

Revelation, Part 20

Review

Last session we looked at chapters 14 and 15. Beginning in chapter 14, we saw a prophetic peek at the Second Advent and the victorious Lamb “standing with” the 144,000, and they were singing a song of victory.

That was followed by a slight step back in time to just before the Second Advent and an angel flew by shouting, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.” That was followed by another angel announcing the fall of Babylon. This precedes the Second Advent and announces some final events of the Tribulation.

And yet a third angel follows this announcing that anyone that worships the beast or takes his mark on his forehead or hand will “drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone”.

Time pretty much stops, as we then are shown some of the final judgments. John sees a vision of the “Son of Man” (Christ) sitting on a white cloud with a sharp sickle in His hand. Yet another angel, apparently in frustration with what is happening on Earth, calls out to Christ, “Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.” And the Son of Man does that.

Then another angel comes out of the Temple in Heaven, and he commands an angel to “Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.” And that angel does.

Verse 20 tells us “And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses’ bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.” All this is figurative language describing the final judgments upon fallen mankind that we will see later. This “trodding” of grapes is figurative language for God’s judgments. Picture someone stomping on grapes in a winepress, squashing the grapes, and forcing out the juice of the crushed pulp. There is a certain amount of anger pictured in that act, and God is indeed angry. The juice flows out of the winepress and is normally captured in vessels and stored to ferment

and age, but here it runs out on the ground and is pictured as a huge amount. From this, one might conclude that there are many alive on Earth who have rejected all of God's appeals to repent of their sins and have taken the mark of the beast. This otherwise idyllic scene from a grape crushing, which in normal times is one of happiness for a bountiful harvest, is here turned into a picture of the extreme manifestation of God's anger. Yes, God does get angry.

The scene seems to be pointing directly to the Second Advent when Christ returns, and His robes are splashed with blood, as seen in Isaiah 63:3 "I have trodden the winepress alone ... For I have trodden them in My anger, And trampled them in My fury; Their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, And I have stained all My robes."

Chapter 15 is a continuation of chapter 14, and we see "seven angels having the seven last plagues" that complete God's wrath. God is past the point of showing mercy, and rightfully so. Mankind has been given all manner of warnings from the subtle to the extreme to get their attention, but man still does not repent and turn to God. Mercy is now off the table and no longer an option. "The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed" (Rev 15:8). No one is allowed access to God until the last seven judgments are done.

The Bowl Judgments

Rev 16:1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth."

2 So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.

3 Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died.

4 Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying:

"You are righteous, O Lord,
The One who is and who was and who is to be,
Because You have judged these things.

6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,

And You have given them blood to drink.

For it is their just due.”

7 And I heard another from the altar saying, “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.”

8 Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. 9 And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.

10 Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. 11 They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

12 Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. 13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14 For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

15 “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.”

16 And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

17 Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” 18 And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. 19 Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. 20 Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. 21 And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.

Chronologically this chapter is close to the time of the second coming of Christ, and the judgments described fall in rapid succession. The seven angels with the seven bowls are in position having come out of the Temple

in Heaven, which is now filled with smoke, signifying there is no more approach to God on the basis of His mercy. The justice of God must now administer what the righteousness of God demands. God's mercy can only delay the administration of justice, giving those under condemnation a grace period to repent and avoid God's wrath. They have had that with the associated warnings, and they still chose to ignore the signs of impending judgment. As we shall shortly see from these bowl judgments, even with the obvious administration of divine judgment, which many believe would cause man to turn to God, man still does not repent. Instead, his heart gets harder, and he becomes even more defiant. God's wrath is about to be fully poured out on the earth.

Rev 16:1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth."

John hears a loud voice from the temple ordering the angels to pour out their bowls. The loud voice is undoubtedly that of God and not some high-ranking angel. The adjective translated "loud" (*megalēs*) is often translated as "great" and is used frequently in this chapter. Here, it implies that the voice is great in the sense that it is very loud and commanding in its presence. The same Greek word is used in connection with intense heat (v. 9), the great River Euphrates (v. 12), the great day of God Almighty (v. 14), a severe earthquake (v. 18), the great city (v. 19), Babylon the Great (v. 19), huge hailstones (v. 21), and a terrible plague (v. 21). As a result, this chapter of Revelation is sometimes called the "Great" chapter of the Bible.

Some have argued that the bowls are merely an extension or enlargement of the seven trumpet judgments and are the same. There are some strong similarities between the trumpets and the bowls.

- The first in the series deals with the earth
- The second with the sea
- The third with the rivers and fountains of waters
- The fourth with the sun
- The fifth with darkness
- The sixth with the Euphrates River
- The seventh with lightnings, thunderings, and a great earthquake

But similarities do not prove identity. There are also numerous differences, as we shall see. The bowl judgments fall in a rapid succession of hammer blows and are consumed in a very short period of time close to the end of

the Great Tribulation, but the bowl judgments are an extension of the seventh trumpet and climax God's divine dealings with a blasphemous Earth and are just preceding and are capped by the Second Advent.

First Bowl: Loathsome Sores

Rev 16:2 So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.

The Greek word translated "sore" is *helkos* /hel·kos/ and is the same Greek word the translators of the Septuagint used in translating the Hebrew of Exodus 9:9-11 to the Greek when referring to the "boils" inflicted on the Egyptians. They are described as "foul" or "noisome" and "grievous" or "loathsome". "Foul" is the Greek word *kakos* which is usually used for someone who is wicked or bad or wretched. It implies something extremely objectionable. "Grievous" or "loathsome" is the Greek *ponēros*, which means bad, evil, wicked, or even malignant. It carries a sense of moral corruption. These sores seem to be terribly painful and, if seen as boils, they are exuding corrupted dead tissue. They not only appear foul but probably also smell foul.

Notice they "came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image". This implies those who did not receive the mark do not suffer from them. The same seems to apply to the other plagues we will look at. Their impact seems limited to those who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. The elect may suffer persecution and even death at the hands of demon-controlled people, but they seem unaffected by these terrible plagues.

Second Bowl: The Sea Turns to Blood

Rev 16:3 Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died.

There is a notable contrast between the second bowl and the second trumpet. After the second trumpet blew, "a third of the sea turned into blood," killing "a third of the living creatures" and destroying "a third of the ships" (8:8-9). In the second bowl, however, every living thing in the sea

died (16:3). It is probable that the ocean here did not actually become human blood, but that it looked like blood and had the same effect in killing everything. We occasionally experience algae blooms in lakes and the seas, also called “red tides” because of the red tint of the affected water, in which sea life cannot survive. This one would cover the world’s oceans. Imagine the stench from this. There is a possibility that the reference to “sea” is limited to the Med, but that is probably not the case. If so, as most of the earth’s surface is covered by the seas, this is a worldwide judgment of an unimaginable magnitude. “Every living creature in the sea died.”

Third Bowl: The Waters Turn to Blood

Rev 16:4 Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying:

“You are righteous, O Lord,
The One who is and who was and who is to be,
Because You have judged these things.

6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
And You have given them blood to drink.
For it is their just due.”

7 And I heard another from the altar saying, “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.”

Just as the third trumpet made “a third of the waters” bitter (8:11), so the third bowl extends the judgment of the second bowl on the sea to rivers and springs, and they became blood (16:4). Everything in the sea is dead, and now every other source of water is corrupted. Though the text doesn’t say so, based on what happened to the seas, the creatures in the fresh waters also die. And there is no water to drink. You can go a long time without even a scrap of food but you can survive only a few days without water. If you get thirsty you get to drink blood.

This sounds terrible and perhaps even unfair and certainly merciless by human standards, so John heard the angel in charge of the waters proclaim that God the Holy One is just in His judgments (v. 5). God turning the waters to blood is in response to the shedding of the blood of the saints and prophets (v. 6). This judgment is targeted retribution for the spilled blood of the Tribulation martyrs. This is echoed by a word from the

altar declaring the judgment just in verse 7 “And I heard another from the altar saying, ‘Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.’”

Liberal theology has painted an inaccurate picture of the righteousness of God. As a result, human viewpoint cannot imagine a God who would do something like this. All they ever heard is “God loves you,” and He does, but God is also a righteous standard. It is part of His essence. They may say the God of the New Testament is not the same vengeful God of the Old Testament, but God never changes. That is also part of His essence. Man’s point of contact with God is not His love but is His justice, and what the righteousness of God condemns, the justice of God judges. What the righteousness of God approves, the justice of God blesses. What the righteousness of God demands, the justice of God executes — and does it through His love.

Fourth Bowl: Men are Scorched

Rev 16:8 Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. 9 And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.

This judgment focused on the intense heat of the sun. The Greek word for “scorched” suggests torturous heat. The “and men” of verse 9 should be translated as “and THE men” because that is what the text says. Implied are those that suffer from this heat are those “men (and women) who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image” mentioned in verse 2. The saints of this period do not suffer these plagues, at least not to the extent the “men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image” do. How so? Answer: however God protected Daniel and his friends in the fiery furnace.

The response of those who worshiped the beast is they cursed God and refused to repent. By contrast, the fourth trumpet (8:12) darkened only a third of the heavens but did not include additional intense heat. It is clear from this and other prophecies that dramatic climate changes will occur in the Great Tribulation. (Maybe if we would just reduce our carbon footprint, we could avoid all this?)

Fifth Bowl: Darkness and Pain

Rev 16:10 Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. 11 They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

This judgment is directed toward the beast's throne. It imposes darkness on the earth and inflicts painful sores on people. Again they curse God and refuse to repent. This is the last reference to a failure to repent in Revelation. This failure, in the face of ample warnings, is a recurring theme in Revelation.

Rev 2:21 (Jesus said of Thyatira) "And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent."

Rev 9:21 speaking of the results from the sixth trumpet, "And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts."

Rev 16:9 And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.

Rev 16:21 And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.

They did not respond during a time of grace, and they do not respond in a time of cursing. These are very hard hearts.

The fifth bowl is similar to the fifth trumpet (9:1-11) in that both will bring darkness, but the fifth trumpet has to do with demon possession rather than physical pain. This is such a painful experience, the darkness, the sores, the pain, and yet they resist and curse God. We have all probably encountered people who are bitter towards God because they suffered some loss or experienced hardships. "God never gave me a chance." God did give you a chance and you rejected Him.

Sixth Bowl: Euphrates Dried Up

Rev 16:12 Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared.

There has been endless speculation about “the kings from the East,” with many expositors trying to relate them to some contemporary leaders of their generation. A survey of 100 commentaries of the Book of Revelation reveals many different interpretations of the identity of the kings of the East. The simplest and best explanation, however, is that this refers to kings or rulers from the Orient or East who will participate in the final world war. In the light of the context of this passage indicating the near approach of the second coming of Christ and the contemporary world situation in which the Orient today contains a large portion of the world’s population with tremendous military potential, any interpretation other than a literal one does not make sense.

This is related to the great River Euphrates because this is the water boundary between the Holy Land and Asia to the East. While the implication is that the water is dried up by an act of God, the fact is that dams have been built across the Euphrates River to divert water for irrigation so that there are times even today when there is little or no water in parts of the Euphrates.

Rev 16:13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14 For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. 15 “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.” 16 And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

John was then given a symbolic and comprehensive view of the preparation for the final bowl of God’s wrath. He saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs coming out of the mouths of Satan (the dragon) and the two beasts, Antichrist and the false prophet. We don’t need to speculate

on the identity of the three frogs, for verse 14 explains that they are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they physically resembled frogs. These demons “go throughout the world influencing kings to assemble for the battle on the great day of God Almighty” (v14).

While the meaning of this symbolic presentation is clear, there is a major problem involved in what the demons do. The coming world government in the Great Tribulation will be established by the power of Satan (13:2). Here, however, Satan, the world ruler, and the false prophet unite in inciting the nations of the world to gather for the final world war. Actually the war is a form of rebellion against the world ruler. Why then should satanic forces be let loose to destroy the world empire which has just been created? The answer seems to be in the events which follow. Satan, knowing that the second coming of Christ is near, will gather all the military might of the world into the Holy Land to resist the coming of the Son of Man who will return to the Mount of Olives.

Zech. 14:4 And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives,
Which faces Jerusalem on the east.
And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two,
From east to west,
Making a very large valley;
Half of the mountain shall move toward the north
And half of it toward the south.

Though the nations may be deceived into entering into the war in hope of gaining world political power, the satanic purpose is to combat the armies from Heaven (introduced in chap. 19) at the second coming of Christ.

Rev 19:1 After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God!

The war is said to continue right up to the day of the Second Coming and involves house-to-house fighting in Jerusalem itself on the day of the Lord’s return (Zech. 14:1-3).

Zech 14:1 Behold, the day of the Lord is coming,
And your spoil will be divided in your midst.
2 For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem;

The city shall be taken,
The houses rifled,
And the women ravished.
Half of the city shall go into captivity,
But the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city.

The reference to “the battle” (ton polemon, Rev. 16:14) is probably better translated as “the war”. Thus, it is better to speak of “the war of Armageddon” rather than “the battle of Armageddon,” although some do use the term “Battle of Armageddon”. The idea is that this war has been going on for some time, but the climax will come at Christ’s second coming. It began with the invasion of the Kings of the North back before the Abomination of Desolation, more than three and a half years before the Second Advent. (We will expand on that later when we try to plot out a more accurate timeline of events.)

“Armageddon” comes from the Greek harmagedōn, which transliterates the Hebrew words for Mount (har) of Megiddo. That mountain is near the city of Megiddo next to the plain of Esdraelon, the scene of many Old Testament battles. This is about 60 miles north of Jerusalem. The Valley of Esdraelon is a wide flat valley that extends from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River Valley. It was described by General George Patton as the perfect tank country. Tel Megiddo, an ancient Canaanite town sitting on the hilltop next to the modern city of Megiddo is now an archaeological site that overlooks the Valley of Esdraelon.

John heard the warning coming from Christ Himself, “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.” Christ’s return is often compared to the coming of a thief. It implies suddenness and unpreparedness as far as unbelievers are concerned, just as Christians are not to be surprised by the Rapture of the church

1 Thes. 5:4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.

Believers at the time of the Second Coming will be anticipating His return and, unlike before for the Rapture, they will have had many signs pointing to the Second Advent. Blessing is promised to the one who is prepared for

the coming of the Lord by being attired in the righteousness or clothing which God Himself supplies.

Taken as a whole, the sixth bowl of the wrath of God is preparing for the final act of judgment before the Second Coming. The time factor between the sixth trumpet and the sixth bowl is comparatively short. The sixth trumpet (below) seems to be preparation for the events of the sixth bowl.

Rev. 9:13 Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, 14 saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." 15 So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind. 16 Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.

The loosing of the four angels resulted in releasing an army of 200 million ... mounted troops. Most interpreters do not take the number literally, though there is good evidence that all other numbers in Revelation are literal. Even if taken symbolically, this figure represents an overwhelming military force. Years ago Red China claimed to have an army of 200 million (cf. Time, May 21, 1965, p. 35).

Some interpreters say these millions are demons, but demons are not normally marshaled as a military force. The fact that John heard the number, as obviously he could not visually count 200 million men, seems to lend credence to the concept that this is literal and predicts that an army will come from the East crossing the dried-up Euphrates River (16:12).

Seventh Bowl: The Earth Utterly Shaken

Rev 16:17 Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" 18 And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. 19 Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of

the fierceness of His wrath. 20 Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.

The seventh angel then poured out his bowl into the air. John heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" A similar pronouncement followed the seventh trumpet (11:15-19). Here also John saw lightning flashes and heard thunder, which was followed by a severe earthquake (16:18). John was then informed that this will be the greatest earthquake of all time, and the resulting description indicates that it will affect the whole earth.

The most important event, however, is that the "cities of the nations," meaning the Gentile nations, all collapsed. The huge earthquake will reduce to rubble all the cities of the nations. The stage is thus being set for the second coming of Christ. Obviously, in the collapse of the world's cities, there will be a tremendous loss of life and destruction of what is left of the world empire.

Though Jerusalem is mentioned in 11:8 as "the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified," "the great city" here is specifically Babylon, as indicated in 16:19. God will give Babylon the cup filled with the wine of the fury of His wrath, that is, she will experience a terrible outpouring of His judgment.

The question is raised: is Babylon the literal city of Babylon in Iraq or is it the symbolic city of Babylon where resides the world ecumenical religion, which is likely Rome? I believe this city is Rome but is called Babylon because of its spiritual declension. Others view "Babylon" as the rebuilt city of Babylon located on the Euphrates River, and it will be the capital of the final world government. Many claim ancient Babylon will be rebuilt, but I do not, at this time, subscribe to that. It is so poorly located and isolated it seems impossible it could ever assume the vaulted position of a financial and trade capital of the Antichrist's world religion and government. I see no evidence in Scripture that Antichrist ever makes it to a rebuilt ancient Babylon, much less operates from there. The closest he seems to get is Jerusalem, as seen in Daniel 11:44-45. I believe Babylon is Rome during the Tribulation. (More on this later.)

In addition to the terrible earthquake, and probably because of it, John recorded, "Every island fled away and mountains could not be found."

These verses (vv. 18-20), if taken literally, indicate there will be great topographical changes in the earth, which eventually will also include great changes in the Holy Land in preparation for Christ's millennial kingdom.

Rev 16:21 And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.

In addition to the earthquake, huge hailstones of about 100 pounds each fell on people. Such huge masses of ice supernaturally formed would destroy anything left standing from the earthquake and would no doubt seriously injure those they hit or more likely kill them. Despite the severity of the judgment and its cataclysmic character, the hardness of human hearts is revealed in the final sentence, "And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail because the plague was so terrible."

With the final destruction coming from the seventh bowl of the wrath of God, the stage will then be set for the dramatic and climactic second coming of Christ, revealed in chapter 19. Before this event, however, a future detailed description is given of Babylon in chapters 17-18. After we look at these chapters, I will attempt to connect all the dots and pull together a timeline of events.