

October 15th: Revelation 15-17

Chapter 15

We now enter another cycle of 7 calamities. These are not 7 calamities distinct from the 7 seals and 7 trumpets, but these 7 bowls of plagues are a retelling of the 7 calamities from a different perspective, with an increased intensity. The 7 angels have the 7 LAST plagues because in them the rage of God was completed. These 7 plagues goes back to Deuteronomy 28 & Leviticus 26:1, God announced that if Israel walks in a way contrary to God then God would pour plagues on them. These plagues are aimed at all of those who resist God. The divine judgment doesn't simply end, but is the COMPLETION (completed in God's time zone with God's action). Those who conquer are standing UPON chaos and judgment (sea of glass mixed with fire)... Chaos has been controlled and God's judgment has not consumed those who conquer but they've risen above it. Persistent resistance in the present is being integrated into God's worship in the future.

-15:5-8.... The site of the temple being opened in this context is drawing upon the image of Rome when the temple of Janus is left open. This temple would only be left open during times of war. No one will be able to enter the temple, God's smoky plague wrath is coming out of the temple. Clothing is priestly attire, they're mediating God's wrath. Bowl imagery is significant because they're linked with worship (flat, shallow bowls that are used in cultic worship). These bowls are especially linked with wine libations. Wine was used as that which you offer a God. This is being tipped upside down, instead of the wine being poured out as an offering to God, the bowls are tipping out from heaven as the wrath of God poured out for those who would have participated in such cultic worship and other idolaters. The temple filled with smoke is an ominous sign, God is smoking mad. No one can enter God's presence until God completes Gods' wrath. God is currently unapproachable.

Chapter 16

The voice coming out of the temple is God's commissioning voice. God commands the bowls of wrath to be poured out. While God is alone God is still very involved in everything going on. The poured out imagery is very common in Ezekiel. Rage is particularly poured on to the 4 elements (earth, air, water, and fire) this reinforces that God is ruler of everything.

Plague 1: Festering sores. The festering sore recalls the plague of boils in Ex ch. 6, but the boils here are ironic. Previously those who had the mark of the beast had a good deal because it exempted them from affliction and persecution, but now that's tipped upside down and the mark is the cause of affliction. This is a divine reversal. Those who enjoy Rome's permission, protection, and prosperity will have a divinely imposed festering sore.

Plague 2: Sea of Blood/Death. Reversal imagery of religion in the ancient world. Cultic worship poured out blood as an offering resulting in life, here the angels are pouring out blood and the result is death. Recalls Ex 11 plague in Egypt and Rev 8:8-9. However, when creatures die previously it was only 1/3, but now it's ALL of the sea creatures. This is not even fresh blood, but coagulated nasty stagnant blood! God's wrath is so powerful

that it has destroyed the spawning ground of the sea beast! God destroyed those who lived in chaos!

Plague 3: Rivers of Blood. Now blood is poured out into the freshwater. Rome had bloodied God's faithful people, so now God was giving Rome blood to drink. The fresh water supply of earth is affected. Judgment doxology declares God's judgments are solemn and true, here you get the imagery of axios, the balance. They are the ones who poured out the blood of the saints and prophets and they are axios with God's judgment. Blood pourers become blood drinkers.

Plague 4: Scorching Sun. Back in ch. 7, divine sun block was given to protect Gods' people so they wouldn't be scorched, now people recognize God's hand in all of this, but they don't repent they blaspheme against God and clearly don't repent. They are damning God because God is damning them. This parallels pharaoh's arrogant heart during the plagues against Egypt. Before they were suckered into blasphemous actions by the beast, but now they're directly cursing God for God's wrath.

Plague 5: Darkness. Intense darkness, recalls 9th plague in exodus. Darkness is always judgment, eclipses in the ancient world were regard as negative divine signs. This is an attack at the beast's dominion, the lights of empire have gone out in a divinely imposed power outage. They're plunged into darkness, but instead of repenting they spend their time blaspheming the one who could turn the lights back on.

Plague 6: The River Euphrates dried up. The Euphrates marked the Eastern border of the Roman Empire, beyond which Rome's most feared enemy, the Parthians, resided. The 6th trumpet unleashed a cavalry across the Euphrates, but this bowl of plague dries up the Euphrates to prepare the way for the kings of the east to invade. This is the flip side of the exodus story, Exodus the sea was dried so they could escape, but here it's dry so the kings of the east can invade. The spiritual frogs come out of the mouth of the demonic trinity and seductively recruit the kings of the whole earth. All empires join with the empire for THE battle (the big one). They're armed and ready for the final battle and their goal is to get rid of God once and for all. Irony is that God's planned this whole scenario. God stands over the beasts attempted manipulation of the kings of the earth. Etymology of "Har meggidon" is most likely referring to the Mountain at Megiddo. This is theological geography since Megiddo is not a mountain but is an elevated location in the Jezreel valley (a gateway... if you're coming from Egypt and want to head to Babylon you have to go through the Jezreel valley). Because of it's strategic value, the Jezreel valley is a common place for war in the OT, this is the place where God's righteous people are attacked by the evil nations. Everyone's gathered for battle, but we get no battle at this point!

The 7th Plague: The Earthquake to end all earthquakes. Hundred pound hailstones. Earthquake splits Babylon into 3 parts. The fall has taken place. Referring to God's remembrance in vs. 19 goes back to Exodus 2 & 6, when God remembers God's people in bondage, God vindicates and executes justice and those who think they are in control are humbled. God's remembrance is bad news for Babylon. People still don't repent,

even with 90 pound hail! God is giving the plagues as opportunities to repent, but people just blaspheme God because of the hail.

Chapter 17

We are now transported back in time to BEFORE the fall of Babylon (as described by the last plague). A prostitute is now pictured as a living symbol for Rome/Babylon. -Vision of women are much more allegorical than previous visions (drawing from OT and common cultural topos)

-Revelation is also playing off of the imagery of the goddess Roma. Goddess Roma is perched on 7 hills with her foot in the Tiber river. This was the image that was on the most common coin. we back track to the days of the height of Rome's idolatry and adultery followed by its judgment. Adultery is an image for religious infidelity. The whore she stands as the anti-type for the woman in chapter 12 (the mother of the Messiah), and forwards she stands as the anti-type for the woman who is the bride of the itty-bitty lamb. This section is taking the prostitute imagery and mixing it with the cup of wrath imagery. "Seated upon the many waters" indicates Rome's enthronement over many nations, also an indication that she rules chaos itself, and harkening back to the coin imagery. The inhabitants of the earth were made drunk... Rome's power and allurements makes the nations become drunk, they can't see reality, they've been lured into a drunken stupor and can't see reality.

-17:3-6... Back in ch 12 wilderness was a safe haven for the protagonists, but here wilderness is the desolation of the urban life that is Rome. It's the location of the liaison between the prostitute and the scarlet beast. Likely the beast of the sea (chaos connection), red color connects the beast to the dragon. The prostitute is arrayed in the luxury and extravagance of the elite. All the immoralities for which she stands are poured into the cup which she holds. She is working for Satan. She's gotten drunk by the blood of the testifiers of Jesus. She's blood thirsty. Her sitting position introduces the theme, a political statement that reinforces her demonic alliance with empire and Satan. Sitting is the image of enthronement. Babylon is posing as an enthroned imperial power. If Babylon is throned, Babylon can be dethroned. Who is in charge? God and the lamb who sit on the throne or the prostitute who sits on Satan? The fact that she's the mother of prostitutes and represents a city "metropolis". Her motherhood is geopolitical, just like Rome is a mother city to all other cities. The fact that she is a mother underscores Rome's ability to extend itself. Rome keeps spawning itself.

-17:15-18... Waters represent her enthronement over a multi-national empire. Universal character is the antithesis of the lamb's multinational worship. Here there is an unexpected turn of events, the civil war, the 10 kings under the direction of the beast attack the prostitute and devour her!!! This is recalling the demise of Jezebel (gets eaten by dogs so only her hands and feet are left). Theologically this depicts evil's inherent self-destructive nature, those who serve the alluring mistress when given the opportunity will eat the mistress. Ironically the civil war fulfills God's plan. God can use the most alien means to achieve God's plan because God is in charge of everything (who used Babylon to punish Israel? God! Who used Cyrus of Persia to bring down Babylon and send Israel home? God!). The city of Rome will be a desolate wasteland... the verb

used for desolation often describes the desolation and deforestation of conquered lands through warfare in Greco-Roman times, this verb is not used as a verb to depict rape. Rome will be defeated and utterly stripped and humiliated and will happen because of the imperial power it wields and sets itself over and against God and Gods' people. This is a prophetic rant not against urban life, but against the idolatrous exploitation which imperial powers authorize and exercise.