man of sin through Sunday observance. Now God gives them up to the god they have chosen to worship. Though they find the sun to be an unrelenting task master, rather than a deity deserving worship, they stubbornly refuse to repent.

The fifth seal follows the fourth, bringing darkness

so deep that men gnaw "their tongues for pain" (Revelation 16:10). Again this plague is but the result of their own choice. God sent His Son into the world to bring life and light. Yet "men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:17-19). They hate the light and will not go to the light that their deeds should be reprov'd (see John 3:20). So while they "blaspheme the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores," again they do not repent of their deeds (see Revelation 16:11).

The Sixth and Seventh Vials

The sixth vial is poured out upon the "great river Euphrates; and the water thereof" is dried up (see Revelation 16:12). This prepares the way for the "kings of the east" (Revelation 16:12). The river Euphrates ran through the literal city of Babylon supplying it with water. It was when Cyrus diverted this great river that he and Darius, then the kings of the east, captured the city of Babylon. This led to the release of God's people and the re-establishment of Jerusalem. So, also, with spiritual Babylon. "Waters" symbolize "peoples and multitudes, and nations, and tongues" (Revelation 17:15). The kings of the east are God and Jesus Christ (see Matthew 24:27; Isaiah 41:25; Revelation 7:2). The drying up of the waters represents their conquest of spiritual Babylon as they come to this earth to rescue their faithful followers (see Revelation 19:11-18).

When the seventh angel pours out his vial into the air, we hear "a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done" (Revelation 16:17). This voice and the events following it are similar to previous pictures that John was shown of Christ's actual appearance in earth's atmosphere (see Revelation 6:14-17; 11:15-19). The "great voice" declaring that "It is done" especially reminds us of a similar declaration that promises that the "kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 11:15). The seventh vial indicates that the final end of that "great city" Babylon and the end of all earthly rule has come. God's kingdom has been vindicated and established forevermore.

The Battle of Armageddon

Between the sixth and seventh plagues there is an interlude consisting of four verses dedicated to describing the battle of Armageddon. There is much speculation and varying opinions as to what this battle is and when, where, and between whom it will be fought. These verses in Revelation 16:13-16 give us

some vital insights that will answer these questions. First, let's consider who is involved in this battle. The Bible says that "the spirits of devils, working miracles, 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" (Revelation 16:14). These spirits of devils go forth from "the dragon" and "the beast" and "the false prophet" (Revelation 16:13).

So here we have the where and whom. The battle will be fought in the whole world. The leaders on one side are the dragon or Satan, the beast, and the false prophet. On the other side is God Almighty. All the inhabitants of the world will take their stand on one of these two sides. God is working to "draw all" unto Him through the manifestation of His great love (see John 12:32; 6:44). Satan works on the other side, through miracles, deceptions and coercion to gather his army (see Revelation 16:14; 13:13, 14).

That the nature of the battle is spiritual is evidenced by the fact that it involves a false prophet, miracles, and a warning from God to keep the garments of Christ's righteousness (see Revelation 16:13-15). The issue of the battle is the gospel. Satan is disguising himself as an "angel of light," and he has "ministers" who appear as "ministers of righteousness," even "false apostles" who transform themselves "into the apostles of Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). His purpose is to present "another Jesus," "another spirit," and "another gospel" (2 Corinthians 11:4). Satan uses these false teachers to turn multitudes away from the truth and sound doctrine (see 2 Timothy 4:3, 4).

To stand against Satan's deceptions we are encouraged to "put on the whole armour of God" (Ephesians 6:11). This spiritual armor that will help us stand in the battle of Armageddon is outlined in verses 14-18 of Ephesians chapter 6. It is the truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God, and prayer. Each of these make up the armor we will need to stand on God's side in this great battle.

What about the idea of a literal battle of Armageddon in the Middle East somewhere? The Bible says that all will be drawn to "a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon" (Revelation 16:16). The word *Armageddon* in the Hebrew comes from two roots which mean "mount of the congregation," or "mount of assembly" (see *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 846). Going back to the fact that this battle is between God and Satan, we can gain some tremendous insight as to the place of this battle from the book of Isaiah. Speaking of Satan's plan to weaken the nations of the earth, the prophet Isaiah penned these words: "For