

REVELATION 16

Introduction

- *“The severity of God’s judgments will increase as the end of this world at Christ’s return draws nearer. In fact, this is the overall emphasis in this third vision of earthly events. While some of the events presented in this third vision repeat those in the second, in the third vision they are all intensified in order to portray God’s final warning of the seriousness of his judgment at the End. For example, in 8:8-9, one third of the sea is contaminated and one third of ocean life perishes, but in the corresponding plague in 16:3, all seawater becomes blood and all sea creatures perish. Thus the plagues of God’s wrath in the third vision urge the human race to repent before it is too late since no one will escape the final judgment” (Brighton, Revelation, CPH, p. 409).*

Rev. 16:1

- “A great voice from the Temple” – Since this voice comes from the Temple, it is the voice of God Himself, and, more specifically, of Christ, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity. As we are reminded throughout Revelation, it is Christ, the One who alone can break the seals, who is in charge of the events which unfold on earth before His glorious return.

Rev. 16:2-4

- “First angel . . . first bowl . . . harmful and painful sores” – Reminiscent of the plague of boils or blisters that struck Egypt (Ex. 9:8-12). However, the boils then were only for a short period of time, while the harmful and painful sores from this first bowl of God’s wrath will strike humanity all through the New Testament Era. We are not to take this literally, as though the entire human race will be struck down with literal “harmful and painful sores,” but rather that humanity will be afflicted physically by God’s wrath in many and various ways throughout history and that these afflictions will be intensified as the Day of Judgment draws ever closer.
- “Second angel . . . second bowl . . . sea became like blood” – However this plague shall be fulfilled, one thing is certain, namely that increasingly the seas, the bodies of salt water, will be made unfit for people or beasts, and that some of the basic requirements for sustaining human food and the cycle by which ocean water evaporates and then provides rain to water the earth will, in many and various ways throughout history, fail.
- “Third angel . . . third bowl . . . river and springs of water became blood” – Not only will the seas be plagued throughout history in many and various ways, so also the freshwater supply will be plagued. The point is clear in both plagues that afflict humanity’s water supply, namely that God’s wrath will strike them in such a way that they will sometimes harm, rather than sustain, human life throughout history.

Rev. 16:5-7

- “The angel of the waters” – This indicates that God’s holy angels have been given specific responsibilities to oversee specific aspects of His creation. Here, this angel has oversight of the waters of the earth.
- “Just are You, O Holy One . . .” – The angel of the waters cries out in worship and praise of God, declaring that His judgments are just. God’s holy angels know all too well what our sins deserve, for they are ever in the presence of the Holy and Righteous Creator of the universe. The greatest mystery to them is the fact that God would become Man in order to save the human race from what they deserve for their sins. They gladly obey God in ministering to His chosen people, those to whom He gives faith, but they also gladly obey God in administering His wrath and judgment upon those who reject Him and remain in their sins. They realize very clearly what we sinners fail to fully comprehend, namely that God is perfectly righteous and just in both instances, when

He declares sinners righteous on behalf of His Son in whom they believe and when He punishes those who refuse to accept the gift of faith He desires to give them.

- “For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets” – While all unbelievers will justly experience God’s wrath and punishment, it is specifically those who persecute and kill God’s chosen people which is highlighted by the angel here. They will get what’s coming to them in the End. God will vindicate His people. He will take vengeance upon those who have harmed or killed them. And, again, God will be perfectly righteous and just in doing so. This is a constant theme throughout Revelation and we have seen the fact that God will punish those who afflict His people highlighted throughout (cf. 6:9-1; 8:3-5).
- “And I heard the altar saying . . .” – *“Earlier, in Revelation 6:9, the souls of the martyrs were depicted beneath the heavenly altar. In Revelation 8:3-5, the prayers of the saints were signified by the incense arising at the altar. Now, the altar itself becomes the personification of the prayerful desire of God’s people for the vindication of His righteousness. The altar testifies to the perfect appropriateness of God’s judgment upon the wicked. It could not be otherwise, for the Judge is ‘the Holy One,’ ‘Lord God Almighty,’ whose divine judgments are always ‘true and just’” (Dr. Laurence L. White, “The Book of Revelation: Scripture’s Crescendo and Culmination,” p. 466).*

Rev. 16:8-11

- “Fourth angel . . . the sun . . . scorch people with fire” – The angel pours out the fourth bowl and the sun is allowed to scorch people with fire. Of course, this is figurative language and does not mean that the sun will literally rain literal fire down upon people to scorch them, but rather that the sun will be used to cause great pain and discomfort among the people of the earth. Some modern commentators see the breaking down of the ozone layer, which is in place to protect us from the sun’s ultraviolet rays, as the fulfillment of this fourth plague, stating that the more the ozone layer breaks down, the more harmful the sun’s rays will become, signaling that the End is near. While this could certainly be a result of the fourth angel pouring out his bowl, we cannot limit our interpretation to this alone. Remember, all of these plagues, or judgments, happen in various ways throughout the New Testament Era. Thus, we could rightly conclude that the fact that the sun has been increasingly damaging to people on earth of late could very well indicate that the End is drawing near, we must also recognize that God has allowed the sun to plague people on earth in many and various ways throughout history, and that, whenever that has happened, it has been a result of the judgment we read about here.
- “They cursed the name of God . . . did not repent and give him glory” – The point of all of the judgments or plagues brought upon the earth by God is to warn people of the Judgment to come and to call them to repentance and faith. But, most people miss the point entirely. When these judgments come upon them, instead of turning to God in repentance and faith, they blaspheme and curse Him. Either they acknowledge that there is a God and hate Him (or her, or it, whomever or whatever they think God is) for allowing them to suffer, or they attribute their sufferings to random chance or “fate,” refusing to acknowledge God, which is just as blasphemous. People often say things like, “If God does exist, I want nothing to do with Him! I will not worship a God who allows all this pain and suffering in the world!” What such people fail to realize is that God allows “all this pain and suffering in the world” because He cares about their eternal well-being. He uses pain and suffering to turn them from their rebellion and rescue them from the eternal pain and suffering they will experience in Hell should they refuse to turn to Him in repentance and faith. It is truly better to suffer here on earth than to suffer eternally in Hell!
- “Fifth angel . . . throne of the beast . . . darkness” – Since those who have “the mark of the beast” upon them refuse to repent, God now strikes the beast and its kingdom, which is the very object of their worship and allegiance. The beast’s kingdom is “plunged into darkness,” which is

reminiscent of the plague of darkness brought upon Egypt (Exodus 10:21-23). However, there is a difference between the darkness then and the darkness spoken about here. In Egypt, it was a literal darkness, but here it is a spiritual darkness, symbolizing eternal death, damnation, and everlasting separation from the Light, i.e., Christ (cf. John 1:4-10). Already in this life, those who are citizens in the beast's kingdom will experience spiritual darkness, lacking the peace, hope, and comfort which comes only through faith in Christ. Their lives will be in spiritual disarray – in darkness – for such is the nature of the kingdom of the beast. However, the darkness they experience in this life will be nothing like that eternal darkness to come.

- “People gnawed their tongues . . . cursed God . . . did not repent” - God's actions here to plunge the kingdom of the beast into darkness is to awaken those who belong to that kingdom to realize the futility of their allegiance and to turn in repentance and faith to His Kingdom of Light. But, again, we are alerted to the sad fact that most people will not take heed of God's warnings. Instead, they will grow more vehement in their hatred and anger toward God. They “gnaw their tongues in anguish” now, but as our Lord tells us, “they will be thrown outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” for eternity (Matt. 8:12; cf. also Matt. 22:13; 25:30; 2 Pet. 2:17; Jude 13).

Rev. 16:12-16

- “Sixth angel . . . Euphrates . . . prepare the way for the kings from the east” – Here, like in the Sixth Trumpet Judgment, we are given a picture of the final battle between God's Kingdom and the kingdom of the beast (Satan's kingdom). *“The devil's war against the church continues throughout the entire NT era (as portrayed in 12:13-17), but it culminates in one last and greatest battle before the End at Christ's return”* (Brighton, *Revelation, CPH*, p. 416). The Euphrates River is mentioned again (9:14) because it played a significant role in the history of the Israelites and the other nations of the Fertile Crescent. Likewise, kings from the east are mentioned because most of Israel's enemies came from the east. These historically significant things are used to symbolize the last great battle to take place between Satan and the Church. The fact that the water of the Euphrates is “dried up” to allow the kings from the east to enter the battlefield calls to mind the parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21-31) and the splitting of the waters of the Jordan River (Joshua 3:9-17). In those instances, it was God who parted those waters to allow His people to cross on dry land once to escape the pursuit of their Egyptian enemies and again to allow them to enter the Promised Land to conquer their enemies. Here, the drying up of the Euphrates symbolizes the fact that God will allow His enemies, under the control of the beast (Satan), to enter the battlefield for one final conflict with His Church. The kings from the east represent all those who worship the beast and its image and, thus, pledge their allegiance to the Dragon, i.e., all unbelievers.
- “Out of the mouth of the dragon, beast, and false prophet” – Here we have before us a picture of the same unholy trinity we witnessed in chapters 12-13, Satan's attempt to mock the Triune God (cf. notes on chapter 13). Here, however, the third person in this unholy trinity is given a new name/title, i.e., the false prophet. Previously, we were introduced to the dragon, the beast from the sea, and the beast from the earth. Here, we have the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. The false prophet is the same figure as the beast from the earth. This is the person of the unholy trinity which mocks the Third Person of the Most Holy Trinity, i.e., the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit always prophecies about, and points people to, Christ. He is the True Prophet. The beast from the earth prophecies about, and points people to, the first beast, i.e., the second person of the unholy trinity which mocks the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, i.e., Christ. He is the false prophet.
- “Three unclean spirits like frogs . . . demonic spirits . . . assemble them for battle” - The unholy trinity is the power and influence behind the kings and their hosts who will enter the battlefield to

make war with Christ's Church. They release their demons, symbolized by frogs, to go out and gather the troops for the final battle. Why frogs? This symbolizes the frogs that covered everything in Egypt (Exodus 8:3-4) and means that the host gathered by these demons for battle will cover the entire earth. This is consistent with the teaching throughout Scripture, and especially Revelation, that when the Last Day arrives, the whole world will be under Satan's influence. There will be a very small remnant of God's people left on earth. The vast majority of people living on earth at that time will have fallen prey to Satan's influence during his "little season" and will have forsaken God and become His enemies. This is what is meant by the demons "performing signs." The signs they will perform are spiritual in nature, the greatest of which are those that twist, distort, and replace true Christian doctrine and practice into false doctrine and practice. You have to keep this in mind throughout Revelation, for the purpose of the unholy trinity is to replace Christ's Church with a false Church, to deceive people into believing that they belong to Christ's Church, even though they clearly do not (cf. Matt. 7:13-23; 24:23-28). As I have noted many times throughout this class on Revelation, it is very possible that we are already in Satan's "little season" and that the Last Day is drawing near given the fact that there is very little true Christianity left in the world. And, the true Christianity which still does exist is shrinking day by day, being replaced with all kinds of false religions which merely masquerade as Christianity.

- "Battle on the great day of God the Almighty" – This is the "Great Day of God" because it is the Day when God will finally bring an eternal end to the assault on His kingdom. This is the Day of Reckoning, the Day on which Satan and all his followers will receive their eternal judgment and no longer be able to do any harm against God's people.
- "Like a thief . . . stays awake . . . keeping his garments on" – Christ speaks one final warning to all before this final battle takes place, for when it begins, that will bring an end to any chance to turn to Him in repentance and faith. It is especially a plea to His people, His Church, to remain awake and not grow weary, lest they fall prey to Satan's influence and find themselves on the wrong side of the battlefield on the Last Day. This is the message given throughout Revelation and, indeed, throughout Scripture as a whole, namely that God's people are exhorted to remain steadfast in His Word. To "stay awake" is to remain steadfast in His Word in the midst of living in this dead and dying world with all of its attempts to lure us away from the truth. It is to "keep our garments on," that is, to remain clothed in the righteousness and holiness of Christ in which we were robed at the baptismal font. How do we do that? By living a life of daily repentance, continuously recognizing and confessing our sinfulness and trusting in our Lord Christ who paid the price for us in full, and by continuing to come to the place where Christ meets us with His gifts of Word and Sacrament to feed, nourish, and strengthen us in the one, true, faith. Those who "endure to the End," that is, those who remain steadfast in God's Word, are truly blessed and have nothing to fear on the Last Day.
- "Armageddon" – Armageddon literally means, "mountain of Megiddo." Megiddo, an ancient city located in Israel's Jezreel Valley, is one of history's most famous battlefields, with records of battles taking place there as far back as 1468 B.C. Megiddo is mentioned in Scripture several times (e.g. Judges 4:14-24; 2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Kings 9:23-29; Zechariah 12:11, et. al.). However, this is the first time "mountain of Megiddo" is mentioned, which is a bit odd, since Megiddo is famous not for its mountains, but for its vast expanse of flat land. There are hills surrounding that region, but the battles have always been fought in the huge valley of Megiddo. But, since this is not literal, but figurative language, the "mountain of Megiddo" could allude to the fact that mountains have often witnessed great events in Biblical history (cf. Isaiah 44:23; Ezekiel 6:3-13; 35:12; 36:17). Thus, when you put the two together (Megiddo and Mountain), you have the image of a significant battle taking place (Megiddo symbolizing the battle and Mountain symbolizing the significance of the battle). Whatever the case, we know with absolute

certainly, regardless of what today's dispensationalists and so-called "prophecy experts" claim, that Armageddon does not refer to a specific geographical location in which the final battle between the kingdoms of Satan and Christ will take place. Brighton summarizes, "*Thus Armageddon is used here not as the designation of a particular geographic place, but as a terrifying metaphor of a war that will cover the expanse of the entire earth, since the whole human race will be caught up in it (see 20:9). And the enemy's intent in this last battle before the End will be the destruction of the people of God, the church of Jesus Christ (20:9; cf. Ezek. 38:7-16). But the enemy shall not prevail (Rev. 16:19; 20:9-10), and the kingdom shall belong to the Lord forever and ever (Obad. 21; 1 Chr. 29:11) (Brighton, Revelation, CPH, p. 423).*

Rev. 16:17-21

- "Seventh angel . . . into the air . . . loud voice . . . 'It is done!'" – The loud voice is the voice of God the Father, who exclaims that the End is here, for all things have been done. This is reminiscent of Christ's exclamation on the cross, "It is finished!" indicating that everything necessary to bring about the salvation of mankind was now fully and completely accomplished with His death on the cross. Here, God's exclamation refers to the sure and certain fact that everything that needed to happen has been completely accomplished and the End can now come. In both Christ's exclamation on the cross and the exclamation made by God the Father here, the verb used in the Greek is in the perfect tense, which is significant, since the perfect tense indicates completed action with ongoing result. Thus, Christ's death on the cross brought about the complete fulfillment of mankind's salvation and the results are eternal – nothing more could be done ever to add to or take away from the salvation He accomplished. Likewise, nothing more could be done ever to add to or take away from all of the events that were to take place before the End would come. God has done everything necessary. He has provided every warning needed. He has issued every call to repentance necessary. Nothing has been left undone. It is time. Christ can come!
- "Flashes of lightning, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake, etc." – The first thing that comes to mind here is the scene at Mt. Sinai when God appeared before the Israelites to give them His Commandments (Exodus 19:16-18). The Israelites were scared to death and asked Moses to go speak to God on their behalf. That imagery is used here to describe the appearance of God in Christ on the Last Day. Like the Israelites, most people will be absolutely terrified on that Day. However, unlike that day at Mt. Sinai, the physical phenomena mentioned here will be much more severe in scope, encompassing the whole earth. There have been severe storms with dangerous lightning and loud thunder and large hail, etc., and there have been massive earthquakes, and destructions of cities, etc. throughout history, but none of them compare to what will occur on the Last Day. The earth will shake like never before when the Trumpet blares announcing the return of Christ. The fact that all of this physical phenomena will occur on the Last Day is necessary given the fact that a New Heaven and New Earth will be ushered in.
- "They cursed God for the plague of hail" – The hail here is reminiscent of the sixth plague of Egypt (Exodus 9:13-35). However, here the hail is huge and falls upon the whole earth. "*The image is one of nature gone mad, raining death and destruction upon the world of men*" (White, Revelation, p. 493). Amazingly, even at the End, even after those marked by the image of the beast realize that Christ is Lord of all, they still curse God. They know that Judgment has come upon them and rather than apologizing to God for their stubborn refusal to repent and trust in Christ (not that that would do them any good at this point), they continue to blaspheme and curse His name, showing their utter hatred and contempt for Him and indicating their faithful allegiance to Satan.