

Revelation

A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #16
Revelation 6:1-17
10/25/2006

The Judgment of God, The Great Tribulation, The Great Day of God's Wrath

INTRODUCTION

Before we proceed into chapter six, we need to review what we have studied in this Revelation of Jesus Christ. In chapter one, verse nineteen, we saw God's outline for the Revelation when He told John to **“write the things which thou hast seen (past: chapter one), and the things which are (present - church age: chapters two and three), and the things which shall be hereafter (future: chapters four through twenty-two).”**

In **chapter one**, the past, the emphasis was upon the glorious deity of Jesus Christ.

In **chapters two and three**, Christ told us about seven real, historical churches with each one representing a period in the life of the church. This description of the church-age is about what happens to the church on the earth. When chapter three closed, the church is never again seen on the earth and we read no more about the church because the word **“church”** is an earthly description of the New Testament saints who compose the second body of Jesus Christ, a spiritual body functioning through the believers on this earth.

Chapter four began the third division, the future, and in verse one John was called up into heaven, representing the rapture of the church. Therefore, chapters four and five described for us the scene of the saints, who had composed the church on the earth or what is known as the body of Christ which had been born at Pentecost, in heaven worshipping GOD THE FATHER and GOD THE SON. It is a picture of the glorious future of believers in heaven and what life in heaven will be like.

This third division has two parts. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, chapters four and five give a view of what life will be like in heaven for this body of believers, previously known as the church. It is truly a heavenly scene as John was in heaven viewing that life and this constitutes the first part of this third division.

The second part of the third division begins in chapter six and continues through chapter nineteen. It is heaven's view of what will happen on this earth when God pours out His wrath upon all the unbelievers who had rejected His grace. It is the beginning of what is known by various terms of which some are: **“The seven-year period of the great tribulation,” “The great day of God's wrath,” “The time of Jacob's trouble,”** and a number of other titles used throughout God's Word to warn man about this time.

Chapter six presents a great divide. Prior to this, in His Revelation of Himself, Christ has described glorious things, heavenly things, wonderful things that thrill the heart and excite the mind in gratitude for God's wonderful grace in the past and in great anticipation of what God has prepared for those who love Him. However, beginning with chapter six and for the next thirteen chapters that follow it, we will read of the most awful things as God pours out His wrath upon sinful mankind. The things described are so different from anything ever experienced or witnessed on this earth previously that many people find it beyond their understanding and acceptance and try to explain those things away by allegorizing them away or simply rejecting them.

It is not that the things about which we shall read are too difficult to understand. Rather it is that they are hard to believe, particularly for those who have a distorted view of God that refuses to recognize that He is holy and that His holiness demands that He punish sin in appropriate judgment. Such a view of God simply denies that God is capable of wrath and would do the things we shall read about in the chapters before us.

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While any person who so chooses may take this position, it is an extremely dangerous denial of reality and truth. God never has lied or misled man, nor can He do such a thing and remain holy and righteous. He tells us the truth and only a fool, to his own peril, would reject what God tells us He is going to do to this wicked world. As we proceed we will see that, for the most part, God uses plain, simple words to describe His actions even though much of what He describes are things never before seen on this earth. These events may be beyond the belief of some people, but they are not beyond the understanding of most.

Whenever human words are not capable of describing the action or scene, God draws "word pictures," sometimes referred to as symbolism, to help the reader comprehend what He is saying. In such cases God indicates to us that He is using some symbolism to describe an otherwise indescribable event. We have already seen God use some symbolism such as the images of "**the throne,**" the "**four living creatures,**" and "**the lamb.**" Another example is "**the four horsemen**" presented in chapter six. The presentation of these is preceded by the phrase, "*as it were*" to indicate that some of the descriptions which follow contain symbolism. Sometimes God uses symbols because there is simply no way that our minds can comprehend what He is saying to us without them.

This brings us to the point where we need to mention the two prominent approaches to understanding the book of The Revelation of Jesus Christ. "**The historical approach**" views the events as already having happened in spite of the fact that we all know that the events described herein have never happened before. They are not a part of this world's history. As seen in amillennialism, in this approach the reader spiritualizes everything he reads rather than accepting it as being literally true. The other view is called "**the futuristic approach**" and recognizes that the events described are yet to take place. They are yet to happen. This approach sees the events as being literal events which God is describing before they happen. This is our approach which we believe to be the correct one.

Chapter six introduces us to **the first set of God's judgments, "the seal judgments,"** which includes the "**four horsemen.**" There are two other series of judgments during this seven-year period called "**the great tribulation.**" **The second set of judgments,** seen in 8:2-11:19, will be the "**blowing of seven trumpets**" or what is known as "**the trumpet judgments.**" **The third set of judgments,** in chapters 15 and 16, known as "**the bowl judgments,**" will be seen when the seven bowls or vials of God's wrath are poured out upon the earth. Following the "**bowl judgments**" we will read about God's judgments upon the two Babylons in chapters 17 and 18. Finally, in chapter 19, we will see the glorious and victorious second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in what is often called "**the war of Armageddon.**"

Each of these sets of judgments is sequential and follows the previous set. Notice, in 8:1, when the last of the seven seal judgments takes place it introduces the next set of judgments, the "**trumpet judgments.**" Out of the opening of the seventh seal (11:15) flows a number of intensified judgments. After the interruption of chapter twelve where God summarizes His spiritual conflict with Satan, the opening of the seventh seal results in the "**pouring out of the seven vials of God's wrath**" beginning in 16:1.

Each series of judgments not only follows the previous one, but also grows in intensity and severity until they come to a climatic conclusion.

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As we study these judgments we will recognize that many of the particulars of these events have a close relationship to God's judgments and prophecies in the Old Testament. One of the reasons for this is that the seven-year period of tribulation has a special "Jewish flavor" to it. It will be the time when God disciplines the descendants of Abraham and in Jeremiah 30:7 it is even called "**the time of Jacob's trouble.**" In addition, it is also "**the seventh week**" in Daniel's prophesy about the future of the descendants of Abraham in Daniel 9:24-27. These judgments have nothing to do with those who have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior because when He died on the Cross He was being judged in their place for their sins and paid the complete penalty for all of their sins.

God says, "**their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more**" (Hebrews 8:12) because, having accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, He had become their "**High Priest**" before GOD THE FATHER and "**by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us**" (Hebrews 9:12). Jesus had "**offered one sacrifice for sins for ever and sat down on the right hand of God**" (Hebrews 10:12) "**for by one offering He hath perfected (completed, fulfilled) for ever them that are sanctified (cleansed from sin and guilt)**" (Hebrews 10:14).

Therefore, the deserved punishment or judgment for sin that those in heaven rightly deserved had been borne by Jesus Christ on the Cross when He died in their place, being judged as guilty in their place as their vicarious, propitiatory substitutionary sacrifice. They are not in heaven because they are innocent. They are in heaven because they have been judged already and found guilty, but they accepted Jesus Christ as their substitute. By means of the rapture God removed them from the earth to get them out of the way of His judgment upon those who had refused to accept Jesus Christ as their substitute. The judgments of God's wrath about to poured out upon the earth upon all sinners yet remaining there could have been completely avoided had they also accepted Jesus Christ as their substitute, their Lord and their God. Instead, they, having rejected Jesus Christ as their God, chose Satan as their god and must therefore suffer judgment with him.

There are certain specific factors that increase the intensity and ferocity of the judgments to come.

1. The Holy Spirit will no longer restrain Satan and sin (2 Thessalonians 2:7). It will not be because the Holy Spirit will no longer be in the world. He was in the world before the Day of Pentecost, but on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) He assumed a new ministry of baptizing believers into the spiritual body of Christ. At the rapture He removes that body from this world. That does not mean that He is going to leave this world, but that He will no longer restrain evil by working through that body because it is no longer here.
2. For a limited time, seven years, Satan will be allowed to produce the normal results of sin. In the present time our merciful God has diluted the results of sin. God has not allowed man to suffer all of the disastrous consequences of sin. However, one aspect of God's wrath will be to allow sin to do its full work of destruction. See James 1:15 and then 1 Corinthians 5:5 where, to correct a sinner's rebellion, God told the church to give him over to Satan for "**the destruction of the flesh.**" No man would logically desire the results of sin if he really knew what it produces. Thus far in this world no man has felt the full fruit of sin, i.e., the total separation, called death, from God and all the benefits that result from His presence. During the seven-year period of the great tribulation God will allow sin the freedom to produce the fullness of its nature. Destruction and disaster of unprecedented proportions and degrees will then be experienced on this earth.

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3. The instruments of God's wrath will be those produced by God, not by man. Today man frets and worries about the use of nuclear weapons to destroy mankind. God does not use man's weapons. Two reasons immediately come to mind, though there may be others. First, if man designs a weapon, another man can design a defense against it. Second, God simply does not need man's weapons. He has plenty of resources at His disposal that He, Himself, has created.

At times God does allow the totality of man's evil nature and unrestrained wickedness to be unleashed against other men in a viciousness previously unseen. Also, God does allow Satan to use all of his deceitful wiles and "magic" to dupe men into following him to disaster and destruction.

God also allows the diseases and germs, spawned by man's sin, to grow, mutate, and destroy man with incurable ailments (16:2). In addition, God allows strange, demonic creatures to inflict indescribable pain upon the worshippers of Satan (9:2-6).

However, far the most part God uses what He has created in nature. Man has no defense against the elements of nature. The Scriptures tell us that, even now, nature is painfully affected because of man's sin and looks forward to being free from man's sinful bondage (Romans 8:19-22). The Scriptures also tell us that it is Christ who holds all of nature together and causes it to function orderly (Colossians 1:17). Therefore, it is only necessary for Christ to withdraw His supervisory hand and all of nature, including both what is on the earth and what is in outer space, will act in a totally unpredictable and indefensible manner. Man has no way to protect himself when the seas turn into blood (8:8), earthquakes move and destroy mountains (16:18), and, among other things, 125 lb. hailstones fall from the sky (16:21).

God uses one other instrument when He pours out His wrath. His tongue (19:15). It will be particularly ironic for those who have denied the creative authority of God's spoken word when His tongue issues forth words which have more destructive power to punish them than all of the weapons designed by man.

God's wrath is real. It is coming. Man has been warned. Man has been given a day of grace in which he can respond and repent of his sins and turn his life over to God, accepting Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. If he does not, he cannot blame God. He will deserve the judgment that God is going to pour out upon all those who have rejected His offer of salvation. Such men will be choosing judgment over forgiveness — foolishly demanding justice, and justice and judgment they will get.

Now we are prepared to begin studying the first series of judgments which we find before us in chapter six, "the seal judgments," when Christ opens the seven seals and reveals what is behind them.