



Part 35 – “It Is Done!”

Revelation 16:12-21

John now sees a gathering for battle (vv. 12-16) and the final defeat of the dragon and the two beasts (vv. 17-21). Though a final conflagration is never actually described, it is clear that, in the words of the Lord, “It is done!” (vs. 17). When the followers of the beast move to finally wipe out the church, they will discover, to their dismay, that they have only brought about their own destruction (Revelation 20:9).

The sixth bowl of God’s wrath

Vs. 12 – The Euphrates marked the eastern and northern boundaries of the Roman Empire beyond which lived the much-feared Parthians, whose horsemen had conquered the lands from the Euphrates to the Indus in what is now Pakistan and had, more than once, threatened Rome with invasion. In the thought world of the first century, hordes from the east represented the greatest threat to the empire. The *sixth trumpet* also announced the appearance of a great army of fierce horsemen from the east who brought death to a third of mankind. Had Revelation been written today, the image might well have been that of world-wide terrorism or some confrontation ending in a nuclear exchange.

Vv. 13-14 – “*Out of the mouth of the dragon...*” – The devil works chiefly by lies. He is not so interested in haunting houses or making heads spin. His medium is deceit. So out of the mouths of the dragon and the two beasts come unclean spirits described symbolically as frogs. This is likely a reference to the plagues on Egypt and so remind us also of God’s judgement as does the hail (vs. 21). It is also true that frogs were considered unclean. So, three evil spirits are depicted as coming out of the mouths of the dragon (Satan), the first beast (the satanic corruption of human government), and the second beast or false prophet (the beast’s religious propogandist). They execute their warfare by lies.

A warning and blessing

Inserted between the visions of the sixth and seventh bowls, John places parenthetically the words of the Lord which come in the form of a warning and a blessing.

Vs. 15 – First is the Lord’s familiar warning that his return will take the world by surprise. And so, “Blessed is the one who stays awake” – They will not be caught naked, as it were. That is, they will not be ashamed at the Lord’s coming but rather will welcome him with joy. All the saints will be finally gathered in by the Lamb who was slain for them. They are blessed in their watchfulness.

“Armageddon”

Vs. 16 – John uses the Hebrew “Armageddon” which is a compound word (*Har Mageddon*) which means “Mount Megiddo.” That presents a challenge since there is no Mount Megiddo. Megiddo is, in fact, a plain that is part of the valley of Jezreel located between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea. In fact, by the first century it was already one of history’s most famous battlefields. The Egyptian Pharaoh, Tuthmosis III fought there in 1468 B.C. The Judges Barak and Deborah defeated the Canaanite king Jabin at Megiddo. Ahaziah was slain by Jehu there and Josiah by the Egyptians in Jeremiah’s day. Given that Armageddon is not actually a mountain, it is one of the reasons why so many interpreters and theologians have taken John’s reference to it as symbolic (quite fitting for apocalyptic literature). Just as numbers are used symbolically, so too are certain locales and cities (Babylon for instance). In 14:20 the final battle is said to occur at Jerusalem, not Megiddo. So, this last battle is depicted as happening in different locations because it is really a spiritual battle, rather than a military showdown with munitions being launched toward Jesus and the hosts of heaven. “Armageddon is prophetic symbolism for the whole world in its collective defeat and judgment by Christ at his second coming.”¹ As Robert Mounce Observes:

“Geography is not the major concern. Wherever it takes place, Armageddon is symbolic of the final overthrow of all the forces of evil by the might and power of God. The great conflict between God and Satan, Christ and Antichrist, good and evil, that lies behind the perplexing course of

¹ Sam Storms, *Our God Reigns* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 2024) p. 415

history will in the end issue in a final struggle in which God will emerge victorious and take with him all who have placed their faith in him. This is *Har-Mageddon*.²

The seventh bowl of God's wrath

Vv. 17-18 – “The seventh bowl gives us a final camera angle on the completion of God’s wrath... The finality of this perspective and of the bowls cycle as symbolizing God’s climactic judgments at history’s end is affirmed by the voice from God’s heavenly temple as the bowl is poured: ‘It is done!’³ The bowl is poured out on “the air” perhaps indicating the passing away of the first creation and pointing forward to the new creation. Or, possibly, because “biblical cosmology sometimes identifies ‘the air’ as the realm of Satan’s evil dominion (Eph. 2:2; 6:12).”⁴ The catastrophic disasters in nature are elsewhere indications of the Lord’s holy presence.

Vv. 19-20 – “The great city” is likely Rome, the most immediate example of the beast, the satanic corruption of human government. Here, John signifies Rome as Babylon which has colluded with the cities of the nations.⁵ That God is described as remembering is a metaphor for his enacting justice upon Babylon, the city which became symbolic for the entire world system arrayed in wicked opposition to God and his people.⁶ The destruction of the mountains and islands was also depicted in the *sixth seal* (6:14). The final judgment will not simply initiate a renovation of the first creation but its replacement with the new creation.

Vs. 21 – The Old Testament describes God as using earthquakes and hail as means of judging the enemies of his people. The principal impression of this last judgment visited upon man is its finality: the complete collapse and destruction of godless civilization; the end of the age. The response of those under the final judgment is identical to that described with the pouring out of the fourth and fifth bowls of God’s wrath. Rather than repent, they cursed God, preferring their sin to the Lord’s salvation.

The seven bowls present a further development in the portrayal of God’s final judgment. The following chapters will serve to zoom in, as it were, on some of the images introduced in the bowl cycle. Then will come the end of the age, the final destruction of Satan and all wickedness and the inauguration of the new creation.

- John’s vision depicts the final end of sinful human empires. He is showing the persecuted church that while the beast looks invincible, it is not ultimate. Its claims to eternal rule are a parody. The beast will not have the last word. When we reach chapter 19 where we expect a final and epic clash of armies, something else astonishing happens. Christ appears as a rider on a white horse. Legions of angels are assembled behind him, armed to the teeth. Then they simply take their stand. The word comes out of the Lord’s mouth, which is described as sharper than any double-edged sword (the advanced weapon of the time). And the beast and the kings of the earth are defeated by the word that proceeds from him.
- There is no prolonged battle described. No Christian foot soldiers are seen taking up arms against hostile evil forces as the *Left Behind* series would have us believe. The battle is over before it begins. We are given only a casualty report of the enemys of God (19:20-21).
- It is a powerful depiction of how Jesus has defeated sin and death through his sacrifice on the cross. Even earlier, in Revelation 5, John hears of the Lion of Judah. But when he turns, he sees a Lamb, standing as though slain. This is the entire theological center of the book! Victory in Revelation does not come through superior fire power but through the blood of the Lamb and the faithful witness of the church.
- Empire thrives on spectacle: parades, weapons, intimidation, and crucifixions lining the roads. The Lord subverts that spectacle. John’s vision stages what looks like the ultimate military showdown and then refuses to narrate it as a conventional war. Why? Because the point is not that God wins an armed conflict. The point is that the beast’s power is hollow before the Lamb who was slain. God’s power through the crucified and risen Christ brings to nothing the principalities and powers of this evil age.

² Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) p. 302

³ Dennis Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb* (Phillipsburg, NJ, 2001) p. 237

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ian Paul, *Revelation*, TNTC (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018) p. 272

⁶ See Beale, Osborne, Mounce, Schreiner, Caird, Paul, Keener, Duvall, Johnson, etc.