

Lesson 37

Last week, when we ended, we were looking at the prophecies of Babylon's fall in Jeremiah and Isaiah, and we were comparing those prophecies with what we see here in Revelation 16.

What we found was that Isaiah and Jeremiah had two prophecies of Babylon's fall. Isaiah literally described how the city would fall, even to the point of naming the king who would conquer the city long before that king was even born. Jeremiah, on the other hand, figuratively described the fall of the city using vivid apocalyptic language that was not intended to be taken literally.

How do we know for sure that Jeremiah was not intended to be taken literally? Because Isaiah and Jeremiah are describing the same event! They both can't be taken literally. To do so would create a contradiction. Also, when we read Jeremiah 50-51 we recognize the apocalyptic language of judgment that we see elsewhere in the Bible, such as in Matthew 24 (where we also know for sure that the language was not intended to be taken literally).

We are seeing the same thing here in Revelation 16. This vision is describing the judgment of Rome in vivid apocalyptic language just as Jeremiah used the same language to describe the fall of ancient Babylon.

We started looking at the sixth angel in verse 12 last week. As you recall, that angel's bowl dried up the Euphrates to make way for an invasion force from the east. Verse 13 continues that description.

Revelation 16:13-15

13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14 For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of

God Almighty. 15 Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.

Rome thought it was eternal, but it was not. The Roman emperors thought they were gods, but they were not. The Roman empire thought it was the true royal priesthood, but it was not. All throughout this book we have seen the contrast between what is true and what is false. We have seen the contrast between Caesar and Christ, between the kingdom of Caesar and the kingdom of Christ. Nowhere is that contrast more starkly described than right here in verse 13. In contrast to the eternal Godhead of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we see three unclean spirits that look like frogs!

The “false prophet” mentioned in verse 13 is also mentioned later in 19:20 and 20:10. Who is this false prophet? We have already talked about him. Back in Chapter 13, when we looked at the second beast from the earth, we saw how that beast was described as a false religious figure. That second beast from the earth in Chapter 13 represented the false religious side of Rome, and that second beast is who is referred to here as the false prophet, and again later in Chapters 19-20. And the beast with the false prophet in verse 13 is the first beast from the sea that we saw back in Chapter 13. That beast represents the royal side of Rome, and together the two beasts show Rome as a royal priesthood.

And who is behind the scenes running the show and pulling the strings of the two beasts? The dragon. In verse 13, we see all three: the dragon, the beast from the sea, and the beast from the earth (who is here called the false prophet). These three stand assembled against God and against the kingdom of God. Together they form a hideous contrast to the trinity of the Godhead—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

There is one characteristic of the dragon and the two beasts that really shines through in the book of Revelation, and that characteristic is this: they have big mouths! We have seen much come from the mouths of the dragon and his minions.

- In 12:15, we saw a flood come from the mouth of the dragon.
- In 13:5, we saw blasphemies come from the mouth of the first beast.

- In 13:14, we saw deceit come from the mouth of the second beast.

Here we see an unclean spirit like a frog come from the mouth of each of the three. In verse 14, these unclean spirits perform miracles and assemble the whole world for battle. We talked about the miracles back in Chapter 13 — these are false signs, just like the false signs performed by Pharaoh's magicians back in Exodus. These miracles are the “signs and lying wonders” of 2 Thessalonians 2:9. These false signs are part of God's judgment.

2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 — And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

They didn't believe the true miracles — let's see what they do with false miracles. That is what these unclean spirits perform.

Why are the unclean spirits compared to frogs?

Frogs are famous for their empty and continuous croaking. Even today we have the idiom of having a frog in your throat. The sound of a frog is a symbol for meaningless speech, and such speech characterized the speech of the dragon and the two beasts.

Once again, there may be a historical allusion here. After Nero's death, one ancient writer said that Nero was nearly reincarnated as a viper, but mercifully was instead allowed to come back as a frog so he could continue his singing!

Frogs are mentioned in only three other places in the Bible — the second Egyptian plague in Exodus 8 and twice in the Psalms (78:45 and 105:30). In Egypt, God sent a swarm of frogs, but here we see only three frogs.

How bad was the plague of frogs against Egypt? Psalm 78 tells us that the frogs in Egypt “destroyed” the Egyptians. That's how bad it was. Even so, when Pharaoh was given the opportunity to have them removed, what did he say?

*Exodus 8:9-10 — And Moses said unto Pharaoh, Glory over me: when shall I intreat for thee, and for thy servants, and for thy people, to destroy the frogs from thee and thy houses, that they may remain in the river only? And he said, **Tomorrow.***

That is truly one of the classic answers in the Bible! A famous gospel sermon by brother Marshall Keeble was based on those verses and was entitled, “Another Night with the Frogs,” and sadly Pharaoh was not the last person to reject the favors of God so that he could spend another night with the frogs! Rome’s failure to repent tells us that they too wanted another night with the frogs, and in fact they were about to spend an eternity with these frogs.

Some commentators note that in Zoroastrianism, the Persian religion, frogs were the bringer of plagues and an agent of the power of darkness. So they argue that this symbol may have been attached to the symbol of the kings from the east, but I don’t think so. I think these frogs are instead taking us back to the plagues of Egypt.

What is “the battle of that great day of God Almighty” in verse 14? Who are “the kings of the earth and of the whole world”? We’ll discuss those questions when we get to verse 16.

In verse 15, a voice (almost certainly Jesus) says that he comes as a thief! What does that mean?

Well, first, how do thieves come? Do they leave signs of their coming ahead of their arrival? Or do they come unannounced? Do you expect their coming, or does their coming occur as a surprise and at an unexpected time? Assuming our thief is not auditioning for “World’s Dumbest Criminals,” we know the answers to these questions! A thief comes without signs and catches you by surprise.

What else comes without signs and catches us by surprise? Two events. One is the final judgment of the world. That is how Jesus described that event in Matthew 24.

***Matthew 24:42-44** — Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.*

But there is another event that can also come as a thief — another event that can come unannounced and that can come as a surprise. What is that event? Our death.

There are two reasons why we must always be ready to meet God. One is that the world may come to an end, but the other is that our life on this earth may come to an end. With either event, our door of opportunity will close forever.

Which event is in view in verse 15? Doesn't the time frame of the book help us answer that question? If the book is focused on first century Rome, and if the world did not end in the first century, then what remains? In what other way besides their death and the judgment that followed did Jesus come in judgment against these persecutors in the first century?

And doesn't the beatitude at the end of verse 15 also help us answer that question? "Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame." Doesn't that sound much like what Jesus said in 2:10 — "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life"?

The message of verse 15 is that Rome had no idea what was coming. Rome would never have dreamed that they were going to lose. Rome thought it was the eternal kingdom! To Rome this judgment was not only a mystery, but it was a surprise! They were not prepared for it.

But the Christians could be prepared for it. Even though it might come at an unexpected time (such as by a knock at the door in the middle of the night when the authorities came to arrest you), those who were watchful and who kept their garments clean could be ready. And that has not changed at all in the intervening two thousand years.

Titus 2:11-14 — *For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live **soberly**, righteously, and godly, in this present world; **Looking for that blessed hope**, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

1 Thessalonians 5:2-6 — *For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a **thief in the night**. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day*

*should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but **let us watch and be sober.***

Did you notice in those verses what is linked with our watchfulness? **Sobriety.** “Let us watch and be sober.” There’s an entire sermon in that verse just waiting to be preached! But we must move on now to the Battle of Armageddon!

Revelation 16:16

16 And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.

If Revelation 13:18 with its cryptic 666 reference is the most well known verse in Revelation, then verse 16 here must be in second place.

If you ask the man on the street about Armageddon, you will most likely hear that it marks the location of the great battle at the end of the world. But where did anyone ever get the idea that there will be a battle (great or otherwise) at the end of the world? That is when every knee will bow to Jesus Christ. There will be no fighting when Jesus returns to claim his own and punish the wicked. The Bible tells us what to expect on that last great day — and a giant battle between good and evil is not on the list!

So what is Armageddon? The name Armageddon or Har-Magedon means the Mount of Megiddo. Megiddo in Hebrew means “place of troops,” which provides a big clue as to what this symbol means.

The Bible speaks of “Megiddo and its three heights” in Joshua 17:11 (ASV), “Megiddo and her towns” in Judges 1:27, “the waters of Megiddo” in Judges 5:19, and “the valley of Megiddo” in 2 Chronicles 35:22 and Zechariah 12:11.

Megiddo is located at a height near the edge of the Jezreel Valley, also known as the Plain of Esdraelon (Esdraelon being the Greek version of Jezreel). The site is located almost exactly halfway between Haifa on the Mediterranean coast to the west and Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee to the east.

From its advantageous location, Megiddo controlled one of the most important roads in the ancient world, the Via Maris, which was an international military and trade route that ran between Egypt in the south and Syria, Phoenicia, and

Mesopotamia in the north and east. This location gave Megiddo great strategic significance.

From the most ancient times to the time of Napoleon and to the present day, Megiddo has been one of the great battlegrounds of the world. One author states that “the area surrounding the ancient site of Megiddo in the Jezreel Valley has seen more fighting and bloodshed over an extended period of time than virtually any other spot on earth.”

- It was at Megiddo that Thutmose III fought in 1479 BC what one scholar has called the first battle known in recorded history anywhere in the world (although he also suggests that Pepi I instead may have had that honor as early as 2350 BC).
- It was at Megiddo that the Mongols lost their first major battle ever during their sweep across Asia and the Middle East.
- Megiddo was the plain where Barak and Deborah overthrew Sisera and his chariots in Judges 4.
- Megiddo was in the valley where Gideon’s 300 men defeated the Midianites in Judges 7.
- Saul and Jonathan were killed at the eastern edge of the Megiddo valley in 1 Samuel 31.
- Megiddo is where Ahaziah died by the arrows of Jehu in 2 Kings 9.
- Megiddo is where Josiah perished in battle with Pharaoh Necho in 2 Kings 23.

That last example with Josiah was particularly important because this delay of Necho allowed Babylon to defeat the Assyrians and become the leading power of that time. Josiah’s defeat and death paved the way for the Babylonian exile of the Jews beginning in 586 BC

Napoleon once remarked that all of the armies of the world could make battle at Megiddo. In his book, *The Battles of Armageddon*, Eric Cline describes thirty-four battles fought at the city of Megiddo or its surrounding valley. About a dozen of those battles occurred in Biblical times. Here is how he describes the area:

For four thousand years, this region has suffered almost constant warfare. Indeed, one may seriously ask if there has ever been a time when the rulers of the area, whether local or for-

eign, were not at war. The turbulent history of all Israel, and Judah, Canaan, and Palestine, is reflected in microcosm in this blood-soaked little valley, for virtually every major invader of Israel has had to fight a battle in the Jezreel Valley. Egyptians, Canaanites, Israelites, Midianites, Amalekites, Philistines, Hasmoneans, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Muslims, Crusaders, Mamlukes, Mongols, Palestinians, French, Ottomans, British, Australians, Germans, Arabs, and Israelies have all fought and died there.

So why is Armageddon mentioned here in verse 16? Because God chose for this great scene the most famous battlefield on earth so that on that battlefield he could depict the complete judgment and utter destruction of Rome.

Are those pictured here in verse 16 as assembling at Armageddon preparing to fight a **literal** battle? No. This battle is no more literal than the war in heaven we studied earlier in Chapter 12.

Hailey: “To look for a physical military battle between human armies to be fought in northern Palestine [with carnal weapons] at some future date is completely without scriptural support and foreign to the spirit and purpose of Revelation.”

Is Armageddon a vivid image for a figurative battle? Definitely. There could be no more vivid location for a great figurative battle than Armageddon. It was then and remains to this day the most famous battlefield in the world.

So who is fighting in this great figurative battle? Well, verse 14 tells us that on one side we have **God Almighty**. God is the “he” in verse 16.

God may be using the “kings of the east” from verse 12 as a tool in this judgment of Rome. We saw that earlier when we talked about the Parthians, and the irrational fear they provoked in Rome. But they are just a tool — Parthia is not judging Rome, God is judging Rome.

Before we see who is on the other side — let me ask this question: **does it matter who is on the other side?** If God Almighty is on one side, then whoever is on the other side does not stand a chance! The battle is over before it is even fought. And guess what? **That is message of verse 16!** There is no suspense in the outcome of this battle. Even before we identify who is on the other side, we know whoever it is will lose. Romans 8:31 — “If God be for us, who can be against us?”

But who is on the other side here? Who is “them” in verse 16? It certainly includes “the kings of the earth and of the whole world” in verse 14, and it likely also includes the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet from verse 13.

We know who the dragon is — Satan. We know who the beast is — the beast from the sea, the royal side of Rome. And we know who the false prophet is — the beast from the earth, the perverted religious side of Rome.

So who are “the kings of the earth and of the whole world”? **Rome and everybody else! Rome and anybody else! Rome and all of Rome’s big ugly friends!**

Having grown up in Katy, Texas in the 1970’s with a calculator strapped to my belt and as a proud member of the slide rule club and the marching band, I know a few things about bullies. And believe me — that was decades before anyone had ever heard of such a thing as an anti-bullying campaign! So let me tell you this as an expert on the subject: **Rome was a bully!** And the message here is that God is going to take care of that bully. But God isn’t just going to take care of just one bully in the schoolyard. Instead, God is gathering all of the bullies together in one place to take care of all of them at one time. God is telling the first bully to meet him for a fight — and God is telling that first bully to bring all of his bully friends with him! God is telling them all to meet him at Armageddon. Why? **So God can mop the floor with them!**

When the early church first heard this part being read aloud to them in the seven churches of Asia Minor, I suspect that this is the part where they all stood and cheered! (I can guarantee you that this is where the slide rule club would have stood and cheered! And for those of you who have never heard of a slide rule — we went to the moon with them, and we haven’t been back since we stopped using them.)

Where is the church during this battle? We will see the answer to that question when we get to Chapter 19, which will give us some more details about this great battle.

Revelation 16:17

17 And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done.

This seventh bowl in verse 17 pours its contents into the air. We are not given any details about what was in the bowl, but the great voice (almost certainly the voice of God) let's us know what that seventh bowl accomplished — “It is done!”

“It is done!” This is the end. But the end of the what? The end of the world? No. The end of Rome. The judgments poured out on Rome have ended. Rome has been judged. The church has emerged victorious.

How do we know that this isn't the end of the world? For starters, our time frame is still firmly in place. We saw it in the very first verse of the book, and we will see it again in the closing verses of the book. But, also, in a few chapters we will see descriptions of the church that can apply only to the church on earth. Rome is gone, but the church continues, as does the great mission of the church. In fact, one reason that Rome was judged was because Rome had gone from being a help to the church to instead being a great hindrance to the church. With Rome gone, the church could be more easily carry out its great mission. We are not seeing the end of the world with the church going to heaven. Instead, we are seeing the end of Rome with the church going out to spread the gospel.

Was Rome the eternal kingdom? Hardly! At this point Rome's fate is sealed and its fall is inevitable. The verdicts of historians notwithstanding, the book of Revelation makes it clear that Rome fell because Rome persecuted Christians. Rome's fall was a divine judgment from God. The most powerful empire the earth had ever seen went up against the church and lost. Rome was swept away by the eternal kingdom of God just as Daniel had foretold seven centuries earlier.

Note that this seventh bowl is poured into the air. What does the air depict? Ephesians 2:2 tells us that Satan is the prince of the power of the air.

The defeat of Rome was a great defeat for Satan. Yes, Rome was part of God's plan to bless the world through Christ, but Satan used Rome as a tool for his own purposes. Just think about how Satan had used Rome:

- In Matthew 2, Satan used the Roman puppet king Herod in an attempt to kill Jesus in his infancy.
- In Acts 2:23, wicked Roman hands were used to crucify Jesus.
- Satan used Nero to persecute the early church, including the martyrdom of Peter and Paul.

- With Nero now dead, Satan was preparing to use Domitian to carry on the persecution of the church.

Satan used Rome to attack Jesus in his infancy, and Satan used Rome to attack the church in its infancy. Satan failed! Yes, Satan had a tremendously powerful tool in Rome, but that tool proved powerless against Christ and against the church of Christ.

Satan was the power behind Rome, and Satan failed when Rome failed. Satan's complete defeat with regard to Rome will be described in detail when we get to Chapter 20.

Revelation 16:18-21

18 And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. 19 And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. 20 And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. 21 And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.

As usual, a great judgment by God is accompanied by voices, lightning, thunder, and earthquakes. We have seen these images before used for the same purpose as they are used here, to heighten the dramatic effect.

This earthquake was “such as was not since men were upon the earth.” That means that this judgment was different from the previous judgments we have

seen earlier in this book. The earlier judgments were partial, but this judgment was total and complete. Since the world had never seen an empire like Rome, the collapse of Rome created an earthquake like the world had never seen.

But doesn't this description of the earthquake mean that this bowl must correspond to the final judgment at the end of the world? No. Similar language is used elsewhere to describe other past judgments that were not the end of the world.

For example, Ezekiel describes a judgment against Judah at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar.

***Ezekiel 5:9** — And I will do in thee that which I have not done, **and whereunto I will not do any more the like**, because of all thine abominations.*

And compare the description of God's judgment in AD 70 against Jerusalem.

Matthew 24:21** — For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, **no, nor ever shall be.

The earthquake in verse 18 is figurative, and the hyperbolic language in verse 18 simply stresses the intensity of the earthquake. In short, when Rome fell there was a mighty crash!

Verse 19 says that the great city was divided into three parts. What does that mean?

First, the great city in verse 19 is Rome. It is called Babylon in the same verse, and we know that Babylon refers to Rome, both in this book and elsewhere in the New Testament (1 Peter 5:13). And, of course, we know that from the context as well.

So what does it mean that the great city was divided into three parts? There are many opinions on that question, but, as usual, I think the best approach is to go back to the Old Testament to see how similar language is used there. Here is how Ezekiel describes another judgment.

***Ezekiel 5:2** — Thou shalt burn with fire a third part in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are fulfilled: and thou shalt take a third part, and smite about it with a knife: and a third part thou shalt*

scatter in the wind; and I will draw out a sword after them.

There a division into thirds is used to depicts the total destruction of a city (in Ezekiel's case, Jerusalem). But there is another (and, I think, better) possibility that comes from our earlier study of Zechariah.

Zechariah 13:8-9 — *And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the Lord, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. 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.*

As we studied earlier, those beautiful verses are describing God's rescue of his people both from the destruction of Jerusalem and from the persecution by Rome. I think the division into three parts here in verse 19 is intended to remind us of that great promise from Zechariah 13.

Verse 19 also tells us that Rome did not fall alone. The other cities of the nations fell with her. The entire pagan world is pictured as collapsing together. These cities had all drunk the wine of Rome's fornication, and now they were suffering the consequences. Verse 19 is a reminder on a national scale that we should be careful of the company that we keep!

What does the end of verse 19 mean? "Great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath." It is simply restating what we have already seen stated before — Rome got what Rome deserved. Rome fully deserved the cup it was not receiving. And more than that, verse 19 is a reminder of a central theme of this book: God knows! God is remembering here what Rome had done, and God is holding Rome accountable for it. Later in 18:5, we will read: "For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities." That situation is very different from the blessings of those who are in Christ: "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 10:17).

In verse 20, the islands flee away and the mountains cannot be found, and in verse 21, huge hailstones fall from heaven. What does that mean?

The islands flee and the mountains cannot be found. That means there is no place to hide and no place of escape.

The hailstones remind us of the seventh plague in Exodus 9:18 and also of the great stones that fell in Joshua 10:11.

The language we see in verses 20-21 often accompanies judgments in the Old Testament.

Micah 1:3-4 — *For, behold, the Lord cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place.*

Nahum 1:5 — *The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein.*

Psalms 18:7-13 — *Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth. ... 12 At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hail stones and coals of fire. The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail stones and coals of fire.*

Ezekiel 26:18 — *Now shall the isles tremble in the day of thy fall; yea, the isles that are in the sea shall be troubled at thy departure.*

As before, Rome's response in verse 21 is to dig in even deeper by blaspheming God.

With this seventh bowl, God's judgment against Rome is completed. The fall of the great city will be described in more detail in Chapters 17 and 18, the battle of Armageddon will be described in more detail in Chapter 19, the defeat of Satan will be described in more detail in Chapter 20, and the victory of the church will be described in more detail in Chapters 21-22.

Introduction to Chapters 17 and 18

Chapters 17 and 18 are an obituary for the great city of Babylon, which is Rome. In Revelation 14:8, we were told: "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." Chapters 17 and 18 provide the details of that fall.

A primary character in these next two chapters is a great harlot named Babylon the Great. Here are the descriptions we will see about her. Do they sound familiar?

- She is powerful (17:1, 3).
- She is wealthy (17:4).
- She is royal (17:4).
- She is immoral (17:4).
- She is bloodthirsty (17:6).
- She is arrogant and proud (17:5).
- She sits on seven hills (17:9).
- She rules the world in John's day (17:15, 18).
- She is a terrible persecutor and murderer of God's people (17:6; 18:24).
- She is the leading commercial power on earth (18:3; 18:11-19).
- She is supported by a great military force (17:3, 7).
- She is destroyed in part by her own military power and inner strife (17:16-17).

The Roman Empire is the only nation that fits each of those descriptions. Babylon is Rome — and Babylon is fallen!