



THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

LESSON 10 – The Harvests and the Seven Vial Judgments

LESSON OBJECTIVE

The goal of this lesson is to understand the interpretation of chapters 14:14-20, 15 and 16 of the Revelation, with particular emphasis on the two harvests and the seven vial judgments.

NOTES ON REVELATION 14:14-20

14:14 “And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud *one* sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.”

The remaining seven verses in this chapter cover what we might refer to as the reaping of the grain (14-16) and the reaping of the grapes (17-20). In these verses, John looks forward to the events at the very end of the Tribulation, and then chapters 15 and 16 will fill in the details leading up to the “reaping” events recorded here in chapter 14. John sees a person on a white cloud, “one ... like unto the Son of man.” Jesus’ favorite designation for himself was “Son of man.” This title not only indicated his humanity, but was a specific reference to Daniel 7:13. By his use of this title, Jesus was consistently claiming to be the Son of man from Daniel 7, and therefore, consistently claim to be the one who would, as stated in Daniel 7:14, take dominion over the world at the end of the Tribulation. As an apostle, John was well aware of Jesus’ use of this title, and John’s use of it here is no accident. We are to understand that Jesus is in view here, riding on a cloud, and wearing a golden crown. There are two Greek terms for “crown,” the Greek *diadem* and *stephanos*. The former means a king’s crown, while the latter means a victor’s crown (i.e., as in the winner of a race). In the Revelation, Jesus is seen wearing both, but here, it is the *stephanos* or victor’s crown that Jesus is wearing. Thus, this verse is about his victory, but over whom? For the answer to this question, we must look to what Jesus is doing. John says he holds a “sharp sickle.” This is a husbandman’s tool for reaping.

14:15 “And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.”

Jesus received a command to reap. We should not think this unusual. The Greek word *angellos*, often transliterated as angel, means messenger. Fundamentally, angels are messengers of God. This particular angel is seen exiting the heavenly temple, where God the Father dwells, and by implication is delivering a message or instruction from God the Father to God the Son. The message is to use the sickle and reap because “the time is come for thee to reap.” We know that the time is come because the “harvest of the earth is ripe.” This is not the only place in the Bible where the idea of putting in the sickle to reap the harvest is used. In the context of judgment at the end of the Tribulation, see Joel 3:9-14. For a New Testament example, see Matthew 13:24-30. This last parable speaks of the reaping at the end of the Tribulation, both in the context of judgment and in the context of deliverance (i.e., salvation). The reaping done by Jesus here is deliverance (e.g., Matthew 9:37-38), that is, his reaping indicates persons being saved during the Tribulation. One final note about verse 15, the reaping comes at a precise time when God the Father announces that the harvest is ripe. The universe is not unfolding by chance.

14:16 “And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.”

Jesus now takes his sickle and reaps Tribulation Christians. It is important to note that he reaps from the entire earth. This is evidence of the fruitfulness of the ministries of the two witnesses of Chapter 11, the 144,000 of Chapters 7 and 14, and no doubt countless others who are saved during the Tribulation and risk death spreading the gospel. Remember, during this time, everyone without exception chooses between Jesus or taking the mark of the beast, with no middle ground; refusing the mark, in itself, is a powerful testimony of faith in this troublous time. Also recall, Jesus said in Matthew 24:14 that at the time of the Tribulation the gospel will have been preached to the whole planet. Jesus’ prophecy in the Olivet Discourse is fulfilled here.

14:17 “And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.”

John now sees a second angel come out of the heavenly Temple with another sharp sickle.

14:18 “And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.”

John now sees a third angel, and this one comes from the altar that has the fire under it. Recall that the altar (Revelation 6:9, 8:3, 5, 9:13) is the altar where the prayers are offered, and under the altar are the Tribulation Martyrs. We are to understand, at least in part, that this reaping is related to the Tribulation Martyrs. Recall that they are waiting to be avenged. The third angel states loudly to the second angel to reap the harvest of grapes. These are the grapes of wrath, for it is the time of the final judgment.

14:19 “And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast *it* into the great winepress of the wrath of God.”

As he was instructed, the angel thrust in his sharp sickle and reaps the grapes. The grapes are thrown into the winepress of the wrath of God. The imagery of a winepress in relation to the wrath of God occurs elsewhere in the Bible. (see, e.g., Isaiah 63:1-6) In the winepress, the grapes are smashed and the juice released.

14:20 “And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand *and* six hundred furlongs.”

Here, the winepress is metaphoric, for in actuality it is a “blood-press” – “blood came out of the winepress.” The winepress is trodden outside the city, that is, a great judgment occurs outside the city so that blood flows “unto the horse bridles” for a distance of 1,600 furlongs. The city is the Holy City, Jerusalem. This event is described in more detail in Zechariah 12:2, 14:1-5 and Joel 3:1-2, 9-17, and is the event commonly known as Armageddon (Revelation 16:16; we will address “Armageddon” in more detail in our study of chapter 19). The point about the blood coming up to the horse bridles may be *hyperbole* to emphasize the severity of the carnage, or it may be as Dr. Morris suggests (pp. 277) that the blood flows into the valley and literally reaches the horse bridles. The army in view here is huge as the battle covers 1,600 furlongs. A furlong is about 607 feet, and 1,600 furlongs comes to about 180 miles in length. Again, as Dr. Morris suggests, this army could easily be 200,000,000 in number.

NOTES ON REVELATION 15

15:1 “And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.”

Chapters 12 through 14 were a parenthesis (the third parenthesis in the book) between the sixth and seventh trumpet judgments. The prophecy now returns back to the unfolding judgments. John sees a great sign in heaven, namely, the seven angels that have the seven final “plagues” or judgments of God. Recall that the “title deed to creation” introduced in Chapter 5 was a seven-sealed scroll, and only Jesus was worthy to take the scroll (i.e., to take possession of the inheritance). As Jesus opens each of the seven seals, judgments unfold. The first six seals occur during the first half of the Tribulation, and the seventh seal occurs during the second half. The seventh seal itself contains seven individual judgments that we call the trumpet judgments (Revelation 8:1-2). And what we will see now is that the seventh trumpet judgment, occurring very near the end of the Tribulation, itself contains seven individual judgments that we call the bowl or vial judgments. The point is that very near the end of the Tribulation, just before Jesus returns, the seven bowl or vial judgments will unfold in rapid succession. Note that these are not just vials of God’s wrath, but the vials are “filled up.”

15:2 “And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, *and* over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.”

The sea of glass was first introduced in Revelation 4:6; it is before the throne of God and represents order, purity and holiness. But unlike its introduction in chapter 4, the sea of glass here is mingled with fire. The reason is that those standing on the sea of glass, before God, are Tribulation Martyrs, having just come out of the terrible events of the Tribulation. They had victory over the beast (Anti-Christ), they had victory over his image (the image that was animated by the False Prophet or beast from the land) by not bowing the knee, and they had victory over the number of the beast’s name. Recall that the beast’s number is 666, a number emphasizing that he is a mere man. Every person alive at this time in the Tribulation either takes the mark, identifying themselves with Anti-Christ and his number, and bowing the knee to his image, or they refuse these things and risk martyrdom. There is no middle ground and no refusing to choose; instead, everyone either chooses Christ (and perhaps martyrdom) or chooses the Anti-Christ and eternity in the Lake of Fire. The Tribulation Martyrs have harps to place music as an accompaniment to the song they will sing in the next verse.

15:3 “And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous *are* thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true *are* thy ways, thou King of saints.”

Their song is not just any song, but the song of Moses. One song of Moses is sung in Exodus 15 in commemoration of God’s freeing the Israelites from bondage in Egypt and conquering Pharaoh. But I think the song referenced here is the song of Moses from Deuteronomy 31:19-30 and Deuteronomy 32; unlike the Exodus 15 song, this one is tied to the “latter days” (Deuteronomy 31:29) and witnesses against Israel for their disobedience. The worst of Israel’s disobedience was its rejection of Jesus as Messiah. Here, the song is recognized as the song of Moses and the Lamb (Jesus). The song of the Lamb may refer to the song in Revelation 5:9-10. Those who sing this song, which doubtless include many Jewish people, are those that did not reject Jesus. This song is not quoting any of

the songs of Moses or the “new song” from Revelation 5, but the ideas are the same. Some hold that two songs are sung; I think there is only one song, something of a combination of the songs of Moses and the Lamb. I think, to some extent, the identification of the one being praised is intentionally blurred; whether he is God the Son, God the Father, or God the Holy Spirit is not clearly stated, and I think it is because the Triune God is in view here. As in Moses’ song, the Triune God is praised for his works and might, and is praised as King and on the basis of his truth and justness.

15:4 “Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for *thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.*”

The question here is rhetorical. The answer demanded is “no one,” that is, there are none who will not fear Jesus and glorify his name to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:11). He is holy and nations shall come to worship before him. (Zechariah 14:16) The justness of his judgments will be manifest, that is, seen and acknowledged by everyone.

15:5 “And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened:”

Recall, this is the heavenly Temple where God the Father dwells. John sees it opening, which means an event is fixing to happen that comes directly from the hand of God.

15:6 “And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles.”

John sees seven angels (remember, if it is from God, it is done in sevens) coming from the Temple to carry out God’s will. They are dressed in white linen and have golden girdles. This clothing is reminiscent of the angels clothing in Daniel 10:5, Jesus in Revelation 1:13, and the saints in Revelation 3:5. As Dr. Morris comments, the white linen speaks of righteousness and the golden belt of riches and beauty. The angels have the ministry of delivering (or pouring out) plagues on the earth. When we think of plagues, we are instantly reminded of the plagues God brought on Pharaoh to secure the release of Israel from bondage. Those plagues, recorded in Exodus 7-11: (1) river to blood (fish die, cannot drink the water); (2) frogs; (3) lice; (4) flies; (5) cattle destroyed; (6) boils/sores; (7) unprecedented hail mixed with fire; (8) locusts; (9) darkness; (10) destruction of all firstborn. Several of these plagues will be repeated on a global scale in the seven Vials (specifically, the first, sixth, seventh, and ninth plagues) in the next chapter. All of the Vials will be reminiscent of the plagues in that, like Pharaoh, the unsaved who are punished by the plagues will harden their hearts and not repent. Christians are not affected, just as Israel was not affected by the plagues on Pharaoh in Moses’ day.

15:7 “And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever.”

The four beasts are the cherubim that surround the throne of God the Father in the temple. One of the four has handed to the seven angels seven vials (or bowls) full of the wrath of God. These are not half-full judgments, but full and complete judgments, which indicate their great severity. These will occur right at the end of the Tribulation in rapid succession.

15:8 “And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.”

The judgments in these seven vials are so awesome an outpouring of God's power that the Temple is filled with smoke (see Deuteronomy 29:20, smoke indicates wrath) and no one can enter the Temple until the seven "Vial Judgments" are completed. The next chapter covers those seven judgments. They are reminiscent of earlier judgments (seals and trumpets), but we are to understand them as the most severe and to unfold quickly.

NOTES ON REVELATION 16

16:1 "And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth."

The great voice may be God, but I think is likely one of the four cherubim, for they were the ones that handed the vials to the seven angels and it therefore makes sense that one of them pass along the instructions. The angels are told to pour out their Vial Judgments upon the earth. This indicates world-wide judgments. This is the wrath of God poured out like never before in history.

16:2 "And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image."

Recall that in Revelation 15:1, these Vial Judgments were referred to as "plagues." Also, note that the Vials will correspond to the Trumpets. The first Trumpet was the falling of hail-fire stones upon the earth that burned up one-third of the vegetation. Whereas the first Trumpet did not fall on men, the first Vial "fell ... upon the men." The first Vial is a plague of sores. Only those that have taken the mark and worshipped the Anti-Christ's (animated) image are affected; the children of God on the earth during the Tribulation are untouched by this plague. The sore is "noisome and grievous," indicating that those affected are in tremendous pain and they cry aloud in their despair and suffering.

16:3 "And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea."

The second Vial Judgment is that the sea becomes blood. Recall that the Second Trumpet turned one third of the sea (i.e., all oceans) to blood. (Revelation 8:8) That judgment destroyed one third of the life in the sea. The second vial is far more severe, destroying all sea life and turning all the oceans to blood. We are not to imagine fluid blood, but coagulated blood ("of a dead man").

16:4 "And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood."

The third Vial Judgment corresponds to the Third Trumpet (Revelation 8:10-11), except that instead of destroying a third of the rivers and underwater water sources as before, this destruction (turning to blood) is complete. I believe this must be very close to the end of the Tribulation because people would rapidly go through their fresh water supply and it could not be replenished. People will be alive and set to battle Jesus when he returns at the end of the Tribulation, so this may be just a matter of days or weeks before then.

16:5 "And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus."

The angel that poured the Vial Judgment, causing great destruction, praises God because he is righteous in his judgment. Those who have taken the mark of the beast are getting justice.

16:6 “For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.”

Recall that in Revelation 6:9-10, the Tribulation Martyrs asked when they would be avenged. These judgments are vengeance for the spilled blood of the martyred saints and prophets.

16:7 “And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.”

This may well be a representative speaker from among the Tribulation Martyrs (again recall Revelation 6:9-10), seeing the vengeance unfold that the Tribulation Martyrs had sought, and therefore declaring God’s judgments as true and righteous.

16:8 “And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire.”

The fourth Vial Judgment corresponds to the fourth Trumpet, affecting the sun. But here, rather than darkening the sun, it is heated, or at least its effects are more severely felt. The ambient air temperature is greatly increased (i.e., instant global warming/burning) so that fires are started and people are burnt.

16:9 “And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.”

The world testifies that man is fundamentally good, for if God would only show Himself, they would honor Him. But that, of course, is not true. Man is fundamentally corrupt apart from a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. These people are scorched in this Vial Judgment, but instead of repentance, they blaspheme God. They know the source of the plague and yet do not repent. They are unwilling to give God glory, yet they have the mark of the Anti-Christ and freely give him glory. This is the heart of unredeemed man.

16:10 “And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain,”

The fifth Vial Judgment is unleashed upon the “seat of the beast,” that is, upon the Anti-Christ’s base of operations. He is put in darkness; I take the darkness here to be absolute, so that electrical sources of power are extinguished. We are not told how the darkness is accomplished. John saw the sun darkened at the blasting of the Fifth Trumpet by the locusts from the abyss, so there is at least some correspondence between the fifth Trumpet and fifth Vial. The combination of the first Vial (sores) and the second and third Vials (water sources destroyed) and the fourth Vial (scorching sun) has brought about complete misery. Their tongues swell in pain and the people futilely bite at their own tongues.

16:11 “And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.”

And again the text shows us that men are not fundamentally good. In spite of all they have endured, they curse God for what has unfolded rather than turning in repentance. They

continue in their sinful deeds. Make no mistake about it. God is completely just in what he has done, in the face of God's judgments, they continue to sin, effectively looking up to God and challenging Him. Therefore, God is just in what will follow as well.

16:12 "And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared."

The sixth Vial attacks the Euphrates River. Recall that the sixth Trumpet unleashed the four demons bound at the same river, which demons led the assault with 200,000,000 cavalry. This Vial removes the river, a natural impediment to the kings of the east moving a large army. The backdrop for this verse is Daniel 11:36-45, a passage about the exploits of the Anti-Christ. Many people think of the coming Battle of Armageddon as a battle between Anti-Christ's forces and Jesus, but the events leading to Armageddon is a rebellion. Not all the peoples (and kings) of the earth want to be under Anti-Christ's power. In particular, the kings of the east, which probably includes China, mount a rebellion. They will cross the now dried up Euphrates River and come into the Holy Land to attack Anti-Christ's forces.

16:13 "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet."

Recall that there was a "parenthesis" between the opening of the sixth and seventh Seals, and a parenthesis between the blasting of the sixth and seventh Trumpets. Consistent with this pattern, there is a parenthesis (vv. 13-16) between the sixth and seventh Vials. Probably, these events unfold during the pouring out of the six Vials. John sees "unclean spirits," that is, demons, come from the mouths of the dragon (Satan), the beast (Anti-Christ), and the false prophet (counterfeit Elijah). We are told the identification of these demons in the next verse. Note here that the demons look like frogs. I do not think we can be dogmatic about the meaning of the frog imagery. Recall that frogs were one of the plagues (Exodus 8) against Egypt and, in that sense, has a negative connotation.

16:14 "For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty."

The frogs are demons ("spirits of devils"). They are released on the earth to work miracles, and in particular, to rally the kings of the earth for a battle (Armageddon). Satan knows the end is at hand and in one last desperate attempt to hold onto power, he tries to rally all of the world's armies together to fight for Anti-Christ. As we have seen (e.g., the animated image, the false prophet's ability to call down fire from heaven, the death and resurrection of the Anti-Christ), the world looks for signs as if signs give validity to the message. Satan is a deceiver; his message is that he (the Anti-Christ) will prevail. The world's kings believe the message because the frog demons do miracles before them. Also, recall that demons do not have bodies, for they are fallen spirits. They likely work their miracles by working in and through people by possessing them and then working their miracles. They may even possess some of the kings of the earth. In the first instance, I think this rallying of forces is to strengthen Anti-Christ's forces against the coming onslaught from the kings of the east.

16:15 "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame."

Jesus always said his second coming would be like a thief (i.e., at an unannounced time) (Matthew 24:36-44). The admonition here, as in Matthew 24, is to be prepared. The prepared ones are Christians (they have garments) and they watch.

16:16 “And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.”

God gathers the armies at Armageddon. The word Armageddon is from “Har-megiddo” or “Mountain of Megiddo.” Megiddo was a town about 60 miles north of Jerusalem overlooking the plain of Megiddo to the west and the Valley of Jezreel on the northeast. Many ancient battles occurred here (e.g., Judges 5:19, 2 Chronicles 35:22). The armies from the east that cross the Euphrates will drive through this area toward Jerusalem, and they will meet Anti-Christ’s forces there.

16:17 “And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done.”

Now the seventh Vial is poured out, the final and most severe of all the judgments. Recall that at the blasting of the seventh Trumpet, God’s triumph was announced. Here too, it is that triumph that is announced from a great voice (God the Father’s voice) out of the heavenly Temple where the Father dwells. Jesus’ last word on the cross (a single word in Greek, *tetelestai*) was, in English, “It is finished.” Here, God the Father makes the same exclamation, indicating the completion of a major part of His program for history. This pronouncement will be made again (Revelation 21:6). All of the judgments have been poured out, and now Jesus can come and take what is his.

16:18 “And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.”

The seventh Vial is a tremendous, unprecedented worldwide earthquake. The voices and thunders and lightnings are seen in heaven, as they always have been in this book, accompanying God’s judgment.

16:19 “And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.”

The great city, Jerusalem, is divided into 3 parts by this global earthquake. Also, note that the great city is distinguished here from Babylon, and so they are not the same. Many of the cities of the worlds fall. We are to understand that large cities, with their towering buildings, fall; in other words, the structures come down. This is a total destruction. Babylon receives the wrath of God (much more on this destruction of Babylon in the next two chapters).

16:20 “And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.”

This verse speaks to the severity of the earthquake. The islands have subsided into the oceans, and mounts have flattened out, crumbling apart.

16:21 “And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.”

The earthquake is accompanied by hailstones. Each weighs a talent, or about 100 pounds. Even here in this last judgment, the corruptness of man is present. They curse God and do not repent.

COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY

Henry M. Morris, *The Revelation Record*, Tyndale House Publishers (1983)

RECOMMENDATION

It is highly recommended that each person taking this course read chapters 15 and 16 for this lesson and chapter 17 for next week in Henry M. Morris' commentary.