



2019 Q1 The Book of Revelation - Lesson 11 The Seven Last Plagues

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Not being a theologian, by any stretch, instead a seeking believer trying to make sense of Revelation, I owe it to myself and you all, to read widely and to at least TRY to distill the information.

We have the two foremost SDA Revelation scholars represented in the Bible Study Guide and the accompanying Teacher's notes. We can channel Tim in the reading of The Remedy.

For more alternative views: Dave Larson article refers to Adventist theologians with new perspectives <https://conversation.spectrummagazine.org/t/revelation-our-options-for-interpretation/17676>

God of Sense and Traditions of Nonsense, by Sigve Tonstad (last 2 chapters on Revelation) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaFbegB6zeM>

<https://conversation.spectrummagazine.org/search?q=timeout>

With this in mind, I'd like to introduce the concept of Differential Diagnosis (D/Dx):

In medicine, there may be more than one possible explanation for a given set of symptoms; e. g cough. Cough is a symptom, usually one of several, with which a patient presents. While most likely representing some form of URTI, is it viral or bacterial? Is it pneumonia or just a "cold"? Is there an underlying condition that could predispose the patient to complications? Is it possible that it represents GERD, or even a side effect of other medications?

Nowadays, anyone can google "D/DX of Cough" and come up with percentages of likelihood of any given symptom represents one condition vs another. This is how patients think medicine is practiced: "Dr. Google". (Not back in 1980s, for sure; today's TV docs all walk around with an iPad! - fonts of knowledge of the most obscure diagnoses. Practical? Because only rarely is a single symptom present in isolation, e.g., our patient with a cough: is there accompanying fever and chills? Nausea/vomiting? Post nasal drip? Sputum production? You can see how quickly one would need multiple Google searches, all able to correlate and integrate information from the others to rule in or out particular options for your single diagnosis of the patient's condition.

I don't know what medical education is like today, but in my day we spent years honing our abilities to discern which details of the patients history and physical were pertinent; D/Dx is the task of finding the most persuasive explanation for ALL the findings/symptoms in a given patient.

Wiki Definition "the process of weighing the probability of one disease versus that of others possibly accounting for a patients' illness"



- Why does one's diagnosis matter? BECAUSE IT CHANGES THE TREATMENT! The physician's or provider's DIAGNOSIS -- their JUDGMENT -- matters in how they recommend and implement treatment for the patient towards healing and restoration of health. You can't arrive at the correct treatment until you have the correct diagnosis.

Applying these concepts to spiritual matters:

- How has "God's Judgment" been defined by those adhering to the penal substitution? A legal finding and determination of imposed punishment for breaking of arbitrary rules
- How have we defined "judgment of God"? His DIAGNOSIS of the condition of the heart; His therapeutic intervention to heal and save; His pronouncement of the natural result of the condition of the heart and mind (depending on the context of the use of "judgment")

But God's judgment is not the only judgment discussed in Scripture:

Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD. Isaiah 1:18

May you be proved right in what you say, and you will win your case in court." Romans 3:4 (GNB)

"God, may you be proved right and true in the hearts and minds of your intelligent creatures when you present yourself openly for their judgment." Romans 3:4 Rem

So, what about YOUR judgment of the evidence? We are invited to weigh all the evidence in the case of God's trustworthiness, of his Righteousness. All the various motivations ascribed to God in the stories revealed in the Bible, the ways in which He designed the universe to function, and the degree to which He manifests/abides with His law of Love --> your assessment of Him, your "diagnosis" of His character will define the way you become, for we become like that which we worship and admire. the way you treat others and, ultimately, whether your heart has his Law of Love written upon it, and you love others more than self. Other-centered giving, service, and love results in maturing and perfecting of character, and healing of mind and body.

In D/Dx - not all evidence is equal; not all diagnoses are equal; In the spiritual realm, while each thoughtful person's "diagnosis" of God's character may deserve thoughtful consideration, one must ultimately arrive at a "diagnosis" of God, His character, His methods, His judgments.

Turning to our study of Revelation and the awful, AWE-ful plagues:

Review provisos:

- Revelation is highly symbolic: If one part of a passage is symbolic or metaphor, then the rest is symbolic or metaphor unless clear reasons to be literal are expressed in the text; the Bible will be used to interpret itself (i.e. symbol interpretations will use Bible definitions before other definitions).
- The general theme is that of the conflict between Christ and Satan.



- **No interpretation should be accepted that represents God in a character different that Jesus revealed, or which has God violating His design laws of love and liberty**

This being said, we may still come to different conclusions about what symbols mean; We don't have to interpret every detail of the symbols "correctly" to be saved; Salvation is found in Jesus, trusting Him, opening the heart and being reborn by the indwelling Spirit—Saved people can disagree on technical points of interpretation—it's okay!

Let's listen to each other and possibly learn.... Ultimately, you'll find that I ultimately, ask:

- What does this perspective say about God?
- Is it in keeping with what I KNOW to be true: through Scripture, through Design Law and science, and through life experience; all overlapping/intersecting to reveal harmonized Truth - with a capital T! The Integrative, Evidence-based Approach?

SABBATH

The challenge of Revelation is that it all must be taken in context; this is a book named “reveal”, to “open” our eyes to what's going on, even tho' using strange (to us!) imagery and symbols to depict events.

One can't pick up the study of the plagues, for example, without seeing the setting in the chapter just prior. Or recognizing the familiarity of "7's", or the “thirds”, particularly regarding the trumpets previously. [The intricacies of Revelation allow for people to do dissertations on one symbol!]

Memory Verse: starting with Rev 15:1-4 (Phillips):

1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, *which are* the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished.

2 And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God. 3 And they *sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

“Great and marvelous are Your works,

O Lord God, the Almighty;

Righteous (setting right) and true (trustworthy) are Your ways,

King of the nations!

4 “Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify (speak well of) Your name?

For You alone are holy (faultless);

For ALL THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE YOU,

For Your RIGHTEOUS ACTS (RIGHT-NESS) HAVE BEEN **REVEALED** .”

The **setting** for the upcoming plagues is: the throne room, the heavenly council. Familiar? Same as it was for the seals (Rev 4 and 5) and the trumpets (Rev 8:2-5)



- God is active: HIS angels, HE directs the releasing of the actions of the adversary; even actively “letting go”...

but at the same time:

- God is revealing: the nature of the adversary; allowing him to show himself for what he is.

V. 1: another revelation is about to begin; the “last” plagues, maybe in contrast to the trumpets (“first?”); also, the wrath of God...is finished. We have come to the end of a process. The “wrath of God”:

1. letting go – permission to loose the restraints, and
2. revelation – exposing the adversary for who he is Vv2-4: the sea of glass – at the foot of the throne of the heavenly council (Rev 4:);
 - a. The harps of God – Rev 14:1-2

A victory celebration for and by those who had won the war. Singing (echoes of the seeming chaotic choirs, chants, etc described in the heavenly council after the Lamb stepped up to open the seals). Hymns that speak primarily to the kind of person God is! Your deeds, Your ways, Your name and Your judgments – **have been revealed!**

Song of Moses (Deut 32:4); review Moses’ story: Moses was kept from entering the Promised Land after striking the rock, when God had told him to speak to it (Num 20:7-11); He was God’s representative, and by striking the rock, he misrepresented God’s character and methods. Moses admits to his failure, and in his song, he “gets it right!”

But this song is sung by both Moses and the Lamb! What a Seal of Approval! And sung in concert with Jesus.

Revelation 15:5-8 continues the heavenly context for the giving of the seven last plagues.

v. 8: Read . **8** And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

It is important to notice that no one is in the temple in heaven when these plagues fall. Previously, the throne room in heaven was full of millions upon millions of heavenly beings. Might this “mean” (?)/lead us to believe that the events connected to the seven last plagues will take place after the close of probation.

Would someone like to summarize what we mean by “close of probation”?

Does anyone have any insight to affirm the idea that the close of probation has already happened PRIOR to the 7 last plagues? Why would it even matter?

To one who believes that the catastrophes wrought in the 7 seals/trumpets/plagues are “from the hand of God”, as “punitive judgement” or “covenant curses” on the unbelieving/unrepentant -- these plagues would then be falling on permanently deaf ears. So, to what end? punishment? retribution?? Stick it to ‘em? WHAT DOES THAT SAY ABOUT GOD?!?!



SUNDAY

(last para) The expression “no one was able to enter into the temple” ([Rev. 15:8, NKJV](#)) points to the close of probation ([Rev. 22:11](#)). As Christ’s mediatorial ministry in heaven (**He is certainly in heaven, but his mediatorial ministry is involved in changing His people here...working in their minds to heal and restore.**) comes to an end, the door of opportunity to repent closes forever. Therefore, the last plagues will not bring anyone to repentance, but only disclose the hardness of the hearts of those who chose to side with Babylon, prompting them to hate God even more ([Rev. 16:9, 11](#)).

The temple is a symbol of God’s people. We are all spiritual stones built into one building that is designed to house God. In all the previous times mentioned when God’s glory fills the temple, nobody could enter it. In Exodus 40:34-35, Moses could not enter the tent of meeting. In 1 Kings 8:10-11 and 2 Chronicles 5:13-14, the glory of God filled the temple like a cloud, and the priests could no longer serve. So, in this metaphor, God’s people -- his temple -- is so filled with the character of God Himself that there is no longer any need for the “priest’s” duties to be fulfilled.

Summation thus far:

- God is active: HIS angels, HE directs the releasing of the actions of the adversary; even actively “letting go”...

but at the same time:

- God is revealing: the nature of the adversary; allowing him to show himself for what he is.

MONDAY

(1st para) With the cessation of Christ’s intercession in the heavenly sanctuary, the destiny of each individual is forever determined. **Determined by what? Jesus stops because what He has been working for has been achieved. The glory of the Lord is in His temple. (glory=character, temple=His people) Everyone else has rejected the truth enough that they no longer hear it. The time has come for those who have spurned the gospel to experience God’s wrath in its fullness. True, but written poorly. “The time has come for those who have rejected the truth, the good news about God’s character, to experience what happens when God lets them stay in error. They are so tied the lies that He cannot reach them anymore, so He lets them go.**

Going back to v. 7 imagery:

7 Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God (NASB)

Some might say, “How can this be read as anything OTHER than coming from the hand of God?”



Here I want to point out the picture from The Remedy: aren't you drawn to The Remedy's description of the 7 bowls as "God's heartbreaking disengagement" and "the final 7-step release of God's restraint"

In fact, let me read them by verse, from The Remedy :

15:7 . seven gold bowls filled with the heartbreaking disengagement of God who is the source of all life. The gold bowls are symbolic of God's stepwise release of those who choose to be separate from him.

15:8 . the final seven-step release of God's restraint

16:1 ...the seven bowls God's heartbreaking disengagement upon the earth.

16:2 ... symbolizing God's love granting people their final choice of rejecting him, and allowing them to reap the consequences of their choice by no longer shielding them with his protective hand

16:3,4,8,10 symbolizing the withdrawing of God's protective and life-sustaining presence from the earth

16:12 ...symbolizing the withdrawing of God's forces of righteousness

16:17 ... symbolizing God's restraining and protective presence being completely removed from the earth

SUNDAY

The Meaning of the Seven Last Plagues

(1st para) People have already made their choice either for God or for Babylon. Before Christ comes, however, the destructive winds of Satan's fury that have been restrained ([Rev. 7:1-3](#)) are unleashed, followed by the seven last plagues.

Review imagery of 4 angels releasing winds of strife: Rev 7:1-3.

What are the four angels doing? Holding back the winds of strife, the forces of evil, satanic agencies, thus their power to harm the earth is by letting go their hold – just like God let Satan loose in the book of Job.

EGW supports this view:

The restraining Spirit of God is even now being withdrawn from the world. Hurricanes, storms, tempests, fire and flood, disasters by sea and land, follow each other in quick succession. Science seeks to explain all these. The signs thickening around us, telling of the near approach of the Son of God, are attributed to any other than the true cause. Men cannot discern the sentinel angels restraining the four winds that they shall not blow until the servants of God are sealed; but when God shall bid His angels loose the winds, there shall be such a scene of strife as no pen can picture.—Testimonies, vol. 6, p. 408.

Four mighty angels are still holding the four winds of the earth. Terrible destruction is forbidden to come in full. The accidents by land and by sea; the loss of life, steadily increasing,



by storm, by tempest, by railroad disaster, by conflagration; the terrible floods, the earthquakes, and the winds will be the stirring up of the nations to one deadly combat, while the angels hold the four winds, forbidding the terrible power of Satan to be exercised in its fury until the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads. {ML 308.2}

If there are no objections, I'm going to skip Sunday's content, because, it asks us to "compare and contrast" the 7 last plagues with the 10 plagues on Egypt.

1. The analogy is weak, vaguely repetitive and only incomplete alignment between the 7 last plagues and the 10 plagues upon Egypt
2. And, as I understand them, in the plagues of Egypt, GOD was the acting subject, yet the 7 last plagues are NOT God acting, but demonic activity.

Later, I'd like to demonstrate the comparison of the last plagues and the TRUMPETS sequence. (And then ask yourself why the quarterly might not be making this much more OBVIOUS comparison?)

[The plagues of Egypt were intended to reveal the truth about God and to convince the Egyptians (and probably also the Israelites) of the uselessness of worshiping false gods. Each plague pointed out and worked against one of the false gods and its "power." Pharaoh hardened his own heart against this truth, as did many of his people.

God was acting to demonstrate that He is the only true God, that the gods they worshiped were not God. God was responsible for presenting the evidence, but then God left Pharaoh free to decide how they would respond to the evidence. Would they repent and humble themselves before the Lord or would they reject the truth and thereby harden their heart?]

(2st para) The seven last plagues are referred to as the "last" plagues because they come at the very end of earth's history. *Maybe to contrast the "first" plagues, i.e., the trumpets? "Last" in that with them, God's wrath (letting go) is complete. 15:2 Rem: "last" because when these are released, God will have ceased all intercession on earth.* [In contrast, the plagues of the seven trumpets cover the time period that includes the entire Christian age and are restricted in their scope. *Historicist/New Historicist viewpoint.* They are executed while the gospel still is being preached ([Rev. 10:8-11:14](#)) and intercession is taking place ([Rev. 8:2-5](#)). They are mixed with mercy, and their purpose is to bring the enemy of God's people to repentance.]

** (3rd para) On the other hand, the seven last plagues are poured out just prior to the Second Coming. They are poured out upon those who, like Pharaoh, hardened their hearts against God's redeeming love and would not repent ([Rev. 16:11](#)). Divine wrath is God's righteous judgment on the choices people have made ([Rom. 1:26-28](#)), and at that time the lost are reaping the consequences of their own choices. *Translation: Gods righteous judgment is His correct diagnosis of the condition of all, based on the choices they have made. God lets go of those who have rejected Him, leaving them to the consequences of their own choices.*

Do you see how EASY it is to interpret using the penal view?

All the more reason to flood our minds with this picture of God!



MONDAY

The Outpouring of the Last Plagues

I am a member in the library SS class at the big church; I taught the week of the Trumpets, to less than grand fanfare. I dissented with the Quarterly position that the trumpet “plagues” were “divine judgments of retribution, “punitive judgments” and/or “covenant curses”, as described by its authors. Instead, I hold that the plaques were delivered by the adversary; they have his “fingerprints” all over them!

And while the vast majority of Christianity agrees with the SS authors’ conclusions, I’m holding out: based on what I know to be true about God, He just can’t be saying all along, “All I want from you is your love and devotion”. Only to, in the end, say, “... or I’ll have to kill you.”

Particularly Trumpet/Bowl #6: Both revolve around the Euphrates river.

Can you imagine that this correlation is an accident? This is “recapitulation”; Revelation being consistent with itself, within the text itself (see Proviso #1). More easily seen when RE-reading Revelation, as I have strived to do during this quarter and would recommend doing – particularly listening to audio version. Do your own thinking and come to your own conclusions.

Can you imagine why the quarterly authors might not have drawn attention to these comparisons?

Read Rev 16:12-16: 6th bowl

Conclusions of the Bowl plagues:

1. The bowls recapitulate the trumpets – only they are worse
2. The identity of the acting subject that is in the foreground in the trumpet cycle carries over into the bowl cycle.
3. In the sixth trumpet, Satan is not just barely active; he is not just acted upon; he is – instead – acting with all stops pulled!

#	TRUMPETS	BOWLS
1	Hail, fire, and blood fall on the <i>earth</i> .	The bowl is poured on the <i>earth</i> .
2	A blazing mountain falls into the <i>sea</i> . One third of the sea becomes <i>blood</i> . A third of <i>sea creatures die</i> .	The bowl is poured on the <i>seas</i> . The seas become <i>blood</i> . Every living thing in them <i>dies</i> .
3	A blazing star falls on a third of <i>rivers and fountains of water</i> .	The bowl is poured on <i>rivers and fountains of water</i> .
4	A third of <i>sun, moon, and stars</i> are struck, resulting in darkness.	The bowl is poured on the <i>sun</i> , resulting in fierce heat.
5	Shaft of the <i>bottomless pit</i> opened. Sun and air are <i>darkened</i> with smoke. Locusts appear to <i>torture</i> people.	The bowl is poured out on the <i>throne of the beast</i> , plunging it into darkness. People <i>bit their tongues in severe pain</i> .
6	The four angels bound at the <i>great river Euphrates</i> are released. Cavalry numbering two hundred million kills a third of humanity.	The bowl is poured on the <i>great river Euphrates</i> . Kings of the world assemble for battle on the great day of God the Almighty in a place called <i>Armageddon</i> .
7	<i>Loud voices in heaven</i> announce the coming of the kingdom of God and Christ.	The bowl is poured into the air. <i>A loud voice from the throne</i> announces “It is done.”



TUESDAY

Drying Up the Euphrates River

Read Revelation 16:12 along with Revelation 17:1 and 15. What does the symbol of the Euphrates stand for? What is the significance of the drying up of the Euphrates in the context of the seven last plagues?

Compare and contrast the quarterly's interpretation of this event with Tim's understanding of the "drying up of the Euphrates" and the "kings from the east" (Wednesday), as we read in The Remedy. Diametrically opposite.

I'll leave interpretation of particular symbols to others...

(3rd para) The symbolic drying up of the Euphrates in [Revelation 16:12](#) results in the collapse of Babylon in the end time. Because the Euphrates in Revelation represents the world's civil, secular, and political powers giving their support to Babylon, the drying up of the Euphrates symbolizes the withdrawal of their support and their subsequent attack against Babylon, thereby causing its downfall.

As the people of the world witness the upheaval in nature ([Rev. 16:3-9](#)), they turn to Babylon for protection. However, as the fifth plague strikes the seat of Babylon's authority ([Rev. 16:10-11](#)), they see the futility of seeking help there. Feeling deceived, they turn against Babylon, causing her downfall ([Rev. 17:16](#)). Yet, as we have seen, their hearts remain hard against God and His people. As such, they become fertile soil for the final deception by which Satan will draw the world to unite against God's people to wipe them off the face of the earth.

In what ways have you learned how risky it is to place your trust in humans and in human institutions?

Interesting question...for isn't our church a human institution? I agree, that our trust should be in God and not in individual people or in the institutions people create and/or maintain.

Read [Revelation 16:13-14](#). What is the role of the three unclean spirits in the preparation for the battle of Armageddon? How are they a satanic counterfeit of the three angels' messages in [Revelation 14](#)? ([See 1 Tim. 4:1](#))

WEDNESDAY

(Wed 3rd para) Through the final events leading up to the close of probation, every human being will be led to choose on which of the two sides he or she will stand in the battle of Armageddon. As a prelude to this spiritual warfare, John sees three demonic spirits resembling frogs. Satan's last attempt to deceive involves demonic, lying spirits.

The dragon (paganism and spiritualism), the sea beast (Roman Catholicism), and the false prophet (apostate Protestantism) unite under Satan's command ([Rev. 13:11-12](#)). Satan enables



the lamblike beast to perform miraculous signs ([Rev. 13:13-17](#)) that includes spiritualistic manifestations. These signs are part of Satan's end-time deceptive strategy to persuade the world to follow him rather than the true God.

Blinded by their hatred of God and His truth, the leaders of the world readily believe Satan's lies, which are cloaked in a pleasing religious guise ([2 Thess. 2:9-12](#)). Ultimately, they will unite in the final battle leading to the end of this world.

THURSDAY

Gathering for the Battle of Armageddon

(3rd para) The "mountain of Megiddo" is an apparent allusion to Mount Carmel that towers above the valley in which the ancient city of Megiddo was located. Mount Carmel was the site of one of the greatest clashes in Israel's history, between God's true prophet (Elijah) and the false prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18). This showdown answered the question, "Who is the true God?" The fire that came from heaven demonstrated that the Lord was the only true God and the only one to be worshiped. While the spiritual issue of the battle of Armageddon - Will we obey God or man? - is decided *before* the plagues fall, those who side with the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet ([Rev. 16:13](#)), will then be totally controlled by the devil (as Judas was, leading up to Christ's crucifixion [[Luke 22:3](#)]).

Having chosen the losing side, they will be among those who cry for the mountains to hide them ([Rev. 6:16](#); *read also* [2 Thess. 1:7-8](#)). Before the plagues fall, however, [Revelation 13:13-14](#) portrays the earth beast bringing fire down from heaven to deceive the world into thinking that Satan's counterfeit, which will include false revivals led by another spirit, is the work of God.

(5th para) Armageddon is not a military battle among nations to be fought somewhere in the Middle East, but a global spiritual contest in which Christ decisively confronts the forces of darkness ([2 Cor. 10:4](#)). The outcome will be like that at Carmel but on a worldwide scale - with God's triumph over the forces of darkness.

Armageddon will not be some kind of military battle either in the Middle East or anywhere else on the earth. It will be a spiritual battle over who is telling the truth and whom we can trust. The weapon will be truth vs. falsehood, love vs. selfishness.