

THE SEVEN BOWLS OF GOD'S WRATH

Introduction:

1. The second section of the book of Revelation has shown how Satan has fought throughout the ages against God and His faithful remnant.
2. In the early history of the church, he used two beasts associated with the Roman Empire to attack and persecute the church.
3. Both Rome's political power and religious pressure were used to turn Christians from their faith or to ensure their deaths.
4. Now the time has come for final judgment upon this wickedness to occur.
5. Chapter 15 revealed the victory of the faithful but also demonstrated the certainty of judgment upon the wicked.
6. Now, both the intensity and the finality of that judgment will be made known.

I. The First Bowl

(16:1-2)

- A. The voice John heard from the Temple was likely the voice of God.
 1. These angels act on God's authority and at His command.
 2. This is a righteous judgment of God.
- B. It should be remembered that this is a judgment upon the dragon and his servants – the beasts and those loyal to them.
 1. Though this is a judgment with finality, it is not the final judgment.
 2. In the context, it is most likely a judgment upon Rome.
 3. However, the principles found here apply throughout time whenever God's church is persecuted.
- C. The idea of bowls was introduced with the prayers of the saints (5:8).
 1. Perhaps this links the judgments of God to those prayers.
 2. Though much time would pass before their prayers were answered with judgment, the Christians were to continue praying.
- D. As noted previously, the "earth" often symbolizes the world of carnal, unregenerate man (6:15; 7:2; 12:12; 13:8, 11).
- E. When the first angel poured out the contents of his bowl, it produced wounds and sores upon those who worshipped the beast.
 1. Note that man is affected immediately by the first bowl, unlike the trumpets (5th) or the 10 plagues (6th).
 2. The word for "sore" indicates an ulcer, a result of impurities in the body or, here, the corruption of society.
 3. It was "noisome" and "grievous" – meaning, "troublesome and painful."
 4. This symbolizes the reaping of consequences from the false worship of the Emperor and the Roman system (cf. Galatians 6:7).
- F. Those affected were the ones who participated in that false system.

II. The Second Bowl

(16:3)

- A. When the second angel poured out the contents of his bowl, the sea became blood and all life in it perished.
 1. Earlier, it was noted that the "sea" represented the "sea of humanity" – the society of worldly people who lived in turmoil as they rejected God (8:8; 13:1).

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2. Note that all the sea is affected, unlike the sounding of the second trumpet (1/3).
3. Hailey stated: "The bowl of wrath thus brings into focus the utter putrefaction of a dead society."
4. The blood of a dead man is rotten, fetid, and spoiled.
5. The spiritually dead are just a vile in sight of God.
- B. A society that rejects God dies and begins the process of slow decomposition until it "returns to dust."

III. The Third Bowl (16:4-7)

- A. When the third angel poured out the contents of his bowl, the rivers and fountains of water became blood.
 1. In the first of the Ten Plagues, the water of the Nile River turned to blood.
 - a. However, the people could still dig and find fresh water (Exodus 7:24).
 - b. Here, even the underground springs of water are turned to blood.
 2. Note that all the waters are affected, unlike the third trumpet (1/3).
- B. Following this, an angel declared that God was righteous in this action.
- C. The wicked had "poured out" the blood of the righteous, now they will be forced to drink blood.
- D. Then, another voice from the altar announced that the judgment itself was righteous and just.
 1. The altar under consideration here is not certain.
 - a. If it is the altar of sacrifice, then it relates to those slain for their faith (cf. 6:9-11).
 - b. If it is the altar of incense, then it relates to the prayers of the saints (5:8; 8:3, 5).
 2. Yet it is a declaration of vindication and victory for the faithful.
- E. While the wicked are forced to drink blood for water, the righteous drink from the "fountain of living waters" (Jeremiah 2:13; 17:13; Isaiah 12:3; John 4:10, 14).

IV. The Fourth Bowl (16:8-9)

- A. When the fourth angel poured out the contents of his bowl, men were scorched with intense heat as from the sun.
 1. Instead of darkness, as in the fourth trumpet and the ninth plague, the sun becomes a source of intense light and heat that burns.
 2. This burning fire symbolizes the divine judgment of God (cf. Psalm 97:3, 7; Isaiah 47:13; 50:11).
- B. The beast from the earth had caused fire to fall from heaven as a means of deception; now, God sends the true fire of judgment (cf. 13:13)!
- C. Instead of allowing this to motivate their repentance, the wicked used it as an opportunity to blaspheme God.
 1. Note that they did not glorify God (cf. Romans 1:21).
 2. Consider also that repentance from sin glorifies God.
- D. Like Pharaoh of old, they hardened their hearts and chose to persist in their sins (cf. 22:11).
- E. The remaining bowls focus on judgment upon the political and moral world of the wicked.

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- V. The Fifth Bowl (16:10-11)
- A. The fifth bowl of God's wrath was poured out upon the throne of the beast.
 - 1. The previous bowls had been poured out on those who worshipped the beast and did his bidding.
 - 2. Now, the beast is facing judgment.
 - 3. His throne and authority had been given to him by Satan, the dragon (13:2, 4).
 - 4. Thus, this was the seat of world power.
 - B. As a result, the kingdom of the beast was filled with darkness.
 - 1. When the fifth trumpet sounded, the air was darkened with smoke – representing the error and deception of Satan (9:1-2).
 - 2. Here, the darkness or blindness does not seem to come from smoke.
 - 3. It is more like the ninth plague upon Egypt – darkness throughout the land (Exodus 10:21-23).
 - 4. This darkness seems to symbolize a blindness in leadership that will lead to the fall of the kingdom (cf. Isaiah 8:21-22; 9:19; Psalm 69:23).
 - C. In utter spiritual darkness, they refused to acknowledge their sins or their need of God, choosing to blaspheme His name.
- VI. The Sixth Bowl (16:12-16)
- A. The sixth bowl of God's wrath was poured out upon the Euphrates River, causing it to be dried up.
 - 1. At the sounding of the sixth trumpet, the Euphrates released four angels that ushered in an army on horseback (9:13-14).
 - 2. They came to bring a limited judgment on the world of men.
 - B. The Euphrates River had long been significant to the people of God.
 - 1. It was the far eastern border of the nation of Israel (cf. Genesis 15:18; 1 Kings 4:21).
 - 2. It stood as the dividing line between Israel and the powers of the East – Assyria, Babylon, Persia (cf. Jeremiah 46:6-10).
 - C. Here, it symbolizes a hindrance to invasion, but now the way is made ready for the kings of the east (sunrising).
 - 1. This parallels the fall of Babylon to the Persians.
 - 2. Herodotus wrote that the Persians diverted the waters of the Euphrates and entered Babylon along the dry riverbed.
 - 3. Like Babylon, Rome was not impervious to defeat.
 - 4. It should be noted that these "kings of the east" are wicked, worldly powers, even though they accomplish the purpose of God (vs. 14; cf. Habakkuk).
 - 5. This is not a reference to a specific nation; rather, it alludes to the principle of the fall of a world power.
 - D. Following this, John saw three unclean, demonic spirits "out of the mouth" of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet.
 - 1. Earlier, the dragon had released from its mouth a river of deception that was swallowed up by the earth (12:15-16).
 - 2. Out of the mouth of the beast John had heard great boastings and blasphemy against God (12:5-6).

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3. Out of the mouth of the false prophet deceptive propaganda had been delivered to persuade men to worship the beast (13:14).
4. Now, John sees unclean spirits like frogs accomplishing the same the work of these evil beings – deceiving and alluring them into battle against God.
 - a. The plague of frogs upon Egypt was said to have “destroyed them” (Psalm 78:45; cf. Exodus 8:2-7).
 - b. The frogs completely conquered the land of Egypt, even filling the king’s house (Psalm 105:30).
 - c. Frogs were considered an abomination (Leviticus 11:9-12) and loathsome creatures.
 - d. Their croaking likely symbolized confusion as it became maddening.
- E. “The battle of the great day of God Almighty” is a day of judgment by God upon men.
 1. Note that this is just the gathering of forces; no battle has begun.
 2. In fact, this battle will not be fought until chapter 19.
 3. This is not the final judgment of God at the end of time, for there will be no battle on that day.
 4. Also, the symbolism must be remembered – this is a spiritual fight between good and evil.
- F. In the midst of this, Jesus speaks.
 1. The meaning of His words is simple: one cannot know when He will come in judgment, so one must always be prepared.
 2. This involves being on guard and keeping pure from sin.
- G. These forces are gathered into a place called Armageddon.
 1. This is a Hebrew word referring to the “hill or city of Megiddo.”
 - a. Note that this verse says nothing about a battle being fought here.
 - b. It only states that this is where they were gathered.
 2. Megiddo is mentioned several times in the Old Testament (Joshua 17:11; Judges 1:27; 5:19; 2 Chronicles 35:22; Zechariah 12:11).
 3. It was an important location, serving as a northern entrance into the nation of Israel.
 4. Several important battles took place there in Israel’s history:
 - a. Deborah and Barak fought the Canaanites (Judges 4 – 5).
 - b. Gideon’s 300 men defeated the Midianites (Judges 7).
 - c. King Saul and Jonathan were killed here (1 Samuel 31:1-6).
 - d. King Ahaziah of Judah was slain here by orders of Jehu (2 Kings 9:27).
 5. It was also here that King Josiah died in battle against Necho of Egypt (2 Chronicles 35:20-27).
 - a. This battle kept Egypt from supporting Assyria in the fight against Babylon.
 - b. As a result, Babylon rose to power in the world.
 - c. Sadly, it marked the beginning of the end of Judah, for Josiah was the last good king to reign.
 6. Clearly, Armageddon is meant to symbolize a decisive battle between good and evil, God and Satan.
 7. In the end, God wins (19:11-21)!

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- VII. The Seventh Bowl (16:17-21)
- A. The final bowl of God's wrath was poured out upon the air.
 - 1. All four elements have now been affected – earth (vs. 2), water (vs. 3, 4), fire [sun] (vs. 8), and air.
 - 2. Thus, the entire wicked system aligned against God and His people has now felt divine judgment.
 - B. The air seems to be symbolic for the sphere of Satan's influence (Ephesians 2:1-2; cf. 6:12; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19).
 - C. Thus, a voice from the throne declared: "It is done."
 - D. Following this declaration, there was the sound of voices and thundering joined with lightning, an earthquake, and great hail (cf. vs. 21).
 - 1. These elements first appeared at the throne of God (4:5).
 - 2. When the seven seals were opened, these elements appeared again (8:5).
 - 3. They were seen and heard again at the sounding of the seven trumpets (11:19).
 - 4. Each time they represented judgment from God.
 - 5. With each appearance their intensity was strengthened.
 - E. The earthquake represents the shaking of world powers (1 Kings 14:15; Psalm 18:7; Isaiah 2:19-21; Joel 3:16; Haggai 2:6-7; Hebrews 12:26ff; cf. Matthew 27:51; 28:2; Acts 16:26).
 - F. As a result, the great city of Babylon was broken into three parts.
 - 1. This city had been introduced and warned earlier (11:8, 13).
 - 2. Its judgment and fall had already been announced (14:8).
 - 3. Now, it is pictured as divided into three parts – representing total destruction.
 - a. Later, her judgment from God is described as death, mourning, and famine (18:8).
 - b. It also hearkens back to the three-fold judgment of Jerusalem by fire, sword, and scattering (Ezekiel 5:1-3).
 - G. When Babylon is brought down, the other nations and power who supported her will also fall.
 - H. Because the time of their judgment had come, God remembered them (cf. Genesis 8:1; Acts 10:31).
 - I. Thus, He forced them to drink from the cup of His wrath (cf. 14:10).
 - J. The removal of the islands and mountains symbolized that there was no place to flee to and nowhere to hide from the judgment of God.
 - K. The final picture of this judgment was a hailstorm unlike any ever witnessed by man.
 - 1. Each hailstone weighed around one talent – around 90 or 95 pounds.
 - 2. These came from heaven as a judgment from God (cf. Exodus 9:18-26; Joshua 10:11).
 - L. Despite the severe nature of this judgment, men still refused to repent, choosing rather to blaspheme against God.
 - 1. Clearly, this was not the final judgment at the end of time.
 - 2. It was the downfall of Babylon – Rome – described in detail in the next two chapters of the book.