



God's wrath and judgment

Revelation 15-20 – Leaders version

Check in – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including the leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today. Explain that this is going to be a heavy going study about God's wrath and judgment and ask whether anyone doesn't feel up to it.

What does the passage say and mean?

90 minutes

Revelation 15

1. What sign does John see now, in v1, and what is the significance of this sign?

Seven angels (note: angels, not demons) with seven plagues, with which God's wrath will be completed i.e. this is an image of God's final judgement.

2. Who else does John see in v2-4, and what are they doing?

He sees the believers, 'the victorious', singing praises to God. The song mentions God's justice, his Kingship, his holiness, that all nations will worship Him and that His righteous acts have been revealed to everyone.

Explain that the seven angels come from God's presence (specifically, from the place in the temple where the Law was kept, i.e. the place of God's covenant with man) and one of the living creatures (4 v 6) gives each angel a bowl filled with God's wrath. Remember, this is symbolism. God's glory fills the scene.

Revelation 16

3. What are the angels told to do with the bowls of wrath ('the seven last plagues') in v1?

To pour them out on the earth

4. What are the plagues and who/what are they poured upon?

Write the answers in a table on the flipchart.

If you have time, or maybe in cell, go back to Revelation 8 & 9 and identify the seven trumpets. This exercise is out of interest, rather than being essential to the study, but shows us that the trumpets and the plagues are imagery of the same event. However, note that the trumpets show limited destruction whereas the plagues show complete destruction.

	Upon	Plague		(Trumpets)
16 v 2	Land	Sores on the people who worshipped the beast	8 v 7	1/3 of the earth burned up
16 v 3	Sea	Sea turns to blood and everything in it dies	8 v 8-9	1/3 of the sea turned to blood
16 v 4	Rivers and springs	Rivers and springs become blood	8 v 10-11	1/3 of the rivers and springs turn bitter
16 v 8-9	Sun	Scorches people with fire, who curse God and refuse to repent	8 v 12	1/3 of sun, moon and stars turn dark
16 v 10-11	Throne of the beast	Beast's kingdom plunged into darkness. People curse God (which means they know the plague is from God!) but refuse to repent	9 v 1-6	Unbelievers are tortured for 5 months
16 v 12-13 & v16	River Euphrates	Dries up, therefore loss of protection from Eastern invaders. Three demonic spirits appear who will gather kings for battle in Armageddon (v16) (a real place in Israel, representing the final clash between good and evil)	9 v 13-18	1/3 of mankind killed
16 v 17-21	Air	Loud voice from God's temple, 'It is done'. Babylon (likely symbolising Rome specifically as well as rebellious mankind generally) is destroyed and all the cities of the earth collapse. Plague of huge hailstones and the people curse God. This is the Day of Judgment.	11 v 15-19	Loud voices in heaven saying that Christ's kingdom has come and will last for ever. God is worshipped and the time for judgment has come. Natural disasters including a hailstorm.

Note: since Armageddon and Babylon are/were real places being used as imagery for the whole world, we are not being told in this passage to look to events in the Middle East in the run-up to the Second Coming. In the culture John was writing to, the imagery made sense as these were places his readers had heard of.

?

What is the big picture message of Revelation 15 and 16 so far?

What impact does this have on your thinking?

God's judgment is a reality, not a myth. It won't necessarily happen exactly as John saw it in his vision, but the fact of judgment is real and we are being warned. Note that God is in control of what is happening, v1; He hasn't taken the handbrake off and walked away.

Consider the impact on us of the reality of God's judgment. (It may be safer to have a discussion about the impact on mankind, rather than on us personally – make a decision based on who is in your group).

5. Read v5-7. We read this in the middle of the descriptions of the judgments. What do we learn about God's judgment here?

God's judgment is just. This is not God throwing the toys out of the pram, this is His wrath being worked out in a controlled, focussed and just way. Those who are receiving judgment are those who have killed God's people (v6) (this may not refer to direct killing, maybe to persecution or opposition? The nature of the plagues universal, not just to a small group of people who actually killed the prophets).

6. Read v15. Jesus speaks. How can we be prepared for judgment?

'I come like a thief' – refers back to Jesus' warning in Matthew 24 v 43 that we should be prepared for His second coming and judgment. 'Blessed is the one who stays awake' – referring to believers being spiritually awake. 'And remains clothed' – in robes of righteousness, as Revelation 3 v 5. The only way we can be prepared for judgment is by repenting and believing. There is no other way to be protected from God's wrath than by depending on the One who has already faced it in our place on the cross.

Revelation 17

7. Read Rev 17 v 3-6. John sees the great prostitute. What do we learn about her and what is her identity?

She is sitting on a beast that has ten horns and seven heads (same beast as ch13, to which the dragon gave his authority) and is covered with blasphemous names. She holds a cup of abomination and filth and is 'drunk with the blood of... those who bore testimony to Jesus' i.e. she has killed them.

The name 'Babylon' is written on her head – she could be specifically the city of Babylon or Rome (which is elsewhere referred to as Babylon, has seven hills, v9, and was the contemporary superpower. Naming Rome directly may not have been a wise move!). Generally, she represents fallen human culture in its rebellion against God.

8. What do you make of v15-17?

Skip this question if it's too hard!

Satan's kingdom will destroy itself. The beast that the woman is sitting on destroys her i.e. the nations that Babylon/Rome has dominion over rise up against that city. God has put into the hearts of the ten kings (represented by the ten horns) and the beast (another king) to accomplish His purpose by destroying the prostitute (Babylon/Rome).

'God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purposes', v17 – He uses His enemies to destroy His enemies. Is this something you've ever thought about before? How does it play out today?

Note: we need to be careful that we don't end up judging people by saying that they are getting what they deserve from God. We are responsible for our own actions, even if God uses them for His purposes.

Remember Judas Iscariot – he knew he was responsible, even though someone had to betray Jesus. We can't attribute every situation that seems to result in justice (in our eyes) to God directly intervening, but in this prophecy it is what we see happening.

Revelation 18

Explain that this chapter is about the fall of Babylon (Rome?). The group can read it at their leisure. Remember that the vision is not chronological – this chapter refers in the future tense to events we've already read about in Chapters 16-17.

9. Read v4. Who is speaking and why do you think He makes such an offer?

This must be Jesus speaking – 'my people', calling His people to safety. It's an offer of salvation, seemingly at the eleventh hour! This is pure grace, a demonstration of God's love for us that He would call us out of the city He is about to destroy i.e. save us from our coming judgment.

10. Read v9, v11, v15, v19. What is the other response that people make to the destruction of Babylon?

They weep and mourn over the loss of the city. These people are the kings who shared in her luxury, the merchants who made their profits there and the sailors who made their wealth by bringing cargo there. The loss to their own prosperity seems to be their major concern.

?

How are the two responses to the destruction of Babylon relevant to us today as we think about the reality of God's judgment?

We can accept the hand of rescue that Jesus is holding out or we can mourn over and be terrified at what's happening to/around us.

The Revelation 19 questions are **SELF-DIRECTED QUESTIONS**. You need to write them on flip-chart sheets for the group to work on in pairs.

Revelation 19

John hears celebrations in heaven over Babylon's destruction and the announcement of the 'wedding of the Lamb' (God's people coming into the presence of God for eternity).

11. **SDL** Read v 11-16. Who is on the white horse and how do we know that? What will he do?

It's describing Jesus – 'Faithful and True', with justice he judges and wages war, parts of the description of Jesus in His glory from Chapter 1, his name is the Word of God etc. He will judge with justice and wage war (on evil), v11.

?

Imagine the scene described – is this your usual way of thinking of Jesus? Why or why not?

12. **SDL** Read v 19–21. What happens to the beast, the false prophet and their armies?

The beast and false prophet are thrown into hell and the armies are killed by the sword coming from Jesus' mouth i.e. destroyed by the word of God. Note that this is the same battle as was described in 16 v 16 and will also be described in 20 v 7-10. Remember, Revelation is not a chronological sequence but an apocalyptic vision.

?

What is the big message of Revelation 19?

Jesus wins! The beasts, the kings and all the other bad forces we have seen do have power but not against Jesus. Their time is limited and He will destroy their power and lock them up. There is an end to all the bad things.

Revelation 20

13. Read v 1-3. What happens to the devil and why?

He is locked away in 'the abyss' (hell) for a set period of time 'to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore'.

This is one of those bits of Scripture that Christians like to argue over! Try not to get embroiled in the 1000

years debate as it doesn't help us to know or follow Christ any better, it's just an academic debate that can be divisive. However, some notes if you need them:

The summary of the **Premillennial** position is that Christ will come back before the millennium. At this time believers will be bodily raised (to their resurrection bodies) and reign with Christ who is physically present on earth, some would say literally for 1000 years, others not. There will be peace on earth during this time since Satan will be in the abyss. At the end of the 1000 years there will be a final Satanic rebellion in which Satan is defeated and then final judgement (Grudem p1112).

This position aligns closely with Rev 20 and takes the time sequences in Revelation literally, which we have seen is not the way to understand the vision. Note that we've already seen Satan defeated and thrown into hell in Ch19, so the next chronological event cannot be temporary imprisonment. Bewes (2003, p138) tells us that Satan being thrown into the abyss (Satan's defeat and the start of the time of victory for God's people) happened at the cross and 'from then on it was not possible for Satan to keep the nations in deceit' (p141).

The summary of the **Amillennial** position is that we are now living in the 1000 years (not a literal number, but 'a long time') when Satan's power is reduced so that the gospel can be preached. Those reigning with Christ for the 1000 years are those believers who have already died. Christ's reign in this time is heavenly, not in bodily form on earth. When Christ returns there will be a general resurrection, believers rising eternal life and unbelievers to eternal condemnation (Grudem p1110).

See Grudem for more information, including re Postmillennialism and Pretribulational (Dispensational) Premillennialism.

14. Read v 7-10. Satan rallies troops from all over the earth against God's people. What happens next and what are we to understand from this?

God's people are defended by God. Fire comes from heaven and devours (destroys) Satan and his followers – this is an act of final judgement on Satan and there is no escape route.

15. Read v 11-15. What does John see next? Who is on the throne? On what basis will we be judged (v15)?

Final judgement on the people with Christ on the throne (we know from the rest of John's vision who is on the throne and who has authority to judge). Our judgement is based on whether our name is 'found written in the book of life' – whether we belong to Christ or not. There is a rescue plan for people!

Pick up on the phrase 'judged according to what they had done' and explain that this refers to our response to Christ, not to our own work.

?

What do you think the two main learning points are from this chapter?

Satan will be judged and thrown into hell – there is no rescue plan for him.

People will be judged by Jesus, the outcome depending on whether their name is in the book of life i.e. their response to Jesus' offer to save them.

?

What we have studied today has been hard going. But the message we need to remember is that there is a rescue plan for us! Have you accepted it yet?

Check out – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.

God's wrath and judgment
Revelation 15-20 – Leaders version

What does the passage say and mean?

Revelation 15

1. What sign does John see now, in v1, and what is the significance of this sign?

2. Who else does John see in v2-4, and what are they doing?

Revelation 16

3. What are the angels told to do with the bowls of wrath ('the seven last plagues') in v1?

4. What are the plagues and who/what are they poured upon?

	<i>Upon</i>	<i>Plague</i>		<i>(Trumpets)</i>
16 v 2			8 v 7	
16 v 3			8 v 8-9	
16 v 4			8 v 10-11	
16 v 8-9			8 v 12	
16 v 10-11			9 v 1-6	

16 v 12-13 & v16			9 v 13- 18	
16 v 17-21			11 v 15- 19	

?

What is the big picture message of Revelation 15 and 16 so far?

What impact does this have on your thinking?

5. Read v5-7. We read this in the middle of the descriptions of the judgments. What do we learn about God's judgment here?

6. Read v15. Jesus speaks. How can we be prepared for judgment?

Revelation 17

7. Read Rev 17 v 3-6. John sees the great prostitute. What do we learn about her and what is her identity?

8. What do you make of v15-17?

'God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purposes', v17 – He uses His enemies to destroy His enemies. Is this something you've ever thought about before? How does it play out today?

Revelation 18

9. Read v4. Who is speaking and why do you think He makes such an offer?

10. Read v9, v11, v15, v19. What is the other response that people make to the destruction of Babylon?

?

How are the two responses to the destruction of Babylon relevant to us today as we think about the reality of God's judgment?

We can accept the hand of rescue that Jesus is holding out or we can mourn over and be terrified at what's happening to/around us.

Revelation 19

John hears celebrations in heaven over Babylon's destruction and the announcement of the 'wedding of the Lamb' (God's people coming into the presence of God for eternity).

11. **SDL** Read v 11-16. Who is on the white horse and how do we know that? What will he do?

?

Imagine the scene described – is this your usual way of thinking of Jesus? Why or why not?

12. **SDL** Read v 19–21. What happens to the beast, the false prophet and their armies?

?

What is the big message of Revelation 19?

Revelation 20

13. Read v 1-3. What happens to the devil and why?

14. Read v 7-10. Satan rallies troops from all over the earth against God's people. What happens next and what are we to understand from this?

15. Read v 11-15. What does John see next? Who is on the throne? On what basis will we be judged (v15)?

?

What do you think the two main learning points are from this chapter?

?

What we have studied today has been hard going. But the message we need to remember is that there is a rescue plan for us! Have you accepted it yet?