

THE WRATH OF GOD IS FINISHED

Revelation 15-16



Intro: In chapters 12-13 we noted how the Dragon (Satan) was bent on destroying God's people, using two fierce beasts (the Roman Empire and emperor worship) to persecute the faithful. However, chapter 14 focused on those who were allies of God and the judgment that was coming. Our focus in this lesson is on how God's full judgment came at that time. Bear in mind the two principles we discussed from Rev. 1.1. These pictures of judgment are symbolic and not to be taken literally (note again that 15.1 begins with "a sign in heaven") and this judgment "must soon take place". Thus, we are not discussing signs that will precede the final judgment (cf. 1Thess. 5.2) but how God would judge the instrument of Satan at that time: The Roman Empire.

Recall that the seven trumpets were partial judgments, giving the world an opportunity to repent. An opportunity the world refused (see 9.20-21). But now God's patience was exhausted, the wicked would experience the full wrath of God.

Chapter 15: The Gathering Storm

1. Preparing the bowls of wrath (vss. 1,5-8)

- a. In vs. 1 we see that 7 angels have 7 plagues. These are described as "the last" because God's judgment on His enemies at that time was final, there would be no more opportunity for repentance. Thus, "in them the wrath of God is finished".
- b. In vss. 5-6 we see that these angels are both clothed in similar fashion to Jesus (see 1.13) and they proceed from the sanctuary of God. There can be no doubt that the judgments they are delivering are from God. This is further confirmed when one of the four living creatures (see 4.6) gives the angels bowls full of wrath
- c. Finally, we see that the temple is filled with God's glory and no one can enter (vs. 8). "The temple was a holy place where the priests interceded for the people. The fact that no man was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues were fulfilled would indicate that no amount of intercession would cause God to not destroy the Roman Empire," (Green).
- d. The martyrs had called out for God's vengeance (6.10). God's vengeance was about to be poured out in full!

2. A look at the victorious (vss. 2-4)

- a. Even as God's full vengeance is about to be poured out on His enemies, we are again reminded that the redeemed are victorious.
- b. While not certain what all is intended by the sea of glass mixed with fire, it is likely associated with the Israelites passing through the Red Sea. Just as Israel had been rescued from Egypt and crossed through the Red Sea, now those victorious were crossing a red sea.
- c. The Exodus imagery continues in that the victorious sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. The song of Moses was sung after the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, Exodus 15.1. It was a song of victory. This song sung now is also a song of victory...victory through the blood of Christ, 7:14; 14:4.

Chapter 16: The Pouring Out of God's Wrath

1. The first six bowls (vss. 1-12)

- a. Chapter 15 introduced these bowls of wrath, declaring that these were the "last" and that in them "the wrath of God is finished". As we noted then, these bowls are in contrast to the trumpets of judgment found in chapters 8-9. Those were partial judgments meant to convince man of his need to repent. These judgments are full and deliver God's full wrath to wicked man.
- b. The first bowl (vs. 2) afflicts those that have the mark of the beast (13.16-18) with painful sores reminiscent of the 6th plague in Egypt (Exodus 9.8-11)
- c. The second bowl (vs. 3) turns the sea into blood, killing every living thing in it. Similar to the second trumpet which turned 1/3 of the sea into blood (8.8) and to the first plague in Egypt (Exodus 7.14f)
- d. The third bowl (vs. 4) affects the rivers and springs, turning them into water. Again, this is similar to the second trumpet and first plague. However, "At that time the people could dig and find water to drink (Ex. 7:20f); under the plague of the third bowl, even the underground springs are turned to blood," (Hailey)
- e. The fourth bowl brought about scorching heat from the sun (vss. 8-9). "This symbol has no parallel in the plagues brought upon Egypt. Most of the pagans worshipped the sun. An object of their worship is used here as a symbol of their destruction," (Green). However, there is a parallel between man's reaction in vs. 9 with Pharaoh's heart in Exodus 9.13-17,34-35.
- f. The fifth bowl (vss. 10-11) brings the entire kingdom (i.e. the Roman Empire) into darkness. Similar to the 9th plague in Egypt that brought utter darkness on the Egyptians (Exodus 10.21-23). Yet, man would still not repent.
- g. The sixth bowl (vs. 12) dries up the water of the Euphrates, clearing the way for the armies of the east. The idea is the same as the sixth trumpet, 9:13-21, where a great army comes from the river Euphrates. The trumpet referred to invasions that would serve to warn, now this bowl will again be a part of the final judgment against the Empire. "This Euphrates here is not a physical or geographical location; it symbolizes a barrier or deterrent to invasion, which is

now removed," (Hailey).

- h. We passed over vss. 4-7, but consider them now. These verses serve as a reminder of why God's wrath was being poured out; it was His justice. A justice deserved by wicked man for rejecting Him and persecuting His people. And He is righteous in executing judgment.

2. Armageddon (vss. 13-16)

- a. There was a pause b/w the opening of the 6th and 7th seals and trumpets. Likewise, there is now a pause b/w the pouring out of the 6th and 7th bowls. What this pause shows us is that Satan and his allies are continuing to struggle against God, seeking to obtain victory, yet they shall not.
- b. We see "unclean spirits like frogs" coming out of the dragon's mouth and the mouths of his allies (vs. 13). Frogs were one of the plagues in Egypt (Exodus 8.1-15) and unclean under the Law (Lev. 11.9f). The point is that Satan has not stopped seducing the nations even as God was bringing about His judgments. Satan was still recruiting, still gathering his forces for war.
- c. And Satan gathers his forces to a place called Har-Magedon (i.e. Armageddon). This term literally means "hill of Megiddo" a fortress town in Palestine where many decisive battles were fought:
 - i. Barak & Deborah vs. Kings of Canaan, Judg. 5:19.
 - ii. Gideon vs. Midianites, Judg. 6:33.
 - iii. Saul defeated by Philistines, I Sam. 31:8.
 - iv. Ahaziah defeated by Jehu, II Kings 9:27.
 - v. Pharaoh Necho overthrew Josiah, II Kings 23:29-30.
 - vi. "In view of these battles of historical significance we conclude that John used the word symbolically to describe a great decisive spiritual battle b/w the army of Satan and the forces of God," (Hailey). See 19:11-21.

3. The seventh bowl (vss. 17-21)

- a. Given what we saw in vss. 13-16 we would expect a great battle to be described in these verses.
- b. But no battle is described, only victory is declared! Future passages will speak more of this conflict, but the seventh bowl declares that victory is accomplished "It is done" and gives several more pictures of judgment (lightning, earthquake, hail).
- c. Satan may have gathered his forces, but nothing would stop the wrath and fury of God!
- d. But even as we see God's wrath being brought about fully on the kingdom of the beast, on Babylon, we see that man does not turn to God. Rather, he continues in blasphemy (vs. 21).

Application

1. God's victory is assured.

- a. We noted several links in chapters 15-16 with the exodus from Egypt. John's readers could know that God had triumphed over Egypt in delivering Israel.

Those events had happened long ago. God's point to them was that just as God had been victorious over Egypt, He would also be victorious over Rome.

- b. God's foes do not recognize that they are defeated. They continue to rebel and to war against Him. But it will not change the fact that God will be triumphant.
 - c. However, the saints can know that they are victorious. It may not look like victory now, but God will be triumphant.
2. God is righteous in His wrath. We noted this in 16.5-7. The wrath of God doesn't fit with the modern sense of God, a God who loves and forgives. God is that too, but the Scriptures point out that God's wrath on His enemies is sure and it is righteous.
 3. God's patience is not infinite. God is patient (2Peter 3.9), but ultimately His patience will come to an end. God had sought to bring about the repentance of Rome (9.20-21), but when repentance man would "drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger" (14.10). That fact that we have today to repent is a sign of God's enduring patience, but tomorrow is not guaranteed.