

16.03.2019 THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES

Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested.” Revelation 15:4

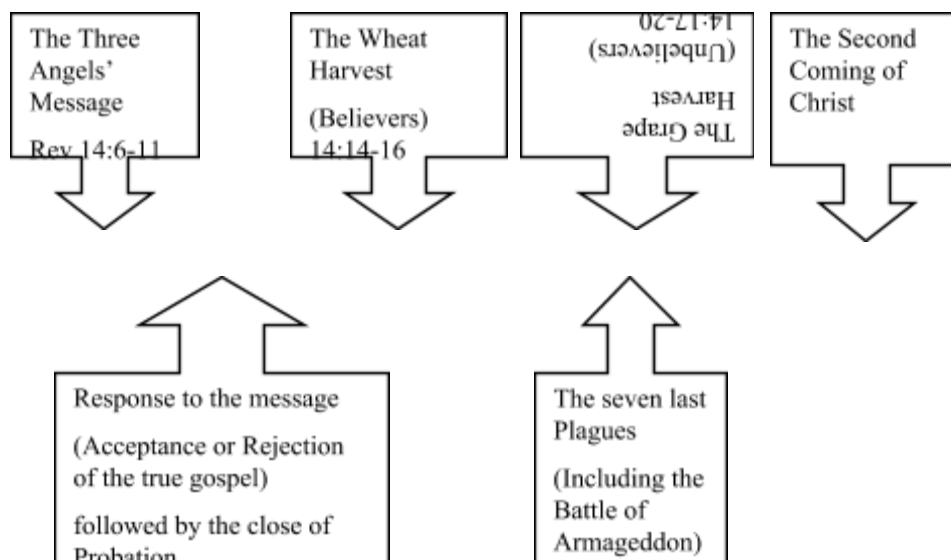
This week’s study is the seven last plagues described in Revelation 16. The plagues are the manifestations of God’s wrath described in the third angel’s message and the grape harvest of Revelation 14.

After the messages of the 3 angels (the proclamation of the eternal gospel to the entire world, the doom of Babylon and its counterfeit gospel and the punishment of Babylon, the wrath of God), the whole of humanity will be faced with a choice. The choice is...Do I worship the true God or do I worship a counterfeit god (Satan in all his manifestations)? The choice is also...Am I saved by Christ alone (‘Not I, but Christ’) or do I believe that I must do something to be saved (salvation by works).

Once the choice is made, there will be only 2 camps – Believers and Unbelievers. The character of the Believers (also described as saints and the 144,000 in Revelation) is described in Revelation 14:12-13.

When this choice has been made in the end-time, it is irrevocable. Christ’s intercessory ministry in the sanctuary ceases and probation closes for mankind. Now men and women will reap the harvest they have sown.

The Seven Last Plagues



The Wheat Harvest and the Grape Harvest (Revelation 14:14-20)

Once men and women have chosen who they will worship, there are 2 harvests. The first harvest (Rev 14:14-16) is reaped by the Son of Man. The second harvest (Rev 14:17-20) is reaped by an angel who casts this grape harvest into the winepress of the wrath of God.

This passage has language very similar to Jesus’ parable of the wheat and the tares found in Matthew 13:24-30. Here too, there are 2 harvests. The Master in the parable says:

He said unto them, An enemy has done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay, lest while you gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together all the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

In Revelation 14:14-16 we find the harvest of the wheat; those who have chosen to worship God and give Him glory. God will gather them 'into His barn'; they will be safe during the harvest of the grapes – the outpouring of God's wrath.

The Bible has many promises about the safety of God's believers in times of trouble, but one of the most beautiful is David's Psalm 91... *He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust... He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler...thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. Psalm 91:1-10*

Revelation 7, 11:2, 14:1-5 and 15:2-4 tell us that while believers live on earth in the end-time, by faith (Hebrews 10:19-23) they are dwelling in heaven, in the sanctuary, in the Holiest, on Mount Zion, in God's presence.

Revelation 14:17-20 describes the harvest of grapes – those who have refused to worship the true God; fearful is that harvest.

Jesus described it to His disciples thus:

*Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man [which is Christ, the gospel]; The field is the world: the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; **the harvest is the end of the world**; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth: Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father. He who hath ears to hear, let him hear. Matthew 13:36-40*

The Seven Last Plagues

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete...After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever. The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed. Revelation 15:1, 5-8

From the above passage we learn:

1. The plagues are the LAST plagues i.e. they occur at the end of this earth's history (unlike the seven trumpet plagues which occurs during the intercessory ministry of Christ).
2. They are punitive for unbelievers... for in them the wrath of God is complete. Divine wrath is the righteous judgment of God on those who harden their hearts against Him.
3. They are redemptive for believers; for at the end of the plagues, God's people are delivered.
4. No-one is able to enter the temple while they are poured out; Christ's intercessory ministry is completed.

There are similarities between the 10 plagues of Egypt and the seven last plagues:

- The plagues of Egypt were punitive to the Egyptians but brought deliverance to the Israelites.
- The plagues of Egypt brought no true repentance to the Egyptians...Pharaoh 'hardened his heart'.
- Some of the plagues of Egypt were counterfeited; during the sixth plague, Satan will use his counterfeit trinity to proclaim a false gospel and back it up with signs and wonders.

When the Israelites were finally delivered from the Egyptians after crossing the Red Sea, they sang the Song of Moses:

*"I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea! The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; my father's God, and I will exalt Him. The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is His name...
The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my desire shall be satisfied on them. I will draw my sword, My hand shall destroy them.'
You blew with Your wind, the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters.
Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?
... You in Your mercy have led forth the people whom You have redeemed; You have guided them in Your strength to Your holy habitation.
"The people will hear and be afraid... fear and dread will fall on them; by the greatness of Your arm they will be as still as a stone, till Your people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over whom You have purchased. You will bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which You have made for Your own dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established. The Lord shall reign forever and ever." Exodus 15:1-18*

When God's people are delivered after the seven last plagues, they will sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, the song of deliverance:

"They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvellous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested." Revelation 15:3, 4

The Outpouring of the First Four Plagues: Revelation 16:1-11

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

The order comes from the temple; God Himself decrees the seven plagues.

Since these plagues are in the future, we cannot be dogmatic about the interpretations. But it would seem from the passage that the first five plagues are not universal in extent. The first angel called the world to worship "*Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.*" It is interesting that the first four plagues are poured on the earth, the sea, the rivers and springs of water and from heaven (the sun).

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

The sores of this plague are like the Egyptian plague of boils (Exodus 9:8-12).

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

Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. (16:4)

These plagues are like the Egyptian plague of blood (Exodus 7:14-24).

“You are righteous, O Lord, the One who is and who was and who is to be, because You have judged these things. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due...Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.” (16:5-7)

After the 3rd plague, the redeemed and the angels now acknowledge that God is avenging the blood of the martyrs.

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

Nothing will move the unrepentant. They blaspheme the name of God and rebelliously refuse to give Him glory.

The Fifth Plague

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

Men continue to blaspheme God and refuse to repent.

This plague is aimed directly at ‘the throne of the beast’. Satan gave the sea beast of Revelation 13 a throne. The throne of the beast becomes full of darkness literally, for spiritually it has always been a kingdom of darkness. Through this plague, the men and women of the world begin to recognise the beast’s inability to protect them from God’s plagues. Yet they refuse to repent and seek to find scapegoats for their misery. They plan a final assault against the kingdom of God, the Most High.

The Sixth Plague

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

This is a symbolic picture reminding us of how ancient Babylon was defeated. Cyrus, of the Medo-Persians ‘dried up’ the bed of the Euphrates by channelling its waters away from the river bed and entered Babylon through it. The enemies of Babylon came from the East. Christ, the great King of the East with His people (the kings) is coming to overthrow Babylon. As God’s people were delivered from ancient Babylon, by the coming of Cyrus, God’s anointed (Isaiah 45:1), so God’s people in the end-time will be delivered from Babylon by the coming of Christ, God’s Anointed.

This provokes Satan and his counterfeit trinity to provoke even more demonic activity described symbolically as frogs (the plague of frogs was the last Egyptian plague that Pharaoh’s magicians were able to counterfeit). They do signs and miracles to deceive the unrepentant. Satan is gathering his army of the unrepentant to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. (16:12-14)

He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast. Rev 13:13, 14

Paul described it thus: *And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 2 Thessalonians 2:8-10*

“Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.” (16:15)

John interrupts his description of the plagues with an exhortation directly from Jesus Christ...*‘Behold I am coming...’*

The first exhortation: While the world marches to the banner of Satan, Christ reminds His people that they must remain alert...*‘Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation’*. The deceptions at that time will be so great, that they need to be alert, for Satan will try his best to deceive the elect of God, His people (Matthew 24:24). The battle is not a military battle but a spiritual battle; a battle for the hearts and minds of people.

The second exhortation: God’s people must remain loyal and faithful to Him, trusting in Him alone for their righteousness, keeping their garments white and unspotted from the flesh (Rev 3:4, Jude 1:23). They belong to His army, the army of heaven ‘clothed in white linen’ (Rev 19:14) and they too, are soon to be called to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

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

Armageddon is symbolic. In Hebrew, **Armageddon** means “mount of Megiddo.” In ancient Israel, Megiddo was a key city overseeing a major travel route between the great kingdoms of Mesopotamia and Egypt. Huge armies could assemble in the neighbouring Plain of Esdraelon. Moreover, God’s people had experienced decisive battles there (Judges 5:19; 2 Chronicles 35:20-22). Thus it is a fitting symbol for the location of the climactic battle. Overlooking the plain is Mount Carmel, known even today to the people of Israel as the Mount of Megiddo. Carmel is where Israel was asked to make a choice...who would they serve? God or Baal?

In the end-time there will be one question that is asked of mankind. The answer will determine their eternal destiny. The question is...**‘who is worthy of worship...God or Satan?’**

Those who choose Christ will march under His banner; the banner of the Lamb. He is Lord of lords and King of kings and those who are with Him are called, chosen and faithful (Rev 17:14).

The followers of Satan and the beasts *will ‘make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings’ Revelation 17:14*

The outcome of the battle is never in doubt. Our Lamb has conquered; let us follow Him.

The Seventh Plague

Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” (16:17)

The seventh bowl brings the cycle of judgments to an end. Like the other cycles (the seals and the trumpets), this one ends with the Second Coming.

And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great. (16:18-21)

John uses imagery from Ezekiel 38, where God depicts His judgments upon His people’s enemies.

For in My jealousy and in the fire of My wrath I have spoken: 'Surely in that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel, so that the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all creeping things that creep on the earth, and all men who are on the face of the earth shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground.' I will call for a sword against Gog throughout all My mountains," says the Lord God. "Every man's sword will be against his brother. And I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the LORD." ' Ezekiel 38:19-23

Conclusion:

We are living in the time between the 6th and 7th trumpet. In the time just before the seven plagues are poured out. The great Day of the Lord is upon us and the question is: 'Will you be able to stand in the day of God's wrath?'

Who will be able to stand? Those who are washed in the blood of the Lamb and who are sealed by the Spirit will be able to stand. Their names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Let us renew our commitment to Christ daily. And let us take hold of the promise He gave to Joshua, just before the battle that was to give the children of Israel victory over the enemy. His promise holds true today to everyone of us who chooses to follow the Lamb:

"No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you." Joshua 1:5
