

# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

## ***Lesson 10***

Chapter 15 allowed us to see the comforting and encouraging picture of the saints standing on the burning sea of glass while praising God for their victory. The followers of the beast had failed to repent, despite multiple warnings and punishments. God's final judgment was now upon the unrighteous, and God will use all means to pronounce judgment on the dragon, the beast, and his followers. This will write the end of this chapter of history but not final judgment, which will be discussed in chapter 20. Obviously, similar events of judgment have occurred in the past and will be repeated at various times throughout history. There are many similarities between the trumpet judgments and the bowls of wrath, judgments directed both on nature and directly against mankind. Whereas the trumpet judgments were partial (affecting only one-third), the bowls are more complete. The three forces which brought down Rome (natural disasters, social decay, and invading nations) again find meaning in the coming bowls, as they did with the previous trumpet judgments. Several visions that explain the earthly spiritual conflict and God's protection for His church separated the unfolding of the 7 trumpets and 7 bowls. Now is the time for the end for Satan's wicked agent, the beast.

## **CHAPTER 16**

A great voice is heard coming from the temple sanctuary, commanding the seven angels to pour their bowls out on the earth. As the first angels obeys, the unrepentant develop a terrible sore (sores?) on their bodies, painful and injurious. It is as if the corruption of the world that festers inside of them breaks through to the surface for all to see, causing severe suffering. Whereas the first four trumpet judgments brought calamity on nature, the first bowl of wrath directly injures mankind. Just as from unforgiven sin, there is no relief from these sores.

The second angel pours out his bowl into the sea, which now becomes as the blood of a dead man – clotted, rotting and fetid. Every creature in the seas died, unlike just one-third with the corresponding trumpet. Everything coming from the sea would also be toxic to mankind. The analogy to the spiritual death

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and disease found in the unrighteous society of the beast is clear. In likeness to the third trumpet, the third angel follows in line and pours his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, which also turn to blood. Unlike Egypt during its plague of blood, there would no longer be any source of water. In like fashion, spiritual healing could no longer be found, and followers of the beast would die of spiritual thirst. This is righteous vindication and not angry vindictiveness: Rome had become “drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (17:6). They shed innocent blood, and now all they have to drink is diseased blood themselves. They were given the opportunity to drink of the water from which they would never thirst again and would become a well-spring to eternal life (John 4:14) but had sadly rejected it. Another voice from the altar speaks and claims “*true and righteous are thy judgments.*” Unrighteous men do not understand the great offence of sin in God’s eyes, and do not know the great price paid to remove sin from the penitent. In reality, God’s judgments show His great love and mercy (Rom. 1:18-29), and that all His works are “true and righteous” (19:2; 15:3-4).

A fourth angel pours out his bowl, causing the sun to give off such heat and fire as to scorch men. One would think that such a display of God’s power would melt the hearts of men and lead them to repent, but instead it only sears their hearts and consciences, leading to more blasphemy. One can only think of arrogant men such as Pharaoh, who despite seeing and *knowing* the awesome power of God, refused to step off his own pedestal and honor Him (Ex.9:13-17 & 34-35; remember also Rom. 1:21). Despite these severe penalties of judgment, there would *still* be time to repent before ultimate destruction. This is a similar scene to that of the judgments of the trumpets (9:20-21), and is painful for the saved to behold. Yet, God always has the last word. One’s sins will always come back to “*find you out*” (Num. 32:23). Paul also used the analogy of reaping and sowing for one’s actions (Gal. 6:7-8).

In verses 10-21 of chapter 16, the penalties deal with moral and political issues. When the fifth angel empties his bowl, he pours it on the ‘seat (throne) of the beast.’ This seat or throne represents the seat of world power, which the first century readers would have thought of as the world ruled by Rome. This is the dominion to which the beast and Satan have been given authority. Darkness often signifies evil in scripture, and thus the hiding of wisdom and spiritual

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understanding. We remember when the fifth trumpet sounded, smoke arose from the abyss and caused utter darkness. In this darkness, horrifying locusts came forth which tormented the unrighteous (see 9:1-11). Already tortured by sores and the burning heat, now the followers of the beast are tortured by their spiritual darkness, sorrow, and calamity. Still clinging to earthly comforts and pleasures, they are still driven by their pride and stubbornness. They are no longer able to see sin as the cause of their pain and no longer able to see any relief from God in the darkness. Filled with agony and despair, all they can do is curse and blaspheme God.

The sixth angel pours his bowl onto the great river Euphrates. The result is a drying up of the river, exposing the eastern border of the Roman Empire to invasion. Over 600 years earlier, a similar ploy was used by the Persians (diversion of the river at that time) to allow invasion and destruction of Babylon and the Babylonian Empire (see Isa. 44:28 – 45:7 and Jer. 51:57-58). This is also similar to the sixth trumpet judgment (9:13-19). As before, Babylon (now the new Babylon or Rome) is exposed to invasion by armies in God's hands with a mission to destroy the beast. This included the Parthians, who we mentioned before. In response to these severe judgments, the dragon and beast and false prophet all produce terrible unclean spirits "like frogs" out of their mouths (remember the foul river the dragon produced to drown the woman). We also think of the second plague against Egypt, that of frogs. Although we are not told how, they destroyed the Egyptians (Ps. 78:45). These demonic spirits are able to perform great signs and wonders before the kings of the world, to enlist their help in fighting "*the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.*" Some would refer to this as the Battle of Armageddon (see 16:14 and 19:19-21), but that is actually a spiritual battle and not a physical one, waged in the hearts of men. Satan uses false religion and worldly propaganda to successfully deceive the minds of many.

Verse 15 presents the third of seven beatitudes found in the Revelation. It reminds the saints to always keep watch and be prepared, as the Lord's coming will be sudden and unannounced, whether for a future judgment of God or the end of time. This is the same warning as found in I Thess. 5:1-3. Garments here stand for the saint's thoughts and behaviors, which must be kept pure and faithful at all times. Our conduct must always reflect the truth of the gospel (Phil. 1:27). The revelation already warned the reader of things "that must shortly come to

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pass” (1:1; 22:6) and “for the time is at hand” (1:3; 22:10), making this warning of judgment against the beast particularly important.

In verse 16 is the only mention in the Bible of Har-Magedon, or Armageddon. It is actually an ancient city on the northeastern side of Mount Carmel, overlooking the Valley of Jezreel or Plain of Esdraelon. This valley was the major route of north-south travel through Palestine, and is mentioned ten times in the Old Testament. It was the site of evil King Ahab’s palace, and many famous politically & spiritually important battles in Israel’s history were waged here (Deborah & Barak defeating Sisera – Judges 4.5; Gideon’s rout of the Midianites – Judges 7:1; Saul & Jonathan killed by the Philistines – I Sam. 31:1-6; the death of King Ahaziah – II Kings 9:27; the defeat & death of the good King Josiah against Pharaoh Necho II at the Battle of Megiddo [thus preventing Egypt from aiding the Assyrians against the Babylonians] – II Kings 23:29; even the disastrous march of Napoleon Bonaparte to Syria traveled this route just over 200 years ago). John uses this place symbolically to describe a great and decisive spiritual battle between the forces of Satan and the forces of God. Never in doubt, the war was fought and won by the Lord, with the complete destruction of the beast/ Roman Empire and its promotion of paganism and emperor worship. This was never a picture of a physical battle yet to be fought in our future before a supposed 1000 year reign of Christ on the earth. The kingdom of Jesus will never be advanced by physical warfare (John 18:36, II Cor. 10:4). Our only sword is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17).

Why was the analogy of Meggido used? Just as referencing places such as ‘Waterloo’ or ‘Normandy’ or ‘Pearl Harbor’ denotes great conflicts with great victories/ defeats in our minds (“... he met his Waterloo...”, or “...he crossed the Rubicon”), referencing ‘Armageddon’ would elicit similar feelings & understanding in the minds of John’s audience. These analogies also never lose their significance, as similar battles of the forces of good versus evil have continued throughout history. Satan’s battles with God will ever continue until the end of time, and the spiritual battle of Armageddon can even be seen, in a sense, in each of our lives on a personal basis.

We now have the seventh angel pour his bowl upon the air. This shows a completion of God’s judgment against the world of the unrighteous (earth, water, fire/ sun, and air). Air is likely used symbolically here to refer to the entirety of

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Satan's domain: "...in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." Satan is also referred to as "*the prince of this world*" (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11). Air is the realm where the wicked live, governed by their prince, Satan. A great voice is heard, stating "*It is done*" (verse 17). What follows is great flashes of lightning, peals of thunder, and an earthquake unmatched in intensity since the beginning of mankind. We previously saw the last of the opened seven seals closed with the same thunder and lightning and voices and an earthquake. The sounding of the seven trumpets also closed with these same signs and included hail. Now these seven bowls of wrath also conclude in the same fashion, although much greater in scope. The result of these powerful signs is that the 'great city' (Rome) was split into three parts. The nations (those who followed and aided Rome) were also destroyed. Every island fled away (were removed) and the mountains were also destroyed. This is similar to the opening of the sixth seal, where the foundations of the islands and mountains were moved out of their places. We now see that every place where men can dwell are affected, and there is no place of refuge from God's wrath. As we saw the unrighteous trampled in the winepress of God by His righteous anger and their own blood spilled (14:20), so here they continue to become "*the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.*"

The final aspect of the seventh bowls was a hailstorm unlike any ever before seen. Stones of the weight of a talent (60-100 lbs, most likely about 90 lbs) fell on the unrighteous and killed many. Hail was a symbol of divine judgment since God's wrath on Egypt, the seventh plague. We also see such judgment on the Canaanites (Josh. 10:11) and symbolically on Jerusalem (Isa. 28:15-18 and Ezek. 38:22). Amazingly, those who lived only blasphemed God again and refused to repent. God's judgments on the beast are now finished, and the empire and its influence and power destroyed. Only the final judgment at the end of time remains to complete the punishment on all sinners who have ever lived.

## CHAPTER 17

After the judgments of the seven bowls of wrath are emptied, one of the seven angels who poured out these judgments approaches John and invites him

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to see the judgment of the “great harlot.” It is important to remember the events of chapter 16, as the scene and events and symbols have not changed. Much speculation has been given to her identity, whether Rome or the entire empire, or Jerusalem, or even papal Rome. Give the most logical premise of a late first century dating for the apocalypse, it best fits the great city or Rome (see 14:18). She is actually symbolic of the power and position of the emperor who at the time of writing would be Domitian. Her demise was already foreshadowed in 14:8 and 16:19, and now more details are given to these events.

Rome was basically the capital of the known world, “*who reigns over the kings of the earth*” (vs. 18). She sits on “*many waters*”, or the restless sea of humanity from many nations (vs. 15). She did this by force and coercion, enticing other kingdoms to share in her wealth and pleasure and immorality, as well as her violence. The analogy to a drunken whore who seduces the world to defy God is an exact picture of the Roman Empire. John is now transported in the Spirit (as in 1:10), and taken to the wilderness again (12:6). As the first woman who bore a child (the Savior) was introduced in chapter twelve, symbolizing the faithful remnant of God, we now see this second woman, an immoral harlot who is the direct opposite, symbolizing everything anathema to the truth of God. This harlot is clothed in purple and scarlet, adorned with precious jewels and gold and holding a golden cup. Everything about her suggests wealth and power and social status. She appears to have the “best” of everything the world can offer. Yet, her cup is full of the abominations and filthiness of her fornication. Her wine is not beneficial, but has the intoxication of sin, containing spiritual poison which causes spiritual death. She proudly wears a name written on her forehead: “*Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth.*” She is not the first empire to practice spiritual fornication, but she is now the major source of sin, immorality, and cruelty/ violence in the world. She is drunk from drinking the blood of the saints who have become witnesses/ martyrs for Jesus. John writes: “*In her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all that have been slain upon the earth*” (18:24). Without concern for her behavior or the consequences, she shamelessly parades in front of the world and forces them to do likewise.

The previously mentioned angel now proceeds to explain the identity of the beast and the harlot. The beast on which she rides seems very familiar. It is red,

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the color of violence and bloodshed. There are great similarities between this beast and the beast of chapter 13. Both have seven heads and ten horns. One comes out of the sea, and the other from the abyss (the habitation of Satan and his minions). One had a head that was wounded to the death but was now healed, and the other “*was, is not, yet now is*”. Both made war with God, the first with the saints and the second with the Lamb (and thus the saints). Of course, we also see that both have a resemblance to the dragon introduced in chapter 12, the manifestation of Satan. Although used here in a different context, this red beast appears to be the previous beast out of the sea.

What follows in verses 8-13 is some of the most difficult imagery to understand in the entire book of the Revelation. There is a question of whether the angel now identifies the beast with the emperor or the entire empire, either of which could authorize the direct persecution of the saints. This beast comes from the abode of Satan (the abyss), and once used by Satan will be sent to destruction or utter ruin (perdition). The ‘resurrection’ from the fatal wound suggests the revival of either a Caesar (remember the revival of Nero’s persecution policies in Domitian), or the revival of another empire (such as Rome) which brings back evil and sinful behavior and persecution to the world. Either way, the unrighteous (those “*whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world*”) will be amazed by this spectacle of continued powerful political revival and still follow the beast (Caesar or empire).

Verse 9 tells us that the seven heads of the beast are seven hills or mountains, which would clearly suggest the geography of Rome. However, verse 10 tells us these seven heads stand for seven kings. Whether the number seven is used here to indicate seven individual kings, seven governments or empires, or the complete number (7) or fullness of anti-Christian power, it is difficult to say. Verse 10 now says that five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come (and will only remain a little while when he does come). Further, verse 11 tells us that the beast which was and is not, is himself also an *eighth* and is one of the seven. Apparently the heads are also the same as the beasts. We must now choose the meaning of the seven heads to understand this passage. Three main ideas have been proposed:

**1).** Some scholars believe the seven heads stand for great pagan kingdoms of the past. The first five that have fallen are Old Babylonia (Gen. 10:8-11), Assyria, Neo-

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Babylonia, the Medo-Persians, and Greece. The one that is would be Rome. The seventh head would be all anti-Christian governments through time after Rome. The eighth might be a later revival of Rome (a point often made by Premillennialists).

**2).** A second proposal, with many adherents, suggests these are actual individual Roman emperors, which does fit nicely into the narrative. The five which have fallen would include Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero. The next three emperors (Galba, Otho, and Vitellius) all ruled for less than one year and were not well-known throughout the empire, so are omitted in the counting. The sixth, the one “that is”, would be Vespasian, and the one not yet here and would only stay for a little while is Titus (the seventh, emperor for just two years). The one that “was and is not”, who would be an eighth Caesar and one of the seven (*like* the seven, with resurrected policies such as persecution) would be Domitian (the “resurrected Nero”). Although this proposal correlates well with history, this would place the first writing of the Revelation by John during Vespasian’s rule (AD 69-79). This creates a problem, as finding a reason for John’s banishment this early in the First Century is questionable (although possible). Also, all the early church fathers and historians place the dating of the Revelation in the 90s, late in Domitian’s reign (AD 81-96). It is still possible the Revelation was written early and only released or only taken to Ephesus late, shortly before the major persecution began during the end of Domitian’s rule.

**3).** A final idea suggests that the seven heads or kings (a complete or perfect number) simply refer to the whole of Satan-influenced and anti-Christian empires throughout history, Rome being the most recent. Some suggest that Rev. 20:3,7-8 provides a clue. Satan is briefly loosed after the figurative 1000 years, only to gather “Gog and Magog” to attack the saints one last time before his destruction. This would be the eighth manifestation of the beast, also “*one of the seven.*” This is an interesting but completely unprovable speculation, suggesting another “Armageddon-like” battle in the future. Even if true, that provides no evidence to the premillennial concept of a predictable series of events and world-wide war shortly before the end of the world, an idea not found in scripture.

As we previously said, horns represent power. We see the ten horns being related to ten kings which had not yet received a kingdom. When they do, they are granted brief authority with the beast (only one hour). At the direction of the



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dragon, they form a coalition with the beast, and give their power and authority to the beast to wage war against the Lamb (Rev. 16:14). The Lamb and His forces destroy all of them, for *“He is Lord of lords, and King of kings.”* What was previously stated in verse 15 of chapter 11 is fully realized: *“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.”* *“All things have been put in subjection under His feet”* (Eph. 1:20-23; I Peter 3:22). The question does arise: was this speaking of the “Battle of Armageddon” hinted at in chapter 16 and actually concluded in chapter 19 (verses 19-21), or some other conflict? We must remember that such wars are not physical but spiritual, waged whenever Satan challenges God. The purpose of mentioning this current conflict is to show that Rome’s policy of forcing vassal states to fight with them actually led to them turning against the empire and hastening its downfall. Although Satan enticed them to follow Rome, it was God who put this in their minds and also turned their minds against Rome to defeat her. Indeed, verse 16 clearly states that the subordinate kingdoms and even the internal moral and political rottenness of Rome itself led to the downfall of the harlot. Her destruction is stated in horrible terms: made desolate and naked, her flesh eaten and burned with fire. The harlot, or the great city Rome, is eventually destroyed, leading to the great lament for Babylon in chapter 18.