

INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest dangers in studying the book of Revelation is that you can become a little bit enamored and obsessed with the future to the extent that you neglect the present. Some people have become so obsessed with who the fourth toe on the foot of some beast is that they never use their own feet to go out and witness for the Lord. So when you study the book of Revelation it really should not make you "Other worldly minded" it should draw your attention back to here and now to say, "I want to do everything I can to reach my world for Christ," because these events described in Revelation will happen in the future. It is our privilege and our responsibility to share the gospel so our friends and loved ones won't have to experience this terrible Tribulation.

As I have done often let me give you the framework. Jesus Christ could come and rapture the church at any moment. That means those of us who are born again will be caught up to be with the Lord in the air and those who are not Christians will be left behind. There will be seven years of Tribulation. Jesus called it, "Great Tribulation." The Bible calls it, "The time of Jacob's trouble." Seven years we'll be in heaven and what a terrible time it's going to be on earth. That's what we are studying right now but at the end of the seven-year Tribulation, Jesus Christ is going to come back and there will be the very quick battle of Armageddon that we will introduce tonight. It will be described more in detail in chapter 19. After that there will be the millennial reign of Christ. The word "millennial" means one thousand years. Then, after the millennial reign will come the new heaven, the new earth, the great white throne judgement and eternity as the Bible describes it. Today we are going to look at "The Gathering at Armageddon."

Revelation 15:1-2: John says, "I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God's wrath is completed." The word "completed" means "finally it is finished." "And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb."

I. THE SCENE OF JOY

The first thing we are going to notice quickly is the scene of joy! Because the first part of chapter 15 is the scene in heaven and it is a scene of joy. I grew up singing the hymn "I will sing the wondrous story / Of the Christ who died for me / How he left his home in glory / To the cross of Calvary." And it says, "I will sing with the saints in glory / Beside the crystal sea." I can remember singing the words to that hymn and thinking, "What kind of crystal sea are we talking about here?" Well this is where it talks about it. John is using words to describe what he has seen and sometimes the words he chooses do not really do justice to the beauty of it. He says it is like a sea made out of glass mingled with fire. He says it is absolutely beautiful. And standing beside this sea is a whole host of people who have been victorious over the Antichrist. They are what we call the Tribulation saints, those who persevered to the end during the Tribulation and did not take the mark of the beast. Many of them were martyred. That's why it is a scene of joy, because no longer are they in the Tribulation—they are in heaven.

II. THE SONG OF JESUS

Notice the second thing in verses 3-4. This group "sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb. 'Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.'

So the second thing we see is the song of Jesus. You say, "The song of Jesus what are you talking about?" Look at verse 3 again. It says this group of saints sang two different songs. First is the song of Moses. You say, "What's the song of Moses?" Well we're not going to take time to do it, but sometime go back to Exodus 15 after Moses led the children of Israel across the Red Sea, the water parted and then they got to the other side, then Pharaoh and all of his armies were drowned and the Israelites then sang a song. It is the first recorded song in the Bible. And what a great song it is praising God for his greatness. So the Bible says just as the children of Israel were delivered from those trying to kill them, these Tribulation saints were also delivered from those who tried to kill them on earth, so they sing the song of Moses.

The other song they sing, "the song of the Lamb." Notice the difference and the similarities between these two songs. They were both sung beside a sea. The song of Moses was first sung beside the Red Sea; the song of the Lamb is sung beside the crystal sea. They were both sung after a time of great victory. The children of Israel had victory over Pharaoh and the Tribulation saints have victory over the Antichrist. They were both sung for the same reason. It's because the children of Israel were brought through a time of testing and the Tribulation saints were brought through and out of a time of testing.

The song is full of praise and admiration. They don't say anything about themselves. They don't say, "Look what we did. We persevered. We were faithful. We were kind." It's all about God. By the way, anytime you want to praise the Lord, you sing praises *to* the Lord. Notice the second person pronouns. It says "Great and marvelous are *YOUR* deeds. Just and true are *YOUR* ways verse 4 "Who will not fear *YOU*, O Lord, and bring glory to *YOUR* name, for *YOU* alone are holy." There are two kinds of songs we sing in church. One is a song of testimony, such as "I Have Been Redeemed" or "When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder, I'll Be There." that's a testimony. I am saved and I'm going to be in heaven when the roll is called! But the other kind of song we sing in church is a song of direct praise to the Lord and the way you can usually identify or distinguish between the two is a song of testimony is generally sung *about* the Lord whereas a song of praise is sung *to* the Lord. The song sung in heaven, the song of Jesus, was a song of direct praise and adoration to the Lord.

III. THE STRATEGY OF JUDGEMENT

The main part of this message deals with this third point: The strategy of judgement. The seven-year period of Tribulation follows a chronological framework of the three series of sevens. There were seven seals, seven trumpets and now we come to the third series of sevens: The seven bowls (or vials) of wrath that are going to be poured out. What are these seven bowls of wrath? Revelation 15:5-8. John says, "After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the

tabernacle of the Testimony was opened. Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed."

1. Cancer of the slain

Did you know that there was a temple in heaven? The tabernacle of the Testimony. In fact, when God gave Moses the directions to build the tabernacle and the temple that later became the temple on earth it was patterned after the temple in heaven. So just as there was a temple on earth there was and still is a temple in heaven. Now we are introduced to these seven plagues. Look at 16:1-2. John says, "Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, 'Go pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth' The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image."

The first bowl of wrath, the first judgement, is cancer of the skin. As we read through these, it's not going to be very pleasant but as I have told you before I am committed to preach the whole counsel of God. This is not one of those fun sermons where you kind of skip out of here saying, "Wasn't that wonderful!" Anytime you are exposed to the judgement of God, it is not pleasant. That's why I am glad I'm going to miss the judgement of God! That's why I am glad I have been forgiven and I am not going to be condemned and you are not either if you are a Christian.

The Bible says during the time of Tribulation great sores and boils like cancer of the skin are going to break out on the people on earth. As I have told you before I believe part of this that is going to be happening could be some kind of a nuclear holocaust even though there seems to be a gradual dismantling of the nuclear arsenal now in the world, which is good to think. As long as there are nuclear weapons and as long as there are maniacs and power-hungry people, there is still the threat of nuclear disaster. Radiation sores can be caused that could be part of this judgement. These plagues have similarities to both the trumpets and the seals and also to the plagues during the time when Moses was asking Pharaoh to let the children of Israel go.

2. Contamination of the sea

Verse 3. "The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood, like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died." The second bowl of wrath is contamination of the sea. The sea turns to blood. Some have said this could be a phenomenon that has already occurred in the world, called "the red tide." In 1949 on the western coast of Florida along the region by Tampa and St. Pete they had what they called "the red tide." Billions of what they called venal flagellates bonded together and for a 60 mile stretch of the water the water was blood red and all the fish and sea creatures in that area died and washed up on the shore. What a terrible stink it was! Can you imagine what it would be like if all the oceans of the world were inflicted with this kind of environmental disaster? Who knows with what man has already

created himself that he could not be the one that brings about some kind of environmental disaster such as this but it will be part of the plan and judgement of God.

3. Corruption of the streams

Verses 4-7. "The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: 'You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.' And I heard the altar respond: 'Yes, Lord God Almighty, True and just are your judgments.'

The third bowl of wrath is corruption of the streams. God turns the fresh water into blood. Isn't it interesting to know the first recorded miracle Jesus performed was changing water into wine? If God in the flesh could turn water into wine, of course God can turn water into blood. There seems to be a poetic justice here, because the angel says, "God, you were just in doing this because these are the very people who shed the blood of your servants and now because they have given you blood, God you're going to give them blood."

Have you noticed there does seem to be a perfect justice about God? I already talked about Pharaoh in the book of Exodus. Pharaoh drowned all the boy babies born to the nation of Israel. How did Pharaoh himself die? He was drowned. That's the justice of God. In the book of Esther, Haman builds gallows to hang his enemies. How did Haman die? He hung on those same gallows, the poetic justice of God. Remember King Saul in the Old Testament? God told Saul to kill all the Amalekites and Saul didn't do it. Guess who killed Saul? The Amalekites. There is a poetic justice about the nature and character of God. Let me tell you something about that.

Look at verse 5. The angel said, "God you are just in your judgments." There may be some of you who are reading through the book of Revelation and the thought may be creeping into your mind "I don't know if I like a God like this. I don't know if I like a God who pours out all kinds of plagues and wrath and all kinds of judgments on the earth. It messes up my impression of God as being some old, long-bearded grandfather sitting up in heaven rocking, and saying everything is going to be okay. I don't know if I like a God like this. This doesn't seem to be fair." That's just part of our old sinful flesh reasoning that way. When you go to heaven and you become like Jesus, everything God does will seem to be the most just and righteous thing in the universe. Right now we are still carrying some of this old, sinful flesh and it's hard for us to comprehend. I heard Billy Graham say something one time that really shocked me until I thought about it. He said, "Some of you wives may have husbands who are not Christians and there would be no way you would ever want your husband to die and go to Hell but if you died and went to be with Jesus and then your husband died without ever accepting Christ, you would then believe it was the most just, righteous thing in the universe for your husband to spend eternity in Hell." I thought, "Well I don't know about that!" but the more I thought about it, the more I came to understand that all of God's justice is righteous.

Have you watched some of these stupid trials on television and in movies? Some of them are comical. I won't refer to any of them by name, but sometimes in our legal system, justice is not

served. Sometimes guilty people get off, sometimes because of some little technicality and sometimes innocent people are sentenced because our justice system is not perfect but God's justice is perfect and without fault, and that's what the angel says.

4. Catastrophe of the sun

Verses 8-9. "The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him." Plague number four is a catastrophe of the sun. In Revelation 8:12, during the time of the opening of the seals, the Bible says, "the sun is darkened." In Luke 21, Jesus says, "You'll know that the Battle of Armageddon is going to be near when you see signs in the sun and the moon. This judgement is some kind of intensification of the heat of the sun that scorches people.

Don't you love sitting out in the sun on a nice, warm day, letting the heat from the sun warm you? I've always enjoyed lying on a white beach soaking up the rays as we say. Our atmosphere (the ionosphere) serves as a filter blocking out those harmful rays that keep us from frying to a crisp. I don't have to tell you environmentalists are telling us right now the ozone layer is depleting. What would happen to our planet if there were no ionosphere to block out the harmful rays of the sun? On an ordinary day you would be terribly, terribly burned, so could it be that man is bringing this judgement upon himself by the way he is not taking care of this planet God has given us? Or it could be some kind of solar flare. Solar flares are tremendous explosions that burst out from the surface of the sun. On November 12, 1960, one of the largest solar flares in history since they started measuring them was recorded. One tongue of flame that thrust out was ten million miles wide! It was so strong that radio reception on the earth was affected by it and many people were terribly sunburned just from that one solar flare that happened briefly for one moment. The Bible says something is going to happen that will cause the sun to burn people terribly.

Look at verse 11. What are these people on earth going to do when all of these plagues are happening? Fall on their knees and repent and say, "God, save us! God, help us!" No. They are going to curse God. It continues to be the "in" thing in the entertainment industry to blaspheme God and His word. You hear more and more comedians on television blaspheming God. You hear more and more people publicly cursing God. The time is going to come when that will be the reaction of most of the people on the earth even when God's judgement is on them.

5. Darkness for the beast

Verses 10-11. "The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done."

Look at the first four of those judgments. Do you remember when I said there was always a special sequence to these three sevens? The first four of them were always associated and they are given one, two, three, four—they are all similar. For instance, with the first seven seals, the first four of the seven seals were characterized by the Four Horsemen. The first four trumpets were all together then the last three are separated. It is the same here. It's as if these first four

bowls of wrath are poured out on the world in general but then these last three are a little different and they represent specific areas of judgement. For instance, we just read about number five. It is darkness for the beast. Who's the beast? That's the Antichrist; that's what Revelation calls this political leader who is going to come on the scene during the time of Tribulation. It says his throne is going to be thrust into darkness. Darkness is also one of the plagues that happened to the nation of Egypt during the plagues in the time of Moses. They were plunged into darkness. God has power over light and darkness. When Jesus was hanging on the cross at noon, it became totally dark—we're not talking about an eclipse here—it was dark for three hours.

As I was studying the other day I came across something that said there is even recorded in American history. On May 19, 1780, there was a period of supernatural darkness in America. President Kennedy referred to this day of darkness in one of his speeches. So there have been periods throughout history when there has been unexplainable darkness, not just clouds not just an eclipse, so God has the power to plunge the throne that the Antichrist is ruling from into darkness. In verse 10 there is going to be such pain from these other plagues that men are going to scream. They're going to gnaw their tongues and they are going to curse God.

6. Details of the battle

Now we come to the place I have been leading up to this whole time. Look at verses 12-16, because this sixth bowl of wrath talks about Armageddon. "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. Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs;" Many who have studied this say a frog is an amphibian creature. It is at home in water and at home on land, signifying that three individuals seem to have a dual kind of existence a devilish, demonic kind of existence and a human existence. This is the devil's trinity. Look at these three frogs "they came out of the mouth of the dragon, [Satan] out of the mouth of the beast [the Antichrist] and out of the mouth of the false prophet." Several weeks ago when we studied the Antichrist I introduced you to this unholy trinity. Just as we have God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, Satan has his trinity. The devil, who is the dragon; the Antichrist, who is like Satan in the flesh; and then there is the false prophet who bears witness to the Antichrist.

Verse 14. "They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty." God is talking about a battle here. The Antichrist and the false prophet are going to gather all the kings of the earth to a battle. Look at verse 16. "Then they" The dragon, the Antichrist and the false prophet "gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon." This is plague number six, I am calling it the details of the battle, because throughout the word of God it has been prophesied that there is going to be one great big battle when finally and forever, God absolutely destroys wickedness and sets himself up as ruler over all. This is what we call the Battle of Armageddon.

Billy Graham has written a book "Armageddon." You hear about Armageddon in the movies and in books it is a term a lot of authors like to use. Let me explain it to you. "Armageddon" is not a word at all; it is actually two words *Har*, which means "mountain," and *Megiddo*, which is a plain. It is the Plain of Esdraelon, which is in Israel. I've been there and I've seen it. Napoleon

called the Plain of Esdraelon, "the most perfect natural battlefield on earth." I have stood on Mount Carmel and have looked to the southeast across the plain of Megiddo, so the words "mountain of Megiddo could mean Mount Carmel or one of the other mountains surrounding this plain, which is scooped out almost like a saucer. By the way the Bible says "the blood of these troops who come against God are going to fill it up to the horses' bridles." That's an amazing prophecy, considering this area is about 20 miles long and 12 miles wide.

Look back in verse 12. Somehow God is going to dry up the great Euphrates River and what a great river it is! The Euphrates is 1,800 miles long and is more than half a mile wide at its widest point. It is 30 feet deep and God is going to dry it up so an army from the East can travel in toward Israel. We have studied this before in Revelation 9:16. There is going to be an army of two hundred million. Remember I said there are some similarities between the bowls of wrath and the trumpets? Revelation 9:15 says, "And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number." There is only one army on the face of the earth that can boast an army of two hundred million soldiers: China. But in order to move an army of two hundred million from China westward into Israel, you'd have to have the Euphrates River dry up so they would have a natural highway on which to travel.

This sixth bowl of wrath is like a preview of what's going to happen. In order for you to catch the significance of it, look ahead at Revelation 19:19. This is my favorite chapter in the book of Revelation; because this is when God comes and cleans up this mess we call the world. It's the very same thing John is talking about in chapter 16. "Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army." The rider on the horse is Jesus and we are his army. Don't be afraid, you are not going to have to fight—you won't even have a weapon. The only weapon that is going to be used is the mouth of Jesus. He'll speak and like a two-edged sword, the enemies will be destroyed. That is what we call the Battle of Armageddon.

Jesus Christ is going to come back leading the saints, (that's us) the Tribulation saints, the 24 elders (that's us) leading us back to planet earth and that is his Second Coming. You say, "Well, now, Brother David, I thought the rapture of the church was the Second Coming of Jesus, and you're talking about his coming in power with an army there to Israel on the Mountain of Megiddo. I don't understand that!" Well, really all of that involves the Second Coming. Sometimes people are confused, because they read in certain places where Jesus says, "I'm going to slip in quietly, silently, quickly like a thief in the night." And there are other times when the Bible says when Jesus comes back he's going to come back and every eye is going to see him. He'll come back in power and glory with his angels. People say "I can't justify the two." The reason is when Jesus comes back to rapture the church, he will be like a thief in the night but when he comes back to the Battle of Armageddon it will be "and every eye will see him" and what an event it will be!

7. Destruction of Babylon

Some of the details of the Battle of Armageddon are given here in verse 16. Verse 17 "The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the

throne, saying, 'It is done!' Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake." That could be what is described in Zechariah 14. Verse 19. "The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. From the sky huge hailstones of about 100 pounds each fell upon men." But notice their reaction still the same "And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible." Plague number seven is what we call "the destruction of Babylon." I'll go into more detail about the fall of Babylon next time. What is Babylon? It is simply the Antichrist's worldly system: his political system, his economic system and yes even his religious system.

The Promise

Here is the prediction that this ungodly world system will be utterly destroyed. The final thing I want you to notice is in the midst of all of this judgement God gives a promise. I skipped Revelation 16:15 intentionally. In the midst of all of this prophecy and prediction of judgement, God gives a special message to the church. Originally, these seven churches in Asia Minor were getting this letter. Christians throughout the ages have been reading the book of Revelation and then in the middle of all of this drama, God interrupts and says, "By the way I need to give you a personal message." And here it is in verse 15. "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." That means keep up on your righteousness, because a garment of righteousness is described in the Bible "

In Matthew 24:42, Jesus said, "If the master of the house had known when the thief was coming, he would have been ready." In 1 Thessalonians 5:12, Paul says, "The Lord will come as a thief in the night." I don't know if this has never happened to you but I know in a congregation this size it has probably happened to some. Some of you have probably been robbed before. Someone has perhaps come into your home at night and taken what was yours. That happened to my mother after my father died. She was a widow all alone in Mobile and somebody broke in her house and took a lot of things. I'll tell you I felt so much anger and hatred toward that guy! I believe I really would have throttled him if I could have caught the guy that did that! The police never did. But I know for certain that if my mother had known when that thief was coming, or if I had known when that thief was coming, I would have had every police officer in Mobile, Alabama parked outside our house. We would have had armed guards there ready. We just didn't know when.

Jesus Christ is going to come back and rapture the church and it's going to be like a thief in the night—when we are not expecting it. So what's the message here? Be ready! Be ready! BE READY! Constantly! Be on guard because he could come at any moment!

OUTLINE

I. THE SCENE OF JOY

II. THE SONG OF JESUS

III. THE STRATEGY OF JUDGEMENT

Seven Bowls of Wrath:

1. Cancer of the slain (vs. 16:2)
2. Contamination of the sea (vs. 16:3)
3. Corruption of the streams (vs. 16:4-7)
4. Catastrophe of the sun (vs. 16:8-9)
5. Darkness for the beast (vs. 16:10-11)
6. Details of the battle (vs. 16:12-16)
7. Destruction of Babylon (vs. 16:17-21)

The Promise (vs. 15)



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes