

The great hail of Revelation 16:21

by Douglas E. Cox

As part of the seventh vial, a plague of great hailstones is described in Revelation 16:21. Like the fire that devours the hordes of Gog and Magog in Revelation 20:9, the hail is said to fall upon men from heaven.

In Revelation 20:8-9, people from all parts of the earth, who number as the sand of the sea, come against the camp of the saints, and the holy city, which is the church.

In both of these events John alludes to the prophecy of Ezekiel 38, where God's judgments on the armies of Gog and Magog, including hailstones, pestilence, blood, rain, fire and brimstone, are all mentioned together in the same verse.

Ezekiel 38:22

And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone.

In Revelation, John connected the plague of hailstones with the parable of Jesus about the talents in Matthew 25:14-30, by saying each hailstone weighed about a talent.

Revelation 16:21

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.

In the parable of Jesus, the talents issued to the servants represent God's word, which all believers have received. This applies more specifically to prophecy, as the parable is included in the Olivet Discourse.

The man who received five talents traded with them, and gained five more, meaning that he was creative in the way he used his talents. Trading with the talents suggests he applied the scriptures in various ways, and did not cling to the literal words, but let the message and sense of the prophecy develop and mature, becoming more meaningful, eventually turning into something greater, and more valuable, than what he received. He was "fruitful." This pictures the person who is willing to interpret the scriptures according to the spirit, rather than according to the letter.

In contrast, the man who received only one talent buried it in the ground. This is like the attitude of those who insist that the words of scripture can mean only what they literally say. Typically such people disregard scholarship, and the interpretations of others; a great earthquake, in the apocalyptic language of Revelation 16, must mean a literal earthquake; islands must be literal islands; mountains that can't be found are literal mountains; hail is hail, etc. In the judgment this person says to Christ, "Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine." [vs. 24-25]

The Lord answered him: "Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Hail that weighs a talent in Revelation 16:20 links to this famous parable of Jesus.

A literal approach to many of the judgments in scripture causes men to blaspheme; "and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great."

Taking prophecy literally often leads to absurd conclusions. Some who lack understanding make ridiculous claims about God's judgments, causing those who are not believers to blaspheme. Paul noted that this problem existed among Jews in the first century. He said, "For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written." [Romans 2:24]

Because of the attitude of literalist, "holier-than-thou" deceived false prophets, "the way of truth" has been maligned and ridiculed; it is "evil spoken of."

2 Peter 2:1-2

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

The great hailstones in the prophecy of Ezekiel are associated with rain, and Isaiah compared God's word to rain and snow. Eventually, it will accomplish its purpose.

Isaiah 55:10

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.