

St. Therese Catholic Church

Book of Revelation

Chapters 15-16

March 4, 2025

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Overview

- Chapters 12 to 14 recapitulated the history of salvation. The visions began with Israel before the birth of Christ (Rev. 12), continued through Satan's war on the Church by means of the beasts (Rev. 13), recounted the worship and witness of the Lamb's faithful followers (Rev. 14:1-5), and arrived at the final judgment (Rev. 14:6-20) (254).
- Now chapters 15 and 16 return to an earlier point in the story, resuming immediately after the seventh trumpet has sounded. They depict the preparation and pouring out of seven bowls that contain the seven last plagues that complete God's judgment on evil (15:1) (254).

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Three Signs

- Sign one: The woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, on her head a crown of twelve stars (Rev. 12:1).
- Sign two: Huge red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven diadems. It attacks the woman's offspring – the Christian community.
- Sign three: Seven angels with seven last plagues, for through them God's fury is accomplished (McIlraith, 136).
- Third sign shows how God's judgment is carried out and Satan's plans are defeated (McIlraith, 137).

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Revelation 15 - 20

- This section on judgment runs from here in Revelation 15 to the Apocalypse's version of the Last Judgment in 20:11-15.
- We have seen that God's judgment is twofold. It means salvation for the just and punishment for the evil. This is the scenario that is unveiled here (McIlraith, 137).
- The just, the Wife, drinks the cup of God's will, namely accepting Christ and the divine love, and becomes the prepared Wife and finally the Bride. The dragon and all those who refuse to drink God's cup of love encounter God's infinite love as wrath, divine love rejected (McIlraith, 137).

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Revelation 15 - 16

- Revelation 15 and 16 are closely connected. The seven angels are prepared in Revelation 15 and carry out their mission in Revelation 16 (McIlraith, 137).
- Revelation 15 has three parts.
 - 15:1: The angels are introduced.
 - 15:2-4: A hymn praising God is sung by those conquering, now in heaven.
 - 15:5-8: The seven angels again, prepared for mission.
- Key: The task of the angels is to bring all nations to worship God (McIlraith, 137).

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Exodus Motif

- The presence of the Exodus motif is very striking in this short chapter. We find here the plagues, the sea, the song of Moses, and the tent of testimony.
- All these are types and now replaced in a Christian melody that explains the work of the Lamb, the Risen Jesus (McIlraith, 137).



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Exodus Motif

- Seven angels with the seven last plagues: We saw three plagues of fire, smoke, and sulfur come from the mouth of horses in Rev. 9:18.
- These seven last plagues brings the number of plagues to ten, the same number that struck Egypt when God delivered Israel through Moses (255).
- God's fury accomplished: Revelation reserves the words "judgment," "wrath," and here "fury" to describe God's final response to those who refuse to repent despite the testimony of Christians and the chastisements that accompany the seals and the trumpets that function as divine warnings. At last God's response to evil is going to be revealed (255).

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Exodus Motif

Exodus 15	Revelation 15
Israelites walked through the Red Sea (Exod. 14:29)	Sea of glass mingled with fire (Rev. 15:2)
Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord (Exod. 15:1)	The martyrs and God's holy people who remained faithful unto death sang in the great trial (Rev. 15:3-4)
The tabernacle (or tent of testimony) was modeled on Moses' vision of the heavenly tabernacle (Exod. 25:9; Heb. 8:5)	John has another vision wherein the temple that is the heavenly tent of testimony is opened (Rev. 15:5).

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Final Vision

- They were dressed in clean white linen: The angels wear liturgical vestments, clean white linen (linen was worn by priests or angels: Lev. 16:4, 23; Ezek. 9:2-3) (258).
- Gold sash: Like the gold sash worn by the “one like a son of man in 1:13, indicating they bear special authority (258).
- One of the four living creatures: Just as they initiated the first four seal judgments in chapter 6, so now one of them initiates the bowl judgments (258).
- God’s fury: God’s wrath is not motivated by emotional reaction but rather by perfect justice and holiness (258).

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Final Vision

- The temple became so filled: When the cloud of God's glory first descended on the tabernacle in the wilderness, Moses was unable to enter it (Exod. 40:35).
- When the glory of God filled Solomon's new built temple, the priests could not enter it (1 Kgs. 8:11).
- Key: The impossibility of entering the temple indicates an overwhelmingly powerful manifestation of God's presence. Whereas previously God's glory marked the completion of the temple, here it points to the completion of God's judgment, the seven plagues. God will bring a complete end to evil (259).

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Final Vision

- Revelation 15 provides us with an Exodus motif. God delivered his covenant people from the slavery of Egypt via ten plagues and bringing them through the Red Sea such that the Israelites sang a hymn of praise to God.
- Here, the hymn is sung by those conquering (via their dependency upon Jesus and his love). Those conquering are the espoused Wife of Jesus, those who through their first works, remain in their nuptial relationship of love with Jesus.
- If they are in heaven, then they have come through the Last Judgment (McIlraith, 138).

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Chapter 16 - Overview

- Chapter 16 reports a vision of God's final judgment on evil in the world, depicted symbolically as the pouring out of seven bowls of wrath (260).
- If the events following the opening of the seals depict tragedies typical of human history – conquest, violence, famine, pestilence – and the events following the sounding of the trumpets represent escalation in which natural disasters and demonic torments strike the people of the earth, to press them toward repentance, the seventh trumpet and the ensuing seven bowls bring final judgment on those who persist in doing evil (260).

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Chapter 16- Overview

- The seven bowls are described as “plagues” recalling the plagues that God brought down on Pharaoh and Egypt.
- They manifest God’s overwhelming power applied to an ever-increasing force against those who resist his will, refusing to repent (260).
- The progression from seals (quarter), to trumpets (third), to bowls (all) reflects an intensification of troubles affecting more and more people as history tends toward its climax (260-261).

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Chapter 16- Overview

- While the first five bowls entail natural calamities that affect the whole world, the sixth bowl depicts events leading up to a final assault by God's enemies against his people, and the seventh depicts God's intervention with overwhelming power to judge Babylon.
- Chapters 17 to 20 zoom in to reveal more about the judgment of Babylon, the defeat of the beast and its armies, and the final defeat of Satan (261).



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Seven Bowls

- Like the first four trumpet judgments (8:7-12), these four bowl judgments strike each part of a fourfold division of creation: earth, sea, springs and rivers, and heaven (262).
- Seven bowls of God's fury: The wrath of God manifests destructive effects of God's holiness and love on evil, "like the effect of light on darkness." (262)
- The use of seven indicates the fullness of God's wrath. God's wrath is his love in its negative aspect of destroying evil (McIlraith, 140).

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Chapter 16- Overview

Bowls	Exodus
1. Bowl on earth: Festering and ugly sores broke out on those with the mark of the beast.	Sixth plague of Egypt brings sores (Exod. 9:10-11).
2. Bowl on sea: Sea turned to blood like that of a corpse, every creature died	
3. Bowl on rivers/springs of water: These also turned to blood.	First plague of Egypt, turns Nile to blood (Exod. 7:17)
4. Bowl on the sun: It was given the power to burn people with fire	

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Seven Bowls

- Whereas the angel in charge of the waters proclaims the the justice of God in passing sentence (Rev. 16:6), those affected by the plagues blasphemed the name of God and did not repent or give him glory (263).
- Key: The sun can melt wax or harden clay. If a substance melts or hardens is not determined by the sun but by the material the sun shines on. So are our hearts.
- The first four plagues affected the beast's followers. The next three plagues deal with the destruction of the beast's kingdom (McIlraith, 141).

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Seven Bowls

Bowls	Exodus
5. Bowl on the throne of the beast: the headquarters of the dragon's enterprises. Its kingdom was plunged into darkness; people bit their tongues	Ninth plague covered Egypt in darkness. Light was on the Israelites but the Egyptians were in darkness (Exod. 10:21 – 23)
6. Bowl emptied on the great river Euphrates: Allows forces of evil to mount a final attack, an assault that will lead to their defeat. Frogs emerge from mouths.	Second plague of Egypt was a plague of frogs that covered the land, homes, and infested food (Exod. 7:26 – 8:11)
7. Bowl poured into the air: Symbolizes God's final judgment on the part of the human race that persists in rebellion against him. Large hail falls. Chapters 17-20 unpack this judgment.	Seventh plague of Egypt was a hailstorm that lasted eight days, accompanied by fire and thunder (Exod. 9:22-26).

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Seven Bowls

- Bowls five, six, and seven deal with the destruction of the beast's kingdom.
 - Bowl Five: Poured on the throne of the beast, the headquarters of the dragon's enterprises. The result was darkness in the beast's kingdom (McIlraith, 141).
 - Bowl Six: Demonic spirits gather kings of the whole world to assemble for battle on the great day of God the almighty. It is a prelude to their defeat.
 - Bowl Seven: The beast's city of Babylon falls.

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Bowl Five

- Its kingdom was plunged into darkness: What hurt the Egyptians helped the Israelites. The Israelites were in the light, but the Egyptians were in darkness (McIlraith, 141).
- Wisdom 17 elaborates on this darkness, describing it as moral darkness. The darkness of their evil consciences so darkened everything for them that they were terrified of everything, even of the air (McIlraith, 141).
- Those affected by the fifth plague have the same reaction as those in the fourth. They know this is from God but instead of giving God glory, they curse God (McIlraith, 141).

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Bowl Six

- Great river Euphrates: Ancient boundary separating the east from the west. The Assyrian (721 BC) and Babylonian (586 BC) Empires came from the east.
- These ancient enemies and the military threat to Rome are only symbols of something worse. Place names in Revelation are almost always primarily important for what they symbolize (265).
- Unclean spirits like frogs: The role of these demonic spirits is propagandistic; they are to persuade the kings of the whole world to assemble for war (265).

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Bowl Six

- Battle on the great day of God the almighty: The great eschatological (end times) conflict, the last battle, the day of judgment, when evil will be defeated at the return of Christ (265).
- Ezekiel prophesied that before the final restoration of Israel and the establishment of the temple (Ezek. 39:25-29; 40-48), the Lord would incite the pagan nations to assemble before battle against his people (Ezek. 38) so they could be completely defeated, allowing his people to live in peace (265-266).

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Bowl Six

- Armageddon: In Hebrew means “mountain of Megiddo.” Megiddo was an ancient city located on a small mound in the Jezreel Valley overlooking an important trade route in north-central Israel (266).
- It was the site of a number of important battles. Rev. 16:6 is the only mention of the name Armageddon in the Bible.



Tel Megiddo – Site of the ancient city Megiddo. Tel Megiddo is 19 miles southeast of Haifa.

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Bowl Six

- One of the defining features of Revelation is recapitulation, retelling the same story from different angles. Here the story is about escalating satanic-inspired opposition to Christians and about God's future salvation (267).

Sixth Trumpet	Sixth Seal
Demonic invasion released after sixth trumpet (9:13-21)	Assembling of kings for battle at Armageddon (16:14-16)
Demonic calvary issues threefold evils of fire, smoke and sulfur (9:17)	Frog-like demonic spirits come from the mouths of dragon, beast, and false prophet (16:13)
Met with unrepentant wrongdoing (9:20-21)	Follows persistent unrepentance (16:11)
Plague kills a third of the wicked (9:18)	Plague will kill all assembled (19:19-21; 20:7:10)

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Bowl Six

- It seems to me that the visions of the beast waging war against the two witnesses (11:7-10), the beast who blasphemes God and wages war against God's holy ones (chapter 13), and the demonic spirits performing signs and mobilizing the whole world to attack (16:13-14) do not describe separate events but refer in different ways to the final phase of the war of the dragon against the woman and her children (12:17), the war of Satan against the Church, which has been taking place since Jesus ascended into heaven (12:5).
- Although the conflict ebbs and flows in intensity throughout history, Revelation indicates – in agreement with Jesus' eschatological discourse and with Jewish apocalyptic literature – that it will become especially fierce immediately before the end of the age (267).

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Bowl Seven

- The seventh bowl symbolizes God's final judgment on the part of the human race that persists in rebellion against him. The next three chapters, 17-20, unpack this judgment and give us a more complete picture, although not one that answers all our questions (268).
- In the air: The fact that the angel pours out his bowl into the air, above everything else, indicates that the final act of judgment will strike everything (268).
- Greek science understood the world to be composed of four elements, and the bowls have now struck all four: earth (16:2), water (16:3-6), fire (16:8), and air (268).

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Bowl Seven

- Lighting flashes: Now we have another cosmic shakeup, a theophany, a divine manifestation. This includes the fifth and final earthquake of the book, the greatest earthquake ever experienced indicating God's final judgment is being carried out (McIlraith, 146).
- Great city: Babylon is called the great city since it is the capital of an empire. To John's readers, Babylon was the pagan that conquered Judah, destroyed the temple, and became the place of Israel's exile (268-269).
- Nevertheless, in Revelation, Babylon assumes a symbolic significance as the city of those who reject God, the "dragon's covenant people" who bear the mark of the beast (269).

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Bowl Seven

- God remembered great Babylon: In the Bible when God remembers someone, it means that he turns his attention to that person or people, either to save (Exod. 2:24; Luke 1:72) or, as in this case, to judge (269).
- Every island fled and mountains disappeared:
Demonstrates God's surpassing power and greatness in comparison with created things, a point made with similar imagery in the Old Testament (Ps. 97:5; Is 2:12-18) (269).
- Large hailstones: Reminiscent of the seventh Egyptian plague (Exod. 9:22-26).

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Bowl Seven

- Blasphemed God: For the third time, people respond to the bowl judgments by blaspheming God, indicating a definitive choice (16:9, 11, 21) (269).
- Like Pharaoh of old (Exod. 8:15), they harden their hearts and do not repent. Instead, like the beast (13:1, 5-6), they revile God (269).
- Once again we have climbed what seemed like the final ascent to discover that we have not arrived at our journey's end. Judgment is still raining down, and God's enemies are still shouting their defiance (269).

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Seven Bowls

- What is the message of the seven bowls? No matter how powerful the worldly forces arrayed against God and his people appear, their sudden and irreversible destruction is certain (270).
- God is in charge. He is just and brings judgment. He will vindicate his people. He will pay back evildoers for what they have done to others (270).
- God is patient and deliberate in his administration of justice, but in the end, calamity descends on those who refuse to repent (270).

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Next Time

- Tuesday, March 25th



Revelation 17	
Babylon the Great	17:1-6
Meaning of the Beast and the Harlot	17:7-18