

THE REVELATION TO JOHN

THE THINGS FUTURE, REVELATION 4 - 22

INTRODUCTION

- The seven bowl judgments which were introduced by the seventh trumpet in chapter 11, are now about to take place. These seven bowls are an expansion of the seventh trumpet. These judgments are poured out rapidly just prior to the establishment of the millennial kingdom. Again, it is noted that despite the severity of the bowl judgments, people refused to repent (16:11). The final bowl judgment concludes the devastation on the earth and prepares the way for Christ's second coming to be seen in chapter 19.
- Charles Ryrie, *Unlike the previous series of judgments of the trumpets and seals, each of which had a break between the sixth and seventh judgments, the seven plagues of the bowls are poured out without interruption and apparently quite rapidly.*
- George Ladd, *These plagues are God's answer to Satan's last and greatest effort to frustrate the divine rule.*
- John Walvoord, *Chronologically this chapter is close to the time of the second coming of Christ, and the judgments described fall in rapid succession . . . Daniel indicated that these closing days of the Tribulation will be a time of world war (Dan. 11:36-45). World events are now pictured by John as rapidly coming to their climax.*
- Charles Swindoll, *Revelation 16 describes the final round of ever-increasing judgments on the people who will stubbornly take the side of evil against the Lord in spite of countless warnings throughout the seven-year tribulation period.*

THE SEVEN BOWLS OF JUDGMENT, REVELATION 16:1-21

THE FIRST FOUR BOWL JUDGMENTS, REVELATION 16:1-9

- A. The start of the bowl judgments (1), *Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God."*
1. Supplemental verses
 - a. Revelation 15:1, *Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.*
 - b. Revelation 15:7, *And 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,*
 - c. Zephaniah 3:8, *"Therefore wait for me," declares the LORD, "for the day when I rise up to seize the prey. For my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all my burning anger; for in the fire of my jealousy all the earth shall be consumed.*
 2. Commentary
 - a. Henry Swete, *The first four affect individuals directly either through personal affliction or through objects of nature, and the last three are on more of an international scale, leading the way to a final major confrontation.*
 - b. John Walvoord, *This is undoubtedly the voice of God speaking from His heavenly temple.*
 - c. Charles Ryrie, *All the angels receive their orders to go at the same time (v. 1), which would indicate that these judgments follow each other in quick succession.*
 - d. Charles Swindoll, *John watched as the angels proceeded in a somber manner, one at a time, in a preset order.*
- B. The first bowl (2), *So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.*
1. Supplemental verses
 - a. Revelation 13:16, *Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead,*
 - b. Revelation 16:10b-11), *People gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.*

2. Commentary

- a. William Barclay, *The first terror is a plague of malignant and ulcerous sores. The word is the same as is used to describe the boils and the sores in the plague in Egypt (Exodus 9:8–11), the pains which will follow disobedience to God (Deuteronomy 28:35), and the sores of the tortured Job (Job 2:7).*
- b. Charles Ryrie, *The group afflicted is limited to those who are followers of Antichrist, the believing remnant being exempt (cf. Ex. 9:8-12). Apparently the Best cannot heal them, for they are still cursing God for these sores after the fifth bowl has been poured out (v.11). Notice too that the Beast is in power and that his image has been set up and worshiped when this first bowl judgment comes.*
- c. Thomas Constable, *The first four trumpet judgments will fall on the human environment, rather than on people themselves, but the first bowl judgment will fall directly on people. This plague results in some harmful and painful sores breaking out on the beast-worshipers (cf. Exod. 9:9–11; Lev. 13:18–27; Deut. 28:27, 35; Job 2:7) ... the plague of boils in the Exodus was literal, so it seems that this plague will be literal too. This sore appears to be some type of skin ulcer that breaks out on the surface of the body.*
- d. Warren Wiersbe, *... consider almost the entire population of the world suffering from a painful malady that nothing can cure. Constant pain affects a person's disposition so that he finds it difficult to get along with other people. Human relations during that period will certainly be at their worst.*
- e. John Walvoord, *The only ones who escape the judgment are those who have refused to obey the edict of the beast, the few individuals who trust in Christ in those evil days.*
- f. Charles Swindoll, *Although those who received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image will think they have spared their lives and saved their families, the reality is that they only buy themselves about three years ... in exchange for eternity!*
- g. John Phillips suggests these sores come upon the place where persons received the mark of the Beast, *There, on the right hand, a horrible, putrefying, incurable cancer! There on the face, a loathsome, ugly, disfiguring, and agonizing blotch! Men become horrible to look upon and their pains never end.*

C. The second bowl (3), ***The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died that was in the sea.***

1. Supplemental verses

- a. Revelation 8:8, *The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood.*
- b. Revelation 8:9, *A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.*

2. Commentary

- a. Thomas Constable, *Some commentators interpret the sea here as the masses of humanity, but there are no clues in the text that this sea is any more symbolic than the waters that Moses turned to blood.*
- b. Charles Ryrie, *When the second bowl is poured on the sea, it results in the water becoming like the blood of a dead man and "every living thing in the sea" dying. The illustration vividly depicts a dying person wallowing in his own blood. In like manner, the seas will wallow in blood ... The stench and disease this will bring, especially along the shores of the seas of the earth, are unimaginable.*
- c. J. Vernon McGee, *The sea is a great reservoir of life. It is teeming with life ... However, in this plague, blood is the token of death; the sea becomes a grave of death instead of a womb of life.*
- d. John Walvoord, *Just as in the second trumpet, the blood here is analogous to the first plague in Egypt (Ex. 7:20–25). As most of the earth's surface is covered by the seas, this is a worldwide, tremendous judgment.*
- e. Grant Osborne, *The sea was the lifeblood of Rome, for its food supply but even more for commerce, since the majority of trade goods came by sea. This is tantamount to the destruction of all civilization.*

D. The third bowl (4), ***The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood.***

1. Warren Wiersbe, *The second vial will center on the sea, and the third will turn the inland waters (rivers and fountains) into blood.*
2. Charles Ryrie, *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.*
3. John Walvoord, *The third in the series of judgments extends the turning of water into blood to rivers and fountains, apparently with the same devastating effect, though the results of the judgment are not mentioned.*
4. Charles Swindoll, *... all of the fresh water will be turned to blood, resulting in nothing safe to drink. Then the people of earth can turn their attention only to the skies and pray for fresh, pure rain to water their parched lips. Sadly, they had long refused to turn their hearts toward heaven to quench their dry, barren souls!*

E. The worship of God (5-7)

1. Supplemental verses

- a. Isaiah 49:26, *I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine. Then all flesh shall know that I am the LORD your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.*
- b. Luke 11:50, *so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation,*
- c. Revelation 11:18, *The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.*
- d. Revelation 13:15, *And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.*

2. Commentary

a. By an angel (5-6)

1. A declaration of praise to God (5), ***And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, “Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments.***

- a) Charles Ryrie, *Another angel from the altar echoes the refrain of the righteousness of God’s judgments.*
- b) Thomas Constable, *The angel of the waters evidently refers to the angel responsible for the seas and fresh water ... Scripture reveals that angels affect the elemental forces of nature (cf. Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1:7; Rev. 7:1; 9:11; 14:18).*
- c) Charles Swindoll, *At this point you may be thinking, How awful! What kind of God would do this? Do these people really deserve these extreme judgments? So it’s fitting that the angel associated with the waters should break into a brief doxology to set the record straight. John heard him reaffirm that through these judgments God will demonstrate His perfect righteousness and holiness (16:5).*
- d) Warren Wiersbe, *Heaven gives justification for this terrible judgment: the earth-dwellers have shed the blood of God’s people, so it is only right that they should drink blood. In God’s government, the punishment fits the crime.*
- e) Grant Osborne, *This could also be called a “vindication hymn,” for there is equal stress on the avenging of the blood of the saints.*

2. A justification of God’s judgments (6), ***For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!***

- a) Charles Ryrie, *“They deserve it” (v.6) refers to the victims of this judgment. The reason it is difficult for people to conceive of God dealing in this manner is that for thousands of years He has been long-suffering and gracious, not meting out the judgment the world deserved.*
- b) Thomas Constable, *This angel attributes righteousness to the eternal God for judging in kind and degree, namely, giving them back what they had given to others (cf. 15:3–4; Gal. 6:7) ... He makes the punishment fit the crime (cf. Isa. 49:26).*
- c) Warren Wiersbe, *Haman planned to hang Mordecai on the gallows and to exterminate the Jews; but he himself was hanged on the gallows, and his family was exterminated (Es. 7:10; 9:10). King Saul refused to obey God and slay the Amalekites, so he was slain by an Amalekite (2 Sam. 1:1–16).*
- d) Charles Swindoll, *They will martyr the saints and murder the prophets (16:6), spilling their holy blood upon the earth. Because “justice” means getting what a person deserves, then true justice will be served on the wicked of the world. In fact, the angel’s praise concludes, “You have given them blood to drink.*

c. By those around the altar (7), ***And I heard the altar saying, “Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!”***

1. Charles Swindoll, *Like a responsive refrain, a voice from the altar reiterated this truth: “Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and Righteous are Your judgments” (16:8). Neither the angel nor those around the altar left room for anybody to question the righteousness and goodness of God.*
2. Thomas Constable, *The Tribulation martyrs offer their amen from under the altar (6:9; 15:3–4) ... God always judges consistently with His character, which these martyrs describe as being almighty, true, and righteous.*
3. Grant Osborne, *The true nature of God’s actions are grounded in his very nature as true, and this means that every judgment of this book is absolutely just.*

- F. The fourth bowl (8-9), *The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.*
1. Supplemental verses
 - a. Malachi 4:1, *For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.*
 - b. Revelation 8:12, *The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.*
 2. Commentary
 - a. Thomas Constable, *The fourth trumpet judgment had darkened the sun (8:12), but this judgment increases the sun's intensity.*
 - b. Charles Swindoll, *This end-time global warming will make today's hot-earth hysteria resemble nothing more than a warm spring day.*
 - c. Charles Ryrie, *The fourth judgment affects the sun so that power "was given to it to scorch" people. That they Day of The Lord would come like a burning furnace was predicted in Malachi 4:1. Instead of turning to God and pleading for mercy, people blaspheme His name and do not repent.*
 - d. Robert Thomas, *They blame God for the first four plagues, rather than blaming their own sinfulness.*
 - e. Grant Osborne, *The most grievous aspect is not the punishment but their reaction to it. As they are severely burned, they respond not with repentance but instead "curse [literally 'blaspheme'] the name of God." This fiery judgment is a particularly severe warning, and when they not only reject it but blaspheme in return, their guilt is obvious.*
 - f. William Barclay, *It is the picture of people who had no doubt of the existence of God and even saw God's hand in events—and who still went their own way.*

SUMMARY

- John Walvoord, *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. v. 11, 21).*
- Charles Swindoll, *Everyone who will be afflicted by the plagues will have had access to the same predictions you're reading about now. They will have had seven years of successive warnings building on the prophecies fulfilled just a short time before. Though they have no excuse for continued rebellion, they will still curse their Creator and rage at their Redeemer.*
- William Barclay, *We are bound to ask ourselves whether we are so very different. We do not doubt the existence of God; we know that God is interested in us and in the world which he has made; we are well aware of God's laws; we know his goodness and we know that sin has its punishment; and yet time after time we go our own way.*