

"The Pouring Out of the Seven Bowls of Wrath"

Revelation 16:1-21

The First Bowl Judgment: (16:1-2)

The Introduction: The beginning of chapter 16 begins with a command for the pouring out of the seven bowl judgments. It is at this point in John's vision that he hears a loud voice from the Temple. Remember that the scene is in heaven and this is a reference to the temple in heaven. This loud or great voice is none other than the voice of God. He issues forth the command that the seven bowls of His wrath are to finally be poured out and His judgment against the earth completed. The term for "loud" *meegas* can mean "loud, great, huge, fierce or large." It is interesting that it is used 11 times here in chapter 16 of Revelation (cp. vv. 1, 9, 12, 14, 17, 18, 19, 21). The focus is on the fierce and great wrath of almighty God against those who have rejected Him.

The Pouring out of the First Bowl: Now John sees the first angel pour out his bowl into the earth. This judgment will be that of a loathsome and malignant sour upon the men who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image. Notice first of all the recipients of this judgment are particularly those who have received the mark of the beast and have worshiped the beast's image. Those believers who have been left alive during this terrible time will be spared this terrible judgment. The focus of these judgments seems to be upon the unbelieving world. Second notice the form of this judgment as being loathsome and malignant sores. "Loathsome" is *kakos* which means "evil, injurious" and refers to what brings about a crippling effect. "Malignant" is *ponhros* which means "active, malignant" and looks at what is painful, destructive, and even vicious. This stresses the effect, degree, and intensity."⁴⁴⁶ "This judgment will involve a foul-smelling, malignant ulcer (like a boil) that is extremely painful and will not heal."⁴⁴⁷ "The Septuagint (LXX) uses the same Greek word to describe the boils that plagued the Egyptians (Exodus 9:9-11) and afflicted Job (Job 2:7). In the New Testament, it describes the open sores that covered the beggar Lazarus (Luke 16:21). All over the world, people will be afflicted with incurable, open oozing sores."⁴⁴⁸

The Second Bowl Judgment: (16:3)

While the unbelievers of the earth are severely suffering from the result of the first bowl judgment, the second angel immediately pours out his bowl into the sea. The result is similar to that of the 2nd trumpet judgment in that the seas turn into blood. The difference here is that all of the seas upon the earth are turned to blood rather than 1/3 of the seas as in the 2nd trumpet judgment. This demonstrates the extreme severity of these bowl judgments. The type of blood that the salt waters of the earth are turned into is compared to that of a dead man. "The water in the world's oceans will become thick, dark, and coagulated, like the blood of a corpse. The death and decay of billions of sea creatures will only add to the misery of this judgment."⁴⁴⁹ Notice the emphasis of verse 3 regarding the result of such a devastating judgment upon the sea. *Every living thing in the sea died.* Such a judgment will further reduce the scarcity of food and add to the plague of drought and famine upon the world. It will also make it next to impossible for transporting anything by way of the sea, as traveling by boat will be impossible under such conditions, not to mention that there will be a terrible stench from the waters. The shipping and fishing industries will be non-existent from this point on.

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The Third Bowl Judgment: (16:4-7)

The Pouring out of the Bowl: At this time the third angel pours out his bowl and the fresh water supply is now contaminated. "Fresh water already in short supply because of the prolonged drought (11:6), will now suffer the fate of the oceans (cf. Ex. 7:19ff). In addition to suffering from thirst, the worshippers of Antichrist will have no clean water with which to wash their sores."⁴⁵⁰ All rivers, lakes and springs will be affected. All the water supply that is used for drinking will be turned to blood. This is similar to the third trumpet judgment when the meteor or comet wormwood poisons 1/3 of the fresh water supply. The results are not mentioned, but it can clearly be implied that there will no longer be any pure drinking water driving the world to an unquenchable thirst. Those who even attempt to drink the water will die. "Without water, people will go mad and will stop at nothing to quench their thirst. We can only imagine the agony, panic, and death this pollution will create."⁴⁵¹ Thus far the bowl judgments have brought incredibly painful sores that cannot be healed, upon the unbelieving world, and all the waters of the earth both salt and fresh water will be turned to blood.

The Statement of Vindication: It is at this point that we are told that John heard an angel speak forth. This angel is called the angel of the waters. This angel has some sort of jurisdiction or control over the waters. It is unclear whether this is a reference back to the third bowl angel or some other angel. "This angel makes a statement vindicating the holiness of God and setting forth the reason for the judgment (vv. 5-6)."⁴⁵² This statement begins with an affirmation of the righteousness of God. After proclaiming the righteousness of God the angel goes on to affirm the eternity of God in the statement *who art and who wast*. This is followed by an affirmation of the holiness of God. God is depicted as righteous, eternal and holy, therefore just in pouring out His wrath upon these rebellious rejecters. Since these evil individuals poured out the blood of the saints and the prophets, God has given them blood to drink instead of water. This is what these wicked people deserve and God is completely righteous and just in doing so. At this point John personifies the altar in heaven and this altar echoes the words of the angel. God is affirmed as being almighty and His judgments are called true and righteous. It is apparent that the world rightly deserves the just judgment of God in the pouring out of these bowl judgments.

The Fourth Bowl Judgment: (16:8-9)

The Pouring out of the Fourth Bowl: The fourth angel now moves forward and pours forth his bowl. This angel pours his bowl out upon the sun rather than on the earth. The purpose in doing so is so that the sun will scorch men with fire. "This judgment like the fourth trumpet, involves the sun, yet it is quite different. Under the fourth trumpet, one-third of the sun will be darkened (8:12). Here the sun's intensity will be supernaturally increased by God, causing it to scorch people with fire."⁴⁵³ The term fire is defined for us in the next phrase as it states that *men were scorched with fierce heat*. "The sun that normally provides light, warmth, and energy will become a deadly killer. With no fresh water to drink, earth's inhabitants will face extreme heat. The scorching heat will melt the polar ice caps, which some estimate would raise the level of the world's oceans by 200 ft., inundating many of the world's major cities and producing further catastrophic loss of life."⁴⁵⁴

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The Response of Mankind: Verse 9 goes on to explain that men were scorched with fierce heat from the intensity of the sun. As a result mankind blasphemed the name of God. Notice that the people of the earth clearly recognize these events from the bowl judgments as being from the hand of God. Instead of repentance however, they blaspheme God. They refuse to repent of their sin and give glory to God. They will become hardened in heart and more callused than before.

The Fifth Bowl Judgment: (16:10-11)

It is unclear how much time falls between each of these bowl judgments. They do come in rapid-fire succession one right after another. However it is unclear whether we are looking at just days between them or weeks between them. One thing is clear that they are long enough to have a great affect upon the people. In this fifth bowl judgment the throne of the beast is the target of the judgment. The fifth angel pours out his bowl upon the throne of the beast and his kingdom becomes darkened. Since the entire world will fall under the jurisdiction of Antichrist's control, the entire world will be darkened. This understanding is clear also in that thus far the bowl judgments have world-wide implications. The people of the world will still have the terrible loathsome sores weeping, oozing, itching and causing great pain. They will still have no water to drink or to bathe in or clean their sores with, since the waters will still be blood. They will still have terrible burns from the fierce heat of the sun. Then the sun will be completely darkened throwing the world into a dark state of chaos. Without rain from the world-wide drought and without sun to produce photosynthesis, all the plants of the world will surely be dead by now if they haven't been killed or burned up already. The loss of heat from the sun will cause temperatures to plunge drastically all over the world. That will severely disrupt the earth's weather patterns and the seas' tides, leading to violent, unpredictable storms and tides, the destruction of crops, and further loss of animal and human lives."⁴⁵⁵ The world will be plunged into darkness and there will likely be widespread panic and fear. In fact the pain from the previous judgments and the fear of this particular judgment will drive many to gnaw their tongues. Some have suggested that this is a preview of the outer darkness of hell that unbelievers will suffer (cf. Matthew 25:30). It has no effect however on the spiritual state of these people as they further blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores. They were not moved to repent of their wicked deeds.

The Sixth Bowl Judgment: (16:12-16)

The Pouring out of the 6th Bowl Judgment:

Now the sixth angel pours out his bowl of judgment. Notice first of all the direction of this judgment. This bowl is specifically directed at the great Euphrates River. J. Hampton Keathley III lists some important facts about this river in his study of Revelation 16:

- (1) It formed the Eastern boundary of ancient Rome and its conquests.
- (2) It forms the Eastern boundary of the land as promised to Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:18; Deut. 1:7; 11:24; Josh. 1:4).
- (3) For a brief season David and Solomon extended their authority to the Euphrates (1 Kings 4:21; 1 Chron. 18:3; 2 Chron. 9:26).

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(4) The river is 1,800 miles long and has always stood as a natural barrier separating the east from the west.

(5) The river forms in Armenia and 1,800 miles later empties into the Persian Gulf. About 90 miles from the Persian Gulf, it is joined by the Tigris.⁴⁵⁶

This no doubt sheds some light as to why the Euphrates River is called great. Second notice the specific result of the pouring out of this bowl judgment. The Euphrates River was dried up. Remember back in the third bowl judgment that the rivers were turned into blood. The raging river of blood in the Euphrates will be dried up completely at the pouring out of this bowl. John goes on to explain the reason or purpose for this river to be dried up and it is *that the way might be prepared for the kings from the east*. It will be necessary for the kings from the East to move forward across the Euphrates River and will be unable to do so without the pouring out of this bowl to dry up the flow of blood. "God providentially draws these kings and their armies in order to destroy them in the battle of Armageddon (v. 14). Their reason for coming may be to rebel against Antichrist, whose failure to alleviate the world's suffering will no doubt erode his popularity. Or, this may be a final act of rabid anti-Semitism intent on destroying Israel, perhaps in retaliation for the plagues sent by God. Since the sun may have melted the ice caps on Ararat, flooding the valley of the Euphrates as the river overflows its banks and bridges, the land will be swamped. God will have to dry it up miraculously for the eastern army to get to Armageddon."⁴⁵⁷ There are as many as 50 different interpretations as to the identity of these armies. In the Greek it is literally rendered, "the kings of the rising sun." This signifies simply the direction that these are coming from. Today nations such as China, Japan, India, Iran and a host of others are positioned due east from Israel across the Euphrates River, which runs through modern day Iraq. It is important to note that the Scriptures here in Revelation do not give us any further identification of these kings, nor does it provide a specific reason for their coming. It is unwise to speculate beyond the data given.

The Resulting Vision:

It is at this point that John has a vision, which speaks of the direct result from the sixth bowl judgment. First of all John describes demonic activity. He sees frogs coming out of the mouths of the dragon (Satan), the beast (Antichrist), and the false prophet. Then he goes on to explain what these frogs represent. They are more particularly the spirits of demons. They are pictured as frogs more than likely to emphasized their vileness especially since frogs were considered to be unclean (cf. Leviticus 11:10, 11, 41). "These demonic spirits will perform miracles that will entice all nations to bring their armies to Israel for the battle of that great day of God Almighty (v. 14)."⁴⁵⁸ Regarding the miracles that they perform: "These are supernatural wonders (cf. 13:"12-15) designed to deceive (cf. 19:20; 1 Kings 22:20-23; Mark 13:22) the kings into invading Palestine. Their impact will be so great that the unclean spirits are able to induce the kings to make the journey to Palestine in spite of their sores, the intense heat, drought, and darkness."⁴⁵⁹ Now these demonic spirits influence more than just the kings from the East, but they seem to influence the kings of the whole world to gather together for war. The Greek term for war here *polemos* signifies more than a single battle or isolated conflict. It truly represents an entire campaign or a full-fledged war. Either, war will have broken out upon the world scene due to Antichrist's lack of control over world conditions, causing some to rebel against him. Or, this is simply a reference to their desire, brought on by these demonic spirits to wage war against the nation of Israel and eventually against the Lord Himself.

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Whatever the case God allows these demonic spirits to influence the kings of the world to gather together for war. The specific war they are gathering for is the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. This war we know of by the term Armageddon, as is made clear in the actual place these armies are gathering (v. 16).

It is at this point that a voice calls forth with a special announcement. This special announcement includes the third beatitude in the book of Revelation (cf. 1:3; 14:13). The voice first states *Behold, I am coming like a thief*. This is obviously the voice of the Lord. It is in Matthew 24:43 and Luke 12:39 that Christ compares His Second Coming to that of coming as a thief. It is also the warning of Christ to the church in Sardis in Revelation 3:3. Clearly this is a reference to the Lord's voice and He is clearly announcing that He will return suddenly and unexpectedly. Although tribulation saints know that they are living in the end of times, they still will not know the exact moment of Christ's coming. After the announcement of His certain coming, Christ pronounces a third beatitude: *Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments, lest he walk about naked and men see his shame*. This beatitude is offered to those tribulation saints who have survived the seven-year ordeal and have obviously escaped martyrdom. This is an encouragement to true believers and a call for them to stay alert in light of Christ's imminent return. "The word garments is symbolic of the righteousness of the saints (cp. 19:8). Those who are walking in sin before God (p. 3:18) and the world are considered to be spiritually naked. This is shameful at any time, but especially in light of the Second Coming of Christ. Believers must guard their lives from evil at all times and be clothed in God's righteousness."⁴⁶⁰ Don't misunderstand here. True believers will find this statement as an encouragement, while the unregenerate will see this as a warning. At the close of this vision John moves on to identify the location of the gathering armies. It is none other than Armageddon. Armageddon is a Greek translation of the Hebrew term *Megiddo*. "Geographically it relates to the Mount of Megiddo located adjacent to the plain of Megiddo to the west and the large plain of Esdraelon to the northeast."⁴⁶¹

The Seventh Bowl Judgment: (16:17-21)

Finally, the last of the seven bowls is poured out. This is the most severe and devastating judgment of all and the final judgment of the tribulation judgments (7 seals, trumpets & bowls). Notice first of all, this seventh bowl is poured out upon the air. The Greek term *aera* refers to the atmosphere. Thus, this judgment has a much wider impact than the preceding ones and will prove to be catastrophic. After the pouring out of this bowl *a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, "It is done."* "This bowl will complete God's wrath (except for final judgment on the rebellion at the end of the Millennium; 20:7-10) and immediately precedes the Second Coming of Christ. It will usher in the worst calamity in the history of the world. The voice from the temple in heaven is undoubtedly that of God Himself. *It is done* is best translated, "It has been and will remain done."⁴⁶² At this point the scene shifts to the effect of this judgment upon the world:

Atmospheric Disturbances: The first result of the pouring out of the seventh bowl is that of atmospheric disturbances. These include *flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder* as is the case in the seventh seal (8:5) and the seventh trumpet (11:19).

A Great Earthquake: As is also the case in the seventh seal (8:5) and the seventh trumpet (11:19) there follows an earthquake. This earthquake is different though. It is referred to as a **great** earthquake. The Greek term *meegas* is used here.

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This mega quake is the second such quake during the tribulation period. The first occurred as a result of the sixth seal judgment and caused the mountains and islands to be moved out of place. This one here in accordance with the seventh bowl will be much worse. It is once again a world-wide quake. In fact it is a quake that is so strong and mighty that it is said that such a quake had not been since man came to be upon the earth. It will be a quake far exceeding any ever recorded and far worse than the one associated with the sixth seal. Look at the effect of such a quake on the earth: **1-**It first of all *split the great city into three parts*. The great city is a reference to the city of Jerusalem (cf. 11:8). The city of Jerusalem has previously suffered a great earthquake in Revelation 11:13, causing 1/10th of the city to fall. Now what remains is split into three parts. **2-**Not only is Jerusalem affected by this great quake, also *the cities of the nations fell*. Jerusalem fared better than most since it was only split into three parts, but the rest of the cities among the nations will be destroyed; completely demolished. They will fall into a heap of rubble. **3-**Thirdly, Babylon the Great will be remembered by God as He gives her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. Babylon the Great seems to be a reference to the rebuilt city of Babylon and the likely capital of the Antichrist's kingdom. God will especially direct His wrath at Babylon the great. Antichrist's capital will not be spared, but will receive the brunt of God's righteous and burning anger. Clearly this seems to imply that the future rebuilt city of Babylon will be utterly destroyed. **4-**Lastly, *every Island fled away, and the mountains were not found*. The sixth seal mega-quake only shifted the islands and mountains out of their place, but this quake here will cause the islands to disappear and the mountains to be flattened. What a powerful force! What powerful shaking! EVERY Island fled away! NO mountains were found! The Earth will be utterly shaken by the great and mighty wrath of God. There will be widespread death and destruction across the globe.

A Great Hail Storm: Not only will there be atmospheric disturbances and the world's worst recorded earthquake, there will also be an unprecedented hail storm. These huge hailstones will weigh over 100 pounds each as they fall from heaven upon the earth. In fact the Greek term *talantiaios* (talent) refers to a weight of 108 to 130 pounds. There will be widespread devastation all over the earth from these huge boulders of ice. The severity of this judgment is so extreme that it is called a plague. The atmosphere is convulsing and raining God's wrath down upon the earth. The people recognize this as a judgment from God and they blaspheme God for the severity of this plague. At this point in the chronology of Revelation, God's judgment during the tribulation period is complete. Chapter's 17 & 18 will be one final interlude providing further needed explanation of the world situation just prior to Christ's Second Coming.