

Revelation Chapters 15 and 16 - John Karmelich

1. This lesson is called "The Point of No Return".
 - a) Hopefully, that won't inspire you to not return to these studies. ☺
 - b) We are now at a point in Revelation where it is too late for people to be saved.
 - c) For those who rebelled against God, this is the point of no return.
 - d) This lesson is the "heaviest" of the Revelation lessons. The good news is it goes downhill from here, although Chapters 17 and 18 still deal with some specific judgments.
2. Let me summarize where we are in Revelation and come back to this title:
 - a) Chapter 15 is a short 8-verse chapter. It is the "preparation" of the heavy judgment described in Chapter 16. It is God's final judgment of the world.
 - b) The "end-time judgment" of the world started back in Chapter 6. It began with a series of judgments called the "seven seals". A judgment is a specific punishment on the world. The punishment is on nonbelievers for failing to trust in Jesus as payment for their sins.
 - i) The judgment process started in Chapter 6. There were seven seals removed from a scroll. After each seal was removed, some sort of judgment happened on earth.
 - ii) The seventh and final seal judgment separated into seven "subparts". This was called the seven "trumpet" judgments. Each of these judgments started with an angel blowing a trumpet. This was described back in Chapters 8 and 9.
 - iii) The seventh angel with the seventh trumpet didn't happen until Chapter 11.
 - iv) We've had a break from the judgment aspect to describe the major characters in Revelation. From Chapters 11-14 have been descriptions of angelic and demonic beings as well as key figures who are saved and unsaved.
 - v) In Chapter 15, the break is over. ☺ We're now back to judgment.
 - vi) The seventh "trumpet" judgment from Chapter 11 is now breaking into "seven subparts" just like the seventh seal-judgment broke into seven "trumpet" subparts.
 - vii) The good news is there are no more subparts. ☺ God is ending the great destruction process here in Chapter 16.
 - viii) In case you haven't noticed, Revelation has 22 chapters. After Chapter 16, we get two chapters that fill in some of the details of this final judgment. More on that in the next lesson. Beginning in Chapter 19, is the details of Jesus' return.
 - c) Which leads us here to Chapter 15: We have seven final judgments called "bowl" judgments. The Greek work refers to a narrow flat bowl, with just a small rim. The idea is whatever "bad stuff" is in these bowls can be poured out quickly and completely.
 - i) Think of it this way: The first set of judgments were called the "seven seals". This is when God "unraveled" or "revealed" his plans on mankind.
 - ii) The second set of judgments were called the "seven trumpets". A trumpet is used to make an announcement. It is to get everyone's attention. If you recall in those chapters, the damage was in "thirds", where a "third of this or that" was harmed or killed. The idea was to get people's attention and see who would repent.
 - iii) The third and final set of judgments is called the "bowl judgments". The idea is judgment is being poured out of a narrow saucer-bowl and is complete.
 - a) The idea of this final set of bowls is that it is complete. There are no more warnings. It is a "point of no return".
3. OK John, I get the idea that God is wiping out the unsaved. I get the idea that some are saved and there is a point where it is too late. Why should I care? ☺
 - a) First, read these chapters and think, "This could be you (or me)". This would have been our fate. One has to never stop praising God for our salvation. Remember what it is we are being saved from as one reads this chapter.

- b) Next, notice this verse near the end of Chapter 16: "Men 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." (Revelation 16:10b-11, NIV)
- i) This verse says in effect that despite all of the bad things happening to the earth, people still refuse to turn to God.
 - ii) I've learned that "pain" does not get people to turn to God over the long run. Some may cry out for relief, but eventually those people go back to their old ways. What "pain" does do is amplify how one feels about God. In other words, if one trusts in God, that person will turn and trust in God even more so in such times. The opposite is true with those who don't want to turn to God.
 - iii) What does get people to turn to God? His grace and His grace alone. I used to pray for God to "get people" (i.e., some negative pain) in order for them to turn to God. I've changed. Now I pray that God's grace comes in their lives. I pray for their hearts to be open to the truth. It has to start with God's grace.
- c) There is a concept in Christianity that "vengeance" belongs to God and not to us.
- i) This is not about self-defense or even putting bad people in jail. Those are separate issues. I'm talking about the actual punishment of people for their non-belief in God. Those who mock God or turn from Him in their lifestyle are to be punished by God and not by anyone else.
 - ii) Paul wrote, "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. (Romans 12:19 NIV; including Paul's quote of Deuteronomy 32:35).
 - iii) What about Christian martyr's who have been killed through the last 2,000 years? They don't get judgment of the Great Tribulation. Why do those murderers suffer any less than those in this time frame? The truth is those murderers are in hell. For all we know, they do suffer an equal fate. The point of these two chapters is to show those that rebel against God in the Great Tribulation do lose the war. The other point is that it is God Himself who does the "judging". In other words, there is no Christian army overcoming the antichrist in this time era.
- d) On this happy, note, let's start on with Chapter 15. ☺
4. Chapter 15, Verse 1: I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues--last, because with them God's wrath is completed.
- a) If you recall from the introduction, we had lots of "subparts" to God's judgment on the earth. The seven "seal-judgments" broke in to seven "subparts" which is the seven "trumpet" judgments, which then become the seven "subparts" which are the seven bowl judgments of Chapter 16.
 - i) Getting tired of judgments? ☺ So is God. Verse 1 says, "God's wrath is complete".
 - b) Back when I was describing the earlier judgments, I made the comparison to a bartender yelling out "last call". It's a sales gimmick to get people to buy a drink before the bartender closes up shop for the night. The earlier judgments were God's "last call". God "drags out" the judgment process as long as possible to see who would repent. At the same time there has to be a point of no return, or else no one would take the warnings seriously. If one is making a threat, one has to back it up. That is Chapters 15 and 16.
 - c) Let's read this verse in context of the last chapter:
 - i) Chapter 14 ended with two "harvestings". In Chapter 14, Verses 14-16, one group was "reaped" and in Verses 18-20, another group was reaped.
 - ii) The text is not blunt about this, but one gets the impression that the first "harvesting" is the saved people being taken to heaven and the second group is a judgment on some sort of great battle that takes place on earth.
 - iii) My point here is Chapter 15, Verse 1, is not a direct continuation of Chapter 14.

- d) The last part of Chapter 14 gave an overview of the "harvest and judgment" of the earth.
 - i) Beginning here in Chapter 15, we get more details.
 - e) Here in Verse 1, John looked to heaven and saw seven angels coming out of heaven with seven last plagues.
 - i) I wonder how John understood all of this. Did the plagues in the bowls have big "do not touch" warning labels? ☺ The truth is God "revealed" the key information to John and we have to trust in what is written.
 - ii) The point of this verse is the final vengeance sequence is God-orchestrated.
5. Verse 2: And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God.
- a) In Verse 2, John takes his focus off of the judgments and onto other things in heaven.
 - b) The first is a "sea of glass mixed with fire".
 - i) Notice right before that phrase, it says, "looked like". This is a word-picture. In a world as we know it, one cannot stand on a glass platform which is on fire.
 - ii) To understand this, we have to back to Chapter 4. In Chapter 4, Verse 6, God's throne was described as a sea of glass. As I've stated throughout Revelation, God's throne room is similar in design to the tabernacle as described in Exodus (See Hebrews 8:5). One of the pieces of furniture in that tabernacle is a large "bathtub" for washing. The idea of God's throne room is we no longer need washing as we are cleansed by the blood of Jesus. In God's throne room, instead of washing, we are now "standing on the tub" as that water is now a sea of glass.
 - iii) If all of this sounds weird, remember one has to "think Jewish" to understand much of Revelation. In Jewish thought, one must cleanse him or herself to approach God. The Christian equivalent is the confession of sin. Once we get to heaven, there is no more sin to deal with. We can now stand on a sea of glass, as opposed to having to wash anymore.
 - c) Next, this sea of glass is mixed with fire. "Fire" in the bible is associated with purification from judgment. For example, silver is heated to get rid of impurities. The idea here is those who are saved have been "purified" by God and can now stand on this glass.
 - i) Here is a case where I disagree with the NIV translation. The King James says these people are standing "on" the sea. The NIV says "besides" the sea. The Greek word can be translated either way, but "on" fits the word picture better.
 - ii) My point is these saved people are standing "on" this sea of glass.
 - d) Now let's talk about who are these people: The text says, "Those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name ".
 - i) In other words, this "group" is those who are saved out of the Great Tribulation.
 - ii) If you recall from the last lesson, there was two "harvestings". I argued that the first of the two "harvestings" were those who were saved. It is a debated topic as it is not bluntly stated in the text. My support for this argument is here in Verse 2. The saved people from the Great Tribulation are now in heaven.
 - iii) In other words, "The waiting game is over". Those who are saved are now in heaven. It is now judgment time. There are no more warnings to those on earth.
 - e) The final sentence of Verse 2 says, "They held harps given them by God".
 - i) I sort of vision this greeting line with God saying, "Hello, welcome to heaven. Here's your harp. Now go down the hall for your harp lessons. Next!" ☺
 - ii) I trust in the fact that God knows what is best for us. If He feels we need to have "harps" to praise Him, I'll trust in that fact. ☺
 - iii) The true point is that we spend a lot of time in heaven praising God. Harps are associated in the Old Testament as a key musical instrument in praise.

6. Verse 3: and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. ⁴ Who will not fear you, O 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."
- a) The good news is that prior to all the "heavy" judgments of Chapter 16, we get the "good news" of those who are saved out of the Tribulation.
 - b) The first thing we read about this group is they are all assigned a harp and then sing praise songs.
 - c) Verse 3 says two songs are sung: "The song of Moses... and the song of the Lamb".
 - i) The lyrics to the "Song of Moses" are not stated.
 - ii) Here in Chapter 15, Verses 3 and 4 are the lyrics to the "Song of the Lamb".
 - d) Let's discuss the first song, which is "The Song of Moses, the servant of God".
 - i) Back in Exodus 15, there is a chapter-long song. Moses wrote it for the Israelites to sing after they got out of Egypt.
 - ii) The point of that song is to sing of their redemption. In the Passover, (Exodus 12) God said He would kill all firstborn sons unless they had the blood of the lamb on the doorposts. The point is the Israelites were spared judgment not because they were better people than the Egyptians, but they trusted in God and trusted in that blood of the lamb for their redemption.
 - iii) Here in the Great Tribulation, some people are saved not because they are better people, but because they trusted in the blood of the Lamb. That is why it is appropriate that the song from Exodus 15 is emphasized here.
 - e) The second song is the one listed in Verses 3-4.
 - i) It is a new tune. We don't know the music, just the lyrics.
 - ii) Notice who is not being praised in this song: The redeemed. For example, you don't read any lyrics of this song, saying, "By our willpower we overcame the temptation to put a 666 on our hands and Lord, look how wonderful we are!" ☺
 - iii) The lyrics focus on God. The word "You" is used over and over again in this song, referring to God Himself. That is the great lesson about the purpose of salvation: Giving God the glory. Our focus is to be on God and not ourselves.
 - f) Notice this group of redeemed people focus their prayers on God for their salvation.
 - i) The prayer also states some of the key facts of Revelation. This includes the line that "all nations will come and worship before You".
 - ii) As part of worship, it's always a good idea every now and then to pray "future promises" as if it is already a done deal. Revelation is full of future predictions that God says will come true one day. We have to count on those promises. We need to proclaim those promises. This is not to remind God about His promises, but to remind us of what the future will hold. In the end, God' wins. Pray that!
 - iii) A purpose of praise songs is to remind us of God's attributes. God is not some sort of shallow being that needs praise. It is for our benefit so that we can be reminded who God is and what He has accomplished.
 - g) Meanwhile, here comes the judgments: ☺
7. Verse 5: After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened. ⁶ Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. ⁷ Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever.
- a) Here begins the "process" of the seven final plagues on earth. They are called the "bowl judgments" by bible scholars as each judgment is poured out from a bowl.

- b) Notice that Revelation is emphasizing the "ritual" prior to the actual judgment. In other words the text does not just say, "Then all of sudden, these final judgments began". Instead, we get a glimpse into the ritual process leading up to this judgment.
 - c) Let's describe some of the word pictures and then get into the "why" question.
 - i) The temple in heaven is where God's throne is. Here it is called "The tabernacle of the Testimony". Again, God's throne room is similar in design to the tabernacle structure in Exodus. The most important piece of furniture in that tabernacle was a box called the "ark of the testimony". It represented God's presence. The point of saying "The tabernacle of the Testimony" here in Revelation is to comprehend that this final set of judgment is God-ordained and comes from God Himself. It is a "very Jewish way" of saying God Himself is ordaining this final judgment.
 - ii) Verse 6 says that seven angels had these seven final plagues. The idea is a separate angel is assigned each of the final seven plagues. I sort of picture each angel yelling, "Stand back, this stuff is lethal". I picture smoke rising out of each bowl and angels carrying it like they were carrying toxic waste. ☺
 - iii) Verse 6 says the angels were dressed in clean linens with golden sashes around their waste. My first thought was, angels can get dressed? ☺ Focusing on the text, the point is "clean linens" represent "purity". The priests in the Exodus tabernacle were always required to wear only pure linens. The fabric linen allows less sweat and one's body is "cleaner". Thus, the reference to purity.
 - iv) Golden sashes around the waste are a sign of authority as "priests". The idea is these angels were doing their "duties" that God assigned to them.
 - d) Let's get back to the "why" question: Why would God give us these ritual details?
 - i) Part of the reason is for us to understand that God does ordain the "judging". There is this false view of God that He loves people "just as we are" and all people get to go to heaven even if we reject His standards for our lives.
 - ii) Next, God wants to understand there is a "point of no return". This eight-verse chapter shows the redeemed from the Great Tribulation are in heaven prior to the final set of judgments listed in the next chapter. God is patient with us and waits a long time to see who will turn to Him. There is a point where it is "too late" and we are watching that point here in Revelation.
 - iii) How does this apply to us today? God "designed" this end time scenario so that no one knows when it is going to happen. That's the idea. The idea is to keep Christians "on our toes" as we don't know the time frame of Jesus return. Reading this should be motivational factor to reach out to others. God knows who is saved and who is not. We don't. Therefore, God calls us to reach us to others and get as many people as possible saved prior to a "point of no return".
8. Verse 8: 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.
- a) Whenever you see the word "smoke" in the bible, it is usually right before some major judgment is about to occur. When one sees smoke in a forest, it usually means some sort of fire is about to happen. The word picture here is the "smoke of God's fire" is rising up to fill the temple before the actual final set of judgments begins.
 - b) The text says "no one could enter the temple (paraphrasing) until this judgment is over".
 - i) Why would God "shut the door" to heaven at this point? Some possibilities:
 - a) Does this mean no one "new" can get saved at this point? Possibly
 - b) Does this mean those in heaven couldn't enter God's Temple as they had to watch the earth judgment process? Possibly.
 - ii) Sometimes one has to just accept the text at face value. It means God has to focus on the final judgment on earth and there is no other "activity" at this time. My personal view is that God regrets doing this. He desires that all people be saved.

- iii) At the same time, God cannot compromise His standards. Like I said earlier, God's threats cannot be taken seriously unless God was willing to take "full action" at some point. There has to be a point of no return.
- 9. Chapter 16, Verse 1: Then I heard 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) In other words, God is saying, "OK folks, Show time! I've done all I could to get people to repent, and some have still refused. Let's get the demolition ball rolling." ☺
- 10. Verse 2: The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.
 - a) One thing to understand about the judgments of this chapter is that it is not a "let's just harm everybody equally all at once type of judgments". Each judgment is designed for a purpose. If you get that concept, the chapter will make more sense.
 - b) Verse 2 is the first of the seven final judgments. This judgment is on those who had the mark of the beast and those who "worshipped his image".
 - i) In other words, let's say you didn't have this mark on your right hand or forearm as prescribed back in Chapter 13. On the other hand, you still worshipped the antichrist (i.e., fully trusted in him and not God) for your life. You did this by paying homage to his statue. That is the concept here in Verse 2.
 - ii) The point is either way, you're going to get it. ☺
 - c) Now the punishment itself: One gets painful sores. Doctors will tell you that when one gets boils or sores on the skin, it is an outward sign of an inward problem. I can't think of a better "punishment" for those that worship the antichrist. They took a mark as a "sign" of their rebellion against God.
 - i) The punishment is "appropriate" in that God is saying in effect, "I told you not to take the mark. I sent angels to you warn you against this in Chapter 14! You still took that mark anyway. Now, you are "infected" and you will suffer the signs of an infection!"
 - ii) Having sores on one's skin gets one to focus on one's skin. It makes people think about the mark of the beast. The idea is gets the guilty to focus on their sins.
 - d) One of the things to get out of Revelation 16 is God is going to punish people in a way that is "appropriate" for what they did. It is not about getting people to repent. It is too late for that. God wants them to realize they are getting what they deserve.
- 11. Verse 3: The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.
 - a) In this second "bowl" judgment, it was poured out on the sea, and all sea life died.
 - b) I have to admit, I wondered, "What did fish do to deserve this punishment? Did sardines and whales have a "666' tattoo on their fins? ☺ Why make them suffer? Understand that the punishment is focusing on people. Innocent animal life has always suffered due to the sins of mankind. Romans 8:22 states that all of creation "groans" in effect, due to sin.
 - c) Notice the word "sea". In the bible, the word "sea" is associated with the Mediterranean Sea. Remember that John's "world" was the Roman Empire, which stretched around the Mediterranean Sea. For those of us who see all of this as a single future event, the antichrist leads a world-empire whose territory is similar to that of the Roman Empire.
 - i) By the way, many people argue that all the "judgment" aspects of Revelation are historical to us and describe the history of mankind since Jesus. I've always had a tough time with that view. There has never been a time in history when all sea life has died. That is another reason I take all of this as a future event.
 - d) Back to the "punish the sea" question: Back in Chapter 8, we had the seven "trumpet" judgments". In Verses 8-9, the second of those judgments were on the sea. In those verses, the "sea" was judged and one third of the creatures died.

- i) A purpose of those trumpet judgments back in Chapter 8 were God firing "warning shots" to the world to repent. In other words, God didn't wipe out everybody, but caused enough damage in hopes that everyone else would repent.
 - ii) Now consider the fact that in Chapter 8, one third of the sea creatures died. If that were a "warning", it wouldn't carry any credibility unless there was a "point of no return". Thus, part of the final judgment is a complete sea destruction.
 - e) As to why the sea was punished, the answer is to connect Verse 3 with Verse 6:
 - i) Verse 3 says the sea "turned to blood".
 - ii) Verse 6 says, "For they (unbelievers) have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you (God) have given them blood to drink as they deserve."
 - iii) The point is God is saying in effect, "You shed the blood of those who followed Me. You want blood? I'll give you blood. Look at all the waters around You!" The punishment is what these people "deserved". God wanted those who rebelled against Him to see "blood" everywhere and realize what they have done.
12. Verse 4: The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.
- a) In Verse 3, the focus was on seawater. Now in Verse 4, it's the "fresh water's" turn.
 - b) A point is those on earth couldn't look for any source of water for protection.
 - c) You can't read these two punishments and not think about the plagues on Egypt.
 - i) In Exodus Chapter 7, part of the 10 plagues that God threw on Egypt included turning the Nile River into blood. In that plague, the fish also died. The Egyptians worshipped the Nile River as a "god". They also refused to touch blood as it was sacred. God showed his superiority over their gods by those plagues.
 - ii) Again, the purpose of this "blood judgment" is for people to connect the fact that this is "payback time" for the blood of the martyrs. God wants the unrepentant to see the connection and He puts blood everywhere.
 - d) Like the last plague on the sea, this is a "warning fulfillment":
 - i) In chapter 8, one of the plagues harmed a third of the sea. (Rev. 8:8-9).
 - ii) Here in chapter 16, everything in the sea died. (Rev. 16:3).
 - iii) In chapter 8, a plague harmed one third of the fresh water sources. (Rev. 8:10).
 - iv) Here in chapter 16, everything in the springs and rivers died. (Rev. 16:4).
 - v) Again, the idea is if chapter 8 was a "warning", that warning does not have any validity unless God was willing to "go all the way with punishment".
13. Verse 5: Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; ⁶ for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve."
- a) In Verses 5 and 6, we get a short break from the final plagues so an angel can praise God for this judgment.
 - b) First, notice who is speaking: "The angel in charge of the waters".
 - i) Some have taken this to mean that there is a special angel in charge of the waters. As if this angel has had this assignment all of his existence.
 - ii) A better way of looking at this is simply the fact that the angel God told to go harm the fresh water sources is the same angel who stops to praise God. It is John saying in effect, "Hey, you know that angel who damaged the fresh water sources? That angel took time out of his assignment to sing a praise tune!"
 - iii) These verses are another indication that angels are not some "mindless-robots" that just do exactly what is told. I think this one took time to give God praise.
 - c) So, what is the purpose of this verse? Why should we care that this angel took the time to praise God, for wiping out the water sources?
 - i) First, I get the impression that this water source is still "drinkable". In other words, it looks like blood and may even taste like blood. It was still "drinkable".

- ii) People still water to survive. In other words, we don't read of everyone on earth dying of thirst.
 - iii) Again, the point is this "water to blood" is designed to be "appropriate judgment". The idea is earlier in Revelation, Christians will be killed (I suspect in the millions). It is God saying in effect, "You want blood? I'll give you blood!" In other words, God wanted the guilty to focus on their evil deeds. God won't let people get away with sin in the long run. God only makes people focus on what they did.
 - iv) The application to us is when we see evil is to understand what is in store for those who commit such acts. We may not see them punished, but God does.
 - a) "When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me, till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny." (Psalm 73: 16-17 NIV)
 - b) Does this mean when someone is attacking us we should not defend ourselves? No. The point of these verses is to understand that people don't get away with sin, not now, not ever.
 - c) Does this mean we shouldn't put bad people in jail? No. Sins against society need to be paid. Sometimes there are corrupt governments in charge and the "law" can't help us. I get the impression the Great Tribulation is one of those periods. During such times, one has to trust in God not only for salvation, but also for vengeance.
 - v) The idea is not that God wants to hurt people. The idea is that God loves us too much to let our enemies get away with this.
14. Verse 7: And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments."
- a) In Verse 7, we had a "response" to the angel's praise. It is "somebody" in heaven agreeing with the angel's prayer of the last two verses.
 - b) The more I read Revelation, the more I realize no one can praise God without somebody else joining in! ☺ One gets the impression that when we get to heaven we're going to spend a lot of time praising God as just to join in and agree with others.
15. Verse 8: The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire.⁹ They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.
- a) Let's suppose you're skin was burning where your "666" tattoo was located. ☺ Now suppose you saw the sea turn to blood and fresh water turn to blood. Now suppose something happened to the sun so that the heat intensified.
 - i) My point here, is by now, I'd be screaming "uncle" and saying, "OK God, I give up. You win. What do I have to do?"
 - ii) Now look at Verse 9: "they cursed the name of God who had control...plagues".
 - iii) The point is those on earth understood that God was behind it and still refused to do anything about it.
 - b) As to the plague itself, God is "turning the heat up". The water supply was damaged with the last plague and now the world is experiencing a severe heat wave.
 - i) By the way, the commentaries are full of theories on the "how" issue. People speculate about chemicals in the water that make it turn red and a nuclear bomb causes changes in the atmosphere that causes this heat. Personally, I don't worry too much about the "how" issue. If "God is god", He can do anything.
 - ii) What is important to me is the "why" issue. Why would God pick the specific punishment of turning up the heat? All the text says is that people cursed God because of that heat. It probably also has something to do with the sixth plague coming up, where God wanted the Euphrates River to dry up. Beyond that, it is speculation as to why God picked this specific plague.

- c) Let's talk about "why" people refused to repent during this time frame.
 - i) Adversity is not enough to get people to turn to God. What adversity does is "amplify" what one already believes. If one already believes in God, one turns to that God even the more so during rough times. The same is true for those who refuse to turn to God. They get "even more stubborn" during such pain.
 - ii) One wonders if a "point of no return" includes a mental attitude of such. One gets the impression this is a point in time where it is too late to repent. Here, we also get the idea that God turns from some people as they simply refuse to turn to God, no matter how bad things get.
 - iii) Another thing that is important to emphasize is that we never know who has and has not reached a "point of no return". The mistake Christians make is to look at certain people and think of them as beyond hope. Only God knows who is and is not saved. The point of this chapter is to understand that there are people who have reached such a state. It is our job to preach the Gospel and tell people of this fate in the hopes they never go this far.
16. Verse 10: The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony ¹¹ and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.
- a) In this fifth plague, God gets more specific in location: One gets the impression the previous plagues were somehow "world-wide" or at least covered a large geographical area. Here, the antichrist's "headquarters" was targeted. Somehow, this location got so dark, it was agonizing for those living and working in this location. The antichrist and those who were at his headquarters suffered in darkness, but refused to repent.
 - i) It is God saying in effect, "You don't want to see "My light"? OK, if it is darkness that you want, darkness you will get".
 - b) The closest visual explanation one can have to this darkness is to be deep inside a cave and have all the lights go out. One has no visual sense of where to go and cannot even see their hands in front of them.
 - c) Again, one sees a parallel between the plagues in Egypt and the plagues here in this chapter. One of the 10 plagues on Egypt was darkness (Exodus 10). The difference is the Pharaoh of Egypt temporarily "gave in", at least until he could see again. Here in Revelation, despite the pain, those in charge refused to give up.
 - d) Again, we're back to the idea of a "point of no return". Reading these verses, despite the fact they knew "God was winning", these people still refused to repent. There are some people who will simply refuse to turn to God no matter how bad it gets.
 - e) Again, if there is one lesson I get out of Revelation 16, it is the way I pray for the unsaved. In the past, I would pray for God to "get" those I wanted to see saved. I wanted God to bring in some difficult situation in their lives, hoping that would get them to repent. Now I just pray for God's grace to be upon them. I realize that adversity is not enough.
 - f) Understand that Verses 10-11 are a "preview" of the next lesson.
 - i) Chapter 16 focuses on God's final judgment on the whole earth.
 - ii) Chapters 17-18 fill in more details about the ultimate end of the antichrist.
17. Verse 12: The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East.
- a) In this sixth plague, the river Euphrates was dried up. You have to admit, in comparison to the other plagues, this one doesn't sound very impressive. ☺
 - b) Obviously, God has some other purpose other than just to dry up a river. That reason is stated in the last part of the verse: "To prepare the way for the kings from the East."
 - i) The only other clue we get is in Verse 16: "Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon."
 - ii) The Euphrates River runs through Iraq.

- iii) Armageddon is a large valley located in Israel.
 - iv) Apparently, drying up the river makes it possible for a large army from the east to gather at Armageddon. The big question is "why".
 - v) The most likely reason is Satan, who realizes he is about to be defeated, makes "one last ditch effort" by gathering armies from the west and the east together. Remember Satan is aware Jesus will return. I see this as "one last ditch effort" to prevent this rule from happening.
 - a) Part of the reason for Jesus Second Coming is so He can rule and reign from Israel over the world. There are going to be some who survive through the Great Tribulation. Jesus rules from Jerusalem over the surviving remnant by force. We'll get to that in Revelation Chapter 20.
 - vi) The prophet Zechariah predicted this event: "I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured...Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle." (Zechariah 14: 2-3 NIV). The idea of this verse is the nations fight against Jerusalem and for a while, the "nations" will win. Then Jesus comes back and the "nations" are wiped out.
18. Verse 13: Then I saw three evil 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.¹⁴ They are spirits of demons performing miraculous 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.
- a) OK, let me try my best to explain this. I admit, it's pretty weird. ☺
 - b) Three "spirits" come out of the "false trinity": The devil, the antichrist and the false worship leader. Apparently, Satan manifested himself in some sort of physical form during this time era. The "spirit" of Satan along with whatever demonic spirit was inside the antichrist and his worship leader, "left" to go organize this big war. These spirits are compared to frogs in that they "quickly leap" out of the bodies they manifested.
 - c) This leads us back to the "war theory". I believe that Satan is trying "one last ditch effort" to destroy Israel and organize this war.
 - i) Does this mean that all wars are based on demonic influences? No. The text is not describing a general principal, but a specific event.
 - d) Remember all of this is a "plague" (i.e., judgment) on mankind on the earth. God is "allowing" Satan to go through with this plan as to show God is greater than Satan and all of his plans.
19. Verse 15: "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed."
- a) We interrupt the destruction of the earth to bring you a message from Jesus. ☺
 - b) I call this time period, "the point of no return" as to describe a time frame when it is too late. Yet, here is a text warning people to "be aware" of what is about to happen.
 - c) The text "I come as a thief" refers to Jesus. Back in Revelation 3:3, Jesus said in effect that if Christians don't watch for His return, Jesus would come "as a thief". This means He comes unexpectedly and it is not good.
 - d) Let me explain a little what this means:
 - i) It does not mean we quit our jobs and spend all day staring at the sky waiting for Jesus return. The idea is we are aware Jesus will return one day. When He does, we can say, "Oh, I was expecting You!" The immediate event may be a shock, but then we remember that Jesus said it would happen.
 - ii) The event is like a "theft" to the nonbeliever as Jesus comes back for judgment and to take one's soul to hell.
 - e) Now let's get back to the verse: Why have it here? Remember that Revelation is written to the "believer" and not the unbeliever. The idea is God wants us to read Chapter 16 and say, "This is not good. I don't want to be around when this happens".

- i) I stated earlier that difficult situations "amplify" what is already inside of us. Those that don't believe in Jesus are all the more stubborn during this time frame. Those that seek God do all the more so when things get rough. Jesus is telling Christians in effect, "This is the fate of all who turn from Me! Be aware that all of this bad stuff happens and cling close to Me to avoid all of this".
20. Verse 16: Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.
- a) People who know very little about the bible have heard of "The Battle of Armageddon". Most people don't know exactly what it is, but they know the bible speaks of it. When people hear the word "Armageddon", they think of the greatest battle epic of all time.
 - b) First, let me explain what that word means: It is actually two words combined. It combines "valley" with "Megiddo". The location is a large, (literal) valley located in Israel. Throughout history, there have been a number of major battles fought in this valley.
 - c) Why this place? Because it is the best geographical place in Israel for a large battle. Scholars believe this is "Satan's final attempt" to stop God's plan. I believe the idea is that Satan knew Jesus would return to Israel and He is organizing a world size army to prevent this from happening. (This is a commonly held view among evangelicals.)
 - d) I always hate calling this a "battle" as it is more of a "wipe out".
 - i) Back in Chapter 14, there was a description of this battle: "They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia (i.e., 180 miles)" (Rev. 14:20 NIV)
 - ii) Revelation 19 also describes the results of this battle: "Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. ... The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh." (Rev. 19:19-21)
 - iii) The point is a huge worldwide army is gathered to fight God. God wins. The "rider" in Revelation 19 is Jesus Himself. This isn't a battle that is fought long and hard, and then one side wins. I see this more of a quick wipeout.
 - e) We'll get to the "Battle of Armageddon" more in Chapter 19. The point here is to understand that part of this "final judgment" is that God "allows" Satan to organize this final battle. Ultimately it is for Satan's ultimate destruction.
 - i) If Satan "knows his bible", why would he do this in the first place? You have to read it as a last attempt of a desperate entity! Satan knows his time is almost up and he is doing anything and everything to prevent his ultimate destruction.
 - f) Meanwhile, we only have one more plague to go! ☺
21. Verse 17: 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!"
- a) The final "bowl judgment" is poured out in the air. The idea is that it affects everything.
 - i) Paul gave Satan the title, "The prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). The idea is Satan is in charge of this world. The idea is he is more powerful than any and all nonbelievers as they don't have God's protection ("seal") within them.
 - ii) Given that power, it would be fitting the final judgment is poured "in the air".
22. Verse 18: Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake.
- a) The key word here is "earthquake" the other terms describe noises and lightening. The "real damage" as we'll read in the next few verses, comes from this quake. Let me add the next few verses and then I'll discuss this earthquake some more.

23. Verse 19: The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath.
- a) To understand this, we need to look at an Old Testament prediction: "You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him." (Zechariah 14:5 NIV)
 - i) The prophet Zechariah is predicting a great earthquake in Israel that will cause the inhabitants to flee "like they did in the days of Uzziah". Apparently, there was an earthquake at the time of King Uzziah.
 - ii) This earthquake predicted by Zechariah includes the phrase, "Then the LORD my God will come and the holy ones with him". We've had thousands or millions of earthquakes through history. None are coupled with God's return!
 - iii) Yet here in Revelation 19, we have a "great earthquake" that is the final judgment. The only thing "left" in Revelation is Jesus Second Coming! We will read later in Revelation that the "saints" return with Jesus (Ref.: Revelation 19:14).
 - b) Back here in Revelation, the earthquake affected the "great city". The text does not say what the "Great City" is. As I stated a page back, the prophet Zechariah predicted all nations would fight one day against Jerusalem. (Ref. Zech. 14:2). Tying that to this prediction, it means "the great city" refers to Jerusalem itself.
 - i) Zechariah goes on to say this earthquake is a "positive thing" in that "living water" will flow out of Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:8). The idea is that a new water source will come out of the "remodeled" Jerusalem, due to this earthquake.
 - c) Back to the "great earthquake". This earthquake does two things:
 - i) One is that it causes Jerusalem to split in three parts. Tying it to Zechariah, this becomes a "good thing" in that a new "living water" is based out of this city.
 - ii) The other thing is a worldwide destruction. God uses an earthquake as the final judgment method on the earth.
 - d) So why "end" the worldwide judgment process with an earthquake?
 - i) The idea is the "world" (i.e., nonbelievers living at this time) want the earth to themselves. They want to live under the antichrist's rule. The "world" will be given back to Jesus and His followers. In order to prepare the world for that event, it needs to be "shaken up" at first.
24. Verse 20: Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found.
- a) Earthquakes are usually a local phenomena. There has never been a worldwide earthquake. The idea of this earthquake is that it reshapes the world. One gets the idea that mountains crumble and tidal waves destroys islands. The world as we know it will be a lot different after this earthquake. We're going to need new globes. ☺
 - b) If all of this sounds horrifying, it is. This will cause the destruction of a lot of lives. The main point is God knows this will happen one day. The idea is to avoid being here when it happens. The idea is God will judge the people of the earth whether they want it or not. Just as the world-as-we-know it had a beginning, it also has an ending. That is what is being described in this text.
25. Verse 21: From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.
- a) Here's the final verse of this chapter: If the earthquake was not bad enough, there is also a hailstone of giant rocks falling on people. Some speculate that the great earthquake causes volcanic eruptions and that is what causes the giant rock-storm. It is possible.
 - b) Why have these big stones as the final death-judgment?
 - i) It's just my opinion, but I think it ties to "stoning". In the Old Testament, the punishment for idolatry is "stoning". (Ref.: Leviticus 24:6) This was the method for execution for disobedience. I believe God initiates a large, world wide "stoning" against mankind for their disobedience.

- c) The final line of this chapter is those who are alive on earth at this time "cursing God" because of this giant "rock" storm.
 - i) It amazes me that despite all of this judgment, some people refused to turn to God, even to the end. If there is one thing to learn from this lesson, is "pain is not enough" to get people to turn to God. One can get to such a mental "point of no return" that it does not matter what God throws at them, it is too late.
26. Let's wrap this up for the week with some final thoughts:
- a) This is the "heaviest" of the Revelation lessons in terms of judgment. There are still two more chapters on judgment, but those chapters fill in some details from this final earth-judgment here in Chapter 16.
 - b) The point is there is coming a day when God will judge the earth for unbelief. It is a tough thing to read about and a horrible thing to have to think about. The idea is God wants us to avoid being a part of this. One of the key verses in the middle of the destruction process is Jesus Himself warning us to "not be a part of it".
 - c) So when does all of happen? Jesus states that only God the Father knows the time of the Second Coming. (Ref. Matthew 24:36, Mark 13:32).
 - i) The first point is if God came back, say, fifty years ago, most of us would not be saved. Be grateful God is waiting as long as He does.
 - ii) Next, know that "things cannot continue as they are forever". If that were the case, God would not be "perfect" in judgment. There has to be a wrap-up process one day. That is what Revelation is describing. Just as Genesis describes the "beginnings" of the world, so Revelation describes the ending process.
 - d) Understanding the fate of the unsaved should do a couple of things for us:
 - i) It should drive us to our knees to be grateful that for whatever reason, God picked you and me. I don't know why He picked me, but I plan on spending eternity showing my gratitude that He did.
 - ii) Next, we don't know who else God picks. Therefore, God wants to use "us" to tell the world what will happen to those who refuse. God desires to work through people to spread the salvation message to others.
 - iii) Finally, I think it is important for Christians to have a good attitude. Think you're having a bad day? Read Chapter 16 and put your life in that perspective! ☺ Be grateful you (and I) don't have to live through this! Be grateful God has called us to an eternal blessed life and not through this final judgment process.
 - iv) The title of this lesson is "A point of no return". It not only describes unbelievers but believers as well. If we are "sealed" by God, there is "no return" to our old lives prior to our commitment to Jesus. God calls us to salvation and that means to not look back at our old lifestyle. God "takes care" of nonbelievers in the end. Our job is to be thankful we're not part of that judgment process and to warn others of that coming day.
27. On that happy note, ☺ let's pray: Father, we thank You for counting us worthy for salvation. Help us to realize that this judgment-fate was meant for us, and it is only by Your grace that we are not part of it. Help us to see people as "needing You". May Your grace shine upon those on our hearts who we want to see saved, just as You do. Help us to be living witnesses for You, and warn others of what is to come. Help us to live in gratitude for Your salvation. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.