

The Book of Revelation

Week #15 – The Angels with the Seven Last Plagues

I. REVIEW: REVELATION 14

A. The Lamb and the 144,000

In Revelation 13 John presents us with a vision of the beast and its followers.

John's next vision opens with the Lamb standing on Mount Zion with the 144,000 of the redeemed [martyrs].

- The Lamb and his followers are contrasted with the beast and his followers.

The followers of the Lamb have attained redemption by:

- offering their lives to God as a sacrifice through martyrdom and by
- the testimony of their word.

B. Who Are the 144,000?

This is a symbolic number representing the 12 (tribes of Israel) x the 12 (Apostles) x 1000 (indicating a large number).

- The 144,000 belong to Christ and His Father and bear their mark on their foreheads.
- The followers of the beast bear its mark on their foreheads.
- The 144,000 are a special group within the faithful.
- These are the first martyrs [*firstfruits*] for Christ.

C. Mount Zion

There is an earthly Mount Zion where the historical city of Jerusalem was first made an Israelite settlement [2 Sam 5:7].

And there is a heavenly Zion which stands for the heavenly Jerusalem.

The earthly Zion is a visible model of the heavenly Zion.

D. The Virgins

The 144,000 are described as celibate men [literally virgins *who have not defiled themselves with women*].

Virginity here then stands first for fidelity to the Lord.

The 144,000, therefore, are like the twenty-four priestly elders who offered their lives as a priestly sacrifice to God.

E. Firstfruits

They perform a priestly function for the entire people of God and the human race. Their sacrifice as martyrs has a salvific or redeeming effect on humanity.

II. THE THREE ANGELS

A. The Gospel – a Two-Edged Sword

The first angel comes proclaiming the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to *“every nation and tribe and tongue and people.”*

Those who accept it will be saved: those who deliberately and consciously reject it will be condemned.

B. The Fall of Babylon Predicted

The second angel predicts the fall of Babylon – a code word for Jerusalem [or Rome].

The angel says that that the city has “fallen” though John has not yet seen it destroyed. Like the prophets, the angel speaks of something about to happen [prophecy] as if it had already happened [history].

Jerusalem is given the title Babylon because Babylon was the nation that destroyed the Jerusalem temple in 586 BC.

- Jerusalem is like Babylon because it destroyed the true temple, Jesus Christ [John 2:19-21].
- Rome is also like Babylon because it destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD.

C. The Fate of the Followers of the Beast

The third angel proclaims a warning to all.

A dreadful fate awaits those who do not repent and accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The punishment will be terrible and eternal.

- The false prophet threatened that anyone refusing to worship the beast would be killed.
- The angel shows that anyone who sides with the beast will suffer a far worse fate – eternal death.

D. The Rest of the Blessed

Those who are called to die in the Lord in the persecution about to begin are doubly blessed:

- They are blessed because of their martyrdom, and
- They are blessed because of all their good works [*“for their deeds follow them”* - Rev 14:13].

E. The Harvest of the Son of Man

The judgment of the righteous and the wicked is symbolized in the harvest of the grain and the grapes.

- First, the saints are gathered up like sheaves of wheat to be stored in a granary,
- Then the sinners are severed like grapes from the vine to be thrown into a wine press and crushed.

The final coming of the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, is depicted in verse 14.

- The sickle in Jesus' hand is a tool for harvesting.
- The Son of Man reaps the grain – the final gathering of the elect, while
- The angel with the sharp sickle reaps the grapes – the harvest of those destined for eternal punishment.

III. REVELATION 15 – THE FINAL PLAGUES

A. Overview

Chapter 15 ushers in the sequence of the last seven plagues in which the wrath of God reaches its climax.

Although parallels exist between the seven bowls and the seven trumpets, the bowl judgments are more devastating and extensive.

The final plagues will bring God's wrath to an end. Here again we must understand God's fury and anger as the inevitable effects of sin.

The wrath of God is what humans experience when they reject God's infinite love. It is experienced in various trials or afflictions including disease, death and destruction.

The reason that there are so many trials is that God, in great patience, is using them to call the rebellious to repentance.

The seven plagues contain themes of the old Exodus; the sea, the song of Moses, the smoke [cloud] of Sinai, and the tent of testimony. To this we may add the fire of Sodom.

Before John tells of the seven angels with the seven bowls of wrath, he shows us a picture of those who have come through the martyrdom for Christ.

Read: Revelation 15:1-4

[1] Then I saw another portent in heaven, great and wonderful, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is ended.

[2] And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire, and 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 wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are thy ways, O King of the ages!*

*[4] Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord?
For thou alone art holy.*

*All nations shall come and worship thee,
for thy judgments have been revealed."*

B. The Third Sign

The third portent, following the signs of the woman and the dragon, is of special significance – it is “great and wonderful” – for it heralds the final outcome of the battle between the beasts and the followers of the Lamb, between the powers of evil and the Church of Jesus Christ.

C. The Song of the Victors of Christ

John sees and hears the martyrs of heaven standing beside the sea of glass mingled with fire, and singing praises to God.

As in Chapter 5, the saints sing a “new song” beside a “sea of glass” just as Moses sang a “new song” with Israel on the shores of the Red Sea, after Israel’s deliverance from Pharaoh and his army.

Read: Exodus 15 – The Song of Moses

They are singing a “new song” because they have conquered the beast and his followers.

This hymn of praise, part of the heavenly liturgy, initiates divine justice on earth as in the blowing of the seven trumpets.

IV. SEVEN ANGELS WITH SEVEN BOWLS

Read: Revelation 15:5-8

[5] After this I looked, and the temple of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, [6] and out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues, robed in pure bright linen, and their breasts girded with golden girdles.

[7] And one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives for ever and ever;

[8] 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 ended.

A. The Tent of Witness

The *tent of witness*, or the *tent of testimony*, containing the tablets of the covenant, is a common title in the Old Testament for the portable tabernacle in the wilderness, in which Israel worshipped. The Jerusalem temple later replaced the tent of witness.

B. Seven Bowls or Chalice

And one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives for ever and ever;

The word for “bowls” here may also be translated “cups.” The Greek word for cups specifically describes a liturgical vessel. Therefore, the word could be translated as “chalice.”

The liturgical element is highlighted further when we read that the angels came out of the temple. Their white clothes and golden sashes are priestly clothing and recall John’s description of Christ as High Priest in Revelation 1.

Here, then, we see once again how the heavenly liturgy initiates the events on earth in response to the prayers of the saints.

The bowls, to be poured out on earth, contain God’s wrath, that is, his judgments – divine justice.

The seven plagues recall the plagues sent on Egypt in the Exodus.

C. The Temple Was Filled with Smoke

The temple becomes so filled with the cloud of God’s glory and might no one could enter until the seven plagues had taken place.

This is the same cloud of glory [shekinah] that filled both the portable Mosaic Tabernacle in the wilderness, and the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, making entrance temporarily impossible.

*Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting, because the cloud abode upon it, and the **glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle** [Ex 40:34-35].*

*And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for **the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD** [1 Kings 8:10-11]*

V.REV. 16 – THE BOWLS OF GOD'S WRATH

A. Overview

One by one, the seven angels are summoned to pour out the seven bowls of wrath upon the world.

The plagues that are now visited upon the earth resemble the plagues of Egypt [the Exodus], and those described earlier in the trumpet series [8:6-21].

The main difference now is that everything is affected, whereas previously only a third was affected - signifying that divine intervention is on the increase up to the very end.

Jerusalem has now become the new Egypt, and so it is appropriate that the judgment on the new Egypt be described in terms of the plagues that fell on old Egypt.

These evils are the result of sin, and God allows them to occur in the hope that men will turn back to him.

As history advances, the signs are that sin is on the increase; sin is the ultimate cause on the new plagues [cancer, AIDS, abortion, poverty, famine] which can be seen in the world today.

We see in the plagues the solidarity of nature with the plans of God. Nature itself experiences disturbances when human beings rebel against the author of nature, e.g., when Adam sins, the earth is cursed.

Read: Revelation 16:1-11

[1] Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God."

[2] So the first angel went and poured his bowl on the earth, and foul and evil sores came upon the men who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

[3] The second angel poured his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a dead man, and every living thing died that was in the sea.

[4] The third angel poured his bowl into the rivers and the fountains of water, and they became blood.

[5] And I heard the angel of water say, "Just art thou in these thy judgments, thou who art and wast, O Holy One.

[6] For men have shed the blood of saints and prophets,

and thou hast given them blood to drink.

It is their due!"

[7] And I heard the altar cry, "Yea, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are thy judgments!"

[8] The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch men with fire;

[9] men were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory.

[10] The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was in darkness; men gnawed their tongues in anguish

[11] and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

B. The Voice of God

The voice from the temple is the voice of God who is sending his angelic agents to carry out his divine justice.

C. The Bowls

The bowls symbolize both the prayers of the saints, which have caused God to intervene, and the effects of those prayers.

The bowls contain either the prayers of the saints or the blood of the martyrs. Their content is not the plagues as such but the outcome of prayer - action on God's part to console the righteous and punish the wicked.

D. First Plague – Sores

So the first angel went and poured his bowl on the earth, and foul and evil sores came upon the men who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

Those who once bore the mark of the beast now bear the mark of ulcerous sores and boils. This shows the effect of the mark of the beast – it is disfiguring, a punishment that fits the crime.

E. Plagues 2 and 3 – Water Turns to Blood

Nature turns against man to protest his sin and threatens him with total destruction. The wicked have shed the blood of the martyrs; now the sea and the rivers turn into blood – “*man is punished by the very things through which he sins*” [Wis 11:15-16].

The wicked have taken the lives of the martyrs, now the basic necessity for life, water, is slowly but surely taken away from them – first with the sea, then with the remaining rivers and fountains.

Blood is all that is left to drink:

“For men have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink. It is their due!” [Rev. 16:6]

F. Fourth Plague – Scorched by the Sun

“Men were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory.”

The fourth plague is one of intense heat – made all the more unbearable since all the water has turned to blood. With no fresh water, the people have no way to refresh themselves.

The fate of the wicked is the exact opposite of the saints of whom it is said: *“The sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat” [Rev 7:16].*

Despite the plague, the wicked did not repent; instead *“they cursed the name of God.”*

G. Fifth Plague – Darkness

As the fifth bowl is poured out on the throne of the beast, his kingdom is plunged into darkness. Darkness was the ninth plague that fell of Egypt, and was the last plague before the final judgment – the death of the firstborns.

Similarly, darkness appears here as one of the last bowl judgments before the final destruction of the city.

Not even this brings about repentance. Instead, the beast and his followers blaspheme against God and curse him.

Historically, the darkness may apply to the death of Nero, whose suicide in June AD 68 caused considerable chaos in the Empire.

For a further historical application, see the description of the destruction of Jerusalem by the historian Josephus, and the obstinate refusal of the people to surrender and repent of their rebelliousness. [See pages 198-199 of *Coming Soon*].

VI. THE SIXTH PLAGUE

Read: Revelation 16:12-16

[12] The sixth angel poured his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east.

[13] And I saw, issuing from the mouth of the dragon and from the mouth of the beast and from the mouth of the false prophet, three foul spirits like frogs; [14] 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.

[15] ("Lo, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake, keeping his garments that he may not go naked and be seen exposed!")

[16] And they assembled them at the place which is called in Hebrew Armageddon.

A. Armies from the East

The drying up of the river Euphrates opens the way for the hordes from the east [the Parthian armies] to descend upon the world.

In AD 70 the Roman armies crossed over the Euphrates on their way to destroy Jerusalem, coming from the east.

The prophets Isaiah and Daniel referred to judgment as coming from this direction. The Babylonian army had to cross this river when it advanced toward Jerusalem to destroy it in the sixth century BC.

It was from across the Euphrates that the invasion of the Antichrist was expected in the form of *Nero redivivus* [from Parthia].

B. The Evil Frogs

The plague of frogs recalls the second plague of Egypt.

Three unclean spirits [demons] issue from the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet [second beast].

According to the Levitical code of law, frogs are “unclean,” and thus an appropriate symbol for demons.

With this plague of demonic frogs, demonic activity reaches its climax, and wickedness envelops the land.

C. The Battle of Armageddon

“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.”

These demonic spirits seduce “the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.”

This is the gathering of the armies of the east for the famous and final battle of Armageddon. [Hal Lindsey interprets these armies here as in 9:14-18 as those of Communist China].

“And they assembled them at the place which is called in Hebrew Armageddon.”

The name Armageddon means “Mount of Megiddo” in Hebrew. Megiddo was a fortified settlement in central Israel overlooking a broad plain that was used as a battlefield in biblical times. The plain of Megiddo evokes memories of victory and defeat.

It was the site of one of Israel’s most tragic battles – the defeat and death of good King Josiah in battle with Pharaoh Neco – a tragedy the Jews never forgot.

From the most ancient times to the time of Napoleon it was one of the great battle-grounds of the world.

See *Coming Soon* pages 201-203 for more details.

Revelation envisions another conflict, staged near Megiddo, one destined to end with the devastation of the harlot city [chaps 17-18], along with the defeat of the beast and the false prophet [19:11-21].

The idea of a final conflict between God and the forces of evil is an old one. We find it in Psalm 2:2.

*The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the LORD and his anointed . . .*

D. A Warning: Be Vigilant

(“Lo, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake, keeping his garments that he may not go naked and be seen exposed!”)

The people are warned to be watchful since the Lord may come at an unexpected time, and in fact comes many times, for He comes in judgment, in the Eucharist, at death and finally at the Second Coming.

Jesus comes not only at the end of time but in historical crises.
