

Joel Breidenbaugh

(Revelation 16:17-21)

Intro. When you hear the word “Armageddon,” do you think of a giant meteor heading to the earth to destroy it? How many of you think of judgment day? How many of you don’t know what to think? Just a couple of days ago, news broke that NASA is planning to send a rocket into space in 2022 to hit a meteor to see if they can change its course. They want to do it to plan for a future meteor they may need to alter its course—we may be playing with fire in trying to undo whatever God determines to do, but then again, that way of thinking falls right in line with this text today on “God’s Great Wrath” from Revelation 16:17-21 on “The Final Battle.”

Theme: God’s wrath/judgment

Background: The Apostle John has shared the final set of judgments with his readers in this chapter & refers to them as plagues sent from God upon the unbelieving world.

- Other passages here in Revelation have much in common with this passage, the 7th bowl—hail is mentioned in 8:7 (during the first trumpet, just after the 7th seal) & 11:19 (7th trumpet); a great earthquake occurs in the 6th seal in 6:12-17 (viewed as the Lamb’s wrath) & also in the 7th seal, accompanied by thunder & lightning (8:5)—also in the 7th trumpet (11:19)—these similarities are part of the reason why I view Revelation as a series of descriptions of the same judgments given from different angles, emphasizing the complete destruction of the world of unbelievers & the judgment of God against sinners

Explanation of the Text:

1. The 7th bowl is the final judgment from God on earth (16:17-21)

- Parts of this judgment are predicted in Isaiah 28:17; 30:30; Daniel 12:1; Zechariah 14:1-5; Haggai 2:6
- “it is done!”—“it is over;” “the end has come”
- A great earthquake occurred at Mt. Sinai with the giving of the old covenant & all of heaven & earth would be shaken more greatly at the dissolution of that covenant (cf. Hag 2:6; Heb 12:26-28)
- The earthquake is so great, every major city in the world will be destroyed—New York, Chicago, LA, DC, Rome, London, Mexico City, Tokyo, Cairo, Istanbul, Paris, Moscow, Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Manila & more
- This judgment is reminiscent of the 7th plague of hail on Egypt (Exodus 9:22-26)
- In the OT, God repeatedly punished the enemies of His people with hail—5 kings fleeing from Joshua (Joshua 10:11), Ezekiel’s prophecy against Gog (28:18-22), Egypt & here
- The hailstones were a talent in weight & ancient weights differed—it could be as light as 60 lbs (if you call that light) & as heavy as 130 lbs—most translations opt for a middle average of 100 lbs., but no matter how you weigh it, they will be unlike any hailstones the world has ever seen
- With the falling of these hailstones killing people, we remember that much of the world will have died during the judgments preceding this final one—1/4 of the earth’s population is killed by the 4th seal (6:8) & then 1/3 of the remaining population suffers violent deaths (9:15)—these alone, if taken literally, will reduce the earth’s population to 50%

Illus: “Movements of armies, confederations of nations & worldwide opposition to God cannot hinder the Lord from fulfilling His Word & achieving His purposes” (Wiersbe, 1072)

2. The 7th bowl probably includes Christ’s return (16:17; cf. 19:11-21)

- When Christ returns, He will find the kings & armies of the earth gathered together to make war, which seems to be what we find in the 6th bowl carried over into the 7th one
- The world will not stand a chance against the Lord, for the Scriptures ask “Who can stand in the day when God’s anger is unleashed?” (Psalm 76:7; Malachi 3:2; Nahum 1:6)? Certainly the answer is “no one”
- The Gentile nations will look on Armageddon as a battle, but to God, it will be only a “supper” for the birds of the air (Rev. 19:17-21)

3. Babylon the Great refers to a worldwide spiritual & political coalition (16:19; cf. 17:18)

- Scholars differ on whether 1 or 2 cities are described here—if one, many point to Rome, which was the main antagonist against Christians in the 1st century & was referred to spiritually as ancient Babylon, because of her oppression of God's people
- If two cities, this first one is probably Jerusalem (cf. Rev. 11:8)—prophesied by Zechariah (14:4)
- Last time we looked at the great gathering of the nations at Armageddon, an area which lies some 60 miles north of Jerusalem. I believe that gathering initiates this final battle as the armies move south against Jerusalem & God's people (at least Israel, but it may include Christians, too)
- The second city, if two are in view, is either Rome or ancient Babylon, the subject of the next two chapters (17:18; 18:10, 18-19, 21; cf. 14:8)—if Babylon, then just as all people came to ascend & place themselves on the level of God by building a tower (Genesis 11), so all people will gather to fight against the God they think they can defeat—just as the Lord brought them chaos & confusion in ancient days, so He will bring disaster & death in the final days
- Satan's entire dominion will be judged by this bowl—the religious system (described as a harlot in ch. 17), the political & economic systems (part of Babylon in ch. 18) & his military system (the armies of ch. 19)

Illus: "Everything that man has built will crumble before his eyes. Quite literally the whole world will collapse around him, yet he will persist in thinking he is still the master of his own fate without any need for God" (Ryrie in *Revelation: 4 views*, 453, 455)

Application of the Text:

1. Trust in the work of Christ for what He has done & what He will do (16:17; cf. John 19:30)

- While the wording is different between "it is done" in this text and the words Jesus cried on the cross as He gave up His spirit, "It is finished!" both are important for us to remember Christ's completed work for our sins & His final work against sinners
- Both are battles ultimately between Christ & Satan as Christ undoes the work of Satan's deception & destruction he has brought to the world
- Both battles are won by Christ & the only way to take part in the victory is to trust in His Work done for you

2. Repent from your sin or face the judgment of God (16:21; cf. 16:9, 11)

- Throughout 3 of these last 4 judgments, mankind failed to repent but continued to curse & blaspheme God (16:9, 11, 21)—that's the wrong approach & response to all this judgment

Conc. Once when pioneers were making their way across one of the central states to a distant place that had been opened up for homesteading. They traveled in covered wagons drawn by oxen, and progress was necessarily slow. One day they were horrified to note a long line of smoke in the west, stretching for miles across the prairie, and soon it was evident that the dried grass was burning fiercely and coming toward them rapidly. They had crossed a river the day before but it would be impossible to go back to that before the flames would be upon them. One man only seemed to have understanding as to what could be done. He gave the command to set fire to the grass behind them. Then when a space was burned over, the whole company moved back upon it. As the flames roared on toward them from the west, a little girl cried out in terror, "Are you sure we shall not all be burned up?" The leader replied, "My child, the flames cannot reach us here, for we are standing where the fire has been!" What a picture of the believer, who is safe in Christ! "On Him Almighty vengeance fell/ Which would have sunk a world to hell/ He bore it for a chosen race/ And thus becomes our Hiding Place." The fires of God's judgment burned themselves out on Him, and all who are in Christ are safe forever, for they are now standing where the fire has been (Ironside, *Illustrations of Bible Truth*, 34-35). Would you trust in Christ & turn from sin, trusting His work to be your salvation?