

Read ch.15 – which is the shortest chapter in the Book of Revelation.

This describes the middle period of the time of the Great Tribulation and serves as an introduction to the cataclysmic events of the latter half of that period and the coming Judgement of God upon a world that has rejected him.

v1 – John saw another ‘great and marvellous sign’. This suggests something quite unique and never seen before, and which reveals the intensity of the wrath of God in his judgement on men. There has been nothing quite so severe before – although there have been many severe times of judgement in both Biblical records and subsequent history e.g. the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; the 10 plagues in Egypt etc.

But this judgement will be more severe than them all. This is the final judgement after which there will no longer be a Day of Grace when those punished will be able to change their minds about God.

This last judgement is described as ‘a cup which is being filled up’ and cannot be made more full or severe. The sign John saw is not a mystery - but it is a pointer to the truth.

The sign was of 7 angels with 7 bowls containing 7 plagues which would be let loose. The end is drawing near and is coming into sight.

v2 – John also saw a ‘sea of glass mixed with fire’ which is different from the ‘sea of glass’ which is pure as crystal before the throne of God in ch.4 v6

Standing beside the sea, but not touched by its destructive power stood the ‘saints’ who had been victorious over the Beast, and have not been branded with the ‘mark of the Beast’, or his number of 666. They were victorious over Satan himself and now were waiting to witness the final overthrow of the one who had tried to destroy them.

They played their harps to accompany their singing of a Song of Moses and the Lamb. One signifies victory in the OT and the other in the NT. It is a song that acclaims Jesus as the Lamb who is also Almighty God. v3b. In the song he is called –

- a) The Lord God Almighty;
- b) The King of the ages i.e. the Everlasting king;
- c) v4 He will be worshipped and feared and glorified. i.e. shown his due respect reverence and honour. He is also holy and righteous too.
- d) He is holy and righteous too

What a song to be singing both then and now!

v5 – John looked again and in heaven he saw a Temple which was open to allow another 7 angels to come out to receive from the hand of one of the living creatures the bowls containing the 7 plagues which were to be poured out on the world.

Again note how they were dressed - In clean, shining linen- which tells us of their purity in the presence of God.

Entry to the Temple was restricted because of the presence of God filling the place and here represented by the smoke that came from the fire of his glory

God has set aside his love and mercy and is about to pour out his wrath (righteous indignation) on the wicked of this world.

This chapter is full of 2 opposites – Glory and Judgement.

Finally, God's judgement is to fall on Satan and all who have continued to sin as he did. The only ray of hope is that when this period of Judgement on sinners is over there will begin the Millennial reign of Christ and his church.

Chs.16-18 describe the effects of God's wrath beginning with the voice of Command to the angels to reap a grim harvest of Judgement, and it is not until ch.19v1 that John is to hear the Song of Salvation again and sounding of Hallelujahs resounding throughout all heaven.

These things are difficult to understand – but we must try to do so because sin is so serious it makes God's judgement inevitable if the opportunity to repent and believe is not taken. God intends to remove all that offends Him, or that opposes his Son, before He ushers in the great period of his reign of righteousness.

The Tribulation Period is very hard to envisage when we consider a God who name and character is LOVE - and who gave his only Son because he loves sinners so much despite their sin. But it also serves to show us that sin is very sinful and God hates it.

John 3v16 should always lead us to read vv17-18 because Jesus said that he hadn't come to judge men but to save them. Men only bring judgement upon themselves when they reject such an offer of salvation through faith in him

This should spur us on to tell the world of a God whose grace is still open, and that His way is the only way to escape from the wrath that is to come.

ch.16 brings us to the actual carrying out of the judgement which has been waiting to be released at God's command.

The 7 angels that are poised to carryout God's Will are waiting for the word of command to begin by pouring out the contents of their 7 bowls of plagues which will trouble the world that has refused every opportunity to repent and be saved.

Ch 16 graphically describes these 7 bowls of God's wrath. **Read vv1-6**

v1 - John heard a 'great voice' coming from inside the Temple. This was no less than the voice of God commanding the 7 angels to begin their work.

The voice said – 'GO' - and then told them what to do. They were to pour out from the bowls they carried the Wrath of God on the earth.

Isaiah heard the same voice tell him to 'GO' – but for him it was a message of Grace and Salvation rather than a message of Judgement – although even that message would fall on deaf ears and hardened hearts.

Some commentators say that the judgements described here are only symbolic, yet 4 similar judgements were carried out in a limited measure on Egypt as a means of letting Israel go to freedom. There we take them as literal – they actually happened – so why not here in Revelation?

Each of the angels has a specific target for the contents of the bowl he carries.

v2 – the 1st Angel - his bowl was to be poured out on the land. – but not on all the people in the land. It was to fall on those who bore the 'mark of the beast and who worshipped him.' This plague is like the 6th Plague in Egypt – i.e. an outbreak of ulcers and sores which were very painful. It was long lasting and incurable cp v10 that despite the pain they were still not willing to repent.

v3 – the 2nd Angel was to direct his plague on to the sea where it congealed like the blood of a dead man- with the result that all sea-life died as well.

This is like the 1st plague in Egypt and that of the 2nd Trumpet in Rev.8 vv8-9

There are differences in that in Egypt only the rivers were affected, whereas now it is the sea - and in Rev.ch.8 only 1/3rd of the sea life died, whereas here it is all sea-life.

This tells us that this judgement is final and complete.

v4 – the 3rd Angel's target was the rivers and springs as it had been in Egypt - and they too were turned to blood. Cp. with 8v11 and the 3rd Trumpet judgement.

Why turn the water into blood?

Maybe to remind the offenders that they had shed much innocent blood of those who would not worship their Beast as god.

This kind of retribution often falls on those who would seek to destroy others in some way.

Pharaoh drowned Hebrew boys in the Nile - but his whole army was drowned in the sea.

Haman would have hung Mordecai on a scaffold, but he himself was hanged on it.

At one time I could never imagine that the sea could become polluted to any great extent – yet mere man has managed to do it. What man can do partially God can do completely.

God is not being vindictive and the 'angel of the waters' exonerated him in vv5-6

What God commanded the angels to pour out on wicked men was deserved cp v6c -.

All heaven responded to that vindication of God cp v7 when a voice came from the altar which had seen the shedding of much innocent blood for the redemption of God's people – and especially the altar of the Cross where sin was dealt with in Christ's death.

The voice from the altar agreed – .Yes, Lord God Almighty - True and just is your judgements'.

You might recall that earlier in Revelation we read that the prayers of the saints seeking god to act against their oppressors was laid on the altar, and that from beneath the altar the martyred saints has cried – 'How Long'?

What was said from that altar is also described in 15vv3-4 as they sang in heaven the Song of Moses and the Lamb.

v8 – the 4th Angel had as his target the sun, which was made even hotter than we have ever known it. They would receive more than a suntan – they would be scorched and seared by the intense heat. This would have no effect on them repenting of their sin – for we are told that they refused to do so. Surely this implies they had been given the opportunity to do so, but instead had cursed God instead of glorifying Him.

Suffering either brings men to repentance, or it hardened them even more if that were possible. They didn't call on the name of God – they cursed him.

This intense heat is more than global –warming – it is a foretaste of the heat of hell itself into which Satan and all his like will be cast. Remember the parable Jesus told of the rich man who pleaded with Abraham to send someone with a few drops of water to cool his burning tongue. Cp. Malachi 4 vv1-2 - 'Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be as stubble, and that day will set them on fire,' says the Lord Almighty.'

Those who will suffer such loss are described by Paul as building their lives with 'wood, hay and stubble.' - which are all combustible – rather than with 'gold, silver and precious stones' which are not.

v10 – the 5th Angel had as his target the 'throne of the Beast' and the effect was to plunge his kingdom of darkness into even greater darkness.

This kingdom of darkness is where we once were but cp Colossians 1v13 where Paul tells us that 'We were rescued from the kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son He loves.' Amos gave the same message – ch.5v18 – where he predicted that the 'Day of the Lord would be darkness, and not light.'

The result was still the same - they refused to repent and remained sinful and stupid to the end.

v12-16 – the 6th Angel was given the task of preparing the way for a massive invasion by troops from the East.

The River Euphrates was to be dried up to enable the forces of invading armies to come in from the East and allow them free access to Israel and Jerusalem as their target for conquest

In John's day the invasion of the Roman empire by Medes and Persians – the present day Iraq and Iran. For the future yet to be this might also signify the movement of massive armies from that same area against modern day Israel - and be climaxed at a place called Armageddon (v16) where God and Satan will finally settle the whole issues of the power of good against evil. These armies are led by their Commander- in- Chief – the Devil and his henchmen. Cp vv13-14

What John saw he describes as being like 3 frogs that came out of the mouth of the Dragon, who is Satan. The Beast and the false prophet are part of this vision and we have seen from ch.13 who they were and who they represent an unholy counterfeit trinity.

This place of Armageddon has been seen by military generals as the ideal place for pitched battles, and is often seen in the OT where it is sometimes referred to as Megiddo i.e. a place of troops and slaughter - it is also called the Plain of Esdraelon and the Valley of Jezreel.

So it is to this place of battle that the enemy from the East is heading. Some see this as a future Islamic confederation of nations determined to destroy Israel.

These armies are noted for the violence, and they are all preparing for and heading to the place of final Battle on what v14b describes as 'the battle on the great Day of God Almighty.

vv17-21 – the 7th and last Angel is then ready to pour out the contents of his bowl into the air where the devil thinks he reigns as the one called – 'the Prince and power of the air.' God may allow him to rule in that sphere now, but not for ever. the day of reckoning is forecast and will come and result in the total overthrow of Satan.

When the bowl was poured out there came the voice from the throne again saying, 'It is done - It is finished.' Just as Jesus cried on the Cross – 'It is finished' when he took away Satan's power over death and hell –

Now the call comes again – 'It is done – finished' - and this signifies the final Judgement and overthrow of Satan. He and his entire kingdom are doomed and this we will see in the following chapters.

This 7th Bowl of judgement is poured out on the air with thunder and lightening accompanying it. the effect will be heightened by a simultaneous earthquake the strength of which this world has never seen before.

v19 – the effect of it will split the city of Jerusalem into 3 parts along with the cities of many other nations. The earthquake will be so sever that you won't be able to measure its force on the Richter scale as we do now. Islands will disappear along with mountains. Hailstones will fall weighing 100 lbs each –i.e. approx 50 kg.

This chapter not only announces God's wrath on Antichrist and his followers, but it also encourages the church to look for the final overthrow of such forces by Christ in all his power and glory. All those who overcome through the blood of the Lamb will escape such judgment which was borne for them by the Christ of the Cross.

This chapter shows the moving of their armies into the final battle area, and predicts the outcome as the overthrow of Satan typified by the name of Babylon,

Every age has been able to identify in some way events simpler but not as sever as, or as final . as these - but in the last day every detail will fit into place and the angel will announce- 'It is done – It is finished.'

How will it be done? Ch 17 and 18 will show us how. **Read ch 17 vv1-8**

Here we see the –

The world religious system is destroyed.

Later in ch.18 the destruction of the world political and financial system will follow.

All through scripture the true Church is holy and pure as we shall see in ch.19

False religion is impure – unholy – and unfaithful like the prostitute (harlot) who has abandoned the love of Christ, and the truth of His word, for personal gain and pleasure. This fallen ‘church’ has always persecuted the ‘true church’ and has set up in its place a worldwide, apostate religious system not worth of the name of Christ.

Many - in fact most- Bible scholars relate this apostate ‘Woman’ to Rome and to the religious system that has come from it. Although the NEW AGE system makes similar claims it can be seen as an infiltration of the religious systems which have existed throughout the centuries, as it seeks to water down the truth about salvation only in Christ into a faith that depends on works – and which eventually will be works alone instead of what the Bible teaches about salvation by Grace alone through Faith alone – in Christ alone.

In verse 1-6 John saw woman who was as bad as to be described as a ‘great prostitute’. The description of this ‘woman’ shows her to be vile in the extreme.

v1 – John is invited by one of the 7 angels to come into the desert to see her downfall. Twice (vv1 and 5) she is called a prostitute – and her great sin is adultery v2/4.

He wrote down what he saw –

Genesis begins with a pure woman in the Garden of Eden – Revelation ends with a woman who is a prostitute in a desert. That is the total effect of sin from the beginning even up to the end of time.

v4 – her appearance is glittering and attractive – but appearances can be deceptive.

Things are not always what they seem to be. Her effect on the world was to make them intoxicated with her.

Look at what she holds in her hand – a Golden CUP v4c – filled with horrible filthy things which are the result of her adulteries. (Plural)

Look at what is written on her forehead – v5 – Babylon the mother of prostitutes.

Look at the Beast on whom she rides – v3b

Look at where she sits –v1b – on the waters – cp v15 the ‘waters ’ are defined as people – multitudes of them of all nations and languages.

No the wonder John was astonished v6c. - Although the angel wasn’t. v7

The angel gives John and us the explanation for the strange combination of the ‘Woman’ riding on the Beast and explains the mystery v5 ‘Babylon is the mother of great prostitutes’ who have turned others away from God.

v18 tells us who this woman represents – the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.

The Woman represents Babylon – which is also used as a code word for Rome in 1Peter 5v13 - ‘she who is in Babylon (Rome) sends you her greeting.’

Babylon is also used by John to disguise the actual location which may have meant Rome to those of his day. Remember that the original Babylon lost its power in world affairs long ago.

Babylon was founded by Nimrod (Genesis 10 vv8-11) and later was known as Babel – which is literally translated ‘the gateway to god’. This was the place where idolatrous people tried to build a tower to reach God by their own efforts (Gen. ch 11). You know how God confused their language so that they couldn’t understand each other and the building project was abandoned. But Babylon still represents those who have been trying to do the same thing every since. Later,

Babylon became a great Empire—only to be overthrown by the Medes and Persians. However this idolatrous spirit of false religion has been remembered simply by referring to it as Babylon, which was anti-God and anti-Christ.

The woman is not only a prostitute, but also her children are, for she is the mother of them all.
Read vv7-12

v9 – the Beast that the woman rides on has 7 heads which are identified as a city with 7 hills – i.e. Rome.

The Beast she rides on is scarlet- as is the Woman who is dressed in all her finery of purple and scarlet; glittering gold; precious stones and pearls v4

She was richly adorned but this hid what she really was. cp Isaiah 1v18 which talks about our sins being also scarlet.

v3 – she rides on the scarlet Beast which has come up from the Abyss. This Beast had 7 heads and 10 horns. These 7 heads are 7 kings or kingdoms – and the 10 horns are a federation of 10 nations wielding immense power. They only have such power as is given them by the Beast cp v12 and 13

v10 gives us a partial clue as to the coming in history of these 10 kingdoms.

5 have already come and gone and may refer to those of Egypt; Assyria; Babylon; the Medes and Persians; and Greece. Five have fallen, but one is still there .

At the time John was writing the one Empire that remained was Rome.

That leaves one more which is still to come i.e. the reign of Antichrist which will not be for ever, but will be restricted to a ‘little while’ mentioned in v10c.

Remember the course of events so far revealed – as far as Satan and this world are concerned –
i. The conquest of the nations -and especially Israel - by deceptive words resulting in a United States of Europe.

ii As a peace-bringer Antichrist will settle the Middle East crisis between Arab and Jew.

iii. He will sign a treaty with Israel, which he will break at the mid-point of the Tribulation - and there will follow 3½ years of persecution of both Jewish and Gentile believers.

v11 – predicts an 8th kingdom which is stated to be that of the Beast- and which is also destined for destruction.

All these powers and kingdoms represented by the heads and horns of the Beast have one purpose in mind v13 – they will give themselves to serve under the authority of the Beast and make war against the Lamb. v14. They will fight a losing battle for the Lamb will be victorious and he will overcome them because he is ‘Lord of Lords’ and ‘King of Kings’. – with a following army that cannot be counted - i.e. the believers of all the ages who have been called ;chosen and remain faithful to the end.

In John’s day the ‘woman’ was seen as Rome – In later centuries this was taken to be the Roman religious system – not the Roman Catholic Church which has many true believers – but the religious system called Rome - which has mixed a little of the truth with a great amount of error.

There seems to be here an unholy and un-stoppable evil alliance of the Beast and the Woman - but v16 - the Beast will turn against the woman and strip her naked and she will be devoured and burnt with fire.

So we end this chapter with the Woman making war with the Lamb – and losing.
And the Beast making war on the Woman and destroying her and all she represents.
The Beast will not have any rival in the matter of worship and obedience.

Once the Beast used the Woman to get all earthly power on his side – but once he got what he wanted the Woman was expendable – and the 10 kings helped him in his task because they had sworn allegiance to him and to no other.

Politicians may use religion to get their own ends, and religion sometimes uses politics for its own purposes too - but we must never forget that what ever happens to this world in its wickedness there is one overriding purpose which it points to v17 God's purpose which he will accomplish by the means of giving power to the Beast to rule until God will say that is enough.

God knows what the end will be and uses the power of the Beast to destroy itself.
v18 – gives us a more precise identification of what the 'Woman' represents and certainly for John's readers in the 1 Century they would be in no doubt as to seeing Babylon and the Woman as being Rome that 'great city which ruled over the kings of the earth.'

Norman Hiley November 2008