

**REV. 14-16 CHRIST BEGINS TO THRESH THE EARTH; SEVEN LAST PLAGUES**

As we reach in Revelation the final crescendo before Christ's return, God first encourages John and the Church. Justice will be meted out in due time--the saints will be rewarded while the wicked will be punished. Rev. 11:18 summarizes this: "The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, *and the time of the dead*, that they should be *judged*, and that You should *reward* Your servants *the prophets and the saints*, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should *destroy* those who destroy the earth." Notice the judgment upon *the dead* has *not happened* yet, refuting the idea of an immortal soul.

John states, "Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Write: *'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'* 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them'" (Rev. 14:12-13). So the dead "who die in the Lord" or the deceased brethren, are not "awake" in heaven but are "resting from their labors," undermining the immortal soul belief.

As *The IVP Commentary* mentions, "Jewish texts spoke longingly of the day when the sufferings of the righteous would end...Jewish funerary inscriptions regularly mentioned *peace for the dead*; over half the Jewish epitaphs recovered in Rome included the words 'in peace' (hence 'rest in peace' is not only a modern concept). The image of *reward for works* is from the Old Testament and is common in Judaism and in the New Testament (see Rev. 22:12)."

Regarding the comment that "their works follow them," Ladd points out, "The Greek word translated 'labors' means labor *to the point of weariness*. Their afflictions by the Beast have worn the saints down to the point of exhaustion. Nevertheless, they have died *in the Lord* and their deeds (lit. works [from the Gk. *ergon*]) follow them beyond the grave. Deeds here include their *endurance, obedience to the commandments of God*, and *faith in Jesus* mentioned in the preceding beatitude [Rev. 14:13]" (p. 198).

After this, John receives a vision of the "threshing" of the earth. He writes, "Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat

on the cloud, 'Thrust in Your sickle and reap, *for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe*. So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and *the earth was reaped*. Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, 'Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.' So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and *threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God*. And the winepress was trampled *outside the city*, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs (or 1,600 stadia)" (Rev. 14:14-20).

Notice the person on the cloud with a golden crown and a sharp sickle is called "One like the Son of Man." This is the same title given to Christ in Rev. 1:13 where it says, "in the midst of the seven lampstands *One like the Son of Man*." This phrase comes from Dan. 7:13 and refers to the Messiah. Christ used it of Himself as the One who will reap the harvest of human beings (Mt. 13:37; 40-42).

Ladd adds, "The Son of man is a frequent term to designate the eschatological (or end-time) role of Christ...The term Son of man in the New Testament is never applied to angels, so we must conclude *it is a vision of the returning Christ*. 'The harvest of the earth is fully ripe'...conveys the idea that...history is moving under the sovereignty of God...[it] will not get out of control; in God's hour, the issues will be settled" (p. 199).

So this is a description of Christ ready to carry out the will of the Father here on the earth. The consequences for the wicked in the world will be catastrophic. From Armageddon, the great armies will come and surround Jerusalem when Christ is seen returning in glory. This is the same battle later described about Jesus' return in Rev. 19:15-21, "Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should *strike the nations...He Himself* treads *the winepress* of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God...Then I saw an angel standing in the sun...saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, 'Come and gather together for the supper of

the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men...And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh."

The destruction of hundreds of millions of soldiers warring against Christ will result in blood covering 1,600 stadia, or about 180 miles, probably the diameter around Jerusalem, with the blood reaching around four feet deep. Remember, just from the East, 200 million soldiers will come (Rev. 9:16), which means many millions more will gather from other parts. It will make Verdun, France, a battlefield in WWI with around one million dead, look puny.

Now in Zec. 14:12, it describes how they shall die instantly, "And this shall be the plague with which the Lord will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths." Although a gruesome-sounding death, where the body releases all its blood, it is mercifully quick. It is also comforting to know many of these soldiers deceived by Satan will have a chance to repent when they come back up in the Second Resurrection—for they would not be lost forever!

Next, in chap. 15, John has a vision of how the earth will be threshed, but again, before this occurs, God *first encourages the Church*, reassuring it of its final victory. He writes, "Then 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. And 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. *They 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! 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'" (Rev. 15:1-4).

The song sung by the redeemed is a single song as vv. 3-4 show. Note the striking parallel between the 144,000 and the great multitude in Rev. 7 on the one hand and the 144,000 in Rev. 14 and a great

multitude in Rev. 15 on the other. In both instances, the 144,000 are protected but the innumerable multitudes appear not to be, since in Rev. 7 they "come out of the Great Tribulation" having been *in it*. Here in chap. 15, a great multitude of resurrected saints is again before the throne of God, singing praises to Him. As *The BK Commentary* points out of Rev. 15:2, "Beside this sea, John saw *the martyred dead, the same group described in Rev. 7:9-17.*" They are likely the innumerable multitude.

Notice also these saints "have the victory over the Beast" so they *must have lived* in the end time and were faithful to the end. When did they gain the victory? Since they are servants of God, they are resurrected in the First Resurrection, along with the 144,000—but now are described *in the future* as being *both with God the Father and with the Lamb*.

This group is *also* described in Rev. 7 as being *before the throne of God and serving the Lamb*, and it is not a coincidence. This portrayal can mean something figurative or symbolic, such as when the slain saints are pictured as being "under the altar" in Rev. 6:9, or it can be literal, such as when *the New Jerusalem* comes down to the earth and all are together. As it says in Rev. 22:3-4, "And there shall be no more curse, but *the throne of God and of the Lamb* shall be in it, and *His servants shall serve Him.*"

In the latter case, Beckwith points out, comparing Rev. 7 and 15, "The language in Rev. 7:15, 'Shall spread his tabernacle [God the Father's] over them,' etc., belongs rather to the *renewed earth* as the abode of the blessed, *as in Rev. 21* [when the New Jerusalem comes down to the earth]" (p. 554).

Ladd summarizes this section, "On the *threshold of the last plagues*, John has a *proleptic* vision of the *conquerors of the Beast* [proleptic means something described as happening in the present when it is actually in the future]. They are in fact the martyr-saints *slain* by the Beast because of their endurance in the face of persecution, their steadfast obedience to the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus (Rev. 14:12)...We must assume that the persecution waged against the saints by the Beast continues throughout the period of the seven bowl plagues...The song of the Lamb...is a song of deliverance from the hatred and hostility of the Beast. As God delivered Israel from Egypt, even while pouring out plagues on the Egyptians, so He

has delivered the saints from worshipping the Beast, while pouring out these judgments on the worshipers of the Beast” (pp. 204-205).

So, after this *proleptic* scene of triumph, come the 7 last plagues. Rev. 15:5-8 says, “After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. And 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. Then 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. The 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.*”

This scene in heaven reveals the threshing of the earth by God’s wrath. It consists of the third and final series of numbered plagues—the seven bowl plagues. They follow the same pattern of sevens with seals, trumpets, and now, the seventh trumpet sound, which equates to “the third woe” (Rev. 11:14), and the outpouring of the seven bowls.

John continues, “Then 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.’ So 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” (Rev. 16:1-2).

Notice who received the punishment—those who had the mark of the Beast—and not the saints. Just as the Passover in Egypt, God spares His own here. So those who had the mark of the beast now receive the first “marks” of punishment by God. No amount of treatment will get rid of these terrible ulcers.

Expositor’s explains, “Each plague in both series (the trumpets and the bowls) is reminiscent of the plagues on Egypt before the Exodus. The first four in both series cover the traditional divisions of nature: earth, sea, rivers, sky. But in each of the bowls, unlike the trumpets, the plague on nature is related to the suffering of mankind. Furthermore, each bowl plague seems to be total in its effect (‘every living thing...died,’ whereas under the trumpets only a part is affected (‘a third of the living creatures...died’ [Rev. 8:9])). Therefore, it seems better to understand the trumpets and bowls as separate judgments; yet both

are described in language drawn from the pattern of God’s judgment on Egypt under Moses. The final three plagues are social and spiritual in their effect and shift from nature to humanity.”

John continues, “Then 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” (Rev. 16:3).

Nelson’s Commentary notes, “The second bowl turns the sea into blood, as did the second trumpet (Rev. 8:8). However, only a third of the sea was affected by the trumpet (Rev. 8:8-9). This bowl brings about the death of every living creature in the sea. This verse is similar to Ex. 7:17-21, in which the Nile River is turned to blood; however, the judgment here is infinitely worse because of its global scope.”

The reference to “blood as of a dead man” means it is like coagulated, rotting, and foul-smelling blood. It is the reverse of Gen. 1:21--instead of the animals being given life, here, it is taken away. Yet we should remember, God will give life again (Ez. 47:1-12).

Next, John says, “Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters saying: ‘You are righteous, O Lord, the One who is and who was and who is to be, because You have judged these things. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. for it is their just due.’ And I heard another from the altar saying, ‘Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments’ (R. 16:5-7).

So with the third bowl, the fresh water is also turned into stinking, rotting, undrinkable water. Until God intervenes to create fresh water again, man’s days are counted.

As Ladd mentions, “The judgments of God have fallen upon a rebellious world as a vindication to those who have been martyred (Rev. 6:9) in answer to the prayers of the persecuted saints (Rev. 9:13). Furthermore, the angel who had commanded that the vineyard of the earth be reaped came from the altar (Rev. 14:18). The altar affirms that God’s judgments are not arbitrary and capricious but are true and just. In the end, God’s acts of judgment will be completely vindicated” (p. 211).

So much to contemplate for today and for the future! Let’s continue to be faithful to the end!