

CHAPTER 16

INTRODUCTION:

At the close of chapter 15, seven angels were poised with their seven bowls or “plagues” representing God’s wrath and signifying the “beginning of the end.” This will be God’s final warning to the unrighteous. Before we read of the pouring out of these bowls, perhaps a few comments are in order.

Do not conclude that the pouring out of these plagues is merely a repeat or replica of the seven trumpets back in chapter 8. While there are similarities, which we will discuss as we go along, a closer look will reveal that the events of this chapter appear to be physically taking place after the trumpets, later in the time frame of our journey – right on the cusp of a quickly approaching judgment. Also, they are set forth more forcefully because this is the last straw, or rather, the last chance to repent before it’s everlastingly too late. We were told in chapter 15:1 that the wrath of God is finished in these plagues – the *“seven angels having the seven last plagues”* – and that they contain the full wrath of God – *“for in them is filled up the wrath of God.”* God has been more than lenient in delaying this final judgment because His true desire is for ALL to repent and turn to His Son. Just as Jesus’ death and resurrection provide the ultimate reward for the faithful, there is an equally ultimate consequence for those who choose not to follow Him. These are “eleventh-hour” bowls, if you will, a final opportunity to avoid a never-ending torment so terrible it can’t fully be described.

The text follows; so as we have done fifteen times before, let’s read it, allow the scene to form in our minds, and then discuss.

**“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.’ 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. 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. And the third angel poured out his vial upon the**

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**rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood. 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. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.’**

**And I heard another out of the altar say, ‘Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.’ And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. 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. 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, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.**

**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. 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. 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.**

**Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon. 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.’ 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. 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. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. 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.”**

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John says he heard *“a great voice out of the temple”* telling the seven angels to pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth. Since we were told at the end of chapter 15 that *“no man was able to enter into the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled,”* and because the *“temple”* spoken of here represents the Shrine of God (Rev. 15:8), the voice heard can only be the voice of God. Some believe Jesus might be the one speaking because we know that He took His place at the “right hand of God” when He ascended (Mark 16:19, Luke 22:69). But, because Jesus Himself tells us in Matthew 24:35 that God is the only One who knows that day and hour, I would suggest that if Jesus is the one speaking, it is because He received the order to do so from the Father. I prefer, though, to believe the *“great voice”* coming from within the temple is the voice of God Himself.

Some bible versions refer to the containers held by the seven angels as “bowls” and other versions call them “vials.” The actual Greek word used in the manuscripts is *“phiale”* and Thayer defines it as a *“broad, shallow bowl, or a deep saucer,”* so “bowl” is the word I choose to use.

### THE FIRST BOWL:

It is said *“a noisome and grievous sore fell upon the men which had the mark of the beast and also on them that worshipped his image.”* Since “noisome and grievous sore” isn’t a commonly used description, I looked it up in Thayer’s Greek/English dictionary. The word translated “noisome” is *“kakos”* and is defined as a *“troublesome, injurious, destructive”* sore. “Grievous” is *“Poneros”* meaning *“full of labor, annoyances and hardships; pressed and harassed; bringing toils, annoyances, perils causing pain and trouble.”* Other translations use the words “horrible, malignant” or “foul and loathsome.” I immediately thought of Lazarus, the poor beggar outside the gate where the rich man lived. Luke’s record says Lazarus was “full of sores” and the dogs came and licked them. Even though Lazarus’ sores were certainly painful, it’s no stretch to believe the sores resulting from the pouring out of God’s wrath were much worse.

Let’s keep in mind that these sores only fell upon those who had the mark of the beast or worshipped the image of the beast. Imagine if every unrighteous individual on earth were to

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suddenly break out with these grievous wounds, while not a single righteous person has even one small sore... Would that not give a person reason to think, “Why me?”

I have already mentioned that similarities exist between the seven trumpets and the seven bowls. Let’s compare the first of each. The sounding of the first trumpet was accompanied by the casting of hail, fire, and blood upon the earth so that one-third of the trees and all the green grass were burned up. In other words, the earth itself took the brunt of God’s wrath, suffering the consequences of the first trumpet. However, the target of the first bowl was not the earth, but the unrighteous people themselves.

### THE SECOND BOWL:

The second angel poured out his bowl upon the sea and it became as blood, causing every living creature in it to die. How is this different from the second trumpet? When the trumpet sounded, only one-third of the sea became as blood. I take that to mean only one-third of all the sea water. Also, it appears that only one-third of the ships on the sea were destroyed, and one-third of the sea creatures perished. When this second bowl was poured out, though, the devastation was total: all of the seas became as blood and every living creature perished. Do you notice how the severities of the warnings seem to escalate, from the trumpets to the bowls, the closer we get to the end?

### THE THIRD BOWL:

John says he heard this angel say as he poured out his bowl, ***“Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus.”*** This wrath fell upon the rivers, lakes, streams, and springs. In other words, all fresh water on the face of the earth became as blood. While the word “all” is not in the text, I believe we can assume it to be so because no particular amount is mentioned here, but was when the second trumpet sounded. If that assumption is correct, then at this point all water, sea and fresh, has been contaminated.

As these things were happening, John heard in verse 7, ***“...another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.”*** Don’t forget, this altar is the altar of incense where the martyred saints in chapter 4 were asking ***“How long, Lord?”*** And

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just before the seven trumpets began to sound, it was from this same altar that the angel filled the censer with fire and cast it to the earth (8:5). This is a righteous vengeance.

### THE FOURTH BOWL:

*“And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire”* and, the verse goes on to tell us that they were unrepentant and continued to blaspheme the name of God. Some have suggested that the unrighteous’ hearts were hardened similar to the Pharaoh’s when the plagues were brought on Egypt, and that may be true. Do not, however, make the assumption that God hardened their hearts, thus predestining them to destruction. The very purpose of these last plagues is to convince all the wicked to turn away from the two beasts and to repent.

Do you remember the angel of chapter 14 flying in the midst of heaven (the sky) and preaching to those that dwelled on the earth? His message was *“Fear God and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.”* These first four bowls of wrath complete the message delivered by that angel. The symbolism of the number four is “physical world (creation)” and the four underlined items above represent all of that. We must keep in mind that the pouring out of these bowls is not the destruction of the world, but the last warning before the destruction happens – which will come quickly.

The question has been asked, “Are the righteous suffering the consequences of the bowls being poured out, too?” The correct answer is “Yes, and No.” Just like with the ten plagues God brought on Egypt before the Pharaoh consented to let the people go, most of them affected everyone in Egypt – even the land of Goshen, where the Israelites lived. I believe the only exceptions were the plague of flies, and hail. Those were for the Egyptians only, serving to “set apart” the Israelites in the eyes of the Egyptians to show that they were God’s people. Similar to that was the pouring out of the first bowl which only affected the unrighteous.

There are other similarities between the plagues of Egypt and those in Revelation. The sixth plague in Egypt caused boils, distinctly painful and scarring to those who were affected. In

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Egypt, the first plague occurred when Moses struck the Nile River with his staff and its waters turned to blood. At the same time Aaron caused the water in the canals, ponds and pools of Egypt to turn to blood. The waters reeked with the stench of dead fish. This, of course, parallels the pouring of the second and third bowls that killed all marine life in both sea and fresh water.

The warnings have been cumulative – the seals, the trumpets, and now the bowls. After the pouring of the fourth bowl, all of creation has been harmed: the earth – the sea – the fresh water – and all life would have been affected in one way or another. But, in spite of the clear message of the consequences of God’s wrath, the unrighteous as a whole did not turn away from their lives of sin. They blasphemed. They did not give God the glory. In essence, they sealed their destiny!

The next two bowls turn their focus directly toward the source of the unrighteous belief – the seat of the beasts and the land from which they came:

### THE FIFTH BOWL:

***“And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness...”*** The seat, or throne, of the beast was given to him by the dragon. (Rev. 13:2) That seat, like the “diadem” crown that he wore, signified his authority and served as the center of his power. We are not given a location for this seat of power, but we do get a suggestion if we jump ahead to the sixth bowl of wrath which was poured upon the Euphrates River. The major city of power along the Euphrates River is Babylon. Why would the beasts’ headquarters be in this city? Because it represented idolatry and worldliness! We will see Babylon named and dealt with later in this book, but one might ask, “What about Rome?” In John’s time period, this city showed no respect for Jehovah and His Son or the church, either. It could also represent worldliness. Remember, we’re dealing with symbols which even encompass the 21st century. Our present source of evil isn’t Babylon or Rome. The city is used is a symbol of everywhere in the world that refuses to recognize Jesus for who He is and the church He established. Worldliness is alive and well in our time, and it fosters a growing lack of esteem for the church and for God. It is the power of sin. And even though the worldly will

blaspheme God and choose not to repent, chapter 16 assures us that their end is coming! It is said that when the fifth bowl was poured out, the kingdom of the beast was ***“full of darkness”*** which I believe is another allusion to the plagues of Egypt. This darkness, though, is symbolic of the spiritual darkness that prevails among those given to the beast. Jesus is the light. Those that dwell in darkness have rejected that light therefore, they have no hope in their heart.

#### THE SIXTH BOWL:

“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.” This “great river” is not only mentioned here, but also with the sounding of the sixth trumpet. Its meaning is the same in both instances. As this sixth bowl is emptied on the river, its water is dried up. Waterways provide a nation with a natural barrier of protection and a dry riverbed creates a path for enemies to cross and attack. The direction “east” is symbolically the direction from which enemies arise, and gets its meaning from the old Hebrew tradition. In this instance the “Kings of the East” represent the judgments of God. The ones that are laid open to attack are those unrighteous followers of the beast.

Do you remember that after the sixth trumpet had blown two slain witnesses for God – killed in their service to the Lord – lay in the street for three and a half days, then arose and ascended to heaven? That scene temporarily drew our attention away from the trumpets. The same thing happens here after the sixth bowl is poured. But notice what John sees next: ***“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.”*** It appears they were not three individual devils coming out of the mouths of the Dragon and the two beasts, but rather their *spirits* – their influence – as they continue to gather an army for the battle that will conclude on that great day. The number “three” is applied to signify they are “enough” to carry out their assigned tasks, and they are called “*spirits*” because of their agility and swiftness as they go about wreaking havoc. They are liars and false teachers deceiving men, spreading the doctrine of the devil. They are “*unclean*” because they delight in their work for the Dragon and relish their own impurity, finding joy in doing his dirty work.

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We were introduced to the beasts in chapter 13. One rose out of the sea and represented the love of the world or worldly power, his purpose to overcome the saints with that power. The other rose out of the earth and exercised all of the power of the first beast but with the added ability to do great wonders and deceive those dwelling on the earth so they would make idols and worship them. He represented self-deceit. Of course they gained their power from the dragon, that is, Satan. They sought to rally the kings of the world to fight against God and His followers in the ultimate battle – Good vs. Evil – which we will see depicted in chapters 19 and 20. I refer, of course, to Armageddon as this last battle, said to take place in the valley of Megiddo where Josiah was killed by Neco, King of Egypt. The spelling of Armageddon comes from the Hebrew letters “Rh” (which when converted to the Greek became “Ar”) attached to the word “Megiddo.” “*At the waters of Megiddo*” is also where the army of Sisera was defeated by Barak in Judges 4. You may remember that Jael killed Sisera by driving a tent stake through his temple.

However, don’t get the idea that Armageddon is literal. There isn’t really going to be a “battle to end all battles” at this place called Megiddo. It is yet another of the many symbols in this book. And here’s something else you might not realize: this is not some far-away event scheduled for those days near the end of the world. It is going on right now and you and I are involved in it! It is the battle that has been waged against God by the forces of evil throughout history, beginning with the fall of Adam in the Garden and ending on Judgment Day.

And by the way – though the battle IS on-going, and a fierce one at that, there is little to remind us of it outside of the Bible. Those without knowledge of God’s word go through day-to-day life unaware of it. A weak believer could even find himself to be unconcerned about it. But let me assure you that on the last day when our sentence is passed, we will be made very aware of just how ferocious the hostility between God and Satan is! I can also promise you that, not only will God be victorious, but the only ones who will share in this victory with Him are those who DID know the battle was on...and were suited up and actively participating in it.

After describing the battle as current and on-going, I am often asked, “Then, why is it called a battle of ‘*that great day*’?” The answer is because on that day everything will be



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resolved! On that day the outcome will be plainly determined and the struggle terminated! When will that be? Only God knows. But I do know this: Jesus says in verse 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.***” Similar words were used to address the Christians at Sardis (a church that rested upon its reputation of being alive, though they were actually dead) back in chapter 3. So, we might say that on “**this day**,” the battle rages, but on “**that great day**”...the Almighty God will end it and the faithful will live a very literal storybook ending: happily ever after.

### THE SEVENTH BOWL:

The seventh angel poured his bowl into the air and there “***came a great voice***” out of the temple of heaven. This is the same voice that was heard in verse 1 – God’s voice! And God said, “***It is done!***” That doesn’t mean the end has come, just that it is imminent. You may remember that there was silence in Heaven as the seventh seal was opened. At the sounding of the seventh trumpet the judgment was only vaguely referenced in the triumphant song. Here, only a brief mention of that day is given. The actual end will be described in chapter 20. But we are told what will happen: “***And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and a great earthquake,***” – the usual accompaniment of judgment in scripture. Notice the next phrase, “***such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.***”

It is emphatic; God’s anger is increasing. “***And the great city was divided into three parts...***” One for each of the evil trinity – the Dragon and his 2 beasts... “***...and the cities of the nations fell...***” signifying the ungodly. “***...and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.*** The ungodly will pay for their allegiance to the dragon on that last day. In this description, God’s wrath was so severe that every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. “***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.*** According to Strong’s dictionary, a silver talent weighed about 100 lbs, and a gold one 200 lbs., so, we can

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rest assured this is more than golf ball sized hail! Yet still, the unrighteous people blasphemed God, unwilling to repent.

As we close out this lesson, I offer you the comparison chart below to highlight the close association of the Seven Trumpets with the Seven Bowls of wrath. I reiterate that the warnings are escalating in severity. These bowls represent the final one. The end is near. The outcome of the ongoing battle of Armageddon will soon be decided as we continue our study...

### A Comparison Chart between the Seven Trumpets & Bowls of Wrath

Trumpets	Bowls
1. Hail, fire and blood cast upon the earth; one-third of trees, etc are burned.	1. The bowl is poured out on the earth and is sore upon the followers of the beast.
2. One-third of the sea is made into blood; one-third of the sea creatures and ships are destroyed.	2. The entire Sea is made into blood as of a dead man. Every soul therein is destroyed.
3. One-third of the Rivers made bitter like wormwood. Many men were destroyed.	3. All of the Rivers made into blood. It was declared to be God's vengeance upon all men.
4. One-third of the Sun, etc. smitten; One-third of the day was darkened.	4. The Sun is smitten; men are scorched; men blaspheme and repent not!
5. Star from heaven falls into the Abyss; [Satan] sends forth the locusts; men seek death. The Hebrew name of their king is Abaddon.	5. The throne and kingdom of the beasts are smitten; men are in pain; continue to blaspheme God and repent not!
6. Armies from the Euphrates destroy one-third of men; men repent not! The two witnesses of God speak for Him and work miracles; War against them by beasts. Appear dead - raised!	6. The way is prepared for the kings beyond the Euphrates. Three unclean Spirits of the dragon witness for him work miracles; War by the world at Armageddon!
7. Voices in heaven; the judgment; earthquakes, etc. and hail!	7. Voices in Heaven; the Fall of Babylon Judgment, earthquake, etc. and Hail!