

The Book Of Revelation

*3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy,
and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.
(Revelation 1:3. NRSV)*

*5 And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.'
Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.'
(Revelation 21:5. NRSV)*

Message 11

Revelation 15 - 16
January 29th, 2012
Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good evening! Tonight we begin our study of the fifth vision in the Book of Revelation and before we do I think we need to spend a little bit of time figuring out how to understand it in relation to some that have gone before. All commentators seems to agree that the fifth vision, the vision of the seven bowls, has an obvious relationship with the vision of the seven trumpets. Let's go back and quickly remind ourselves about the vision of the trumpets. (Using the chart from previous class show the relationship between the trumpets and the seals). We agreed that at some point in the 6th trumpet the last elect person is saved and we noticed that from that point on no one repents and no one is converted. The 7th trumpet is a picture of the consummation. So how do the 7 bowls relate to the 7 trumpets? The commentators tend to agree and disagree with each other on this, which can be fairly confusing. So for example, Hendricksen says three things simultaneously. He says that the 7 bowls parallel exactly in a temporal sense the 7 trumpets and the 7 seals. So he would actually suggest that the 7 bowls cover the entire dispensation from the ascension of Christ to his return. But then he also says that he understands them as dealing in specific detail with the days immediately before the return of Christ. He then also says that they can be understand in a sort of existential sense meaning that they depict for every human life what happens when you fail to respond to the warning trials (trumpets) that universally occur: you pass through some manner of death and face the final, unmixed wrath of God. Thus he sees these trumpets as depicting in a non temporal sense the passage through death of all people into

the unmixed wrath of God from which there is no escape and in which there is no repentance. Morris is not substantially different though he is less explicit. He quotes Hendriksen in affirming the existential meaning and he also seems to generally agree that the 7 trumpets are being paralleled in depicting the final days before Christ returns.

Confused yet? Let's agree with both scholars in terms of the existential meaning, which both of them put forward as a kind of secondary and universal application. Let's agree then that all men and women will pass into death through disease (the boils), natural disaster (the seas), poverty and lack (the waters), cancer and pain (the sun), darkness and confusion (the 5th) or through conflict and war (the sixth). All men and women who have failed to repent will enter death in some way and will face the unmixed wrath of God from which there is no escape and in which there is no opportunity to repent. Let's agree with that difficult truth. But then let's attempt with some more specificity to relate the bowls to the trumpets. It seems that this may best be understood this way: (show this week's graph)

In the same way that the trumpets were an extended telling of the 6th seal, so also, I think the bowls are best understood as an extended telling of the final days of the 6th trumpet. The trumpets certainly deal with the Great Tribulation or what is sometimes called The Great Day of Wrath. They cannot be too long in duration and one gets the sense that they are measured in years and at most decades. So if the seals collectively cover 2000 years, for example, the trumpets appear to cover 1-2 decades. The bowls seem to cover months or at most a year or two. The trumpets talk of the beginning of devastation but always in a limited sense. 1/3 of the sea, 1/3 of the people. Now we are dealing in finalities. All of the sea. All of the waters, all of the cities are affected. So let us proceed on the basis that sometime after the last elect person is saved near the end of the 6th trumpet we enter into the final months of the Great Day of Wrath. These are closing events of history. No one gets saved. Wrath falls unmixed with mercy. Let us read the text to test that understanding and by God's grace we will divide the Word as we go:

¹Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete.

The key words here are "last" and "complete". That last clause in Greek literally means "for in them is fully discharged or fully completed the wrath of God." Whereas the emphasis in the trumpets was on partiality and last chances, the emphasis now is on completeness and finality.

²And I saw *something* like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark *and* over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.

³They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: “Great and marvelous *are* Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true *are* Your ways, O King of the saints!

⁴ Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For *You* alone *are* holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested.”

This is a key narrative clue for us and helps us line this vision up with the vision of the trumpets. Commentators agree that this is Red Sea imagery. Do you remember when God led the people of Israel through the Red Sea? They got to the other side and then God caused the waters to collapse onto the Egyptians and then the people, saved and standing on the shore sang a song of deliverance as they saw the Egyptians drowned in the waters. So look closely; here we have a song of redemption sung by the sea after the whole people of God has passed over. Do you see? That helps us understand that these events happen after the last elect person is saved – he has crossed over – and now nature itself begins to collapse on Egypt – the world opposed to God. That is what is happening. The song is called “The Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb” as a way of showing that the salvation of God is the same in the Old Testament and the New, the one is an analogy, type or prophesy of the other. This is what the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:

¹Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, ²all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

¹¹Now [£]all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹²Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. (1 Corinthians 10:1-11. NKJV)

We will see more Exodus language before this passage is over. Verse 5 continues:

⁵After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened.

⁶And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands.

⁷Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever.

⁸The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

The language of verse 5 is very interesting, it literally reads “the tent of the testimony” which is a unique phrase taken from the LXX translating the OT phrase “tent of meeting”. The Greek could literally be translated as “the tent of the martyr”. The unique wording I think is meant to connect

the wrath that is coming with the slaughter of the witnesses. This passage does overlap nicely with what we see in Revelation 11:

⁷When they finish their **testimony**, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. ⁸And their dead bodies *will lie* in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. ⁹Then *those* from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. ¹⁰And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. ¹²And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. ¹³In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven. (Revelation 11:7-13. NKJV)

So the witnesses finish their testimony and then are martyred. Then they go victorious into heaven and a great earthquake happens and the world comes to an end. Look at what comes next in chapter 11:

¹⁵Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The ⁴kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Revelation 7:15. NKJV)

The seventh trumpet and the consummation. So I think we have lined this up correctly. We are looking at a blown up version, a longer telling of the events after the witness is silenced, after the testimony is finished, after the last elect person is saved and before the blowing of the last trumpet.

Going back to chapter 15 we need to notice that this outpouring of judgement comes from God with all authority and highest sanction. It comes from the temple, the holy place, the inner sanctum, it comes by means of the four living Creatures and the seven holy Angels. Like with the “four horsemen”, these awful plagues come not up from hell, they come down from the heart of heaven. That no one could enter the temple until the plagues were completed means that the time for intercession and prayer is over. Repentance will be given now to no man. Time is up. There is no more mercy to be mixed with wrath.

¹Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth.” ²So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.

The word for “sore” there is *helkos* and is the word from which we get our English “ulcer”. So whether this is connected to the water supply – recall that in chapter 8 in the description of the 3rd

trumpet we are told that a third of the water supply became bitter and infected. Could we be seeing the result of that now? Possibly. Interestingly, like the plague in Egypt in Exodus the illness seems to fall only on unsaved people. Those saved elect who are not yet in heaven are exempt.

³Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead *man*; and every living creature in the sea died.

Again there are obvious connections to the trumpet judgements. The second trumpet struck the sea such that one third of it became dead. Now that spreads and becomes total. The sea is dead, nothing lives in it. The Greek is blunt: blood like death.

⁴Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.

Again, what was partial in the trumpets becomes complete in the bowls. The third trumpet ruined a third of the water supply, now it is ruined totally. This is viewed as the death knell. People can only live a few days without water. If reserves have been gathered and stored this can be stretched into weeks and months but it only postpones the inevitable. Thus the angel cries in verse 5:

⁵And I heard the angel of the waters saying: “You are righteous, ^fO Lord, The One who is and who ^fwas and who is to be, Because You have judged these things. ⁶For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, And You have given them blood to drink. ^fFor it is their just due.”

God is declared just and right in these judgements because the only people suffering them are those who persistently rebelled despite all the early warnings and invitations to repent. The outpouring of wrath is again tied to their rejection of the message and their mistreatment of the messengers. They killed the witnesses and now from the tent of witness has come their death. It is their just due.

⁷And I heard ^fanother from the altar saying, “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous *are* Your judgments.”

The language here is quite interesting. The word “another” as in “I heard another from the altar” is not actually in the text. The text literally says: “I heard of the altar saying”, which doesn’t really make sense. So the NRSV and NIV have it simply as “I heard the altar saying” whereas the NKJV adds the word “another” which attempts to make sense of the genitive. I’m not sure which is right. The point seems to be that again, a connection is being made between the wrath

poured out and the prayers of the martyrs. God did hear your prayer in persecution and this is his answer to it.

⁸Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire.

We recall that the fourth trumpet affected the sun in a partial way, a third of the sun was struck, here again whatever was begun there has now become finally altogether lethal and inhospitable to human life. Whether this represents a collapse of the ozone layer or a deadly increase in solar radiation, obviously we can only speculate.

⁹And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and **they did not repent and give Him glory.**

Again, this wrath is unmixed with grace. The grace of repentance is spent. No one converts in these final days of wrath and suffering. Speaking existentially we might add, people do not repent in hell because as we agreed last week, the wrath of God in hell is unmixed with grace and mercy. No one repents in hell. They go on hating God for all eternity.

¹⁰Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. ¹¹They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and **did not repent of their deeds.**

The suffering that falls here is said to be particular to the people of the beast, again suggesting that whatever few elect and saved persons are physically on the earth are exempt from this particular pain. The pain is so intense they begin to gnaw on their own tongues; but they do not repent.

¹²Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared.

This one probably needs to be unpacked a bit. In the Roman world at that time the Euphrates River was the eastern border of the Empire. It was the limit of the known world. Everything beyond that was alien, shadow and rumour. There was even a rumor at this time that Nero would rise from the dead and lead an army of Parthians to destroy the Roman Empire and bring in the

end of days. Revelation seems to be borrowing that imagery here. The earth seems to partner with alien and strange invaders to bring about the final downfall of mankind.

¹³And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs *coming* out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.

¹⁴For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, *which* go out to the kings [£]of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

Here we see the interplay of source and agency. The dragon, the beast – anti-christian government and the false prophet (false religion and anti-christian science and philosophy) collectively and collaboratively give birth to all manner of demonic deception that serves to position mankind for final destruction. They are particularly said to influence the leaders and kings of the earth.

¹⁵“Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed *is* he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.”

So Jesus interjects here to provide some meaning to this gathering. By means of various demonic deceptions, the peoples of the earth are being summoned for a final visitation. Christ will come suddenly and any elect people on the earth will want to be dressed in their robes of righteousness on that day because great and final is his coming. The Greek is bizarre here it actually says that they will want to guard their robes for this day. Guard your faith, examine yourself that think you stand lest ye fall. Be ready, be watchful and be dressed. Many of Jesus’ parables about his coming have this same tone.

¹⁶And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, [£]Armageddon.

The Hebrew phrasing used in verse 16 is found no where in the Old Testament. There is a city of Megiddo that is mentioned often and there is a hill fort at that city so it seems likely that this should be translated as The Hill Fort of Megiddo. Or the Mountain of Megiddo. I’ve been to this place and it is quite impressive. It is a large hill fortress that looks over a major crossroads that was used in ancient times to travel from Europe to Africa or from Asia to Africa. It is probably the most important intersection on the planet. Now commentators differ as to how literal we are to take this. Is this a real battle? That is certainly possible. With water supplies now universally damaged people would need to move and if part of the deception was that rumours are spread that the water is still good in such and such a place you could certainly gather armies from all over the world into this little intersection as part of a migration battle. On the other hand some people see

this as entirely symbolic. Meaning they see this as the preparing of all people into a similar place of deception and guilt ready to meet the coming wrath of God. The imagery of Megiddo suggests that it is a place where God shows up to defeat enemies and vindicate his seemingly helpless people. It has that symbolic value in the Bible. However, it also stands for decisive battle and for massive confrontation. All of that could be seen in this, it is difficult to say for sure. Regardless, the gathering itself is not the focus. The judgement that meets the gathering is obviously primary:

¹⁷Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, "It is done!"

¹⁸And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth.

¹⁹Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.

The great city here probably means the world civilization opposed to God is now fully fallen. Utterly divided, totally ruined. That is why these terms "the great city", "the cities of the nations" and "Babylon" are all used together, they all mean the same thing. The world opposed to God has now been laid low.

²⁰Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.

²¹And great hail from heaven fell upon men, *each hailstone* about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great. (Revelation 16:1-21. NKJV)

Even in this final act of world wide wrath and judgement, men did not repent and they cursed God even in their falling. Without the mercy and help of God we are wicked, rebellious and hostile until the bitter end. Let's end there and we can take some questions.