

Revelation Chapter 16

Doomsday – The Seven Bowl Judgments

God, in His grace and His desire for all men to be saved, has given the inhabitants of the earth many chances to hear the gospel and to receive its life-giving message during the tribulation period [i.e., the 144,000 Jewish evangelists, the two witnesses, the tribulation saints and God's holy angel proclaiming the everlasting gospel throughout the earth]. These rapid-fire bowl judgments are God's last expression of divine wrath against sin, unrighteousness and blasphemy that is rampant upon the earth. These devastating plagues, that will bring the earth to the brink of total disaster, will culminate in the second coming of Jesus Christ to the earth.

As stated in the introduction of the seven bowl judgments in chapter 15, the earth is ripe for judgment – overflowing with the wickedness and rebellion of mankind against a holy, righteous God. The time has come for God to execute His fierce wrath upon all those who are sinful and unrepentant. The seven angels, who were given the vials of God's wrath in chapter 15, are now given their marching orders to release His last seven plagues upon the earth.

I. The First Bowl Judgment – Grievous Sores [16:1-2]:

The seven angels holding the instruments of judgment [15:1] are now given permission to release their seven plagues upon the earth [16:1]. These angels immediately respond to the voice of God coming from the temple. The first angel of the seven angels poured out his vial containing God's wrath upon sinful mankind. Zechariah wrote about a similar plague [Zech. 14:12].

A. Noisome and grievous sores [v. 2]:

This judgment is in the form of physical affliction of unusual severity bringing widespread suffering. These two words *noisome* and *grievous* when used together depict festering, painful and malignant sores. The word for sore *helkos* means ulcer. These loathsome and incurable ulcers [Ex. 9:9-11; Luke 16:21] will bring, unrelieved physical torment upon those who worship the beast.

B. Beast Worshipers Affected [v. 2]:

These malignant ulcers fall only on those people who have taken the mark of the beast and those who have worshiped the beast's image. This establishes the bowl judgments in the second 3½-year period of the tribulation. Even though God warned them not to take the mark [14:9-10], many chose to follow the False Prophet's edict [13:6-7]. Their disobedience to God will result in unbearable suffering and torment. Since this bowl judgment is poured out only upon the beast worshipers, the believers are exempt by this plague.

II. The Second Bowl Judgment – the Seas are Smitten [16:3]

This judgment is similar to the second trumpet judgment because it affects the seas; however, this bowl judgment is universal rather than the limited area affected in the trumpet judgment [8:8-9]. This judgment will be devastating for the seas are important to all life on earth.

A. Sea of Death

This worldwide plague will destroy the seas of the world. The oceans will no longer be fluid but become thick, dark and coagulated like the blood of men. The world's seas will become a stinking cesspool of death as billions of sea life die. The seas will become toxic and affect the world in numerous ways.ⁱ

B. Sea of Poison

With the death of billions of fishes, marine mammals and marine reptiles, the sea will become poisoned and contaminated. The dead creatures will float to the top of the ocean. The stench of death and the potential disease of this bowl judgment will send people into distress and confusion. It will affect the world's food chain, water supply, hydrologic cycle and commercial shipping. The oceans around the world will no longer be the life-giving waters they were created to be.ⁱⁱ

III. The Third Bowl Judgment – Rivers Smitten [16:4-7]

By the time the third angel pours out his vial, the supply of fresh water will be in short supply. One-third of the fresh water supply was polluted in the third trumpet judgment; however, this judgment will be a staggering blow, as the remainder of the earth's fresh water supply will be turned to blood, which will breed disease and pestilence. According to verse six, people may be able to drink this water through some type of purification process, but it, no doubt, will be bitter and repulsive. This judgment upon the rivers and fountains of the water will make human survival much more difficult since water is basic to human existence. There will be no water to drink nor water to clean the oozing ulcers caused by the first bowl judgment.ⁱⁱⁱ

A. The Angel of the Water [16:5-6]

God has assigned this particular angel over the waters of the earth. This angel now speaks in defense of God for the justification of this bowl judgment upon mankind. No doubt there will be a great outcry against the eternal God when they are forced to drink this putrid water in order for them to survive. Ungodly men have murdered God's saints and prophets throughout the centuries; however, the bloodletting during the tribulation period on God's people will be without precedent in history. Therefore, the angel declares that God is righteous in His judgment because He is holy.^{iv}

B. A Voice from the Altar [v. 7]

Not only does the angel of the water bear witness to God's righteous judgment of turning the waters into blood but now John hears another voice from the altar proclaim the same thing. Some scholars say this may be the voice of another angel coming out of the altar. Some manuscripts, however, omit "another out of" so the text would read, "I hear the altar say." Obviously, the altar itself cannot speak but it may refer to the great-unified voice of the martyred saints that are underneath the altar [6:9-11] who are praising God for He is now avenging their blood. They ascribe the appropriate name to the great Judge [4:8; 15:3]. Because of whom He is, His judgments are altogether true and righteous [Ps. 19:9].

IV. The Fourth Bowl Judgment [16:8-9]:

The fourth angel pours his judgment upon the sun instead of the earth. Since the day of creation, the sun has served the earth and mankind well. This judgment will cause the sun to become a deadly killer.

A. The Sun – A Deadly Killer [v. 8]:

Even though a third of the sun was darkened in the fourth trumpet [8:12], the remainder of the sun will increase in its intensity and will scorch unrepentant men and women with unbearably, fierce heat that will feel like fire [Mal. 4:1; Isa. 24:6]. With the cumulative affects of the bowl judgments – putrid, ulcerous sores, lack of water for drinking and bathing and now excruciating, scorching heat, men will **not** repent but will blaspheme God.^v

B. The Melting of the Polar Ice Caps

From the intense heat of the sun, the great ice sheets on Greenland and the continent of Antarctica will melt. It is estimated there is enough ice stored in these great storehouses to raise the sea levels about 200 feet. The resulting rise in the water levels will bring widespread flooding, causing the polluted waters of the dead seas to flood inland. Widespread damage and loss of life will ensue. Transportation on the seas will become virtually impossible [Job 38:22,23; Amos 9:5-6].

C. Blasphemies of God [v. 9]

God's judgments are designed to bring sinners to repentance [Rom. 2:2-5]. However, in these judgments, men only hardened their hearts and now begin to curse God. Even in the face of God's power and righteousness, men refuse to turn to Him. Instead of driving them to their knees, their rebellion and hostility only increase, even though they recognize these plagues come from the God whom they reject. This is the first of three occasions in this chapter when people blaspheme God [16:9, 11, 21].

V. The Fifth Bowl Judgment – Darkness [vs. 10-11]:

A. Directed at the Beast:

The fifth angel pours out his vial upon the throne of the beast and his subjects. Bible scholars are not in complete agreement as the extent of the meaning of the seat of the beast. Some believe it is the actual throne [headquarters], others believe it's the capital city of Babylon while others believe its his entire kingdom. This thick darkness will render the beast and his subjects powerless in the face of God for even Satan and his evil duo will not be able to bring light to the Antichrist's kingdom. This plague again will not touch the believers. Therefore, it is evident that God is sovereign, and **all** are subject to His power.

B. Brings Torment & Blasphemy:

This darkness will bring with it unbearable pain and torment. The wicked are stated to "Agnaw their tongues for pain" which describes their severe agony; the torment of their festering sores, along with bitter water, burning heat and now heavy darkness will cause them to gnash their teeth and gnaw their tongues. Their torment is so great, yet their blasphemy of God continues.^{vi}

VI. The Sixth Bowl Judgment – Euphrates River Dries Up [16:12-18]:

The sixth angel will pour his vial on the great river Euphrates, the most significant river in the Middle East. Along with the Tigris River, the Euphrates is the lifeblood of the Fertile Crescent in that area of the world. This supernatural event will remove the barrier that has kept the Asiatic powers from invading Israel to challenge the authority of the beast.

A. The Euphrates Dries Up [v. 12]:

The source of the Euphrates is located in the snowfields and ice caps high on the slopes of Mt. Ararat. In the fourth bowl judgment, the blazing heat of the sun will melt the ice sheets, causing massive flooding and damage to land, crops, bridges, etc. The drying up of the Euphrates will bring the kings of the east and their armies east to Armageddon in Israel. The evaporation of the water of this great river will enable them to cross the riverbed on dry land. What will draw the armies of the world to cross west over the Euphrates? Antichrist's world empire begins to disintegrate, and the armies of the east will cross the Euphrates in their march to Israel [Dan. 11:40-45]. This unrest among the nations [16:13-14] are part of God's plan to bring the armies of the east, along with the beast's armies, into Armageddon where they will be destroyed at the second coming of Jesus Christ [19:11-21]. They are brought to judgment for their persecution of Israel [Joel 3:2] and because of their sinfulness and godlessness [Rev. 16:9].^{vii}

B. Unclean Spirits Appear [vs. 13-14, 16]:

John's attention is now directed from the Euphrates River back to the city of Babylon. Whatever the human reasons are for the invading army of the east, the primary reason for their advance to Armageddon is satanically inspired. John sees three unclean spirits [demons] coming out of the mouths of the unholy trinity. Frogs are unclean – slimy and cold-blooded just like these demons who go forth to seduce the kings of the world to fight against God and His army [1 Kings 22:19-22]. These demons will not only persuade men to fight against God but will do miraculous signs to convince men to battle with the Almighty God in the place called Armageddon [Joel 3:11-17]. Even though these evil spirits bring the kings of the earth to Israel, they are doing God's will for all things are subject to God's sovereignty.

C. God's Challenge to His Saints [v. 15]

Once again God encourages His saints who are still living in the closing days of the tribulation to be faithful to the end. With the final battle of Armageddon looming on the horizon, the Lord gives the third of seven beatitudes He tells His saints to be watchful and alert. Just as a thief comes quickly and unexpectedly so will the Son of God [Rev. 22:20]. But unlike a thief, He will not come to steal but to take back what is rightfully His [Rev. 3:3; Matt. 24:42-44; 1 Thess. 5:2]. Be ready as a soldier – awake and with your clothes on so you will be prepared for combat. Those who will have the garments of salvation and the robes of righteousness [Isa. 61:10; and who have accepted Jesus Christ [Rom. 13:14] will have no shame when Christ appears [1 John 2:28].

VII. The Seventh Bowl Judgment [vs. 17-21]

The seventh angel pours out his vial and this plague affects the air. This is the last and greatest of the seven bowl judgments. The deathblow will be the most complete and devastating catastrophe to ever hit the earth. As the angel empties his vial, the voice of the Most High God declares "It is done" for in this judgment the wrath of God is finished [15:1]. It is the final plague of God preceding the second coming of Christ. This will bring doom to unrepentant sinners.

A. Voices, Lightning's & Thunders [v. 18]

Like the seventh seal [8:5] and the seventh trumpet [11:19], the seventh bowl [16:18] is introduced with the imagery of a fierce thunderstorm – voices, thunders and lightning's followed by an earthquake. However, the magnitude of this earthquake will be greater than any other earthquake to ever hit the earth.

B. A Great Earthquake [v. 18]

The earth convulses as the time of the Gentiles come to an end. This earthquake is the most powerful and most deadly quake to ever strike the earth for this earthquake will literally shake the globe [Haggai 2:6; Heb. 12:25-29]. This global earthquake will be so severe that it will drastically change the topography of the earth. Every city of the world [except for the eternal city Jerusalem] will be destroyed, leaving the monuments of men in shambles. The fierceness of God's wrath will cause the islands and mountains to disappear [v. 20]. Great loss of life will ensue.

1. The Great City will be split [v.19a]:

This great city will be split into three parts causing great physical changes, but the text doesn't say that the city is completely destroyed. Although there is some debate whether this city is Jerusalem or Babylon, many scholars believe this city is Jerusalem because (1) it is called the great city in Rev. 11:8; 21:10; (2) distinction is made between Jerusalem and the cities of the nations; (3) there will be great physical changes to Jerusalem [Zech. 14:4-10]; and Jerusalem is distinguished from Babylon [16:20].^{viii}

2. Great Babylon [v. 19b]:

The fate of Babylon is much different than that of Jerusalem. Babylon will fall like the other nations of the world. However, Babylon is the special object of God's wrath because of her wickedness and because she led many into spiritual adultery. She must now drink of the wrath of God [Rev. 14:18-20] and will be violently destroyed from the face of the earth [Rev. 18:21].^{ix}

C. Huge Hailstones [v.21]:

Those who may have been fortunate to escape the destructive earthquake will face another catastrophe – huge hailstones [boulders] weighing 100 pounds each. This is unprecedented in history for the heaviest hailstones recorded to date are approximately two pounds each. The unusual weight of these hailstones will cause great devastation by crushing humanity and everything else left standing after the earthquake. The seventh bowl judgment is a clear demonstration of God's power and sovereignty, yet men will become so hardened in their sin and so totally committed to Antichrist and his anti-God system that they blaspheme God once again. There is no repentance, there is no remorse, there is no sacrifice, for their souls are sold out to Satan – condemning them now and for all eternity. This is the last time in Scripture that men blaspheme the name of God.

Conclusion:

The Day of the Lord is quickly approaching and there will be no turning back when judgment comes. God is a holy God; therefore, He must judge unrepentant mankind for their sin. In that day, the unredeemed will not be able to escape His wrath [Isa. 43:13]

unless they avail themselves of the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. The pain and suffering of that day will be unbearable. Even in the face of overwhelming evidence of God's power and sovereignty, their perverse hearts only become more hardened as they are brought to the bar of justice before Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords. In that day, they will truly understand that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God. God's loving grace will end and His fierce wrath will begin. The writer of Hebrews warns the unsaved, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" [Heb. 4:7] for today is the day of salvation [2 Cor. 6:2].

ⁱ The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Revelation 12-22 by John MacArthur, Jr. talks about the second bowl judgment:

One of the reasons the bowl judgments will be so devastating is that their effects are cumulative. Before the sores of the first bowl could heal the second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died. This judgment is similar to the first plague in Egypt [Ex. 7:20-24] and the second trumpet judgment [8:8-9]. But this time the effects will be much more intense and widespread; since the oceans cover approximately 70 percent of the earth's surface, the effects of this judgment will be worldwide. . . The transforming of the world's seas into putrid pools of stinking death will be graphic testimony to the wickedness of man, and the reverse of the day when God originally gave life to all sea creatures [Gen. 1:21].

ⁱⁱ The Revelation Record by Henry M. Morris, p. 298 comments on the effects of the poisoned sea of the second bowl judgment:

In this toxic ocean nothing can survive, and soon all the billions of fishes and marine mammals and marine reptiles and the innumerable varieties of marine invertebrates will perish, thus still further poisoning the oceans and contaminating the sea shores of the world. The oceans will have effectively complete their age-long function in the earth's physical economy, and will die. As God had created every living soul in the waters [Genesis 1:21], so now every living soul died in the sea.

ⁱⁱⁱ The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Revelation 12-22 by John MacArthur, Jr. P. 142 discusses the shortage of fresh water:

By the time the third bowl is poured out, fresh water will be in critically short supply. . . The destruction of what is left of the earth's fresh water will cause unthinkable hardship and suffering. There will be no water to drink; no clean water to wash the oozing sores cause by the first bowl judgment; no water to bring cooling relief from the scorching heat that the

fourth bowl judgment will shortly bring. The scene is so unimaginably horrible that people will wonder how a God of compassion, mercy, and grace could send such a judgment. And so there is a brief interlude in the pouring out of the judgments while an angel speaks in God's defense.

^{iv} The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Revelation 12-22 by John MacArthur, Jr., pp. 142-143 discusses the righteous judgment of God turning the water into blood:

The angel declares that the Christ-hating, God-rejecting people receiving these judgments will bear an overwhelming burden of guilt . . . the angel reminds the reader that they poured out the blood of saints and prophets. They will mercilessly persecute and kill believers throughout the Tribulation, beginning with the martyrs of the fifth seal [6:9-11] . . . Fittingly, those who have spilled so much innocent blood will be given blood to drink. In the angel's chilling words, "They deserve it." God is just and holy and will execute vengeance for His people [Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30]. Having willfully rejected the knowledge of the truth [Heb. 10:26], there is nothing left for the unbelieving world but to receive what they deserve, Aa terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries" [Heb. 10:27].

^v The Revelation Record by Henry M Morris, p.303 talks about the scorching heat of the sun:

When he [the angel] pours out the contents of his great bowl on the sun, it will heat up to great intensity and the solar radiation will pour forth in great waves of scorching heat on the earth . . . The inhabitants of the earth are thus tormented still more. The burning heat is bad enough in itself, but it becomes like coals of fire on the ulcerous sores in their skin. Furthermore, there is little relief at night and it is difficult to rest or sleep . . . Water supplies are critical and must be allocated only to the most essential uses, and then only after expensive purification treatments. The whole situation will be traumatic and maddening, and it will be difficult for men even to think rationally anymore.

^{vi} The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Revelation 12-22 by John MacArthur, Jr., p. 145 discusses the blasphemous nature of the unbelievers:

The cumulative effect of the painful sores, fouled oceans, lack of drinking water, intense heat, all engulfed in thick blackness, will bring unbearable misery. Yet, incredibly, the wicked, unbelieving people of the world will still refuse to repent. John notes that they gnawed their tongues because of the most intense and excruciating pain, yet with those same tongues they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores and they did not repent of their deeds – the ultimate act of defiance by those hopelessly engulfed in Antichrist's satanic system. This is the last reference to their unwillingness to repent. The first five plagues were God's final call to repentance. Sinners ignored that call and are now confirmed in their unbelief. The final two bowls, containing the severest of all the judgments, will be poured out on hardened, implacable impenitent men.

vii Light for the World's Darkness by John F. Walvoord, p. 164 states that the drying up of the Euphrates brings the armies of the East to the final stage of the Armageddon campaigns:

The drying-up of the Euphrates is a prelude to the final act of the drama, not the act itself. We must conclude, then, that the most probable interpretation of the drying-up of the Euphrates is that by an act of God its flow will be interrupted even as were the waters of the Red Sea and of Jordan. This time the way will open not for Israel but for those who are referred to as the Kings of the East . . . The evidence points, then, to a literal interpretation of Revelation 16:12 in relation to the Euphrates.

viii The Revelation Record by Henry M. Morris, pp. 319-320 discusses the effects of the great earthquake on the great city:

Jerusalem alone, of all the great cities of the earth, is thus to be spared destruction by the earthquake at the end of the tribulation. It is the one eternal city, and will survive as long as the earth endures in its present form, finally being replaced as the new Jerusalem, in the new earth [1 Chron. 23:25; Ps. 125:1; Micah 4:7]. . . But even Jerusalem is to significantly changed when the great earthquake strikes. . . Thus, two of the three parts into which the great city will be divided by the earthquake will evidently be Mount of Olives (north) and Mount of Olives (south) [Zech. 14:1-4]. Perhaps the third is Mount Zion itself, which is now separated from the Mount of Olives by the Kidron Valley, with the Brook Kidron meandering its way down to the Dead Sea. It seems likely that the cleavage of the Mount of Olives will stop at Kidron, since Zechariah does not imply that the new valley cleaves Mount Zion as well. In fact, the Scriptures (note above) seem strongly to assert that Mount Zion (the complex of hills on which most of the old city of Jerusalem was constructed) will stand forever (that is, as long as the earth stands).

ix The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Revelation 12-22 by John MacArthur, Jr., pp. 152-153 discusses the fate of Babylon:

Unlike Jerusalem, which was enhanced by the earthquake, the cities of the nations fell, perhaps simultaneously with the defeat of Antichrist by the Lamb (17:12-14). Naturally, such a powerful earthquake will cause massive, widespread destruction. Specifically singled out is Babylon the great, which was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. As the capital city of Anti-christ's empire, Babylon especially will be made to drink the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. The downfall of Babylon, mentioned here in passing, will be described at length in chapters 17 and 18.