

The Apocalypse of St. John

Chapter 16

Read 16:1

Add: Q. What is the sanctuary? It is the holiest place in God's temple (the holy of holies).

-The tabernacle or tent was a sacred place where God chose to meet His people, the Israelites, during the 40 years they wandered in the desert under Moses' leadership.

-The "tabernacle of witness" was the holiest place where the Ark of the Covenant was.

-In 950 B.C., Solomon built the Temple, the holiest place was again where the ark of the covenant was.

-Christian Temples also have a sanctuary where the altar and artophorion is which contains our Lord.

From Wiki on Sanctuary:

"In many [Western Christian](#) traditions including Roman Catholic, [Lutheran](#), [Methodist](#), and Anglican churches, the area around the altar is called the sanctuary; it is also considered holy because of the physical presence of God in the [Eucharist](#), both during the Mass and in the tabernacle on the altar the rest of the time. So that people can tell when [Jesus](#) is there (in the tabernacle), the [sanctuary lamp](#) is lit, indicating that anyone approaching the altar should [genuflect](#) in adoration to the Blessed Sacrament. In many Western traditions [altar rails](#) sometimes mark the edge of the sanctuary or chancel (the term [chancel](#) is used to refer to the area around the [altar-table](#)).

"In the [Eastern Orthodox Church](#), [Eastern Catholic Churches](#) of [Syro-Malabar Church](#), [Byzantine rite](#) and [Coptic Orthodox Churches](#), the sanctuary is separated from the [nave](#) (where the people pray) by an [iconostasis](#), literally a wall of [icons](#), with three doorways in it. In other [Oriental Orthodox](#) traditions, a sanctuary curtain is used.

"The area around the altar is called the "sanctuary", and that terminology does not apply to Christian churches alone: [King](#)

Solomon's temple, built in about 950 BC, had a sanctuary ("Holy of Holies") where the Ark of the Covenant was."

"[Today] in most modern synagogues, the main room for prayer is known as the sanctuary, to contrast it with [other] rooms (there is a raised bimah in the sanctuary, from which services are conducted, which is where the ark holding the Torah may reside). [In similar fashion]... in some Protestant churches, the term *sanctuary* denotes the entire worship area."

Orthodox Bible Study (OBS): This voice (v.1) from the heavenly sanctuary is the signal that God will render recompense to all on earth who have defied Him and persecuted His Church. Earlier the seventh trumpet and the third woe had been announced (11:14-15). Here that judgment comes to pass in the form of the seven bowls. P.169

INTRO:

In the vision of the seven bowls, we see the same divine structure and precedents as with the seven seals and the seven trumpets. The initial structure [of plagues] repeats the first four trumpets in that the judgments are poured out successively upon the earth (8:7; 16:2), the sea (8:8; 16:3), the waters (8:10, 16:4), and the heavens (8:12; 16:8).

The seven bowls also share with the seven trumpets the same plagues as those of Egypt. As with that outpouring of wrath on the land of Pharaoh, so with this eschatological judgment. In Egypt, the waters turned to blood. So in this outpouring, the sea (and the fountain of waters) becomes blood (16:3-4). In Egypt, boils and sores broke out upon man and beast (Ex. 9:10). So here, loathsome sores break out upon all those who have the mark of the beast. In Egypt, darkness fell over all the land (Ex. 10:22). So here, darkness falls upon the throne of the beast and his kingdom (16:10). In Egypt, hail fell upon the land (EX. 9:25). So here, huge hail falls from heaven upon men (16:21). In Egypt, a swarm of frogs came up and invaded all. Even here there are parallels, as 'unclean spirits like frogs' come forth from the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (16:13).

All of this tells us that God will again judge the earth with power, just as surely as He did when He once liberated His people from the tyranny of Pharaoh. Just as Pharaoh and Egypt were judged because of their hardness of hearts, so judgment will be inevitable upon mankind for relentlessly persecuting God's Church and refusing to repent at her preaching.

Finally, in comparison to the trumpet plagues, we also notice a distinct escalation in the plagues of the seven bowls (they are final, not transitory). This is evident in the very names of the plagues: trumpets imply warning, bowls of wrath imply pouring out. The trumpets were unleashed upon a third of the world, but the bowls upon the totality. This escalation is apparent also in the timing of the plagues. There was a brief delay between the fifth and the sixth trumpets (9:12) and between the sixth and the seventh trumpets (11:4). But there is no such delay between any of the bowls. [Indeed, those who are judged are still suffering the effects of the first bowl (sores v. 2), when the fifth bowl strikes (darkness vs. 10-11).] This, again, speaks to the finality of these plagues upon earth.

Orthodox Study Bible Note 16:1

Read 16:2-3 [Make sure to announce the headings]

Note 16:2-4

OBS: So the first angel pours out his bowl and those who have the mark of the beast & worship his image are afflicted with "foul" (or bad) & "loathsome" (or evil) sores. -P. 171

foul is from the Gk:

κακός kakós, kak-os'; adj. apparently a primary word; worthless (intrinsically, such; whereas [G4190](#) properly refers to effects), i.e. (subjectively) depraved, or (objectively) injurious:—bad, evil, harm, ill, noisome, wicked.

loathsome is from the Gk:

πovηρός ponēros, pon-ay-ros'; adj. from a derivative of [G4192](#); hurtful, i.e. evil (properly, in effect or influence, and thus differing from [G2556](#), which refers rather to essential character, as well as from

G4550, which indicates degeneracy from original virtue); figuratively, calamitous; also (passively) ill, i.e. diseased; but especially (morally) culpable, i.e. derelict, vicious, facinorous; neuter (singular) mischief, malice, or (plural) guilt; masculine (singular) the devil, or (plural) sinners:—bad, evil, grievous, harm, lewd, malicious, wicked (-ness). See also **G4191**.

OBS: Immediately after the second angel pours out his bowl into the sea (v.2), the sea becomes blood, coagulating and rotting as that of a dead man. As would be expected, every living creature (lit. every living soul), in the sea dies. P. 171

OBS: Then the third angel pours out his bowl into the rivers and fountains of waters (which are the sources of drinkable water) for mankind, making them also blood (reminiscent of Moses' turning the Nile into blood). P. 171-172

Read 16:4-7

Note 16:5-7

OBS: So those in heaven (v.5) praise God at the coming of His divine justice. The angel assigned to care for earth's waters proclaims the poetic justice of God's judgment on the waters. It's ironic that since the persecutors so vehemently poured out the blood of God's saints and prophets, God gives them nothing to drink but blood (since they are so blood-thirsty). P. 172

OBS: Then those martyred souls under the altar (who called for justice in 6:9-10) add their praise also, declaring that God's judgments are righteous and true. The evil done on earth against Christ and His Church is finally reaping what they have sown. P. 172

This idea of martyrs under the altar still has liturgical significance for Christians today. First why under the altar?

From Wiki on Sanctuary:

"In [ancient times] Christian temples or churches were [often] built on land considered to be a particularly holy spot, perhaps where a

miracle or martyrdom [had] taken place or where a holy person was buried. Examples are [St. Peter's Basilica](#) in Rome and [St. Albans Cathedral](#) in England (...). The place, and therefore the church built there, was considered to have been sanctified (made holy) by what happened there. In modern times, [Catholics in the Latin Church] have continued this practice by placing in the altar of each church, when it is consecrated for use, a box (the *sepulcrum*) containing relics of a saint. The relics box is removed when the church is taken out of use as a church.

"In the [Eastern Christian tradition], the [antimension](#) on the altar serves a similar function. It is a cloth [icon](#) of Christ's body taken down from the cross, and typically has the relics of a saint sewn into it. In addition, it is signed by the [eparchial or diocesan] [bishop](#), and represents his authorization and blessing for the [Eucharist](#) to be celebrated on that altar."

Read 16:8-9

OBS: In this plague the sun is given power to scorch all those on the earth and burn men with fire. This passages shows the spiritual depravity of these people because their response to such powerful judgments is not repentance but further cursing and blaspheming of God.

Note: 16:8, 9

Add: The sufferings and afflictions we experience are allowed by God to move us to turn to Him in repentance or redemptive suffering. We can heal ourselves and others through our patient acceptance of sufferings and trust in God's ultimate mercy.

Read 16:10-11

Note: 16:10

OBS: The fifth angel pours out his bowl on the throne of the beast, the city of Rome, and its kingdom becomes darkened (much like Egypt which experienced a darkness so heavy that could be felt, Ex. 10:21). Since they rejected the spiritual light of Christ, they are now deprived

of the physical light. They are in such pain from their sores, they gnaw their tongues and once again blaspheme God.

Read 16:12-14

Note: 16:12; 16:13; 16:14;

OBS: The Euphrates (v. 12) was the protecting eastern boundary of the civilized (Roman) world. This great river is described as being dried up, thus leaving the world exposed to invasion from the kings from the rising of the sun [or the east]. This image of military judgment, which recalls the Roman's fear of invasion from the dreaded Parthian Empire in the east, is also cosmic. The coming of these kings from the very rising of the sun (in the furthest east) serve as a sign for the final conflict and ultimate fiery ordeal. -P.174

ADD: It also corresponds to a Christian tradition about Christ's Second Coming. Q. Who knows what direction our Lord is traditionally believed to return from? **A. The east.** Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew (24:27): "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be."

Based on this and other Scripture passages, the Church has traditionally looked to the east **in prayer**, the direction of the rising sun, for our Lord's return. It is why our Churches have traditionally been built facing east and is why the altar area to this day is always called "east" regardless of how the Church is facing. So it is interesting that this judgment upon the world coming from God, comes from the east.

OBS: Then just as the drying up of a river leaves the frogs, so this drying up of the Euphrates (**v.13**) brings demonic frogs from the mouths of the evil trinity: the dragon, the beast and the false prophet (which is the same as the 2nd beast 13:11). These unclean spirits, represented by the unclean frogs (**croaking out their lies**), are demons, deceiving the world with signs to assemble them for war for the great day of God, the Almighty.

Read 16:15-16

OBS: Then the voice of Jesus (v.15) is suddenly heard (like the suddenness His second coming will have). He will come "like a thief in the night" (Mt. 24:43-44), i.e. without any warning.

Note 16:15b

OBS: Not only were they stripped... the guards garments were also set on fire and burned completely. He would have to walk home naked and shamed.

Note 16:15a, 16:15c

OBS: So the Lord's people must keep awake spiritually and not be unconscious of the spiritual peril of sin and apostasy.

[As our Lord said, "...take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." (St. Luke 21:34-36).]

OBS: The place where they assemble (v.16) is called "Armageddon." The name comes from the Hebrew "Har-Magedon" or "Hill of Megiddo." Historically it was the plateau surrounded by hills near the city of Megiddo and was the scene of many decisive battles in the history of Israel (Judg. 5:19; 4 Kings 9:27; 23:29).

Note 16:16

The Didache, a Church document from the 1st century, speaks of a time when "the world-deceiver will appear as the Son of God, working great signs and wonders," and when "all created mankind will come into the fire of testing."

Here is that final event. In saying that all were assembled to Armageddon, St. John means that all the world was united for the last and final battle when all the world is assembled for their definitive

rebellion against God. It is "the battle of that great day of God." P. 174-175

Read 16:17-18

Note 16:17-21a

OBS: The seventh angel now pours his bowl upon the air (v.17). God had formerly poured out His wrath upon earth, sea, and rivers (8:7-11, 16:2-7), even upon the sun, moon and stars (8:12, 16:8), but never before upon a thing so all-encompassing as the air itself. Now, in an unprecedented display of power, the very air around man is full of judgment, from which there is no escape. P. 176

OBS: It is done (v. 17) in Gr. is a single dramatic word: "gegonen" meaning "brought (to pass), happened, ended, finished, fulfilled..."

OBS: The occurrence of flashes of lighting, rumbling sounds and peals of thunder filling the air is meant to humble arrogance of men with the power of God. P. 176

Read 16:19-21

Note 16:17-21b

OBS: Hail stones weighing approximately 75 -100 lbs have to be understood in their proper context. This occurrence is not to be understood as just an odd form of precipitation or a meteorological anomaly. Hail is uniquely a Biblical symbol of divine wrath (cf. Josh 10:11; Is. 30:30; Ezek. 38:18-23). This **terrifying** occurrence would be understood by the recipients of St. John's Apocalypse as representing the wrath and judgment of heaven, as if God were pounding in fury everything beneath the clouds.

OBS: The climatic conclusion is a great earthquake as has not occurred since man came upon the earth: The great city (Jerusalem) is split in three parts (i.e., split entirely), all the cities of the nations fall (collapsing from the earthquake), islands are submerged in the seas and the mountains having fallen flat are no longer found. Babylon the Great (Rome), arrogant in her evil power and dominance, is

remembered before God and given her cup “of the wine of the indignation of His wrath.” Word is piled upon word to express the divine anger, poured out at last upon the world.

When we think of God's judgment expressed in this book we can think of the evil in this world. Think of all the evil the radicals are doing in the world and know there will be justice in the end.