

Revelation — Lesson 20

14:13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!” 14 Then I looked, and lo, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. 15 And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat upon the cloud, “Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.” 16 So he who sat upon the cloud swung his sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.

Verse 13 contains one of the seven beatitudes in this book: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth.”

The “henceforth” means that the blessedness will occur after death for those who die in the Lord. The situation is very different for those who die outside the Lord. In this life and on this earth, Rome seemed blessed and the Lord’s people seemed cursed — but what a difference after death! Remember, things are not what they seem!

Verse 13 ends with a beautiful elaboration of that blessing: “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!” Earlier we saw eternal restlessness; here we see eternal rest. They will leave their labors behind, but not so with their works. Their works will continue, both in eternity and on earth as a testimony to their faithfulness. We should all be toiling to leave behind that sort of legacy — not of money or property, but of good works. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable,

always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58)

In verses 14-16, Jesus is pictured as riding on a white cloud, wearing a crown of victory, and holding a sharp sickle ready to reap the harvest. Except for its use in Mark 4:29, the sickle is mentioned only in this chapter of the New Testament, where it is mentioned seven times. These verses remind us of Joel 3:13 — "Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the vats overflow; for their wickedness is great." They also remind us of Jeremiah 51:33 — "The daughter of Babylon is like a threshingfloor, it is time to thresh her: yet a little while, and the time of her harvest shall come."

We have seen many images of Christ in this book, but this must be one of the most striking: Jesus wearing a golden crown and carrying a sharp sickle. Those today who believe that Jesus will save everyone (expect perhaps Hitler) need to consider this image of Christ very carefully.

A common symbol for judgment is the separation of wheat and chaff, and separation is a recurring theme in this book. The call to the church was the same then that it is now: "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you." (2 Corinthians 6:17) We need to separate ourselves now, so that we will also stand separate on that last great day when Jesus separates the sheep from the goats. If we are no different than the goats today, then we will likely end up numbered among the goats on that day as well. The winepress of God's wrath will eventually be experienced by all who leave God out of their lives and their thoughts.

17 And another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. 18 Then another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has power over fire, and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Put in your sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine

of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.” 19 So the angel swung his sickle on the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth, and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God; 20 and the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse’s bridle, for one thousand six hundred stadia.

We see two angels — one angel who carries a sickle and another angel who comes “out from the altar” and who “has power over fire.” The first angel begins to “reap the earth” when the second angel gives him the go-ahead.

The gathering of the vintage is a classic figure for God’s judgment of the wicked. He tramples the wicked as one tramples grapes.

Verse 20 tells us that the grapes are trodden “outside the city.” Which city? Rome is the most likely candidate, but some commentators argue that this city is the city of God, the church. Isaiah 63:3-6 is a judgment against Edom in which God is pictured as trodding the wine press alone.

I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come. And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me. And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth.

A few verses earlier in Isaiah 62:12 we see a reference to “the holy people, the redeemed of the LORD,” and we see that they will be called “Sought out, A city not forsaken.” What we see there seems to be a

picture of God trodding the wine press outside of the city alone. Perhaps, here, too, we see God stepping alone outside of his own city to trod the wicked in his wrath.

The vast amount of blood in verse 20 graphically depicts the severity of the judgment. The blood flows in a river as high as a horse's bridle and 1600 stadia or furlongs long, which is about 200 miles long. Its intent is to frighten, and it does a very good job! This coming judgment will be terrifying. As Egypt lost horse and rider in the Red Sea, so will Rome be engulfed, but this latter sea of blood will be much redder than the Red Sea!

Verse 20 causes a fair bit of trouble for the literalists. A river of blood 200 miles long, a modest 100 feet wide, and 5 feet deep would contain about 4 billion gallons of blood, which is enough blood to fill up over 3 billion people. Literal? Of course not. Terrifying? Definitely.

Why 1600 stadia? Is there some symbolic significance in that number? It is probably not a coincidence that 1600 is the square of a very familiar Biblical number, 40. The number 40 is often used to denote a period of trial or tribulation, with the exodus being the prime example (Psalm 95:10). Thus, 1600 may simply indicate tremendous tribulation, and the squaring may point back to our previous discussion of the significance of the number 2 in Chapter 13. Or 1600 may be the earthly number 4 squared multiplied by 10 squared for completeness, thus depicting a judgment against all who dwell on the earth (which is how the wicked are described in this book). It is also possible that the number was chosen simply to depict a great deal of blood. To paraphrase Freud, perhaps in this oil painting from God a brush stroke is sometimes just a brush stroke.

Where are we at the end of Chapter 14? Before the seals were opened we had a vision of Heaven assuring us that the true throne was in Heaven and not in Rome. Before the trumpets were sounded we were shown a period of silence in Heaven and told that the coming judgment was occurring due to a call for justice by the saints. Chapter 15 will show us a third vision of Heaven and occurs before the bowls of

God's wrath are poured out in Chapter 16. This book has a beautiful structure!

Chapter Fifteen

1 Then I saw another portent in heaven, great and wonderful, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is ended.

So far, the judgments have been partial and have allowed for repentance. The judgments of the seven bowls are total and final, and repentance will soon no longer be an option (although even here we will see glimpses of the longsuffering nature of God extending an opportunity for repentance).

Hailey: "If proclaiming the good news of redemption does not cause men to fear before God, and if partial judgments do not turn them from humanism and materialism to repentance, then such an unre-generated society forfeits its right to continue. A destruction by judgment is inevitable and just."

Verse 1 tells us that, with these final plagues, the wrath of God is ended. What does that mean? It means that this is God's final word with respect to Rome, the great enemy of God's people on which this entire book has been focused.

But it says the wrath of God is *ended*. Doesn't that mean we have finally reached the end of the world with this verse? No, it doesn't. First, remember the time frame of the book — it contains things that were to shortly come to pass. We are told that twice at the beginning of the book and twice at the end.

Second, as before when we were tempted to leap ahead thousands of years, we should pause first to consider whether similar language was ever used in the Old Testament to apply to an event of that time — and

the answer is yes, it has. In Ezekiel 7:2-3, with regard to a judgment against Israel, we read:

Also, thou son of man, thus saith the Lord GOD unto the land of Israel; **An end, the end is come** upon the four corners of the land. **Now is the end come upon thee**, and I will send mine anger upon thee, and will judge thee according to thy ways, and will recompense upon thee all thine abominations.

The judgment of Jerusalem described in Matthew 24:13-14 is another example: “But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” Was that end the end of the world? No, because just a few verses later in Matthew 24:34, Jesus said, “This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.” So the “end” in verse 14 was a first century event — the judgment of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

As with Israel in Ezekiel 7 and Jerusalem in Matthew 24, there is a similar end with Rome in Revelation 15. In short, God can use the word “end” in contexts apart from the end of the world, and that is how the word is used here. The Greek word *teleo* translated “end” here simply means to carry out, accomplish, perform, or fulfill, and that is exactly what is happening in this chapter with regard to Rome.

2 And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. 3 And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, O King of the ages! 4 Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord? For thou alone art holy. All na-

tions shall come and worship thee, for thy judgments have been revealed.”

Swete says that these martyrs have come safely through the sea of martyrdom to arrive at the shore of heaven. Some translation of verse 2 indicate that those who conquered the beast were standing “on” rather “beside” the sea of glass. If so, then perhaps that small change indicates that the saints have moved closer to the throne through their suffering. Philippians 3:10 reminds us that we become like Christ by sharing in his suffering.

This sea is mingled with fire. What does that mean? The most common suggestions are that it refers either to the fiery judgments that were about to fall on Rome or that it refers to the fiery trials through which the Christians had emerged victorious. I much prefer the second option based on the context. The conquerers are standing on the sea, which is showing by reflection the fiery trials they endured. We are reminded of several verses:

- **Zechariah 13:9** And I will bring the third part through the fire, **and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried:** they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.
- **Malachi 3:2-3** But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? **for he is like a refiner's fire**, and like fullers' soap: **And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver:** and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.
- **1 Corinthians 3:12-15** Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, **because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.** If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: **but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.**

Verse 2 also says that they held harps of God in their hands. What are the harps of God? We looked at this issue in our discussion of 5:8. Remember that what we are seeing here are *symbols*. This language is figurative. In the same verse where we see harps, we also see a sea of glass mingled with fire and beast along with its image and the number of its name. These harps are symbols for praise, just as elsewhere incense is used as a symbol for prayer. We saw a similar symbol in 14:2 — “the **voice** I heard was like the sound of harpers playing on their harps.” And that verse is very instructive — perhaps the harps of God symbolize the harps that he created when he created the human *voices* that sing his praises.

And for those who think they can worship God by using their human hands to play a harp that was made with human hands, perhaps they should consider Acts 17:25 — “Neither is [God] worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.” We should worship God with the harps that he made — our voices.

Who are those that conquered the beast? They are the Christians (both living and dead) who endured and remained faithful to God despite the persecution, the temptations, and the trials. What incredible examples that have left for us to follow! Whenever we think we have it bad or are facing some persecution or trial, we should look back to their example and consider what they endured. As Hebrews 12:4 reminds most if not all of us today, we “have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.”

In verse 3, they sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. The song of Moses in Exodus 15 celebrated a great victory of God over Egypt, the great enemy of God’s people. Here the song celebrates another great victory over another great enemy, Rome. The song of the Lamb celebrates the same victory because it is only through the Lamb that such a victory was possible. That both songs are sung confirms our view that the woman in Chapter 12 represents the faithful remnant under both covenants who are united in Christ as one redeemed people.

We have seen many comparisons in this book with the events of the Exodus, and here we see yet another with the song of Moses. But there is a key difference between the two events: The deliverance from Egypt was a *physical* deliverance while the deliverance from Rome was a *spiritual* deliverance. Hebrews 3 likewise tells us that Jesus “was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house.” Moses could do nothing for a dead Israelite, yet in Revelation we read that in the Lamb the dead are blessed.

The singers give no glory to themselves. Instead they sing, “Great and wonderful are **thy** deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are **thy** ways, O King of the ages! Who shall not fear and glorify **thy** name, O Lord? For **thou** alone art holy. All nations shall come and worship **thee**, for **thy** judgments have been revealed.” (Quite different from some of the humanistic songs in our own song book that are much more focused on man than on God!) Swete says that the singers seem lost in the joy of being before God, and in their praise they completely forget what they have been through to attain this position —

In the presence of God the martyrs forget themselves; their thoughts are absorbed by new wonders that surround them; the glory of God and the mighty scheme of things in which their own sufferings form an infinitesimal part are opening before them; they begin to see the great issue of the world-drama, and we hear the doxology with which they greet their first unclouded vision of God and his works.

And we are reminded of a song we often sing — “Sing On, Ye Joyful Pilgrims.” How does that song end? “My heart is filled with rapture, My soul is lost in praise!”

Is Revelation all about heaven and the end of the world? No. But does this book tell us a great deal about what Heaven will be like? Absolutely. Some day we too will be lost in the joy of being before God.

In verse 3, some translations have “king of the ages” while others have “king of the nations.” The ancient manuscripts are divided between

the two, but “king of the nations” seems to fit the context better. In any event, Jesus is King of kings, which means he is the King of the ages and the King of the nations.

- **Jeremiah 10:7** Who would not fear thee, O King of nations? for to thee doth it appertain: forasmuch as among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like unto thee.
- **Psalm 86:9** All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name.

The word translated “holy” in verse 4 could be translated “sacred.” It refers to that which is religiously right as opposed to that which is unrighteous or polluted. God’s righteousness was about to become clear to all. Psalm 98:2 — “The LORD hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen.”

5 After this I looked, and the temple of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, 6 and out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues, robed in pure bright linen, and their breasts girded with golden girdles. 7 And one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives for ever and ever; 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 ended.

What is the tent in verse 5? It is the tent of witness (or the tent of testimony) that held the ark of the covenant in the inner sanctuary of the temple. Only the High Priest could enter this inner sanctuary where God dwelt and then only once a year with the blood of an innocent victim. The priest would carry a censer of incense that billowed smoke to ensure that he did not see God. And John sees this tent opened.

What comes out of the temple of the tent of witness? The seven angels with the seven plagues. They come out of the inner sanctuary. What that tells us is that the judgment they are bringing is coming directly from God.

Back in 6:10 we saw that the coming judgment was a divine judgment brought about by the prayers of God's people. That point is further emphasized here by what the angels are wearing. They are pictured in priestly clothing—bright linen and golden girdles. Such a girdle was worn by a priest only when he was officiating on behalf of the people. These angels dressed as priests come directly from the presence of God to wage a holy war against Rome.

We have already discussed the four living creatures in 4:6-8 who protect God's reputation and demand punishment of the ungodly. It is one of these living creatures who passes out the bowls of wrath to the seven angels. The Greek word used here for "bowl" occurs only in Revelation (where it appears 12 times). It denotes a broad shallow vessel or a deep saucer. It is similar to some of the bowls used in the Old Testament for sacrifices and rituals.

What is the purpose of these seven bowls? The purpose of the seven seals was to **reveal**. The purpose of the seven trumpets was to **warn**. The purpose of the seven bowls is to **execute**.

Why does verse 8 say that no one could enter the temple until the bowls were completed? Because these events were a manifestation of the glory of God upon which no one could look.

We see something similar in 1 Kings 8:10-11 where, at the dedication of the temple, the priests could not enter the house of God because of a cloud of smoke. We are also reminded of Leviticus 16:2 —

And the Lord said to Moses, 'Tell Aaron your brother not to come at all times into the holy place within the veil, before the mercy seat which is upon the ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat.'

The message from the Old Testament was that no one could look upon the glory of God and live. God's judgment of Rome was likewise a manifestation of his glory.

There is another possible reason why we are told that no man could come into the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels had been completed. That prohibition may be a symbolic statement that no approach of man to God could halt the coming judgment. The time for talk was over.

Swete: "The divine judgments are impenetrable until they are past; when the last plague has fulfilled its course, the smoke will vanish, and the vision of God be seen." Then we will see clearly what is now obscured.

What's next? Chapter 16 describes these seven bowls, which depict a total and complete judgment against Rome. The trumpets were intended to warn. The bowls are intended to recompense.

That Christians are not to take vengeance on their persecutors does not mean there will be no vengeance. Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord!

Chapter Sixteen

1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God." 2 So the first angel went and poured his bowl on the earth, and foul and evil sores came upon the men who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

Chapter 16 has been called a "vivid dramatization of the fight God puts up from heaven in behalf of his church."

No one to my knowledge has ever successfully assigned definite meanings to each of the symbols in this chapter, and neither will we. Milligan explains the situation well: “No attempt to determine the special meaning of the objects thus visited by the wrath of God — the land, the sea, the rivers, the fountains of the waters, and the sun — has yet been, or is ever likely to be, successful; and the general effect alone appears to be important.” And, as will see, the general effect is staggering.

Because 15:8 indicates that no one could enter the temple until the judgment had ended some surmise that the voice in verse 1 is the voice of God commanding the bowls to be poured out.

The first bowl contains foul and evil sores that afflict those who worship the image of the beast. This bowl parallels the sixth plague against Egypt in Exodus 9:11. The word used for “sore” in this chapter occurs elsewhere only in Luke 16:21, where it denotes the sores on Lazarus the beggar.

These comparisons with Egypt are here for a reason. They remind the readers of how God dealt with past enemies of his people. Everyone knows how the conflict with Egypt ended, and the conflict with Rome will end the same way: A total victory for God’s people.

There is a difference, though, right from the start between these bowls and the plagues of Egypt or even the seven trumpets. It was not until the sixth Egyptian plague and the fifth trumpet that men were affected *directly*, but men are affected directly starting with the very first bowl of wrath.

Were the Romans *literally* afflicted with these sores? No. (I know I keep asking that question and keep giving the same answer, but many misguided commentators try to literalize the symbols in this book, and by doing so they miss the whole point of the book and destroy its beauty in the process.) These bowls and the punishments they bring are symbolic. Yes, the sores in Egypt were literal as was the fire and brimstone in Sodom. But those sores and that fire and brimstone afterward became symbols for those earlier judgments. We have seen the language used that way by the Old Testament prophets, and that is

how the language is being used here. If the sores in verse 2 are literal, then what about the beast in verse 2? Is it a literal beast?

With the first bowl, God uses a symbol that reminds the reader of an Old Testament judgment against a great enemy of his people.

3 The second angel poured his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a dead man, and every living thing died that was in the sea.

The second bowl turns the sea into blood. Again we are reminded of a past display of God's wrath against Egypt. Exodus 7:19 —

And the LORD spake unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and stretch out thine hand upon the waters of Egypt, upon their streams, upon their rivers, and upon their ponds, and upon all their pools of water, that they may become blood; and that there may be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood, and in vessels of stone.

We know the plague against Egypt was literal, but is this plague also literal? No. The purpose of this symbol is to remind us of that previous plague. It is intended to remind us of how God dealt with Egypt.

Did all of the creatures in the sea literally die? No. In fact, there is no reason we should take the "sea" to refer to the literal ocean. Elsewhere in this book we have seen "sea" used symbolically, and that is almost certainly how it is used here. The first beast arose from the sea, that is from the unsettled and wicked nations of the world, and that is most likely what is intended here as well. The blood would denote, as one commentator described it, "the utter putrefaction of a dead society," or, as another said, it is a "a revealing illustration of the true nature of the spiritually dead."

Hailey: "A society abandoned to idolatry and its consequent morals, as was the Roman empire of John's day, is spiritually dead. In such a society, morals decline to the lowest level; the family collapses,

schools breed anarchy and rebellion, business ethics are forgotten, entertainment becomes base and sordid, and printing presses exude smut and filth, until the whole is strangled in its own death blood and suffocated by its own stench.”

In any event, this language in verse 3 is not to be taken literally. Similar figurative language was used in Zephaniah 1:2-4 to describe a judgment against Judah —

“I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth,” says the Lord. “I will sweep away man and beast; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. I will overthrow the wicked; I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth,” says the Lord. “I will stretch out my hand against Judah, and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal and the name of the idolatrous priests.”

Compare the description in Isaiah 13:19-22 of the fall of Babylon —

And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendor and pride of the Chaldeans, will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them. It will never be inhabited or dwelt in for all generations; no Arab will pitch his tent there, no shepherds will make their flocks lie down there. But wild beasts will lie down there, and its houses will be full of howling creatures; there ostriches will dwell, and there satyrs will dance. Hyenas will cry in its towers, and jackals in the pleasant palaces; its time is close at hand and its days will not be prolonged.

Did that literally occur? No. History tells us that Babylon fell without a shot. The priests opened the gates and let Cyrus in after Belshazzar was assassinated.

But note that Isaiah said that Babylon would fall as Sodom fell, that no one would ever live there again, and that no one would ever pass

through it again. None of that was *literally* fulfilled. Alexander the Great headquartered there. People live there today.

What then is meant by such language? Babylon, the kingdom, would fall never to rise again. The language was designed to instill terror and describe the wrath and judgment of God against the ungodly. The language paints a picture of God's wrath against the ungodly. That was how the language was used Zephaniah and Isaiah, and that is how the language is being used here.

4 The third angel poured his bowl into the rivers and the fountains of water, and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel of water say, "Just art thou in these thy judgments, thou who art and wast, O Holy One. 6 For men have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink. It is their due!" 7 And I heard the altar cry, "Yea, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are thy judgments!"

The second bowl turned the sea into blood. This third bowl turns the fresh water into blood. Again, we are reminded of God's wrath against Egypt and the first plague, which turned the Nile into blood.

Once again, is this literal? No. It is being used for the same purpose as the previous bowl. But why do we have two bowls that turn water into blood? One reason may be to show that this plague is worse than what befell Egypt because Exodus 7:24 tells us that the Egyptians could obtain water by digging, but that does not seem to be the case with this third bowl of wrath. Beyond that all we can say is that the two plagues combine with the other five to create a picture of utter devastation.

Does anyone teach that these passages should be taken literally? Yes. Hal Lindsey, who has sold millions of books on this subject, has the following to say about these verses:

As if the bloodied sea wasn't enough, the third angel poured out his bowl of judgment into the rivers and springs of waters, and they became blood also. It gets pretty grim when there is no fresh water to drink anywhere on earth. There's going to be a big run on Coca-Cola, but even this will give out after a while!

How ridiculous! How trivial! It is a crime when such a beautiful book as Revelation is butchered by the likes of Hal Lindsey! And why does he write such sensationalism? Greed! It sells! I am reminded of 2 Corinthians 2:17 — “For we are not, as so many, **peddling** the word of God.” There were many then, and there are still many today.

The prophets in verse 6 are the New Testament prophets. Notice the wonderful sarcasm and irony in that verse! The Romans were blood thirsty so God gave them blood to drink. They wanted blood so God gave them blood! He more than quenched their thirst for blood. It reminds us of what God said to Edom on Obadiah 15 —

For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head.

In verse 7, the altar cries out to declare the justice of God. We have seen this altar before. Recall Revelation 6:9-10 —

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne; they cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?”

That cry for justice was what prompted this display of God's wrath, and that cry came from the martyrs gathered under the altar. Those same martyrs voice their approval in verse 7. Their prayers have been answered.

Finally, we should pause to consider the vast difference between what the Romans had to drink and what Christians had to drink.

- **Isaiah 12:3** Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.
- **John 4:14** But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

The Christians had a life-sustaining drink that was utterly unknown to the pagans that surrounded them and that were drowning in a sea of blood and filth.

8 The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch men with fire; 9 men were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory.

The fourth bowl causes the heat of the sun to intensify and scorch men with fire. To a waterless world filled with blood we now add the blazing sun. (This is starting to sound like west Texas!) The source of light that was created to guide and warm had instead been turned into an instrument of pain. We are reminded of Psalm 104:4 — “Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire.” And we are reminded of Isaiah 47:13-14 —

Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it.

But once again the Romans are getting what they gave. We should recall how Nero had used the burning bodies of Christians. Tacitus wrote that the Christians “were covered with wild beasts’ skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night.” The Romans wanted blood, and so God gave them a river of it. They wanted light, and so God gives turns up the heat of the sun.

We should also recall the beautiful description of God’s people given in Revelation 7:16-17 —

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

As we would expect, the condition of the ungodly is being pictured as opposite that of the godly.

And note the response in verse 9 — “they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory.” We are reminded of Romans 1:21 — “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.” But notice that the phrase “they did not repent” suggests that even at this last stage, repentance was still an option.

10 The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was in darkness; men gnawed their tongues in anguish 11 and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

The fifth bowl pours darkness on the throne of the beast and its kingdom. The throne of the beast is Rome. This bowl parallels the ninth plague against Egypt in Exodus 10:21 — “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand toward heaven that there may be dark-

ness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.” The darkness here can also be felt. It causes men to gnaw their tongues in anguish.

This bowl may depict the moral darkness that we discussed in Chapter 9 where, as you recall, smoke from the bottomless pit darkened the sun and sky.

The Bible has much to say about darkness. In fact, the first recorded words from God were “Let there be light!” Spiritual darkness is often described as a judgment from God, and darkness is pictured as the domain of Satan and the opposite of the Christian walk.

- **Psalm 69:23** Let their eyes be **darkened**, that they see not.
- **Isaiah 9:19** Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts is the land **darkened**, and the people shall be as the fuel of the fire.
- **John 1:5** And the light shineth in **darkness**; and the darkness comprehended it not.
- **John 3:19** And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved **darkness** rather than light, because their deeds were evil.
- **John 8:12** Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in **darkness**, but shall have the light of life.
- **Romans 1:21** Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was **darkened**.
- **1 John 2:11** But he that hateth his brother is in **darkness**, and walketh in **darkness**, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that **darkness** hath blinded his eyes.
- **Ephesians 6:12** For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of **the darkness of this world**, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

- **Colossians 1:13** Who hath delivered us from **the power of darkness**, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.
- **2 Corinthians 4:6** For God, who commanded the light to shine out of **darkness**, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
- **Romans 13:12** The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of **darkness**, and let us put on the armour of light.

It was through the work of Satan that this world was plunged back into darkness, and it is through Christ that the light shone once again in that darkness. In fact, *both* the Old and New Testaments begin with God saying “Let there be light!”

12 The sixth angel poured his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east.

The sixth bowl causes the water in the great river Euphrates to dry up to prepare the way for kings from the east. (By the way, if these bowls are describing *literal* plagues, then where did this water come from?)

We should recall that the sixth trumpet also depicted warfare as an instrument of God’s judgment. There in 9:13-19 we saw 200 million troops crossing the Euphrates river to march against Rome. But the war of the sixth trumpet was only a partial judgment — only a third were killed. The war of the sixth trumpet was horrifying, but how much worse must be the war of the sixth bowl!

Recall from our discussion in Chapter 9 that “Crossing the Euphrates” was a vivid picture representing the threat of military power. In the Old Testament, the Assyrians and Babylonians crossed the Euphrates river to attack the Jews. Rome feared an invasion from the Parthians across the Euphrates. The Euphrates symbolized a barrier or a deterrent to external invasion, and that barrier has now been removed.

The drying up of the waters is a common sign of God's power. In Exodus 14:21, God showed his power by drying up the Red Sea. In Joshua 3:17, God showed his power by drying up the Jordan river. In Jeremiah 51:36, God threatened to destroy Babylon by drying up her sea. In Zechariah 10:11, God threatened to destroy Egypt by drying up the Nile. Here, in Revelation 16, we see God drying up the Euphrates river to allow his armies to advance upon Rome even more easily than they did in Chapter 9. There will be nothing to stop them or even slow the down.