The Book of Revelation

Zanesville, OH | Wednesday/Sunday Bible Study

**Chapter 16**

* **16:1-2– The First Bowl: Malignant Sores on Earth**
  + The seven bowls are very similar to the seven trumpets primarily because both judgment series are modeled off of the plagues in Exodus. Each bowl connects in some way to each trumpet with minor variations occurring in each. The bowls provide more detail and more totality than their trumpet counterparts.
  + The purpose of the bowls is similar to that of the trumpets: God pours out these plagues to execute judgment against the unrepentant, hardened unbelievers who no doubt reflect the nature of Pharaoh and the Egyptians who oppressed the people of God.
  + These plagues must be poured out because of God’s love, justice, righteousness and holiness. He cannot and will not allow evil and opposition to Him to go unpunished. The pouring out of these plagues once again emphasize an active God answering the prayers and pleas of His faithful children (cf. 6:9-11).
  + The contents of the seven bowls are best interpreted as the execution of God’s judgment against the dragon, sea beast, earth beast and their associates. These judgments are reiterated throughout human history against God’s enemies. These judgments find their ultimate fulfillment in the consummation.
  + **Verse 1**– A loud voice from the temple (God’s presence) gives the command for the angels to pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath on the earth. This “pouring out” is not intended to be literal but rather it is a figurative way of describing divine judgment to be executed on God’s enemies.
  + This idea of God’s wrath being poured out echoes 14:10 but also several OT passages that contextually speaks of God’s judgment against the wicked and in particular those who oppress His people and break His covenant (Psa. 69:24; Jer. 10:25; Ezek. 14:19).
  + **Verse 2**– The first bowl produces malignant, loathsome sores (cf. Job 2:7-8, 13) echoing the sixth plague in Egypt (Ex. 9:8-11) and also the curses of the covenant (Deut. 28:27, 35). This plague comes upon those who are idolaters. Those who have the mark of the beast receive this painful mark from God.
* **16:3– The Second Bowl: Blood in the Seas**
  + **Verse 3**– The second angel unleashes the second plague in striking similarity to the second trumpet (8:8-9). The sea became like blood and all the creatures in the sea perish. This is echoing the first plague in Egypt (Ex. 7:14-24).
  + This plague leads to severe economic repercussions in conjunction with severe famine conditions. Not only does every living thing in the sea die, but a lack of food and economic may no doubt lead to human death.
  + Intertwined into this plague may also be the metaphorical idea of the “sea” representing evil as in 13:1. Thus, it may also be describing the evil people being destroyed and the conclusion is that they are turned to blood in death (cf. 14:20).
* **16:4-7– The Third Bowl: Blood in the Inland Waters**
  + **Verse 4**– Similar to the third trumpet, the rivers and waters are struck and they become blood. This again reiterates the first plague in Egypt (Ex. 7:14-24) and like the second bowl, it leads to severe economic repercussions and famine (cf. 18:8, 10-19).
  + While not explicit in the text, like the second bowl such conditions will inevitably lead to human suffering and eventually death.
  + **Verses 5-6**– A doxology is offered to God in the midst of this plague. The angel who speaks here may be the same angel of v. 4 or another angel (cf. 14:18). His words of praise to God is strikingly similar to the song of 15:3-4. God is acknowledged as the Righteous Judge, the Eternal One and the Holy One.
  + God is righteous because He is not leaving these wicked ones who corrupt and pollute His good creation and persecute His faithful servants. In an instance of Lex Talionis He gives them blood to drink because they have poured out the blood of His people (cf. Isa. 49:26).
  + God is just because He is repaying them with what they truly deserve. Although the time for these judgments may not have come when it was desired, God ensures that they will face the penalty worthy of their evil.
  + **Verse 7**– Another voice acknowledges God’s righteousness and justice in the pouring forth of these plagues. This is simply stated as “as the altar” and it may be referring to the voice of the saints in unison celebrating giving thanks because their enemies are being repaid for their iniquities (6:9-11; 8:3-5; 9:13).
  + This is similar to the way God was praised in the OT following the Exodus plagues (Deut. 32:4). Similarly God is being praised for the Exodus like plagues here as they redeem His people and punish the unbelievers.
* **16:8-9– The Fourth Bowl: Scorching fire on Blasphemers**
  + **Verse 8**– As the fourth angel unleashes his bowl, the sun releases an intense heat so as to scorch the earth-dwellers with fire. A literal fire may not be intended here as was the case in 11:5 and 9:17-18. Fire is synonymous with the wrath of God in the bible (Deut. 28:22; Matt. 3:11-12). This also reiterates 14:10.
  + **Verse 9**– These who are scorched with the heat blaspheme the name of God and harden their hearts (cf. 13:5-6). They have no intention of giving Him glory (Rom. 1:21). These idol worshippers receive their just punishment (Psa. 97:3, 7: Isa. 47:14). Unlike these, the people of God are pictured as being protected from the heat in 7:16.
* **16:10-11– The Fifth Bowl: Darkness on Beast’s Kingdom**
  + **Verse 10**– As the fifth angel pours out his bowl, darkness falls upon the kingdom of the beast. His supposed “sovereignty” is the subject of judgment here and soon all will see that he in fact does not have the power to overcome God (cf. 13:1-7). This throne of the beast is synonymous with the throne of Satan in 2:13.
  + This plague is similar to the fourth trumpet which both echo the ninth plague in Egypt (Ex. 10:21-29). Darkness is commonly associated with divine wrath in the OT (Isa. 13:10; Joel 2:2; Amos 5:18) and is it sometimes used as a metaphor to speak of the consequences of sin (Matt. 25:41; Col. 1:13).
  + Darkness indicates the absence of light and God is said to be that which is light (Jn. 1:4-5, 9; 8:12; 1 Jn. 1:5). This darkness isn’t a mere lack of sunlight but a symbolic display of what sin leads to: **separation from God**. That is what gives rise to this “gnawing pain” (cf. Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30).
  + **Verse 11**– Similar to v. 9, they blaspheme God because of their pain and sores (v. 2). They describe their condition based on the previous bowls. The point is that these plagues don’t let up.
  + Like Pharaoh and the Egyptians, they have hardened their hearts to their own dreadful demise. God has given them countless opportunities to do the right thing but they have rejected Him.