

The Seven Last Plagues

Revelation 11:18 summarizes events on earth right before the battle of Armageddon: “The nations were angry”. This state of affairs on earth matches Jesus’ description of the last days (Luke 21:25) and is followed by God’s wrath, which are His judgments in the form of the seven last plagues upon the unrepentant (Rev. 15:1).

Revelation 15 opens with the picture of seven angels with seven bowls filled with this divine wrath. But before this outpouring happens, we have a future glimpse of God’s faithful people (Rev. 15:1-4). They are described as victorious “over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name” (Rev. 15:2, NKJV), as they stand on something resembling a sea of glass and sing the song of Moses and the Lamb - all images reminiscent of the Hebrews on the shores of the Red Sea, celebrating God’s victory over the Egyptians (Exodus 15).

These victorious saints are the same ones referred to as the 144,000 in Revelation 14:1-5. Having refused the mark of the beast, they are protected from the seven last plagues. Then, at the Second Advent their mortal bodies are transformed and clothed with immortality (1 Cor. 15:51-54), and they will join the resurrected saints when Jesus comes in power and glory (1 Thess. 4:17).

Read for This Study: Rev. 15:1; Rev. 7:1-3; Rev. 14:9-10; Rev. 16:1-12; Rev. 17:1; Daniel 5; Rev. 16:16; 2 Thess. 2:9-12.

The Meaning of the Seven Last Plagues

People have already made their choice either for God or for Babylon. Before Christ comes, however, the destructive winds of Satan’s fury that have been restrained (Rev. 7:1-3) are unleashed, followed by the seven last plagues.

Read Revelation 15:1 along with Exodus 7-11. How are the Egyptian plagues, considered the backdrop for the seven last plagues, instructive regarding their purpose and meaning?

The seven last plagues are referred to as the “last” plagues because they come at the very end of earth’s history. In contrast, the plagues of the seven trumpets cover the time period that includes the entire Christian age and are restricted in their scope. They are executed while the gospel still is being preached (Rev. 10:8-11:14) and intercession is taking place (Rev. 8:2-5). They are mixed with mercy, and their purpose is to bring the enemies of God’s people to repentance.

On the other hand, the seven last plagues are poured out just prior to the Second Coming. They are poured out upon those who, like Pharaoh, hardened their hearts against God’s redeeming love and would not repent (Rev. 16:11). Divine wrath is God’s righteous judgment on the choices people have made (Rom. 1:26-28), and at that time the lost are reaping the consequences of their own choices.

Read Revelation 15:5-8 along with Exodus 40:34-35 and 1 Kings 8:10-11. What does the statement that “no man was able to enter the temple” (Rev. 15:8) suggest about the timing of the seven last plagues?

The expression “no one was able to enter into the temple” (Rev. 15:8, NKJV) points to the close of probation (Rev. 22:11). As Christ’s mediatorial ministry in heaven comes to an end, the door of opportunity to repent closes forever. Therefore, the last plagues will not

bring anyone to repentance, but only disclose the hardness of the hearts of those who chose to side with Babylon, prompting them to hate God even more (Rev. 16:9, 11).

The Outpouring of the Last Plagues

With the cessation of Christ's intercession in the heavenly sanctuary, the destiny of each individual is forever determined. The time has come for those who have spurned the gospel to experience God's wrath in its fullness.

The seven last plagues mirror the plagues poured out upon Egypt (Exodus 7-11). As the Egyptian plagues affected the Egyptians while the Israelites were spared, so God's people will be protected during this time of trouble (Ps. 91:3-10; see *The Great Controversy*, pp. 629, 630). The plagues on Egypt disclosed the hardness of Pharaoh's heart and showed the Egyptians the inability of their gods to protect them. Similarly, the last plagues increasingly harden the hearts of the worshipers of the sea beast and reveal the powerlessness of Babylon to protect them from divine judgment.

Read Revelation 16:1-11. What is happening here, and how is it portrayed?

The first four plagues "are not universal, or the inhabitants of the earth would be wholly cut off". - Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 628. The first inflicts painful and loathsome sores exclusively on the worshipers of the beast. The second and third plagues affect the sea and the rivers and the springs of water, which turn into blood. Without water to drink, rebellious humanity cannot survive. The fourth plague affects the sun so that it scorches people, causing unbearable pain.

The unbearable pain inflicted by the plagues does not soften the hearts of unrighteous humanity so as to change their rebellious attitudes. Instead, they curse and blaspheme God, who executes these plagues. Nor do any of them repent.

In Revelation 16:10-11 (see also Exod. 10:21-23), we can see that the fifth plague strikes the throne of the beast. It was Satan who delegated the throne to the beast (Rev. 13:2). Now even the seat of Satan's authority cannot withstand the force of these plagues. As people suffer in pain, they realize the inability of Babylon to protect them. However, they have set their minds against God, and even the terror of the plagues does not change their hearts.

Drying Up the Euphrates River

Read Revelation 16:12 along with Revelation 17:1 and 15. What does the symbol of the Euphrates stand for? What is the significance of the drying up of the Euphrates in the context of the seven last plagues?

In the Old Testament, the Euphrates was a critical means of support for Israel's enemies, Assyria and Babylon. The river flowed through Babylon and was important to the city because it nourished crops and provided water for people. Babylon could not survive without the Euphrates.

Revelation 17:1 describes end-time Babylon as sitting upon many waters, perhaps a reference to the Euphrates (Jer. 51:13). Revelation 17:15 explains that the waters upon which end-time Babylon sits represent the people who support it: the worldwide civil, secular, and political powers behind the system. However, these powers eventually will retract their support.

The scene of the sixth plague reflects the capture of ancient Babylon by Cyrus the Persian (see Daniel 5). According to the ancient historian Herodotus, on the night that King Belshazzar and his officials had a feast, the Persians diverted the Euphrates and entered Babylon along the riverbed, taking the city by surprise.

The symbolic drying up of the Euphrates in Revelation 16:12 results in the collapse of Babylon in the end time. Because the Euphrates in Revelation represents the world's civil, secular, and political powers giving their support to Babylon, the drying up of the Euphrates symbolizes the withdrawal of their support and their subsequent attack against Babylon, thereby causing its downfall.

As the people of the world witness the upheaval in nature (Rev. 16:3-9), they turn to Babylon for protection. However, as the fifth plague strikes the seat of Babylon's authority (Rev. 16:10-11), they see the futility of seeking help there. Feeling deceived, they turn against Babylon, causing her downfall (Rev. 17:16). Yet, as we have seen, their hearts remain hard against God and His people. As such, they become fertile soil for the final deception by which Satan will draw the world to unite against God's people to wipe them off the face of the earth.

Satan's Last Great Deception

Revelation 16:12 tells us that the purpose of the drying up of the Euphrates is to prepare the way for "the kings from the east" (NKJV). In the Old Testament, "the kings from the east" were Cyrus and his forces coming from the north, then approaching Babylon from the east (Isa. 41:25). Their conquest of Babylon made the return of God's people to their homeland possible (Isa. 44:27-28). In the same way, the symbolic drying up of the Euphrates prepares the way for the coming of the kings from the east to provide deliverance to God's end-time people.

The kings from the east in Revelation 16:12 are Christ and His army of heavenly angels. At His second coming, Jesus will appear with His angelic host, "clothed in fine linen, white and clean" (Rev. 19:14, NKJV), which is the dress of sinless angels (Rev. 15:6). Accompanied by the host of heaven, Christ will, as Revelation 17:14 shows, overcome the satanic forces that oppress His people (compare Matt. 24:30-31). This final conflict against Christ and His people leading up to the Second Coming is known as the battle of Armageddon.

Read Revelation 16:13-14. What is the role of the three unclean spirits in the preparation for the battle of Armageddon? How are they a satanic counterfeit of the three angels' messages in Revelation 14? (See 1 Tim. 4:1).

Through the final events leading up to the close of probation, every human being will be led to choose on which of the two sides he or she will stand in the battle of Armageddon. As a prelude to this spiritual warfare, John sees three demonic spirits resembling frogs. Satan's last attempt to deceive involves demonic, lying spirits.

The dragon (paganism and spiritualism), the sea beast (Roman Catholicism), and the false prophet (apostate Protestantism) unite under Satan's command (Rev. 13:11-12). Satan enables the lamblike beast to perform miraculous signs (Rev. 13:13-17) that includes spiritualistic manifestations. These signs are part of Satan's end-time deceptive strategy to persuade the world to follow him rather than the true God.

Blinded by their hatred of God and His truth, the leaders of the world readily believe Satan's lies, which are cloaked in a pleasing religious guise (2 Thess. 2:9-12). Ultimately, they will unite in the final battle leading to the end of this world.

Gathering for the Battle of Armageddon

Read Revelation 16:16. How successful will Satan's end-time deception be in gathering the people of the world to the battle of Armageddon?

The deceptive demonic miracles will achieve worldwide success. In having spurned Bible teachings, people will believe a lie that will be accompanied by deceptive miracles (2 Thess. 2:9-12). They will unite together in purpose, symbolized by their gathering to a "place", which is in Hebrew called Armageddon, meaning "the mountain of Megiddo". Megiddo was not a mountain, but a fortress city located in the Valley of Jezreel (or the Plain of Esdraelon) at the foot of the Mount Carmel ridge. It was an important strategic site.

The Plain of Esdraelon was known for many decisive battles in Israel's history (see Judg. 5:19; Judg. 6:33; 2 Kings 9:27; 2 Kings 23:29-30). Revelation uses this historical background to depict a final great conflict, called Armageddon, between Christ and the forces of evil. The people of the world are portrayed as a unified army under the leadership of this satanic league.

The "mountain of Megiddo" is an apparent allusion to Mount Carmel that towers above the valley in which the ancient city of Megiddo was located. Mount Carmel was the site of one of the greatest clashes in Israel's history, between God's true prophet (Elijah) and the false prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18). This showdown answered the question, "Who is the true God?" The fire that came from heaven demonstrated that the Lord was the only true God and the only one to be worshiped. While the spiritual issue of the battle of Armageddon - Will we obey God or man? - is decided before the plagues fall, those who side with the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (Rev. 16:13), will then be totally controlled by the devil (as Judas was, leading up to Christ's crucifixion [Luke 22:3]).

Having chosen the losing side, they will be among those who cry for the mountains to hide them (Rev. 6:16; read also 2 Thess. 1:7-8). Before the plagues fall, however, Revelation 13:13-14 portrays the earth beast bringing fire down from heaven to deceive the world into thinking that Satan's counterfeit, which will include false revivals led by another spirit, is the work of God.

Armageddon is not a military battle among nations to be fought somewhere in the Middle East, but a global spiritual contest in which Christ decisively confronts the forces of darkness (2 Cor. 10:4). The outcome will be like that at Carmel but on a worldwide scale - with God's triumph over the forces of darkness.

Further Thought:

"None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict. To every soul will come the searching test: Shall I obey God rather than men? ... The apostle Paul declared, looking down to the last days: 'The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine'. 2 Timothy 4:3. That time has fully come. The multitudes do not want Bible truth, because it interferes with the desires of the sinful, world-loving heart; and Satan supplies the deceptions which they love.

“But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority - not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain ‘Thus saith the Lord’ in its support. ...

As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. The church has long professed to look to the Saviour's advent as the consummation of her hopes. Now the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come. In different parts of the earth, Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation. Revelation 1:13-15. The glory that surrounds him is unsurpassed by anything that mortal eyes have yet beheld. The shout of triumph rings out upon the air: ‘Christ has come! Christ has come!’ The people prostrate themselves in adoration before him. ... In gentle, compassionate tones he presents some of the same gracious, heavenly truths which the Saviour uttered; he heals the diseases of the people, and then, in his assumed character of Christ, he claims to have changed the Sabbath to Sunday, and commands all to hallow the day which he has blessed. He declares that those who persist in keeping holy the seventh day are blaspheming his name by refusing to listen to his angels sent to them with light and truth. This is the strong, almost overmastering delusion”. - Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 593-595, 624.