

REV. 16-17 SEVEN LAST PLAGUES; THE RELIGIOUS HARLOT

We are covering the Seven Last Plagues in Rev. 16, now focusing on the Fourth Calamity. Remember, these seven plagues comprise what was the seventh trumpet or the third woe--including Christ's return. Although these plagues are terrifying, we know God has no choice but to punish mankind, for they are very close to destroying the earth--as WWII starts. It is sobering to know where the world is heading.

Mounce comments, "The judgment of God is neither vengeful nor capricious. It is an expression of his just and righteous nature. All caricatures of God that ignore *his intense hatred of sin* reveal more about human nature than about God. In a moral universe, *God must of necessity oppose evil*. 'Righteous are you, O Lord,' declared the Psalmist, 'and your laws are right' (Ps. 119:137, ISV).

John continues, "Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. And 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" (Rev. 16:8-9).

In the Third Plague, the earth's sources of fresh water--rivers and lakes--are made undrinkable. Now, God focuses on the sun and intensifies its heat to sear its inhabitants. Temperatures will probably rise above 130°F. Yet, people are so adamant about following the Beast and False Prophet they won't repent of their sins nor glorify God.

One relatively recent example of this stubborn mindset occurred in WWII, when most of the German people and soldiers followed Hitler's orders to the very end, despite mounting heavy losses. They had been intimidated, yet also praised and coddled so much by Hitler that many believed in their supposed racial superiority and refused to believe he was wrong or that their cause was truly lost.

As Mounce points out, "[People,] knowing full well that it is God himself who controls the plagues, refuse to repent but resort to blasphemy. Like Pharaoh, they have hardened their hearts, and repentance is out of the question. They have gradually taken on the character of the false god they serve" (p. 296).

Next comes the Fifth Plague: "Then 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. They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds" (Rev. 16:10-11).

"The throne of the beast would be his authority or dominion," remarks Mounce, "and in John's day Rome was the geographical focus of that power. The resulting darkness is reminiscent of *the ninth Egyptian plague*. This supernatural darkness not only intensifies the distress of the previous plagues, but also adds a terror of its own" (p. 297).

Where would the throne of the Beast be in the future? We don't know for sure, but three cities could be involved: (1) *Rome*, the city founded on seven hills or mountains (Rev. 17:9), which appears to be the capital of the False Prophet, described more in detail in Rev. 17 as *the religious Babylon*--the woman mounting the Beast; (2) *Jerusalem*, as the place where the Beast will eventually set up his palace, as Dan. 11:45 explains, and will lead to the abomination desecration; (3) *Civil Babylon*, which we are not sure where this will be. It could be the headquarters of the future 10-king federation somewhere in Europe, which eventually will turn over its authority to the Beast. Wherever the Beast's capital will be, this fifth plague will directly affect it.

We now come to the Sixth Plague: "Then 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. And 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. For 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. '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.' And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon" (Rev. 16:12-16).

This Sixth Plague is very different from the previous ones. It does not inflict punishment, but rather prepares the scene for the final battle between Christ and the world's armies. The plague is poured out on the Euphrates River, a natural

boundary between Asia and the Middle East. The reason it is dried is to enable the armies of the East to cross over to this region of the Middle East.

Once the Euphrates is ready to be crossed by millions of soldiers from the East, three demons, seen by John in a form similar to ugly frogs, are sent by Satan, the Beast and the False Prophet, to deceive and entice, through counterfeit signs, the rest of the world's leaders. They will send their troops to gather in Israel's largest valley, Esdralon or the valley of Jezreel. It is about 25 miles long and is where many great battles were fought, with the famous hill of Megiddo (*Armageddon* in Hebrew), a fortress in ancient days, overlooking the valley. It is some 55 miles north of Jerusalem. It will be the place of gathering of all these armies, but the actual battle will take place around Jerusalem, in the valley of Jehoshaphat, or the modern Kidron Valley, east of Jerusalem. References to this "battle of that great day of God Almighty" in Jerusalem are found in the Old Testament in Joel 2:11; 3:1-2, 9-14; Zec. 14:1-15 and in the New Testament, in Rev. 19:17-21. Yet, it is not only Christ's battle, but also God the Father's, for He is the one who issues the command for Christ to descend and overcome the invading armies.

As usual in Revelation, after describing such a terrible battle, God wants to comfort His people and so Christ interjects a thought, encouraging them not to lose their focus or perseverance, so they won't be deceived during this period and to remain faithful.

As Mounce brings out, "We are reminded of the unexpectedness that...Jesus connected with his own return (Mt. 24:42-44) and of Paul's statement that the day of the Lord will come 'like a thief in the night' (1 Thes. 5:2). The faithful are admonished to be on the alert for this great event—not taken by surprise as a soldier who, when the alarm is sounded, must run away naked because he has misplaced his clothing. (According to the Jewish Mishnah, the captain of the temple in Jerusalem went his rounds of the precincts by night, and if a member of the temple police was caught asleep at his post, his clothes were taken off and burned, and he was sent away naked in disgrace)" (p. 300).

John writes, "Then 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!' And 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. Now 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. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And 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" (Rev. 16:17-21).

With this last plague, Babylon, probably referring to Rome, is punished and cities of the earth are flattened into rubble by a worldwide earthquake--the greatest ever recorded--and also the largest hailstorm known to man—for each hailstone weighs around one hundred pounds. The world's political and economic system is now in tatters, yet, mankind still refuses to repent of breaking God's laws!

Mounce notes, "The great city that is split into three parts in undoubtedly to be identified as Rome. This follows from the fact that in the following chapter Rome is referred to as the 'great city' (vv. 10, 16, 18, 19, 21). The subsequent reference in the same verse to Babylon does not imply yet another different city. For John the allusion would be to Rome as the center of Satanic power and oppression against the fledgling church. The division of the city into three parts indicates the completeness of its destruction. That all the cities of the nations fall with Rome indicates the dominant role of the great capital in its network of imperial communications...With this vision, the Revelation might come to an end—in terms of God's judgments.

"But the vision does not end there. What follows is an extended description of Rome as a luxurious prostitute who meets a gruesome death at the hands of the scarlet beast she commands (chap. 17). The demise of the great city is then described in chapter 18 as a great funeral dirge complete with the mourning of kings, merchants, and all seafaring people whose livelihood depended upon Rome's insatiable appetite for extravagance. Both chapters spell out in detail what is involved in the final bowl judgment" (pp. 304-305).

We now come to Rev. 17, and as we write in our booklet on Revelation, "Chapters 17-19 explain the

reason for the harlot city's destruction. They also describe the fate of the armies Satan has persuaded to fight against Christ as He descends to the Mount of Olives just outside of...Jerusalem. We have already seen that Satan's influence on mankind, especially over the kingdom of the Beast, emanates from 'the great harlot [city] who sits on many waters...' (p. 64)

John relates, "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, 'Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.' So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written: Mystery: Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth. I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement" (Rev. 17:1-6).

Here is the famous depiction of a fallen woman riding a scarlet beast, symbolic of the relationship between the False Prophet and the Beast. The term 'harlot' is used for a religious system that mixes its politics with civil power. It is a contrast to the chaste woman, symbolizing the true Church, not mixed with the world's politics and is faithful to the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus.

As Morris brings out, "A further way in which the figure [of the harlot] is used is to describe insolent and idolatrous world powers as harlots, e.g. Tyre (Is. 28:16) and Nineveh (Nahum 3:4). They are not said to be adulterous, for they are not God's people, His bride. It is significant...the term is *whore*, not 'adulteress.' John is not speaking of the people of God, but of a secular [and religious] power."

Our booklet on Revelation states, "More than any other Western city, Rome, heir of ancient Babylon's mystery cults, has a history of being 'drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus' (Rev. 17:6). Influenced by a religious

system that has led the way in opposing obedience to the commandments of God, Rome has allowed and often led the charge in persecuting 'those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus' (Rev. 14:12). No city in the world fits the description of Rev. 17 as she does. Pictured as a harlot sitting astride the Beast—the 10-king empire of which she is the cultural and spiritual center—this city of John's prophecy will yet again exert a vast influence over the earth's 'peoples, multitudes, nations and languages' (Rev. 17:15, NIV). As she has so often in the past, she will once more enjoy the fame and status of being 'that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth' (vs. 18)" (p. 65).

As *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* notes, "One of the seven angels invites John to witness the judgment of the great harlot. This is a great religious and commercial system with headquarters in Rome. Many believe that chapter 17 describes religious Babylon and chapter 18 the commercial aspect. Religious Babylon certainly includes apostate Christendom, both Protestant and Catholic. It may well represent the ecumenical church. Notice the description. The harlot sits on many waters, controlling great areas of the Gentile world. The kings of the earth have committed fornication with her; she has seduced political leaders with her compromise and intrigue. The inhabitants of the earth have become drunk with the wine of her fornication; vast numbers have come under her evil influence and have been reduced to staggering wretchedness.

"The apostate church is seen sitting on a scarlet beast. We have already noted in chapter 13 that this beast is the revived Roman Empire (and sometimes the head of that empire). The beast is full of blasphemous names and has seven heads and ten horns. For a while the false church seems to dominate the empire. She sits in full celestial state, wearing the symbols of her vast wealth and displaying a golden cup full of her idolatry and immorality. A name of mystery is on her forehead: Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth. This is the church that has shed the blood of Christian martyrs down through the centuries, and is still doing it. She is drunk with their blood." Next time, we will study more about this false religious and secular system.