

Love Community Baptist Church

Wednesday Night Virtual Bible Study

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Revelation – Chapter 15 and 16 part1

PRELUDE TO THE BOWL JUDGMENTS

Those victorious over the beast.

(Revelation 15:1) Seven angels with seven plagues.

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete.

Revelation 14 seemed to describe the consummation of all things, ending with the fury of the Battle of Armageddon. But now John will go back and describe God's judgment in more detail. This idea of stating and re-stating in more detail is common with prophecy, and with Hebrew literature in general (see Genesis 1:1-2:7 and Genesis 2:8-25).

Seven angels having the seven last plagues: This idea is also in Leviticus 26:21: *Then, if you walk contrary to Me, and are not willing to obey Me, I will bring on you seven times more plagues, according to your sins.* These seven last plagues are God's judgment on a disobedient and contrary world.

The ancient Greek word for wrath is thymos. As was the case in Revelation 14:10, there are two words for wrath or anger in Biblical Greek: thymos (a volatile, passionate anger) and orge (anger from a settled disposition). This is a place where God's anger flashes hot.

- Orge is the more common word for God's anger in the New Testament. Thymos is used only 11 times, and 10 of the 11 are in Revelation. It is the book that reveals the judgment of God against a Jesus-rejecting world.

The word complete (the ancient Greek word etelesthe) means, "to reach an end or an aim." Here, the hot wrath of God will fulfill an eternal purpose. God isn't just blowing off steam.

(Revelation 15:2) A multitude on the sea of glass.

And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.

The sea of glass is mingled with fire. This may be a reminder of the "fires" of judgment.

- "The sea is designed to reflect the glory of God. In chapter 4 its description 'like unto crystal' speaks of the holiness of God. Here the sea mingled with fire speaks of divine judgment proceeding from God's holiness." (Walvoord)
- Because many of the images in this chapter are connected with the Book of Exodus, some simply see an indication of the color red, with it an allusion to the Red Sea and the deliverance from bondage. Also in this chapter we see plagues, Moses, the tabernacle, and the cloud of God's

glory. This chapter shows the ultimate Exodus, the freedom of God's people from a sinful and persecuting world.

Those who have victory over the beast: These are those who were victorious over the beast through their faithfulness unto death. They are the tribulation martyrs, described in Revelation 7:9-17.

- They are not those who survive the tribulation. As much as we can discern any sort of chronology from Revelation (which is difficult), we are still very much in the tribulation — the bowl judgments still wait.
- Therefore, even though the Antichrist kills them, they have victory over the beast — they are not losers. The early church consistently described the day of martyrdom as “a day of victory.”

Standing on the sea of glass: The ancient Greek word for on (epi) can mean on, over or beside. Many believe that in the architecture of heaven, the sea of glass is a physical representation of the Word of God, connecting to the idea of the tabernacle's laver and the washing of water by the word (Ephesians 5:26). Perhaps we could say that these saints are standing on the Word.

The only people seen with harps before were the twenty-four elders (Revelation 5:8). These tribulation martyrs are given the blessing of worshipping God with music in heaven.

(Revelation 15:3-4) Their song of praise.

*They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying:
“Great and marvelous are Your works,
Lord God Almighty!
Just and true are Your ways,
O King of the saints!
Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?
For You alone are holy.
For all nations shall come and worship before You,
For Your judgments have been manifested.”*

Only one song is sung, but this song goes by two titles (the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb). The two titles refer to a single song. Here is a perfect union between law and love, between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

This song, deeply rooted in the Old Testament, gives praise to:
God's works (Great and marvelous are Your works).
God's ways (Just and true are Your ways).
God's worthiness (Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy).
God's worship (all nations shall come and worship before You).

Your... Your... You... Your... You... You... Your: These martyrs are only focused on God. They did not even focus on their own costly and glorious victory. They have the heart of true worship, understanding that it's all about God, not about us.

**Seven angels are given seven bowls of judgment.
(Revelation 15:5-6) Seven angels, distinctively clothed.**

After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands.

Exodus 25:8-9 and Hebrews 8:9 remind us that the tabernacle God told Moses to build was based on a heavenly pattern. The temple of the tabernacle here refers to the heavenly reality of the tabernacle, not the earthly copy.

These angels bring God's judgment. It is significant that they came directly from heavenly temple, from the presence and throne of God. They do not act on their own authority, but God's.

Pure bright linen... their chests girded with golden bands: Their clothing is a reminder that God's judgment is always completely pure and righteous. They are not like the modern anti-hero or vigilante, who sink down to the level of the criminals they fight.

(Revelation 15:7-8) The bowls are given; the cloud of God's glory fills the temple.

Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever. The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

Seven golden bowls: These bowls are broad, flat bowls or saucers used ritually for drinking or for pouring libations in sacrifice. The contents of such a shallow bowl were quickly, easily, and completely poured out.

- The King James Version says that the angels had seven golden vials full of the wrath of God. The word vials is really a poor translation. They are really "shallow, pan-like, golden bowls, or censers, such as were used in the temple to hold the fire when incense was burned." (Seiss)

When the cloud of glory fills the temple in heaven, no one can enter. It was the same when Moses could not enter the Tabernacle when the smoke of the cloud of God's glory, sometimes called the Shekinah filled the tent (Exodus 40:34-35).

Both the bowls and the cloud came from the glory of God and from His power. This is a reminder of God's special presence and glory, even in the midst of devastating judgment.

No one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed: This declares that judgment was now irreversible. Nothing could hinder it any longer, because access to this temple in heaven would not long be denied.

CHAPTER 16

THE BOWL JUDGMENTS

Bowls directed against natural phenomenon.

(Revelation 16:1) A voice from the temple.

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."

These bowls of judgment are the third woe described in Revelation 11:14. Because they are described as the wrath of God, they are chastisements (with the purpose of bringing repentance) as much as punishments (with the purpose of dispensing justice).

- As such, we usually think of these as occurring at the end of the seven-year period, immediately before Jesus' return.

- Images from Israel's Exodus are prominent in the bowl judgments. In the days of Moses, God sent plagues upon Egypt that included plagues of boils (Exodus 9:8-12), waters turning to blood (Exodus 7:14-25), and darkness (Exodus 10:21-29).
- Are the plagues described in this chapter symbolic? Perhaps we can't envision all that these words mean. However, God's judgment of this world will not be a symbolic judgment. We can remember that the reality behind a symbol is always more real — and in this case therefore more terrifying — than the symbol itself.

(Revelation 16:2) The first bowl: foul and loathsome sores.

So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.

Those who worshipped the beast and received his mark are now marked by God with loathsome sores.

(Revelation 16:3) The second bowl: the sea turned to blood.

Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died.

Revelation 8:8-9 described a partial contamination of the sea. Here the contamination is made complete (every living creature in the sea died).

Blood as of a dead man: The sea doesn't necessarily become blood, but as of a corpse's blood. It will match the appearance and sickening character of the blood in a dead body.

(Revelation 16:4) The third bowl: fresh waters polluted.

Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.

This complete contamination is in contrast to the partial (one-third) pollution of fresh waters shown in Revelation 8:10-11.

They became blood: When these judgments come, the time must be very short until the return of Jesus. With ecological disaster such as this, the human race cannot survive long.

(Revelation 16:5-7) The righteousness of God's judgments.

And I heard the angel of the waters saying:

*“You are righteous, O Lord,
The One who is and who was and who is to be,
Because You have judged these things.
For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
And You have given them blood to drink.
For it is their just due.”*

And I heard another from the altar saying, “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.”

It is completely fitting that those who delighted in shedding the blood of the saints should now be forced to drink blood. They refused the Living Water, and now will be given death to drink.

You are righteous, O Lord: Even in the midst of judgment, it is right that the angel says this. Not only is God's justice fair, it is also pure and appropriate. There is no "vigilante justice" with God.

(Revelation 16:8-9) The fourth bowl: the sun scorches men.

Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. 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.

The sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire: What is normally taken for granted as a blessing — the warmth of the shining sun — is now a curse.

The failure of men to respond with repentance shows that knowledge or experience of judgment will not change man's sinful condition. Those who are not won by grace will never be won.

Bowls directed against the beast and his government.

(Revelation 16:10-11) Fifth bowl: a plague of darkness.

Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

His kingdom became full of darkness: Some see this as a symbolic darkness. Caird called the last three plagues a "triad of political disaster" — internal anarchy, invasion, and irreparable collapse. (cited in Mounce)

- But it isn't necessary to see this darkness as a symbolic political darkness. The ninth plague on Egypt was a literal darkness, with spiritual overtones. It could be felt, as described in Exodus 10:21-22.

They gnawed their tongues because of the pain: The darkness of the fifth bowl is a preview of hell itself, which is described by Jesus as the outer darkness (Matthew 25:30). Those under the judgment of this fifth bowl stand, as it were, on the shores of the lake of fire.

And did not repent of their deeds: In man's sinful condition, he increases his sin when under God's judgment, the very time he should forsake his sin.