

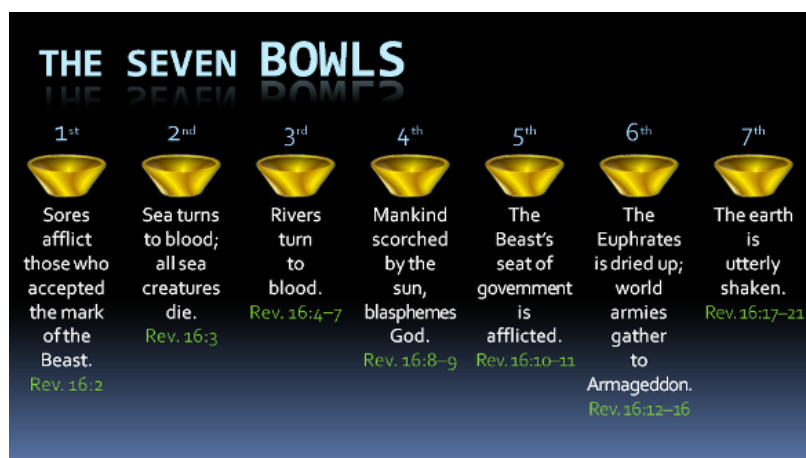
THE BOWL JUDGMENTS OF REVELATION 16

INTRODUCTION

- The bowl judgments of Revelation 16 constitute the final set of seven judgments unleashed by God in the Tribulation
- “Since they are the final outpouring of God’s wrath, the bowl judgments will be more severe than all the earlier judgments. Their severity is strong proof of how God feels about those who persistently, willfully reject Him. This particular epoch in human history will be a fitting time for God’s wrath to reach its apex, for mankind’s rebellion against God will also then be at its apex.”¹
- They will occur close to the time of Christ’s Second Coming and they will occur in rapid succession
- Unlike the previous two sets of judgments which had a break between the sixth and seventh judgments, no such interruption occurs in the bowl judgments

Revelation 16:1 ~ Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.”

- A “loud” (*megales*) voice sounds prior to the release of the bowl judgments, undoubtedly the voice of God
- The word “great” occurs frequently in this chapter (vv. 9, 12, 14, 17, 18, 19 [2x], 21 [2x])
- The seven angels receive their orders at the same time to pour out the bowls of the wrath of God
- This points to these judgments occurring rapidly without interruption
- “All indications are that the bowl judgments fall with trip-hammer rapidity on a world that is reeling under previous judgments and a gigantic world war.”²



- Whereas the plagues brought against Egypt (Ex 7-12) were very localized and the plagues from the seven trumpets affected one-third of the world (Rev 8:7-12; 9:15, 18), these plagues will affect the entire world.

¹ John MacArthur, *Revelation 13-22*, 138.

² Walvoord, J. F. (1985). *Revelation*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 967). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

THE BOWL JUDGMENTS

The First Bowl

Revelation 16:2 ~ So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image.

- Those who follow Antichrist will receive ugly and painful sores
- The word for “sore” (*helkos*, from which we get the English word “ulcer”) is the same word used by the translators of the LXX for the boils inflicted on the Egyptians in Ex 9:9-11 and on Job in Job 2:7
- They will be “loathsome and malignant” sores = *kakos* (“bad, evil”) and *poneros* (“bad”)
- “Where *kakos* and *ponēros* are put together, *kakos* is always put first and signifies bad in character, base, *ponēros*, bad in effect, malignant”³
- They will be festering, painful, and incurable infections
- Some believe that the sores will be “malignant” or cancerous in a medical sense
- Only the worshippers of Antichrist will be afflicted by these open, oozing sores; the believing remnant will be exempted from them (cf. Ex 9:8-12)

The Second Bowl

Revelation 16:3 ~ The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died.

- This judgment is similar to the first plague in Egypt (Ex 7:20-24) in that the sea will be turned into blood
- Whereas a third of the sea creatures die in the second trumpet judgment (Rev 8:8-9), in this bowl judgment every living thing in the sea will die
- Adding to the already bloody waters of the sea will be billions of dead and decaying fish and marine animals, resulting in contaminated, putrid bodies of water
- Since most of the world is covered by the seas, this will be tremendous worldwide judgment

The Third Bowl

Revelation 16:4-7 ~ Then the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying, “Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things; 6 for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it.” 7 And I heard the altar saying, “Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.”

- Just as the third trumpet made the fresh waters bitter (Rev 8:11), so the third bowl judgment will result in them becoming bloody, unfit for human consumption and useless in washing their sores
- But rather than one-third of the fresh water being affected, all of it will suffer this judgment

³ Vine, W. E., & Bruce, F. F. (1981). *Vine's Expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words* (Vol. 2, p. 95). Old Tappan NJ: Revell.

- This punishment on the wicked world will be justified because of how they “poured out the blood of saints and prophets”
- “The victims of this judgment will experience the relentless law of retribution. They shed the blood of the saints and prophets, so they must now drink blood.”⁴
- This demonstrates that God will avenge his martyred saints
- In fact, they will “deserve it”
- But God will be shown to be “true and righteous” in these judgments
- “The destruction of what is left of the earth’s fresh water will cause unthinkable hardship and suffering. There will be no water to drink; no clean water to wash the oozing sores caused by the first bowl judgment; no water to bring cooling relief from the scorching heat that the fourth bowl judgment will shortly bring. The scene is so unimaginably horrible that people will wonder how a God of compassion, mercy, and grace could send such a judgment. And so there is a brief interlude in the pouring out of the judgments while an angel speaks in God’s defense.”⁵

The Fourth Bowl

Revelation 16:8-9 ~ The fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch men with fire. 9 Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory.

- In contrast to the fourth trumpet which resulted in a third of the heavens being darkened (Rev 8:12), this judgment will result in an intensification of the sun
- The effect of this is that men will be “scorched with great heat”
- Instead of providing warmth, light, and energy as it has done since the beginning of creation, the sun will harm and destroy
- In addition to burning people with its intense heat, the super-heated sun will likely melt the polar ice caps, causing the ocean levels to rise greatly, resulting in widescale flooding for miles inland along coastal regions
- As a result, great damage and further loss of life will occur
- Rather than causing them to turn from their wicked ways, the followers of Antichrist will manifest their hard-hearted rebellion against God in two ways:
 1. They will blaspheme the name of God
 2. They will refuse to repent
- This will be the same response to the judgment in the fifth bowl (vv. 10-11)
- “The wishful thinking of some that men would repent if they only knew the power and righteous judgment of God is shattered by frequent mention in this chapter of the hardness of the human heart in the face of the most stringent and evident divine discipline (cf. vv. 11, 21).”⁶

The Fifth Bowl

Revelation 16:10-11 ~ Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain, 11 and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.

⁴ Charles Ryrie, *Revelation*, 132.

⁵ MacArthur, *Revelation 13-22*, 142.

⁶ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 234-235.

- This plague brings darkness to the to the seat of Antichrist’s government (“throne of the beast”)
- Darkness will engulf the entire world which contains Antichrist’s worldwide kingdom
- Such darkness surrounding the Day of the Lord is anticipated:

Joel 2:2; 3:14-15 ~ A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness. As the dawn is spread over the mountains, So there is a great and mighty people; There has never been anything like it, Nor will there be again after it To the years of many generations... 14 Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. 15 The sun and moon grow dark And the stars lose their brightness.

Zephaniah 1:15 ~ A day of wrath is that day, A day of trouble and distress, A day of destruction and desolation, A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness,

Mark 13:24 ~ But in those days, after that tribulation, THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT

- This action will hinder his ability to force all people to worship him
- It will result in the people gnawing “their tongues because of pain” and the torment of their affliction
- Again, they will refuse to turn to the Lord but will instead blaspheme Him and not repent
- This is the last reference in Revelation of their failure to repent (cf. 2:21; 9:20-21; 16:9)
- Again, “The Scriptures plainly refute the notion that wicked men will quickly repent when faced with catastrophic warnings of judgment. When confronted with the righteous judgment of God, their blasphemy is deepened and their evil purpose is accentuated.”⁷

The Sixth Bowl

Revelation 16:12-16 ~ The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east. 13 And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; 14 for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. 15 (“Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.”) 16 And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon.

- This plague dries up the Euphrates River, preparing the way for kings from the east
- The Euphrates forms the eastern border of Palestine (Gen 15:18)



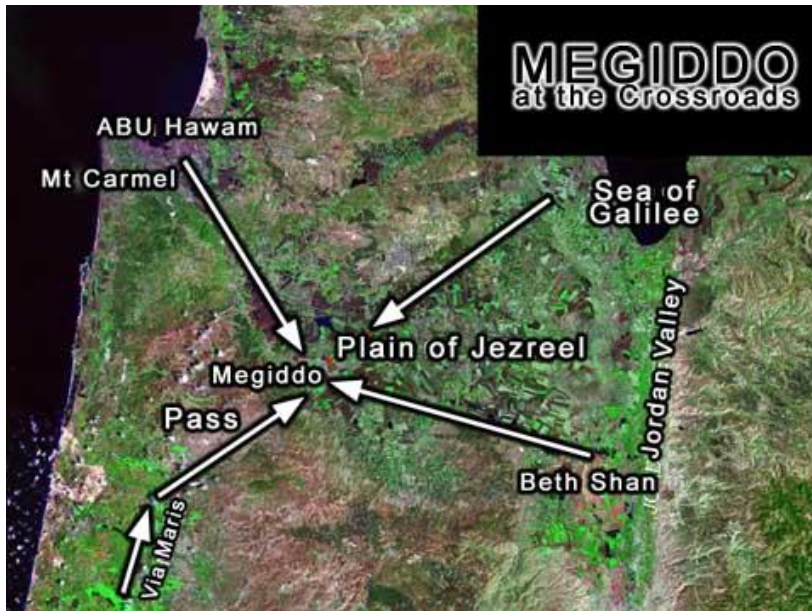
⁷ Ibid., 235.

- “There has been endless speculation about ‘the kings from the East, with many expositors trying to relate them to some contemporary leaders of their generation. A survey of 100 commentaries of the Book of Revelation reveals at least 50 interpretations of the identity of the kings of the East. The simplest and best explanation, however, is that this refers to kings or rulers from the Orient or East who will participate in the final world war. In the light of the context of this passage indicating the near approach of the second coming of Christ and the contemporary world situation in which the Orient today contains a large portion of the world’s population with tremendous military potential, any interpretation other than a literal one does not make sense.”⁸
- It would seem best to take the “kings of the east” as referring to armies from modern-day Russia, China, or India
- The “three unclean spirits” (v. 13) are clearly identified as “spirits of demons” (v. 14) who will perform signs throughout the world, drawing them into the final “war of the great day of God”
- These three spirits will be emissaries of the unholy Trinity (Satan, Antichrist, false prophet) who will work lying wonders to deceive the nations into doing battle with God Himself
- The “war” is probably not a single battle, but a whole series of conflicts
- The word for “war” (*polemos*) indicates that Armageddon is really a campaign made up of numerous conflicts among a number of nations over a period of time at the end of the Tribulation
- A problem arises here: How is war possible when there is a world government under the control of Satan and the beast? → “Some have interpreted this as a gathering of forces in anticipation of the second coming of Christ. More probably, it reflects a conflict among the nations themselves in the latter portion of the great tribulation as the world empire so hastily put together begins to disintegrate. The armies of the world contending for honors on the battlefield at the very time of the second coming of Christ do all turn, however, and combine their efforts against Christ and His army from heaven when the glory of the second coming appears in the heavens. It will be the final challenge to divine sovereignty and power as the military might of the world of that day will be engaged in fighting on the very day that Christ returns (cf. Zech. 14:1-3).”⁹
- It is possible that, despite Antichrist’s rule over whole world, considerable unrest develops against his rule and people will begin to oppose Antichrist
- Nations begin to congregate in Palestine with the intention of overthrowing Antichrist
- But soon the “sign of the Son of Man” (Matt 24:30) appears in sky
- As nations realize Christ is coming back, they unite together to do battle against Christ
- The words of v. 15 are likely those of God Himself promising blessing to those who prepare for His return and judgment on those who don’t
- Blessing is promised to the one who “stays awake and keeps his clothes,” likely a symbolic reference to living a righteous life in light of the imminent return of Christ
- His return will happen “like a thief” (cf. 1 Thess 5:2, 4; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 3:3)
- Har-Magedon = in Hebrew “the mountain or hill of Megiddo”
- Mt. Megiddo is located 60 miles north of Jerusalem
- Megiddo or Tel Megiddo, an ancient fortified city, is one of the most famous battlegrounds in the world and the site of many OT battles (Judges 4, 7)

⁸ Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 968). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁹ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 237.

- Historians believe that more battles (200) were fought at this location than anywhere else on earth
- Napoleon referred to it as the greatest battlefield he had ever seen
- The valley of Megiddo, now known as the valley of Jezreel, will serve as the gathering place for the final battle between Christ and Antichrist's armies
- Actually, the final battles will encompass the entire length of the nation of Israel (Rev 14:14-20)



- Thus, this plague is preparation for the final act of judgment before the Second Coming

The Seventh Bowl

Revelation 16:17-21 ~ Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, "It is done." 18 And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty. 19 The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. 20 And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. 21 And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.

- The final bowl signals the completion of God's wrath and begins with the words "It is done"
- Numerous catastrophic events accompany this final plague:
 - Flashes of lightning (v. 18)
 - Crashes of thunder (v. 18)
 - An earthquake of such a magnitude as never before felt in the history of the world (v. 18); it will literally shake the globe
 - The division of the great city (either Jerusalem – cf. Rev 11:8; or Rome or a rebuilt city of Babylon) into three parts (v. 19)
 - The downfall of the cities of the world (v. 19), reducing them to rubble and resulting in great loss of life
 - The destruction of islands and mountains (v. 20)
 - One hundred-pound hailstones which will cause great death and destruction (v. 21)

The heaviest authenticated hailstone ever measured was one of 2.25 pounds that fell in the Gopalganj district of Bangladesh on April 14, 1986. The stones size was not measured although anecdotal reports claimed the stones were the size of “pumpkins”. Ninety-two people perished as a result of the storm although how many of these can be attributed to the hail is uncertain.¹⁰

- These geographical changes will likely result in a restoration of the pre-flood environment, such that there will be no more uninhabitable mountain ranges, deserts, or ice caps, but rather gentle rolling hills
- These changes may actually leave Jerusalem as the highest point on earth

Isaiah 2:2 ~ Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it.

Jeremiah 3:17 ~ “At that time they will call Jerusalem ‘The Throne of the LORD,’ and all the nations will be gathered to it, to Jerusalem, for the name of the LORD; nor will they walk anymore after the stubbornness of their evil heart.

- Rather than finally submitting to the Lord in this final act of judgment, the wicked world will blame and blaspheme God
- “Everything that humanity has built will crumble before their eyes. Quite literally the whole world will collapse around them, yet they will persist in thinking that they are still masters of their own fate, without any need for God.”¹¹
- “The utter perversity of human nature, which will reject the sovereignty of God in the face of such overwhelming evidence, confirms that even the lake of fire will not produce repentance on the part of those who have hardened their hearts against the grace of God.”¹²
- With the final outpouring of God’s wrath in the seventh bowl, the stage will be set for the climactic return of Christ in chapter 19
- The full judgment of Babylon is described in chapters 17-18

¹⁰ <https://www.wunderground.com/blog/weatherhistorian/worlds-largest-hailstones.html>

¹¹ Ryrie, *Revelation*, 134-135.

¹² Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 242.