

Lesson 24 Lecture  
Revelation 15:1-16:21  
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Do you like a good movie? Vickie and I are movie lovers. Probably our favorite type of movie is a good drama. There have been so many great dramatic movies over the years. The Godfather trilogy, Schindler's List, The Shawshank Redemption, and ...what was that one about Napoleon? Hold on, I've almost got it. Oh, yeah – Napoleon Dynamite! Well, the book of Revelation is the most incredible dramatic story there is. In any good drama, there is a structure and flow to it, and Revelation comes with one. You may recall Jesus gave it to us in Chapter 1, verse 19, "*Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.*" For the purpose of laying out where we are in today's reading, I'm going to break out that outline a bit.

In each drama, there are progressive segments, or acts. I see Revelation having six acts:

1. Jesus' introducing Himself in His glorified state and speaking to the 7 churches
2. The rapture of the church and worshipping God
3. The first of three 7-step judgments – the seven seals
4. The second set of judgments – the seven trumpets
5. The third and final set of judgments – the seven bowls
6. The promised return and victory of Jesus Christ to rule and reign forever

Every drama has one or more settings, and Revelation has two primary settings – here on earth and in heaven. Great dramas come with great characters. The key characters in Revelation are:

- Jesus Christ
- Satan, The Antichrist, The False Prophet
- The Angels & Demons
- Believers & Unbelievers

There's one more critical component of every good drama, and I'll speak to that at the end of the lecture. My friend Steve Mood gave us a great teaching on chapter 14 where we learned more about the 144,000 Jewish remnant and got a vision of the ultimate judgment on unbelievers prior to Jesus' return. In today's reading, we are arriving at the 5<sup>th</sup> act – the third and final set of judgments – the seven bowl judgments. Chapters 15 and 16 are linked with a brief interlude before God sends the final expression of His wrath and most devastating of all the judgments.

Chapter 15 opens up with John in heaven seeing seven angels with the seven last plagues – indicating that upon their delivery, God's wrath will be completed. We're then given an image of those who will withstand the persecution of the Antichrist in the Tribulation. This is an example of where I have a problem with the NIV translation. The NIV says they were standing "beside" the sea of glass glowing with fire. The NKJV and NASB versions, which are closer to the original text, have them standing "on" the sea. In my book, that is a big difference. For whatever reason, the NIV translators have a problem with these overcomers standing *on* the sea. We're in heaven at this moment, so who is to say people can't stand or walk on water?

These people sing the song of Moses, recorded in Exodus 15:1-21 and Deuteronomy 32:1-43, and it is the first song of the Bible. They also sing a song of the Lamb. Both songs speak of God's deliverance, salvation, and faithfulness. Jon Courson and Dr. Robert Jeffress make these interesting comparisons between the two songs:

<b>The Song of Moses</b>	<b>The Song of the Lamb</b>
Sung near the Red Sea	Sung on the glassy sea
Dealt with rescue	Deals with the Rapture
Song of triumph over Egypt	Song of triumph over Babylon
How God brings His people out	How God brings His people in
First song of Scripture	Last song of Scripture

The song continues in verse 4, *“Who will not fear you, Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”* These words are a fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy, *“And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.”* (Zech. 14:16)

In verses 5-8, we're presented the temple. The temple is mentioned 12 times in the Book of Revelation, and that's an important point. We need to remember that the Book of Revelation is about God dealing with the Nation of Israel – fulfilling His covenants with them that started with Abraham. I know there are certain components of the church that believe when the Jews demanded the crucifixion of Jesus, they forfeited their inheritance and rights to be the beneficiaries of God's covenants. This teaching believes the church has taken Israel's place. That is utter nonsense and blasphemy. The church has never been associated with the temple, and the prominence of the temple in the Book of Revelation is undeniable. For us, the church, we should rejoice in all this talk of the temple, because since we have nothing to do with the temple, we must already be in heaven due to the Rapture!

We're introduced to seven angels with seven plagues. One of the four living creatures gives to the angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God. The wrath of God is something a lot of people don't want to talk about – for somewhat understandable reasons. Modern church “teaching” seeks to emphasize the love of God. This is good, to a point, because it is true. God *is* love. I believe love is one of God's foundational character traits, but it is only part of who He is. Jesus Himself spoke of the wrath of God in John 3:36, *“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.”* Another foundational component of God's character is He is holy. For Him to defend His holiness, He must respond to acts of unholiness – namely sin.

God is in control of everything – *especially* His wrath. Many people when reading Revelation draw the misinformed conclusion that God is unfair and cruel in His wrathful judgments. The Lord is exceedingly patient – far beyond anything you or I could ever be. Back in Genesis 15:13-16, God told Abraham that he and his people would be in another country for 400 years. His people will be afflicted and enslaved because the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full. God was giving these people 400 years to repent, but they did not. In Deuteronomy 20:17, God gave Joshua the order to destroy the Amorites. He's given humanity 2,000 years to repent and receive the gift of His Son's sacrifice, and for most of those during the Tribulation, they are going to refuse to turn to God. He *must* exact His wrath on unrighteousness to defend

His character. However, and this is very important - His actions are *completely* dictated by the choices we humans make. His preference is to forgive and redeem, and He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. In the end, though, God must be God for Him to remain true to His glorious character.

Verse 8, which says, “*And 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.*” If you recall from last year’s study, the temple was the place where the priest would go into the Holy of Holies before the presence of God and ask for forgiveness, mercy, and help on behalf of himself and the people. With verse 8, we’re told no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues were delivered. What this means is, it is too late to pray. The dye has been cast. There is no more room for mercy and grace. Again, it’s not like humanity hasn’t been warned, but there is a point where people make one more rejection of Christ, and God achingly accepts that as their “final answer.” At that point, their eternal destination is set in stone. For those who choose to continue in their refusal to repent, they will be going through these seven bowls of judgment and will have a date before God at the great white throne. We all know people who are not yet saved, so I hope you use this important truth of Scripture to strengthen the courage of your faith and speak/live the love and truth of God into these people.

As we move into Chapter 16, we hear a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, “*Go, pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath on the earth.*” A safe bet is this voice is none other than Jesus Christ Himself. The Lord said in John 5:22, 27, “*For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.*” The seven bowl judgments have nothing to do with Satan’s actions – this destruction is 100% orchestrated by Jesus. With the commencement of these judgments/plagues, we’re going to find a lot of parallels to Old Testament ones as well as the trumpet judgments. Another thing to consider is there are few pauses in the delivery of these plagues. You may draw to the conclusion these are issued one right after the other. Keep that in the back of your mind as you consider their progressive devastation.

In verse 2 of chapter 16, we learn the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly, festering sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The Greek word for “sores” is the same word used in the Greek version of the Old Testament. This is called the Septuagint. This same word describes the boils that afflicted the Egyptians in Exodus 9:8-12 and Job in Job 2:7. Moses prophesied about this judgment in chapter 28 of Deuteronomy. This judgment is targeted at people – specifically those who have taken the mark of the beast.

The second bowl’s target is sea life. If you recall when we covered the trumpet judgments, 1/3 of the sea life was wiped out with the second trumpet. With this bowl judgment, the entire oceanic ecosystem will perish. “*The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead person, and every living thing in the sea died.*” The seas won’t be *like* blood, they will *be* blood. This sounds very much like the first plague God unleashed on Egypt in Exodus 7:19-25. Imagine the smell and the flies.

Moving to the third bowl, the angel poured out his on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. Again, this is a more severe judgment than the trumpet judgment, which wiped out 1/3 of the fresh water supply. This will make the earth’s entire fresh water supply undrinkable. The average human can go about 40 days without food but only three days without water.

In verse 5, John hears from the angel in charge of the waters. How many of us when we think of angels think of them being solely attendants for us, or they're killer harp players? I'd also like to think of the Angels as a playoff team, but I've been denied that for some time! Apparently, their responsibilities go beyond humanity and harps – this particular angel is in charge of the waters. With the water covering 71% of the earth, this is a BIG job! This angel says to Jesus, “*You are just in these judgments, O Holy One, you who are and who were; for they have shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.*” The altar at the throne of God affirms this critical component of His character, “*Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.*”

Anyone of you ever questioned God's fairness? Why did a child have to die? Why didn't my marriage survive? Why did I lose my job? Why did I get COVID? Our flesh can't help itself – we have each developed our own sense of what is right or wrong – what is fair and unfair. When we see something that is so obviously counter to our idea of fairness and justice, we can't help to look up and ask God, “*Are You paying attention?*” or “*Why aren't You dealing with this?*” The older I get and the more I get to know God, the more I know I don't want His job. I mentioned earlier that I'm a movie lover, and there was a funny but poignant movie called *Bruce Almighty*. The main character, played by Jim Carrey, takes over the role of God while He “goes on a vacation.” Carrey finds out over time that playing the role of God is too much responsibility for him. If you haven't seen the movie, I won't spoil the ending.

Coming to trust the fairness and justness of God is an essential step in one's walk *with* and growth *in* Christ. The author of one of the top 5 books I've ever read after the Bible, *Pain, Perplexity, and Promotion*, is Bob Sorge. He was a pastor, and he had an issue with an ulcer on his vocal cords. He had laser surgery to deal with it, and it went badly. It permanently damaged his vocal cords where it is extremely painful for him to talk out loud, and when he does talk, it's barely above a whisper. He's very transparent about the journey he has been on for more than 20 years. He openly admits He questioned God's fairness towards him in this situation. Yet, out of his extreme pain and suffering, though, he has authored this book along with the *Secrets of the Secret Place* and others. Mr. Sorge admits he would not have written these great books had he not been through his battle.

When you're in the midst of a situation that simply seems unfair, you have a choice to make. You can get mad at God, blame Him for not being fair and not caring, and turn away from Him. Or, you can take the faithful and courageous step to press into God and His Word and ask Him to help you with your season of doubt of His character. For me, personally, I started to take the first step away from God in the midst of our storm, and things got very dark very quickly. Thankfully, by His grace and the strength of my wife's faith, I turned back towards God. I'm absolutely certain that the quality and depth of my writing and teaching would be nowhere near what it is today had I not gone through a season of questioning the fairness of God. I would be lying to you if I said I have total peace about the things that I still don't understand, but every time I look at the cross, I'm reminded God's ways are not my ways, and His thoughts are higher than mine.

The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was allowed to scorch people with fire. Jesus prophesied there would be signs with the sun in the Great Tribulation in Luke 21:25, “*And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring;*” There are actually several Old Testament prophecies that speak to excessive heat during the Great Tribulation:

- Deuteronomy 32:24a, *“They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction:”* (KJV)
- Isaiah 24:6: *“Therefore, the curse has devoured the earth, and those who dwell in it are desolate. Therefore, the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left.”*
- There are other mentions of burning from heat in the Great Tribulation in Isaiah 42:25 and Malachi 4:1

God will preserve His own per Psalm 121:6, *“The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.”* For the people who will be affected by this judgment, they will curse the name of God, who has control over these plagues, and they will refuse to repent and glorify Him. Think about that response. There is worldwide relentless devastation around you. Wouldn't you think at some point that you may consider a different approach in hopes of getting a different result? You know the definition of insanity? Doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. The fruit of a hardened heart is a detachment of sanity and reality.

*“The 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 and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.”* (Rev. 16:11) If the beast has a throne and a kingdom, there shouldn't be much question that he is a man. The “beast” title is a descriptive of the Antichrist's character. This judgment is similar to the ninth plague on Egypt in Exodus 10:21-22. What does total darkness typically promote? Fear. Isaiah prophesied of this in Isaiah 60:2. Joel, in verses 1-2 and 31 in the second chapter of his book predicted things like, *“A day of darkness and gloominess; a day of clouds and thick darkness; the sun shall be turned into darkness...before the great and awesome day of the Lord.”* Nahum, Amos, and Zephaniah also spoke of this time. Finally, Jesus Himself told us in Mark 13:24, *“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;”*

In verse 12, we see the sixth angel pouring out his bowl on the Euphrates. It was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. The Euphrates is called the “great river” in Scripture – it is mentioned over 25 times. J. Vernon McGee noted that *“it was the cradle of man's civilization and obviously will be the grave of man's civilization.”* The Euphrates was the northern border of the land God promised to Abraham. (Gen. 15:18) The Euphrates is 1,800 miles long, an average of 30 feet deep, and 3-1,200 feet wide. How does a river of this size and magnitude dry up? Some suggest this is the result of detonations of nuclear warheads. Another possibility is there is the Ataturk Dam located at the headwaters of the Euphrates, and through its controls, that could be the method to dry up the river.

Regardless of the “how” question, the more important question is “why?” Verse 12 tells us this was done to prepare the way for the kings from the East. This phrase is literally translated the “land of the rising sun.” This could be references to China and Japan. The drying up of the Euphrates will pave the way to Armageddon. We read back in chapter nine about a 200-million-man army. With China's population over 1 billion, mounting an army of this size would be totally plausible.

John's vision progresses in verse 13-14, *“Then 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. They 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.”* Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet release three evil spirits whose mission is to tempt the kings

of the whole world to converge into one location to wage war against at least Israel – but likely also against each other and against God.

Where is this one location? Verse 16 tells us this location is called Armageddon in Hebrew. Located just sixty miles north of Jerusalem is the Jezreel Valley. It is a beautiful area – lush with agriculture. By looking at it, you wouldn't know it has a long history of warfare. Gideon and his 300 men overcame the Midianites in Megiddo. When Samson took on the Philistines, one of the key battles was at Megiddo. King Josiah was killed at Megiddo. Deborah and Barak defeated Sisera at Megiddo. The Turks, Muslims, Syrians, Egyptians, and the Europeans have all had battles here. Napoleon (not Dynamite), when visiting the Jezreel valley, said, *“If ever there is a place on earth where the last war must be fought, it is here.”*

Verse 17 tells us the 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!”* I can't confirm this through Scripture, but I believe this is the voice of Jesus. This isn't the first time He's uttered words like these. Just before He gave up His spirit, the sixth of seven things He said on the cross was *“It is finished.”* (John 19:30) What was finished? -Satisfying the Father's requirements to become the permanent substitution sacrifice for my sins and your sins. We can't get any more saved beyond the simple belief in Jesus being the Christ – the only begotten Son of the Father – and His finished work at the cross.

What was done in verse 17? With the releasing of the seventh bowl judgment, the fullness of God's wrath was done. However, the ripple effects were not yet finished. Verses 18-21 tells these ripple effects included:

- Flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a never felt before earthquake that shook the planet.
- Jerusalem (the “great city”) is split into three parts and other cities were leveled – most notably Babylon.
- Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found.
- 100 lb. hailstones fell on people.

Verse 21 reminds us again that after all this judgment, these people who rejected Jesus and God show their folly of their minds and hearts by cursing the one they rejected!

At the beginning of the lecture, I offered the image of a movie and its components in an attempt to provide some context to what is going on in this amazing book of Revelation. I noted, though, there was one key component of the movie I left off until now. Every good movie needs a great director. The one who has both the vision and the authority to dictate how the movie plays out. I hope that one of your key takeaways from this year's study is Jesus is completely in control of all the events – He is the Director. Each of us is living out our own movie – our own story. My question for each of you is who is the director of your story? Is it you? Are you still living with the delusion that you are in control of everything in your life? When you look around what's going on with the pandemic, the Russia/Ukraine crisis, and countless other things, do you feel like you're in control?

Brothers and sisters, with no attempt to diminish your suffering and the challenges you may be facing at this point in time, what is going on now in the world is nothing compared to what is coming. On the surface, that may not seem to be either a helpful or comforting statement. Think about this, please. We're 16 chapters and three series of 7-fold judgments into the book of Revelation. Every step of the way Jesus, the worthy Lamb of God, is in total control. If He is in

total control in the future, and He is the same, yesterday, today, and tomorrow, you can be assured that He is in *complete* control of your circumstances. I will not promise you He will immediately deliver you from what you're going through. However, I can promise you that He, if you choose to believe, will offer you a peace that passes all understanding in the midst of your trials to help you get through them. He will not leave your side. Surrender your life's director's chair to Jesus, and you can be certain that the love He has for you that sent Him to the cross, will be poured out on you in His perfect timing. Your movie isn't done until the director says, "*That's a wrap!*" Until then, what does the director say when it's time of the next scene? "*Action!*" Jesus is a God of action. Please live in the expectation that with Jesus being in control of your life, He will direct all things for your good because you love Him and are called according to His purpose. Let's pray.