

## **Seven Bowls Of God's Wrath**

### **Revelation 16:1-21**

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Revelation 16:1 says, "Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, 'Go and pour out the bowls...'—or "vials"—"...of the wrath of God on the earth."

There are two temples at this time of the tribulation. There is the temple on earth, in which the beast, the Antichrist, has put an image of himself and has commanded everyone to worship him and to receive a mark on their right hand or on their forehead. Then there is another temple in heaven. The focus of chapter 16 is the temple in heaven, and I thank God for that.

The Antichrist is on earth thinking that he is in control, that he has created a one-world government and everyone must bow and worship him. He's Satan's man-of-the hour. But God is in the heavens. Read Psalm 2. Verse 4 says about God that "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh." Man tries to raise his fist against God, but God will mock and laugh at man's futility.

So we see the throne that is in heaven, in Revelation 16. Verse 1 says, "Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, 'Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth.'" God sovereignly is controlling from heaven the affairs of nations on earth.

Chapter 16 is perhaps not only the darkest chapter in Revelation, but it is one of the darkest chapters in the entire Bible. Not only do preachers not want to preach Revelation, but very few preachers who preach Revelation will preach chapter 16. They want to skip over that. It's understandable. But the Bible says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable." That means it is God breathed and breathed out. So we want to know the whole counsel of God since it's profitable. We want to know not only about God's love, grace and mercy, but we want to know about God's righteousness, holiness, wrath and judgments.

This chapter will sober you and give you a new perspective on eternity; to not live for this world, which will pass away, but to live for eternity where the Lord sits on the throne in heaven.

In chapter 16, we move from the parenthetical section of chapters 10-15 to the chronological section of chapter 16. Then chapters 17-18 will be the next parenthetical section. The narrative or chronological section picks up again in chapter 19 with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Now chapter 15 has been a prelude to chapter 16. So the challenge of preaching from Revelation is also the challenge of teaching from Revelation. I have one goal: that you learn your Bible, you learn the book of Revelation and you understand God's Word.

You should really take chapters 15 and 16 together, since all of chapter 15 is a prelude to chapter 16. Let me give you a sample. In Revelation 15:1, John says, "Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels..."—here's our introduction to them—"...having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete" or "filled up" or "finished."

Revelation 16:1 says, “Then I heard a loud...”—or “great” in the King James—“...voice from the temple.” The word “great” is repeated 11 times in chapter 16. So in chapter 15 we are introduced to the seven angels who have the seven plagues, and in them is the wrath of God.

The book of Revelation started with the seven seals, in chapter 6; then it went to the seven trumpets, in chapters 8-9; then in chapter 16, it moves to the seven bowls.

The King James translations says “vials,” but it was actually a bowl or what we would more often call a “saucer.” It wasn’t a deep bowl, which when poured out would take time for it to empty. It was a shallow saucer, which when poured out would empty immediately. The priests would use a saucer-like utensil. So this chapter is a picture of God’s wrath being poured out on a Christ-rejecting world.

One of the fundamental things to know about the tribulation period is that its source is from God. God will use the devil and evil men to serve His purposes. Martin Luther, the great Protestant reformer, said, “Even the devil is God’s devil.” I like that. The devil serves God’s purposes. So God uses the devil and evil men, but the wrath comes from God.

But we, as Christians, are not appointed to wrath, “but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,” 1 Thessalonians 5:9. I don’t believe that we, the church, the bride, the body of Christ, will be on earth during the tribulation period. I believe we will be “caught up” or raptured before the seven-year tribulation. And then in chapter 19, we will come back with Christ at the end of the tribulation, during the battle of Armageddon. Then Jesus will set up His kingdom for 1,000 years. At the end of that period, there will be a new heaven and a new earth. We will then have the eternal state. We’ll study this in the next few weeks.

Now in chapter 16, we come to the end of the parenthetical section of chapters 10-15, and chapter 15 is a prelude to chapter 16.

“God writes history and uses no eraser,” someone said, because God makes no mistakes. I like that. God is writing history, and He makes no mistakes.

The study we will look at today is in three sections. The first section is in verses 2-11, the wrath of God and the first five bowls. It starts with verse 1, “Then I heard a loud voice from the temple...”—notice that the temple is in heaven—“...saying to the seven angels....” We don’t know whose voice it is, but it is “a loud voice.” A good guess is that it is the voice of God the Father saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth.”

The phrase “the wrath of God” will be repeated three or four times in our text. When we look at the attributes of God, which are attribute to His very nature and character, we see that God is love, grace, mercy, righteous, compassionate and kind, but God is also holy. And because of God’s holiness and righteousness, He must judge sin. He can’t turn His back to sin.

Then you ask, “Well, how does He forgive us if we’re sinners and He doesn’t punish us?”

The answer is the Cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus paid the price. Jesus died in our place. If you do not appropriate what Jesus did on the Cross for yourself by faith, then you have to drink the cup of God's wrath. There are two cups: the cup of salvation—you put your faith in Christ and are saved—or the cup of God's wrath. You pick one or the other; you choose which one you will drink. So because God is holy and righteous, there is the wrath of God.

Now the seven angels with seven bowls, in verse 1, will pour them out right before the Second Coming of Christ. The pouring out of all these bowls happens in rapid succession. There are no pauses; it's just one after another. It will happen at the end of the tribulation, culminating in the battle of Armageddon and in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

The first bowl is in verse 2. "So the first..."—that's the first angel—"...went and poured out his bowl upon the earth." Each one of these bowls that is poured out has a particular target. The first target is the earth and wicked mankind. "And a foul and loathsome..."—or "grievous"—"...sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image." From the word "grievous" in the Greek we get our word "malignant."

These seven plagues that will be poured out from these seven bowls—there will be seven angels, as there were seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowls; seven is the number of completion—in them is filled the wrath of God. We read about it in chapter 15, verse 1. So this is the culmination of God's wrath, which happens in rapid succession and with great intensity. If you thought the seals were bad or the judgments were bad, you ain't seen nothin' yet! God's wrath is going to be poured out by these seven angels from these seven bowls onto the earth.

Notice who He pours them out upon: "upon the men who had the mark of the beast..."—that's the "Antichrist," chapter 13—"...and those who worshiped his..."—or "the Antichrist's"—"...image." So the recipients of this sore had the mark of the beast, and they worshipped his image. The hearts of these people had become so hardened that we'll see they are unrepentant to the point that they cannot believe, so God's wrath is poured out on them. This grievous, vexing, loathsome, malignant sore—what a horrible thing this is!

It's interesting that the Antichrist, who they worship and whose mark they bear, was unable to heal them, even though he performed miracles during the tribulation. You'd think because they say, "Hey, we worship you! Why don't you help us in our hour of need!" that he would.

It goes to show you that if you're not worshipping the true and living God, whatever god you worship can't help you in your time of need. If you worship money, there's a point at which your money can't save you. If you worship materialism, it can't deliver you in your hour of need. So because they are not worshipping the true and living God, they get this horrible sore.

Many of these plagues we'll read about by these seven angels from the seven bowls correlate with the plagues that came on Egypt before the exodus. The Egyptians had boils break out all over their bodies in the sixth plague, in Exodus 9:9. The same word taken from the Hebrew to the Greek for "boils" would be the word "sores," in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the

Old Testament. So there are many parallels between the judgments in Exodus and the judgments of the seven bowls by the seven angels in our text.

Now we have the second bowl, in verse 3. This one is targeted on the sea. “Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it...”—that’s “the sea”—“...became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died.” It doesn’t say that it became blood; it became “as” blood.

Under the second trumpet judgment, one-third of the sea became blood and one-third of its sea creatures died. Now we see the entire sea turning to blood and all its sea creatures dying. It’s not specified what “sea” this is, but the word translated “sea” could refer to all the oceans of the earth.

I’m an ocean guy. Give me the ocean above mountains anytime. I’ve always loved it. So I can’t imagine every living thing in the ocean dying.

Some try to explain these plagues in natural terms. It’s possible that God uses natural ways. Some say it’s the red tide. But the red tide doesn’t cause everything to die in the ocean and doesn’t destroy the ocean. I hardly think that’s the case.

But if God is the creator of all things, God has all power. Don’t you think He can do what He wants when He wants? There is no problem for God? If God can speak the universe into existence, what’s so hard about God saying everything in the ocean dies? We depend so much on the sea to sustain life. Seventy percent of the earth’s surface is ocean. Without the ocean, the earth will die. So basically we see God devastating planet earth when everything in the ocean dies.

Some say that the “sea,” in verse 3, could be the Mediterranean Sea. That’s possible, but the Scriptures seem to indicate more that it is a universal judgment on the whole world. “Every living creature in the sea died.”

Then in rapid succession we have the third angel, in verses 4-7. This time His judgment is upon the rivers and fresh-water systems of the earth. “Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.” They didn’t become “as blood” but actual blood. This is a divine, supernatural judgment on earth. These plagues are so bad that there is no question in peoples’ minds of their source; they come from God Himself.

In Egypt, the Nile River turned to blood. That was one of the plagues, a judgment upon the Egyptians.

“And I heard the angel of the waters...”—apparently there is an angel that oversees the waters —“...saying: ‘You are righteous, O Lord, the One who is and who was and who is to be...”—that’s the eternal nature of God—“...because You have judged these things. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets.” I don’t believe these are church saints; I believe they are tribulation saints and prophets. “And You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just

due.” So in heaven they say, “God, you’re right on; your judgments are righteous. They’ve killed the saints and the prophets, and now You’ve given them blood to drink.” The Bible says, “Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” Continuing, “And I heard another from the altar saying, ‘Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.’” So God is righteous in His judgments.

It’s interesting that Pharaoh in Egypt was having the male babies thrown into the Nile River to kill them. But God had Pharaoh’s army go into the Red Sea, and they drowned there. “Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”

In the book of Esther, Haman built a gallows to hang Mordecai on, but Haman and his own sons ended up dying on the very gallows he built for Mordecai. So we see that God judges righteously with equity and truth. “True and righteous are Thy judgments.”

Many times people get mad at God and say, “Well, God, that’s not right! God, who do You think You are?!” Uh—God. Before anything else existed, there was God. God created all things. God sustains all things. And God can take it out anytime He wants in any way He wants, and no one has the right to lift their hand to rebel against God.

Then we have the fourth bowl, in verses 8-9. This time the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun; it’s a solar judgment. “Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire.” In an earlier judgment, “the sun became darkened as black sackcloth of hair.” And now the sun has intensified in its heat. “And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.”

Think about this. Men know this is a judgment of God, but rather than repenting and turning to God, crying out for mercy and forgiveness from God, they shake their puny fists at God and blaspheme Him.

So God has the control and power over these plagues. God is sovereign. No one can thwart His purposes. He gives these plagues to sinful men, but they do not repent, and they do not give Him glory. How sad is that.

Again, a lot of people like to hold a natural explanation for this bowl being poured out on the sun. We have “global warming,” which is quite popular today. They find it here in the Scriptures. But this is a supernatural intervention of God during the tribulation. It’s not anything like the earth so called “warming up” today. This is God punishing mankind on the earth.

Malaki 4:1 says, “‘For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,’ says the Lord of hosts.” I believe that is a prophecy of this event in the day of the Lord, when God allows the sun to actually scorch men with intense heat, and people curse God at this time.

Now we move to the fifth bowl, in verses 10-11. This time it’s poured out on the seat, the throne

or the kingdom of the Antichrist. "Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast..."—which is "the Antichrist"—"...and his kingdom became full of darkness." The ninth plague in Egypt, in Exodus 10, was darkness, but there was light in the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel were. This was oppressive darkness. "And they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores." This happened in verse 2 during the first bowl plague. And by the time you get to this fifth bowl, they are still having these malignant sores. "And [they] did not repent of their deeds."

This is the second time in this passage that they did not repent. The Greek word is "metanoia." It means they did not change their minds. I believe it's because their minds become reprobate, Romans 1. The word "reprobate" means "doesn't work"; it's broken. They don't think correctly. So they curse God and don't repent. And they gnaw their tongues in pain in this darkness. They also blaspheme God.

If you don't repent because of God's goodness and grace, you will not repent in times of wrath. If the goodness of God doesn't lead you to repentance, what will? If you don't realize that God is loving, merciful, gracious, kind, patient and forgiving and come to Him now, when will you come to Him?

The Bible indicates that you can reach a point of no return, where your heart spiritually atrophies. You were made for God. You were made to know God. You were made to be in fellowship with God. If you reject the Light, refuse to repent and harden your heart, then your heart will atrophy. You'll reach the point where the Bible says, "Therefore they could not believe." These people who this judgment is coming upon are the people who have crossed that line. They've been deceived. They cannot be saved. There comes a time when God's patience will run out. The wrath of God in the bowls is the last series of plagues poured out on mankind.

So don't blaspheme the Holy Spirit, which is the unpardonable sin. You never know when God will stop knocking on the door of your heart. "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your heart." You don't know if you have tomorrow, next week or next month to repent. Today if you know you're not right with God, today if you know you're far from God, today if you're living in rebellion toward God, repent while there's hope and opportunity. Today is the day of grace, but there is coming an age when God will pour out His wrath and His patience will come to an end.

Now remember when Jesus died on the Cross? This darkness is interesting. He was on the Cross from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m., six hours. But from high noon until 3:00 p.m., there was darkness. When the darkness came, Jesus cried, "Eli, eli, lama sabachthani," or "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Think about that. Then God covered the earth with a veil of darkness.

I happen to believe that this darkness was universal darkness. As God the Father turned His back on God the Son, Jesus, who knew no sin, became sin for us as He drank the cup of God's

wrath.

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." Then He drank the cup of God's wrath. When Jesus died on the Cross, not only did our sins get placed upon the sinless Son of God, but God's wrath was poured out upon Jesus. We can't even fathom that. Jesus was forsaken by His Father so that we would never have to be forsaken by God.

But these people in our text did not trust and believe in Christ. They rebelled against Him and worshipped the image of the Antichrist and took his mark. So there is darkness over the whole earth.

Now the sixth bowl is in the second section, the war of Armageddon, in verses 12-16. Verses 1-11 is the wrath of God, and verses 12-16 is the war of Armageddon in this sixth bowl. We're almost complete in this time of God's wrath. "Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits..."—these are demons—"...like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast..."—or "the Antichrist"—"...and out of the mouth of the false prophet."

This false prophet was the beast that came out of the land, in chapter 13. "For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. 'Behold, I am coming as a thief.'" This is the Lord speaking. "'Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.' And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon." Armageddon means "hill of Megiddo." It's on the plains of Esdraelon.

Notice that this sixth bowl is expanded; there's more information about it than the others. First, it is poured out "on the great river Euphrates." It's interesting that the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers come together between Iraq and Iran, and they flow into the Persian Gulf. They originate in Turkey at the base of Mount Ararat, where Noah's ark rested. The Euphrates River flows about 1,800 miles in length. It's about 1,200 yards in width and 30 feet deep. It's interesting that God dries it up, so the kings of the east are able to cross it to get into the Middle East.

Israel is a natural land bridge between the continents of Europe, Asia and Africa. This area is the birthplace of humanity, where the Garden of Eden was located; mankind started here.

The battle of Armageddon will be in the Valley of Jezreel. The mountain there is called Megiddo. From it we get our word Armageddon or "hill of Megiddo." It's a valley in the middle of Israel where all the armies of the world will gather together at the end of the tribulation just before and during the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This battle will be raging, and mankind will have the ability to kill himself off planet earth when Jesus Christ comes in His Second Coming. So we still have World War III ahead of us, but the church will have already been "caught up" to be with Christ and will come back with Him in His Second Coming.

The Valley of Jezreel or the plains of Esdraelon is in the central valley of Israel. It is inland a little ways from Haifa and from the Dead Sea. It runs for miles and miles and is surrounded by mountains. Napoleon overlooked this valley and said, "What a great place to bring all the armies of the world together in a battle." It was here that Barak fought his battle. It was here that Gideon fought his battle. It's where King Saul was killed on Mount Gilboa. So there were many battles here in the past, and there will be a battle here in the future.

So in verse 13, demons come out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. Bible students have called this "the unholy trinity." Just as there is God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit—one God in three Persons—so Satan has his imitation trinity. The dragon is Satan, the beast is the Antichrist and there is the false prophet, which is the counterpart to the Holy Spirit. The Bible doesn't call it "the unholy trinity," but it is an interesting parallel to see in the Scriptures.

In Joel 3:14, he said, "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!" In Revelation 19, when the Lord comes back, He destroys the Antichrist and the false prophet, puts an end to war and He sets up His kingdom on earth for 1,000 years. So this is the Lord coming back to end man's war on earth.

The frogs or unclean spirits, in verse 13, are interesting. I am creeped out by frogs. I don't do frogs; I don't touch them, pet them or play with them. If I see them in the driveway, I run them over. (Pray for me.) I don't mind listening to them in the creek. We have a wash behind our house, and in the winter when it fills with water, we can hear the frogs. But I don't like them in my house.

And what happened in Egypt? Frogs everywhere. Pharaoh freaked out and told Moses, "Get rid of the frogs!"

Moses asked Pharaoh, "When would you like me to get rid of the frogs?"

Pharaoh said, "Tomorrow."

What? He wanted to spend one more night with the frogs?! How insane is that! No; right this moment! Get those frogs out of my bed!

It's interesting that men are so unwilling to repent. They love their sin, and they want what they want when they want it.

So God brings these demons or "unclean spirits," but they look like frogs. They are ugly. (Sorry, you frog lovers.)

What are demons? They are fallen angels. There is only God and angels. And angels consist of good ones and bad ones. The bad ones are Satan and demons, which are fallen angels. The good angels are those that are pouring out the wrath of God on the Christ-rejecting world.

You might think of one verse, verse 15, as being parenthetical. It's a pause where even in wrath, God remembers mercy. Some Bible translations have it in red letters, and I think rightfully so. The Lord says, "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame." Seven times we have these blessings or beatitudes in Revelation.

The picture here is of a thief. Nowhere in the Bible does it teach that Jesus comes as a thief for the church. 1 Thessalonians 5:4-5 says, "...so that this Day should overtake you as a thief... You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness." So we are awake, dressed and ready.

When you go to bed you take off your clothes, put on your pjs and jump into bed. You wake up in the morning, get up, you get dressed and are ready. So don't be unready; be ready, be clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Be ready when He comes again.

So this is just a word to those on the earth during the tribulation who still need to repent that He is "coming as a thief" and be ready and watching.

Verse 16, "And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon."

In the last section, in verses 17-21, we have the wasting of the earth. Environmentalists are all worried about what we're doing to planet earth. Wait until you see what God does! You think we're messin' things up? You ain't seen nothin' yet! There'll be the world's greatest earthquake to ever happen in history.

"Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air." Now remember that Satan is called "the prince of the power of the air." So this is no doubt directed toward Satan's kingdom. "And a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, 'It is done!'"

Doesn't that have a familiar ring to it? It could be translated, "It is finished," "It is complete" or "It is done." Either you rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross or you drink the cup of God's wrath upon the earth.

Verse 18, "And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. Now the great city..." It doesn't tell us what great city, but it might be Babylon or probably Jerusalem. When Christ comes back He comes to Mount Olivet, and it's split down the middle with all these topographical changes in the earth. It "...was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell." All the big cities of the nations fell: New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Hong Kong.

For me, Hong Kong is one of the most amazing sites I've ever seen. Compacted together in that small space are many, giant buildings. But they'll all come down.

Verse 19, "And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of

the fierceness of His wrath.” We’ll get that in chapters 17 and 18. “Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.” So if you were planning to live on Maui during the millennium, forget it; it’s gone. If you planned to live on Hawaii, it doesn’t exist anymore. All the islands and mountains will disappear.

But He’s not done yet. “And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent.” A talent is 100 pounds. Can you imagine hailstones coming out of heaven from God weighing 100 pounds each?! “Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.”

So God pours out His wrath on this Christ-rejecting world. And all the world is shaken until “the things which cannot be shaken may remain.”

What does it tell us? Live for eternity. If you’re living for this world, “the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

What are you living for? Hoping for? What is your trust in? Is it in government? Science? They’ve sure been confused lately. Philosophy? Psychology? They’ve really helped us out. My hope is in Jesus Christ.

I like that great Gospel song,

“My hope is built on nothing less

Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.

I dare not trust the sweetest frame,

But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.

On Christ the solid Rock I stand.

All other ground is sinking sand.”

Are you ready? Are you dressed? Are you awake? The Lord is coming soon. Don’t put your stock in man. Put your stock in God.