**VICTORIOUS LIFE CHURCH BIBLE STUDY**

**SERIES: THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

[**REVELATION 16**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+16&t=NKJV) **– THE BOWL JUDGMENTS**

**Revelation 16**

**And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth. 2 And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image. 3 And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea. 4 And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. 6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy. 7 And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments. 8 And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. 9 And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory. 10 And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, 11 And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds. 12 And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. 13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14 For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. 15 Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. 16 And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon. 17 And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done. 18 And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. 19 And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. 20 And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. 21 And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great. Revelation 16 resumes the account of God's judgments on the wicked. It describes the bowl judgments, the third seven-part series of God's wrath described in the book of Revelation. Prior to this were seven seal judgments, the last of which were the trumpets. The trumpet judgments totaled seven, the last of which were these bowls of the wrath of God.**

Revelation chapter 16 describe the final seven Vials of the wrath of God, representing the climax of God's punishment of sinners during the Tribulation period. While repentance is hinted as a possibility, none repentance is invited or shown. The judgments are somewhat parallel both to the 10 plaques on Egypt and to the trumpets of chapters 8 and 9. The vials (also called bowls), are more total and universal in their effects than were the trumpets, and generally affect people more directly.

**Bowls directed against natural phenomenon.**

**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.”**

Since no one could enter the temple as we saw in [Revelation 15:8](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+15.8&t=NKJV), this **loud voice from the temple** must be God Himself. It was this voice that would personally initiates the horrific judgment that would pour out from the bowls. These bowls of judgment are the third woe described in [Revelation 11:14](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+11.14&t=NKJV). Because they are described as **the wrath of God**, they are chastisements that are done with the purpose of bringing repentance, as much as they are punishments which are done 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. 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.

**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.**

The first bowl judgment brings harmful and painful sores to those who carry the mark of the beast. Those who worshipped the beast and received his mark are now marked by God with loathsome sores.

**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.**

Following the third bowl judgment, an angel declares that God is just to avenge the wicked for their murderous acts against the saints and prophets. The angel's declaration is met with full agreement from a voice from the altar (Revelation 16:5–7). At this point, earth has been fatally ruined and the tribulation is all but over. Chapters 17 and 18 will go into greater detail, some of it poetic and descriptive, to further explain the fall of the wicked. Chapter 19 will resume the moment-by-moment description of the end times, including the second coming of Jesus Christ. [Revelation 8:8-9](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+8.8-9&t=NKJV) described a partial contamination of the sea. Here the contamination is made complete (**every living creature in the sea died**). 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.

**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.**

The third bowl judgment turns rivers and springs into blood. Unlike prior incidents where some portion of the sea or rivers was affected, this event appears to ruin all waters throughout the entire earth (Revelation 16:1–4). This complete contamination is in contrast to the partial (one-third) pollution of fresh waters shown in [Revelation 8:10-11](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+8.10-11&t=NKJV). 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.

**“They thirsted after blood and massacred the saints of God; and now they have got blood to drink!” (Clarke)**

**(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. 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. This voice is either an angel speaking from the **altar**, or the **altar** personified, representing the corporate testimony of the martyrs ([Revelation 6:9](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+6.9&t=NKJV)) and the prayers of the saints ([Revelation 8:3-5](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+8.3-5&t=NKJV)). This speaking altar may be God’s altar – the cross, where His greatest sacrifice was made, and which here testifies of His righteous judgment, both in the past and soon to come. This is the altar where God in His love offered a way of escape from these judgments.

**(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 fourth judgment scorches the wicked with fire, but instead of repenting, unbelievers curse God. This might refer to a reduction in earth's natural protection from the sun, "allowing" it to burn the people of earth. 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.**

**(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.**

The fifth bowl judgment plunges the kingdom of the beast into darkness. The wicked respond by gnawing their tongues in anguish and by cursing God. Some see this as a symbolic **darkness**. Caird called the last three plagues a “triad of political disaster” – internal anarchy, invasion, and irreparable collapse. 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](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+10.21-22&t=NKJV). The darkness of the fifth bowl is a preview of hell itself, which is described by Jesus as the outer darkness ([Matthew 25:30](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Matthew+25.30&t=NKJV)). Those under the judgment of this fifth bowl stand, as it were, on the shores of the lake of fire. In man’s sinful condition, he increases his sin when under God’s judgment, the very time he should forsake his sin.

**(12-16) The Sixth Bowl: Armies are gathered for a great battle.**

**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 like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 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. 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.**

The sixth judgment dries up the Euphrates to prepare the way for the kings of the east. Next, demons assemble the kings of the whole earth to battle against God at a location referred to as *Armageddon*, meaning thehill—or mountain—of Megiddo (Revelation 16:8–16). The Romans considered the Euphrates River to be a secure barrier against invasion from the empires of the east. In that day it was 1,800 miles (2,900 kilometers) long and anywhere from 300-1200 yards (275-1,100 meters) wide.

If the Euphrates were dried up and made a road, massive armies from the east (nations such as China, India, and Japan) could move westward with ease. Some speculate on the reason these armies of the east come westward. Some think it is to wipe out Israel, or to rebel against a European-based world leader (the Antichrist). Ultimately, they come to do battle against God and His Messiah ([Psalm 2](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Psalm+2&t=NKJV)). I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon: The spirits are like frogs in form. The ancient Jewish people regarded frogs as unclean and repulsive, but the Egyptians revered a frog-goddess. They are spirits of demons, performing signs: Again, signs and wonders are used by demons as tools of deception. The false prophet here is the second beast of [Revelation 13](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+13&t=NKJV). This battle is not nation against nation, but the nations against God ([Psalm 2:2](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Psalm+2.2&t=NKJV)). This is one of three important battles mentioned in prophecy.

1. The battle of Gog, Magog and her allies come against Israel ([Ezekiel 38](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ezekiel+38&t=NKJV) and 39).

2. The battle of **Armageddon**, when the Antichrist leads the world system against a returning Jesus ([Revelation 17:12-16](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+17.12-16&t=NKJV), [17:14](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+17.14&t=NKJV), [19:19](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+19.19&t=NKJV)).

3. The final battle, when Satan and his allies, after the millennium, make war against God ([Revelation 20:7-10](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+20.7-10&t=NKJV)).

The winner of this battle is apparent. It is the great day of God, not the great day of man, not the great day of the Antichrist, not the great day of the dragon.

In the midst of the description of the coming battle, there is a warning to be prepared in light of Jesus’ assured victory.

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:

**(17-21) The seventh bowl: the final judgments.**

**Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” 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 was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.**

The seventh bowl judgment brings about an earthquake that splits Jerusalem into three parts. Also as a result of this earthquake, cities worldwide fall, Babylon feels God's wrath, islands flee, mountains crumble, and hailstones weighing about 100 pounds bombard people. Still, the wicked refuse to repent. Instead, they curse God (Revelation 16:17–21). It is Done!! This announcement, coming from the throne itself tells us that there will be no more delay. In mercy, God has stretched out this scene as much has He possibly could. The seals were followed by trumpets; the trumpets were followed by bowls; but there will be no more judgments upon the earth after this – it is done. The fact that the bowl is poured into the air may show judgment against the prince of the power of the air ([Ephesians 2:2](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ephesians+2.2&t=NKJV)) and his allies.

In these final judgments, God shakes the earth with a tremendous earthquake. The same is promised in [Hebrews 12:26](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Hebrews+12.26&t=NKJV)

**Now He has promised, saying, “Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.” Yet, what cannot be shaken will remain.**

**Great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath**: The fall of Babylon is more explicitly described in [**Revelation 17**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+17&t=NKJV) and [**18**](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Revelation+17.18&t=NKJV). Here, it is enough to say that God gives her **the cup of the wine of the fierceness** (the ancient Greek word thymos, describing a passionate outburst of anger) **of His wrath** (the ancient Greek word orge, describing a standing state of anger).

**“The combination of thymos and orge connotes the strongest kind of outpouring of divine judgment.” (Walvoord)**

**Giant hailstones fall, weighing up to 100 pounds (45 kilograms). Men responded in utter, unrepentant depravity (men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail).**

Hail is frequently a tool of judgment against God’s enemies, as seen against Egypt ([Exodus 9:24](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Exodus+9.24&t=NKJV)), the Canaanites ([Joshua 10:11](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Joshua+10.11&t=NKJV)), apostate Israel ([Isaiah 28:2](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Isaiah+28.2&t=NKJV)), and Gog and Magog ([Ezekiel 38:22](https://www.blueletterbible.org/search/preSearch.cfm?Criteria=Ezekiel+38.22&t=NKJV)). In each of these instances, hail rained down from heaven as a tool of judgment, not as a corrective chastisement of God’s own children. Despite all their suffering, many still will not repent. The answer to all of this is to cry out to God for forgiveness. God is good and kind. This beast they are worshipping is the created, not the Creator. God is a jealous God. He will not allow us to worship any thing or anyone other than Him. The only good thing that can be said about all of this is that the Christians are in heaven when this takes place.