

Bible Study Guide: Week of 11-13-2023

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

Revelation 16

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

² So the first angel went and poured his bowl on the earth, and a foul and painful sore came on those who had the brand of the beast and who worshiped its image.

³ The second angel poured his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing in the sea died.

⁴ The third angel poured his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. ⁵ And I heard the angel of the waters say,

“You are just, O Holy One, who are and were,
for you have judged these things;

⁶ because they shed the blood of saints and prophets,
you have given them blood to drink.

It is what they deserve!”

⁷ And I heard the altar respond,

“Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty,
your judgments are true and just!”

⁸ The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire; ⁹ they were scorched by the fierce heat, but they cursed the name of God, who had authority over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory.

¹⁰ The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness; people gnawed their tongues in agony ¹¹ and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and sores, and they did not repent of their deeds.

¹² The sixth angel poured his bowl on the great River Euphrates, and its water was dried up in order to prepare the way for the kings from the east. ¹³ And I saw three foul spirits like frogs coming from the mouth of the dragon, from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet. ¹⁴ These are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. ¹⁵ (“See, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and is clothed, not going about naked and exposed to shame.”) ¹⁶ And the demonic spirits assembled the kings at the place that in Hebrew is called Harmagedon.

¹⁷ The seventh angel poured his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” ¹⁸ And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a violent earthquake, such as had not occurred since people were upon the earth, so violent was that earthquake. ¹⁹ The great city was split into

three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. God remembered great Babylon and gave her the wine cup of the fury of his wrath. ²⁰ And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found, ²¹ and huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, dropped from heaven on people, until they cursed God for the plague of the hail, so fearful was that plague.

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

² So the first angel went and poured his bowl on the earth, and a foul and painful sore came on those who had the brand of the beast and who worshiped its image.

Here, as with the vision of the seven seals and the vision of the seven trumpets John recounts a vision of seven bowls of God’s wrath being poured out as plagues on the earth. The language here is reminiscent of the plagues of Egypt in Exodus. Like Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, so we will see that those who worshiped the beast were only embittered by the plagues and refused to repent.

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It is what they deserve!”**

⁷ And I heard the altar respond,

**“Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty,
your judgments are true and just!”**

Here the waters turn to blood, again calling to mind not only Exodus 7, but also earlier parts of Revelation where John envisioned other waters turning to blood. Here the bloody water is symbolic retribution on behalf of the martyrs and saints who were killed by those who worshiped the beast.

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¹⁰ The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness; people gnawed their tongues in agony ¹¹ and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and sores, and they did not repent of their deeds.

Again, note people’s refusal to repent. They recognize God not as a source of mercy to whom they could turn, but rather as a source of their suffering and misery. This gruesome imagery is disturbing to us, but imagine it from the point of view of persecuted Christians in the early church. They would be reassured that God heard their suffering and was planning to act in a mighty way to save them and to deliver justice to those who oppressed them. Like the “great and terrible day of the Lord” often referred to in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, this final outpouring of God’s wrath will be great and terrible—great for those who are rescued and terrible for those who are given bitter justice.

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of the dragon, from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet. ¹⁴ **These are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.** ¹⁵ **(“See, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and is clothed, not going about naked and exposed to shame.”)** ¹⁶ **And the demonic spirits assembled the kings at the place that in Hebrew is called Harmagedon.**

The drying up of the Euphrates River does two things here. First, it makes way for the “kings of the east” to come and join in one last battle. The Euphrates is indeed geographically east of Judea. In fact, it is in modern-day Iraq, forming the western boundary of the so-called “fertile crescent.” The second thing the drying up of the Euphrates does is it opens the way for the mention of Babylon. Babylon, of course, was the empire that once occupied the fertile crescent and which once took the people of Israel captive. The personified Babylon will become a central character in the next chapter, although it is mentioned below in this chapter also. Note the parenthetical aside which shows Jesus speaking words similar to his warnings of his return in the gospels.

Another strange feature here is the mention of “Harmagedon.” We know this word better by its Greek transliteration—Armageddon. As John says, the Hebrew form is actually *“har Megiddo.”* “Har” in Hebrew means mountain or hill. Megiddo is an ancient place name. It isn’t actually a mountain, but rather a tel. A mountain is a geological formation; a tel, by contrast, is an archeological formation. Rather than being made of rock, a tel is a hill which is made up of layers of debris from earlier civilizations. You can imagine cities were usually built in strategic areas—near water or a port, perhaps. Maybe near an important trade route or cross roads. Sometimes these cities would be damaged or destroyed and rebuilt on top of the rubble. Over centuries, great mounds or hills developed. These are called tels. Tel Megiddo is still located in Northern Israel and was an important strategic location. It guarded an important trade route in Northern Israel. One road along this trade route led directly to Jerusalem, so Megiddo was an important barrier against invasion. Because of its strategic value it was fortified by Solomon. Two kings of Israel, Ahaziah and Josiah, died at Megiddo. It was a place closely associated with fierce and decisive battles, which may be why John names it in his vision. In any case, it comes up only once in the New Testament—here in Rev. 16:16. Despite the tendency of some Christians to focus intently on “Armageddon,” it is barely a byword in this passage. We would do well to notice it, but not give it more attention than it warrants, as many Christians do.

¹⁷ **The seventh angel poured his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!”** ¹⁸ **And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a violent earthquake, such as had not occurred since people were upon the earth, so violent was that earthquake.** ¹⁹ **The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. God remembered great Babylon and gave her the wine cup of the fury of his wrath.** ²⁰ **And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found,** ²¹ **and huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, dropped from heaven on people, until they cursed God for the plague of the hail, so fearful was that plague.**

The final bowl of God’s wrath sets into motion meteorological and geological disasters. Babylon comes up here, personified as a woman upon whom God will pour out (or already has poured out) wrath. We will see this woman become a main character in the following chapter.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. What similarities or differences do you see between these plagues and the plagues of Egypt?**
- 2. What similarities or differences do you see between these plagues and the rest of Revelation?**
- 3. Where is the good news in this passage? Where do we find comfort despite all of the frightening images here?**