

The Gathering at Armageddon • Revelation 15-16 • By Dr. David O. Dykes.
Part 22 Revelation: Unveiling the Truth

INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest dangers in studying the Book of Revelation is that you can become 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 right foot of some beast is that they've never used their own feet to go out and witness for the Lord.

When you study Revelation, it should not make you other-worldly minded. It should draw your attention back to here and now so you can 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 that our friends and loved ones won't have to experience this terrible tribulation described in this book.

Jesus Christ could come and rapture the Church at any moment. That means those 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'll be seven years of tribulation. Jesus called it "great tribulation." The Bible also calls it the "time of Jacob's trouble." "For seven years we'll be in heaven, but what a terrible time it's going to be on earth. At the end of the seven-year tribulation, Jesus Christ is going to come back. Then there will be the very quick Battle of Armageddon and then the millennial reign of Christ. The word "millennial" means "thousand years." And then that will usher in the new heaven, the new earth, the Great White Throne judgment, and eternity (as the Bible describes it).

Revelation 15:1-2 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. And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God.

I. A SCENE OF JOY (15:1-4)

John says that standing beside this crystal sea is a whole host of people who have been victorious over the Antichrist, the political leader during the tribulation. These "tribulation saints" lived during the time of persecution and persevered to the end. They did not take the mark of the beast, and they believed in Jesus Christ.

Many of them were martyred (put to death). That's why it's a scene of joy because no longer are they in the tribulation; they're in heaven.

II. THE SONG OF JESUS (15:3-4)

In verses three and four, this group sang two songs: the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb. In Exodus 15 after Moses led the children of Israel across the Red Sea, they saw Pharaoh and all his armies drown. And then the Israelites sang a song. It is the first recorded song in the Bible, and it praises God for his greatness. Just as these children of Israel were delivered from those that were trying to kill them, these tribulation saints in Revelation were delivered from those trying to kill them on earth.

There are similarities between these two songs, the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. For example, they were both sung beside a sea—the Red Sea and the Crystal Sea. They were also both sung after a great time of victory. The children of Israel had victory over Pharaoh. The tribulation saints had victory over the Antichrist. And they were both sung for the same reason, because the children of Israel and saints were brought through a time of testing.

Notice in verse three where the tribulation saints draw their attention. The song is full of praise and adoration for God. They don't say anything about themselves or their faithfulness. It's all about God. There are two kinds of songs we sing in church. One is a song of testimony about how great it is that we've been redeemed and saved. The second kind of song is a psalm of direct praise to God. A song of testimony is generally sung *about* the Lord; a song of praise is sung *to* him! Do you see the difference?

III. THE STRATEGY OF JUDGMENT (15:5-16:21)

The seven-year period of tribulation follows a chronological framework of three series of sevens. Earlier, there were seven seals, wax seals around books that were opened up. Then there were seven trumpets, and each trumpet announced a certain judgment upon the earth. Now we come to the third series of sevens in this passage in Revelation. The seven bowls are vials of wrath that are going to be poured out.

Seven angels hold these seven bowls. Verse one says that God's wrath is finally going to be completed at the end. We've been studying a lot about God's wrath, and I'm glad that we're coming to a time when it's finally over. In Revelation 15:5-8 John says:

After this I looked, and I saw in heaven the temple—that is, the tabernacle of the covenant law—and it 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 for ever 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.

When God gave Moses the directions to build a tabernacle 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.

In Revelation 16:1-2 John says he heard a voice directing the seven angels to pour seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth. Let's look at the seven bowls of wrath described here.

1. Cancer (16:2)

In verse 2, the first angel poured out his bowl, and painful sores broke out on the skin of those who had the mark of the beast and who worshipped him. The first judgment is cancer of the skin, and this could result from the effects of a nuclear holocaust. Many of these plagues, by the way, share similarities with both the earlier trumpets and the seals in Revelation and also to the plagues during the time of Moses and the Exodus.

2. Contamination of the seas (16:3)

The second bowl of wrath (verse three) involves an angel pouring out his bowl so that the sea turns to blood. In 1949 the western coast of Florida experienced what was called a "red tide" when billions of dinoflagellates bonded together for a 60-mile stretch of water. The water appeared blood red, and all the fish and sea creatures died and washed up on the shore. Can you imagine what it would be like if all the oceans of the world were afflicted by such an environmental disaster? Might man be the one that brings about some kind of environmental disaster such as this? Even so, it will be part of the plan and judgment of God.

3. Corruption of the streams (16:4-7)

This bowl of wrath is described in verses four through seven when a third angel pours out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water. The fresh water in the bowl turns to blood. The first recorded miracle of Jesus is that of changing water into wine. If God could turn water into wine, of course God can turn water into blood.

The angel says that God is "just" in doing this because these are the very people who shed the blood of his servants. It's as if he is saying, "And now because they have given you blood, God, you're going to give them blood." There is such a thing as the perfect justice of God. For example, did you know Pharaoh drowned all the

boy babies that were born to the nation of Israel? How did Pharaoh himself die? He drowned. That's the justice of God. Consider the Book of Esther. Haman builds these gallows to hang his enemies, and yet he is the one who hangs on them instead. Do you remember King Saul in the Old Testament? God told Saul to kill the Amalekites and Saul didn't do it. Guess who it was that killed Saul? The Amalekites.

There's a poetic justice about the nature and character of God. The thought may be creeping in your mind, "I don't know if I like a God like this who pours out all kinds of plagues, wrath, and judgments on the earth." It messes up our impression of God as being an old, long-bearded grandfatherly-type sitting up in heaven in a rocking chair. Thinking God is unfair is part of our old sinful flesh reasoning. But when you go to heaven and you become like Jesus, everything that God does will seem just.

Right now, we are still carrying some of this old sinful flesh. And it's hard for us to comprehend what God is doing. I heard Billy Graham explain it this way. He said wives whose husbands are not Christians would never want their husbands to die and go to hell. But, Dr. Graham said, if you died and went to be with Jesus, and your husband died without ever accepting Christ, you would then believe that it was the most just righteous thing in the universe for your husband to spend eternity in hell.

When I heard that, I was not sure I agreed, but the more I thought about it, the more I came to understand that all of God's justice is righteous. Sometimes in our legal system, justice is not served. God's justice, however, is perfect and without fault.

4. Catastrophe of the sun (16:8-9)

In verses eight and nine, the fourth angel pours out his bowl on the sun, and the sun scorches people with such intense heat and fire that they curse the name of God. But they refuse to repent and glorify him. In Revelation 8 verse 12, during the time of the opening of the seals, the Bible says the sun is darkened. In Luke chapter 21 Jesus says that you'll know the battle of Armageddon is near when you see signs among the sun and the moon.

I've always enjoyed lying on a white beach, soaking in some rays. But it's the earth's protective atmosphere that keeps the sun's rays from scorching. The ionosphere serves as a filter that blocks out those harmful rays. As the ozone layer depletes, there is less to block the harmful rays of the sun. It could be that man is bringing this judgment upon himself because we're not taking care of this planet that God has given us. It could be some kind of solar flare, too. Tremendous

explosions have been recorded by astronomers bursting out from the surface of the sun. On November 12, 1960, one of the largest solar flares in history was recorded. One tongue of flame thrust out over an area 10 million miles wide. It was so strong that radio reception on the earth was affected. And many people were terribly sunburned just from that one solar flare that happened briefly in a moment.

So, when the people on the earth who are worshipping the beast undergo this plague, they fall on their knees to repent, right? No, the Bible says in verse 11 that they're going to curse God. The entertainment industry today is leading the way blaspheming God and his word. Comedians blaspheme God and many people curse God publicly, but a time is coming when most of the people on the earth will curse God, even when God's judgment is on them.

Look at the first four of those judgments. There's always a special sequence to these three sevens: seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls. The first four of the judgments are always associated. For instance, the first four of the seven seals were characterized by the four horsemen. Likewise, the first trumpets all roll together, and then the last three are separated. It's the same strategy 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 judgment.

5. Darkness for the Beast (16:10-11)

In verses 10-11, the fifth angel pours out his bowl on the throne of the beast, whose kingdom is then plunged into darkness. Who is the beast? That's the Antichrist who is a political leader that comes on the scene during the time of tribulation. It says in verse 10 that his throne is going to be thrust into darkness. That's also one of the plagues that happened to the nation of Egypt in the Book of Exodus. God has power over light and darkness. When Jesus was hanging on the cross at 12 noon, it became totally dark for three hours. We're not talking about an eclipse, but a supernatural act of God. In the 1700s there was also a period of supernatural darkness that hit America. President Kennedy referred to this day of darkness in one of his speeches. History is full of periods of unexplainable darkness outside of a natural explanation from something like a solar eclipse.

6. Details of the battle (16:12-16)

Verses 12-16 describe the sixth angel pouring out his bowl on the great Euphrates River. Its water dries up to prepare the way for the "kings of the east" to make their way toward Israel for a great battle. John describes three evil spirits that look like frogs, which as you know are amphibian creatures that are at home in the water as much on land. These three individuals likewise seem to have a dual kind of existence: a devilish demonic kind of existence and a human existence.

The Bible says they came out of the mouth of the dragon. That's the devil he's referring to. Just as we have God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, the devil has his unholy trinity: the devil who is the dragon, the Antichrist (Satan in the flesh) and the false prophet who bears witness to the Antichrist (verse 14). These three are spirits of demons, performing miraculous signs. In verse 16, the dragon, the Antichrist, and the false prophet gather the kings together at a place that in the Hebrew is called "Armageddon" for a great battle.

Throughout the word of God, there has been prophesied one great battle when, finally and forever, God absolutely destroys wickedness. And he sets himself up as ruler overall. And this is what we call the Battle of Armageddon. Many Christians like Billy Graham have written books on Armageddon, and the term is often a theme of secular movies and books. However, the word "Armageddon" is actually two words: "har," which means "mountain" and "Megiddo," which means a "plain" of land. I've stood on Mount Carmel and looked to the southeast across the 12-mile-wide plain of Megiddo. Napoleon called this plain in Israel the "most perfect natural battlefield on earth." The Bible describes the bodies from the world's armies piled up on this plain to the height of a horse's bridle.

Verse 12 says that God is going to dry up the Euphrates River, which is 1800 miles long and 30-feet deep. Somehow it's going to dry up so that an army from the east can travel to Israel. In Revelation 9:15, the Bible describes an army of 200 million. There is only one army on the face of the earth that can boast an army that size, and that's China. In order to move an army of 200 million people from China westward to Israel, they would have to cross the Euphrates.

This sixth seal is like a preview of what's going to happen. Chapter 19:19 marks a time when God cleans up this mess that we call the world. It's the very same thing that John is talking about in Revelation chapter seven, verse 16. As the armies of the world gather under the Antichrist, Jesus and his heavenly army (that's us) descend from heaven. This is the Second Coming, when Jesus Christ comes back to earth leading the saints (that's us), the tribulation saints, and the 24 elders. Don't be afraid! You're not going to have to fight. You won't even have a weapon. The only weapon that's 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.

Some people confuse this event with the rapture of the Church. Often people are confused because they read in certain places of the Bible where Jesus says he's going to slip in quietly and quickly "like a thief in the night." And there are other times where the Bible says that when Jesus comes back, every eye is going to see him in his power and glory. How do we reconcile the two? Simple. 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, every eye will see him.

7. The destruction of Babylon (16:17)

Revelation chapter 16 verse 17 is where the seventh angel pours out his bowl into the air. A loud voice in the temple from the throne declares, "It is done. It is finished." What follows is lightning, peals of thunder, and a severe earthquake. That event could be what is described in Zechariah chapter 14 where Jesus touches his foot down on the Mt. of Olives and there is a mighty earthquake. The great city of Jerusalem splits into three parts. The nations collapse, hail pounds the earth, but still the people curse God because of the plagues instead of turning to him for mercy.

The Bible says God gives Babylon a cup filled with a wine of the fury of his wrath. You may not even know what "Babylon" is. It is simply the Antichrist's worldly system. His political system involves the economic and religious systems, and the whole of it is going to be destroyed by God himself.

CONCLUSION

The final thing to notice in the midst of all of this judgment is that God gives a promise to the Church. Originally, seven churches in Asia Minor were getting this letter. But Christians throughout the ages have been reading the Book of Revelation. The personal message is to stay ready because Jesus is coming like a thief. In Matthew 24 verse 42 Jesus says, "If the master of the house had known when the thief was coming, he would have been ready." In 1 Thessalonians chapter five verse 12, Paul says the Lord will come as a thief in the night.

After my father died, my mother was living alone when someone broke into her home and stole a lot of her possessions. I was so angry at the thief. If I'd known when he was coming, I would have had every police officer in Mobile, Alabama, parked outside our house! Did you know Jesus Christ is going to come back and rapture the Church at a moment when we're least expecting it? Like a thief in the night when you're not expecting it, it's going to happen. So what's the message here? Be ready and be constantly on guard because Jesus could come at any moment.

OUTLINE

I. A SCENE OF JOY (15:1-4)

II. THE SONG OF JESUS (15:3-4)

III. THE STRATEGY OF JUDGMENT (15:5-16:21)

- 1. Cancer (16:2)**
- 2. Contamination of the seas (16:3)**
- 3. Corruption of the streams (16:4-7)**
- 4. Catastrophe of the sun (16:8-9)**
- 5. Darkness for the Beast (16:10-11)**
- 6. Details of the battle (16:12-16)**
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