

The Seven Last Plagues

The Time for God's Wrath has Come

Revelation 16 describes the pouring out of the seven bowls—or plagues—of God's wrath on those who rejected the forgiveness offered in Jesus and persecuted those who did accept it. But before this happens, Revelation 15 presents a scene to encourage those on God's side.

Revelation 15:1-4 opens with a scene of God's people standing on the sea of glass.

They have been victorious over the beast and its image. They are celebrating this with the song of Moses and the Lamb. This is a clear

allusion to the Old Testament story of the Exodus from Egypt under Moses. When Israel passed through the Red Sea, they sang a song of praise to God. They had been victorious despite insurmountable odds.

Here is another Exodus, this time from the forces of Babylon—and God's people are headed for the heavenly Canaan. We will also see some of the language of the plagues on Egypt used in the pouring out of the end-time plagues.

Looking Back on the Message of Hope

Each new scene in Revelation begins with a message of hope.

In Revelation 1, Jesus is seen among the seven lamp-stands, which represent the seven churches. This is followed by the sometimes severe messages to the churches. Despite

The deliverance of Israel from Egypt provides encouragement for Jesus' end-time followers | Kevin Carden | Lightstock



- this, the first scene assures the churches that Jesus is still among them.

Now, before the pouring out of the seven plagues, we are assured that God's people will survive this difficult time. They will stand on the sea of glass and sing songs of praise and victory.

The songs in Revelation play an important part in helping to us interpret the meaning and significance of what is happening. Those who do the singing are like a kind of cheer squad for God.

We tend to wonder if God is always fair in the way He deals with us and other people. The promise is given here that one day all will be revealed and when we see the complete story

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we will see that God was there, guiding us in our lives, although we could not always see it.

In this life, we often have to live by faith in His promises.

The Tabernacle of the Testimony

Revelation 15:5-8 introduces a new scene. It is the temple in heaven.

In Revelation 11:19, we were told of the Ark of the Covenant in the temple. Now, we are told, John sees “the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the testimony.” In Exodus 34:28, 29, we find that the terms ‘words of the covenant’ and ‘testimony’ are different terms describing the ‘Ten Commandments’.

When John sees the tabernacle of the testimony, he is noting that the tabernacle is the custodian of the Ten Commandments.

We saw in the preceding scenes that the final conflict will involve the issue of worship,

where the first four commandments state the “who, how and when” of worship. John is no legalist, but he does see the importance of obedience to God’s law.

The Ten Commandments are a testimony to the holiness of the character of God and His justice in dealing with His creation. We are happiest when we respond to our Creator by worshipping Him in the ways He requires.

Divine Judgments are Fair and Just

In Revelation 15:6, the seven plagues come from the tabernacle of the testimony where God’s grace and mercy can be found. It is also a source of divine judgments on those who reject the gospel and deliberately defy the law of God. This verse also gives a reason for the bowls of wrath: “they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets.”

In verse 7, the angels are described like Christ in Revelation 1, suggesting they come

Depiction of the Tabernacle in the wilderness | ratpack223 | Getty Images



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with the authority from Christ who has commissioned them.

In verse 8, smoke from the glory of God fills the temple so no-one can enter. This is the language found in the dedication of the tabernacle in the wilderness (see Exodus 40:34, 35) and the dedication of Solomon's temple (see 1 Kings 8:10, 11).

This is another way of saying there is no mediatory ministry being performed during the time the plagues are being poured out. This is to be a time when those who have rejected the gospel will face the full wrath of God unmixed with mercy.

"No-one could enter the temple" is another way of describing the close of human probation. The seven plagues are the wrath of God that comes under the sounding of the seventh trumpet.

God is now closing the door of opportunity to change sides.

Comparing the Trumpets and the Plagues

There are some close parallels with the trumpets and the plagues: both affect the earth, sea, rivers, sun, darkness and the river Euphrates. But there are also some important differences:

Intercession is still going on during the trumpets sounding and the gospel is still being preached (Revelation 8:2-5).

In the time of the plagues, there is no intercession and no mercy being offered (Revelation 15:8).

The trumpets are restricted to a part of the earth; the plagues involve the whole earth.

The trumpets cover the whole of church history; the plagues are just prior to Christ's second coming.

Just as Israel marched around Jericho six days and then, on the seventh day, blew trumpets and Jericho's walls fell down (see Joshua 6), so both the seventh trumpet blasts and the plagues are a part of the fall of this world.

The great final plagues of earth's history fall on those who have rejected God and hurt His followers. Like the original Exodus from Egypt, God delivers His people.

God sends seal and trumpet warnings ahead of the plagues as acts of compassion to show the unrepentant the consequences of their rejection and to encourage the faithful.

The First Five Plagues or Bowls

▷ Read Revelation 16:1-11

Seven golden bowls are used to pour out the plagues. Vessels were used in the sanctuary for incense and offerings. These are the temple bowls of offerings to God. Earlier, the bowls were full of incense representing the prayers of God's people (see Revelation 8:3-5) but now they have become instruments of destruction.

The execution of the wrath of God is initiated by the prayers of God's faithful people.

An important question asked by many about the plagues is: "Are they literal plagues?"

This is a difficult question. The Book of Revelation is full of symbolic language. But if the plagues are not literal, one wonders how they could affect those receiving them in such a way as to bring about the results as described in Revelation 16:9, where people curse God because of the intense pain.

On the other hand, the sixth plague is clearly symbolic language describing the lead up to the battle of Armageddon. How literal are the others? We may have to wait and see.

It seems the plagues should have some

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The trumpets announced preliminary judgments and were partial; but now God's *full* wrath is being poured out.



The water becomes blood | StMax89 | Getty Images

The Third Plague—Rivers And Springs Becomes Blood (Verse 4)

When the third trumpet sounded, the waters became bitter and many people died because of the bitter waters. Now all the waters become blood and there is no reference to death.

The reason for these judgments is given in Revelation 16:5-7. They have shed the blood of God's people, so they have been given blood to drink.

The altar responds by saying: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments" (Revelation 16:7). This altar is most likely the altar of burnt offering mentioned in the fifth seal. God's people were pictured as calling from under this altar for Him to judge those who dwell on the earth and avenge their blood.

The Fourth Plague—The Sun Scorches People with Fire (Verses 8, 9)

The fourth trumpet affected the sun in such a way as to cause darkness (see Revelation 8:12) but the fourth plague causes the opposite effect—the heat of the sun is increased. This

causes great pain.

The reaction here is incredible. It seems that many people now recognise they have been fighting against God, who has been causing these plagues. But instead of repenting, they curse the name of God and refuse to repent. In doing this, they join the beast who also blasphemes the name of God (see Revelation 13:6).

Some people think they can turn to God at any time. But these verses show how foolish it is to think this way. They have taken a course of action and cannot turn around. What we are today, we will be tomorrow—only more so. How important it is that we turn wholeheartedly to Christ today.

We saw during the study of the death of the two witnesses that some of the earth-dwellers did repent (see Revelation 11:13) and turned to God. In response to the preaching of the first angel's message (Revelation 14:7), some gave glory to the God of heaven. But most did not—and now they cannot.

After the Door of Opportunity Closes

So why do we have these plagues at all when the door of opportunity has closed? The answer is important.

The gospel has been preached to the world, as emphasised in the first angel's message. This continued to happen as the trumpets are sounded as partial judgments to bring people to their senses. Some have responded to this opportunity (see Revelation 11:13) but most resisted and gave their support to the counterfeit trinity, receiving the mark of the beast. Some were deceived and received it on their forehead; others went along with the crowd. They became part of the final confederation against God and His people. They chose a course of action and persecuted God's people. Some even put God's people to death (see Revelation 16:6, 20:4).

Up to this point, some of these people have appeared to be religious, as were the Pharisees in Jesus' day. Signs and miracles have been used to deceive people into joining with Babylon. But the followers of the Lamb and the dragon have been drawing apart.

The Great Divide

One group has decided to follow the Lamb, no matter what the cost. They have responded to the preaching of the three angels. They accept the offer of pardon through Jesus and respond with obedience to the covenant, which is the Ten Commandments (see Revelation 12:17, 14:12). The troubles that come into the world only cause them to trust more in God to get them through.

On the other side are those who decided to resist the preaching of the three angels. They have chosen to follow the counterfeit trinity. The fire coming down from heaven proved to be a powerful deception. They determine to force those in the other camp to join them. In doing this, they are forming an image to the beast—just as the beast has operated throughout the ages. The sounding of the trumpets should have been a warning to them they are fighting against God, but they set their course, from which they will not turn back.

Once everyone has decided for one side or the other, God closes the door. The plagues falling after this time cause both sides to grow further apart. This prepares both sides

for the harvests. One is the grain harvest to be reaped by Jesus when He comes to take them home. The other is the grape harvest, to be crushed when Jesus returns.

Hardened Hearts

The description of the wicked in refusing to repent and cursing God Revelation 16:10, 11 shows the deterioration of the wicked during this time.

Nothing will turn them back to God. They have hardened their hearts to such an extent that there can be no turning back. That's why God closed the door of opportunity—there is no point in offering them the gospel anymore.

As troubles descend in the form of the plagues, one group turns more and more to God for help. He has placed His seal upon them and they are protected. They reflect the character of God (see Revelation 14:1).

On the other hand, those who have turned from God suffer anger, bitterness, pain and destruction. They reflect the character of the dragon as expressed in the mark of the beast (see Revelation 13:16).

The Fifth Plague—Darkness (Verses 10, 11)

With the help of the land beast, the sea beast has had authority over the whole earth. Together they have caused many earth dwellers to come to the side of the dragon. Now the kingdom or seat of the beast is in complete darkness. This parallels the ninth plague on the Egyptians when the whole land of Egypt was affected by total darkness.

Now the followers of the unholy trinity realise more than ever how powerless they are in their rebellion against the Creator. They realise that the powers of Babylon cannot help them in their afflictions.

The people are in agony, sin-crazed and deceived. They get angrier and prepare to turn their hatred toward those who are trusting in Jesus. There will be martyrs before probation closes (see Revelation 16:6, 20:4)

but probably not after, for they are sealed with God's protection.

Despite the pain, Revelation 16:11 says they still refuse to repent of what they had done.

More and more demonic powers take control of the wicked as they see they are powerless against the Creator. This is how it was when the plagues hit Egypt—Pharaoh kept hardening his heart. It was obvious that he was defying the Creator God, but he would not relent.

Looking at the End-War of this World

As the plagues continue, something big is about to happen: Armageddon. This is featured under the sixth plague (see Revelation 16:12-16).

Armageddon has captured the imagination of

the world. Movies have been made and books written with the title. But the central idea of Armageddon revolves around the gospel. Revelation 16:15 talks about staying awake and keeping ones clothes on:

“Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed” Revelation 16:15.

It's a warning to Christians to make sure that when this battle is fought they do not lose their hold on believing in Christ.

We noticed in the first session that Revelation, if rightly understood, helps us to better understand Jesus. This book was not given to tickle our fancy about the future. Its purpose is to reveal Jesus in such a way as to nourish and strengthen our faith in Him. This is an important concept to keep in mind as we look at Armageddon in the next session.

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