

The Twitter Commentary on Revelation
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Revelation Chapter 16

Rev 16 (Introduction)—

This chapter is the third in a series of three numbered plague sequences; the seven seals (Rev 6:1-17 and 8:1), the seven trumpets (8:7 – 9:22 and 11:15-18), and “the seven last plagues” (Rev 16:1-21). All of these plagues bring suffering on the earth.

Many scholars of Revelation see these plagues as a series of divine interventions for the purpose of delivering God’s people and exposing the characters of those who oppose them (including Satan).

The operation of demonic forces is explicit in Rev 16:13-14. So the bowl-plagues could be seen as revelation rather than retribution. The onlooking universe gets to see what the universe would be like if Satan were in control.

The seals, the trumpets and the bowl-plagues all seem to be structured in terms of four and then three. The first four bowls affect nature, the last three concern the final battle to come.

The bowl-plagues are not designed to bring people to repentance (see Romans 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9), they expose the lack of repentance in those affected by them. They are a means of revelation rather than conversion.

Rev 16:1--

The “loud voice from the temple” occurs twice in Rev, here and in 16:17, where the voice also comes out from the throne. The voice here is also directly from God, because no one else but God is now able to enter the temple (Rev 15:8).

The word for temple here (Greek: *naos*) is the same as in Revelation 15:6 and 8, probably referring to the Most Holy Place. This demonstrates a clear connection between Revelation 15:5-8 and what follows in chapter 16.

Rev 16:2--

A grammatical detail ignored by the KJV is the fact that the first three bowls are poured “into” (Greek: *eis*) the earth, the sea and the rivers. The last four bowls are poured “upon” (Greek: *epi*) the sun, the throne of the Beast, the Euphrates and the air.

The bowls fall on the oppressors who sought to destroy the faithful in the end-time crisis (Rev 13:15-17; 16:5-6). They are the fulfillment of the third angel's warning to them. (Rev 14:9-11).

In Greek, "boil" (*helkos*) is the same word as the affliction that broke out during the plague on the Egyptians (LXX: *helkê*). There, as here, the boils affected only the unrighteous, not the righteous.

There is no strong figurative meaning for this plague that makes sense, so it may be that one of the consequences of being found among the opponents of God at the End is tremendously painful skin sores.

Rev 16:3--

This recalls the first of the Egyptian plagues (Exod 7:17-21). The strength of ancient Egypt was the Nile River. Turned into blood, the river was useless to them. Without water to drink, the human race in rebellion against God will not survive.

It became like the blood of a dead man. The word "became" (Greek: *egeneto*) is a prominent word for creation in Genesis 1. When God spoke things "came to be" (LXX: *egeneto*—Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, etc.).

Rev 16:4--

The basic description of this bowl-plague (Rev 16:4) is simple and minimal, building on the actions in the previous plague and interpreted by a pair of heavenly songs (Rev 16:5-7).

The transformation of water into blood is reminiscent of what happened at the wedding of Cana (John 2:1-11). The plagues are undoing God's gracious gift of nourishing water and turning into an image of death and destruction.

Rev 16:5-7--

These songs place all of the plagues in the context of the heavenly crisis concerning God's character and government (Rev 5:1-6).

The idea that angels are assigned various elements or territories may have been common in the ancient Jewish world (*Ethiopic Enoch* 66:1-2; Rev 4:6; 7:1; 14:18).

. . . **who is and who was** . . . This formula leaves out the "is to come" of Rev 1:4, 8 and 4:8. This is a clue that Revelation's story is approaching the End here. God is no longer coming because His arrival is at hand.

In the midst of a collapsing planet, with God being blamed for it all (Rev 16:9, 11, 21), we are assured that the God revealed in Jesus Christ can be trusted.

If the voice from the altar represents the cries for justice throughout human history (see Rev 6:9-11), the seven bowl-plagues are describing an end-time answer to those prayers.

The song of the angel of the waters, like the song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev 15:3-4), contains many possible allusions to the Old Testament (Psa 119:137; 145:17; Isa 49:26).

An allusion here to Isa 49:22-26 would underline the idea that the bowl-plagues are, at least in part, actions of God that deliver His end-time people.

Read in light of Jer 12:1, these songs highlight that the bowl-plagues are evidence God

is not the way people made Him out to be, Satan is the cause of everything we blamed God for.

The consequences of the evil actions mentioned in the first angel's song are called God's work in the sense that they are the natural outcomes of the moral framework that God has established in the universe.

Rev 16:8—

The word "men" here does not apply to the whole human race, but only to those who have the mark of the beast.

The antecedent of "it" is grammatically ambiguous. It is masculine, but so are both the sun and the bowl angel in Greek. As the nearer antecedent, the sun is more likely than the angel to be the active agent of the scorching.

Rev 16:9—

To give God glory is to speak well of Him and of His character. But the plagues do not cause the followers of the beast to glorify God. Instead, they do the opposite, they blaspheme or slander the name of God.

God has the authority to permit Satan's end-time activities or to bring them to a halt. So in that sense, God takes responsibility for the bowl-plagues, even when He does not activate them.

Rev 16:1-9 (Summary and Conclusion)--

The first four plagues affect the four parts of creation mentioned in Revelation 14:7c. The plagues are, therefore, a reversal of the original creation and God's purpose for it.

A symbolic reading of these plagues could be grounded in the covenant curses of the OT, which often use flowery, cosmic language to evoke the spiritual consequences that come as a result of sin.

Taken literally, the bowl-plagues represent the justice of God in allowing the unrighteous to reap what they have sown. Human rebellion reaches a place where the very survival of the planet is at stake.

Adventists look to the writings of Ellen White for clues to the meaning of difficult texts in Rev. In the case of the first four plagues, her most direct comments come in the book *The Great Controversy*, pages 627-634.

In her comments on this passage, Ellen White places most of her attention on the experience of the faithful during this time, something not addressed in Revelation 16:1-9 (GC 629-634).

Ellen White closes her words on the plagues on a very positive note. "Glorious will be the deliverance of those who have patiently waited for His coming and whose names are written in the book of life." GC 634.

Rev 16:10-11--

The first four plagues are poured out on human beings. The fifth plague, on the other hand, is poured out on the seat of the beast's system. The final three plagues trigger great

political/religious movements.

In the OT, darkness is often a symbol of calamity (Isa 59:9-10; Ezek 30:18; 32:7-8; Joel 2:2). The calamity here is the soon destruction of the beast's kingdom, signaled by the gathering darkness.

A throne is a place from which authority and power flow. This plague seem to be a challenge to the sea beast's assumed authority.

The phrase "God of heaven" is mentioned only twice in Rev, here and in 11:13. There some repented and gave God glory (Rev 16:9). Here they only blaspheme God, they consider Him the direct cause of their misery.

Rev 16:12-16 (Introduction)—

In order to understand the battle of Armageddon, you have to see it in the context of the whole passage, beginning with verse 12. That is an important pivotal verse.

Rev 16:12--

All of the other plagues so far have been catastrophic. The mere drying up of a single river does not seem all that significant in comparison. So this text must represent something more than a surface reading would suggest.

John's understanding of the Euphrates River in this text is explained in the immediate context, Rev 17. The many waters of Rev 17:1 are the Euphrates River (Jer 51:13), the river that flowed through the center of ancient Babylon.

Revelation 17:15 defines the Euphrates River for John. It represents the civil and political authorities of the whole world who support end-time Babylon, including all races, ethnic groups, people groups, and languages.

Babylon falls in Jer 50:33-37 when God undermines the resources that made Babylon a powerful ancient nation, its population, officials, wise men, false prophets, warriors, military equipment, and financial resources.

The Euphrates River in Jeremiah 50:33-38 becomes a symbol of all the resources that made ancient Babylon strong. The drying up of the Euphrates River makes the ruin of Babylon possible.

In Isa 44:24 – 45:4 God names the one who dries up the Euphrates River and delivers Israel from Babylon (Cyrus). He will also begin the restoration of Jerusalem and its temple. This prophecy was fulfilled in history.

The OT story of Babylon's fall becomes the subtext for everything taking place within Rev 15-22. That story includes a messiah (Cyrus), the drying up of the river, the fall of Babylon, the deliverance of Israel, and a new Jerusalem.

The third key term in this verse is "the kings from the rising of the sun." This term is best explained with reference to the rest of the New Testament.

"Sunrise" in the NT can be directional (east), but it is also a symbolic reference to Jesus Christ, either at his First (Luke 1:78) or Second Advent (Matt 24:27).

The kings from the rising of the sun, from the east, are related to Christ, rather than being a subset of the kings of the world. The kings come from the east just as Jesus comes from the east at the second coming (Matt 24:27; Rev 7:2).

In John's day, the Euphrates River was roughly the border between the Roman Empire and the Parthian Empire to the east. But the message of Rev is more spiritual than simply a commentary on events that were current at that time.

Why "kings" rather than "king" here if the reference is to Cyrus as a type of Christ? Cyrus led an alliance of at least two major powers, Media (Darius) and Persia (Cyrus). Also Jesus, the end-time Cyrus, is "king of kings" (Rev 17:14).

The titles "called, chosen and faithful" (Rev 17:14) are consistently used in the New Testament with reference to the people of God (Rom 1:6-7; 1 Cor 1:2; 1 Pet 2:9). The final battle is fought on earth by the Lamb and His earthly followers.

Rev 16:12 (Summary)--

In the last days of earth's history there will be a world-wide alliance of the faithful. They are named by many names in Rev: the kings of the east, those who are with the Lamb, the remnant, the 144,000, the saints, etc.

The meaning of this verse is clarified by attention to the context (Rev 17), the OT background and the NT background.

Rev 16:13-16 (Introduction)—

In Rev 16:13-14, the narrative steps back from 16:12 to describe how Satan prepared to meet this spiritual attack on his kingdom. These verses sum up the forces arrayed against Christ and His people in the final crisis.

Rev 16:13--

The dragon, the beast and the false prophet is a reference to the unholy trinity of Revelation 13; the dragon, the sea beast and the land beast.

The three characters in this verse all have acted in history, but will also have a role in the final battle of earth's history.

Ellen White's most direct exposition of Revelation 16:13-14 is found in GC 561-562. She supports the idea of satanic involvement in the run-up to the sixth plague, but doesn't define the three characters that make up the unholy trinity.

While GC 588 is not a clear allusion to this text, it is certainly a possible one, with its reference to a "threefold union" at the end of history participating in worldwide deception.

If GC 588 is an intentional allusion to Rev 16:13-14, Ellen White seems to equate the dragon with spiritualism, the beast with "the Roman power" (to her the Papacy), and the false prophet with Protestant America.

In Rev 16-19, the end-time story of force and deception builds on the foundation laid in Rev 12-14.

In Rev, the mouth is a weapon in the battle between good and evil. The great battles of Rev are not primarily military, they are concerned with truth and lies about the character and government of God.

The term "Babylon" is not used in the sixth bowl, but it is again anticipated in the language here (see Rev 18:2). So the three parts of Babylon in 16:19 likely refer to the dragon, beast and false prophet of this verse.

This verse contains the only reference to frogs in the entire NT. It is part of the Exodus plague imagery running throughout the seven bowl plagues.

The plague of frogs involved the last deception in the Exodus story. This passage describes the last deception of earth's future history.

Rev 16:14--

The unclean frogs are here defined as the spirits of demons. They are the demonic counterpart to the three angels of Revelation 14:6-12.

The word "signs" describes Jesus' miracles in John (2:11, 23; 3:2, etc.). These "signs" were evidence that Jesus was God. But here these signs are "evidence" that the counterfeit trinity is the true God.

The purpose of the deception is to persuade the rulers of the world to give homage to the unholy trinity rather than the true trinity. The three frogs unify the kings so that their power can be placed in the service of end-time Babylon.

The phrase "kings of the whole inhabited world" is parallel in meaning to the Euphrates River (Rev 16:12; 17:1, 15). So this verse sets the stage for Rev 17:1-3, where Babylon rides the beast.

The Greek word translated "battle" is standard military language that is used for spiritual purposes in the NT (Eph 6:10-17; 2 Cor 10:33-5).

Looking back on Rev 13-14, there are two sets of angelic messengers being presented to the world; the three angels of Rev 14:6-7, and the three demonic frogs (Rev 16:14).

The sixth trumpet (Rev 9:13-21) also combines military and demonic language with a reference to the Euphrates River. So the sixth trumpet also depicts the gathering of satanic forces for the end-time battle of Armageddon.

Verbal and thematic parallels suggest a clear allusion to this passage in GC 624.

In GC 624, the crowning act of the deception in this passage is Satan's personation of the Second Coming of Christ.

Rev 16:13-14 (Conclusion)—

This passage is one of four passages in the New Testament dealing with the end-time deception. The other three are Matt 24:24-27, 2 Thess 2:8-12, and Rev 13:13-14.

Rev 16:15--

In this verse there is an abrupt change of pace in the midst of all the evil activity, an appeal to faithfulness in the final crisis.

The appeal here is framed in the language of readiness for the Second Coming of Jesus (Rev 3:3, 18; 1 Thess 5:1-3; Matt 24:42-44; Luke 21:34-36).

In this analogy the outer garment becomes the blanket under which one sleeps. But in sleeping one is not prepared for the garment/blanket to be snatched away.

In Matt 24 and 25, watchfulness is a central theme (Matt 24:42, 48-50; 25:13). Jesus uses a series of parables to define “watching” as obedience to the words of Jesus while one waits for His return.

There is a powerful allusion here to the letter to the church of Laodicea (Rev 3:17-18). There are four major words that are found together in the Bible only in this verse and the Laodicean message.

The readers of Rev are to exercise watchfulness and discernment, fortified with the words of Jesus and the New Testament admonitions to be ready for the Second Coming.

Rev 16:16--

Verse 16 continues the action of verse 14, but switches from the plural, “they gathered”, to the singular “he gathered.” One solution is that “spirits” could be the implied neuter plural subject of the verb in verse 16.

The most likely antecedent for the “he” in this verse is either “God” as in “God Almighty (Rev 16:14) or the dragon (Rev 16:13). The nearest antecedent is God.

Behind the activity of Satan and his angels is the permissive will of God, who allows Satan to demonstrate his character to the universe through his actions in the final conflict (see also Rev 17:17; 2 Thess 2:11).

How do you get from Armageddon to Har-Magedon? Har-Magedon begins with the Greek letter alpha, but includes a breathing mark that adds the “h” sound at the beginning of the word. It is rooted in the Hebrew.

“Har” means “mountain” in Hebrew and “mageddon” is uncertain, but likely refers to the northern Israelite city “Megiddo” (see the Greek and Hebrew of Joshua 12:22, Judges 1:27, 2 Kings 9:27 and 2 Chronicles 35:22).

While there is no mountain in the world named Megiddo, the mountain overlooking the ancient city is named Mount Carmel. The “mountain of Megiddo” suggests an end-time replay of the Mount Carmel showdown.

This gathering of evil forces is prior to the drying up of the Euphrates in 16:12. These forces are gathered in the sixth plague (Rev 16:13-14, 16), they are destroyed in the seventh (Rev 16:17-21).

Rev 16:16 (Spiritual Lessons)--

In Rev the Mount Carmel fire falls on the wrong altar (Rev 13:13-14). It is an act of deception. To endure such a strong deception, believers must be thoroughly grounded in the Scriptures.

Rev 16:16 (Excursis on the Meaning of Armageddon)—

Since Har-Magedon (Greek: *Harmagedôn*) appears only once in the Bible, all the tools of

exegesis in the context of the whole Bible will be needed to understand this concept.

“*Magedôn*” is not a word you can find in a Hebrew dictionary. However, it can be found in many Greek translations of the Hebrew Old Testament, the best known of which is the Septuagint (LXX).

In Josh 12:21 and Judg 1:27 *magedôn* is the Greek word chosen to translate the Hebrew word for the city of Megiddo.

In 2 Chr 35:22 *magedôn* again translates the Hebrew word for Megiddo, but this time it is the “valley” (KJV, NKJV) or the “plain” (ESV, NIV, RSV, NASB) of Megiddo.

What Joshua 12:21, Judges 1:27 and 2 Chronicles 35:22 all have in common is that the Greek *Magedon*, with one “d,” consistently translated the Hebrew *Megiddô*, with two “d”s.

In the Hebrew a double letter is usually signified by a little dot, but the dot is not always placed in the text. Perhaps the translators of the LXX worked from Hebrew texts that didn’t have the dot.

In 2 Kings 9:27 the LXX actually translates *Megiddô* with a double “d,” as *Mageddôn*! This further confirms that the English term Armageddon seems to be based on the concept “Mountain of Megiddo.”

The most natural understanding of *harmagedôn* in Rev 16:16 is “Mountain of Megiddo.” But there is no mountain in the world named Megiddo, so many are reluctant to take the most obvious reading.

In the Old Testament passages related to the end of the world, the final battle of earth’s history is never described as happening at Megiddo, the final battle is always around Jerusalem (Zech 12:1-9; 14:1-15; Joel 3:12-16; Dan 11:40-45).

When you look at the scholarly literature on Armageddon, there are seven major views on the meaning of Armageddon. See “What is Armageddon?” on the Armageddon web site for the details: www.thebattleofarmageddon.com.

Most scholars have settled on one of two interpretations; 1) “mountain of Megiddo,” or 2) some form of the “mountain of assembly” interpretation (Isa 14:12-15; 2 Thess 2:4). Which of the two is more likely?

The main arguments against the “Mountain of Megiddo” interpretation of Armageddon are arguments from silence, usually not the most reliable kinds of arguments.

Major battles in ancient Israel were most commonly fought around Jerusalem or in the neighborhood of Megiddo. I believe both locations are important for understanding Rev.

It seems to me that the Mount Carmel interpretation best explains the final battle in Revelation. The story of Elijah on Mount Carmel is like a background story to the whole account from Revelation 13 to Revelation 19.

Calling fire down from heaven to earth in the context of challenges to the identity of God (Rev 13:13-14) is another allusion to the Mount Carmel event in Rev.

In the end-time showdown, the fire falls on the wrong altar. Thus the Battle of Armageddon will include a major deceptive action on the part of Satan and his earthly supporters.

On the original Mount Carmel it was the priests of Baal who played the role of false prophets. That role in the Battle of Armageddon is played by the land beast of Rev 13.

The sixth bowl plague itself is not the Battle of Armageddon, it is the gathering of forces for that battle. The outcome of the battle is the fall of Babylon (Rev 16:19; 17:12-17 and chapter 18 as a whole).

The gathering of the kings of the world by the three unclean spirits (Rev 16:13-14) is the demonic counterpart to the gathering call of the three angels of Rev 14:6-11, who represent the followers of the Lamb.

The battle of Armageddon serves as the climax of the spiritual battle over worship outlined in chapters 13 and 14 (Rev 13:4, 8, 12, 15; 14:7, 9, 11).

Rev 16:17--

Eph 2:2 describes Satan as the “prince of the power of the air.” The air is described as Satan’s residence or headquarters.

The voice comes from the throne, which is in the temple. The throne within the temple is the governing center of the universe.

In this context, “It is done!” announces the final victory over Satan and the conclusion of history. In verse 17 the seventh plague is announced. In verses 18-21 the plague is carried out.

Rev 16:18--

In Rev, flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and earthquake are phenomena that are consistently associated with the throne of God (4:5; 8:5; and 11:19, cf. Exod 19:16).

Rev 16:19—

The earthquake of Rev 16:18 has its most direct effect on the “great city”, Babylon (cf. Rev 17:18 and 18:10). The three parts of Babylon are the dragon, beast and false prophet of Rev 16:13.

This reference to Babylon looks back to chapter 14:8, but it much more looks forward. Babylon is at the heart of everything that happens in chapters 17 (1-5) and 18 (especially 5-6).

God’s remembrance is not always negative (Acts 10:31; Psa 66:3-6; 2 Chr 20:5-24). God’s remembering is in proportion to the response or lack of it on the part of the human race.

Rev 16:20-21--

The term “talent” represented weights around the Greco-Roman world from 50 to 130 pounds in British/American measurements today (25 to 60 kilograms). Translations generally play it safe by saying “around 100 pounds.”

In the OT, whether the hailstones are a direct action of God or a general consequence of sin, they are considered judgments from God.

The unrepentant state of the wicked here is in contrast with the survivors of the earthquake in Rev 11:13. Probation is truly closed and the plagues have sorted the saints out from among the unrighteous who persist in cursing God.

Rev 16:12-21 (Summary)—

There are two sets of forces arrayed against the end-time “saints,” 1) the united civil-secular-political powers of the world and 2) a world-wide confederacy of religion.

Seeing Armageddon as a spiritual battle is consistent with both the evidence of this passage (Rev 16:15) and the wider perspective of the New Testament (2 Cor 10:3-5; Eph 6:10-17).

The battle of Armageddon is ultimately a battle for the mind--to harness the thoughts on the real priorities of life. The battle of Armageddon is about the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual allegiance of everyone on earth.

Rev 16:12-21 (Spiritual Lessons)—

Spiritual discernment and clarity of mind are among the chief qualities of God's end-time people. They are result of good physical and mental health applied to a lifetime of careful scripture study and prayer.

When godly people use force to gain the upper hand in this world, Satan wins even if his forces seem defeated. On the surface, God wins the victory, in reality, His character is once more dragged through the mud.