



THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES

Course 6, *New World Coming*, Lesson 8

The Problem: Does God Punish the Unrepentant? The Bible answers this question with sobering clarity: yes, God ultimately brings judgment upon those who persistently reject His mercy. Scripture presents numerous examples of divine retribution—not as impulsive punishment, but as a measured and just response to willful rebellion.

Consider King Saul, who repeatedly disobeyed God and eventually lost the divine presence, dying in despair on the battlefield. Or Pharaoh, who hardened his heart against God's appeals and brought ten devastating plagues upon Egypt. In the end, he and his army perished in the Red Sea (Exodus 5–12, 14).

Yet we must be careful: not all suffering is punishment. God sometimes allows His faithful people to endure hardship—not as retribution, but as a refining process. In such trials, believers can rest in the promise that *“all things work together for good to those who love God”* (Romans 8:28).

So why does God punish the wicked? Often, His judgments are redemptive in purpose—designed to awaken the conscience and lead to repentance. That was the goal of the Egyptian plagues: to show Pharaoh that he could not rule without heaven's permission. Similarly, Nebuchadnezzar's pride led to a season of madness (Daniel 4:23–33), but God used that experience to humble him. In the end, the king acknowledged God's sovereignty and gave Him glory (Daniel 4:34–37).

But when every divine appeal is rejected, God eventually withdraws His protective presence, allowing individuals to reap the consequences of their choices. In some cases, He intervenes directly to remove those who pose a danger to others—such as Pharaoh's army, Korah and his followers (Numbers 16:28–34), or Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11).

The Bible speaks solemnly of the final punishment of the wicked (2 Thessalonians 1:7–9; Revelation 14:11). God takes no pleasure in this outcome. He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). His mercy is deep, His patience long—but if every invitation is refused, He will honor that choice. To preserve a universe free from sin, He must ultimately bring sin—and those who cling to it—to an end.

Scripture also teaches that there will be degrees of accountability (Luke 12:47–48). Those who knowingly reject greater light will face greater consequences.

In this study, we explore what happens after the close of probation, when Christ's intercessory ministry ceases (Revelation 22:11). At that point, those who have rejected His love and received the mark of the beast will face the seven last plagues (Revelation 16). These judgments are not arbitrary—they are God's final response to persistent rebellion and Satan's influence. They reveal that even under intense suffering, the unrepentant will not turn back to God.

Yet amid this global crisis, God promises to shelter His faithful people. As we study each of the seven plagues, we will also discover the assurance that those who trust in Christ will be preserved through the final storm.

Objectives:

In this lesson, we will:

- Examine each of the seven last plagues described in Revelation 16.
- Consider which elements are literal and which are symbolic.
- Reflect on how these judgments reveal the justice and mercy of God.

- Discover the hope and protection promised to those who are sealed in Christ.

I. THE FIRST PLAGUE: PHYSICAL AFFLICTION AND SPIRITUAL EXPOSURE

John's description of the seven last plagues in Revelation contains both literal and symbolic elements. As we study each plague, we will explore which components appear to represent literal physical events, and which are best understood as figurative or symbolic representations. Some of these judgments are clearly not universal in scope—if they were, all of humanity would be wiped out before Christ's return. Scripture confirms that many of the lost remain alive until the Second Coming itself (2 Thessalonians 1:8). At the same time, other plagues appear to have global consequences, affecting vast segments of the earth's population and environment.

This prophetic sequence unfolds after the close of human probation, when Christ's intercessory ministry ends and every person's destiny is eternally fixed (Revelation 22:11). From that point onward, the seven last plagues mark the final chapter of earth's history, culminating in the glorious return of Jesus Christ.

The Word:

1. Where do the seven last plagues come from? Whose displeasure results in the plagues being poured out? Revelation 15:1
2. What vision did John receive of those who are sheltered from the plagues? Will they be on earth when the plagues are being poured out upon the lost? Revelation 15:2-4; 18:4; Daniel 12:1; (compare Revelation 3:10; 9:4)
3. What happens immediately before the plagues are poured out? Revelation 15:5-8
4. What is the first plague? Who will suffer it? Revelation 16:1-2

Explanation: The seven last plagues represent God's final and righteous response to a world that has fully rejected His truth. Poured out by heavenly angels, these judgments fall upon those who have worshiped the beast and its image and have received its mark (Revelation 13:15–17; 14:9–10). They occur after the close of probation, when every individual's eternal destiny has been irrevocably sealed (Revelation 22:11).

Although God's faithful people remain on earth during this time, Scripture assures us that they are sheltered under divine protection. As in the days of ancient Israel, when God's judgments fell on Egypt but Goshen was spared, so also the sealed are preserved during this final outpouring of wrath (Revelation 3:10; 18:4; Daniel 12:1; Revelation 9:4). This is not a removal from trial, but a preservation through it—proof that God's grace can shield in the storm.

Just before the plagues begin, John sees the temple of the "*tabernacle of the testimony*" in heaven opened (Revelation 15:5). This marks the conclusion of Christ's intercessory ministry in the heavenly sanctuary—the fulfillment of what the ancient Day of Atonement pointed forward to. In the earthly service, this was the moment when the high priest completed the work of atonement and came out from the Most Holy Place. Anyone who had failed to repent was "*cut off from among his people*" (Leviticus 23:29).

Likewise, in the heavenly judgment scene, Christ—referred to as Michael—"stands up" (Daniel 12:1), the censer is cast down (Revelation 8:5), and the pronouncement is made: "*Let the righteous remain righteous, and the wicked remain wicked*" (Revelation 22:11). No one is seen in the temple thereafter (Revelation 15:8), affirming that the door of mercy has closed and divine justice proceeds unmingled with mercy.

The first angel pours out his bowl "*upon the earth*," and a foul and loathsome sore (Greek: *helkos*) afflicts all who have received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image (Revelation 16:2). The same word appears in the Septuagint translation of Exodus 9:9–10, describing the boils that afflicted Egypt, anchoring this plague in the Exodus motif of divine deliverance through judgment.

This physical affliction underscores a deeper spiritual reality. These sores symbolize the moral decay and spiritual corruption of those who have rejected the everlasting gospel (Revelation 14:6) and refused the seal of God (Revelation 7:1–3). Isaiah’s lament of ancient Israel becomes poignantly descriptive of the final rebellion: “The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints... There is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores” (Isaiah 1:5–6).

In a dramatic reversal of loyalty, those who trusted in a man-made system for healing and salvation are shown to have no spiritual soundness. Their outward condition reveals their inner allegiance—marked by compromise, infected by self-will, and exposed for what they are.

Relevance: The first plague does more than demonstrate judgment—it stands as a final appeal to us today. Jesus longs to clothe each of us in His righteousness through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:16–17). He calls us to worship the Creator, especially by honoring His holy Sabbath—the sign of allegiance to the true God (Revelation 14:7; Exodus 20:8–11; Matthew 24:20).

Before the winds of destruction are loosed, now is the time to be sealed with the character of Christ, to trust fully in His intercession, and to be found among the faithful when the plagues begin. This first plague is not merely a warning—it’s a call to live entirely under Christ’s covering, where His healing, peace, and protection are eternally secure.

II. THE SECOND PLAGUE: JUDGMENT ON GLOBAL COMMERCE

The second plague strikes the sea, disrupting international trade, travel, and the systems that sustain global life.

The Word:

5. Upon what was the second plague poured out? What was the result? Revelation 16:3

Explanation: Before the close of probation, the image to the beast—apostate Protestantism allied with the Papacy—persuades secular powers to enforce economic sanctions against those who refuse the mark of the beast (Revelation 13:16–17). This causes severe hardship for God’s faithful people, who are denied access to basic necessities. In response, God brings world commerce to a virtual standstill. The second angel pours out his bowl upon the sea, and it becomes “*like the blood of a dead man*,” causing every living creature in the sea to die (Revelation 16:3). This plague echoes the first Egyptian plague, when the Nile was turned to blood, polluting Egypt’s life source and exposing the futility of its gods (Exodus 7:19–21). Just as Egypt’s economy and pride were struck, so too the modern world’s systems—dependent on maritime trade, food supply, and global exchange—are devastated. This judgment is not merely ecological; it is symbolic of the collapse of the beast’s economic power. Those who once enforced deprivation upon the saints now experience what it means to be cut off from life-sustaining resources. The sea, often representing the restless multitudes and the foundation of worldly power (Revelation 13:1), becomes a symbol of death and decay.

Relevance: Christians are called to love their enemies and reflect the mercy of Christ (Matthew 5:44). A spirit of vengeance is foreign to the gospel. Yet Scripture affirms that God’s justice is not passive: “*Vengeance is Mine; I will repay*,” says the Lord (Romans 12:19). Divine mercy is never divorced from divine justice. To allow evil to go unchecked would be a denial of love itself. God takes no pleasure in punishment. But when infinite love is persistently rejected, and every appeal of grace is refused, He acts to restrain evil and vindicate His name. The second plague reminds us that those who trust in worldly systems will find them powerless in the day of God’s judgment, while those who trust in Christ will be sheltered and sustained.

III. THE THIRD PLAGUE: BLOOD FOR BLOOD

The third plague intensifies the judgments of the second, extending divine retribution from the sea to the freshwater sources of the earth.

The Word:

6. What happens under the third plague? What is affected, and how does this deepen the global crisis? Revelation 16:4
7. What is the reason for the third plague? What does the angel of the waters declare about God's justice? Revelation 16:5–7

Explanation: In Scripture, rivers and fountains of water often symbolize the sources of life, truth, and spiritual refreshment (Psalm 36:7–9; Isaiah 12:3). But under the influence of the beast and his image, these sources have been polluted—both literally and spiritually. False teachings have replaced truth, and persecution has been unleashed against those who remain faithful to Christ.

Now, in a dramatic act of divine justice, God turns the literal rivers and springs into blood (Revelation 16:4). This plague echoes the judgment on Egypt when the Nile was turned to blood (Exodus 7:19–21), cutting off the life supply of the nation. Here, the symbolism is unmistakable: those who have shed the blood of God's people are now given blood to drink. The angel of the waters affirms the righteousness of this judgment: *"They have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve"* Revelation 16:6, ESV. Another voice from the altar echoes this truth: *"Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are Your judgments"* (verse 7). This is not arbitrary vengeance—it is measured justice. The persecutors of truth now face the consequences of their cruelty.

Relevance: Jesus warned, *"With the measure you use, it will be measured to you"* Matthew 7:2. The third plague reminds us that injustice will not go unanswered. Those who trample truth and harm the innocent may seem powerful for a time, but God sees, remembers, and will act. This is a call to examine our own hearts: Are we aligned with the Lamb or with the systems that oppose Him? The time to choose truth, mercy, and righteousness is now—before the fountains run red.

IV. THE FOURTH PLAGUE: SCORCHED BY THE SUN

The fourth plague intensifies the suffering of rebellious humanity, turning a source of life into an instrument of judgment.

The Word:

8. Upon what is the fourth plague poured, and what is the result? How do people respond to this judgment? Revelation 16:8–9

Explanation: The fourth angel pours out his bowl upon the sun, and it is given power to scorch people with fire. Instead of repenting, those afflicted blaspheme the name of God, revealing hardened hearts even in the face of divine judgment (Revelation 16:8–9). In Scripture, the sun can symbolize both the true God—as in *"the Lord God is a sun and shield"* (Psalm 84:11; Malachi 4:2)—and false worship, particularly in the context of ancient sun deities (Deuteronomy 4:19; 2 Kings 23:5, 11; Ezekiel 8:16). This dual symbolism is significant in understanding the fourth plague. Historically, Sunday worship—the first day of the week—was introduced into Christianity as sun veneration merged with Christian tradition during the post-apostolic era. While many today observe Sunday with sincere devotion, prophecy identifies enforced Sunday observance as the mark of the beast in the final crisis (Revelation 13:16–17). In contrast, God declares the seventh-day Sabbath as the sign of His covenant and authority (Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:12). Thus, those who have chosen the mark of the beast have aligned themselves with a false system of worship. In a striking act of poetic justice, the sun—symbol of their chosen authority—is allowed to afflict them. What was once revered becomes a source of torment.

Relevance: The fourth plague confronts us with a timeless question: Whom will you serve? Joshua once declared, *"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"* Joshua 24:15. Elijah challenged wavering hearts: *"If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him"* 1 Kings 18:21. In these last days, the issue is no less urgent. The call to worship the Creator (Revelation 14:7) includes honoring the day He sanctified. The Sabbath is not merely a day—it is a sign of allegiance to the one true God. The fourth plague reminds us that false worship has consequences, and that now is the time to choose faithfulness.

V. THE FIFTH PLAGUE: DARKNESS ON THE THRONE OF THE BEAST

The fifth plague strikes at the very seat of the beast's authority, plunging his kingdom into literal and spiritual darkness.

The Word:

9. Upon what part of the earth is the fifth plague poured, and what is the result? How do the followers of the beast respond to this judgment: Revelation 16:10–11

Explanation: The Greek text of Revelation 16:10 says the fifth angel pours out his bowl upon the *"throne of the beast."* This throne represents the center of the beast's authority and governance. Revelation 13:2 tells us that *"the dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority."* The dragon, identified as Satan (Revelation 12:9), also worked through pagan Rome (Revelation 12:4), which ultimately transferred its seat of power to the Papacy. Historically, this has been understood to mean Rome became the throne of the beast.

Assuming the Papacy remains headquartered in Rome at the time of the plagues, this city may be the epicenter of this judgment. However, since the image of the beast—a union of apostate Protestantism and civil power—is formed in the United States (Revelation 13:11–15), it is also possible that the spiritual center of beast worship has shifted westward. In either case, the plague targets the core of antichrist authority, wherever it is most active.

The result is deep, impenetrable darkness—a plague that echoes the ninth plague of Egypt (Exodus 10:21–23). This darkness is both literal and symbolic. Those who have promoted spiritual deception and led others into false worship now experience the physical manifestation of their chosen condition. They have rejected the light of truth, and now they are enveloped in the darkness they embraced. Despite their suffering, they do not repent. Instead, they blaspheme God, revealing hearts that are hardened beyond correction (Revelation 16:11). This is a chilling portrait of the final state of rebellion—pain without repentance, judgment without transformation.

Relevance: Jesus warned, *"This is the condemnation: that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light"* John 3:19. He also promised, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"* John 8:12.

The fifth plague reveals the tragic end of those who reject the light of Christ. As the final crisis unfolds, multitudes will face it without a living connection to Jesus. Isaiah's prophecy will be fulfilled: *"Darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people"* Isaiah 60:2. But the promise remains for the faithful: *"The Lord shall arise upon you, and His glory shall be seen upon you."* This plague is a call to walk in the light while there is still time. The throne of the beast will fall, but the kingdom of Christ will endure forever.

VI. THE SIXTH PLAGUE: THE COLLAPSE OF BABYLON'S POWER

The sixth plague brings the unraveling of the beast's global religious-political alliance, setting the stage for Christ's return and the final battle between good and evil.

The Word:

10. Where is the sixth plague poured out, and what happens as a result? What does this make possible? Revelation 16:12
11. What is Satan's final deceptive effort under this plague, and how does it end? Revelation 16:13–16

Explanation: The imagery in Revelation 16:12 alludes to the ancient Euphrates River, which sustained the city of Babylon. The Old Testament prophets foretold the drying up of this river as a prelude to Babylon's fall (Isaiah 44:27–45:6; Jeremiah 50:38; 51:36). This was historically fulfilled in 539 B.C., when Cyrus the Persian diverted the river, allowing his

army to enter the city beneath its walls. That same night, Babylon fell, and the Medo-Persians, the “kings from the east,” took over (see Daniel 5:30–31).

In the context of Revelation, this history becomes a symbolic template. The Euphrates now represents the masses of people who support spiritual “Babylon”—the end-time alliance of the Papacy, apostate Protestantism, and spiritualism (Revelation 17:15). The drying up of the Euphrates symbolizes a withdrawal of popular support from this threefold union, as humanity awakens to the realization that it has been deceived.

As the deception unravels, Satan's final campaign intensifies. Three unclean spirits, described as frogs, emerge from the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (Revelation 16:13–14). These represent demonic influences working through false religion and counterfeit miracles to rally the world to oppose God's faithful remnant. This climactic gathering, called Armageddon, is not a localized military battle but a spiritual conflict—the final confrontation between the kingdom of Christ and the forces of darkness (Revelation 17:14).

Jesus, the true “King from the East” (compare Isaiah 41:2, 25; 46:11), will soon appear in glory with His angels to deliver His people. Just as Cyrus liberated Israel from literal Babylon, Christ will rescue His faithful ones from the tyranny of modern Babylon and take them home to the heavenly Canaan (Ezra 1:1–4).

Though those who once followed Babylon now realize they were deceived and withdraw their support, their decision against Christ is final. Probation has closed. The sixth plague sets the stage for the seventh—the full unveiling of divine justice and the return of the Lamb as King of kings.

Relevance: How much better to follow the truth now—before the world's systems unravel and it becomes eternally too late. The sixth plague offers no opportunity for change, only regret for choices already sealed. Those who received the mark of the beast are now abandoned by the very powers they once revered. They discover, too late, that they stood against Christ. God waited with mercy, extended every invitation, and pleaded through His messengers. But His final appeal has gone unheeded. Now comes the dreadful silence of a soul without hope.

In light of this, we echo the psalmist's longing:

“I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Psalm 84:10).

Today, while mercy still speaks, we are invited to walk in the light and stand with Christ.

VI. THE SEVENTH PLAGUE: THE FINAL JUDGMENT AND GLORIOUS RETURN

The seventh plague describes the climactic moment when God intervenes dramatically on behalf of His beleaguered people. It brings the global rebellion to a close and prepares the way for Christ's glorious return. Earth's darkest hour gives way to heaven's brightest dawn.

The Word:

12. What divine proclamation is heard from heaven when the seventh plague is poured out? Revelation 16:17

13. What catastrophic events unfold as a result? Revelation 16:18–21

14. What dramatic finale brings earth's suffering to an end? Revelation 19:11–21

15. What happens to the living believers who bear the seal of God? 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17; John 14:1–3

Explanation: As “Babylon” begins to unravel, losing the allegiance of the people who once upheld it, many turn in fury against their religious leaders, realizing too late that they've been deceived. It is in this moment of chaos and collapse that God speaks: “*It is done!*” (Revelation 16:17). These words declare that the great conflict between truth and error has reached its end. The door of mercy has long since closed, and now justice moves to its final act.

A chain of cataclysmic events follows:

- A great earthquake shakes the very foundations of the earth—unlike any ever recorded.
- Islands vanish, mountains crumble, and hailstones weighing about a talent (~66 pounds) fall from the sky, shattering the strongholds of human pride and power.
- The great city—spiritual “Babylon”—is split into three parts, symbolizing the complete disintegration of the beast’s unholy trinity: the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet.
- Yet even amid judgment, the unrepentant curse God, revealing hearts permanently set against Him (Revelation 16:21).

Then comes a break in the darkness—a radiant gleam from the east. Christ appears in the heavens, riding forth as King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:11). His faithful people look up with joy and relief as the heavens blaze with divine glory. Graves burst open, the righteous dead rise, and with the living saints they are caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17). Together, they are welcomed into the eternal courts of heaven—the home Jesus has prepared (John 14:1–3).

Relevance: Dear friend, the great controversy will not end in defeat—it will end in glory for those who stand with Christ. The promise of His return is not a fable or far-off dream—it is the sure hope of every believer. And you don’t have to face the seven last plagues or the dread of a hopeless future. This doesn’t mean believers will be removed from the earth before the plagues fall. Rather, it means:

- You don’t have to suffer their judgments.
- You don’t have to fear their outcome.
- You don’t have to stand unprotected.

Those who are sealed—who have surrendered to Christ and walk in His truth—will be preserved through the storm, just as Noah was in the ark and the Israelites were shielded in Goshen.

Salvation is still available today. Jesus invites you into the safety of His grace, the shelter of His righteousness, and the joy of His everlasting presence. Whatever this world offers cannot compare to what Christ longs to give. *“I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness”* Psalm 84:10.

Why not respond now, while the door of mercy is still open?

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. All the plagues are universal.
 - b. There is nothing literal about the plagues.
 - c. The drying up of the Euphrates is a prophetic symbol.
 - d. There is no second chance for anyone after the close of probation.
2. Reflect and Discuss: The real battle between good and evil takes place in the human heart. If Satan can gain control of our thoughts, he can erode our love for God and distort our grasp of truth. Receiving the seal of God means surrendering our minds completely to the guidance and cleansing power of the Holy Spirit. What does that look like in your daily walk?