

Revelation Bible Study #41

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 16:17-21

17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” **18** And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. **19** The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. **20** And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. **21** And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.

Introduction

The Four Cardinal Views

It is time for a bit of review. There are four cardinal interpretive viewpoints for understanding Revelation and its eschatology – the doctrine of Last Things. Futurism states that the events of the book which take place after the letters to the seven churches are mostly to take place in the future. Historicism takes the broad arc of history and finds various fulfillments of oracles from the book throughout history (e.g., the destruction of the harlot being the fall of Rome). Preterism holds that by 70 A.D. either most or all prophecies in Revelation were fulfilled; partial preterists generally hold that the only matter left is for Christ to return, while full preterists hold that there is no unfulfilled prophecy in Scripture. Idealists describe Revelation as a largely *thematic* work, holding that St. John's vision was recorded for the encouragement and admonition of the saints through description of cosmic battles between good and evil.

For this study series, the position taken is a “mix” between the historicist and idealist schools called the typological view; it is the belief that St. John's vision gave cosmic antitypes for later multiple fulfillments in historical types. Revelation is typological prophecy that looks *back* to the antitypes given in the text, whereas the Old Testament gives types which look *forward* to the arrival of Christ. In this way, the Christian is equipped to know how things will go throughout history as the Church waits for the *Return* of Christ to judge the living and the dead.

Two Hermeneutic Rules

In addition to these four cardinal views (and the fifth which this study series embraces), there are two main methods of understanding the flow of writing in Revelation. The first is, for lack of a better term, sequentialism: it is the belief that everything St. John writes down is a sequence of chronological events. Sequentialism posits that the effects of the seven seals come before the effects of the seven trumpets, and that all of these happen one event after the other on earth just as they do in Heaven. The second hermeneutic method is Recapitulation theory, which this series concurs with. Recapitulation theory is the belief that St. John repeats his vision – or *recapitulates* – the events he sees as told in prophetic cycles, each describing history from different points of view. Though they are sequential in Heaven, time in Heaven works differently than it does on Earth; thus, while the vision is shown to be chronological in terms of seals and trumpets and bowls, they are really describing the same

time frame of the Church era.

For the four cardinal interpretations, each adherent chooses one of those two methods. There are historicists who hold to sequentialism, there are historicists who hold to recapitulation, and the same could be said for the other viewpoints. Because this study series embraces the typological view, recapitulation is the sensible hermeneutic for understanding Revelation in a coherent way. The time frame, the Church era, is the arc of history between Christ's Ascension and Second Advent in which the typological fulfillments of the antitypes given in the vision may play out. For instance, when we speak of the “mark of the beast,” the dynamics given in the text are demonstrated in the ash markings necessary to buy and sell in the Roman agora, but they are *also* seen in the practice of “vaccine passes” which various governments demanded people have so they could shop. Neither of these is a *complete* fulfillment of the mark, but both of them point to its ultimate meaning as lifelong reprobate disbelief in the Gospel. Because it is partially fulfilled over multiple eras in history, a sequentialist understanding would rob Revelation and its fulfillments of meaning.

The final bowl's pouring recapitulates the moment when the final seal is opened on the great Scroll and when the final trumpet is blown; these are the same event described from different points of view. Then the seventh seal is opened, silence is observed in Heaven followed by “peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.”¹ When the seventh trumpet is blown, a cry of victory is sounded and the Ark of the Covenant is seen just before “flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.”² In uniform description, the seventh bowl's pouring involves the same anomalous weather phenomena, hail, and noise. In each of these instances, a sense of *finality* is observed. All of them describe what things shall be like right before Christ's Return.

The distinction with *this* prophetic cycle is that the Apostle goes beyond the seventh matter to continue the narrative. After the seventh seal, a new prophetic cycle was begun; after the seventh trumpet, a description of cosmic history from the Incarnation to Judgment Day was given; now, it is time to show the major players and major events that happen after the events of the seventh bowl/trumpet/seal. After this passage, a discussion on “Mystery Babylon” and her fall ensues.

Vs.17-18

17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” **18** And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake.

“It is done” as a phrase cannot be separated from St. John's previous statement that with these seven bowls the wrath of God is “finished,” or completed in its purposes. Everything that occurs after this bowl is poured is a function of the final moment of wrath before the earth is reaped in the Final Judgment. One must note St. John's descriptive language; he *hears* the voice coming from the Throne, but does not see the One speaking the declaration. This tells us that unlike the previous prophetic cycles, he is speaking from the “ground level” of seeing matters on earth. It is *still* a sign vision,³ but is nonetheless one which appears to be pertinent or relatable to the human experience.

The phrase “It is done” appears reminiscent of Christ's words on the Cross, “It is finished.”⁴ This, accompanied by the weather phenomena of lightning and thunder, may lead some to draw a connection between this passage and the Crucifixion – which also saw a great deal of supernatural weather patterns.⁵ Such might *seem* to be the connection, tempting us toward a preterist interpretation

1 Revelation 8:1-5

2 Revelation 11:15-19

3 Revelation 15:1

4 John 19:30

5 Matthew 27:51-54

of all the prophetic cycles, but we must be careful. Indeed, lightning and thunder and loud noises are a sign in Revelation of God's activity, and at the Crucifixion there was certainly Divine activity occurring; nonetheless, care must be placed to examine the language being used lest we draw inferences that are not intended by the author. St. John recorded Christ saying Τετέλεσται,⁶⁷ which connotes *completion of a purpose*. The Divine pronouncement from the Throne, however, says Γέγονεν,⁸⁹ which fundamentally means *to occur*. In other words, at the Crucifixion the declaration was made that Christ had fulfilled His Messianic purpose, namely winning the redemption of all through His Blood; from the Throne, St. John hears that an event has finally come to pass. That there are weather anomalies to both events means they are *related* in that the same Savior who died on the Cross is about to *return* by the time this seventh bowl is fully poured.

Vs.19

19 The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath.

Commentaries are split as to whether the “great city” is in reference to Babylon proper (that is, the actual city), Rome¹⁰ or Jerusalem. The first possible answer has its support in Babylon being mentioned directly in the latter half of this verse. It is also discussed in greater detail in the next chapter as “Mystery Babylon.” But such an interpretation is ultimately confused, as the “great city” is differentiated from the “cities of the nations” that are also falling: since “nations” is most often used regarding Gentile races, why would Babylon merely be split instead of falling with the rest of them? But the exegete may reply that the specific fate of Babylon is saved for the last – to which we reply “correct,” because Babylon is – for a time at least – Jerusalem.

The Apostle is not afraid to get specific regarding what he is speaking of: he does not mention this city as “code” so that only people who are “in the know” will understand it. In Revelation 11, St. John refers to Jerusalem as Sodom and Egypt.¹¹ Sodom is the symbolic home of degenerate sin, and Egypt is the symbolic home of paganism; Jerusalem had become both. Babylon is described throughout the Old Testament as being the home of both of these as well. By describing Jerusalem by the names of these three cities he is spending a great deal more time *condemning* them than trying to keep the nonbelievers from understanding.

The split into three parts is a reference to Zechariah's prophecy concerning Jerusalem.¹² Before Christ returns, the prophet says, there are three specific splits in the city; first, half of the population is separated off into exile, then when Christ stands on the Mount of Olives the city itself is split in twain. As Zechariah is speaking in symbolic terms, it is likely in reference first to the sequential destruction of the Old Covenant, leaving the Christians and the nonbelieving Jews to separate from each other. But here St. John writes about a separate threefold split in *contrast*, with the split in the city being for the purpose of its judgment. Babylon is to be destroyed, but first she must be divided out to separate the damned of the past, the who are damned on Judgment Day, and those who are Saints. Given how few are to be saved in the first place, one must imagine this “third slice” being small indeed.

Vs.20-21

6 Transliterated “Tetelestai,” Strong's #5055

7 <https://biblehub.com/greek/5055.htm>

8 Transliterated “Genonen,” Strong's #1096

9 <https://biblehub.com/greek/1096.htm>

10 We will address the notion of Babylon being a “code word” for Rome in the next lesson.

11 Revelation 11:8

12 Zechariah 14

20 And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. **21** And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.

Earlier, when describing the sixth seal's opening, St. John said that he saw “every mountain and island was removed from its place,” and hail coming from the sky.¹³ Since this has already occurred by the time we come to the seventh bowl, there are no mountains to be seen and the “drift” of islands is reverse to continue their disappearance. In other words, the changes which begin to happen in the cosmos are made so dire that they cannot be undone. Whether a physical set of hundred-pound hailstones falls or not is inconsequential. It is a second reference to the seventh plague on Egypt, hail mixed with fire.¹⁴ Unlike the first reference made to it (the fourth bowl), this hail is not a warning to people. Instead, the great weight of the hailstones means such destruction being inflicted on the earth that there is no possibility of mankind recovering. It is the final message that men should turn to the faith and repent; St. John informs us that, sadly, they refuse. Thus destruction comes.

¹³ Revelation 6:13-14

¹⁴ Exodus 9:13-35