

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. Today we will introduce Revelation 15-16.

REVELATION CHAPTER 15 AND 16 teaches that **God continually pours out his final wrath on the impenitent through the seven bowls of plagues.**

Part 5 of the book of Revelation consists of chapters 15-16.

First. The symbolic picture in Revelation 15:1-4 is concerning the Church triumphant after the second coming.

One. The parts 3,4 and 5 of the book of Revelation are parallel, because the seven bowls of part 5 and the seven trumpets of part 3 effect the same areas and because the same forces of evil operate in part 5 and in part 4, namely the dragon, the beast out of the sea and the beast out of the earth or false prophet. As in the Old Testament period (Lev 26:14-35), so in the New Testament period God first warns people on earth with his 7 trumpets of initial and partial judgements. However, when people refuse to repent, he punishes them with his 7 bowls of final and complete judgements. The 7 bowls of God's last plagues show that the time of God's grace is coming to an end (Isa 6:9-10; Mt 13:11-17), that the final judgement day is close and that God no longer allows intercession to be made in his presence. They are the "last" plagues, because by pouring them out, the whole present world collapses and "God's wrath is completed". The 6th bowl issues in the last great battle in history and the 7th bowl issues in the final judgement day. Thus also Revelation 15-16 spans the entire period from the first to the second coming of Christ.

Two. All genuine Christians will praise God's justice. Because all genuine Christians will be victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, all Christians will stand beside what looked like "the sea of glass mixed with fire". "The sea" is a symbol of *God's everlasting destruction* as in Exodus 14:13-31. "The fire" is a symbol of *God's holy and righteous indignation* by which he executes his final judgements against sin (Mt 3:11-12). "The glass" is a symbol that *God's judgements are completely transparent and just*. God will execute his final judgement on the godless and wicked in the whole world and throughout the whole history by causing them to sink into everlasting destruction in the sea of glass mixed with fire. And the Christians from all nations will sing the song of the Lamb and worship God because his final and complete judgement fulfilled perfect justice against all the evil people who had persecuted them.

Second. The symbolic picture in Revelation 15:5-8 is concerning the preparation of God's final judgements before the second coming.

God's final and complete judgements are not simply natural disasters, but are sent by God from heaven. His final and complete judgements throughout history are executed by angels, as for example Isaiah 37:35-37 teaches.

Throughout the New Testament period, God's people may at all times enter into his holy presence to receive mercy and find grace to help in their time of need (Heb 4:14-16). And throughout the New Testament period, those who are not his people, should seek God while he may be found, should call upon him while he is near, turn to him and find mercy and pardon (2 Cor 6:1-2). However, God's Spirit will not contend with man forever (Gen 6:3). Throughout the New Testament period, there will be times when no one can enter God's presence to plead on behalf of the godless and the wicked. There will be times when God's grace and mercy for the godless and the wicked comes to an end and no one can interfere in the final execution of his holy and righteous wrath. Whenever God exercises his holy indignation against godless and wicked people, no one can come close to his majestic and overwhelming presence. The godless and wicked people themselves can no longer repent and find the grace of God's forgiveness (Rom 1:18-32; 2:5). And the righteous people can no longer intercede for the wicked (1 Jn 5:16)! Whenever God's patience and kindness towards the godless and wicked reaches its end, he pours out a bowl of his final wrath. And "the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever" (14:11; 18:9-10; 19:2-3; Mt 25:46).

Third. The symbolic picture in Revelation 16:1-21 is concerning the outpouring of God's final and complete judgements throughout the New Testament period.

"The loud voice" of God himself ordered the 7 angels to pour out the 7 bowls of his wrath on the earth.

A comparison between the trumpet judgements and bowl judgements reveal the following:

Trumpets *warn concerning judgements*, but bowls *execute judgements*. When God's trumpets of initial judgements do not lead to repentance, then his bowls of final judgements punish the impenitent.

All the trumpet judgements with the exception of the 5th trumpet (9:4) strike believers as well as unbelievers, but the bowl judgements are especially designed for the impenitent, that is, for those who have received the mark of the beast (16:2). Whoever refuses to be warned by God's trumpets of judgement is hurled into hell by God's bowls of wrath.

The trumpet judgements are limited to striking only one third of the area, but the bowl judgements strike the whole area, and thus points to *the finality of God's bowl judgements*.

The trumpet judgements are executed throughout world history, but the bowl judgements are especially executed towards the end of world history. Throughout the history of the world God's wrath is again and again poured out upon the impenitent (9:21; 16:9). Their spirit of independence, rebellion and disobedience reveals itself more and more clearly as we approach the final judgement day.

Any particular judgement may still be a trumpet of warning for one individual, but already a bowl of wrath for another individual. For example, the disease that hurled king Herod Agrippa I into hell served as a warning for others (Act 12:21-24). However, for true Christians, the afflictions they suffer are never bowls of God's wrath, but are God's means to accomplish his plan for each of them (Rom 8:28).

There is a striking resemblance between some of the bowl judgements and some of the plagues of Egypt (Ex ch. 7-10).

The 1st bowl (16:2) affects the *land*.

Sometimes the calamities with respect to the land are used as instruments of God's judgement (Hab 3:5-6). "**The ugly and painful sores**" are symbols of *painful and incurable diseases* that hurl the godless and wicked people into hell with finality (Ex 9:10; Dt 28:27; Act 12:23).

The 2nd bowl (16:3) affects the *sea*.

Sometimes the calamities with respect to the sea are used as instruments of God's judgement (Gen 6:5,17; Ex 15:1; Hab 3:15). "**Blood like that of a dead man**" is thick, clotted and stinking and is a symbol of *the abhorrence of these calamities*.

The 3rd bowl (16:4-7) affects the *water-sources*.

Sometimes the calamities with respect to the water sources are used as instruments of God's judgement (Ex 7:17-21,24; 1 Ki 17:1; 18:5; Hab 3:9-10). People who shed blood of Christians and of those who proclaim the Bible will "**be given blood to drink as they deserve**", in order to satisfy their thirst for blood. The words "**the altar responds**" is a reference to the 5th seal, which revealed the souls of those who had been slain because of their testimony to the word of God in both the Old Testament period and New Testament period (6:9-11). It is these souls that respond by praising God for keeping his promise and for being just and fair in his judgement.

The 4th bowl (16:8-9) affects the *sun*.

Sometimes the calamities with respect to the sun are used as instruments of God's judgement (Dt 28:22; Hab 3:11). "**The sun was given power to scorch people with fire**", to sear them with its intense heat (cf. 14:18), but not to destroy or annihilate them. While the trumpet judgements still give people a chance to repent (cf. 9:20-21), the bowl judgements do not lead to repentance (16:9). The bowl judgements only reveal the utter corruption of the persecutors of Christians throughout the history of this world more clearly. Throughout the whole period from the first to the second coming of Christ the calamities caused by the sun are either warnings calling all people to repentance (8:12) or the means of hurling the impenitent on earth into hell itself (16:8-9; 21:8).

The 5th bowl (16:10-11) is poured out on "**the throne of the beast**".

It corresponds to the 5th trumpet judgement. "**The beast**" (out of the sea) is a symbol representing *Satan's antichristian governments and their persecutions*, especially in the great world empires with their kings that follow one another throughout the period from the first to the second coming of Christ. "**The throne of the beast**" (2:13; 13:2) is a symbol representing *the great centres or capital cities of such antichristian governments* together with their antichristian rulers and antichristian culture. When these great centres of antichristian rule fall, the whole universe of the godless and wicked people seem to collapse (17:9-11). "**His kingdom was plunged into darkness**", not simply into physical darkness (Ex 10:21-23), but into every kind of darkness. It is plunged into great confusion and gloom, probably including political, military, economic and social wars. There will be spiritual and moral darkness. There will be demonic activity (9:1-11) and demonic enmity against the God of the Bible and his cause. Non-Christians often think that it is difficult to be a Christian and live in God's kingdom. But this vision points out that it is much more difficult to be a non-Christian and live in Satan's kingdom (Col 1:13). God executes judgement on the whole antichristian society, its government and its religion. God disturbs its kingdom. This judgement is accompanied by many miseries. "**Men gnawed their tongues in agony**" points to a situation that is so fearful that people bite their own tongues to pieces. "**They cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and sores and refused to repent of what they had done**" (16:9). Also this bowl judgement does not cause people to repent. Instead they sin more by cursing God.

The first 5 bowls of God's wrath are God's instruments of judgement throughout the period from the first to the second coming of Christ. But the godless and wicked people are not sanctified by suffering. On the contrary, they become even more hardened, blaspheme God and refuse to repent of their sins.

The 6th bowl (16:12-16) affects the great river "Euphrates".

This river is a symbol not only for *the Empires of Assyria and Babylonia* (the kings of the East), but also a symbol representing *all the world-powers and all the godless nations* that attack the Church throughout the centuries. The 6th bowl judgement corresponds to the 6th trumpet judgement, but while the 6th trumpet judgement refers to all wars in history that are fought for different reasons, the 6th bowl judgement refers to *all wars against Christians*. "The river Euphrates" was regarded as the border between the God's people living in the promised Land and the unknown inimical nations living East of the River who were regarded as the enemies of God's people (2 Ki 24:7).

"The kings of the East" is a symbol referring to *the enemies of God's people*, who throughout the Old Testament period was envisaged as coming from the East via the North (Jer 46:6), from the river Euphrates: the Arameans, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Medes and Persians and finally the Seleucids (Syrians). Their armies are exceedingly great in number (9:14-16). These armies from the East are symbolically called "the Gog and Magog" (19:17-19; 20:7-9; Ezek 38:18-22; 39:4-6,17-20). During the 1st century A.D. the Romans feared that the Parthians, who lived across the river Euphrates, would invade Rome. In the vision in Revelation 16, the kings from the East living across the river Euphrates are symbols representing *the antichristian world powers that attack and persecute the Church throughout history* and especially at the end of history.

"Its waters was dried up to prepare the way for the kings of the East" is a symbol indicating that *the hindrance that withheld them from moving to make war was removed* (2 Thes 2:6-8). This bowl judgement *sets in motion the battles of Satan, his antichrists, false prophets and wicked kings of the earth against the Church*. In these battles, Satan and his allies are again and again defeated. And in the final battle they will remain defeated for ever!

Evil spirits that looked like frogs came out of the mouths of Satan and his two antichristian allies. They are symbols representing *demonic spirits with repulsive, abominable and disgusting influence on earth*. Although the beast and false prophet represent literal people in history, what they say and do is nevertheless inspired and controlled by hell. Satan is able to have evil influence on people without any visible means on earth and he directly influences the thoughts and deeds of people (Jn 8:44; Eph 6:10-12,16). Satan also uses the antichristian governments (the beast) and antichristian religions (the false prophet) to influence the people on earth. Together these three represent the satanic, hellish, evil ideas, plans, designs, projects, methods and enterprises concocted and introduced by hell into the sphere of thought and action. They are able to know and do things that go beyond what ordinary people can know or do.

The evil spirits gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon" (16:16). The outpouring of the 6th bowl judgement does not predict any future historical battle of Armageddon between for example the Northern or Eastern nations against the Western nations. "Har-Megiddo" means 'mountain or hill country of Megiddo'. This is not a literal place, because there is no mountain in the vicinity of Megiddo. It is a symbol of *the place where the evil world powers will gather together*, just as "Mount Zion" is a symbol of *the place where the people of God gather together* (Heb 12:22). Megiddo is a symbol of *the place of battle and of God's victory*. There in past history God defeated his enemies (Judg 4-5). And since then, 'the battle of Har-Megiddo' became the symbol of *every battle in which God defeats the enemy whenever they oppress God's people* (2 Chron 20; 32:21). The outpouring of the 6th bowl judgement is a prophecy about the crushing defeat of the godless and wicked world powers that threaten to destroy the Church throughout the history of the world up to the final battle at the second coming of Christ (16:14,16; 19:19; 20:8).

The final battle in history coincides with the great tribulation or the very short period of oppression at the end of the history of the world and is spoken about in each of the last four parts of the book of Revelation (11:7-11, 16:12-16, 19:11-21 and 20:7-10). In this final battle against the Church, the Church as an organised institution will be destroyed, its preachers and teachers will be killed and its witness will be silenced. But just when the need of Christians is the greatest, Christ will suddenly and dramatically appear at his second coming to deliver his people and to doom the enemies. Just like the other bowls of God's wrath, the 6th bowl is evident again and again throughout the period between the first and second coming of Christ. Yet, like the other bowls of God's wrath, it also reaches its final and most complete realisation just before the second coming of Christ.

The 7th bowl (16:17-21) affects the *air*.

"The 7th angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying: 'It is done!'" The 7th bowl judgement is a symbol of *the final judgement day*, when God will execute his final and complete wrath. When the "air" is struck, all life on earth must cease. The end of this present earth and the end of the history of this world has arrived! At his first coming Christ proclaimed: "It is finished!" (τετελεσται)(Jn 19:30) and at his second coming the voice of God loudly proclaims: "It is done! It has happened! It has taken place!" (γεγονεν)(16:17). Both verbs are in the perfect tense that emphasise the continuing reality of what had been accomplished. At his first coming Christ *completed his work of salvation* and it remains completed forever! At his second coming he *completed his work of judgement* and it will remain completed for ever! Everything that had to happen within world history has gone into

fulfilment at the second coming (cf. Isa 14:24,27). God's eternal plan with regard to this present world has been accomplished and the eternal state is about to begin (1 Cor 15:24-26).

"The lightning, thunder and earthquake" are the mighty signs accompanying the second coming of Christ (Mt 24:27).

"Babylon" (1 Pet 5:13) is a symbol of *Satan's antichristian world-culture together with its seductions*, especially in industry and commerce, education and justice, luxuries and pleasures, arts and sports. It represents the antichristian kingdom in all countries and throughout all ages. At the second coming of Christ, Christ brings into remembrance all Babylon's godlessness and wickedness and destroys her completely! The very final fall of Babylon is described in part 6 of the book of Revelation (ch 18) and it will be the final crushing blow for the people bearing the mark of the beast. Everything that up to then had brought them profit and pleasure collapses forever!

At the second coming also the earth will be transformed (Acts 3:21). The present map of islands and mountains on earth will change completely (2 Pet 3:10).

"The huge hailstones" falling from the sky are symbols of *God's terrible judgement on the unrepentant godless and wicked people* so that nothing of this godless and wicked world will remain (21:27; Mt 13:41-42)!

These people will "curse God" and this shows that even on the last moment of this present world history they will still harden their hearts and remain impenitent. They do this in spite of the fact that they see the glorious Christ at his second coming (1:7), see the resurrection from the dead (Jn 5:28-29), see the glorious transformation of the remaining living Christians (1 Cor 15:53), see the Christians caught up to welcome Christ in the air (1 Thes 4:14-18), see themselves gathered by angels to face the final and complete judgement of Christ (20:11-15) and hear Christ's irrevocable final and complete condemnation of them on the final judgement day (Mt 25:31-46). Even in hell, in the place of being completely lost and eternally doomed, there will be no brokenness of heart that despises sin as sin against God. Such people will despise the consequences of sin, namely their punishment in hell, but they will not despise the despicability of their sin. Even in hell their hate against God will not be exchanged for love. Their hearts will continue to desire sin, even when they cannot carry it out anymore. At the final judgement day their deepest rebellion against God himself will be openly revealed.

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Read Revelation 17-19. Tomorrow we will introduce Revelation 17-19.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".