

CHAPTER 16

THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES

Chapter 15 is an introduction to chapter 16, and information concerning the structure of this chapter is given in the comments on 15:8. As we study this chapter, we must remember that Revelation is written in symbolic language; therefore, the plagues must not be interpreted as literal, physical plagues like those in the time of Moses. Instead, their symbolic meanings must be found. Some symbols are used nowhere else in Revelation; others are used and defined throughout the book. We believe the symbols retain their same basic meaning throughout the book; therefore, it becomes possible to take the meaning of the symbols from other places in the book and apply them to the same symbols in this chapter. This also helps to draw some logical conclusions about the meaning of the new symbols. By doing this, we believe it is possible to interpret this chapter in a way that is both understandable and in agreement with the teachings of the New Testament.

One outstanding feature about the seven plagues is that they correspond closely to the series of seven trumpets (8:6 - 11:19). The same basic symbols are used in both visions, and they also follow the same order. Because of this, their meanings must be similar. There must also be differences, or else there would be no need for two separate visions. We believe that the connection between the two visions, and the differences also, can be determined by comparing the meaning of the two main symbols of each vision, which are the trumpets and plagues. The trumpets sound a warning.

They warn people of events that are to take place here on earth and, for the most part, affect the spiritual lives of men. The plagues generally describe the problems and torments that those people will suffer who do not submit their lives to the will of God. In both cases, they are describing events throughout the Christian age and into the time of Judgment. In other words, generally speaking, the trumpets warn people about being disobedient to God, while the plagues describe the problems and torments those same wicked people will face here on earth and in Judgment. (See introduction to chapter 15 for more information concerning the seven last plagues.)

Verse 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.

John hears a great voice coming out of the temple telling the seven angels to pour out their vials of wrath upon the earth. This must have been the voice of God because it came from the temple, which was described in 15:8 as being filled with the glory and power of God. Also, verse 9 states that God controls these plagues. If he has control over them, he would be the one to give instructions that they should be poured out. Whether God actually spoke these words, or had another heavenly being to give the instructions, makes no difference because the message is the same. God will send plagues upon those people who are disobedient to him.

The angels are instructed to pour these vials of wrath upon the earth. This means that the vials will be poured out upon people dwelling in this world. As we will see in the chapter, each vial is poured out upon a different portion of this earth. Therefore, it becomes important to understand that these different parts of the earth are used to symbolize different groups of people. Also, in the fourth plague, we see the vial being poured out on the sun. Obviously, the sun is not an actual part of this physical earth; therefore, it must represent a certain group of people dwelling in this world.

THE FIRST PLAGUE

A GRIEVOUS SORE

Verse 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.

As the first angel pours out his vial upon the earth, a grievous sore affects those people who have the mark of the beast. This makes it clear that those affected by these last plagues are non-Christians. Rev. 13:8 explains that those who worship the beast are not Christians because their names are not written in the book of life. This also helps us understand how the “earth” is sometimes used symbolically. People of the “earth” are those who put their faith and trust in some spiritual power other than the true God. This is in contrast to the “sea,” which is used in the second plague to symbolize the ungodly populations of the world. The lesson being taught in this passage is that God will cause sores to fall upon those who worship something other than the true God. The question that must be answered now is: When will this happen? We believe it applies to the present Christian age, just as does most of Revelation. These noisome and grievous sores are also symbolic. They represent the pains and anguishes that sin will cause people to suffer while on earth. Ex. 9:8-11 gives the account of the boils, which was one of the ten plagues God sent against the people of Egypt. In that situation, the people of Egypt opposed God and persecuted his people. In this first plague, all people who worship the beast are the ones who oppose God and oppress his people. They are ones who are affected by these sores. Putting our faith and trust in anything other than God will bring many trials and heartaches in this life. The ungodly powers of this world, whether physical or spiritual, will fall, and those who have depended on them will suffer because of that fall.

Sin will cause all types of mental and physical anguish

that could be avoided by following the ways of the Lord. In order to understand that this must be true, all we have to do is look at the suicide rate in our nation. Many people get so tangled up in the ways of sin that they completely destroy their lives. They can see no way to escape and end up taking their own lives. Many others become physically sick because of the practice of sin. Problems such as sexual diseases and AIDS are largely caused and spread by the practice of sin. People with these types of mental and physical anguishes are “plagued” by sin and their own unwillingness to follow the ways of God.

THE SECOND PLAGUE

THE SEA TURNS TO BLOOD

Verse 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 angel pours out his vial upon the sea. Several times throughout Revelation the “sea” is used to represent people living upon this earth who are not attempting to follow God. The “earth” in the first plague (v. 2) represented the people of this world who put their faith and trust in false religious powers. Both of these first two plagues affect those who are not Christians. They are directed against those people who live on this earth and engage themselves in the acts of sin. It should be emphasized that the symbols “earth” and “sea” have slightly different meanings. The earth refers to those people who are spiritually-minded, or who seek to worship someone or something other than the true God. They may even seek to worship God, but they are doing it according to the ways of man. On the other hand, the “sea” represents those who have no desire to worship or believe in a higher being other than man himself. They put their trust and faith in the governmental or political powers of this world. (For more comments on these symbols, see 12:16.)

It should be clear that both the “earth” and “sea” represent groups of people who are not Christians, and they are the ones affected by these seven last plagues. Therefore, each of these plagues will affect anyone who lives in sin instead of righteousness. This is a likeness to the plagues sent against the people of Egypt. All Egyptians were affected; only God’s people were exempt. Ungodly people are continually affected by these seven last plagues.

This second plague affects the masses of people, symbolically represented as the “sea,” who do not believe in God. The sea becomes as the blood of a dead man, which means that those who do not believe in God are spiritually dead. To be without God in this life is to be spiritually dead and without hope of life in the eternity to come. The spiritually dead of the earth will undergo the second death (21:8), which is eternal destruction. They are as dead men.

THE THIRD PLAGUE: THE WATERS TURN TO BLOOD

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

The third plague is directed against the rivers and fountains of waters. Many interpret these as literal rivers and waters of this world. We must remember we are dealing with symbolic language and, therefore, must seek to find the symbolic meaning. Verse 6 indicates these rivers and fountains of waters are given blood to drink, which means they have the ability to drink. This shows that they symbolically represent a certain group of people. They represent those who “have shed the blood of saints and prophets” (v. 6). (For a complete discussion of these symbols, refer to comments on 8:10.) For the sake of brevity, in this verse these rivers and fountains of waters represent the abundant teachings of those who attempt to direct the spiritual lives of people upon the earth. Specifically, they represent those leaders of false religious organizations who demand or deceive people into

worshipping God according to their instructions.

These people are responsible for shedding the blood of saints and prophets (v. 6). Many Christians have lost their lives throughout the ages because they refused to worship God according to the ways of false religion. As this plague is poured out upon these waters, they become as blood. This indicates that these people are spiritually dead. Because these people practice false teachings and persecute Christians, God has judged them to be spiritually dead or becoming as blood, which signifies spiritual death. (See v. 5.) They are spiritually dead upon this earth, and because of this they will have a part in the “second death,” which is the lake of fire. (See 20:14; 21:8.)

Verse 5. And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, 0 Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus.

An angel declares that the Lord is righteous and that his judgment dealing with those people who have persecuted the saints is just and fair.

The phrase “art, and wast, and shalt be” shows the eternal aspect of God. He has always existed, he exists now, and he will exist forever into the future. Notice that God has already judged that these things must happen. The judgment of God has already been made known to man through the gospel. Jas. 2:12 says that we shall be judged by the gospel or the “law of liberty.” (Also see Jn. 12:48.) We do not have to wait until judgment to know how we are to be judged. God’s judgment has been given to us in his Word. (For additional comments, see 14:7; 15:4.)

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

Because these leaders of false religions have been responsible for the persecution and killing of many Christians throughout the ages, God has given them blood to drink. They have also been responsible for many people losing their spiritual lives. Since blood symbolizes death,

this means that these people are spiritually dead even as they live their physical lives. They have shed the blood of Christians. Therefore, they are spiritually dead. Furthermore, their spiritual lives will be required of them through all eternity. God says that they are “worthy” of that judgment. In other words, they will receive their just and due punishment.

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

A voice comes from the altar proclaiming that the judgments of God are true and righteous. Note that this proclamation comes from the altar. The “altar” is used in other passages in Revelation to symbolize man’s ability to communicate with God. In the Old Testament, man offered sacrifices upon the altar to make atonement for his sins. Today, Christians make atonement for sins through prayers. Verse 7 seems to refer to the question that the saints under the altar are asking in the fifth seal (6:9-10). They desired to know how long it would be before God would avenge their blood on those who had persecuted them. In the third plague, God again shows that those who persecute Christians will suffer persecution themselves because he has judged that it will be so. This should help Christians today, as we suffer the trials and hardships of this life, to understand that someday we will be rewarded and those who persecute us will receive their just punishment from God.

THE FOURTH PLAGUE: MEN ARE SCORCHED

Verse 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 plague is slightly different from the others in that the vial is poured out upon the sun, which in turn is given the power to plague men with heat and fire. Again, these symbols should not be interpreted literally. They are

figurative descriptions of problems that will affect men here on this earth. We use language similar to this today as we speak of people who have gotten themselves into difficult situations. We say the “heat” is on them, or they have gotten themselves into a very “hot” spot. This is the situation many people find themselves in today as they reject the Word of God. The preaching of God’s Word is not an easy thing for sinners to hear. Because they do not want to accept the teachings of the gospel, it “burns” them. It puts the “heat” on them.

The sun must represent the teaching of the gospel. In 2Cor. 4:4, the gospel is referred to as “the light.” According to 1Jn. 1:7, Christians walk in the “light,” which must refer to the righteousness of God’s ways. If we walk in the light, we are obedient to the gospel. Just as the sun is the physical light of this world, the gospel is the spiritual light of the world. (For more information about the symbol “sun,” see comments on 8:12.) Therefore, this fourth plague teaches that the preaching and teaching of the gospel of Christ will torment those who refuse to accept it.

Verse 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.

People who refuse to obey God will blaspheme God because of these plagues. They refuse to repent or accept the gospel of Christ; therefore, these plagues continue to scorch them every time they hear the gospel preached.

Verse 9 states that God controls these plagues, but the gospel must be preached in order for them to be sent upon ungodly men. We know this because 11:6 says that the “two witnesses” (Christians) have the power to “smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.”

The fourth plague is a likeness to the ten plagues sent against Egypt in that these people refuse to repent. Every time a plague was sent against Egypt, Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to let the children of Israel go (Ex. 14:8). As one refuses to hear and accept the gospel, he is hardening his heart against God. He will continue to live in

sin and be plagued by the gospel.

THE FIFTH PLAGUE: DARKNESS AND PAIN

Verse 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 plague of this fifth angel is poured out upon the seat of the beast. This seat refers to the dwelling place of the beast, or his territory of rule and reign. The “beast” refers to those beasts described in chapter 13, which represent all political and religious powers that oppose God and persecute his people. (For a full understanding of the “beast,” chapter 13 must be studied.)

As this angel pours out his vial of wrath upon the seat of the beast, his kingdom becomes full of darkness. To become full of darkness means that these forces no longer give light to the people. They will lose their power. This shows the power of God over the beast. God’s kingdom will stand forever, but the kingdom of the beast, whether it be political or religious, will be full of pain, suffering, and darkness when it falls. We should never place our trust in powers of this earth. We must trust only in the power of God.

Governmental and religious powers of this earth that persecute or ridicule God’s people will rise and fall, but God’s kingdom will stand forever. Those people, who put their trust in kingdoms other than God’s, will suffer greatly, both mentally and physically, as these powers collapse upon this earth. They will “gnaw their tongues for pain.” It must be painful to watch the powers in which you have trusted collapse around you. This is why Christians must always trust in God. His kingdom will never fall.

Verse 11. And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.

Instead of turning away from these powers of the devil and living a life of righteousness, the people affected by

this plague blame God for their sufferings. They refuse to repent of their evil deeds. Therefore, their “pains” and “sores” continue.

All through the study of these seven last plagues, we must remember that we are dealing with symbolic language. These plagues are describing the pain and suffering that people on earth, who refuse to obey God, will endure. This is why terms such as “pains” and “sores” are used. They represent all types of sorrows and sufferings that will affect non-Christians.

“ARMAGEDDON”

Of all the terms we hear and are familiar with in Revelation, “Armageddon” may be the most common. If we turn on our televisions or radios and listen to almost any “religious” program, we are likely to hear this term. We constantly hear predictions that the end of world is near, and that we need to prepare ourselves for the great battle of Armageddon. The world in general today believes that “Armageddon” will be a literal battle fought between the forces of God and the Anti-christ in the Valley of Megiddo. They also believe that Christ will be victorious and set up an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem and reign for a thousand years. We even have those in the church today who are believing and teaching theories similar to this. This is a dangerous belief because it affords a second opportunity on earth to be obedient to the law of Christ. We know that no such second chance exists. When a person dies, his judgment is sealed, and he will either spend eternity with God in heaven or in the devil’s hell.

We hear so much false teaching today about “Armageddon” (the sixth plague) that it becomes extremely important for Christians to understand the correct meaning of this passage, if for no other reason than to strengthen our own faith. We cannot expect the world to immediately accept our teachings about Armageddon because they do not have the same understanding of the New Testament as we do. Therefore, it becomes our responsibility to teach the gospel to all who will hear it. Many take the word of some

man as being the “gospel” and accept it with unwavering faith. We must always keep our minds open to the study of God’s Word and “try” those who teach it in order to determine if they are teaching the truth (1Jn. 4:1).

We will seek to interpret the sixth plague in the same manner as we have interpreted the entire book. Its application will be to the people of this world who live during the Christian age. The sixth plague will take us to the end of all things here on earth, just as does the sixth seal and sixth trumpet. (See comments on 6:12, 9:13-21, and 11:13-14.) These three series are parallel in terms of the time period they cover. In your own private studies, make close comparisons of these three series.

THE SIXTH PLAGUE

THE EUPHRATES DRIED UP

Verse 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 angel pours out his vial upon the great river Euphrates. This makes it possible for the “kings of the east” to have a way prepared. The difficulty in the sixth plague is similar to that of many other passages in Revelation. Many people interpret these symbols literally. However, we are dealing with spiritual matters that are described symbolically by using physical items with which we are familiar. Although there is a literal Euphrates River, which originates from two main sources in the Armenian Mountains and flows into the Persian Gulf, we must determine how it is used symbolically in this passage. In the Old Testament, the actual river Euphrates was the eastern boundary of the land that Israel possessed. (See Gen. 15:18; Deut. 1:7-8; 2Sam. 8:3-4.) If we translate this meaning into symbolic language concerning the church today, it becomes a spiritual boundary between the people of God and those who follow the devil. Therefore, the

Euphrates River is used to symbolize the spiritual boundary between the ways of righteousness and ungodliness. We know that the boundary between righteousness and ungodliness is the law of Christ, or the New Testament. It is the gospel. The gospel is the symbolic meaning of the “water” of the great Euphrates. Just as water is a necessary life-giving substance that man must have in order to sustain his physical life, the gospel is the necessary life-giving substance of our spiritual lives. This water, or the gospel, is the dividing line between the ways of righteousness and unrighteousness. Those who obey the gospel, or partake of this spiritual water, will move from the place of unrighteousness to the place of spiritual righteousness – the church.

When the angel pours out his vial upon these waters, they are dried up. This would mean that some people may become so hardened to the message of the gospel that God will turn them over to their ways of sin. Concerning this, 2Thess. 2:11-12 states, “And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” Also in Rom. 1:28, we read, “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.” These Scriptures teach that when a person becomes so involved in sin that he has no desire to hear about God or make any attempt to turn from his sins, God will “give them over” to those ways of sin. The water of the Euphrates will be dried up for those people. They will believe the lies spoken by the forces of the devil and be condemned.

The “kings of the east” must represent those forces of the devil that constantly work in the world today. Just as many literal kings, who were located east of the Euphrates River during Jewish history, were a threat to the Israelites’ physical lives, the spiritual kings located east of the figurative Euphrates River are a threat to the spiritual lives of men. These kings are referred to in verse 13 as the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. These three

symbols are used throughout Revelation to describe those forces that oppose God. In 12:9, the dragon was called the devil or Satan. In chapter 13, the beast out of the earth describes those religious forces devised by man to persecute the true children of God. The beast out of the earth is symbolized here, and also in 19:20, as the “false prophet.” We know this to be true because the actions of the false prophet in 19:20 are virtually identical to the ones given for the beast out of the earth in chapter 13.

When we put the meaning of these symbols together, the lesson of verse 12 becomes understandable. When man refuses to hear and obey God’s Word, the “waters” (gospel) of the “great river Euphrates” (the boundary between righteousness and unrighteousness) are “dried up.” That person is engulfed in sin and overcome by the “kings of the east” who lead the forces of the devil against men.

Verse 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.

Frogs come out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. They must represent false teachings, or maybe even threats of persecutions, that come from the forces represented by these symbols. These symbols were defined in verse 12. It is significant to note that these frogs came out of the “mouths” of these symbols. This indicates that the words spoken by the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet is that which affects men. These words or teachings are described as unclean spirits, which have the characteristics of frogs. We have no way of knowing exactly why the frog is used as a symbol, but it probably indicates that these speakings go out in every direction. As we all know, frogs do not necessarily follow a straight line. They hop about in every direction. The false teachings symbolized here are much the same. They go forth in all directions and cause men to follow the ways of the devil, either through the persuasion of false teachings or by threats of persecution.

Another reason why this symbol may have been used is that it was one of the ten plagues sent against Egypt. Frogs were used as a physical plague sent directly against the people of Egypt who were persecuting God's people. Today, they symbolize a spiritual plague sent against those who will not obey God's Word.

Verse 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.

These spirits of devils or frogs go forth unto the whole world. They are very much at work in the world today. They are deceiving mankind by the working of miracles, which should not be thought of as actual miracles but as great deceptions that will cause men to follow their ways rather than God's. There are men today who claim to be able to work miracles such as speaking in tongues or healing the sick by simply the laying on of hands. These are examples of the unclean spirits or frogs that plague mankind today and cause him to follow Satan. By these spiritual deceits, these spirits of the devil are going forth to the "kings of the earth" and to the "whole world."

As these spirits of devils go forth unto the entire world, they are gathering their followers together unto the "battle of that great day of God Almighty." This is what many people refer to as the "battle of Armageddon." Obviously, a battle is being fought, but it is not some physical battle to be fought by using our modern weapons of war. It is a spiritual battle that is constantly being fought as these "spirits of devils" go forth over the earth seeking to deceive all mankind into following the ways of Satan.

The "great day" refers to the Judgment day. Jude 6 states, "The angels which kept not their first estate," are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." Therefore, the Judgment day is spoken of as a day of battle. The point that is missed by many is that this will be the final battle that Christians will fight. We are constantly fighting battles with the devil in the world today,

but the battle to be fought on Judgment day will be the final battle in which our Lord will be totally victorious over Satan. Rev. 17:14 states, “These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them.” After the day of Judgment, Christians will no longer have to fight those spiritual battles. We will be victorious and dwell with our Lord forever. The battle will be won.

Verse 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.

Many have a great deal of difficulty understanding why verse 15 is placed in this particular position in the text. With this understanding of the battle of that great day, the meaning of this verse becomes clear. We as Christians are admonished to be constantly watchful and “keep our garments.” As these “spirits of devils” go forth throughout the world waging spiritual war against mankind, we must be extremely careful not to lose the battle ourselves. We are to be watchful. We are to keep our garments. Rev. 3:4 indicates that a few Christians at Sardis had been able to “keep their garments,” while the garments of others had become defiled with sin. Christians are constantly engaged in a spiritual war against sin, and we must be certain to keep our garments clean.

All Christians are admonished to keep their garments lest they walk naked. To walk naked would mean that we have lost our white garments of righteousness. Rev. 19:8b says, “For the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” To lose our white robes of righteousness is symbolic of leaving that sin-forgiven state of a Christian and returning to a world of sin.

Jesus tells us that he will come as a thief. This means he will come the second time when men are least expecting him. Just as a thief enters when a building is vacant or no one is expecting him, Jesus will come when men have turned from God and have their minds centered on matters of this world rather than on spiritual matters. Mt. 24:37 states, “But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the

coming of the Son of man be.” The people in the time of Noah watched him preparing the ark. They laughed and mocked him. Their minds were on anything except the teachings of God, which Noah proclaimed. The flood came at a time when the people of the earth least expected it. This is a likeness to the second coming of Christ. He will return when men turn a deaf ear to the teachings of the gospel and have their minds totally on things of this world. He will not be expected! He will come as a thief. This is why Christians are admonished to be watchful and keep their garments. If we become as people of the world, we will lose our “garments” of righteousness and be naked in a sinful world. (See 3:3-4.) We would no longer have the right to inherit eternal life.

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

Of all the verses in Revelation, and possibly even the entire Bible, verse 16 with its reference to “Armageddon” may be the most familiar to those who profess any type of “Christianity.” There are so many different ideas about Armageddon that it would be impossible to discuss every theory. We will present what we believe to be the truth about Armageddon and encourage you to make comparisons with the many other interpretations. The basic belief of the world today concerning Armageddon is given in the introduction to the sixth plague (v. 12). It will be our purpose to take this verse in its context and draw some logical conclusions about Armageddon, which are in accordance with the teachings of the New Testament.

The word “Armageddon” as it is used in the Hebrew language would be translated “Har-Magedon” in the Greek. This is the only time this word is used in the Bible, and there is no evidence that a place with this specific name has ever existed. This means that this word must have a symbolic meaning. Many believe it refers to the Valley of Megiddo, which was the sight of many bloody battles fought by the Jewish nation. They also believe that the final battle between the saints and the Anti-christ will be fought

on this territory immediately preceding the second coming of Christ. Furthermore, they believe that when Christ does appear the second time, he will lead his followers to a great victory in this valley and proceed to set up an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem for a period of one thousand years. The mistake in this type of reasoning is that it requires a literal interpretation of these symbols. Just as in the entire book of Revelation, these terms are figurative, not literal, and require a figurative interpretation about spiritual matters, not physical.

It is likely that the Valley of Megiddo is the source of this figurative term "Armageddon." Throughout the ages the Israelite nation had mourned many times because of events that took place in this valley. This is illustrated in Zech. 12:11 which states, "In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the valley of Megiddon." This was truly a place of great sorrow for the Jewish nation. Therefore, the term "Armageddon" would carry with it the symbolic meaning of a place of great sorrow.

In the Greek language, the first syllable of this word (har) means "mountain." Therefore, the actual meaning of Armageddon would be the "mountain of sorrows." This should help us understand that, even though the Valley of Megiddo is probably the source of this symbolic word, it does not refer specifically to that place because we are dealing with a mountain instead of a valley. Symbolically, a mountain would refer to a massive amount of almost anything. In our language today, if we have a huge quantity of some item, we may say we have a "mountainous" quantity, or to describe a giant of a man we may say he is "as big as a mountain." With these thoughts in mind, we should begin to understand the symbolic meaning of this term. These people who follow the spirits of devils (v. 14) are going to be gathered into a place called "Armageddon" or "mountain of sorrows." They will be gathered into a place where the amount of sorrow they will undergo will be indescribable. They will suffer beyond our greatest imaginations. This is the sixth plague. Therefore,

Armageddon is not a battle at all. It describes the immense grief those people will feel who have disobeyed God when Christ gathers them together at his second coming.

As people go forth in the world today disobeying God, they are sealing their destiny to be gathered into a place called Armageddon. They may be enjoying the pleasures of this world for a season, but they are destined to find themselves in a state of tremendous sorrow when Judgment comes. They will be on the losing side of that great and final battle when “the Lamb shall overcome them” (17:14).

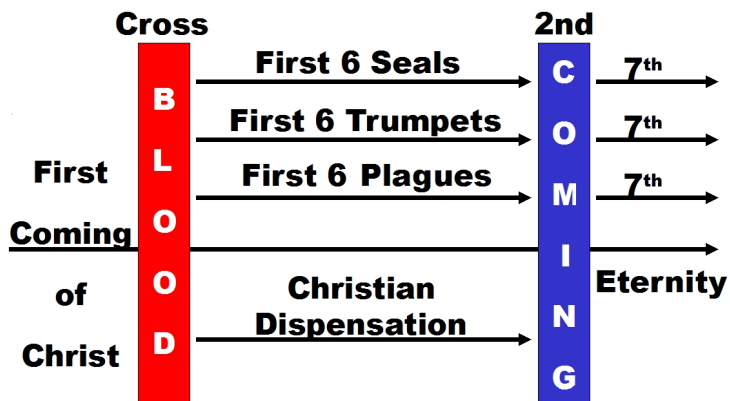
It should now become clear that the overall meaning of the sixth plague shows that when men refuse to obey the gospel of Christ, God will turn them over to their evil ways. He will deliver them over to follow the ways of Satan, which are described as unclean spirits coming out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. When Christ comes again, they will be gathered together into a place of immense sorrow, figuratively called Armageddon. Here they will lose the final battle of “that great day” (Judgment), and the devil and his followers will be cast into the lake of fire to be tormented forever and ever (20:10).

Christians are told to “keep their garments” so they will be able to avoid the consequences of this terrible sixth plague.

THE SEVENTH PLAGUE

HAIL OUT OF HEAVEN

7 Seals - 7 Trumpets - 7 Last Plagues



The sixth plague brought us to the end of all activities upon the earth. The sixth seal and the sixth trumpet also took us to the end of time. Remember, these three visions are parallel, describing different events, all of which are taking place during the present Christian dispensation. The seventh plague takes us into the time of Judgment and eternity. Therefore, even without a great deal of study in this passage, it becomes obvious that the seventh plague will represent the final plague which all those who are disobedient to God will suffer—an eternity in the torment of hell. This will be God’s final and everlasting plague that he will “pour out” upon all those who follow Satan.

Verse 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.

This vial of wrath is poured out into the air. It is difficult to understand exactly why the “air” is used as a symbol. It probably indicates the total coverage of this plague. We know that this final plague will affect all those people who are disobedient to God. If dust were thrown into the air, it would cover a wide area as it fell to the ground. This vial of

wrath is pictured as being poured out into the air and covering the entire world. This would be in contrast to the first six plagues, which were directed at specific groups of people in this world. This has helped us understand who are affected by those plagues, as well as the meanings of the plagues. One passage which should be considered in determining the meaning of this verse is Eph. 2:2. It speaks of those who are in sin as being those who “walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air.” With Satan being the prince of the air, this plague affects Satan and all of his followers. This is in complete agreement with the overall interpretation of these plagues, and also the teachings of the New Testament concerning events that will take place at the end of time.

After this vial is poured out into the air, a voice is heard coming from the Throne in the temple of heaven saying, “It is done.” Since this voice comes from the Throne, it must be the voice of God proclaiming that “it is done.” This would mean that all things of this present world are finished. God’s plan for man has been completed. This is further proof that the series of seals, trumpets, and plagues are parallel, covering the same periods of time. In the trumpet series (10:7), we have a reading that is similar to this verse. It says, “In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.” When the time of the seventh seal, the seventh trumpet, and the seventh plague arrives, all things of this present world will have ended. Man’s sojourn on this earth will be over. This present Christian dispensation will be completed. Man’s destiny will be sealed. There will be no further opportunities for man to obey the gospel of Christ. Those who were obedient to God here on earth will spend an eternity with him in heaven, and those who followed Satan will be afflicted by the seventh plague for all eternity. “It is done.”

Verse 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.

Again the symbols of voices, thunders, lightning, and earthquake used in verse 18 are similar to those used at the conclusion of the seventh seal (8:5) and the seventh trumpet (11:19). In each case they signify the final conclusion of all things that God has planned for man. Voices, thunders, and lightnings are used to announce major events of God. This was true at the giving of the Ten Commandments unto Moses on Mt. Sinai. As God descended upon the mountain in a thick cloud, there were thunders, lightnings, and the voice of a trumpet so exceedingly loud that the people trembled. (See Ex. 19:16; 20:18; Heb. 12:18-19.) The seventh plague will be the final act of God dealing with mankind. At this time, man's destiny will be sealed for all eternity.

The earthquake could easily represent the shaking of the people because of their fear. Heb. 12:21 records that Moses was so fearful as he looked upon Mt. Sinai in the presence of God that he said, "I exceedingly fear and quake." When the time of the seventh plague arrives, those who have been disobedient to God will exceedingly fear and quake. The people of this earth will be shaken as never before.

Verse 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" in verse 19 must be the same one referred to in 17:18 as the "woman." This woman was also called the "great harlot" in 17:1 and referred to as "Babylon the Great" in 17:5 and 18:2. The meaning of this great city is discussed in detail in the above references. Briefly, it represents those systems of organized religion devised by men instead of by God. This means they have left the true teachings of God to follow the ways of men. They have committed spiritual fornication. At the time of this seventh plague, these false systems of organized religion designed

by men will fall. They will be destroyed or, as it is described here, they will be divided into three parts. This destruction is probably described this way because the number “3” is a reference to the divine, and this destruction will be a divine destruction carried out by God.

Another reason we know the “great city” is used symbolically in this passage is because the next phrase tells of the fall of the “cities of the nations.” If the “great city” represented the actual cities of this world, we would have two successive phrases with exactly the same meaning. This would be pointless. In fact, studying and comparing phrases such as this helps us a great deal in determining the meanings of these symbols. Conclusions can be drawn from their similarities and differences. Throughout the book, there are “clues” such as this that help to determine the meanings of these marvelous visions.

The point of verse 19 is that during the time of the seventh plague, all powers that exist in this world will fall. These false spiritual organizations of men will fall, and those physical forces such as governments, cities, and nations will fall. The power of God will overcome and destroy all powers that are in existence. At that time everyone will understand that God is all in all and will submit to his power.

When all powers other than God’s have been destroyed, great Babylon will come in remembrance before God, and she will receive the fierceness of his wrath. Babylon is discussed in detail in the introduction of chapter 18, but for our purposes here, it represents those who oppose God. Just as Babylon of old was an enemy of God’s people, and took them into captivity on several occasions, the “Babylon” of today is made up of those people who oppose God. During this time of the seventh plague, all those who have opposed God will come before him to receive the fierceness of his wrath.

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

The thought that this physical world will be completely

destroyed during the time of this seventh plague continues in this verse. Since the main emphasis of the entire seventh plague is to show that all powers will fall and become directly subject to God, these “islands” and “mountains” are most likely used symbolically. The term “island” is used in the Old Testament to represent leaders among the people of the nations. (See Isa. 41:1; 49:1; 59:18.) Mountains are used symbolically to represent powerful kingdoms or nations. (See. Isa. 41:15; Jer. 51:24-25; Amos 4:1.) If this symbolic meaning is intended in this verse, it would mean that the powers which some individuals (islands) of this world have acquired over others would then mean nothing. Also, those powers of mighty governments (mountains) of this world would no longer matter. The only power that will exist at that time will be God’s. If the symbolic meanings of islands and mountains are not intended here, then this would show the destruction of this physical world. When Christ returns, “the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10).

Regardless of which of these interpretations may be correct, the basic meaning of verse remains the same. During the time of this seventh plague, Judgment, and eternity, all power will lie directly with God and all men will be subject to it.

We might also add that due to the context of this passage and the fact that almost the entire book of Revelation is written in symbolic language, we prefer the symbolic meaning given for this verse.

Verse 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 final part of the seventh plague is the great plague of hail. In verse 19, the disobedient stood before God to receive the fierceness of his wrath. Verse 21 is a figurative description of that wrath of God being poured out upon those who refused to obey him while they lived upon this

earth. This will be an “exceeding great” plague. The weight of these hailstones is described as being about the weight of a talent. According to Howard-Hines *Study of Revelation*, each stone weighed approximately one hundred pounds.¹ If this were a literal plague, such as the plague of hail sent against Egypt by God through Moses, it would be impossible for man to withstand. But, this is not the case. This is a figurative description showing the severity of this final plague, which God will levy against those who have followed the ways of the devil.

The final plague of eternal hell will be so great that we cannot begin to understand it as physical men. It will be a plague of the spirit that will last forever. Living in physical bodies, we can only understand physical pain. Therefore, this description of hell is given in terms of the physical body. We can understand how severe a plague of hail such as this would be against our physical bodies, and this is used as a description of how severe this final plague will be against the spirits of the wicked in hell.

The seventh plague, which is the final plague, will be directed against wicked mankind and will last forever. The only way to avoid this plague is to be a Christian and follow the ways of God. Let us always be diligent to follow God’s ways and do the works he has commanded. Let us remain faithful to him and spend our eternity in a place so wonderful it also defies description. Let us spend our eternity in heaven.

¹V. E. Howard and J. L Hines, *Study of Revelation* (Texarkana, Tex.: Central Printers and Publishers, 1967), p. 110.