

## Revelation 16: The Seven Bowls of God's Wrath

The seven plagues of the seven angels are to begin and finish in chapter 16 as they pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath upon the earth. However, the wrath of God was a fact established by the victory of the Lamb and the church forever and as God foreknew according to his eternal purpose.

### **Revelation 16:1**

*6 And I heard a great voice out of the temple, saying to the seven angels, "Go, and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God into 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, "(which are) the last, for in them is finished the wrath of God." 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 as expressed in Revelation 22:18:

18 I testify unto every man that hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book.

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 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

### **Revelation 16:2**

*2 And the first went, and poured out his bowl into the earth; and it became a noisome and grievous sore upon the men that had the mark of the beast, and that worshipped 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 forth from the presence of Jehovah, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. 8 And he took him a potsherd [pottery fragment] to scrape himself therewith; and he sat among the ashes.

So horrible was Job's misery that he said in Job 3:11, "Why did I not from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost when my mother bare me?" 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

### Revelation 16:3

*3 And the second poured out his bowl into the sea; and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living soul died, (even) the things that were in the sea.*

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 as 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 14:19-20, blood flowed out of the winepress of God's wrath:

And the angel cast his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vintage of the earth, and cast it into the winepress, the great (winepress), of the wrath of God. 20 And the winepress was trodden without the city, and there came out blood from the winepress, even unto the bridles of the horses, as far as a thousand and six hundred furlongs.

The blood figure demonstrates God's denial of life to these evil people. The Lord had said in Leviticus 17:14:

14 For as to the life of all flesh, the blood thereof is (all one) with the life thereof: therefore I said unto the children of Israel: "You shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh; for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof: whosoever eats it shall be cut off."

## The Third Bowl of God's Wrath

### Revelation 16:4-7

*4 And the third poured out his bowl into the rivers and the fountains of the waters; and it became blood. 5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying, "You are righteous, who are and who was, Holy One, because you did thus judge: 6 for they poured out the blood of the saints and the prophets, and blood have you given them to drink: they are worthy [deserve it]." 7 And I heard the altar saying, Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous 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 slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

God provides a way out of idolatry and other sins, according to 1 Corinthians 10:13:

There has no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

## The Fourth Bowl of God's Wrath

### **Revelation 16:8-9**

*And the fourth poured out his bowl upon the sun; and it was given unto it to scorch men with fire. 9 And men were scorched with great heat: and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues; and they repented not to give him glory.*

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

### **Revelation 16:10-11**

*10 And the fifth poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast; and his kingdom was darkened; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, 11 and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they repented not of their works.*

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 great voices had announced:

The kingdom of the world is become (the kingdom) of our Lord, and of his Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever.

God plunges the beast and his kingdom into darkness, denying light. Christ spoke of the outer darkness to which the unfaithful are destined. In Matthew 22:13 the Lord said:

13 Then the king said to the servants, "Bind him hand and foot, and cast him out into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth."

Matthew 25:45-46 further describe this state of darkest of darkness:

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, "Truly, I say unto you, Inasmuch as you did it not unto one of these least, you did it not unto me. 46 And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life."

## The Sixth Bowl of God's Wrath

### **Revelation 16:12-14**

*12 And the sixth poured out his bowl upon the great river, the (river) Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way might be made ready for the kings that (come) from the sunrising. 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, as it were frogs: 14 for they are spirits of demons, working signs; which go forth unto the kings of the whole world, to gather them together unto the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.*

The sixth woe takes us back to Babel and the river Euphrates. As Nimrod and Baal spread the kingdom of the beast of the sea, 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 2:8-12—to gather the kings of the whole world to battle God Almighty. Paul spoke of this same time:

8 And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to naught by the manifestation of his coming; 9 (even he), whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, 10 and with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this cause God sends them a working of error, that they should believe a lie: 12 that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

In 1 Timothy 4:1-2, Paul spoke of this time when he said:

4 But the Spirit says expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience 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 shall be turned into darkness, And the moon into blood, Before the day of the Lord come, That great and notable (day). 21 And it shall be, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall 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 as a thief; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

The Lord described the great day of their wrath in Revelation 6:16-17:

15 And the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the chief captains, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains; 16 and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. 17 for the great day of their wrath is come; and who is able to stand?"

### **Revelation 16:15**

*15 (Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watches, and keeps his garments, unless he walk naked, and they see his shame.)*

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:

7 Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory unto him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready. 8 And it was given unto her that she

should array herself in fine linen, bright (and) pure: for the fine linen is 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."

### **Revelation 16:16**

*16 And they gathered them together into the place which is called in Hebrew Har-Magedon.*

Some versions read Armageddon. The name is only here in the Revelation. The allusion is to the Old Testament and Mount of Megiddo 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; the first being in 2 Kings 23:29-30:

29 In his days Pharaoh-necoh king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates: and king Josiah went against him; and (Pharaoh-necoh) slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him. 30 And his servants carried him in a chariot dead from Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own sepulcher.

2 Chronicles 35:20-21 records the same event:

20 After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Neco king of Egypt went up to fight against Carchemish by the Euphrates: and Josiah went out against him. 21 But he sent ambassadors to him, saying, "What have I to do with you, you king of Judah? (I come) not against you this day, but against the house wherewith I have war; and God has commanded me to make haste: forbear you from (meddling with) God, who is with me, that he destroy you not."

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 in Ephesians 6:10-18:

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual (hosts) of wickedness in the heavenly (places). 13 Wherefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. 14 Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 withal taking up the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil (one). 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: 18 with all prayer and

supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

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

### Revelation 16:17-21

*17 And the seventh poured out his bowl upon the air; and there came forth a great voice out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done." 18 And there were lightnings, and voices, and thunders; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since there were men upon the earth, so great an earthquake, so mighty. 19 And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and Babylon the great was remembered in the sight of God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. 20 And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. 21 And great hail, (every stone) about the weight of a talent, come down out of heaven upon men: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof is exceeding great.*

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 After this Jesus, knowing that all things are **now finished**, that the scripture might be accomplished, said, "I thirst." 29 There was set there a vessel full of vinegar: so they put a sponge full of the vinegar upon hyssop, and brought it to his mouth. 30 When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, "It is finished;": and 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 as taught in Isaiah 46:9-10:

9 Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; (I am) God, and there is none like me; 10 declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not (yet) done; saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."

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 but the heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the Day of Judgment and destruction of ungodly men. 8 But forget not this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness;

but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

11 Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in (all) holy living and godliness, 12 looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, by reason of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? 13 But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells 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 And the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the chief captains, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains; 16 and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: 17 for the great day of their wrath is come; and who is able to 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 2, Jesus said, speaking of the temple,

2 But he answered and said unto them, "See you not all these things? Truly, I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

In verse 3, the disciples responded by asking him two questions,

3 And as he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, "Tell us, when shall these things be? And what (shall be) the sign of your coming, and of the end of the world?"

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, referred to three times by Daniel

Daniel 9:27: And he shall make a firm covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease; and upon the wing of abominations (shall come) one that makes desolate; and even unto the full end, and that determined, shall (wrath) be poured out upon the desolate.

Daniel 11:31: And forces shall stand on his part, and they shall profane the sanctuary, even the fortress, and shall take away the continual (burnt-offering), and they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate.

Daniel 12:11: And from the time that the continual (burnt-offering) shall be taken away, and the abomination that makes desolate set up, there shall be a thousand and two hundred and ninety days.

The *it* in the question is the destruction of the temple as 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, Matthew 24:30-31 teaches:

30 and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Jesus concludes with the same teaching as Revelation 16:15, which reads: Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watches, and keeps his garments, unless he walk naked, and they see his shame.”

In Matthew 24:42-44, Jesus said,

42 Watch therefore: for you know not on what day your Lord comes. 43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken through. 44 Therefore be you also ready; for in an hour that you think not the Son of man comes.