

SECTION FIVE

CHAPTERS 15–16

THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES



○ U T L I N E

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REVELATION CHAPTER FIFTEEN



1. *And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.*

THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES

The events of Chapter 14 brought the earth to its end, though that chapter lacks any actual description of the world's decline and fall. Most of this fifth section will fill in those details. The new *sign* (compare 12:1) is tremendous in scope and astonishing in power. Seven angels will pour out the seven last plagues that the earth and its inhabitants must endure. That these are indeed the very last judgments to strike the earth is confirmed by the fact that *in them is filled up* [Gk—*teleo*, completed, finished, fulfilled] *the wrath of God*. These plagues are sent as a final call to man to remember his Creator and return to worship Him, but the apostasy of the world has progressed to the point that men only become angry and blaspheme God (16:11).

The word for *plague* is *plege*, translated in 13:3 as *wound*, and elsewhere *stripe* (Luke 12:48, Acts 16:23). The vials being poured out are like punishing stripes from a whip (II Cor 6:5) given because of sin and disobedience. The last verse of this section sums up well the purpose of the vision of the seven plagues: *And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great* (16:21). The theme of the seven last plagues is the final judgment of a wicked and apostate world, and is an appropriate conclusion to the trumpet section, whose theme was warning and judgment upon backslidden Christianity during the Church Age (Chapters 8-11).

2. *And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.*
3. *And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty: just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.*
4. *Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.*

THE VICTORS CELEBRATE THEIR DELIVERANCE

Before the seven angels pour out their *plagues*, John is shown a reassuring scene: the saints who have overcome, praising God in heaven. The seals and the trumpets both begin with a prelude portraying the glories of heaven, after which follows a series of judgments intended for the earth and its people. The great rewards the saints receive in heaven are evidences of God's love for those who have kept His commandments and fought courageously against the Beasts of the Dragon. It is significant that the well-being and comfort of the saints is shown before the judgment of the wicked.

Is this joyful scene the eternal abode of the saints, or *Abraham's bosom*, the waiting place of the souls who have died in the Lord (Luke 16:22). We believe it more likely to be the latter, which Jesus called *Paradise* (Luke 23:43), only because the scene comes at the beginning of this vision, and the earth has not ended yet, though the time is very near. The souls of the martyrs have been patiently waiting (a figure of speech) for the day of the Lord's return. The seven plagues will bring the world to the beginning of that very day.

The victorious ones are standing on a *sea of glass* with the *harps of God* singing the *song of Moses*. We first saw this *sea of glass* back in Chapter 4, stretching crystal clear before the Throne of God. Its symbolic significance is drawn from the *molten sea* of the OT temple, a type of the Word of God, and its promises constitute the basis for our salvation. Read more about the meaning of the *sea of glass* on page 100. The sea is like a barrier or boundary of heaven. Like the children of Israel going through the Red Sea and arriving safely on the other side, the children of God have passed from the natural life to the spiritual, and stand triumphantly victorious over the Beast and his wiles, forever to dwell with the *King of saints*.

The glassy sea, like God's Word, is perfect in quality: indestructible, level, and endless. But it is *mingled with fire*, symbolizing the great trials and afflictions that these saints have come through (I Peter 1:7). The Bible road does not promise easy traveling, but the final destination is beyond comprehension. *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory* (II Cor 4:17).

Mingled with fire. The words are a little uncomfortable to us. What burdens will I be called to bear, what trials must I go through to be numbered with the victorious ones on the other side of that crystal sea? Many have given their lives to keep their heavenly ticket in hand, but what have I done?

Whether we are called to deeds great or small, one distinctive feature is shared by all on the *sea of glass*, and that is victory over the Beast, his image, his mark, and his name. This means victory over every temptation of the Dragon: deception, worldliness, and sins of the flesh. The passage is written as if it were describing a great and terrible battle to the death, but this is a spiritual battle of highest consequences for our very souls.

Who is this Beast that fights every soul that attempts to gain eternal life? There can be only one answer, and that is the Devil himself. We saw in the previous section that the kingdom of darkness, led by the evil trinity of Satan, Beast, and False Prophet, worked together to war against the Kingdom of Christ. We realized that though the Beast had specific allusions to worldly government and culture and that the False Prophet had obvious similarities to specific false religions, they also have a broader scope of application, for the Devil uses every method at his disposal to wreck the faith of the Christian. We cannot truly divide the False Prophet and Satan, for the False Prophet is Satan. Neither can we divide the Beast and False Prophet because they depend upon each other; they are equally Satan. Satan, the prince of this world, and the Beast are synonymous (see page 333).

The Beast in verse 4 is primarily the False Prophet of Chapter 13, for it is he that makes an image, imposes a mark upon the inhabitants of the earth, and has a distinctive number. The False Prophet is Satan as deceiver, the Antichrist, who takes many different forms, some of which have deceived millions while others only a few. The False Prophet uses his confederate, the first Beast, as an aid in his corrupting devices. There are *many antichrists* (I John 2:18), and any one of them is strong enough to keep us out of heaven if we allow ourselves to be deceived.

The False Prophet secretly attacks man's innermost part, what we often call his "self." A corrupted self cannot glorify God, and this the Devil knows from his own experience. Overcoming the Beast means to overcome self, to utterly die to self, and to live for Christ. Paul says, *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me* (Gal 2:20). Any person who lives like this has overcome the Beast, for self has been replaced by Christ.

The Beast of verse 2 represents Satan as the great tempter and deceiver of Man. The Beasts are the visible creations of the Dragon—antichrists of great variety that deceive wicked and righteous alike. The Beast is the symbol of choice here because just before Christ's return there will be a *little season* in which the Beast will become so powerful that he is said to be Satan loosed upon the earth (Chapter 20). Here in Chapter 15, the seven last plagues are

focused on those last days, when the power of the Beast is stronger than at any time since the resurrection of Christ. An elect remnant will still be overcoming the Beast when Christ returns, but they will be mightily outnumbered by Beast-worshippers.

The statement that the overcomers have *gotten the victory over the Beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name* can be more generally applied as well. The *Beast* could be seen as Satan the roaring lion; the *image* representing the pride and love of self; the *mark* symbolizing Satan's mark of ownership; and the *number of his name* representing the antichrists of the lusts of flesh and mind. Over all of these the Christian must triumph if he is to stand victorious on the crystal sea of glass. The Greek wording for this phrase is unusual, literally reading "those who have overcome out of the Beast, and out of his image, and out of the number of his name." It is similar to the call of Christ to His people living in Babylon: *Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues* (Rev 18:4). No greater call or warning can be given to the people of the King. The Beast of this world has claimed more souls than any other foe that a Christian will face. *Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you* (II Cor 6:17). The end-time Church needs this to be taught and exemplified in their lifestyle more than ever before.

THE SONG OF THE REDEEMED

The redeemed *sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb* (v3). After Israel experienced the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea (Ex 15), Moses wrote a special song of praise to God, and all the children of Israel sang and rejoiced because of their great deliverance. It is an appropriate praise song for those standing before the Throne, for they have been delivered out of this world, and their enemies have been forever silenced.

The second section of the Book (Chapters 4-7) utilizes many symbols from the OT temple. This section draws its symbolism from the account of Israel's deliverance out of Egypt. We have already seen the saints cross the glassy sea, singing the song of Moses on the other shore. Now the prophecy

uses symbolism from the tabernacle in the wilderness, and the seven plagues themselves are drawn from the ten plagues that fell upon Egypt. The overall picture shows the final deliverance of the Church out of the *world*, known in the Revelation as Babylon, *the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt* (11:8).

The *song of the Lamb* is sung by the redeemed ones, a shout of triumph that fills heaven: *Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb! Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever.* (7:10, 12). Each of the seven sections has at least one scene showing the saints of the ages rejoicing around the heavenly Throne, praising the Lamb for their redemption. As we read these uplifting passages the cares of this world and the struggles of life grow dim. Heaven becomes real, and very close. We can almost hear the songs drifting down: *Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy* (v3-4). Surely the most glorious theme of the Revelation is heaven. The pictures are awesome in scope and inspire the soul to greater commitment. It gives incentive to overcome the Beast of self, and to shout the glad news to the world.

Within the song of saints we have these words: *all nations shall come and worship before Thee; for Thy judgments are made manifest* (v4). There is a day coming when *every knee shall bow...before the judgment seat of Christ* (Rom 14:10-11). The word for *worship* here is *proskuneo*, which means to prostrate oneself in homage. There is another word for worship, *latreuo*, which means to worship by serving God—actions that demonstrate our worship (see Acts 24:14). We have a choice to serve God now, and when our knees bow before Him on the judgment day it will be in joy and happiness. Those who do not serve God will bow too, acknowledging His righteousness; but they will prostrate themselves in apprehension and fear, knowing that they will be held accountable for their sins and rejection of Christ.

It is at the *great white Throne* that God's *judgments* [Gk—*dikaioma*, *righteous acts*] *are made manifest* (v4). The acts of God in calling man to repentance will be revealed and explained so that every guilty person is without

excuse and will stand speechless before Almighty God. The saints do not fear standing before the Throne on that day, for they know that when their name is called, Jesus will say, *Well done, thou good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy Lord* (Mt 25:21).

All nations shall come and worship before Thee (v4). This refrain in the song of the saints is based on the last verses of Isaiah, which figuratively describe the benefits of eternal life for all those who are faithful to the end. *For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before Me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before Me, saith the Lord. And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcases of the men that have transgressed against Me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh* (Is 66:22-24).

In heaven, *all flesh* will worship God—there will be nothing evil to corrupt the *new heavens and earth*. Isaiah 66 has been set forth by some Millennialists to describe their Millennial Kingdom, but since Jesus interprets Isaiah 66:24 to be describing the torments of Hell, it only makes sense to understand the preceding verses to be a spiritual description of heaven. Moreover, Revelation 21 is understood by both Futurists and Historicists to be a description of heaven, and it begins with: *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth*, the same words of Isaiah 66:22.

5. *And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened:*
6. *And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles.*
7. *And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever.*
8. *And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.*

SEVEN ANGELS FROM THE HEAVENLY TEMPLE

The seven vial-plagues are formally introduced by the opening of *the Temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven* (v5). The Temple in heaven symbolizes the dwelling place of Almighty God, as we have seen previously (see 7:15, 11:19, 14:17). As always in the Revelation, the word for temple is *naos*, which refers to the Holy Place within the temple buildings (see page 242). Now John adds a new expression to the *naos*—the *tabernacle of the testimony*. This is a reference to the tabernacle that God commissioned Moses to make after the Israelites had left Egypt (same phrase in Acts 7:44). The tabernacle was an elaborate structure that could be disassembled and moved as the Jews travelled through the wilderness. For centuries it was the center for Jewish worship and the special dwelling place of God. It was eventually replaced by the permanent temple that Solomon built. The tabernacle and the temple are equivalent symbols, and the usage of the tabernacle as a symbol in chapter 15 again draws imagery from the earlier history of Israel.

Within the tabernacle was the Holy Place, a sacred room hidden behind thick curtains. Only a certain order of priests were allowed to enter it. Within the Holy Place was the Holy of Holies, the dwelling place of God. Only the High Priest was allowed to enter it, and only once a year at that. The Holy of Holies contained the most sacred symbol of all: the *ark of the testimony* (Ex 40:3), also called the *ark of the covenant*. It is from this inner chamber, the closest representation of the dwelling place of God to be found in the Bible, that the seven plagues originate. The *naos* of the tabernacle is opened to let out the bowls of God's wrath and then it is closed; nobody is permitted to see inside until the plagues have been completed.

The *ark of the covenant* contained the two tables of stone which God gave to Moses. The requirements of the covenant were engraved on these stones, written by the finger of God. The seven bowls complete the purpose of God for man contained in His Covenant, both Old and New.

The seven angels and their plagues come out of the Temple dressed in pure white linen with golden sashes across their breasts (v6, compare 1:13). The white linen represents righteousness (19:8), and the golden girdles represent divine purity. The plagues are righteous and justified, coming from the purity

and truthfulness of Omnipotent God. The bowl-judgments of the next chapter make men angry and cause them to blaspheme God, but their anger is completely misplaced. The judgments come because of their own wickedness and rebellion, and God's justice requires a proper recompense for all iniquity.

One of the four living creatures gives the angels *seven golden vials full of the wrath of God* (v7). It appears that these *vials*, or bowls in contemporary English, are in addition to the seven plagues, for the angels had the plagues when they came out of the Temple (v6). Probably the idea is that the seven angels put their plagues into the bowls of wrath in preparation for the command to pour them out upon the earth. The bowls are another symbol from the OT tabernacle, where they were used extensively in administering the sacrifices and offerings that God had ordained. There is one conspicuous difference: the tabernacle's bowls were made entirely of brass (Ex 27:19), but the heavenly ones are made of gold. Brass represents judgment and punishment, and at first glance would seem to be a fitting symbol here. There is, however, no judgment, curse, or punishment in heaven, and brass would be inappropriate there. Brass is an earthly element with lower connotations. The bowls are instruments of service, and the fact that they are made of gold indicates the attributes of holiness, justice, and righteousness.

Bowls are not directly used in symbolic language, but are often implied under the figurative picture of God's wrath being *poured out* upon wickedness. *Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, Mine anger and My fury shall be poured out upon this place* (Jer 7:20; see also II Chr 12:7, 34:25; Lam 2:4, 4:11; Eze 22:31; Nahum 1:6). In Revelation 4:10, those who worship the Beast *shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone.*

Is there any significance to the fact that one of the four living creatures is employed in giving the *golden vials* to the seven angels? The four living creatures represent angelic beings of the highest order, those the very closest to Almighty God (see page 102). Except for here and in the four seals of Chapter 6 we do not see them involved in activity related to the earth. They are often mentioned as being before the Throne glorifying God. Perhaps their

significance here is to show again that these judgments are of utmost importance, lesser angels not being sufficient to be entrusted with carrying out these commands.

The bowls given to the seven angels are *full of the wrath of God*. Usually *wrath* in the Revelation is related to the very end of the world (6:16, 11:18, 14:10, 16:19, 19:15), and that would seem to be the case here as well. While the bowl-judgments of the wrath of God take place near the end of the world, God's acts of righteous anger have happened throughout history. The trumpets symbolized these historic judgments of warning and purging of the Church (see Chapter 8), but the bowls are beyond the warning stage. They are wrath judgments poured out upon the earth in righteous indignation. Sin and rebellion never go unpunished, and the wickedness of the end-time world will compare with that of Sodom and Gomorrah, bringing an equally terrible punishment.

After the seven angels have received their plagues, John watches as the Temple fills with smoke from the power and glory of God (v8). This is an allusion to the two OT occasions when the glory of God came into the tabernacle in the wilderness and later into Solomon's temple (Ex 40:34; II Chr 5:14). Those events were accompanied by great demonstrations of God's power, and the seven bowl-judgments are also tremendous acts of God.

In a vision, Isaiah also saw God in the temple, *and the house was filled with smoke* (Is 6:4). David wrote Psalms 18 after the Lord had *delivered him from the hands of all his enemies*. It describes how he cried to the Lord, and how He heard *out of His temple*, coming on the wings of a cherub to his aid: *because He was wroth there went up a smoke out of His nostrils, and fire out of His mouth devoured; coals were kindled by it* (Ps 18:8). Smoke seems to be a symbol of God's anger against His enemies and those who break His Covenant. These people are warned that *the Lord will not spare him, but the anger of the Lord and His jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven* (Deut 29:20). These are fearful words of warning, and they are not just threats; the next chapter shows the action that follows.

No man was able to enter into the Temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled (v8). Such was also the case when the glory of God descended upon the tabernacle and the temple. The meaning here is that no one may intercede to turn away the wrath of God from His purpose. The works of iniquity require divine punishment, and it cannot be averted or delayed. The angels are prepared and waiting to carry out their terrible tasks. The mercy-seat is closed and the time of judgment has come. It is similar to Jeremiah 15:1, when the Lord said about the Israelites: *Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of My sight.* The day of intercession is past, the decree of judgment has been sent forth, and the bowls of wrath will immediately begin. We do not believe that this means God will not hear prayer during this time, but that these plagues simply do not turn men in prayer to Him. Hardened and indifferent, they blaspheme God and *repent not of their deeds* (16:11). Surely some will understand and turn to God, but very few.

REVELATION CHAPTER SIXTEEN



1. *And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.*

THE TIME AND SETTING OF THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES

The seven angels with the seven *vials of the wrath of God* are sent forth by a *great voice out of the Temple* in heaven. In light of 15:8, the *great voice* is either that of a high-ranking angel in the Temple, or is the voice of God Himself. The seven bowl-judgments of the seven angels are the most severe plagues that we will see in the entire Book of Revelation. They are in many ways like the seven trumpets of Chapter 8, but while the trumpet-visions showed partial judgments in that only one-third was smitten, the bowl-judgments are much more severe: every living soul dies in the sea, all the waters become blood, etc.

The symbols for the trumpets and bowls are closely related, the first four being identical: the earth, the sea, the fresh waters, and the heavens. The fifth trumpet describes the kingdom of darkness led by the star fallen from heaven, and the fifth bowl is poured out on the kingdom of the Beast. The sixth trumpet and bowl both describe the destruction of the world and the great spiritual battle that will take place between Satan and Christ at that time. They both use the Euphrates River as part of their description, the only two occurrences of the term in the NT. The seventh trumpet and bowl simply announce that the end of the world has fully come. Both the trumpets and bowls are introduced with a scene of the dead in Christ reigning in heaven, and both have detailed descriptions of the heavenly Temple. Seven angels carry out the commands from the Temple in heaven, and both accounts say that these are *the seven angels*, implying that they are the same angels (8:2, 15:6).

There is, however, a distinct difference between the trumpets and bowls, and that is the time-setting. The trumpets sound again and again throughout the Church Age, making them a timeless message for God's people. The bowls are *the seven last plagues* that the earth and its inhabitants must endure, for *in them is filled up* [Gk—*teleo*, completed, finished, fulfilled] *the wrath of God* (see 15:1). They are complete judgments, not partial ones, and they are beyond intercession (15:8). The bowls are poured out on the kingdom of darkness described by the fifth trumpet, which in turn corresponds to the *little season* that the Dragon is loosed out of his prison at the end-time (20:3). The overall picture and theme of the chapter is God's judgment upon wicked mankind, and the deliverance of God's people out of the apostate *Babylon* of this world.

Are the bowls successive or simultaneous? A hard, or maybe impossible question to answer absolutely, but we do have a few reference points. The sixth bowl describes an event, the final death throes of the world. It corresponds directly with the time and details of the sixth seal and sixth trumpet. The same scene appears in 19:19 and 20:8, describing the end of the world as a great and final battle—the armies of the Beast gathered against the armies of heaven. The seventh bowl, paralleling the seventh seal and trumpet, is a simple announcement that the end has come, the world is over, and the eternal states of heaven and hell have begun. This establishes the end-point of the vision. The first five bowls are harder to place in a time-line. Their severity

indicates that they are very close to the end; final acts of God given as a last call for men to repent. Probably they will fall in rapid succession as God attempts to get the attention of His indifferent creation. For the most part, they will be unrecognized by arrogant, reprobate mankind, but a few will surely take notice and repent.

The bowls are poured out *upon the earth* (v1), the corrupted and sin contaminated world over which Satan, that Beast of deceit, has gained control. The individual *plagues* have many similarities with the ten plagues the Lord brought on Egypt in delivering the Israelites out of bondage. Both sets of plagues fall upon the unbelievers, and those belonging to the true faith are not afflicted by them. They are also similar in that both describe the delivering of God's people out of this world. The first deliverance, under Moses as a type of Christ, was physical and temporal; the last will be spiritual and permanent in heaven.

Are the recipients of the bowl-plagues the heathen world, or disobedient people who are fully aware of God's Word and its requirements? We believe that it is the latter group who will most fully experience the wrath of God. These include those who have heard the Gospel and rejected it, as well as those who say they are following its path but explain away the requirements they find distasteful. The end of the age will see the most severe erosion of godliness and morals within the deepest parts of the visible Church. Indeed, if those days were not shortened, *there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened* (Mt 24:22).

Down through history the trumpets sounded warning judgments to the Churches of the Kingdom. At the end, most people are not listening anymore, and the bowl-judgments are the Lord's final *strange work* (Is 28:21) to purge His people and call for repentance. It is like the prophet Jeremiah lamenting the terrible judgment that God brought upon Judah and Jerusalem because of the continuing wickedness of the Jews: *The Lord hath accomplished His fury; He hath poured out His fierce anger, and hath kindled a fire in Zion, and it hath devoured the foundations thereof* (Lam 4:11).

The bowls graphically show that God is the source of many of the natural and man-caused disasters that strike the earth. Though atheists and doubters try to make God look like an ogre because He allows thousands to die in

floods and earthquakes, they completely misunderstand the circumstances. Rather than ask why a loving God would allow a devastating tsunami to kill 200,000 people in a wicked and corrupt society that is renowned for its immorality and persecution of Christianity, we should ask how a loving God could not bring such judgments on these people who are in desperate need of a wake up call. After all, natural life lasts only about 70 years. Eternity is forever. Should not God do everything possible to warn those who have forgotten Him, and who will end up in Hell forever if they do not heed His voice? Humanism places the highest value possible on natural life, and its every argument is based upon that premise. The Christian knows otherwise, and millions have demonstrated this in that they have readily given their natural lives in order to gain the spiritual life that God has promised to all who believe in Christ.

The bowl-judgments are severe and destructive, forcing men to stop, think, and re-evaluate their philosophy of life. They will either drive men to God, or will cause men to reject Him. Though they are harsh and violent, they are also righteous and deserved. God uses drastic measures to speak to those who are not listening, and the end-time world will definitely require the utmost warnings.

2. And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image.

THE CHRISTIANIZED WORLD IS AFFLICTED

The first bowl is poured out upon the *earth*, and a *noisome* [Gk—*kakos*, see 2:2] and *grievous* [*poneros*] *sore* falls upon the Beast-worshippers of the world. These words occur often in the NT and are almost always translated *wicked* or *evil*. This is the only place they are translated *noisome* and *grievous*. I have not been able to determine why the translators have chosen to use these particular words, though they probably did so with good reason. The chief symbol of the verse is the *sore* (Gk—*helkos*), which is like the open ulcer or

boil that God brought upon the Egyptians in the sixth plague (Ex 9:10). In Moses' prophetic speech to the Jews just before he died, he warned that if Israel fell away from God, He would *smite thee in the knees, and in the legs, with a sore botch that cannot be healed, from the sole of thy foot unto the top of thy head*. It would be the *botch of Egypt*, and would be a *plague of sore sicknesses and long continuance* (Deut 28:35, 27, 59). Deuteronomy 28 was written to keep the Israelites from forsaking God, but metaphorically it is true for God's people of the New Covenant also. The *sore botch* is a punishment that God brings because of sin, and its literal fulfillment varies by person. It could be a physical bodily sore, a mental condition, a natural calamity, an accident, a disease, or something else.

Currently we have one example of such a *sore*, and that is the incurable AIDS virus. It is hard not to see the standing condemnation that AIDS proclaims against the sinful homosexual lifestyle, though gay-rights activists refuse to acknowledge it. This *sore* is not just a physical plague; it becomes a mental mind-set that rules every thought and action. All of life becomes an angry, rebellious struggle against everything morally right, attempting by speech and force to blot out any statement or rule that could be understood to censure homosexuality. The bitterness and hostility of non-Christians towards God's moral law has never been more extreme. They fight out of hatred and a guilty conscience, and it seems like every day another line is crossed, another Biblical law found to be "unconstitutional." It becomes a consuming obsession as they try to wipe out any reference to God and moral responsibility, and it leads society ever further from the truth. It is a noisome and grievous sore to these Beast-worshippers, a sore that cannot possibly be healed by the methods that they are using.

The first three symbolic targets of God's wrath are exact repeats from the trumpet series—*earth, sea, fountains of waters*. The earth and sea are companion figures of Bible imagery, both representing people groups of the world. But there is a difference between the two. The sea represents *peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues* (17:15); the heathen nations who have little or no exposure to the Gospel. The *earth* in figurative contexts represents the sin-fallen people who have knowledge of God and His laws, but have largely rejected them. *Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea* (12:12).

Man's relationship with the *earth* is crucial to understanding how this imagery is used in the Bible. Man was formed from the dust of the earth, and after Adam sinned the future of man and earth were bound together when God cursed the earth because of Adam's sin (Gen 3:17f). The earth shares in the good fortunes of Godly men, and *mourns* when evil takes control (Hosea 4:1f). Isaiah 24 is a long lament concerning the earth, and how it *is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left* (Is 24:5-6). Though the literal earth is spoiled by sin and decaying into ruin, one day it will be created new again—a new heaven and a new earth, with no more sea (Is 65:17; II Peter 3:13; Rev 21:1; see also the glossary for more on the earth and sea).

The pouring out of the first bowl upon the *earth* is appropriate, for those who are most responsible are held accountable and judged before the heathen of the *sea*. The *earth* represents those men who have received *the mark of the Beast* and are worshipping his image. They have allowed themselves to be deceived by the Beast of this world, and have given themselves over to following his kingdom of darkness. Though the time for final judgment has come for apostate men and heathen alike, judgment begins with those in the house of God (I Peter 4:17). Now, just as God delivered His people out of Egypt by the ten plagues, so He will deliver His people out of mystical *Babylon* by the seven last plagues.

3. And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea.

THE HEATHEN WORLD IS SMITTEN

The second bowl is poured out upon the *sea*, and it becomes blood. This is not just the color red, but real *blood*, like that of *a dead man*. Here again we are drawn to the plagues of Egypt, this time to the first plague: *Take thy rod, and stretch out thine hand upon the waters of Egypt, upon their streams, upon*

their rivers, and upon their ponds, and upon all their pools of water, that they may become blood; and that there may be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood, and in vessels of stone. . . . And the fish that was in the river [the Nile] died; and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt (Ex 7:19-21). Such a terrible and miraculous plague must have brought extreme hardship for the Egyptians, and definitely got their attention. But when the plague was taken away they soon forgot about their troubles and Pharaoh *hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had said (Ex 8:15)*. So it is with those under the merciful call of God today, listening when they are in need but hard of heart when all is going well.

The picture of the sea turning to blood gives the idea of death for the heathen of the world, for this is the symbolic meaning of blood (see glossary). Is this physical or spiritual death? Maybe both, though spiritual death is to be feared much more than the death of the body. No man can escape physical death, but we can escape spiritual death. As we showed earlier, the sea represents the restless nations and peoples of the world that do not know God. Like those under the first bowl, the time of the end has come for these as well.

How God will judge those who have not been exposed to the Gospel message and given equal opportunity for salvation, we do not fully know. They will not receive the same punishment as those who have lived under the sound of the Gospel and have knowingly rejected its call. This is clear from passages like Luke 12:47. Likewise, notice here that while the *earth* receives “evil and wicked sores,” implying a slow and painful death, the inhabitants of the *sea* seem to die without those troubles. Nevertheless, *every living soul died in the sea*.

The plague of blood in Egypt did not affect the *sea*, but the fresh waters of the *rivers and ponds*. The Egyptian plague of blood seems to bear a close correspondence to the third bowl, which is notably similar to this second bowl. As God brought plague after plague upon Egypt, Pharaoh alternated between allowing and refusing to let the Israelites go. Finally, after the terrible deaths of every firstborn of Egypt, Pharaoh relented, and even drove the Israelites out of the land, only to change his mind and come with his entire

army against the defenseless Jews. Then God arose and fought for Israel, and wrought a tremendous victory. The armies of Egypt were entirely wiped out; not even one person survived. Israel passed through the Red Sea and arrived safely on the other side, seeing the dead bodies of the Egyptians upon the sea shore all about them. This picture is so similar to the scenes of the deliverance of *the camp of the saints* that we will see in Chapters 17-20, that we cannot miss its significance here in the bowl-series. It draws the spiritual background for those descriptive visions coming in the next section of the Book.

4. *And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood.*
5. *And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus.*
6. *For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.*
7. *And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.*

THE HARLOT IS JUDGED BY GOD

The third bowl brings more judgment under the symbolism of *blood*, this time falling upon the *rivers and fountains of waters*—the fresh waters of the earth. We understand these waters to represent spiritual life—*the water of life* and *living waters* (see glossary). This applies to visible Christian institutions: churches, universities, and organizations. Remarkably, these institutions will turn to *blood*; that is, their offering of spiritual life is so corrupted by false teaching and worldly doctrines that it brings spiritual death to those who drink it. The picture is so shocking that a further explanation is given, an assurance that this truly is just. *Thou art righteous, O Lord, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets* (v5-6). These lying teachers, like *ravens wolves* (Mt 7:15), have led many to spiritual death, but their audience shares in the blame: *For the time will come when they will*

not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears (II Tim 4:3). Together, minister and lay member, pastor and flock, will drink from living waters poisoned with death.

There is also a physical fulfillment to these verses. The Catholics and Protestants have literally *shed the blood* of millions of faithful saints of God. Under the banner of Christ they relentlessly slaughtered true Christians for centuries, and it is only in the last 200 years that physical persecution has ended from the “Christian” quarter. It is significant that *another* voice agreeing with the sentence of death comes from the *altar*. This *altar* is where *the souls of them that were slain for the word of God* wait for justice to be done (6:9), and where the prayers of the saints ascend to God (8:3). Finally answered is their cry: *How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?* (6:10).

According to our interpretation of these verses the Church will see a steady decline in true and powerful Christian living as the end grows nearer. Like the Laodiceans, worldly interests will come before the teachings of Christ, and faith will be hard to find on the earth. The *seducers* of the Gospel will *wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived* (II Tim 3:13). We must sound the warning loud, for many of our close friends and relatives have already fallen away. The time is shortening, *the night cometh, when no man can work* (John 9:4).

Chapter 17 gives a detailed picture of the judgment of apostate Christianity under the symbolism of a Harlot. The Harlot is the end-time form of the False Prophet, and represents a people who have left their true Husband for an adulterous relationship with the worldly Babylon. The connection of the Harlot in Chapter 17 to the third bowl can especially be seen in comparing verse 6 with 17:6, *And I saw the [harlot] drunken with the blood of the saints*. The deceived of the false church are numerous at the end-time of the world.

8. *And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire.*
9. *And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.*

MEN SCORCHED WITH FIRE

The fourth bowl uses the *sun* in a symbolic sense, as also did the fourth trumpet, which depicted the sun, moon and stars being darkened by one-third, bringing darkness upon the earth for one-third of the day and night. The figurative meaning of the warning trumpet was that sin and spiritual poverty would invade the Church, leading a portion of men astray. The bowl-judgment is much more severe, and its figurative description opposite that of the trumpet. The sun becomes extremely bright and hot, scorching men with *fire* and *great heat*. The overall picture is one of pain and discomfort, causing men to blaspheme the *name of God*. Why this pain, and is it a physical one or spiritual? This we hope to answer.

The heat is probably an allusion to that terrible judgment Moses prophesied would fall upon the Israelites if they fell away from following the Lord: *The Lord shall smite thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blasting, and with mildew; and they shall pursue thee until thou perish* (Deut 28:22, see also 32:24). The *great heat* is an act of judgment from God, and could be afflictions both physical and mental. In the parable of the sower the seed that fell on stony ground withered when the sun came up and scorched it, *because it had no root*. Jesus interpreted this for the disciples: *And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the Word, immediately receive it with gladness; and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the Word's sake, immediately they are offended* (Mark 4:16-17). In this parable, the scorching heat from the sun represents affliction and hardship because of the requirements of the Word.

We believe this to be likewise true of the fourth bowl. The effect is just the opposite of the darkening of the sun. The sun is too bright for people to bear; they hate its heat and blaspheme God because of their discomfort. It burns them with *fire*, which often symbolizes the Holy Ghost.

The sun by itself is a symbol of God's law and righteous government. Christ is called *the Sun of righteousness* risen *with healing in His wings* (Mal 4:2). And God's justice is symbolized by the light of the sun in several OT

accounts like Num 25, the story of how the children of Israel sinned by committing fornication with the Moabites. God spoke to Moses and commanded that these immoral men be killed, and that they should *take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel* (Num 25:4, see also II Sam 12:11). Likewise, the going down of the sun released one from uncleanness under the OT law (Lev 22:7; Deut 23:11, Ex 22:26). The activities of man *under the sun* are brought out and exposed by the light of the sun, and this is what God wants to happen. The all-seeing eye of God rewards righteousness and metes out justice within the Kingdom of Christ. We see this illustrated in Ps 84:11, *For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.*

The picture of the sun going *down at noon* (Amos 8:9) or the sun going *down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them* (Micah 3:6) shows the withdrawal of God's attention and favor. Evil things happen in the dark, and without the sun's light they continue unchecked. But this is not the description we see in the fourth bowl. The picture here is of a sun that is extremely hot, and its fire and heat indicate the *true and righteous judgments* (v7) of God. The great wickedness of man requires His justice to be meted out in bowls of wrath poured out upon the earth. They will afflict the consciences of men, forcing them to make a choice between truth and error—their consciences will be either pure, or seared as with a hot iron. We see an example of this choice today in the atheistic, anti-God crowd of professors and “intellectuals” versus the ministers of Christ *holding forth the word of life* (Php 2:16). The hatred and contempt with which these men of corrupted minds treat the pure and truthful words of the Gospel is astonishing, yet enlightening. The heat of the sun is fierce; likewise is the burning of an evil conscience when it is exposed to the truth of righteous-living men.

10. And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain,

11. And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.

THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD IN TURMOIL

The fifth bowl is a picture of pain, sores, and darkness. It reminds one of a prison; of solitary confinement in a deep, cold, and dark-black dungeon with not one glimmer of light to be seen, and not a hope of one ever appearing. This plague afflicts the *kingdom* of the *Beast*—the kingdom of darkness that the Dragon controls on this earth. Their pains and sores are so great that they bite their tongues in anguish and suffering. In this there is an unmistakable similarity to the fifth woe-trumpet, and its *torment* of scorpion stings (9:5). Darkness was also a plague that the Egyptians endured when God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt. In fact, it was the last plague they received before the night of Israel's deliverance.

Exactly how this will be fulfilled we hesitate to positively say, but reviewing the symbols and their meanings will help us set forth an application. The realm of the prophecy's fulfillment is primarily the physical earth, and not the invisible spiritual world. We say this because men receive the effects of this plague, and they seem to have the ability to repent. There is however, a dark-spirit side of this bowl-judgment, for the darkness causes unusual physical pains and sores. Darkness does not normally lead to such ailments, though it does bring mental suffering, depression, and anger, and can even lead to mental retardation and suicide.

Like the companion trumpet-judgment, the overall picture of this bowl suggests that demonic influence is a primary cause for the suffering and painful sores. The chronological placement of this bowl would point to a fulfillment within that *little season* when the Dragon and his horde of demons are loosed from their prison to deceive the nations of the world into assembling in battle against the armies of heaven (20:3). The next bowl details this very event. These men *gnaw their tongues for pain*, a condition of anguish similar to the locust-army of demons in the fifth trumpet that *tormented* men until they sought for death but it fled from them (9:6).

The vial of wrath is poured out on *the seat of the Beast*. Is this the first Beast, which we saw rise out of the sea, or the second beast, which came out of the earth? The question is not easily answered. Every time we read about the second beast in the Book of Revelation it is further identified by its image,

mark, and name. Since verse 10 says nothing about these, we would naturally identify it as the first Beast that rose out of the sea. However, a good argument can also be made that this is the second beast, for so far in the bowls, we have been dealing with the second beast, which is fully named in verse 1. Thus it is very possible that the beasts of the first and fifth bowls are the same—the second beast with an image, mark and name. A third possibility is that this beast is the Dragon-beast of Chapter 12. Though he is never actually called a beast there, a dragon is by definition, a beast, and the Dragon is called a beast in Chapter 17 (compare 17:8 with 20:7).

After reviewing the details, we believe that the Beast of verse 10 probably refers to the first Beast out of the sea. The first bowl is poured out on the earth, symbolically the realm of the second beast of the False Prophet. The next bowl judged the kindreds, tribes and nations of the world, and the third bowl fell upon the “Christian” organizations. It would seem likely that a final judgment is also in store for the first Beast. Additionally, it is significant that as the first Beast is introduced back in Chapter 13, we read that *the Dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority* (13:2). Here the fifth bowl is poured out *upon the seat of the Beast*. In both cases the word translated *seat* is *thronos*, which is usually translated *throne*.

As we showed in Chapter 13, the first Beast represents the kingdoms of the world—its governments, authorities, courts, councils and organizations. These have always been opposed to the Kingdom of Christ, persecuting her people and usurping her authority. It is upon this seat of authority that the fifth bowl of wrath is poured out, and darkness, pain, and torment results. The implication is grim—turmoil and struggle will grip the governments of the world, leading to great tribulation and suffering. Darkness is often used to describe the conditions of a nation that is in civil and social upheaval, a time when governmental authorities cannot hold back the wickedness and violence of a society that has rejected God.

The chief symbol of the passage is *darkness*. The gnawing of the tongues, the pains, and the sores all come as a result of this strange darkness. Like the ninth plague of Egypt, it is a thick and utter darkness. Darkness represents wickedness, sin, and spiritual deficiency. It characterizes the evil spirit-world of demons, working to corrupt and defile every good thing that God has

created. Invariably this blackness descends upon a people who have forsaken God; a people who once walked in the light of His favor but have turned aside and followed the winding paths of this world. Isaiah 59 is a sad picture of Israel in such a state, and we quote a few verses to illustrate: *Therefore is judgment [or justice] far from us, neither doth justice [or righteousness] overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men. We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves: we look for judgment, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us. For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them.*

What a sad and pitiable state to be in! Lost in darkness and obscurity, and weighed down with multiplied sin and iniquity. These are the pains and sores of those smitten by the eleventh-hour plague of darkness. The *god of this world*—the Beast—*hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them* (II Cor 4:4). Their pains and sores do not turn them to God. They do not repent of their deeds and therefore *the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved* (Jer 8:20).

This is the last bowl to be poured out before the final and great battle of the end of the world as described by the sixth bowl-judgment. It will probably be fulfilled in the near future, though world events of the last few decades make one wonder if they could already have begun to be fulfilled. The question must be asked, what are the visible signs of the darkening of the kingdoms of the world? We know that there will be pain, torment, and confusion. Many people believe that the end-time era will see a final extreme persecution of the Church at the hands of wicked rulers under the control of Satan; the whole world will be at war, rule and law will be lost, and a time of great tribulation will grip all mankind.

While this is definitely a possibility, we should also recognize that the turmoil of the governments of the world during the last 200 years has been unprecedented in history. World Wars I and II were global conflicts that reshaped the world at great cost to human life, and earlier civil wars in America,

France, Spain, Italy, and Russia were also appalling in their atrocities. Today, terrible dictators ruthlessly kill their own people by sword and starvation, and terrorists are seemingly everywhere, willing to die themselves if they can only kill a few innocents with them. World conditions appear to be worsening, and the stage is fully set for Christ's return at any time—it may be soon or hundreds of years from now. God alone knows when the bowls are to be poured out. Then *shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black: because I have spoken it, I have purposed it, and will not repent, neither will I turn back from it* (Jer 4:28). Though this is a prophecy against Jerusalem before she was carried away into Babylon, it is a fitting description of the end of the world as well.

12. *And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.*
13. *And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.*
14. *For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto 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 come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.*
16. *And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.*

THE FINAL GATHERING OF THE WORLD INTO THE VALLEY OF DECISION

The sixth bowl brings us to the end of the world. While the previous five bowls describe conditions that come upon the earth from judgments of God, the sixth bowl seems to be describing an event, or events, leading up to the appearing of Christ in the sky. That the fulfillment of this prophecy concerns

the end of the world should be fairly obvious, but for those who would like evidences we offer the following points. First, the sixth seal (6:12-17) and sixth trumpet also described the end, and these three accounts share several unique symbols and phrases (*kings of the earth* in 6:15 and 16:14, the *Euphrates* in 9:14 and 16:12, the *great day of God Almighty* in 6:17 and 16:14, etc). Second, the description of the end of the world as a battle is consistent with the end-time accounts in Chapters 19 and 20. Third, the warning of Christ's coming *as a thief* in verse 15 is appropriate for this setting, and would be an odd and out-of-place statement if this were not that event. Finally, notice the similarities between the sounding of the sixth trumpet and the pouring out of the sixth bowl:

Rev 16:12 *And the sixth angel poured out his vial on the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.*

Rev 9:13 *And the sixth angel sounded... Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men.*

We are not saying that the sixth seal, trumpet, and bowl describe exactly the same events, but that they pertain to the same end-time era. Accordingly, as each account focuses on different things, we expect to also see differences in the pictures. One more note of similarity: the fifth and sixth trumpets were linked together, broken off from the previous four as being the *woe trumpets*. Likewise were the fifth and sixth seals, being separated from the preceding four horsemen seals. It appears likely that the fifth and sixth bowls are also linked, the plague of darkness in the kingdoms of the world leading to the unclean spirits of the demonic realm working miracles that cause the whole world to gather against Christ.

Briefly, the overall picture of the sixth bowl describes preparations for a great battle. It is a specific battle—*that great day of God Almighty*—and it

would be futile to suggest that this *great day* is any other than the final overthrow of Satan and his wicked kingdom of sinful men and angels. This is the same event that we saw in the sixth seal, when *the kings of the earth* (see also v14) ran in terror from the face of the Lamb saying, *the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?* The stars fell from heaven, which departed as a scroll when it is rolled together and the mountains and islands disappeared (6:12-17, also Jude 1:6).

The prophets of the OT declared coming judgments upon Judah that had fulfillments in the Babylonian captivity and other events, but the imagery of their writings contributes to John's descriptions of the end of the world. *The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.* (Zephaniah 1:14-18). We will refer to more of these passages as we progress through the Book and the pictures of the end become more detailed.

The conflict of the sixth bowl has come to be called the Battle of Armageddon, and its dreadful fame and renown has made it the inspiration for books and movies. Due to the abundant speculations put forth by so-called prophecy experts, misconceptions abound on the topic of Armageddon. Historicists (A-millennialists) believe the Battle of Armageddon will take place when Christ returns at the end of the world and destroys the wicked inhabitants of the earth. Futurists (Pre-millennialists) believe the battle takes place at the end of the seven-year tribulation which begins after the Church and Holy Spirit have been removed from the earth. Historicists believe Armageddon signals the end of the world, but Futurists believe it marks the beginning of the thousand-year physical reign of Christ on the earth. Some Futurists put the Battle of Armageddon at the close of the thousand-year

reign and thus at the end of the world. This is a difficult proposition since they interpret the Book of Revelation chronologically, and Armageddon comes in Chapter 16 and the Millennium in Chapter 20—a time reversal of four chapters. Most Historicists understand the Book as seven parallel presentations of the same dispensation—the Age of Grace—and the Battle of Armageddon at the end of the bowl series is exactly where they expect to find the end of the world described.

We believe there is overwhelming Biblical support for the idea that the Second Coming and the end of the world are simultaneous events (see page 142). There is not a single passage that presents the entire Futurist program of Rapture, seven-year interval for the Jews, Second Coming, thousand-year reign, and final end-of-the-world. Instead it must be pieced together from many parts of the Bible. We do not pass judgment on this interpretation, but it surely must be conceded that the lack of a master passage presenting the Futurist chronology is a striking point against it.

Notice here the close transition of Christ's return (spoken of in verse 15) to the end of the world (v17-21). There is no hint of a thousand year interval between the two. The same is true between the sixth and seventh woe-trumpets, where we are told the seventh would rapidly follow the sixth (11:14).

Regardless of one's opinions on the timing, the Battle of Armageddon is a terrible and sinister event, instigated by unclean spirits under the command of the trinity of evil. Though this passage speaks of a battle, we do not actually see one. There is only the preparation for battle. It is a gathering of *the kings of the earth and of the whole world* to war, but the actual conflict is not described until the next section of the Book (19:11-21), and mentioned again in the last section (20:7-10). In those accounts the battle is very one-sided, the armies of heaven utterly destroying the armies of the world and casting the Beast, False Prophet, and Dragon into the bottomless pit along with every wicked person and angel. But the sixth bowl describes the preparation and gathering of the world against the Lord, the *beginning of sorrows* as it were. It is the deceptive and combined charms of the Dragon, Beast, and False Prophet that coerce the world into rebelling against God. The prophetic warning is: beware of *unclean spirits...working miracles* (v13-14).

The passage before us is rich in OT imagery. Though there are several symbols, the main source of imagery is based on allusions (at least four) to miraculous events of God's deliverance of Israel in times of great distress:

1. The drying up of the Euphrates draws imagery from the account of the deliverance of the Jews out of Babylon by its fall at the hands of the Persian armies through the diverting of the Euphrates River.
2. The unclean spirits like frogs relates to the plague of frogs in Egypt. The word *frog* occurs in the Bible only in relation to these two accounts.
3. The end of the world likened to a great and terrible battle alludes to the many times the prophets wrote of the judgment and destruction of the enemies of Israel in a battle of earthshaking devastation by God's supernatural hand.
4. Christ's coming as a thief in the night is an allusion to several NT passages that similarly describe His return (Mt 24:43; I Thes 5:2; II Peter 3:10).

BABYLON AND THE EUPHRATES RIVER

Probably the most important key to understanding the meaning of the sixth bowl regards *Euphrates*, a term found only twice in the NT, both times in the Book of Revelation (9:14, 16:12). The Euphrates River was a touchstone for OT Jewish life, being the northern boundary of the land of Israel that God gave to Abram (Gen 15:18, Joshua 1:4). Babylon and Assyria, two of the three arch-enemies of Israel, lived *beyond the River*, and Babylon is especially associated with the Euphrates in the Bible. When He gave the land of Canaan to Israel, God promised to bless and protect each tribe as long as they obeyed Him and drove out the wicked Canaanites. Those who left the land of Canaan for the pleasures of Egypt or Babylon were cut off from God, and the prophets spoke especially hard against those who refused to return to Jerusalem after Cyrus' decree released them from their Babylonian captivity.

Babylon figures prominently as a symbol in the Revelation, and the next section devotes a whole chapter to describing her destruction. Babylon and the Euphrates River are closely linked, for the Euphrates was the lifeblood of ancient Babylon. The River flowed right through the city, bringing the

commerce of the world into Babylon and making her wealth and luxury without peer at that time in history. The Euphrates River as a symbol contrasts with the *pure river of water of life* (Rev 22:1, Eze 47) which gives spiritual life and strength to the people of God. The Euphrates, as a part of Babylon, represents worldliness, materialism, secular education, and earthly prosperity. We will study this in more detail in Chapter 18.

The sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared (v12). The fall of Babylon at the hand of Cyrus by the drying up of the Euphrates River was the event that signalled the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon. We believe the events foretold by the sixth bowl signal the end of mystical Babylon—this world—and the deliverance of those Christians who remain faithful to God at the end. Babylon was a cruel, wicked, and proud city, and the king at the time of her fall was blatantly blasphemous. There are whole chapters in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel that describe the fall and utter ruin of Babylon, making her a fitting symbol for the societies of the world at the end-time.

The fall of ancient Babylon came as a complete surprise to her inhabitants. Though they knew the armies of Cyrus were outside the city walls, they were sure that they were well-prepared for any attack. However, under cover of darkness, Cyrus' armies slipped under the huge brass gates that guarded the Euphrates River's entrance into the city. This was made possible because, unknown to the Babylonians, Cyrus had secretly dried up the river by diverting it from its original course. Coming from both ends of the empty river, the armies met no resistance until they reached the king's palace, where they quickly overthrew the guards and entered upon a riotous party at which Daniel had just foretold the immediate fall of the city (Daniel 5). The whole city had been celebrating, drinking and reveling even though they were under siege.

The fall of Babylon came at the high point in her history. The people of Babylon were convinced the city would never fall, for her walls were impregnable (100 feet thick) and her food and water stores pretty much self-sustaining. King Belshazzar and his court had been partying long into the night, and in a final note of defiance against God he ordered the sacred Jewish temple

vessels to be brought in and used as wine goblets. Suddenly, in the middle of the reveling, a supernatural hand appeared on the wall, writing words that struck fear into every evil heart: *Mene, mene tekel upharsin*—numbered, weighed, divided. That very night Belshazzar was put to the sword by the invading Medes and Persians. The city fell, that oldest of all cities, never to be rebuilt again. Here is another figure of the complete and utter destruction of the world when Christ returns. Babylon's decline was spectacular—she completely disappeared (though not immediately). For centuries nobody knew her exact location. So complete was her fall that it was not until the early 1900's that the ruins of the city were finally discovered.

Babylon did not fall at the hands of God's people, but to an invading heathen army. Amazingly, the leader of this army, Cyrus, was named in the Book of Isaiah 100 years earlier as the one who would free Judah from Babylon. In fact, Cyrus is called *my shepherd*, and *his anointed* (Is 41:28, 45:1), both distinct titles of Christ. This appears to make Cyrus a Gentile type of Christ, and if so, would be the only one like it in the Bible. The account of Cyrus as the deliverer of the Jews out of Babylon uniquely applies to the Second Coming, for it was his decree that permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem and the land of Canaan.

The phrase *kings of the east* alludes to Cyrus, and Darius the Mede, leaders of the fall of Babylon. The Greek actually reads, *kings from the rising of the sun*, making it similar to the Greek in 7:2, which is also an end-time account. These are the only places in the NT that *east* is thus written, and there is probably a good reason for it. In addition to the connection of the east with Christ's Second Coming (7:2; Mt 24:27; Eze 43:2) the phrase is used in connection to Cyrus, *I have raised up one from the north, and he shall come: from the rising of the sun shall he call upon My name: and he shall come upon princes as upon mortar, and as the potter treadeth clay* (Is 41:25). The Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary remarks, "The kings of the earth who are earthly (v14), stand in contrast to the kings from the East who are heavenly."

If J-F-B is right in interpreting the *kings of the east* as righteous heavenly beings, then these would correspond to the righteous host of the returning Christ of Chapter 19, and the spiritual warriors of the sixth trumpet of Chapter 9. I was at first skeptical of this application, thinking that there would be

better symbols available for the prophetic picture. But the harmony of this meaning with the other passages is evident, and the choice of the symbol does come from the actual background account of the fall of Babylon. Additionally, the accompanying phrase, “that the way might be prepared for,” is used in connection with the Lord’s first coming on several occasions (Is 40:3; Mt 3:3; Luke 1:76).

The alternative would be to apply the *kings of the east* to a literal heathen army that comes upon the world at its end. This would make the *kings of the east* the same as *the kings of the world* (v14). While that is possible, it also leaves the scene with no opponent: an unlikely situation. The parallel passage does name the opponent: *I saw the Beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him that sat on the horse, and against His army* (Rev 19:19). Two armies—the Beast’s army of demons and Christ’s heavenly army—are the ones who will fight this final battle. The description of Christ coming on a white horse, *eyes as a flame of fire* and *His vesture dipped in blood* casting the wicked into the *Lake of Fire*, is an event that every eye shall see. The armies of the Beast stand no chance; they are slain by the sword that goes out of the mouth of Christ (19:21).

ARMAGEDDON: PHYSICAL BATTLE, OR SPIRITUAL CONFLICT?

The sixth bowl does not describe the final battle, but the gathering of the world to that great day. It is not a physical gathering of all nations at the literal valley of Megiddo; rather, it is an organized effort by the trinity of evil against God and His creation. The Dragon, Beast, and False Prophet send out their demonic messengers of deceit, *spirits of devils* that deceive the whole world into sin and rebellion.

Some have made the Battle of Armageddon a physical conflict of good men versus evil, a battle in which the physical forces of Christ overwhelm the wicked armies of the Devil. We disagree, and maintain that this would demean the power and omnipotence of Christ. The texts that describe the battle do not support such an interpretation, and the concept of a physical conflict between good and evil goes against the tenor of NT teaching.

The true Church does not defend herself militarily against *flesh and blood*, a principle that many historical leaders in the “church” have disregarded, and at great cost to the Kingdom of Christ (think of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, et al). Christians with machine guns and tanks is an incongruous picture indeed.

Clearly, our war is against *spiritual wickedness in [heavenly] places* (Eph 6:12). We war against sin and evil in our society, against it creeping into our churches and homes. There seems to be no barrier to stopping the flood of indecency and corruption in our world today. The Dragon has opened the bottomless pit and released countless deceptions and temptations upon the inhabitants of the earth. It is disturbing that so many in the Church seem to be oblivious to the great dangers to which our children are being exposed. The technological wizardry of the world in Internet communities, television shows, computer games, music, entertainments of every variety imaginable—these not only take time away from the Kingdom of Christ, they aid the Dragon in his ambition to corrupt and pollute the *Bride of Christ*.

Three unclean spirits go out of the mouths of the evil trinity (v13). There is no description or individual symbolism regarding these *spirits of devils* (v14), so they evidently represent the entire arsenal of the Dragon’s deceptions. *The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father, but is of the world* (I John 2:16). These three spirits probably have legions of demonic angels at their command, *working miracles* of every sort and possibility in order to deceive and organize the people of the world against Christ. Our answer to avoiding these deceptions is simple yet powerful, for *we have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day stars arise in your hearts* (II Peter 1:19). The word of God in our hands is the most powerful and effective weapon against deception.

A spiritual understanding of the Battle of Armageddon carries far more importance for us today than a single physical battle would. Spiritual battles have raged in various countries ever since the time of Christ, but the spiritual battle of the end-time era will be the worst the world has ever seen. The deceptions and miracles of the evil trinity will be without parallel, like the frogs in the plague of Egypt. Those frogs got into every corner and house—in their beds, their food, their clothes—defiling the whole land and forcing Pharaoh

to call for Moses in haste to get rid of them. The unclean spirits deceive the world into ever-increasing sin and wickedness, denying the existence of God and even attempting to be gods. The world must “fill up its cup of iniquity” to the brim before Christ returns, and the *unclean spirits* are the Devil's evil workers, coercing the world into doing just that.

THE VALLEY OF MEGIDDO

The kings of the earth and of the whole world are gathered to a place called *Armageddon*, a Hebrew word of uncertain meaning. Some say it means “a place of troops,” others, “the mount of the assembly,” still others, “the destruction of their army.” Cruden maintains it means “mount of the Gospel.” It has been variously designated Mount Megiddo, Mount Carmel, and the valley of Jehoshaphat. The confusion comes because there is no exactly matching Hebrew word, nor is the Greek equivalent to be found in the Septuagint OT.

Difficulties notwithstanding, the *Megiddo* of the OT, also spelled *Megiddon* (Zec 12:11), is almost certainly the *Armageddon* of verse 16 (***Har-Magedon***). ***Har*** is the Greek word for mountain, thus the name Mount Megiddo. However, the Megiddo of the OT was not a mountain, it was a town situated in a valley—the *valley of Jezreel*, with the Kishon River flowing through it. Mount Carmel by the sea rims the east end of the valley, and Mount Tabor overlooks it from the north. Why it should be called ***Har-Magedon*** is simply a question without a good answer, for there is no such mountain. It does provide a strong point against taking this prophecy in its most literal sense, which nevertheless is the popular interpretation of our day.

The valley of Megiddo saw some of the most significant events of Jewish history, and was the battlefield of several notable conflicts. Before the time of the kings, Israel was delivered from oppression by Deborah and Barak, who defeated the Canaanite King Sisera *by the waters of Megiddo* (Judges 5:19). Several years later it was Gideon's turn to deliver Israel, this time from the Midianites. The famous battle took place in the *valley of Jezreel*, where *the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude*. God wrought a marvelous victory there, when only three hundred men routed the entire army from the coasts of Israel (see Judges 6). The great showdown

between Elijah and the prophets of Baal took place here, and the evil priests were slain at the Kishon River (see page 252). The last recorded battle in the valley of Megiddo was disastrous for the Jews; it signaled the end of Judah and Jerusalem for the 70-year Babylonian Captivity, for it was at *Megiddo* that good king Josiah died in battle (II Kings 23:29), causing great mourning throughout the land and inspiring Jeremiah to write the Book of Lamentations. It is one of the very few times in the Bible that good appears to be overcome by evil.

Zechariah used this story of Josiah's untimely death when he wrote of the Messiah, prophesying: *In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them. And...I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon* (Zec 12:8-12). This is an astonishing prophecy of New Jerusalem—the Church—that has received little recognition for what it really says. The *feeble* being *as David* can only mean that the commoner will be like a king. This is truly fulfilled in the Kingdom of Christ, in which we reign as *kings and priests* (Rev 1:6). That the *house of David shall be as God*, foretells the Messiah's deity—the Son of David is actually God incarnate.

The Spirit was poured out in those days as at no other time in history, and yet wicked hands killed Him, and the eyes of good and evil saw Him *pierced*. Acts records how the Apostles used the prophets to prove that Christ was really the Messiah, and to those who accepted that proof mourning and conviction followed: *Men and brethren, what shall we do?* these sincere Jews cried (Acts 2:37). Their mourning is likened to the *mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon* (Zec 12:12), likely the very place in Megiddo that good king Josiah died. Most of the Jewish nation rejected Christ, and for these the mourning continues as they wait for a Messiah that will never come in the manner they wish, for He has already come. Yes, the *valley of Megiddon* was a

place of triumph, but also a place of great sadness. *Armageddon* will also be a scene of triumph and yet sadness, for that battle will be a great day of victory for those who are waiting and ready. They will ascend into heaven in triumph, but then also *shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.* (Mt 24:30).

Many have linked the Battle of Armageddon with Joel's *valley of Jehoshaphat* which presents a similar theme: *I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for My people* (Joel 3:2). Though *Megiddo* and the *valley of Jehoshaphat* are physically not the same place, the overall picture of Joel's *valley of Jehoshaphat* and John's *Armageddon* are unquestionably equivalent.

Like *Armageddon*, there is no place in the Bible called the *valley of Jehoshaphat*. Joel seems to be drawing on the account of the miraculous delivering of Judah from an immense horde of Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites who were marching on Jerusalem. The account can be read in II Chronicles 20; how all Judah fell on their knees before God in prayer for deliverance, and how God responded by reassuring Jehoshaphat and the people that they would not so much as have to strike a single blow, but that He would fight for them. So thankful was Jehoshaphat that he had his army march unarmed toward the invading host singing songs of praise and thanksgiving to God, and He did not disappoint. When the Israelites reached the valley, only dead bodies of the enemy remained. Jehoshaphat named this the *valley of Berachah*—the valley of blessing (II Chr 20:26). He named it for the righteous, but for the wicked it is the *valley of decision* (Joel 3:14), the place that their judgment is decided, pronounced, and carried out. Read Joel 3 to appreciate the parallels.

An interesting interjection is given in verse 15: *Behold I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments.* This is an obvious reference to the Second Coming, as it is so described in several other NT passages (Mt 24:43; II Cor 5:3; I Thes 5:2; II Peter 3:10). That it comes here, in the middle of the Battle of Armageddon and the end of the world is significant. Futurists generally apply the *thief* passages of the Bible to the Rapture, which supposedly takes place in Chapter 4 of the Revelation. Regardless, the key is to be ready and watching for His return. We must keep our garments

clean: a figurative way of saying, “take care of your sins now, keep yourself *unspotted from the world*, and follow Christ.” Compare the similar meaning in Revelation 3:4-5.

17. *And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done.*

18. *And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.*

19. *And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.*

20. *And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.*

21. *And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.*

IT IS DONE: THE END OF THE WORLD

The seventh angel pours out his bowl upon the earth and the consummation of the age comes. *It is done!* The declaration is made by the same *great voice* that sent out the seven plagues back in verse 1. It is the voice of God, coming *from the Throne* of His presence within the Temple of heaven. *It is done.* The same voice says these words again in 21:6, inviting the saints to participate in the joys of heaven. At the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry He cried with a loud voice, *It is finished* (John 19:30). The Greek words are different in these two accounts. The statements in Revelation mean literally, “It has come” (*ginomai*), while Jesus words mean, “It is completed, fulfilled, ended” (*teleo*).

The seventh bowl is *poured out into the air*. Here is a new and unique object of God's wrath. The *air* is the place of spirits and demons, Satan being *the prince of the power of the air* (Eph 2:2). Judgment will come to these only at the passing away of the universe in fervent heat, when the evil spirits and demons of Satan will be cast into everlasting chains of darkness at the word of Christ (Jude 1:6). How terrible that the man who rejects the blood of Jesus will join these fearful demons in their place of punishment.

The end is accompanied by the greatest earthquake the world has ever seen. So great is it that the mountains and islands disappear, and great thunder, lightning and voices are heard. We do not feel it at all necessary to find symbolic meanings for each of these words, because the overall picture of this passage is obviously describing the complete and utter destruction of the world. Even if we would use the symbolic meanings for mountains and islands (nations) or thunders and lightnings (powerful acts of God) the picture would be unchanged—the world's end has come. The language closely resembles the scene on earth at the sounding of the seventh trumpet (11:19).

Babylon, *the great city*, and the *cities of the nations* fall, a prelude to the next section of the Book, in which Babylon is the primary character. Babylon is directly called the *great city* several times in the Revelation (14:8, 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21) and seems to be indirectly so called in 11:8 and 17:18.

Some interpret the *great city* of verse 19 to be Jerusalem or Rome rather than Babylon. Jerusalem is supported by 11:8, *And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified*, and Rome is supported by 17:18, *And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth*. Arguments are equally strong for any of these, but it must be noted that Babylon is the only one of these three cities unmistakably called *the great city*, and no less than six times at that. The meaning is little changed regardless of which symbolic city is intended, and there is always the possibility that the *great city* is purposely un-named by John.

Babylon, of course, does not exist as a literal city, and contrary to popular current theories, will never be rebuilt (Jer 50:39). Babylon is a symbol for the entire worldly value system: its pleasures, desires, wealth, and materialism.

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God (James 4:4). The empire of Satan will someday be destroyed, and like Babylon, will never rise again.

The *cities of the nations* seem at first to simply repeat the theme of the fall of Babylon. There may, however, be an additional application. Cities have a way of amplifying wickedness and perversion. Why this is true is another subject, but the influences of Satan are much greater within a city than without. Many of the cities of the nations are notorious world-wide for their blasphemous lifestyles—San Francisco, Buenos Aires, New York, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, etc. Their wealth and luxurious living is a thing of pride, but their end is swiftly approaching.

The dividing of the city into three parts is a rather difficult picture. Maybe it is given simply to further describe the terrible effects of this greatest of all earthquakes. Or, it could relate to Chapter 18 and the fall of Babylon which is lamented three times by three different groups of men who say *Alas, alas, that great city*. The Greek here does not well support the thought of an action “dividing” the city. *And it came into three parts* (YLT) is the closest translation to the original. The Greek word for *divided* is *ginomai*, which is usually translated “it came to pass,” or “it became” (1:1, 16:3). It is often used to indicate that a fulfillment of prophecy has taken place, and is the same word we just saw used in verse 17, *It is done*.

There may be an allusion here to the three words written on the wall at the Fall of Babylon—*Mene, Tekel, Upharsin* (see page 298). *Upharsin* means “divided” (Dan 5:25-28). The Fall of Babylon was both sudden and unexpected, and the end of the world will be similar in this regard (Chapter 18).

The fulfillment of the seventh bowl is future, and the details unclear. Maybe, like the destruction in the valley of Jehoshaphat (II Chr 20), the world will be divided into three groups that turn upon each other and destroy themselves. End-time details are hidden from us, for if Satan knew God’s full plan for this age, he would do what he could to avoid it, and prolong his end. The same was true at Christ’s first coming, an event foretold by numerous OT prophecies but misunderstood by most of God’s own people. It was only after the resurrection that those momentous events were so plainly found in Moses

and the Prophets. If the princes of this world would have known the plan of God in Christ they would never have crucified Him (I Cor 2:8); how much more so His triumphant and terrible return?

Where does the Rapture of the saints take place in this section? The theme has been “the final wrath of God.” The only word to the Christian was the simple warning at the end of the sixth bowl: *Behold, I come as a thief*. Somewhere very near the end the righteous will be taken off the earth, along with the bodies of the departed saints. Then will come the destruction of the world and its unrepentant inhabitants.

The ending of the sixth trumpet also saw the Rapture of righteous: *And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them. And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven* (Rev 11:12-13). The Rapture of the saints will be a frightening experience for the unrighteous, and the same symbols describing it appear in both the sixth trumpet and the sixth bowl—a *great earthquake* and the fall of the *city*.

A great hail from God falls upon the wicked earth (see 11:19 again), making men blaspheme God because the plague of hail is exceedingly great. Each hailstone weighs a talent, about 70 pounds. While it is possible that this will literally happen, there is an interesting figurative possibility. In the parable of the talents Jesus illustrated to His disciples the responsibility that God has entrusted to each man (Mt 25:14-30). The good servants used their talents wisely, but the *wicked and slothful servant* hid his talent in the ground and did nothing with it. The King therefore judged the unprofitable servant and cast him *into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*. Each hailstone from God weighs a talent, the measure of a man’s responsibility. To whom much is entrusted, much will be required. The weight of each is fair and just; those who try to hide it will discover that it cannot be hidden from the all-seeing eye of God.

In summary, the section of the seven last plagues describes the final wrath of God during the last era of the world in acts of judgment upon corrupted mankind. Most men will not hear the warnings or even care about God, and

three times we read that *men blasphemed God* instead of turning to Him. The depravity of mankind will grow worse and worse as the end of time draws near, and this may be the best gauge of how close to the end we are. By all appearances the deceptions of the unholy trinity have gone out into the world and are multiplying rapidly. From divorce to homosexuality and from euthanasia to human cloning, new standards of “playing God” are being set and broken at an astonishing pace. Only God knows when the cup of iniquity will be filled and ready to be emptied. The time may be near, and it may be yet distant. Past writers have felt certain that their day was surely close to the end, but time has proven them wrong. While we are convinced that our own day’s wickedness is unparalleled in history, we do not know the plan of God. Let us live in constant readiness, whether for Rapture or death we do not know.

SECTION SIX

CHAPTERS 17–19

THE FALL AND JUDGMENT OF BABYLON



⊙ U T L I N E

- 17:1-6 The wickedness of the Harlot-woman
17:7-11 The Harlot rides the eighth head of the Beast
17:12-18 The Beast persecutes the Harlot
18:1-3 An Angel announces the fall of Babylon
18:4-8 God's people taken out of Babylon before her destruction
18:9-19 The world laments the utter fall of Babylon
18:20-24 Heaven rejoices at Babylon's final judgment
19:1-10 Heaven prepares for the marriage supper of the Lamb
19:11-16 Christ returns for His saints
19:17-21 The end-time Battle of Armageddon—the Beast and False Prophet cast into the Lake of Fire.

Primary Symbols:

The Harlot—the false end-time Church, corrupt and sinful.

Babylon—the worldly realm under Satanic control. Lusts of the flesh, pride, materialism, self, and sinful living.

