

Rev. 16, The Vial Judgments
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Overview

1. Overall Flow of ch. 4-22
(Recall that the 7th of a series opens the next series.)

a) Heavenly setting	4-7 ch 4-5	8-11 8:1-5	11-16 11:15-19, ch 15	16-22 16:17-21
b) Thndr, Equake, Hail	4:5 T	8:5 TE	11:19 TEH	16:18-21
c) Earthly Judgments	Seals	Trumpets	Vials	

2. Third set of seven judgments.

3. Common features across the seals, trumpets, vials
 - a) Division into four + 3
 - b) End in the temple
 - c) Sixth in series has multiple parts
 - d) Trumpets and vials are especially close to one another. *Trace in the course of exposition.*
 - 1) <<different>>
 - a> 8:7 Hail & Fire 16:2 Sores
 - 2) 8:8,9; 16:3 Sea to blood
 - 3) 8:10,11; 16:4-7 Rivers to blood
 - 4) 8:12; 16:8-9 Heavenly bodies (also 16:10-11)
 - 5) <<different>> 9:1-12 Locusts from the Pit
 - 6) 9:13-11:14
 - a> 9:13, 16:12-16 Army from Euphrates
 - b> ch. 10 Little Book
 - c> 11:1-14 Two Prophets

4. Distinctions of this series
 - a) More severe than the previous ones
 - 1) 4th seal, 6:8, hits a quarter of the earth's population.
 - 2) First four trumpets, 8:7-12, hit a third of their targets.
 - 3) Vials: no limits

 - b) Explicitly references the beast and his kingdom (16:2, 10), which is now possible after the interlude of ch. 12-14.

 - c) These plagues correlate closely with the plagues on Egypt in Exod. 7-12. (So do some of the earlier judgments, particularly T1, 8:7, cf. Ex. 9:23, hail and fire together.) Cf. reference to "song of Moses" in ch. 15, and Megiddo in 16:16 (battlefield between Pharaoh Necho and Josiah). NB: Pharaoh is thus made an image of Antichrist, just as Daniel makes Antiochus, and the Olivet Discourse makes Titus. The general principle is clear: Antichrist is anticipated by and sums up the totalitarian leaders of the world.

Comparison of plagues with T(rumpets) and V(ials):

- 1) Ex. 7:10 Rod to snake T6 (9:19?)
- 2) 7:20 River to blood T2-3 (8:8-11); V2-3 (16:3-4)
- 3) 8:6 Frogs V6 (16:13)
- 4) 8:17 Lice
- 5) 8:24 Flies
- 6) 9:6 Cattle smitten
- 7) 9:10 Boils V1 (16:2)
- 8) 9:23 Hail T1 (8:7); T7 (11:19); V7 (16:21)
- 9) 10:13 Locusts T5 (9:1-12)
- 10) 10:22 Darkness T4 (8:12); V5 (16:10)
- 11) 12:29 Firstborn
- 12) <<Unmatched>> V4 (16:8, scorching)

A. 1, The Angels Dispatched to Judgment

1. "Great voice" occurs 20x in Rev, always of a creature (most commonly an angel, sometimes [19:1] a multitude of people). Yet no one (*oudeis*, not just "no man") can enter the temple, 15:8! Perhaps comes from one of the four living creatures, as the closest created beings to the Father. Cf. 14:15, the command from the temple to begin judgment, since that day belongs to the Father. "Great voices" in Rev:

- a) 1:10 Angel (cf.4:1) Commands John to write
- b) 5:2 Strong angel "Who is worthy to open the book?"
- c) 5:12 Heavenly host "Worthy is the Lamb"
- d) 6:10 Martyrs Plea for vengeance
- e) 7:2 Angel with seal "Hurt not the earth..."
- f) 7:10 Gt multitude Attribute salvation to God
- g) 8:13 Angel Announcing the Woe trumpets
- h) 10:3 Angel w/ book Announcing the Thunders
- i) 11:12 ? Invites 2 witnesses to heaven
- j) 11:15 Heavenly host Announcing God's kingdom
- k) 12:10 People (our b'n) "Now is come salvation"
- l) 14:7 Angel Everlasting gospel
- m) 14:9 Angel Jdgmt to worshippers of the beast
- n) 14:15 Angel < temple Command to reap
- o) 16:1 ? (temple) Dispatches the bowls
- p) 16:17 ? (temple, throne) "It is done."
- q) 18:2 Angel "Babylon is fallen"
- r) 19:1 Much people Praise to God for judging Babylon
- s) 19:17 Angel Summons birds to the carrion
- t) 21:3 ? "Tabernacle of God is with men"

2. Subject: releasing the wrath of God, which until now has always been off in the future.

- a) First mentioned at sixth seal, 6:16-17
- b) Anticipated in the praise of the seventh trumpet, 11:18
- c) Threatened in 14:10, 19.
- d) The bowls focus on this in a way that the previous series do not. These are three times expressly described as "the wrath of God" (15:1, 7; 16:1).

B. 2, First Vial: Boil, Sore, Ulcer

1. Cf. Exod. 9:9,10. One of the plagues of Egypt. Not same as 8:7 (hail and fire), though that was another of the plagues (9:23,24).
2. Aimed specifically at those who have accepted the mark of the beast.
 - a) They were willing to have his brand on their hand and forehead; now God will brand them in turn.
 - b) Cf. 14:8,10: those who drink of Babylon's wine must also drink of God's.
 - c) cf. v.6; those who shed the blood of the saints will drink blood.
 - d) *Application*: Gal. 6:7, "whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap." God fits his judgments to the sin. Not only can we not escape God's judgment; when it comes, it will torment us with the reminder of the nature of our sin.
 - 1) Men seek for "humane" judgments that will not pain or humiliate the guilty; specifically not to be "cruel or inhumane." These may remove the nuisance of the guilty from the innocent, but they cannot serve as effective preventive measures.
 - 2) God's judgments are deliberately "cruel and inhumane." Something worth avoiding if you can!

C. 3-4, Second and Third Vials: Sea and Rivers to Blood

1. Cf. Trumpets 2 and 3, 8:8-11. This time, not restricted to a third of the sea.
2. Cf. Egypt, 7:20,21.
 - a) There, only the rivers. Here, the sea as well.
 - b) Both cases, kills off the fish.
 - c) Exod. 7:34, they could still dig wells for water. Here, the "fountains" (translated "well" in John 4:6) are polluted as well; cf. T3, where the people die as a result.

D. 5-7, Praise for the Judgment on the Waters

1. Two speakers: an angel leads the praise, and a voice from the altar echoes it in v.7. (MT omits "another" [angel] in 7, permitting the natural ascription of the words to the martyrs of the fifth seal.) Cf. 14:3, angels as choir leaders to the saints.

Key point from Hushizer's latest *Milk and Honey*: Music is for the saints' *participation*, not their *audition*. Even unbelievers listen with enthusiasm to Handel's Messiah, but only a believer can sing it with persuasion.

2. The expressions used by both choruses are drawn from ch. 15, the Song of Moses. Given the original setting in Ex. 15, it's

appropriate for the angel of the waters to be the choir leader.

a) Following the order of ch. 15:

ch. 15

ch. 16

- 1) Great and marvellous
[are] thy works,
- 2) Lord God Almighty; :7 (people)
- 3) just and true [are] :7 (people); :5 "righteous"
thy ways,
- 4) thou King of [the ages]. :5 "which art and wast"
- 5) 4 Who shall not fear
thee, O Lord, and glorify
thy name?
- 6) for [thou] only :5 "O holy one" (*hosios*)
[art] holy:
- 7) for all nations shall
come and worship before
thee;
- 8) for thy judgments are :5 "because thou hast judged
made manifest. thus"

b) Following the order of ch. 16:

ch. 16

ch. 15

The Angel:

- c) Thou art righteous, :3 "just and true"
- d) O Lord, which art, and wast, :3 "King of the ages"
- e) O Holy One, :4 "thou only art holy"
- f) because thou hast judged :4 "thy judgments made manifest
thus.
- g) 6 For they have shed ...

The Martyrs:

- h) Even so, Lord God Almighty, :3
- i) true and righteous [are] :3
thy judgments.

3. In particular, these two passages are the only ones where God is described as *hosios* "holy." He is often said to be *hagios*, separate, but this is a different word that is often associated (as here) with "just." The pairing has its prototype in Ps. 145:17, which also applies them to God.

- a) "just" or "righteous" (same Gk word) describes one's relation to God's LAW; one who measures up to the standard. God is consistent with his own legislation. In particular, he must bring judgment where he has said he would.
- b) "holy" (*hosios*) is the LXX reflex of *xasid*, one who is in a relation of *xesed*, covenant love. Thus it describes one's relation to a PERSON rather than to a LAW. Applied to God, it reminds us that even in judgment he keeps covenant with those who are his own.

E. 8-9, Fourth Vial: Scorching Sun

1. The central one of the series is the only one not paralleled in Egypt, but certainly understood in a desert land. The opposite of T4, where the heavenly bodies were turned DOWN (8:12).
2. We hear a lot today about "global warming," but when the sun is allowed to burn up the earth, it is explicitly God, not Freon, who does it.
3. People's response: blasphemy. Excursus: appears in 8 vv in Rev.
 - a) Characteristic of the Beast (13:1,5,6; 17:3). In general, impious speech. Takes two forms in the Rev.
 - b) 2:9, claiming to be God's people when one is not. "the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but [are] the synagogue of Satan."
 - c) 16:9, 11, 21 (all in this chapter!), reaction to God's judgments.
 - 1) They recognize God as the source of their suffering (or at least as able to prevent it)
 - 2) They will not repent of their own sin in the matter.
 - 3) Instead, they criticize God for permitting it to come on them.

F. 10-11, Fifth Vial: Darkness

1. Compare the trumpets, which in 8:12 (T4) and 9:2 (T5) present two causes for darkness: judgment on the heavenly bodies, and the shade cast by the release of the demon hoardes from the pit. The parallel with the trumpets suggests we should link this more closely with 9:2 than 8:12. Demons run rampant during this period.
2. Exo. 10:22-23, anticipated in Egypt.
3. In Egypt, Israel was spared; so here, the darkness is explicitly upon the throne and kingdom of the beast. NB: God's judgments NEVER touch his people. His smart weapons outperform anything seen in the Gulf War.
4. Again, people are not ignorant of God's role, but respond with blasphemy rather than with repentance.

G. 12-16, Sixth Vial: The Final Battle

1. Egypt: cf. the "unclean spirits ... like frogs" with Ex. 8:6.
2. T6, 9:14ff announced saw four angels leading a massive army at the Euphrates. Here there are also spiritual forces (13-14), gathering human armies to battle. By now, our vision is clearer, and we can see the central role being played by the Satanic Trinity in v.13: the dragon (the devil), the beast [from the sea], and the false prophet [the beast from the earth]. The

adversaries are not named, here, but Zech. 12 foretells an international siege against Jerusalem just before the Lord returns and converts Israel to himself. Totalitarian leaders have seldom been favorable toward Israel, and antisemitism will reach new heights under Antichrist, who seeks to carry out the Dragon's program of anger against the Woman and her seed. The remnant will be protected in the wilderness, but the rest will not.

3. Suddenly, another Voice breaks through (v.15).
 - a) As Satan is summoning his hosts, so the Lord Jesus summons his.
 - b) Satan's armies come armed for battle; the Lord encourages his people to guard their garments.
 - 1) 3:4, the few in Sardis who have not defiled their garments.
 - 2) Jas. 1:27, keep oneself unspotted from the world.
 - 3) Just as the soldier focuses on a sharp sword and rust-free armor, the child of God prepares for battle by maintaining personal righteousness and holiness of life.
4. 16, HE gathered them together. Must the the LJC. The demons set loose by the Satanic trinity think they are the ones doing the gathering, but ultimately the Lord is in control.
5. Armageddon = Heb. *har megiddo*, "mount [tel] of Megiddo." An important pass through the Carmel range, giving an army invading from the north access to the coastal plain. (MT is simply "Megiddo.") Associated throughout the OT with great battles:
 - a) Barak and Deborah, Judg 5:19
 - b) Ahaziah died from Jehu's wounds, 2 Kings 9:27
 - c) Josiah slain by Pharaoh Necho, 2 Kings 23:29. This may be particularly in view: the ultimate conflict between the antitype of Pharaoh (Antichrist) and the righteous King of Israel (Christ). The Beast does not yet recognize that this is to be a head-to-head match with the Lord, but we do, anticipating the detailed description in ch. 19.

H. 17-21, Seventh Vial

Discuss this in next sermon, as introduction to ch. 17ff.