

16. The Righteous Judgment of the Lord

Revelation Chapters 15 and 16

The Book of Revelation

YouTube Video link: <https://youtu.be/czSOKT33NvI>

In our previous study, chapter fourteen, we were shown a vision of 144,000 believers from Israel standing with the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, on Mount Zion in Jerusalem (14:1-5). In my opinion, these Messianic Jewish followers of the Lamb remind us that God has not forgotten His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel). Here's what Paul the apostle wrote: **“And concerning Israel, Isaiah the prophet cried out, “Though the people of Israel are as numerous as the sand of the seashore, only a remnant will be saved” (Romans 9:27).** These Messianic believers who come through the Great Tribulation were also described by the prophet Isaiah:

²On that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of Israel's survivors. ³Whoever remains in Zion and whoever is left in Jerusalem will be called holy—all in Jerusalem who are recorded among the living—⁴when the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains from the heart of Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire. ⁵Then the LORD will create over all of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud of smoke by day and a glowing flame of fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a canopy (Isaiah 4:2-5).

Verse five of the Isaiah 4 passage above reminds those of the house of Israel of the presence of God over the tents of those who came out of slavery in Egypt. God's presence was among them as a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire during the night. It speaks of a new day of intimacy with God that will come when His presence is again over Mount Zion and Jerusalem.

Also in chapter fourteen, we see angels giving warnings of judgment along with a call to repentance (vs. 6-13) to those who give their allegiance to Satan and the Antichrist. Chapter fourteen closed with the harvesting of the wheat, i.e., the believers in Christ, and the trampling of the grape harvest, i.e., the judgment of those who refuse to repent. Chapters fifteen and sixteen focus on specific scenes of judgment with the pouring out of seven bowls of wrath. These bowls represent seven worldwide plagues. The word translated “plague” literally means a “blow” or “wound.” It is taken from a verb meaning “to strike.” These judgments are like swift, severe blows. As we have said before in these studies, God will snatch up the godly before He pours out His wrath on those who refuse to repent (1 Thessalonians 5:9). John writes first of the scene of victorious believers in heaven singing praise to God:

The Song of Moses and the Lamb

¹Then I saw another great and marvelous sign in heaven: seven angels with the seven final plagues, with which the wrath of God is completed. ²And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, beside which stood those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name. They were holding harps from God, ³and they sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb:

"Great and wonderful are Your works,
 O Lord God Almighty!
 Just and true are Your ways,
 O King of the nations!
⁴Who will not fear You, O Lord,
 and glorify Your name?
 For You alone are holy.
 All nations will come and worship before You,
 for Your righteous acts have been revealed" (Revelation 15:1-4).

In Revelation 15:3-4, John refers to “the Song of Moses” and “the Song of the Lamb.” Most Biblical commentators agree that the song of Moses refers to one of two Old Testament passages: Exodus 15:1-18 which Moses composed after the Lord’s victory over the Egyptians after they had crossed the Red Sea, or Deuteronomy 32: 1-43, which he composed as the Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land. Both of these would have been familiar to the early Jewish believers in Christ in John’s day and likely taught to the Gentile believers, too. The Song of the Lamb, however, appears to be either new or unfamiliar. So John supplied the lyrics. Both songs praise God for His attributes, Who He is, His ways, and His mighty acts.

One commentator observes:

The Song of Moses was sung at the Red Sea, the Song of the Lamb is sung at the crystal sea; the Song of Moses was a song of triumph over Egypt, the Song of the Lamb is a song of triumph over Babylon. The Song of Moses told how God brought His people out, the Song of the Lamb tells how God brings His people in. The Song of Moses was the first song in Scripture, the Song of the Lamb is the last. The Song of Moses commemorated the execution of the foe, the expectation of the saints, and the exaltation of the Lord. The Song of the Lamb deals with the same three themes, The Song of Moses was sung by a redeemed people; the Song of the Lamb is sung by a raptured people.¹

How wonderful it will be for the people of God to know that the war is over, and it is time to celebrate God’s triumph over evil for good! This song is about all nations coming to worship before the Lord. How wonderful it will be for God’s church worldwide to be united in worship. I look forward to that day!

In verse one, John saw what he calls a marvelous sign in heaven: seven angels preparing themselves to judge the unrepentant on earth. This sign is the third sign John mentions. The other two were of the radiant woman in chapter 12, verse 1, with the second being the great red dragon (12:3). These signs point beyond themselves to marvelous truths of great significance. We are now looking at the turning point of history, i.e., the saints standing together in heaven and the beginning of the judgment of the unrepentant.

For the second time, John sees a sea of glass. The first time was in Revelation 4:6, where he described the sea to be like crystal. In this second view of the sea of glass, it is mixed with fire.

¹ John Phillips. *Exploring Revelation*, rev. ed. Chicago: Moody Press, 1987, p. 187.

In the New International Version that I am using, verse 2 says that those who are victorious over the Beast and his image are *standing beside* the sea of glass, whereas the King James Bible, the NASB, NKJV, and the NLT all translate that *they stood on* the sea of glass. We cannot be dogmatic about it, but John may be seeing a great multitude of believers standing before the Lord and reflecting His glory (like crystal): “**Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed**” (Psalm 34:5). The fire flaming on the sea of glass could be illustrating the fire of passion and love for Christ for all He has done to redeem them to God. This symbol of the Body of Christ mixed with fire could speak of the Spirit of God in them and the overflow of their love for Christ blazing like fire:

Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; **for love is as strong as death**, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. **It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame** (Song of Solomon 8:6).

How is God’s love like a blazing fire? What does fire do?

Preparation for Judgment

⁵After this I looked, and the temple—the tabernacle of the Testimony—was opened in heaven. ⁶And out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues, dressed in clean and bright linen and girded with golden sashes around their chests. ⁷Then one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. ⁸And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed (Revelation 15:5-8).

John's attention focuses on the temple's opening and seven angels preparing to receive the seven bowls of wrath. One of the four living creatures before the Lord gives each of the seven angels a golden bowl with plagues and the responsibility to pour out the judgment plagues upon the world. The temple filling with smoke (v.8) was often a sign of the presence and glory of the Lord, and no one was allowed to approach, which could be indicative of the door of salvation shut and that God will allow no one to come to Him in intercessory prayer. When God's judgment was determined on Jerusalem by Babylon's army to destroy the city, Jeremiah the prophet was told not to pray for the unrepentant of Israel, for God would not hear and respond (Jeremiah 7:16). It is a sad moment when many will come to the door of salvation and find the door shut. When those who refuse to repent protest that they can't get in, He will reply, “**Truly I tell you, I do not know you**” (Matthew 25:10-12). The time to repent is today, while the door is open.

Revelation 16

The First Five Bowls of Wrath

¹Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, “Go, pour out on the earth the seven bowls of God's wrath.” ²So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and loathsome, malignant sores broke out on those who had the mark

of the beast and worshiped its image. ³And the second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it turned to blood like that of the dead, and every living thing in the sea died. ⁴And the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and springs of water, and they turned to blood. ⁵And I heard the angel of the waters say:

"Righteous are You, O Holy One,
 who is and was,
 because You have brought these judgments.
⁶For they have spilled the blood of saints and prophets,
 and You have given them blood to drink,
 as they deserve."

⁷And I heard the altar reply: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are Your judgments" (Revelation 16:1-7). ⁸The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was allowed to scorch people with fire. ⁹They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him. ¹⁰The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in agony ¹¹and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done (Revelation 16:1-11).

The loud voice in the temple is more than likely the voice of God. The first four plagues fall on the natural world as if the creation itself was in revolt against the unrepentant of the earth, the earth, the sea, the rivers and springs, and the sun. It reminds us of Paul's words to the church in Rome: "The whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (Romans 8:22). In rapid succession, judgment after judgment is poured out upon those who refuse to repent; instead, they curse the God who created them (v. 11). Those who have willfully given themselves to evil and have spilled the blood of believers in Christ all over the world, now receive from God's hand what they deserve (v.6). Twice we are told that they refused to repent (vs. 9, 11), and even in their agony at their pains and sores, they curse God.

The Sixth and Seventh Bowl Judgment

¹²The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. ¹³Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. ¹⁴They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. ¹⁵"Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed." ¹⁶Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon (Revelation 16:12-16).

In this passage above, we see the driving force behind the dragon [Satan], the beast [Antichrist], and the false prophet, i.e., three evil spirits that look like frogs—swamp creatures that come out of the Satanic trinity and sent to the leaders of the nations of the world. They are called together

for battle (v. 14). Much of what goes on politically in the world is being manipulated from the invisible realm by dark angels and evil spirits seeking to use people as pawns of control. You shall know them by their fruit, Jesus said (Matthew 7:16). As believers in Christ, we should view with skepticism what the world system tells us. We should look at things from a biblical worldview and try to see what God is doing. More goes on behind the scenes than what is seen with the natural eye.

The sixth angel pours out his bowl upon the great river, Euphrates, making the great river dry up and making it possible for the armies of the east to make their way to Armageddon, the name of a place in Israel. When I say the word "Armageddon," what comes to mind? Most of us picture the final battle of the last days to be in northern Israel in the Valley of Jezreel, commonly called *Armageddon*, but is that correct? We don't read anywhere in the Scriptures of Jesus returning and fighting in that northern valley. Perhaps we should look more closely at the Hebrew place name translated as *Armageddon*.

The word comes from two Hebrew words, "*Har*," which means a hill or mountain, and the second is "*Magedon*," a place name presumed to be Megiddo's hill. Many scholars are looking afresh at the translation name, wondering if it actually is anywhere near Megiddo, partly because there is no mountain at Megiddo. On my tours of Israel, I have gone to Megiddo several times. It is a tell, a mound of earth accumulated over the centuries to be now over seventy feet high—hardly a mountain. We cannot let our religious traditions interpret the Scriptures for us, for there is no basis for believing that the last battle is in the north of Israel. In the Greek New Testament, there are several Hebrew words that describe places. For example:

1. John 5:2 – Bethzatha (A pool)
2. John 19:13 – Babbatha (Stone pavement)
3. John 19:17 – Golgotha (The place of the skull)

In the *Word Biblical Commentary* series, David E. Aune offers the following comments on the place name. He writes:

The name "Harmagedon" has never been satisfactorily explained...The most common explanation of the name is that *har* is the Hebrew word for "mountain(s), hill(s)," while *magedon* refers to the biblical town of "Megiddo," with the entire construction meaning mountain(s) of Megiddo. Megiddo was an ancient city located on a plain in the southwest portion of the Valley of Jezreel or Esdraelon, the site of several significant ancient battles...²

Bible teacher Charles Cooper comments on David Aune's thoughts:

Now, you are probably guilty of the same thing that I was until just recently. Did you notice that Aune states that Megiddo is a **city** located on a **plain** in the **Valley** of Jezreel? Get it—a city on a plain (flat land) in the Valley! How in the world can the phrase Armageddon, if it is the correct reading of Revelation 16:16, refer to a mountain? There

² Aune, D. E. (2002). Vol. 52B: Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation 6-16. Word Biblical Commentary (898-899). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

is no reference in the entire Old Testament to a mountain or hill with the name Megiddo. Not one!

In trying for this study to be short and avoid being technical, suffice it to say that some now believe that the Hebrew place name is *Har Mo'ed*, thus linking it to Satan's boast in Isaiah 14 that his desire is to sit on the Mount of the Assembly (v.13):

¹²How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! ¹³You said in your heart, "I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. ¹⁴I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." ¹⁵But you are brought down to the realm of the dead, to the depths of the pit (Isaiah 14:12-15).

The Hebrew phrase *har mo'ed* (v.13) is usually rendered as "Mount of Assembly."³ This writer believes that the location of the last battle to which the nations are drawn is to take place at the city of Jerusalem, where the Antichrist is reigning, with his image set up in the rebuilt temple of God (2 Thessalonians 2:4). Notice that Revelation 16, verse nineteen, speaks of judgment falling on a place called "the great city" in the below passage:

¹⁷The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" ¹⁸Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since mankind has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. ¹⁹The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. ²⁰Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. ²¹From the sky huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, fell on people. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible (Revelation 16:17-21).

How extensive is the devastation of the seventh bowl of judgment?

Verse 19 above speaks of a "great city" split into three parts because of a severe earthquake. This great city is believed to be Jerusalem because earlier in the text, it is referred to as the place where Jesus was crucified: "Their bodies will lie in the public square of **the great city**--which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt--where also their Lord was crucified" (Revelation 11:8).

Satan sends evil spirits to influence the world's leaders to gather together to attack the city of Jerusalem. Let's talk about Jerusalem:

Jerusalem: the Problem City

The objective of the nations of the world is not to capture a valley in the north of Israel, but the objective is the city of Jerusalem, a city that has been a problem for the world since its recapture

³ <https://www.worldslastchance.com/appointed-feasts/why-does-wlc-claim-that-qarmageddonq-is-har-moed-when-the-word-is-actually-har-megiddon.html>

by the descendants of Israel in 1967. The Lord twice tells us that Jerusalem is His city (Isaiah 45:13; Lamentations 3:51). Jerusalem has always been a target because the enemy seeks to kill and destroy whatever God sets apart as His own. Scripture tells us that, before the time of the end, Jerusalem will be a problem city:

*²"I am going to make **Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling**. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. ³On that day, when **all the nations** of the earth are **gathered** against her, **I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations**. **All who try to move it will injure themselves** (Zechariah 12:2-3).*

There are some things of interest in this passage. First, the nations of the world will be frustrated at their inability to sort out the problem of a Jewish state in the Middle East, and primarily as to who owns Jerusalem. Is it a Palestinian city, or is it a Jewish city? In 1980, Israel passed the "Jerusalem Law," proclaiming "united Jerusalem" as the Israeli capital, thereby annexing East Jerusalem. Only in our day is Jerusalem being recognized as belonging to Israel. Secondly, Jerusalem will be a problem not only for the Arabic nations around her but for all nations; it will be "an immovable rock." The third thing is that all nations are **gathered** against her. Doesn't it sound like the nations of the world advance for an attack on Jerusalem itself? Because of the advance of all nations to attack Jerusalem, the people of Israel will begin to call upon the Lord. The Lord Jesus said: *"For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'"* (Matthew 23:39). The Lord Jesus will appear over Jerusalem just when it seems that all is lost.

The prophet Zechariah says:

*⁸On that day the LORD will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the LORD going before them. ⁹On that day I will set out to destroy **all the nations that attack Jerusalem**. ¹⁰And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. **They will look on me**, the **one they have pierced**, and **they will mourn for him** as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. ¹¹On that day the weeping in **Jerusalem** will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo (Zechariah 12:8-11, emphasis added).*

Why do you think the Jewish people are weeping (v.11) at the intervention of the Lord against their enemies?

You'd think that there should be great rejoicing by the Jews as the Lord Himself steps in to shield those living in Jerusalem and fighting for them. So, why does verse eleven say they are weeping? It is clear from the text that the Messiah (Christ) Himself shows up, and the Jewish people recognize Him as the One pierced, crucified, and rejected by His people. What will be their response? There will be a time of great mourning and repentance.

The traditional place of battle between God and His enemies is Armageddon, but the scriptural evidence seems to point to His appearance at Jerusalem. Let's explore further by looking at what the Old Testament prophet Zechariah tells us about the gathering of all nations to fight:

¹A day of the LORD is coming when your plunder will be divided among you. **²I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it;** the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. **³Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle.** **⁴On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem,** and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. **⁵You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.** **⁶On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost.** **⁷It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime—a day known to the LORD. When evening comes, there will be light (Zechariah 14:1-7).**

On that day, His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives to the east of the city of Jerusalem. It is interesting to know that the Mount of Olives has hundreds of Jewish graves waiting for the Messiah to arrive because of verse four of this above prophecy. They believe the dead will be raised to life at the Messiah's appearance. How wonderful it will be when they recognize their Savior, the One who bears the wounds of His faithfulness and love, the marks on His hands and His feet!

Prayer: Lord, Remind us of your faithfulness. When we are in the midst of our own battles, help us to lift our eyes and see that You are in control. We praise You now and join in that eternal song.

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