

The Book of Revelation

The Seven Last Plagues

Lesson #11 for March 16, 2019

Scriptures: Revelation 15:1,4; 7:1-3; 14:9-10; 16:1-12,16; 17:1; Daniel 5; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12.

1. Revelation 15 and especially 16 describe what are known as the seven last plagues. However, Revelation 15:2-4 talk about a group of people standing on the sea of glass in heaven, praising and honoring God. How is that related? Did John change the subject?
2. Revelation 15:5-8 set up the heavenly context for the giving of the seven last plagues. It is important to notice that no one is in the temple in heaven when these plagues fall. Normally, the throne room in heaven is full of millions of heavenly beings. This means that the events connected to the seven last plagues will take place after the close of probation.
3. But, the most important question to ask about the seven last plagues is who is the one that causes those seven last plagues? And what is the purpose of having seven final plagues if probation is closed and if no one will change his/her mind? An important verse to look at in connection with the seven last plagues is Revelation 11:18. It talks about a time of judgment when those who destroy the earth will be destroyed.
4. The group of people described in Revelation 15:1-4 will be victorious “over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name.” (NKJV*) So, these people certainly cannot be those who are the main brunt of the seven last plagues.
5. Read Revelation 15:1. It seems obvious from this verse that the plagues are being sent by God. However, when we read Revelation 15:2-4, we discover that all the beings around God’s throne and all His friends throughout the universe are celebrating God’s justice and fairness. Would they be doing that if He had just poured out the seven last plagues on His earthly enemies? If God intends to wipe out His enemies, why didn’t He do that long ago?
6. Are the group discussed in Revelation 15:2-4 the same as those described in Revelation 14:1-5, the 144,000? Those certainly are a remarkable group of people: “They have never been known to tell lies; they are faultless.”—*Good News Bible*.*
7. Read Revelation 7:1-3. Clearly, there is a time leading up to the close of probation during which God is holding back the four winds, preventing them from blowing on the earth so that no one is harmed until those who are to be sealed have been sealed.
8. In Exodus 7-11, we read about the 10 plagues which fell on ancient Egypt. How are they to be compared with these seven final plagues described in Revelation 16?

When Christ ceases His intercession in the sanctuary, the unmingled wrath threatened against those who worship the beast and his image and receive his mark (Revelation 14:9, 10), will be poured out. **The plagues upon Egypt when God was about to deliver Israel were similar in character to those [628] more terrible and extensive judgments which are to fall upon the world just before the final deliverance of God’s people....** By condemning the people of God to death, they have as truly incurred the guilt of their blood as if it had been shed by their hands. In like manner Christ declared the Jews of His time guilty of all the blood of holy men which had been shed since the days of Abel; for they possessed the same spirit and were seeking to do the same work with these murderers of the prophets.—Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy** 627.3. [Bold type is added.]

9. The seven trumpets described in Revelation 10:8-11:14 are somewhat parallel to the seven last plagues. But, those events happened earlier in Christian history.

10. What is the result of the **seven last plagues which occur after the close of probation?**

Revelation 16:11: And they cursed the God of heaven for their pains and sores. But they did not turn from their evil ways.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Revelation 16:11). New York: American Bible Society.

11. So, what is happening around God's throne in heaven? Has God finally lost His temper? Has He become so upset that He just has to destroy His enemies? If God were inclined to do that, shouldn't He have destroyed Lucifer when he first sinned in heaven? Read Romans 1:18,24-28. These are the clearest verses in the Bible about *God's anger or wrath*. And it says that God gives people up and hands them over to their own desires when He is "angry."

12. Can we describe God's wrath or anger? **God's wrath is simply His turning away in loving disappointment from those who do not want Him anyway, thus leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequences of their own destructive choices.** (See Hosea 4:17; 11:7-8.) For a much more complete explanation of God's wrath see:

http://www.theox.org/images/uploads/bbk/KHart_BTGG_PDF_Gnrl_Gods_Wrath_or_Anger_16.pdf – a handout in the General Topics of the Teacher's Guide section of Theox.org.

13. Read Exodus 40:34-35 and 1 Kings 8:10-11. These two passages describe events when, first of all, the sanctuary-tent in the wilderness was dedicated, and then, when Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem was dedicated. When the most important events of those dedication ceremonies were finished, the priests left the temple, and God's presence filled it. How should that be compared with Revelation 15:5-8 where we are told that "smoke from the glory and power of God" filled the temple so that no one could enter there? What is God trying to tell us? Is God still there? Or, is this a time when all the occupants of heaven have left to come here?

14. But, Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary will not end until every person living on earth has made her/his decision—actively or passively—as to which side s/he is going to belong. Christ will never arbitrarily close probation.

I saw angels hurrying to and fro in heaven. **An angel with a writer's inkhorn by his side returned from the earth and reported to Jesus that his work was done, and the saints were numbered and sealed. Then I saw Jesus, who had been ministering before the ark containing the ten commandments, throw down the censer. He raised His hands, and with a loud voice said, "It is done." And all the angelic host laid off their crowns as Jesus made the solemn [280] declaration, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still."**

Every case had been decided for life or death.—Ellen G. White, *Early Writings** 279.2-280.0. [Bold type is added.]

15. Read Revelation 16:8-11 and 22:11. These verses make it very obvious that as probation closes, each person's character will be set. When the fourth and fifth plagues will be poured out upon the earth, the wicked refuse to give up their sins or change in any way; they simply curse God.

16. For a brief period of time after the close of probation, God will finally allow Satan to have full

sway on this earth. But, he will not be permitted to destroy any of God's faithful people. But, destroying God's faithful people is exactly what Satan wants to do! He does not care about his own people; but, he would love to destroy God's people. In his anger and fury, Satan does his worst.

These plagues are not universal, or the inhabitants of the earth would be wholly cut off. Yet they will be the most [629] awful scourges that have ever been known to mortals. All the judgments upon men, prior to the close of probation, have been mingled with mercy. The pleading blood of Christ has shielded the sinner from receiving the full measure of his guilt; but in the final judgment, wrath is poured out unmixed with mercy....

The people of God will not be free from suffering; but while persecuted and distressed, while they endure privation and suffer for want of food they will not be left to perish. That God who cared for Elijah will not pass by one of His self-sacrificing children. He who numbers the hairs of their head will care for them, and in time of famine they shall be satisfied. While the wicked are dying from hunger and pestilence, angels will shield the righteous and supply their wants. To him that "walketh righteously" is the promise: "Bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure." "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them." Isaiah 33:15, 16; 41:17.

Yet to human sight it will appear that the people of God must soon seal their testimony with their blood as did the martyrs before them. They themselves begin to fear that the Lord has left them to fall by the hand of their enemies. It is a time of fearful agony. Day and night they cry unto God for deliverance....

Like Jacob, all are wrestling with God. Their countenances express their internal struggle. Paleness sits upon every face. Yet they cease not their earnest intercession....

Could men see with heavenly vision, they would behold companies of angels that excel in strength stationed about those who have kept the word of Christ's patience. With sympathizing tenderness, angels have witnessed their distress and have heard their prayers. They are waiting the word of their Commander to snatch them from their peril. But they must wait yet a little longer. The people of God must drink [631] of the cup and be baptized with the baptism. The very delay, so painful to them, is the best answer to their petitions. As they endeavor to wait trustingly for the Lord to work **they are led to exercise faith, hope, and patience, which have been too little exercised during their religious experience.** Yet for the elect's sake the time of trouble will be shortened. "Shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him? ... I tell you that He will avenge them speedily." Luke 18:7, 8. **The end will come more quickly than men expect.** The wheat will be gathered and bound in sheaves for the garner of God; the tares will be bound as fagots for the fires of destruction.—Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy** 628.2-631.0. [Bold type is added.]

17. If you understand something about conditions on this earth, you recognize that life cannot exist if these plagues are universal. For example, life on land cannot exist for long if everything in the sea dies. Most of the oxygen we breathe comes from microscopic plants that live in the ocean. Does the Bible's description include these plankton?

18. So we ask, once again: **Is it really God who is doing this? No, God is just allowing those seven last plagues so we can see how things would be if the Devil were in charge!**

19. Starting in Revelation 12, we have seen a lot of cooperation between Satan, the sea beast, the land beast, and also governments and businesses that have benefitted from that relationship. But, as these plagues are spreading, the **fifth plague** strikes the throne of the beast. When people realize that the one they have been worshipping cannot even protect his/her own throne, they turn against him/her.

As the people of the world witness the upheaval in nature (see *Rev. 16:3-9*), they turn to Babylon for protection. However, as the fifth plague strikes the seat of Babylon's authority (*Rev. 16:10, 11*), they see the futility of seeking help there. Feeling deceived, they turn against Babylon, causing her downfall (see *Rev 17:16*). Yet, as we have seen, their hearts remain hard against God and His people. As such, they become fertile soil for the final deception by which Satan will draw the world to unite against God's people to wipe them off the face of the earth.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, March 12.

20. Can we maintain so close a walk with the Lord that no matter what happens, we can stay faithful? Will we be so close to God that we will continue doing right because it is right?

21. Read Revelation 16:12. **The sixth plague:** Why does this plague talk about the river Euphrates? In ancient times the river Euphrates watered the kingdoms of Assyria and Babylon. Those two nations were Israel's worst enemies. Today, however, so much of the water from the Euphrates is siphoned off for irrigation that the Euphrates is not much of a river anymore. Is that what it means by *the drying up of the river*?

22. Read Revelation 17:1,15. *Waters* in the book of Revelation represent people. Wouldn't that suggest that the drying up of the waters of the Euphrates is talking about the worldwide civil, secular, and political powers which have, up to that point, stood behind Satan's system? To see what happened in the Old Testament when Babylon deteriorated, read Jeremiah 51:13.

23. An interesting parallel to the sixth plague is the events of Daniel 5. King Cyrus of Persia came out of the northeast and managed to temporarily divert the waters of the Euphrates River so his military could wade under the iron gates—that hung down into the river Euphrates and were intended to prevent any enemy from entering Babylon via that route—and march right into the feast that Belshazzar was holding, and thus, take the city by complete surprise.

24. We have suggested that the *drying up the Euphrates* is a symbol for the loss of support for Satan and his immoral associates at the very end of time. When Cyrus conquered ancient Babylon, he soon gave the children of Israel permission to go back to their homeland. Unfortunately, only a very small number of them did.

25. So, when the modern-day Babylon loses its support, Christ will advance with His army of heavenly angels to take the righteous home to heaven.

26. Read Revelation 16:13-14. What are those **three unclean spirits like frogs** doing as the world prepares for the battle of Armageddon?

27. While God's faithful people are spreading the gospel as portrayed in the three angels' messages, **Satan's unholy trinity** will be spreading his gospel of animosity against God. The dragon (operating through forms of paganism and spiritualism) cooperating with the sea beast (operating as Roman Catholicism) and the false prophet (which we now understand represents apostate Protestantism) will unite under Satan's command. (See Revelation 13:11-12.) Unfortunately, the majority of people on this earth, blinded by their hatred of God and His

people (whom they mistakenly think are responsible for the plagues), will believe Satan's lies and join his side in the final battle against God. (See 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12.)

28. Read Revelation 16:16. A great deal of discussion has taken place regarding Armageddon. The first question to be asked is, "What or where is Armageddon?" The Hebrew word breaks down into two words: *har* which means *mountain* and *mageddon* which could mean *Megiddo* or possibly a word meaning "a place of assembly." But, there is no place called the mountain of Megiddo. Megiddo is a small hill located in the middle of the Valley of Jezreel or the plain of Esdraelon, not too far from Mount Carmel near the Mediterranean coast. That area was known for many decisive battles in Israel's history. (See Judges 5:19; Judges 6:33; 2 Kings 9:27; 2 Kings 23:29-30.)
29. Some have suggested, since there is no Mount Megiddo, that possibly this is an allusion to Mount Carmel where Elijah had that showdown recorded in 1 Kings 18. The big question in Elijah's day was, "Who is the true God?" When fire came down from heaven and burned up Elijah's sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the water, leaving only a black hole in the ground, there was no question in anyone's mind about who the true God was. (1 Kings 18:38-39) Is that the question to be answered in our day? It is interesting to note that at the end of that experience, all 850 of the prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth were destroyed. Those were people dedicated to the conversion of Israel to the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth. By himself, Elijah stood up to them.
30. Read Revelation 6:15-17. So, what will be the final result of these events? Those who have chosen the side of Satan will be calling for the rocks and the mountains to fall on them. See also 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8.
31. **Armageddon will not be some kind of military battle** either in the Middle East or anywhere else on earth. **It will be a spiritual battle over who is telling the truth and whom we can trust.** The weapons will be truth versus falsehood, love versus selfishness.
32. So, how can we prepare ourselves for those final events prior to Jesus's second coming?

None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict. To every soul will come the searching test: Shall I obey God rather than men?... The apostle Paul declared, looking down to the last days: "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine." 2 Timothy 4:3. That time has fully come. The multitudes do not want Bible truth, because it interferes with the desires of the sinful, world-loving heart; and Satan supplies the deceptions which they love.

But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain "Thus saith the Lord" in its support....

As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. The church has long professed to look to the Saviour's advent as the consummation of her hopes. Now the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come. In different parts of the earth, Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the

description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation. Revelation 1:13-15. The glory that surrounds him is unsurpassed by anything that mortal eyes have yet beheld. The shout of triumph rings out upon the air: "Christ has come! Christ has come!" The people prostrate themselves in adoration before him, while he lifts up his hands and pronounces a blessing upon them, as Christ blessed His disciples when He was upon the earth. His voice is soft and subdued, yet full of melody. In gentle, compassionate tones he presents some of the same gracious, heavenly truths which the Saviour uttered; he heals the diseases of the people, and then, **in his assumed character of Christ, he claims to have changed the Sabbath to Sunday**, and commands all to hallow the day which he has blessed. He declares that those who persist in keeping holy the seventh day are blaspheming his name by refusing to listen to his angels sent to them with light and truth. **This is the strong, almost overmastering delusion.**—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 593.2-595.1, 624.2. [Bold type is added.]

33. So, in Revelation 16:15, what is God asking us to do? The white garments mentioned there are representative of the good works of God's people. (See Revelation 19:7-9; compare Revelation 3:4-5 and Revelation 7:14.)
34. One of the things we have noted is that God's faithful end-time people are sometimes referred to as *the remnant* (Revelation 12:17) and sometimes *the 144,000*. (Revelation 14:1) They are also often referred to as *saints*. (Revelation 14:12) They will stand on the sea of glass (Revelation 15:2) because they have been the chosen, faithful followers of the Lamb. (Revelation 17:14)
35. So, why is it necessary for God's faithful people to go through this terrible time of trouble with their lives threatened if no one is going to change his/her mind?
36. The final battle between God and Satan will be over who is telling the truth and who should be allowed to rule. Satan has always claimed that he can do a better job of ruling than God does. It was on that basis that he convinced so many angels to join him in his fight against God. Isaiah 14:13 tells us that Satan has always wanted to sit on the "Armageddon" or "mount of assembly" in the far north where ancient peoples believed the gods lived. (See Isaiah 14:12-14.) This does not refer to any real mountain; it is talking about Satan's desire to be like God, and that will be the basis of the final "battle."
37. It is interesting to note that in the middle of the plague describing the battle of Armageddon, (Revelation 16:13-16) there is a blessing for those who keep watch and hang onto their clothes! Does this remind you of Revelation 3:18, Christ's warning to the church at Laodicea?
38. When Jesus said that He will come like a thief, (Revelation 16:15; Matthew 24:42-44; Luke 12:37-39; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6) what was He talking about? First of all, He was talking about the close of probation which no one on earth will know about. But, to most of the people of the world, even the second coming will be a total surprise. (Revelation 6:15-17) But, there is no reason for God's Bible-studying people to be surprised. He has warned us! (1 Thessalonians 5:6)

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