

Revelation Bible Study

Remember, Revelation is a book of comfort to the Christian!!

Chapters 15-16

Camera angle Four

Remember – What happens in these verses has been going on since the beginning of time and will go on until the Judgment.

At this time view the picture labeled chapters 15-16. It describes the results of the Seven Bowls of God's wrath.

Chapters 15 and 16 of Revelation display the third and last vision of events on earth. As in the first two earthly visions (6:1–8:5 and 8:6–11:19), there are seven scenes. In this third vision, each of the scenes is introduced by an angel with a censer. The first five scenes (16:1–11) depict events that take place concurrently: each covers the same time period, from Christ's ascension up to Armageddon. The sixth scene (16:12–16) describes the last battle, here called Armageddon, which takes place just prior to the end of this present world at Christ's return. The seventh scene (16:17–21) envisions the End at the second coming of Christ. (CC)

Seven Angels with Seven Plagues

Chapter 15

(Notes to help understanding)

15:2 sea of glass. No doubt John was reminded of the "glassy sea, like crystal" before the heavenly throne of God (4:6). However, in 4:6 the heavenly sea, though reminiscent of the past turmoil of the warfare on earth, was quiet and peaceful. Thus it was a reminder to John that the saints in heaven, though they had been in the warfare, were now at rest and peace before God's heavenly presence.

15:2 mixed with fire. Now the "glassy sea mixed with fire" is a reminder of the horrifying warfare with its suffering that the people of God on earth are experiencing. The fiery red reflection of the sea symbolizes this suffering that confronts all Christians. But in this terrifying conflict, though they are conquered by the beast and its image (13:5–7), through death and martyrdom they come out of the struggle victorious, just as their Lord did on their behalf (19:15; cf. Is 63:1–6). Throughout the whole time period of suffering, from Christ's ascension up to the End at his return, the church exhibits this victorious faith by confidently singing the hymn of salvation, even as she goes into death. (CC)

15:3 song of Moses. This can be found in Exodus 15. It was sung to celebrate Israel's deliverance from Egypt. It was also sung on Sabbath evenings in the synagogue to remember how God had brought Israel from Egypt.

15:5 tabernacle of the Testimony. The tabernacle of Moses was the focal point of Israel's life with God. Here John sees heavenly a tabernacle that reminds him of God's holy presence as the center and core of the life of his saints in His heavenly glory.

15:6 golden sashes. Symbolic of royal and priestly functions. (CSB)

15:8 filled with smoke. Smoke symbolizes the power and glory of God. (CSB)

Summary of Chapter 15

This chapter includes the seven angels with the seven plagues in which John sees the church triumphant in heaven. It introduces the last of the three sevenfold series of plagues and points to the vision of the seven bowls of wrath (16:1–21).

(Meditation/Discussion)

1. What lessons did you learn from this section? How will they impact your life?
2. What comfort can you take from this section?
3. What is a favorite verse in this section?

Seven Bowls of God's Wrath

Chapter 16

(Notes to help understanding)

16:1 The seven bowls. This vision also is a symbolic representation of another aspect of the entire NT era. It symbolizes the pouring out of God's judgment on an impenitent world. There is a close parallelism between this vision and that of the seven trumpets. Both refer to the same problem—false teachings of religions, corrupted philosophy—that lead people astray.

16:1 Wrath...Earth. The severity of God's judgments will increase as the end of this world at Christ's return draws nearer. In fact, this is the overall emphasis in this third vision of earthly events. While some of the events presented in this third vision repeat those in the second, in the third vision they are all intensified in order to portray God's final warning of the seriousness of his judgment at the End. For example, in 8:8-9, one third of the sea is contaminated and one third of ocean life perishes, but in the corresponding plague in 16:3, all seawater becomes blood and all sea creatures perish. Thus the plagues of God's wrath in the third vision urge the human race to repent before it is too late since no one will escape the final judgment.

16:2 sores. This painful sore could manifest itself as festering ulcers or abscesses that will cause unending pain, be repulsive to the sight, and have a dying stench. So terrible can these boils become that people will be covered over large parts of their bodies and as a result will be moved to curse God and each other. It is not that all people at any given time will be plagued by them, not that an individual will suffer from them throughout all of life, but they will be a constant menace and many will suffer from them. In general, the plagues will grow worse as the time of Christ's return draws near, even as the ten plagues on the Egyptians grew worse before the exodus. These may very well be spiritual disease.

16:3 Sea...blood. The flow of blood (not yet coagulated) is such that only a very recent corpse could produce it, a person who has just died. While the human race itself is not directly struck, this “blood as from a corpse” is a horrifying plague that strikes the seas. Whatever is involved, it certainly suggests that increasingly the sea, the bodies of salt water, will be made unfit for people or beasts, and that some of the basic requirements for sustaining human life will be severely hindered. For example, the food chain that supplies human food and the cycle by which ocean water evaporates and then provides rain to water the earth could fail. All life in the seas will die in this plague (in contrast to just one third of the sea’s living things in 8:8-9), indicating that as the time of judgment at the End draws nearer, more and more of the seas of the earth will be so plagued.

16:5 angel...waters. Within Judaism angels under God’s authority were understood to be in charge of the elements of creation. They controlled the elements, dispensing them or restraining them, all at God’s direction for the punishment or care of humanity, especially for the sake of God’s own people. Here in 16:5 John sees another such angel, an angel of the waters that have just been plagued. Whether or not this angel was in charge of these waters in the sense of Jewish tradition, he evidently has some responsibility for oversight and care of the waters.

16:7 altar. Personified. The voice speaks for the saints and their prayers, since the incense represents the prayers in which the saints petition God to judge their enemies on their behalf.

16:7 yes. The “amen” is a resounding “yes” to Yahweh, the Lord God Almighty. It confirms His acts of anger because God is true and righteous in his judgments as they are revealed (15:3-4). These acts of judgment will be even more visibly displayed in the following four plagues.

16:9 refused to repent. This they do not do in spite of all that God does to turn them from their rebellion and so rescue them from their eternal shame and ruin. These are general statements about humanity as a whole; they do not preclude the possibility that some may repent and believe in the true God.

16:10 throne of the beast. Here is a change of emphasis. It is no doubt the beast out of the sea (13:1–10), which is a symbol of civil government in its antichristian aspect. “Throne” occurs 42 times in Revelation. The other 40 references are to the throne of God.

Since the worshipers of the beast and its image refuse to repent, even though struck by these various plagues, God now strikes the object of their worship and allegiance.

16:12 his bowl. This angel introduces a scene that is parallel to the scene introduced by the sixth trumpet-angel: the last battle between the forces of evil and the church. The devil’s war against the church continues throughout the entire NT era, but it culminates in one last and greatest battle before the End at Christ’s return.

16:12 Kings...East. The enemies of ancient Israel often came from the east, from Mesopotamia, the region between the Tigris and the Euphrates. The origin of this evil host will not be a geographic location but rather a spiritual locus.

16:13 Frogs. Lev. 11:10 classifies the frog as an unclean animal. The imagery suggests the deceptive propaganda that will, in the last days, lead people to accept and support the cause of evil.

16:13 Dragon...Beast...False Prophet. This is the same unholy trinity which is found in Revelation 12-13, and which is symbolized by the number composed of three sixes: 666. In the economy of this unholy trinity, (Satan) the dragon is the mastermind. The beast is “the beast of the sea” (13:1) This is the first time in Revelation that this “false prophet” is mentioned. It appears that the evil spiritual entity previously called the “beast of the earth” is here called “the false prophet.” Revelation will mention “the false prophet” one more time.

16:16 Armageddon. It is a symbol of the final overthrow of evil by God. Here it is used not as the designation of a particular geographic place, but as a terrifying metaphor of a war that will cover the expanse of the entire earth, since the whole human race will be caught up in it.

16:17 into the air. This is the entire atmosphere that surrounds the earth, including the air that people breathe. This last plague encompasses and impacts the entire earth and all of the human race, much more than did the first six.

16:21 Plague of hail. Hail emphasizes the climax of God’s divine wrath in His anger over the sins and rebellion of humankind. In the OT God sometimes punished the enemies of His people on earth with hail.

Summary of Chapter 16

The seven bowls. This vision also is a symbolic representation of another aspect of the entire NT era. It symbolizes the pouring out of God’s judgment on an impenitent world.

(Meditation/Discussion)

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