

17. The Seven Bowls of God's Wrath (Revelation 16)

16:1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth."

Although, no one could enter the temple, John heard a loud voice from the temple. Chapter 15 verse 1 calls the seven bowls of God's wrath the seven last plagues in. With these plagues, God's wrath is completed. Before visiting the specific plagues, it is important to note that they extend to all who do not keep the words of the Revelation: "18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book." Revelation 22:18. These plagues differ from those announced by the sounding of the trumpets in chapters 8 and 9 where the plagues are intermittent and partial (one-third appears to place a limit on the devastation). In chapter 16, God's wrath is full, complete, and overwhelming. Here, also, those who have the mark of the beast and worship his image will refuse to repent (16:11). Although these plagues are horrible in extent and degree, they are nothing like the final act of God's wrath—the lake of fire, the second death (20:15; 21:8). These seven wraths have a single unifying principle: the angels pour out their bowls to the complete destruction of man's habitat: the land, the sea, the springs of water, the sun, the light, the great river Euphrates—the very region of Eden, and the earth itself. In the next several verses, God's wrath reverses his physical creation of the world, fully and completely. The events do not seem to be chronological, but parallel, as illustrated by verse 12-14 and 16, where the kings of the earth are gathered for a later battle. Also, the final acts of God's judgment—the destruction in the lake of fire—is reserved until later in the Revelation.

The First Bowl of God's Wrath

2 The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.

In Revelation 16:2, the plagues begin with the infliction of pain to the mortal bodies. The ugly and painful sores are reminiscent of the sores of Job in Job 2:7-8: "7 So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. 8 Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes." So horrible was Job's misery that he said, "1 Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?" Job 3:11. Of course, what Job experienced could barely approach the experience of the completed wrath of God. The target of God's wrath is the people who had the mark of the beast and worshipped his image.

The Second Bowl of God's Wrath

3 The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.

At the sounding of the trumpets in chapters 8 and 9, we saw afflictions upon the earth that should lead one to repentance. The interim afflictions of chapter 8 were partial; i.e. a third of the living creatures in the sea died. Now the plague of the second bowl of God's wrath killed everything in the sea. *Blood like that of a dead man* illustrates the horror and stink of decay. This plague is reminiscent of the blood plague against Egypt in Exodus 7:19. Here the consequences of God's wrath are not to warn as in Egypt but to punish. In chapter 14, blood flowed out of the winepress of God's wrath (14:19). The blood figure demonstrates God's

denial of life to these evil people. The Lord had said in Leviticus 17:14, "You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood ; anyone who eats it must be cut off."

The Third Bowl of God's Wrath

4 The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. 5 Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say:

*"You are just in these judgments,
you who are and who were, the Holy One,
because you have so judged;
6 for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets,
and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve."*

7 And I heard the altar respond:

*"Yes, Lord God Almighty,
true and just are your judgments."*

The third angel poured out his bowl into the very source of drinking water, and this water, too, became blood. We learn from the angel in charge of the waters that God is just in his judgment. Symbolically, the blood resulting from God's wrath is in juxtaposition to the shed blood of the saints and prophets. The wrath is upon the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image. Of these, the angel said that they receive just as they deserved. The altar responded that judgments of the Lord God Almighty are just and true. It is common for people to argue against the judgment of God by saying that God in his goodness would not do wrathful acts toward man. God's judgments are true and just, and man has every opportunity to be righteous. The burden is upon man to turn from the beast and his image. The invitation to turn from this evil is open to all according to 2 Peter 3:9: "9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." God provides a way out of idolatry and other sins: "13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. 14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. 1 Corinthians 10:13-14

The Fourth Bowl of God's Wrath

8 The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. 9 They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

Not even with scorching by the sun, would these hardhearted followers of the beast repent. They cursed the name of God and refused. Nor would they glorify him even though he had the control over the plagues. The sun so necessary for light and life scorched the people who cursed God. In spite of the severe punishment, they refused to repent and glorify God.

The Fifth Bowl of God's Wrath

10 The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony 11 and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

The fifth angel poured God's wrath directly on the throne of the beast. The kingdom of the beast is that kingdom of the world. At the sound of the seventh trumpet in Rev 11 :15, a loud voice had announced, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ." God plunges the beast and his kingdom into darkness, denying light. Christ spoke of the outer darkness (KJV) to which the unfaithful are destined. In Matthew 8:12 the Lord said, "12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 22:13 and Matthew 25:29-30 offer the same thought.

The Sixth Bowl of God's Wrath

12 The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. 13 Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14 They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

The sixth woe takes us back to Babel and the river Euphrates. As Nimrod and Baal spread the kingdom of the beast, once again evil is on the march. The actors who play out this final dramatic scene are together: Evil spirits, spirits of demons, one each out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, go up to deceive the kings of the whole world.

The war forecasted is to be a spiritual one. The weaponry is that of miraculous signs used to deceive the kings of the earth. The last rally of the forces of evil rely on deceit as they use these miraculous signs—lying wonders described in 2 Thessalonians 2—to gather the kings of the whole world to battle God Almighty. Paul spoke of this same time:

9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12.

In 1 Timothy 4:1-2, Paul spoke of this time when he said: "In later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. 2 Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron." The gathering here is specific to the spiritual battle and the spiritual battle is specific to the great day of the Lord.

The great and glorious day of the Lord was to happen after the events on the day Pentecost when the church was established in Acts 2:20-21: "20 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord . 21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3). It will come after the man of lawlessness is revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4). The lost angels will be kept in darkness, bound by chains, until the judgment on the great day (Jude 6) The earth will be destroyed at the coming of the

day of the Lord in 2 Peter 3:10: "10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." The Lord describe the great day of their wrath in Revelation 6:16-17:

15 Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

15 "*Behold, I come like a thief!, Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.*"

This quotation of the Lord appears to move back to the present time. In spite of the fact that the revelation reveals God's wrath in detail, the coming will still be as a thief, unexpected in its coming. *Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him* speaks to the preparation of the saints. In Revelation 19:7-8, clothes are a direct metaphor for the righteous acts of the saints:

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.

8 Fine linen, bright and clean,
was given her to wear."

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

The figure was previously used in Revelation 3:18: "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness." The Lord purposefully leaves the exact time of his coming undisclosed. This has always been the case. No one knows except the father. In Matthew 24:36-37, Jesus had fully taught this principle: "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. . . . 42 Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. . . . 44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

16 *Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.*

Some versions read Harmagedon. The name is only here in the Revelation. The allusion is to the Old Testament and Mount of Migiddo where great kings were at battle:

(Harmagedon from Hebrew *har meghiddo*, "Mount of Megiddo"; the King James Version Armageddon: This name is found only in Revelation 16:16. From International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003 by Biblesoft, Inc.)

The Old Testament tells the story of the battle twice:

29 While Josiah was king, Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up to the Euphrates River to help the king of Assyria. King Josiah marched out to meet him in battle, but Neco faced him and killed him at Megiddo. 30 Josiah's servants brought his body in a chariot from Megiddo to Jerusalem and buried him in his own tomb. 2 Kings 23:29-30

Chronicles records the same event:

20 After all this, when Josiah had set the temple in order, Neco king of Egypt went up to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Josiah marched out to meet him in battle. 21 But Neco sent messengers to him, saying, "What quarrel is there between you and me, O king of Judah? It is not you I am attacking at this time, but the house with which I am at war. God has told me to hurry; so stop opposing God, who is with me, or he will destroy you."

22 Josiah, however, would not turn away from him, but disguised himself to engage him in battle. He would not listen to what Neco had said at God's command but went to fight him on the plain of Megiddo.

23 Archers shot King Josiah, and he told his officers, "Take me away; I am badly wounded." 24 So they took him out of his chariot, put him in the other chariot he had and brought him to Jerusalem, where he died. 2 Chronicles 35:20-24

Other than the place name and the great kings battling, this story of old has little to do with the present passage and impending battle. Revelation 19:19-21 describes the battle where the Lord and the armies of heaven destroy the armies of the east, the beast, and the false prophet.

The spiritual allusion here is to the battle that the armies of heaven fight daily, as described by Paul and previously noted in this writing:

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Ephesians 6:10-18

To make Armageddon a physical and literal battle on earth, as some do, requires one to deny the metaphoric nature of all John's vision. For example, the dragon is a literal dragon, not the devil; the mouths of the devil, the beast and the false prophet are literal mouths, etc.

The Seventh Bowl of God's Wrath

17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" 18 Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. 19 The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. 20 Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. 21 From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

The last bowl of God's wrath decimates the habitat of man. This bowl deals with the end of that habitat. The specific judgment upon the souls of men comes in chapters 20-21 and the

lake of fire, the second death. Imagine the worst earthquake, and beyond, to one that the earth has never seen. The great city – the city of evil – the direct opposite to the heavenly city, the holy city, splits into three parts. This city of the wicked is the city of that triad of evil, the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. The great city, Babylon the Great, receives special attention to its destruction in chapters 17 and 18. The victory of the Lamb and his bride, the holy city, will follow in chapters 19, 21, and 22. Babylon the great receives the full fury of the wine of God's wrath. The plagues were so terrible that they cursed God.

"It is done," signals the consummation of God's wrath. The phrase echoes that one made by Christ on the cross in John 19:28-30:

28 Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. 30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

John began his description of the death of Jesus by stating that Jesus knew that all was now complete. The study of chapter 14 showed that God's pronouncements establish the happening:

Because the Lord has pronounced these things, they will be:

I am God, and there is no other;

I am God, and there is none like me.

10 I make known the end from the beginning,
from ancient times, what is still to come.

I say: My purpose will stand,
and I will do all that I please. Isaiah 46:9-10.

Although this bowl of wrath shows the events of the destruction of the earth, the Lord's coming is still as a thief. Parallel to this description of this final wrath is one by Peter in 2 Peter 3:7-13:

7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

The great day of the Lord will see the end of the physical world and the end of the spiritual struggle also. We have already studied Revelation 6:15-17:

15 Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

The events of the verses 12-21 parallel the events described by Christ in Matthew 24. In Matthew 24 Jesus and his disciples were walking away from the temple. In verse 1, Jesus said, speaking of the temple, "Do you see all these things? I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." In verse 3, the disciples responded by asking him two questions, "3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'"

The Lord answers the two questions.

Verses 3-25 answers the first question which is, *when will this happen*. Jesus said that even though many would come claiming to be Christ, though there would be wars and rumors of wars, and though kingdom would rise against kingdom, the end is still to come. He said that you will be persecuted, put to death, and hated; and that many would turn away from the faith, and that many false prophets will appear. He said that many false prophets would appear, and many would fall away from the faith. Those who stand firm, Jesus said would be saved. And the gospel of the kingdom would be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations. Then he said that the end would come. These are the same events that lead up to and include the situation in Revelation 16. The tabernacle of testimony is open (Revelation 15:5).

In this context, the Lord answers the first question: *when will this happen*—the destruction of the physical temple in Jerusalem. The Lord said that it would be when they saw standing in the holy place (the temple) the abomination that causes desolation (Daniel 9:27, 11:31, and 12:11). The *it* in the question is the destruction of the temple, Daniel prophesied. Jesus told them that, if at this time, anyone said that there he is. Do not believe because false Christs and false prophets would appear and do great signs and miracles to deceive. This is also what Revelation 16:14 said.

Verse 26-35 answers the second question: *what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age*. Jesus said that if any one said that he is here or he is there, do not believe it. Jesus said that after the distress of those days, including but certainly not limited to the destruction of the temple: "The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken." This also is what is prophesied in Revelation 16:17-21.

At that time, after the distress of these days: "30 . . . the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."

Jesus concludes with the same teaching as Revelation 16:15, which reads: "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." In Matthew 24:42-44, Jesus said,

42 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.
43 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."