

Focus on Prophecy GUIDE 17



The End is Near

- **We have had our last chance. If we do not devise some greater and more equitable system, Armageddon will be at our door.”**
- **These words were spoken by General Douglas MacArthur September 2, 1945, as he stood on the battleship Missouri after the Japanese surrender.**
- **Less than a month before, at 8:15 a.m. on a sunny Monday morning, August 6, a B-29 bomber, nicknamed Enola Gay, had dropped the first atomic bomb and changed the course of history.**
- **In the aftermath of this new kind of devastation, MacArthur felt compelled to warn the world about a future apocalypse.**

The End is Near

- **Winston Churchill had a similar reaction after he read about the horrors inflicted on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. He spoke these stark words:**
- **“Death stands at attention, obedient, expectant, ready to serve, ready to shear away the peoples en masse; ready, if called on, to pulverize, without hope of repair, what is left of civilization.**
- **He awaits only the word of command. He awaits it from a frail, bewildered being, long his victim, now—for one occasion only—his Master.”**

The End is Near

- **Decades after the birth of the atomic age, wars are still raging around our world, and “death” still stands at attention.**
- **The great battle of Armageddon, which MacArthur referred to, hasn't yet broken out. But the Bible tells us it's coming.**
- **It's going to break out just before Jesus returns to Earth.**
- **Revelation 15 and 16 show us how Armageddon fits into last-day events as one of the seven last plagues.**

A God of Love

- **As we begin our study, let's set the stage. Revelation 14:6-13 portrays the final messages of the three angels that are being proclaimed right now in these last days of Earth's history.**
- **These messages are to be given before the "mark of the beast" and "seal of God" are given. Once the three angels' messages have been proclaimed to all the world, humanity will face a big decision. Everyone must decide between following God and the Bible completely or following a belief system based on human traditions in addition to the Bible.**
- **After earth's inhabitants have decided whom they will follow, something tragic happens to those who reject God. The third angel's message (vss. 9–13) tells us that those who receive the mark of the beast will receive the last plagues. They "drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation" (verse 10).**

A God of Love

- **Throughout our study of the book of Revelation we have uncovered messages that tell us God loves us and cares for us.**
- **Even though at times vivid warnings of calamity and judgment must be given, the bottom line is always: God wants to be our Friend. He has chosen to be honest; He won't cover up unpleasant facts, but above all, God wants us to understand there is great joy and peace in being His children.**
- **So, before He gives us details about the seven plagues and the destruction they bring, God pauses again to remind us that He is a God of love. There is no need to be afraid of Him.**
- **Ultimately, sin and its results must be eradicated. God wants to end suffering. God doesn't want the pain of broken relationships to go on. God doesn't want the agony of cancer or AIDS to go on. God doesn't want the grief of losing a loved one to go on.**

A God of Love

- **Sin must end. But it must end in a certain way. God wants to teach the whole universe something important by the way He puts an end to sin. Everyone must understand how destructive and tragic sin really is.**
- **Created beings must see that when God withdraws His protective hand the results are terrible.**
- **After the seven plagues are unleashed, no one will ever want sin to exist again. Out of love and compassion, God says, “Okay, it is time to expose sin at its ugliest and wrap up the problems of planet Earth.”**
- **THOUGHT QUESTION: God brings the seven last plagues on Earth because He is angry at the way sinners have rejected Him. (False or True)**
- **Those who receive the mark of the beast are those who will receive the seven last plagues. (False or True)**

Sea of Glass (Revelation 15)

- **Before picturing how these plagues fall, God gives us an assurance.**
- **He shows us that many people don't have to worry about these calamities.**
- **Those who've accepted Christ's invitation to follow Him fully and completely are pictured in a different setting altogether.**
- **They're not huddled in fear. They're celebrating victory, standing on a sea of glass.**

Sea of Glass (Revelation 15)

- **John writes, “I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.**
- **They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb” (Revelation 15:2, 3).**
- **Moses and the Israelites lifted up a song of deliverance after God had given them safe passage through the Red Sea, enabling them to escape the Egyptian army.**
- **God’s people will celebrate a deliverance equally dramatic. They sing “the song of Moses.”**
- **They also sing “the song of the Lamb.” They are joyously thanking Jesus Christ for their great victory.**

Sea of Glass (Revelation 15)

- ***Which of God's characteristics described in verses 3 and 4 gives you the most comfort and strength?***
- **Aren't you thankful that God encourages His people by showing them this glorious scene before the plagues fall?**
- **God is reinforcing an important message: He is there for us in the worst of times, even when the tragedy of sin seems to overwhelm us.**
- **Maybe you are struggling with the breakup of a marriage. Maybe you are struggling to pay the rent.**
- **Maybe you have an abundance of wealth, but you're lonely or depressed.**
- **Whatever your situation, Jesus is telling you there is victory in the blood of the Lamb. He gives you an invitation: "Come to Me... and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Jesus can give us rest because He can help us deal with problems and find solutions.**

Seven Plagues (Revelation 16)

- **The subject of plagues is familiar to those who have read the Old Testament.**
- **There is the well-known story of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt and the refusal of Pharaoh to let them leave.**
- **God sent plagues on the Egyptians until they agreed to let the Israelites go (Exodus 7–11). In a similar manner, God uses plagues before the second coming of Jesus.**
- **Many biblical scholars share the view that although these plagues are literal, they also have spiritual applications. Let's consider each plague from this perspective.**

Seven Plagues (Revelation 16)

- **FIRST PLAGUE: MALIGNANT SORES**
- **The first [angel] went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image (Revelation 16:2).**
- **The beast power which enforces the mark of the beast, decrees, “Unless you receive the mark you will be physically harmed.”**
- **This first plague is physical in nature. It suggests that there is physical safety only in Jesus.**

Seven Plagues (Revelation 16)

- **SECOND PLAGUE: THE SEA TURNS TO BLOOD**

- Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died (vs. 3).

- **THIRD PLAGUE: THE WATERS TURN TO BLOOD**

- Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.
- And I heard the angel of the waters saying: 'You are righteous, O Lord, for they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink, for it is their just due' (vss. 4-6).
- In contrast, Jesus is the living water. He described the Holy Spirit working in the life as a "fountain of living water" springing up within one's life (John 4:14). This is the pure well water representing the pure, caring life of Jesus.

Seven Plagues (Revelation 16)

- **FOURTH PLAGUE: MEN ARE SCORCHED**
- **“Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire.**
- **And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues, and they did not repent and give Him glory” (vss. 8, 9).**
- **Here we see sin showing its ugly head in yet another way. Instead of turning to the God who can deliver, the afflicted curse God and uphold the rule of Satan, the one who destroys.**

Seven Plagues (Revelation 16)

- **FIFTH PLAGUE: DARKNESS AND PAIN**
- **Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongue because of the pain.**
- **And they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds (vss. 10, 11).**
- **The beast power has led people into spiritual darkness, and now literal darkness falls on Earth.**
- **Those who've rejected Jesus, the light of the world, now find themselves in darkness. Those who've turned from the lighted path that leads to eternal life now feel the darkness of eternal death all around them.**

Seven Plagues (Revelation 16)

- **SIXTH PLAGUE: EUPHRATES DRIED UP**
- **Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared.**
- **And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.**
- **For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. . . . And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon (vss. 12-16).**

Seven Plagues (Revelation 16)

- **SIXTH PLAGUE: EUPHRATES DRIED UP**
- **This plague ushers in earth's final struggle, the Battle of Armageddon. Scholars interpret this battle in various ways.**
- **However, most everyone agrees that during the last days of Earth's history, the whole world will be turned into a vast battlefield as the wicked attempt to destroy God and His people.**
- **Armageddon symbolizes the final struggle between the forces of Satan and God.**
- **The great controversy that began when sin first entered our world in the Garden of Eden is now coming to a climax. Earth's inhabitants have made their decisions for God or for Satan. Armageddon makes the fundamental issue very graphic: Whose side will you be on? Whom will you serve?**

Seven Plagues (Revelation 16)

- **SEVENTH PLAGUE: THE EARTH IS SHAKEN**
- **Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple in heaven, from the throne, saying, 'It is done!' And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake (vss. 17, 18).**
- **When the blood of Jesus was flowing at the cross, and His humiliation and suffering were drawing to a close, the Savior cried, "It is finished" (John 19:30).**
- **The same phrase rings out at the end of this final struggle with sin.**
- **A loud voice proclaims, "It is done!" (Revelation 16:17). Sin and suffering are gone forever. Love has fully triumphed at last. What beautiful words these will be!**

Seven Plagues (Revelation 16)

- **Widespread disasters are unleashed upon the earth under the seventh plague. “Great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.**
- **Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great” (vss. 19-21).**
- **THOUGHT QUESTION: The Battle of Armageddon occurs under the sixth plague; it symbolizes the final struggle between God and Satan. (False or True)**
- **These plagues are literal, physical calamities; they have no spiritual meaning at all. (True or False)**

Satan's Counterfeit

- **Satan has always tried to confuse and deceive God's people with counterfeits.**
- **Here are some of the ones we've seen in Revelation. All these culminate in the seven plagues.**
- **The Godhead is made up of a trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Satan has his trinity, identified in Revelation 16 as the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet.**
- **Revelation describes God Almighty seated on a throne. The beast also sits on a throne.**

Satan's Counterfeit

- **Jesus received a mortal wound on Calvary and was resurrected. The leopard-beast receives a mortal wound and is healed.**
- **The Holy Spirit leads people into all truth.**
- **The lamb-horned beast leads people into falsehood; he's called the false prophet.**
- **God created man in His own image. Satan gives encouragement to the image of the beast.**
- **God breathed into man the breath of life. Satan breathed life into the image of the beast.**

Satan's Counterfeit

- **God sends three angels to proclaim His final messages to every nation, tongue, and people. Satan sends out “three unclean spirits like frogs” (Revelation 16:13) to assemble people for the final great battle against God.**
- **God bestows the seal of God. Satan bestows the mark of the beast.**
- **God has a remnant in the last days who have faith in Jesus, obey His commandments, have the testimony of Jesus, and sing praises on a sea of glass.**
- **Satan has a group who choose to believe his lies and corrupt doctrines and end up in the lake of fire.**

Satan's Counterfeit

- **All of Satan's counterfeits are part of his covert operation to drag people down to destruction. He doesn't want you to say "Yes" to Jesus and follow Him.**
- **Satan doesn't want you to realize that suffering, tragedy, and death ultimately come from him. He wants you to believe that God is the enemy.**
- **But you don't have to fall for Satan's lies. You have God's Word to the contrary.**
- **In fact, you have God's promise that He will deliver you when sin's final fury envelops the Earth. God is with you to protect you from the plagues.**

Satan's Counterfeit

- **Listen carefully to this wonderful assurance in Psalm 91:**
- **He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.**
- **I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust.'**
- **Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler.**
- **You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday.**

Satan's Counterfeit

- **A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked.**
- **Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your habitation, no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; for**
- **He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.**
- **They shall bear you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone.**
- **You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent you shall trample under foot.**

Satan's Counterfeit

- **Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name.**
- **He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation (vss. 1–16).**
- ***Which phrase in this wonderful psalm is most comforting to you?***
- **THOUGHT QUESTION Satan's deceptions are usually counterfeits of some blessing or characteristic that belongs to God. (False or True)**

Conclusion

- *As you think about the seven last plagues and the final events on Earth before Jesus comes, how do you feel?*
- Remember that in Jesus you are safe from the plagues. Though times will be difficult, you can rest in His sheltering arms. R. A. Anderson tells of a farmer in Australia who returned home one day to find that his house and barn had burned to the ground.
- The man couldn't help weeping as he looked over the charred ruins and realized he'd lost all his possessions. But something caught his eye as he came to the chicken coop.
- He spotted a mound of charred feathers. It was the body of a hen. He idly nudged it with his boot. To his amazement four fluffy baby chicks came out scampering and chirping. This mother hen had stayed there with her chicks safely beneath her as the fire raged. In the ruins of his farm this man had seen a remarkable picture of sacrificial love.

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Conclusion

- **I am thankful that Jesus has the kind of love that will cover us as the final fire rages. I am thankful for that scene of exultant worship in Revelation 15 that precedes the seven plagues.**
- **I look forward to raising my voice along with other victorious believers who stand on a sea of glass and shout: “Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!” (Revelation 15:3).**
- **Right now won’t you make your decision to be there with that joyous group? Won’t you make your decision to follow Jesus?**

Conclusion

- **During World War II, Kata Ragoso, a native chief on the Solomon Islands, led hundreds of military personnel to safety through enemy territory. Kata claimed that his courage came from Jesus.**
- **He'd been born of cannibal parents, but missionaries had led him to accept Christ as his Savior.**
- **Toward the end of the war in the Pacific, one of the officers ordered Kata to engage in tasks that violated his conscience and his commitment to Jesus. He refused to obey.**

Conclusion

- **The officer ordered Kata flogged. This Christian chief was laid face down over a gasoline drum and beaten with a cane until his back was bloodied. Again the brutal officer ordered Kata to obey, and again he refused.**
- **Enraged at what he perceived to be defiance, the officer drew his revolver and rained blows on Kata's head until he fell to the ground unconscious.**
- **Determined to teach the other islanders a lesson, the officer ordered Kata to stand before a firing squad.**
- **After soldiers had tied Kata against a tree, the officer told the squad to fire on the count of three. He started counting, "One, two..." but the word "three" just wouldn't come out. Three times the officer started counting; three times he failed to speak the fatal word. Finally, he turned on his heels and stalked off.**

Conclusion

- **Kata Ragoso was taken to the prison compound and locked up with his most faithful assistant, a man named Ludi. Local church members began to pray.**
- **They knew they were outnumbered by soldiers with guns and bayonets, but they believed that prayer was the most powerful weapon.**

Conclusion

- **The moon rose just before ten that night. The prayer meeting began. At about the same time a tall man holding a bunch of keys walked to the prison gate, selected the proper key, opened the padlock, and then the prison gate.**
- **He called Kata Rago and Ludi to him, took each by the arm and led them outside and along a path toward the sea.**
- **Overlooking the beach, he pointed, "You will find a canoe there. Take it and go home."**
- **The two men walked to the water's edge, and there they found a canoe with two paddles. They turned to thank their rescuer, but no one was there.**

Conclusion

- **Subsequent investigation proved that the original bunch of keys had hung on its peg in plain sight of a sentry all that night.**
- **God is there for us in the darkest hour. God is there for us when the final fire rages. He will keep us in his sheltering arms.**
- **He will send His angels to deliver us. He will watch over you then. He will watch over you right now as you live each day for Him.**
- **Have you accepted Christ's free gift of eternal life? Have you accepted His plan for a better life right now?**
- **If you haven't, please bow your head right now and tell Him you choose Him as your Lord and Savior.**