

ARE WE APPROACHING ARMAGEDDON?

Revelation 16:1-21

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. When you hear the word, “Armageddon,” what comes to mind?
2. Many think of it as a final, catastrophic world war at the end of the world before Christ comes back.
3. “Prophecy experts” have always claimed that Armageddon was going to happen in their own generation. They’ve always been wrong.
4. What does the Bible say about Armageddon?
5. The Bible only mentions the word Armageddon one time, and it is in the passage that we are studying today. The context of the passage is not the end of the world, but the final destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, almost 2,000 years ago.

II. RECAP

1. The approach we have been taking in our study of Revelation is called the preterist view, or the preterist interpretation. The word “preterist” simply means past. According to the preterist interpretation, the bulk of Revelation has already been fulfilled. It was fulfilled in our past.
2. Why the preterist interpretation? The main reason has to do with the time indicators in the first three verses of the book. Revelation 1:1, 3 says that Revelation is about things that must soon take place, because the time is near. As we learned last week, the Greek word for soon, *tachos*, in the NT always means close in distance or close in time; impending; at hand; right around the corner. It never means that something will happen quickly after a long delay, but that it will happen quickly after the statement is made. Likewise, the Greek word for near, *engus*, always means close in time, without delay. Therefore, Revelation is not about things that will take place thousands of years in the future, but right around the corner, not long after it was written.
3. What is Revelation about? It is about God’s judgment on Israel in the first century for rejecting Christ and persecuting His followers. It is about God divorcing Israel, and taking on a new bride, the church. This was fulfilled just a few years after Revelation was written, in AD 70.
4. So far we have seen two sets of judgments. Seven seals, and seven trumpets. As each seal is opened, and as each trumpet is blown, we see another vision of destruction. In Revelation 16 we are going to see the seven bowl judgments. As each bowl is poured out, we see more destruction.
5. How do these three sets of judgments relate to one another? Last week we talked about the recapitulation scheme of Revelation. To recapitulate means to summarize and repeat the main points of something. Most scholars don’t see the judgments as chronological, all pointing to different, successive events. Instead, they see that

John's approach in Revelation is to focus repeatedly on the same events, each time shedding more light, and each time gradually advancing the storyline.

6. All three sets of seven judgments don't point to different events, but to the same events – the events leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.
7. **Bruce Metzger** described the three sevens as “a series of parallel yet ever-progressing sections. These bring matters before the reader over and over again, but in climacteric form.”
8. This will become apparent this morning as we look at the seven bowl judgments. The bowl judgments are very similar to the trumpet judgments, however they are more devastating. The trumpet judgments destroy a third of the land and the water and the people, but with the bowl judgments the destruction is total. As we have moved through Revelation, the destruction is intensifying as we are moving closer and closer to the final destruction of Jerusalem.
9. In these bowl judgments we will encounter Armageddon.

III. HOW WE KNOW THIS IS ABOUT JERUSALEM

1. Before we get into the bowl judgments, let me share with you three reasons we know that the bowl judgments are pointing to the judgment against first century Israel.
 - i. The bowls of wrath are poured out on the “land.”
 1. **Revelation 16:1** Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth.”
 2. “Earth” in Greek is *ge*, which can be translated land, which is a common reference to the land of Israel.
 - ii. The bowls of wrath are poured out on “the great city.”
 1. **Revelation 16:19** “The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell.”
 2. What is the great city? We know from Revelation 11:8 that the great city is Jerusalem.
 - iii. The bowls of wrath are poured out on those who killed the saints and the prophets.
 1. **Revelation 16:6** “Because they poured the blood of the saints and the prophets, you have given them blood to drink; they deserve it.”
 2. Who killed the saints and the prophets? This was Jerusalem's signature description.
 3. **Luke 11:47** “Woe to you! You build tombs for the prophets, and your fathers killed them.”

IV. THE SEVEN BOWL JUDGMENTS

1. The first bowl: Boils.

- i. **Revelation 16:2** “The first went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and severely painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped its image.”
 - ii. Revelation 15 says that these seven angels have the seven last plagues, and they are given bowls with which to pour out God’s wrath on Israel.
 - iii. If you remember the book of Exodus, God punished Egypt with 10 plagues. Here many of those same plagues will be used against Israel, which has become the new Egypt – idolatrous persecutors.
 - iv. The first bowl results in painful sores on the Jews.
 - v. It says that this bowl will be poured out on those who had the mark of the beast? Who are they? The beast is the Roman emperor, and those who worshiped him, choosing him instead of Christ, had the mark of the beast. It was not a real mark, but a symbolic way of saying that they were set apart for the emperor’s blessing, and God’s cursing.
 - vi. This bowl corresponds to the sixth plague in Egypt when God caused painful boils to break out on all the people and animals throughout Egypt (Ex 9:8-12).
 - vii. God warned the Jews that He would punish them in this way if they ever abandoned Him.
 - 1. **Deuteronomy 28:27** “The Lord will afflict you with the boils of Egypt, tumors, a festering rash, and scabies, from which you cannot be cured.”
 - viii. This bowl may simply symbolize the terrible pain that God would inflict on the Jews in the first century.
2. The second and third bowls: Water into blood.
- i. **Revelation 16:3-7**

3 The second poured out his bowl into the sea. It turned to blood like that of a dead person, and all life in the sea died.

4 The third poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. 5 I heard the angel of the waters say,

You are just,
the Holy One, who is and who was,
because you have passed judgment on these things.

6 Because they poured out
the blood of the saints and the prophets,
you have given them blood to drink;
they deserve it!

7 I heard the altar say,
Yes, Lord God, the Almighty,
true and just are your judgments.

- ii. We can put the second and third bowls together because they both have to do with water turning into blood. The second bowl turns the sea to blood, and the third bowl turns the rivers and springs into blood.
 - iii. This corresponds to the sixth plague in Egypt, when the Nile was turned to blood, and to the second trumpet, in which a third of the sea turned to blood. But here, all sea life died.
 - iv. There may be a historical fulfillment in this bowl. **David Chilton**: On one occasion, thousands of Jewish rebels fled to the Sea of Galilee from the Roman massacre of Tarichaeae. Setting out on the lake in small, flimsy boats, they were soon pursued and overtaken by the sturdy rafts of Vespasian's superior forces. Then, as Josephus recounts, they were mercilessly slaughtered: "One could see the whole lake stained with blood and crammed with corpses, for not a man escaped. During the days that followed a horrible stench hung over the region, and it presented an equally horrifying spectacle. The beaches were strewn with wrecks and swollen bodies, which, hot and clammy with decay, made the air so foul that the catastrophe that plunged the Jews in mourning revolted even those who had brought it about."
3. The fourth bowl: Scorching heat.
- i. **Revelation 16:8-9** "8 The fourth poured out his bowl on the sun. It was allowed to scorch people with fire, 9 and people were scorched by the intense heat. So they blasphemed the name of God, who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory."
 - ii. **Larry Ball** explains some possible historical fulfillments: "The final battle against the city occurred in the heat of the summer (ending probably in August of A.D. 70 when the heat was overwhelming). But much worse, think of the men who were caught up in the fire that burned the city."
 - iii. In the final part of the battle, the city was burned to the ground, and many people were burned alive.
4. The fifth bowl: Darkness.
- i. **Revelation 16:10-11** "10 The fifth poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues because of their pain 11 and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they did not repent of their works."
 - ii. This bowl was poured out on the "throne of the beast." Because this chapter is all about God's judgment on Jerusalem, it must be talking about the land beast, the Jewish Priesthood, which reigned in Jerusalem. The throne is either Jerusalem, or the temple.

- iii. As for a literal fulfillment of this plague, **Larry Ball** wrote, “In regard to darkness, think of the whole city on fire, black smoke rising upward, and blocking the light of the sun. The sky was dark with black smoke.”
5. The sixth bowl: Armageddon.
- i. **Revelation 16:12-16** 12 The sixth 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. 13 Then I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming from the dragon’s mouth, from the beast’s mouth, and from the mouth of the false prophet. 14 For they are demonic spirits performing signs, who travel to the kings of the whole world to assemble them for the battle on the great day of God, the Almighty. 15 “Look, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who is alert and remains clothed, so that he may not go around naked and people see his shame.” 16 So they assembled the kings at the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.
 - ii. This is the sixth bowl. The Euphrates also comes up in the sixth trumpet. In the sixth trumpet, four angels were released at the Euphrates river with two hundred million mounted troops to kill a third of the human race. In the sixth bowl, the water of the Euphrates is dried up so that armies from the east can cross it and attack Israel. Both visions refer to the same thing. Historically, this is where all of the Jews’ great enemies came from. The Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Persians all came from the Euphrates river, the northeast border of the Promised Land. This is a warning that just as God sent destroying armies from the Euphrates in the past, He is about to do it again. When the emperor Vespasian sent his son Titus to destroy the Jews, the 10th Legion, part of the destroying force, came from the Euphrates.
 - iii. **Verse 12** says that “kings from the east” would come to destroy Israel. Not only did the Roman legion come from the Euphrates river, but other armies and kings from the east followed the Romans to destroy Jerusalem, such as Antiochus of Commagene and Sohemus of Sophene.
 - iv. John saw three spirits like frogs coming from the mouth of the early church’s three enemies: the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. The false prophet is another name for the Jewish priesthood. They were assembling armies for battle.
 - v. In **verse 15** Jesus says, “Look, I am coming like a thief.” In other words, unexpectedly. This is not referring to His second coming at the end of history, but to His coming in judgment on Jerusalem.
 - vi. **Verse 16** says, “They assembled the kings at the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.”
 - vii. The Hebrew word consists of two parts. *Har* and *Megiddo*. *Har* means mountain. *Megiddo* is the name of a field in Israel. Literally it means

Mountain of Megiddo. The interesting thing is that there is not mountain on the plain of Megiddo. It is flat land. So it must be symbolic language. What does it Armageddon symbolize? Let me answer that with three questions.

1. What is the context? The destruction of Jerusalem in the first century.
 2. What do we know about Megiddo? It was a famous battlefield in Israel. Joshua won a battle there; Deborah won a battle there; King Ahaziah lost a battle there. But the most significant thing that happened at Megiddo was the death of King Josiah. Josiah was Judah's greatest king. A godly king. But at the end of his life, God told him not to go to war against Egypt. But he disobeyed and was killed in battle on the plain Megiddo. After his death, the nation quickly drifted away from God, which to their destruction and captivity by the Babylonians. The Megiddo was a symbol for Israel's defeat in battle. It was a symbol of God's judgment.
 3. What do we know about mountain? Jerusalem is a mountain. It is called Mount Zion.
- viii. We can therefore conclude that Armageddon is symbolic for Jerusalem, the place where the kings of the world – those of Israel, Rome, and others – gathered to fight, and where God's judgment was poured out on the Jews.
- ix. **Gary DeMar** "Israel remembered Megiddo as a place where God vented His divine wrath against rebellion, whether exhibited by Israel or a foreign power. God brought the nations of the world against first-century Jerusalem as He had promised (Mt 22:7; 24:34). Rome, as an empire of nations (Syria, Asia Minor, Palestine, Gaul, Egypt, Britain, and others) representing all the nations of the world, came up against Jerusalem and destroyed her."
6. The seventh bowl: Giant hailstones.
- i. **Revelation 16:17-21** "17 Then the seventh poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" 18 There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder. And a severe earthquake occurred like no other since people have been on the earth, so great was the quake. 19 The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the Great was remembered in God's presence; he gave her the cup filled with the wine of his fierce anger. 20 Every island fled, and the mountains disappeared. 21 Enormous hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, fell from the sky on people, and they blasphemed God for the plague of hail because that plague was extremely severe."
 - ii. In **verse 17** an angel says, "It is done!" Jerusalem is destroyed.

- iii. **Verse 18** describes lighting, thunder and an earthquake. The same thing happened with the opening of the seventh seal (Rev 8:5) and the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Rev 11:19). This is an allusion to Mt. Sinai, when God gave the Ten Commandments to the Israelites. God descended on the mountain and caused lighting, thunder, and an earthquake to show the people that He had the power to protect them if they were faithful, and to destroy them if they were unfaithful. On Mount Sinai He took Israel as His wife, but in Revelation He is divorcing and punishing adulterous, covenant breaking Israel.
- iv. **Verse 19** says, "The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell."
- v. There may be a historical fulfillment to this. As the city of Jerusalem was under siege by the Romans, it was split into three warring factions within its walls. They fighting inside of Jerusalem was so fierce that they weakened themselves, making it easier for the Romans to defeat them. If they would have been united, they may have been able to hold out.
- vi. **Verse 21** says, "Enormous hailstones, each weight about a hundred pounds, fell from the sky."
- vii. This may have a historical fulfillment as well. When Jerusalem was under siege, the Roman army used catapults to hurl large white stones, weighing one hundred pounds, at the city. This caused the walls of Jerusalem to fall down, resulting in the collapse of the city.
- viii. Josephus tells us that the Jews had watchmen posted on the walls to give warnings when the catapults fired the stones. When a stone was on its way, the watchmen would yell, "The son is coming!" Historians have spent a lot of time trying to figure out why they yelled that. The best explanation is that close to the end, the apostle James was living in Jerusalem and preaching about Christ. He was likely preaching, "Repent! The Son is coming in judgment!" And in a spirit of mockery and blasphemy, when the Jewish watchmen saw the giant hailstones being hurled at them, they yelled sarcastically, "The son is coming!"

V. CONCLUSION

1. Armageddon is not the final world war that will wipe out most of the population right before Jesus comes back. Instead, it refers to the final war between Israel and Rome that led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.
2. **Larry Ball** "Armageddon is not something you have to fear, because it has already happened. Yes, you heard that correctly! The war at Armageddon has already happened. It happened about 2,000 years ago... Armageddon was a metaphor for the last great battle at Jerusalem. It was a reference to the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in the apostolic age."