

The Revelation to John
Chapter Sixteen
The Seven Bowls of Wrath

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Here we will see similarities with the plagues on Egypt during the time of Moses and with the trumpet judgments, but there are differences. It is perhaps meaningful in that the Egyptian plagues resulted in the freeing of God's chosen people and the punishment of their holders. Similarly these bowls of wrath will finish the earthly punishment and totally free God's people. Mankind did not suffer any personal attacks in the first five of the Egyptian plagues or in the first four of the trumpet judgments. However mankind is attacked from the first with the bowls. There is also no limitation on the earth distresses with the bowls as there was with the trumpet outbursts. These outpourings of God's wrath are final and total. The first four in the trumpets and bowls are very similar to the Egyptian plagues before the Exodus. Each of these covers the traditional divisions of nature: earth, sea, rivers, and sky. But in each of the bowls the emphasis is on the suffering of mankind. Remember that the word "mankind" means those people who are not God's people. We also will see that the effect of each bowl is complete but with the trumpets only a portion is affected. The final three plagues depart from nature and shift to humanity. It is not likely that these are to be taken literally but should be considered as God's righteous and sure judgment upon humanity that will be done literally and actually on earth one day.

Bowl 1

Rev 16:1 "And I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God into the earth."

Rev 16:2 And the first angel went and poured out his bowl into the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore upon the men who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image."

Since we have been told that the Temple was closed until the end of the final judgments on the earth, it is likely that this voice is the voice of God. Then we see that this final set of judgments is initiated personally by God. Of course He has been the authority behind all the punishments seen in this book. John presents a rapid succession of events until the seventh bowl when he gives more details probably because it is a judgment upon Babylon. The number seven symbolizes fullness and, in this application, fullness of judgment (Lev 26:21). There is no similarity between this first bowl and the first trumpet but is reminiscent of the sixth plague of boils under Moses (Exod 9:10-11). The people affected by this plague were only the ones who were marked as the slave of the beast and who also worshiped his image. These people totally and willfully participated in the ways of Satan. When something is loathsome it is hard to look upon because it looks so horrible. When a sore is malignant its affect spreads throughout the body. Thus these were deadly inside and ugly outside as these people were marked by God for their worship of Satan. God changes His people from the inside out and here we see that He changes His enemies from the outside in.

Bowl 2

Rev 16:3 “And 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.”

The second bowl make the oceans become blood **like** that of a dead man, but **not the** blood of a dead man. Exactly what God caused to happen here we do not know but it could be like phenomena called “red tide” that has had disastrous effects on shell creatures and other sea-dwelling life in particular regions like around Sanibel Island off the west coast of Florida. But this effect will be on all the oceans of the world and every living thing (some translations call souls) will die. This judgment reverses the event of Genesis 1:21. The second trumpet (8:8,9) caused one third of the sea creatures to die but this judgment will cause all living things in the ocean to die. We see that these outpourings of wrath are final and total in their effects.

Bowl 3

Rev 16:4 “And the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood.”

The third bowl and the third trumpet affected the rivers and springs on earth. But the result of the third trumpet was to affect one third of the drinkable waters. With the trumpet the waters became bitter but here they became blood. There would seemingly be no way to purify them for consumption. This judgment affected all of the rivers and springs so that there would be no source of water for drinking. There is no information on how many people die, presumably because the bowls are being poured out so rapidly. This event reminds us of Exod 7:17-21.

Rev 16:5 “And I heard the angel of the waters saying, "Righteous art Thou, who art and who was, O Holy One, because Thou didst judge these things;

Rev 16:6 for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and Thou hast given them blood to drink. They deserve it. ”

Rev 16:7 And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Thy judgments."”

The designation “angel of the waters” appears nowhere else in Scripture. Perhaps the description is just to mean the angel who poured his bowl out upon the waters. The angel justifies the actions of God, Who needs no justification. Perhaps he does this because all the outpouring of wrath seems in contrast to a loving, graceful God. However the primary attribute of God is His holiness and because He is also loving and graceful He has held back His wrath for a long time. Man has often pushed God to the point of unleashing His anger as many verses state including these:

- *Psa 78:38 “But He, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them; And often He restrained His anger, And did not arouse all His wrath.”*

- *Psa 106:23 “Therefore He said that He would destroy them, Had not Moses His chosen one stood in the breach before Him, To turn away His wrath from destroying them.”*

Paul warned his readers of the day of wrath:

- *Rom 2:5 “But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,”*
- *Rom 12:19 “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.”*

The angel then went on to say that the judgment fits the crime. Because mankind poured out the blood of saints and prophets they will now have to drink the blood from God’s wrath (Rev 15:1-4; 11:3-13; 18:20). He says that they deserve it and surely they do. This statement reminds me of the parable of the vine-growers given by Jesus and recorded by Mark:

Mark 12:1-12 And He began to speak to them in parables: “A man PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT, AND DUG A VAT UNDER THE WINE PRESS AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. (2) “At the harvest time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order to receive some of the produce of the vineyard from the vine-growers. (3) “They took him, and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. (4) “Again he sent them another slave, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. (5) “And he sent another, and that one they killed; and so with many others, beating some and killing others. (6) “He had one more to send, a beloved son; he sent him last of all to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ (7) “But those vine-growers said to one another, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!’ (8) “They took him, and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. (9) “What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vine-growers, and will give the vineyard to others. (10) “Have you not even read this Scripture: ‘THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; (11) THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES?’” (12) And they were seeking to seize Him, and yet they feared the people, for they understood that He spoke the parable against them. And so they left Him and went away.

The approval from the altar may be from the saints depicted earlier offering their prayers to God for vengeance (6:9, 11). The voice from the altar affirmed God as Almighty, true, and righteous. He is the only one who can mete justice according to deeds.

Bowl 4

Rev 16:8 “And the fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun; and it was given to it to scorch men with fire.

Rev 16:9 And men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues; and they did not repent, so as to give Him glory.”

Solar flares have been known for a long time and they have caused some severe problems with our communication satellites, but these flares will be considerably more intense. We do not know what God exactly did to cause such severe flares but the result will be disastrous. Certainly all communication will be disrupted and they will cause extreme heat effects on earth so that the people will be scorched with high intensity UV radiation resulting in horrible burns and cancer if they lived long enough. But the problem of the people is spiritual rather than just physical (Isa 52:5; Rom 1:25; 2:24). The people have a predictable reply since they are of their father the devil. They recognize that God has power over the plagues but rather than repenting and giving God glory they blaspheme His name. Today we hear people using the name of Jesus Christ in vain and we hear God being damned in the work place and in movies. It is horrible for us to hear such blaspheming but now the hatred of God will pour forth as they are being punished but they do not recognize it as punishment because they still refuse to know Him as holy.

When we know God is holy and just and we are sinners we react accordingly:

Joshua 7:19-20 “Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, I implore you, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and give praise to Him; and tell me now what you have done. Do not hide it from me.”²⁰ So Achan answered Joshua and said, “Truly, I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel, and this is what I did:”

These people are still worshipers of Satan and follow his example of hating God. They become very obvious here even more so than stated by John: *“the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil.”* (1 John 3:8)

Bowl 5

Rev 16:10 “And the fifth angel poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast; and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain, Rev 16:11 and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.”

God’s wrath now attacks the headquarters of the beast. The previous bowl resulted in solar flares and this bowl causes darkness over the earth. I say over the earth because that is Satan’s temporary kingdom (remember the discussion of Rev 12). Exactly what John means by a darkened kingdom we do not know. Perhaps the bowl caused a dense fog over the earth. A similar darkness was caused by God against Egypt in the time of Moses:

Exodus 10:21-22 “Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even a darkness which

may be felt." ²²So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days."

A darkness that could be felt would be terrible. Perhaps the solar flares caused terrible fires and a resulting smoke that covered the earth. The angel's bowl could then have been the cause of the smoke becoming extremely thick and black. This reminds us of the darkening of the sky by the smoke from the pit as described in Rev 9:2. The people would not be able to see each other and there would be many accidents that could have caused much pain. We do not know if the followers of Satan were in pain because of this new effect or if the pain is from the previous bowls. But instead of praying to God they continued to blaspheme Him as they suffered. It is a horrible action to be mad at God. A friend asked us about some people being mad at God and my wife, Carol, replied as follows:

- 1). The first and greatest commandment is that we love God with all our hearts (Matt. 22:34-40). Anger toward God breaks this commandment and is rooted in self-pity and denies His many blessings in our lives.
- 2). God promises that all things will work together for good to those who love Him (Rom. 8:28). Anger toward God denies this and is rooted in self-righteousness and unbelief which judges God and finds Him inadequate or uncaring.
- 3). We are commanded to be thankful in all things (Eph. 5:20). Anger with God is rooted in ingratitude and shows a lack of faith in Him to fulfill His promises.

I think that Carol gave a great answer that should cause a Christian to repent if anger against God is felt. These people were so hard-hearted that they had no insight at all into the true character of God and just ranted in hatred against God for causing them such pain and hardship.

Bowl 6

Rev 16:12 "And the sixth angel poured out his bowl upon the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, that the way might be prepared for the kings from the east."

The sixth bowl is poured out to prepare the earth for the final bowl of judgment. God was preparing a road to be used by an invading army that He would destroy. Drying up of rivers was often mentioned in the Old Testament as actions of judgment by God and of prophecies such as the following:

- *Exodus 14:21 "Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided."*
- *Isa 11:15 "And the Lord will utterly destroy The tongue of the Sea of Egypt; And He will wave His hand over the River With His scorching wind; And He will strike it into seven streams, And make men walk over dry-shod."*

- *Jer 51:36 “Therefore thus says the Lord, “Behold, I am going to plead your case And exact full vengeance for you; And I shall dry up her sea And make her fountain dry.”*

The Euphrates is the boundary of the eastern land promised Israel and it and the Tigris were important rivers for the entire region. The Euphrates was also a boundary of the Roman Empire and people viewed the land beyond it with fear that some unknown invaders from there might attack. The Parthians lived there during the first century and an invasion by them was feared. So the fear of invasions by kings from the east had been in the minds of people in John’s era for some time. Now God is preparing a route for such an invasion, but an invasion of much greater power and consequences than ever conceived by anyone before this time. There is a similarity between the sixth trumpet and the sixth bowl but the sixth trumpet sets demonic forces to inflict death but the sixth bowl prepares a way for the rulers from the East to meet the Lord in battle:

Rev 9:14-15 “one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.” (15) And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind.”

The Euphrates is the location of Babylon, which is the anti-God throne and the place from which evil hordes will invade Israel.

Rev 16:13 “And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs;

Rev 16:14 for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.”

Seeing that God is pouring forth His wrath, Satan decides to strike back. Now John sees some horrible spirits coming from the false trinity. When John says that they come from the mouths he means that they have the authority and commands of the false trinity. The beast from the earth is evidently the beast mentioned in 13:11. These spirits are spirits of demons and John views them as appearing like frogs. Frogs were unclean and so were vile to the Jews:

Lev 11:10-11 “But whatever is in the seas and in the rivers, that do not have fins and scales among all the teeming life of the water, and among all the living creatures that are in the water, they are detestable things to you,¹¹ and they shall be abhorrent to you; you may not eat of their flesh, and their carcasses you shall detest.”

John would have then seen these as detestable and abhorrent. It is important to realize that John would have been able to see these beings as they really were. Mankind would not have the eyes to see them as the horrible servants of Satan. Remember that Satan can disguise himself so that worldly people do not see him as he really is: *“And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.”* (2 Cor 11:14)

Mankind will see these beings as clever, intelligent and insightful representatives of a great leader. They are going to have a great influence on the kings of the entire world to lead them into battle with God. Such a persuasion by evil spirits reminds us of:

1Kings 22:21-23 "Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord and said, 'I will entice him.'²²"And the Lord said to him, 'How?' And he said, 'I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' Then He said, 'You are to entice him and also prevail. Go and do so.'²³"Now therefore, behold, the Lord has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; and the Lord has proclaimed disaster against you."

John will discuss the fall of Babylon in chapters 17-18 and then the vision of the return of Jesus Christ (the Parousia) in Rev 19:11-16.

Rev 16:15 “(“**Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments, lest he walk about naked and men see his shame.**.”)”

This is the third of the seven beatitudes pronounced by John (1:3; 14:13; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). This verse is not in the oldest manuscripts but is a reminder of the end times as stated by Jesus and Paul:

- *Matt 24:43 “But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into.”*
- *1Th 5:2 “For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.”*

The verse also reminds me of the parable of the ten virgins (Matt 25: 1, 13) ending with: “*Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.*”(Matt 25:13) We should also be prepared at all times: “*Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps alight.*” (Luke 12:35)

Rev 16:16 **And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon.”**

. Some translations read this place as Armageddon and that is what is commonly known by most Bible readers. In Hebrew, “har” means mountain so the place is literally the mountain of Megiddo. However there is no known mountain. Megiddo is an artificial mound that is only about seventy feet high in the time of John. However this statement does refer to a specific time in history when men will face the just judgment of God. The plain of Megiddo is located about 60 miles north of Jerusalem and hundreds of battles had been fought in that area such as:

- *Judges 5:19 “The kings came and fought; Then fought the kings of Canaan At Taanach near the waters of Megiddo; They took no plunder in silver.”*

- *2Kings 23:29 “In his days Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up to the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates. And King Josiah went to meet him, and when Pharaoh Neco saw him he killed him at Megiddo.”*

Since many such battles had been fought in this area, the reference would have been meaningful to the original readers of John’s document. The “they” in the above verse are the evil spirits so they have gathered all these armies of the world (meaning the place of Satan’s influence) in this one area for a great battle against God.

Bowl 7

Rev 16:17 “And the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air; and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, “It is done.””

This bowl affected the atmosphere as considered the place of Satan: *“in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.”* (Eph 2:2)

So God attacked the great armies by attacking their real leader and his demons. Then God spoke from the throne of the temple to simply say, “It is done”. This is reminiscent of the last words of Jesus at His crucifixion: *“When Jesus therefore had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And He bowed His head, and gave up His spirit.”* (John 19:30)

The battle was ended by God by just the three words stated in perfect tense meaning a completed task with ongoing results. When Jesus declared His work on earth finished, He had provided for the salvation of God’s chosen people. When God declared the final battle against evil on earth done, final judgment of all unrepentant people had come. It is finished and it is done are six great words for the Christian!

Rev 16:18 “And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty.

Rev 16:19 And the great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.

Rev 16:20 And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.

Rev 16:21 And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.”

Ezekiel had also looked forward to the Day of Judgment with similar results:

Ezek 36:18-19 “Therefore, I poured out My wrath on them for the blood which they had shed on the land, because they had defiled it with their idols. ¹⁹And in

My zeal and in My blazing wrath I declare that on that day there will surely be a great earthquake in the land of Israel.”

It seems that the battle was over when God said that it was done. Then we see more of the results of the bowl of judgment with lightening, thunder and a tremendous shaking and remolding of the earth. The great city refers to the ungodly civilization of mankind and it being split into three parts refers to its total destruction. All of the cities of man were connected philosophically and so with the fall of the lead city all the cities of mankind fell. The great city of Babylon also refers to the evil civilization of man and God gives it the total cup of His wrath. Justice is being meted as only He can do.

The area was leveled as islands and mountains disappeared. Huge hailstones fell from the sky. The weight of them is meant to be the most that a man could carry so they were of a size never seen before. The falling of such huge hailstones would have also brought great destruction. It is not clear if John meant this literally or to rather demonstrate the total collapse of the world's powers. After all these terrible events the people still did not give God the praise, honor, and glory He deserves but instead they continued to blaspheme Him. Similarly to the hail plague on the Egyptians that further hardened Pharaoh's heart, this plague also did not result in the repentance of mankind. Rather they curse God. God poured forth perfect justice and all the people could see was their losses. The hardness of mankind's hearts was perfectly revealed. The judgment of Babylon is discussed fully by John in chapters 17 and 18.