

Revelation

*Part Forty-Five
Keep Your Garments
(Revelation 16:1-21)*

With Study Questions

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Part Forty-Five

Keep Your Garments

(Revelation 16:1-21)

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." ² 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. ³ 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. ⁴ Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. ⁵ 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. ⁶ For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, And You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due." ⁷ And I heard another from the altar saying, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous *are* Your judgments." ⁸ Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds. ¹² 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. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ "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." ¹⁶ And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

¹⁷ 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!" ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. ²¹ 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 (Revelation 16:1-21).

Introduction

We have idiomatic names and places which conjure thoughts in our discussions. To cross the Rubicon (something Julius Caesar did in battle) means passing the point of no return. Waterloo suggests a great defeat. Pearl Harbor invokes thoughts of attack. Benedict Arnold hints at betrayal, and so forth. A bit of knowledge of history helps us grasp these types of things.

As stated in earlier sermons, the Revelation has well over four hundred allusions to the Old Testament. Reading Revelation with a knowledge of the Old Testament (rather than a knowledge of a modern newspaper) is extremely clarifying.

What we see in this sixteenth chapter of Revelation includes numerous references to the exodus (when Moses led the Israelites out of the slavery of Egypt), and battles, enemies, and locations which the Old Testament speaks of, e.g., Babylon, the Euphrates and Armageddon.

I will approach this chapter as more of a survey than a detailed analysis. Let us look at the big picture of this chapter and what it meant to those who initially received it. By doing this, we can more accurately assess what it means to us.

Bowls of Wrath

The chapter speaks of seven bowls of wrath. We will not be going into minute detail on these. If you recall, there were seven seals, seven

trumpets and now seven bowls. The seals were, more or less, previews of the great devastations of the trumpets. And these bowls appear to have a wider application than the trumpets.

For example, with the second trumpet a third of the sea became blood (Revelation 8:8) where in this chapter it appears that the entire sea becomes blood (Revelation 16:3). This may be due to the trumpets applying to Jerusalem where these bowls apply to the entire Roman Empire, which would have been understood by the readers as the entire world (Romans 1:8).

Briefly stated, in the first bowl **“a foul and loathsome sore came upon men.”** This is reminiscent of plague of boils from Exodus 9:9-11. But the wrath in this chapter not fall upon the Egyptians (due to their lack of willingness to set the enslaved Israelites free). It fell upon those **“who had the mark of the beast...who worshiped his image.”**

This informs us regarding the remaining bowls. These bowls of wrath are not random. This wrath falls upon those who have a full commitment, body, mind and soul, to the beastly government of their day. This may be difficult for us to get our arms around because most of us have never personally experienced the full force of a political system which refuses to share the throne, let alone bow before a heavenly throne.

The unredeemed kings of the earth do not have an amicable relationship with the King of kings. Many of you might recall Pastor Pan who preached at our church a few years back. His church was in China, but he and the members refused to alter their message to assuage the leaders of that government. They have since sought asylum in Korea (which was refused) and are currently in Thailand. We are currently interacting with them in hopes of providing assistance.

I do not know specifically what God has in plan for them. Their small band is no match for the Chinese government. But the Chinese government (or any government) is no match for the God they serve. The nations are **“like a drop from a bucket” (Isaiah 40:15)**. One of recurring themes in Revelation is to persevere, even in the face of death. For God will advance His church even in the face of what appears to be insurmountable. These seven churches were given a message of what God would soon do to their oppressors.

The second bowl, like Exodus 7:17-21 is a sea of blood. This may metaphorically speak of famine, economic deprivation, maritime disaster and so forth. The third angel pours out his bowl and the rivers become

blood. John is of course speaking metaphorically. But this tells us that there will be no refuge. Not just the sea, but the rivers, which would normally be a source of life become a pool of death and disease.

The intensity of these bowls does not escape me. I am guessing it does not escape you. I daresay it did not escape the angel. In verse two we were told who these bowls fell upon-the worshipers of the beast. In verse five through seven we're told why.

God is righteous in His judgments because those who worshiped the beast, **"shed the blood of saints and prophets."** The Bible (truly, all of history) can be a pretty tough book to read. The Scriptures make no attempt at hiding the atrocities of man; even the men who we generally view as heroes in the faith. The behavior of the patriarchs and their families is monstrous almost beyond belief. If only we had eyes to see, we would marvel at God's patience. He is truly more patient than most Christians I read on social media.

Yet His patience only goes so far. And those who are committed to denounce His Son and kill His children, will find that their days are numbered. The conclusion of Jerusalem and Rome, as oppressors and persecutors was at hand.

As we turn to the fourth bowl, we begin to see people's response. The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun which results in men being scorched with fire. Fire is symbolic of judgment. The fifth angel appears to target Caesar directly with darkness. In all of this pain, plague and fire, they are in darkness. It's as if any ability to remedy their situation is extracted from them as they are maneuvering in the blind.

When the judgment of God fell upon them for the great evil they had done, what is their response? We read at the conclusion of the fourth and fifth bowls that they did not repent of their deeds. And at the conclusion of the seventh bowl, they double down. Not only do they refuse to repent (keep in mind here that their deeds, of which they refused to repent, involved the killing of innocent people), but they **"blasphemed God"** (**Revelation 16:21**).

How far removed they were from the heart of the psalmist.

It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes (Psalm 119:71).

Granite has nothing on the hardness of the human heart. And even though this is addressing aggressive persecutors of the church, I must say with great heaviness of heart, that even for the professing believer, affliction can turn a person into a theological liberal. I do pray that we, like Job, when his wife tempted him to abandon his integrity, can say,

Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil (Job 2:10)?

One might ask by what means would all these bowls of wrath would come. This is revealed in the sixth bowl. The drying up of the Euphrates would be a biblical way of saying your protection is removed (Isaiah 11:15; 44:27; Jeremiah 50:38; 51:36; Zechariah 10:11). It just so happens that the Euphrates separated the Roman Empire from the Parthian Kingdoms. These roaming hordes east of the empire is how Rome did eventually fall.

The reference to demonic **“spirits like frogs” (Exodus 8:2-11)** reveals what a vicious battle this would be. Armies, as it were, inspired by darkness. It is here that we are met with the much-used word, **“Armageddon”** which, oddly, means *Mount Megiddo*. I say oddly because Megiddo was not a mountain but a plain. No Mount Megiddo has ever existed.

What we do know about Megiddo though is that it was synonymous with defeat. It has been compared to Waterloo. It is where Barak and Deborah overthrew the hosts of the Canaanite king Jabin (Judges 5:19). Armageddon speaks of the ultimate and final overthrow of Rome. The stone has truly fallen upon the image and has **“broke them in pieces” (Daniel 2:34)**.

The seventh bowl being poured into the atmosphere may be addressing the real of the devil (Ephesians 2:2). Thunderings and lightnings and earthquakes all speak of Babylon (which is Rome) being divided and destroyed. The hailstones (Exodus 9:23-26) may be from catapults launching hundred-pound boulders.

The Benediction

All of this is, no doubt, fascinating history. It should also be very encouraging, uplifting and a stirring of our hearts to know of God’s divine protection of all that is good, right and true-the preservation of His church

and the ultimate victory of the gospel. But it should also be a warning that we do not join the side that appears, momentarily to be dominating, because God has a way of shaking things up.

Whether the earthquake in verse eighteen is literal or not, I will not argue. But Hebrews teaches that God shakes things up and we are told why:

...in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain (Hebrews 12:27).

A friend just recently told me that he thought God shook up the church through Covid that we might see what we're really made of-what we are truly holding onto through difficulty. God will periodically visit our lives with affliction that we may be reminded to hold onto Him-to His kingdom.

Let us finish this message with our eyes on the red letters (the words of Christ)-the benediction contained in the chapter.

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 (Revelation 16:15).

Against popular opinion this passage is not speaking of the Second Coming. Jesus had earlier warned the church at Sardis that if they did not repent, He would come upon them **"like a thief" (Revelation 3:3)**. He had also made a promise to the church in Philadelphia that due to their obedience, He would keep them **"from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world" (Revelation 3:10)**. It strains to make sense of this promise if the hour of trial is not for thousands of years. If such be the case, He would have kept all the churches from the hour of trial.

There is an old saying that goes all the way back to the sixteenth century. Apparently, it was Erasmus who said *"vestis virum facit"* or "clothes make the man." Such a statement may be socially relevant or dubious. But spiritually, it means a great deal.

Jesus was **"coming quickly" (Revelation 3:11)** and they needed to be watchful. But more importantly, they needed to keep their **"garments."** The shame of the exposure of nakedness is a very common theme in the Old Testament. Adam and Eve sought to hide their shame with **"fig leaves"**

(Genesis 3:7), but God “made tunics of skin, and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21). This, of course, required the sacrifice of an animal, which teaches us of the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, the Son of God.

Like Joshua the high priest, God must clothe us in clean garments, in “rich robes” (Zechariah 3:4). And those garments point our hearts to Christ. More than once, the Apostle Paul tells us to “put on Christ” (Romans 13:14; Galatians 3:27). Calvin comments,

Now to *put on Christ*, means here to be on every side fortified by the power of his Spirit, and be thereby prepared to discharge all the duties of holiness; for thus is the image of God renewed in us, which is the only true ornament of the soul.¹

We are in a battle that makes normal armor of little value if not worthless. God is ever preparing us for the long game. We have an earthly dwelling that is eventually “destroyed” (2 Corinthians 5:1). But there is a “building from God, a house not made with hands” (2 Corinthians 5:1) which must, by faith, own our hearts. Paul likens this building to a garment and counsels us that the burdens of this life should not tempt us to “be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed” (2 Corinthians 5:5).

A fireman in a burning building does not panic and dispense of his protective gear but cinches it more tightly. In our afflictions we are to ever “draw near to God and He will draw near to [us]” (James 4:8).

¹ Calvin, J., & Owen, J. (2010). [Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans](#) (p. 490). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

Questions for Study

1. Explain why a grasp of the Old Testament is so critical to under the Revelation (page 2)?
2. What is the difference between the seven trumpets and the seven bowls (pages 3, 4)?
3. Who are these bowls of wrath falling upon and why (pages 4, 5)?
4. Describe the response of those on whom this wrath is falling? Why do you suppose this is? How should we respond to affliction (pages 5, 6)?
5. What does the drying up of the Euphrates tell us about how these bowls of wrath would come (page 6)?
6. What is Armageddon all about (page 6)?
7. How did the benediction in verse fifteen speak to the seven churches who received this letter? How does it speak to you (pages 7)?
8. What does it mean to “put on Christ” (page 8)?