

11. The Seven Last Plagues (1Q 2019—Revelation)

Biblical material: Rev. 15:1, 4; 7:1–3; 14:9, 10; 16:1–12; 17:1; Daniel 5; Rev. 16:16; 2 Thess. 2:9–12.

Quotes

- Apocalyptic is unbeatable because it's reheatable. *Anon.*
- The seven last plagues come as the result of a certain course of action. God does not arbitrarily withdraw His mercy from the earth, and torment men because He has the power to do so. Divine law has been revealed to man age after age; and yet, contrary to that law, men and nations have paved the way for their own destruction. In the history of every nation which has arisen and fallen, God has given an object lesson to the world of the ultimate results of continued disobedience to laws which rule in the universe, and in harmony with which, alone, the universe itself continues to exist. *S.N. Haskell*
- The seven last plagues are the natural results of the spiritual fornication of which the church is guilty when the name Babylon is applicable to her. *S.N. Haskell*
- The seven last plagues are indeed soon coming and that the Lord is coming right at the end of that. *A.T. Jones*
- The seven last plagues, and the three woes, are denounced against the anti-Christian beast, who dwells on and has great power over the earth. *William Miller*

Questions

How does God look in relation to the seven last plagues? What are these plagues “for”? Is there any good news in these last plagues? How do they fit into the great controversy perspective over the nature and character of God? How do we help others understand that God’s judgment is also judgment for good?

Bible summary

The key verses are Rev. 15:1 and 4 (FBV): “Seven angels held the seven last plagues which complete God’s judgment... Lord... you have demonstrated by your actions that you do what is right!” These plagues are the way in which judgment is finished, and we need to see them in this light. Judgment in Scripture is not simply condemnation as we tend to view it today, it is also judgment for vindication: in this case the vindication of God and those who follow him. The plagues begin after the angels holding back the winds let go (Rev. 7:1–3). Rev. 14:9, 10 is the beginning of the third angel’s message. Rev. 16:1-16 details six of the plagues. Key points to note are that people do not repent and that they curse God. Rev. 17:1 reveals the target of God’s judgment. Daniel 5 speaks to judgment. 2 Thess. 2:9-12 also references the end-time judgment.

Comment

There have been many interpretations of the seven last plagues, and what they refer to. William Miller, for example, believed six of the seven last plagues had already occurred over the previous three hundred years. Josiah Litch mentions that he had previously believed six were in the past, but now thought they were all in the future.

Differences of opinion also relate to the length of time the seven last plagues will last. Some believe they last for many years, others for just one year. Generally most interpreters of Revelation see these plagues as being poured out after the close of probation when no one will change their minds. Some have seen this as the vindictive punishment of a hostile God—for if people cannot repent, what is the point of such punitive acts?

So what's the point of the seven last plagues? What are they for?

The key point to notice is that despite the severity of the plagues, the people of the earth do not repent. Instead they curse God, angry with him for bringing judgment upon them. In the same way as Pharaoh of Egypt refused to change his mind and opposed God, these people at the end refuse to acknowledge God. Here we see how deeply ingrained sin becomes that even though in they are in pain and agony they obstinately refuse to respond to God. Here we have the ultimate demonstration that in the end we can go so far in sin that we will never change course, whatever the circumstances. This is not God arbitrarily preventing people from repenting, but a demonstration that the wicked are so settled into believing the Devil's lies that they cannot be moved!

So as we, and the whole on-looking universe, consider these last plagues, what do we see? God is showing us all that those who refuse him in such circumstances have made a final, irrevocable choice. They would rather go down into their graves in extreme agony than turn to God. They curse God for not allowing them to continue in their sinful lives of evil excess. They curse God for not permitting them to pursue their rebellious choices. Most of all they curse God for being the embodiment of all that is good and right and true, for in their perverse nature they live only to wallow in their wickedness.

There is no vindictive retribution here. This is total transparency so that all can see and know where sin leads—that in the end there is no possibility of return. God wants everyone to know the finality of choice, and its ultimate results. For though there is certainly divine involvement here—these are angels of God doing this after all—the focus is on the totality of rebellion that ends in its final doom-laden consequences.

Ellen White Comments

I saw that the four angels would hold the four winds until Jesus' work was done in the sanctuary, and then will come the seven last plagues. These plagues enraged the wicked against the righteous; they thought that we had brought the judgments of God upon them, and that if they could rid the earth of us, the plagues would then be stayed. A decree went forth to slay the saints, which caused them to cry day and night for deliverance. This was the time of Jacob's trouble. Then all the saints cried out with anguish of spirit, and were delivered by the voice of God. {EW 36-7}

After putting Jesus in the background, they attract the attention of the world to themselves and to their miracles and lying wonders, which, they declare, far exceed the works of Christ. Thus the world is taken in the snare and lulled to a feeling of security, not to find out their awful deception until the seven last plagues shall be poured out. Satan laughs as he sees his plan succeed so well and the whole world taken in the snare. {EW 265}

At that time the "latter rain," or refreshing from the presence of the Lord, will come, to give power to the loud voice of the third angel, and prepare the saints to stand in the period when the seven last plagues shall be poured out. {Mar 170}

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