

SEVEN BOWLS OF GOD'S WRATH

Revelation 16

Introduction:

Last Sunday, as we looked at Revelation 15, we saw a fairly detailed introduction to the final judgment and wrath of God against Satan, the Antichrist and all those who buy into his lies and deceit. John saw the temple or tabernacle in heaven opened and out of the sanctuary came seven angels with seven plagues. They were given seven bowls, filled with the wrath of God. We talked about that wrath, God's boiling anger toward all that opposes righteousness.

Our text today begins with the command to those angels to pour out the contents of those bowls – *read v. 1*. The voice is not identified. We are not told who the voice belongs to, but most scholars agree that it is the voice of God. God himself is the one who give this command to initiate the final judgment of mankind.

This pouring out of the bowls, symbolizing the administering of God's wrath on the earth is not done simultaneously. Rather, one by one, in fairly quick succession, and without any further instruction, the angels pour out the contents of their bowls on the earth. What follows is an unimaginable time of chaos and catastrophe that makes the previous disasters seem like child's play.

By the time this period of judgment and wrath is wrapping up, we are watching the assembling of the nations for the final war – the campaign of Armageddon. By the time this series of disasters is finished the world is prepared for the Second Coming of Christ. The Second Coming is when Jesus will return, this time as a warrior-king, as he comes to put an end to the rule of the Gentiles and establish his kingdom on the earth. That coming, in power and glory, is described in chapter 19.

However, before the world gets to that point, it must go through one final period of catastrophe, as God's wrath is poured out on a rebellious world. By this point in the Tribulation, the Antichrist is losing his grip on power and the whole world is reeling under continuous disaster.

So let's have a look at the seven bowl judgments. They begin in verse 2 of chapter 16. The description of most of these are very brief. I am not going to even try to explain a lot of what we will read, but we will focus in on a few key points. As we go through the description of these judgments, I will be quoting substantially from David Levy's concise, well-worded description.

The First Bowl – v. 2

Read v. 2 – The NKJV says, "...a foul and loathsome sore..." This judgment will involve a foul-smelling, malignant ulcer (like a boil) that is extremely painful and will not heal. It is somewhat reminiscent of the sixth plague that God sent on the people of Egypt (Exodus 9:8-12). What is important to note is that this plague is only on those who took the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.

The Second Bowl – v. 3

Read v. 3 – It would appear that this plague affected the oceans and all saltwater seas. The text says the sea became *like* the blood of a dead man. The sea will turn into a thick, coagulated mass producing a putrefying stench like that of a decaying corpse. This condition will cause unimaginable disease and death.

Again, we are reminded of the plagues in Egypt. This judgment is similar to the first plague upon Egypt (Exodus 7:19-21), when all the fish died. It is also similar to the second trumpet judgment, when a fiery mountain will be cast into the sea, turning one-third of the sea to blood and killing one-third of the sea life (8:8-9). Only this time, all marine life will be destroyed, severely affecting the world's food supply.

The Third Bowl – vv. 4-7

Read vv. 4-7 – This time all the freshwater springs, rivers and lakes will be affected. The third trumpet judgment caused one-third of the freshwater to be destroyed, this time the remainder of the fresh water in rivers and springs will be destroyed. We are not told what happens to the water in wells and cisterns, but without reliable sources of water, people will go mad and will stop at nothing to quench their thirst. We can only imagine the agony, panic, and death this pollution will create.

But connected to this judgment is a magnificent angelic proclamation. This angel affirms that the wicked are getting what they deserve. Look at verse 6 – *read it again*. We are going to come back to this angelic declaration later...

The Fourth Bowl – vv. 8-9

Read vv. 8-9 – Like the fourth trumpet this plague involves the sun. However it is very different. Under the fourth trumpet, one-third of the sun will be darkened (8:12). Here the sun's intensity will be supernaturally increased by God, causing it to scorch people with fire. But the interesting thing to note is that, even though it seems as though people will realize that God is the one responsible for this plague, they will not cry out to him for mercy. Rather they will blaspheme and curse God. Not even God's wrath will produce repentance in the hardened hearts of wicked people. They have reached the point of no return. There is no more opportunity for repentance and mercy.

The Fifth Bowl – vv. 10-11

These final three bowls of judgment are directed specifically at the Beast and his kingdom. *Read vv. 10-11* - The throne of the beast is the one spot where Satan's power resides on earth. Up to this point, nothing will touch the throne of the beast, but now God centers his attack on Satan's earthly seat of power.

Again there is a similarity with the trumpet judgments. Among the results of the fifth trumpet judgment was darkness that came over the earth because of the smoke rising from the bottomless pit. In this instance, the darkness is more intense and further reaching. It will cover the entire earth. The darkness will be so thick that it will cause intense psychological pain to people already in physical agony due to festering boils and burning flesh. This will cause them to gnaw "...their tongues in anguish..." This is a preview of the outer darkness of hell that unbelievers will suffer (Matthew 25:30). Yet, again we see that there is no repentance. They will continue to blaspheme or curse "...the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds" (v. 11).

The Sixth Bowl – vv. 12-16

Now we are really coming close to the end. The sixth bowl is preparing the way for the battle of Armageddon. *Read vv. 12-16*. The river is called "great" because of its significant location. It is the longest river in western Asia, flowing almost 1,800 miles from Syria to Babylon and emptying into the Persian Gulf. It forms a natural eastern boundary for the Roman Empire. When it dries up, the kings of the east will pour across the dry riverbed to take part in the battle of Armageddon.

The vision in verses 13-16 provides some needed insight into this gathering of nations for the battle of Armageddon. John saw "three unclean spirits, like frogs, come out of the mouth of the dragon... the beast, and... the false prophet" (v. 13). These demonic spirits will perform miracles that will entice all nations to bring their armies to Israel for "the battle on the great day of God the Almighty" (v. 14).

The word battle (Gr., *polemos*) does not mean a single conflict, but a campaign of battles at the end of the Tribulation. This will set the stage for a climactic conflict with Christ at His Second Coming. The nations will gather at Mount Megiddo (Gr., Armageddon, Heb., Har Megiddo, v. 16) to challenge the Antichrist's worldwide dominion, which will have begun to deteriorate, and to annihilate Israel. Mount Megiddo will be the staging area and focal point of the battle, but the conflict will extend for a radius of about 200 miles around Jerusalem (14:20). While the nations are engaged in conflict, Christ will suddenly appear and destroy them with the sword of His mouth (19:15).

In v. 15 a word of praise and blessing is given to the faithful saints during the Tribulation. It is also a warning for the saints living in the Tribulation to stay alert in light of Christ's imminent return. The word garments is symbolic of the righteousness of the saints. As believers, we must guard our lives from evil at all times and be clothed in God's righteousness.

The Seventh Bowl – vv. 17-21

Read vv. 17-20. "...a loud voice out of the temple, from the throne..." No doubt this is the voice of God himself saying, "It is done." There are many events related to the Campaign of Armageddon, associ-

ated with the sixth bowl which are not described here in Revelation, but when the seventh bowl is poured out, God announces that his wrath is completed. The seventh bowl brings the Tribulation to a definite end.

However, this declaration will be followed by tremendous upheaval. There will be enormous convulsions of nature, including the greatest earthquake ever to occur in the history of the earth. Cities worldwide will be destroyed – *read v. 19*. There will be geographical changes – *read v. 20*. There will be huge changes in climate – *read v. 21a*.

The consequences of these cataclysmic changes will crush the Anti-christ's kingdom, but his followers will not repent. In fact, the opposite will take place. We read that "...they cursed (blasphemed) God for the plague of the hail..." (v. 21).

Conclusion

These descriptions concerning God's wrath being poured out upon the earth are both awesome and terrifying. How do we respond? What should this mean for us? A couple of things...

They should cause all of us to examine our priorities in life and our personal relationship with Christ. Only those who have put their faith in Him will escape the wrath to come.

But there is one other thing I want to focus on as we close today. I would like to go back to verses 5-7 – *read them*. Many times people question God's judgment upon them. People complain that God is not fair in condemning people to punishment or suffering. But the angels never question God's justice. The angels confirm that an eternal God is justified in pouring out His wrath upon the ungodly. This angel affirmed that the wicked are worthy to have "blood to drink" because "they have shed the blood of saints and prophets...It is what they deserve."

Sometimes we are troubled by what seems to be a lack of justice. So was the psalmist Asaph – *go to Psalm 73 and review briefly*.

God's justice is always perfect. Sometimes life seems unfair, but in the end righteousness will prevail and justice will be served. And God will be vindicated.

Close with invitation...