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; 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 and 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 it is sometimes used as a metaphor to speak of the consequences of sin (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.
* **16:12-16– The Sixth Bowl: The Gathering at Har-Magedon**
  + **Verse 12**– The sixth bowl is poured out and the Euphrates is dried up so as to make way for “the kings from the east.” This echoes what God did in the Red Sea (Ex. 14:21-22) and the Jordan River (Josh. 3:12-16). But the understanding of this verse goes back to the historical defeat of Babylon at the hands of the Persians.
  + In the OT, Babylon’s judgment is pictured as happening in relation to the drying up of waters and a king or kingdom then comes to destroy it (Isa. 11:15; 44:27-28; Jer. 50:38; 51:36-37). This prophecy was fulfilled when Cyrus sacked Babylon in ca. 539 B.C.
  + The destruction of Babylon paved the way for the redemption of God’s people who were in captivity in that ungodly regime. With all this in mind, John uses the OT significance of Babylon’s destruction to describe what would happen to the Romans.
  + The Euphrates separated the Roman Empire on the east from their “feared enemies.” The real enemy they need to fear is God. The Euphrates is not intended to be understood as the literal river itself but rather a barrier that prevents invasion.
  + God drying up the Euphrates is a way of saying He has broken down this barrier that will lead to the demise of Rome. Therefore, “the kings of the east” is a symbol for a destructive force or army under the power of God that will judge the evil ones paving the way for redemption of God’s people (cf. 19:11-21).
  + **Verses 13-14**– Verses 13-16 is somewhat of an interlude that serves to connect verse 12 with Rev. 19:11-21. Verses 13-16 imply an anticipation of a battle between the forces of good and evil on the part of the evil trio of chapter 13.
  + The devil, sea beast and false prophet (land beast) are said to produce three unclean spirits like frogs which are the spirits of demons that perform signs (cf. 13:12-17) so as to seduce the kings of the world to come out for battle against God and His forces.
  + The use of frogs as unclean spirits is without a doubt intended to recall the second plague in Egypt (Ex. 8:1-15). Frogs were considered disgusting, irritating and unclean animals (Lev. 11:9-12, 41-47) and the Psalms tell us that they “destroyed” in Egypt (Psa. 78:45). Babylon in Rev. is said to be the source of all things unclean (18:2).
  + This entire picture is drawing our attention to the overarching reality of a destruction that will befall these evil forces. Satan and his two allies employ false deception in order to gather others that will only lead to their own demise (2 Tim. 3:13).
  + Satan and his allies gather earthly kings (as much as they can) for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. They prepare and they strategize but it will be to no avail. The reality of the situation is that they are destroying themselves. Anyone who is without God and rejects God will inevitably bring destruction on themselves. “The kings of the world” echo Psa. 2:1-3, 10-12.
  + This war of the great day of God, the Almighty is drawn from passages like Ezek. 38-39; Joel 2:11, 31; 3:2, 9-17 and Zeph. 1:14; 3:8 and Zech. 14. Throughout human history God unleashes His wrath against the evil nations because of what they have done to His people in addition to their rejection of Him.
  + **Verse 15**– This verse encourages the believers to be ready for God’s judgment will soon come forth as a thief (cf. 1:7). The one who stays awake and keeps his clothes will be supremely blessed (cf. Lk. 12:35-40).
  + Not only is this a reference to not being caught by surprise but in the immediate context it is a reference to not giving into Satan and his idolatrous schemes (cf. 3:4-5). This is further seen from passages like Ezek. 16 where nakedness is associated with idolatry.
  + **Verse 16**– This verse is one of the most misconstrued and misunderstood of the chapter and the book as a whole. Context will best determine what the verse is saying. Armageddon or Har-Magedon in Hebrew means “Mount of Megiddo.”
  + Although there is no specific geographical location in the OT called mount of Megiddo, it does speak of the valley of Megiddo, its waters and its heights. Megiddo is often where the Israelites fought against wicked nations (Judg. 5:19; 2 Kings 23:29). It is a place associated with bloodshed.
  + These battles were considered to be decisive battles in Israel’s history. Ahaziah’s death is also included in this idea (2 Kings 9:27). John is using the concept of Megiddo in the OT to make the point here in Revelation that this battle will be a decisive one associated with bloodshed.
  + This verse does not talk about but later chapters will speak of it including 19:11-21 and 20:7-10. Har-Magedon indicates a decisive battle between good and evil in which goo conquers evil and God wins. There is truly no battle since the Lamb effortlessly dominates His enemies (cf. Rev. 17:14).
* **16:17-21– The Seventh Bowl: Lightning, Thunder, Earthquake and Hail**
  + **Verse 17**– As the seven angel pours out his bowl, a loud voice says the words, “It is done.” The idea is that since all seven bowls have been poured out, the will of God in these judgments have been carried out (cf. 15:1).
  + The bowl being poured out on the air may be indicating judgment upon Satan and his forces since he is described as the “prince of the power of the air” and other similar terms (Jn. 12:31; Eph. 2:2; 6:12). These plagues that are executed against the unbelievers are ultimately judgments against Satan himself.
  + **Verse 18**– The introduction of celestial phenomena that incite fear and destruction is also a part of this bowl and strongly mirrors the content of the seventh trumpet (cf. 11:15-19). The imagery is derived from Ex. 19:16-18 in relation to the Theophany at Sinai.
  + The display of cosmic destruction is also used in Rev. 6:12 and in conjunction with 11:19 and these passages, the idea relates to the completion of judgment against the enemies of the saints and of God. These images find their ultimate fulfillment in the consummation.
  + **Verse 19**– The “great city” which is “Babylon the Great” (cf. 11:8; 14:8) was split into three parts and her allies also fell. God makes her drink of the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath (14:8, 10). The splitting into three parts may simply be a way of describing the total destruction.
  + **Verse 20**– The idea of the mountains and the islands fleeing is intended to highlight the dread of God’s judgment against His enemies. The wording here is similar to 6:14 and Ezek. 26:18. The islands fleeing away and the mountains not being found may be the result of the great earthquake.
  + **Verse 21**– The seventh plague in Egypt (Ex. 9:18-35) is strongly alluded to here and the seven plagues come to a close. One-hundred-pound hail stones are said to come down from Heaven upon the earth-dwellers. The point of these hail stones is that no one can escape them or hide from them.
  + This display of hail in divine judgment is not uncommon for God often struck the nations with hail as they were judged (Josh. 10:11; Isa. 30:30; Ezek. 38:21-22). Men blaspheme God in this judgment just as they did in v. 9 and v. 11. The plague is said to be extremely severe.