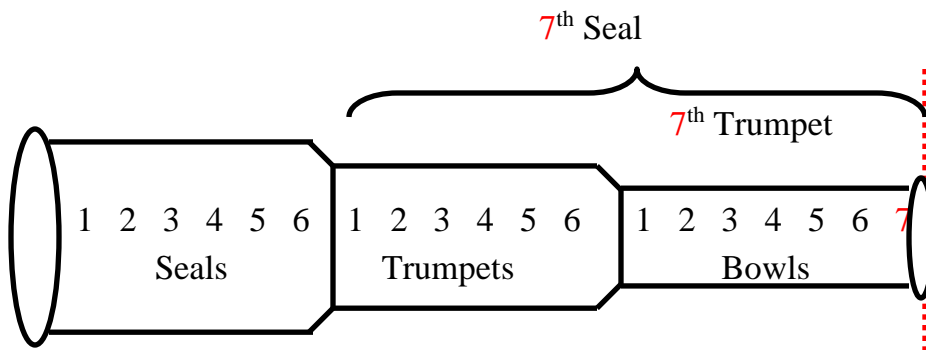


Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church
107 East Austin
Fredericksburg, Texas 78624
830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

A0615 – April 9, 2006 – Rev 16:1-9 – The First Four Bowls

The heavenly rejoicing (15:1-4) and preparations (15:5-8) of the bowls have been made; now let's proceed to the pouring out of the bowls in chapter 16. There is little doubt that the seven bowls come forth from the seventh trumpet as the seven trumpets came forth from the seventh seal (8:1). The arrangement is telescopic so that just when you think the judgments are over the 7th Seal is broken and seven trumpets come forth. Just when you think the judgments are over the 7th Trumpet is blown and seven bowls come forth. In these the wrath of God is finished (15:1).



The 7th trumpet was blown way back in 11:15. At that point no judgment took place, just an announcement that “the kingdom of this world had become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and he will reign forever and ever”. His kingdom will be that which comes after the earth has been purified by the bowl judgments which are equivalent to the 7th Trumpet. So, 16:1 picks up the earthly events immediately after the heavenly events of 11:15 and continues the march toward the 2nd Coming of Christ. The intermediate material in 12-14 fills in details regarding the campaign of the unholy trinity (12-13), the ultimate destiny of the 144,000 (14:1-5), and those who follow the beast (14:6-20).

A. God’s Command (16:1)

Revelation 16:1 *And I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God into the earth."*

And I heard a loud voice. The only *voice* that comes **from the temple** is that of God since 15:8 said that no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues were finished. So, John hears God commanding the **seven angels**. This command comes as God's response to an imprecatory prayer uttered thousands of years ago in Ps 79:6 (also see Jer 10:25; Zeph 3:8).

Psalm 79:6 Pour out Your wrath upon the nations which do not know You, And upon the kingdoms which do not call upon Your name.

We should learn from this that we may never see some of our prayers answered in this lifetime but they may be answered a long time from now. It also shows that God does not forget our prayers. Sometimes the time is not right to answer a prayer but often that time will come. Another prayer like this that we are all familiar with and which all Christians should pray is for the coming kingdom.

Matthew 6:9-13 "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. ¹⁰ 'Your *kingdom come*. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ 'Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. *For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*'

In this prayer the angels are given an imperative command in the aorist tense. **Go** with great haste and **pour**. One command from God to all seven angels. No further instruction is given. They all go at once and in sequence they tip their bowls so that the **wrath of God** pours into (*eis* – bowls 1-3) or upon the earth (*epi* – bowls 4-7). The plagues pile up one upon the other until the end (Thomas, 246).

The words **pour out** are the same words used of the Spirit being “poured out” on the day of Pentecost and upon Israel in connection with the 2nd Coming of Christ (Joel 2:28-29). So, there is a bit of irony here. God **pours out** His Spirit on saints but His wrath upon the ungodly.

1. The First Four Bowls (16:2-9)

The first four bowls are a unit like the first four seals (four horsemen) and the first four trumpets.

a. The Earth: Sores (16:2)

Revelation 16:2 And the first went away and poured out his bowl into the earth, and a bad (kakos) and malignant (poneros) sore there came upon those having the mark of the beast and worshipping his statue.

Similar to the 6th Exodus plague where boils broke out on the Egyptians and not the Israelites demonstrating perfect discrimination (Exod 9:9-11). We observe the same thing here, the malignant sores break out only ***upon those having the mark of the beast and worshipping his statue*** and not those who worship God or are undecided. So, God will exercise perfect discrimination in the future Tribulation.

The first strike is against ***the earth*** (nature) but the consequences are upon man. Terrible sores, evil things, festering, oozing pus and unable to heal no matter the malady ***came upon those having the mark of the beast***. They are still plagued with these sores under the 5th bowl (16:11).

b. The Sea: Congealed Blood (16:3)

Revelation 16:3 And the second poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like a dead person, and every soul of life in the sea died.

Similar to the 2nd Trumpet judgment where a burning mountain was thrown into the sea and 1/3 of the sea turned to blood and the living creatures in that 1/3 died (Rev 8:8-9). The only difference here is that ***the sea*** became something ***like the blood of a dead person***. Pentecost said, "...as I understand it the blood of a dead man congeals...the seas look like Jell-O, so there is no evaporation whatsoever, with the consequence that there can be no evaporation at all with the devastating effects of that."¹ So, the seas will look like strawberry Jell-O and of course, ***every soul living in the sea died***. This is the death of all marine life, total judgment. This is not hyperbole; no marine life could live in a congealed blood. Those who rely upon the sea for food will have unimaginable difficulty. We have difficulty imagining the extent of such a catastrophe but that is no reason not to believe this is literally true, especially in light of the renovation of nature that Christ will

introduce in His earthly kingdom. The two witnesses also have the power to turn water into blood at their discretion (Rev 11:6).

In the first bowl man is judged, in the second nature. Man is judged because of rebellion against God, nature is judged because it was placed under man's original dominion. Because man fell under sin his realm of dominion also fell under sin. Since sin is the object of God's judgment then both man and nature are judged.

c. The Rivers and Springs of Water: Blood (16:4-7)

Revelation 16:4 And the third poured out his bowl into the rivers and springs of waters, and became blood.

Revelation 16:5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying, "Righteous are you (present indicative), the One who is (present participle) and who was (imperfect indicative), the holy (osios) One, because you judged these things,

Revelation 16:6 because they poured out the blood of the saints and prophets and you have given (perfect) them blood to drink, they are worthy (axios).

Revelation 16:7 And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, Lord God Almighty, Your judgments [are] genuine and righteous.

Following the catastrophe of the saltwater seas ***the third*** angel ***poured out his bowl*** into the fresh water ***rivers and springs*** so that they ***became blood***. This is similar to the 1st Exodus plague where the Nile was turned to blood (Exod 7:17-21; Ps 78:44). Also very similar to the 3rd Trumpet judgment where a great meteor fell on 1/3 of the rivers and springs of waters (Rev 8:10-11). The difference is that these springs and waters become blood and those waters became bitter as well as the fact that the 3rd Trumpet only affected 1/3 of the freshwater and the 3rd Bowl affects all the freshwater on earth. The judgment is upon nature but the effects are upon man because the entire world's supply of fresh water becomes blood. The thirst will be unimaginable. Even though many took the mark of the beast so they could buy and sell, having the mark of the beast will not help them get water at this point. While the remnant of Israel who escaped to Jordan will be supernaturally nourished for 1,260 days other believers on earth will not. As such, I advise those believers reading the book of Revelation in that day to have wisdom and figure out who the beast is before he rises to world power and to buy food and water before the mark of the beast is issued so that they will be able to survive. When the similar judgment came upon the Nile people had to dig for water.

In verses 5-6 we have a song very similar to that found in Rev 15:3-4. It comes from *the angel of the waters*. In Revelation we have heard of “the angel of fire” (Rev 14:18), the “four angels of the four winds” (Rev 7:1) and the “angel of the abyss” (Rev 9:11). Angels have been assigned to various parts of nature and this is *the angel of the waters*. And this angel says "***Righteous are you, the One who is and who was, the holy One, because you judged these things, 6 because they poured out the blood of the saints and prophets and you have given them blood to drink, they are worthy.***" This is the legal principle of divine judgment known as *lex talionis* or “eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (Exod 21:24). Here it is “blood for blood”. God is completely righteous in judging the rivers and spring waters by turning them to blood. Verse 6 explains, ***because they poured out the blood of the saints and prophets*** God has ***given them blood to drink***. God is righteous. He would never do anything unrighteous or unjust. He is *the One who is and who was*, an expression of His eternity. He is *the holy One* referring to the standard of His character. And flowing forth from His holy character is the principle of *lex talionis*. This is why unbelievers are judged on the basis of their works. Since they refuse the work of Christ on their behalf the only basis on which to judge them is their own works. Whatsoever a man sows that will he also reap (Gal 6:7). These have sown blood and they reap blood. “You want to spill the blood of My saints and prophets, fine, I’ll give you blood to drink.” God has given them fresh water for thousands of years but they are not grateful. If they are so *bloodthirsty*, let them have blood to drink.”

This has remarkable ties to the martyrs prayer in Rev 6:10

Revelation 6:10 and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

they poured out the blood of saints and prophets. *saints* is a general title for a “believer” of any age and most likely has that meaning here. Since they have taken on the same murderous tactics they are charged with pouring ***out the blood of the saints for thousands of years.*** They also ***poured out the blood of...prophets.*** All ***prophets*** are ***saints*** but not all ***saints*** are ***prophets***. A ***prophet*** is one who receives God’s special revelation and delivers it to mankind. They disregarded God’s prophets who were sent to give them good news and warnings. But they rejected them and murdered them. The fact that the world has treated God’s people and God’s prophets so vilely is taught in many passages.

Revelation 17:6 And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus.

Revelation 18:24 "And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth."

Isaiah 49:26 "I will feed your oppressors with their own flesh, And they will become drunk with their own blood as with sweet wine; And all flesh will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior And your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob."

Verse 7 *And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, Lord God Almighty, Your judgments [are] genuine and righteous."* Since no one is in the temple in heaven except God (15:8) then this cannot be the angel who normally attends the *altar* (8:3ff; 14:18). And an altar cannot speak. Thus, the *altar* is personified to represent the prayers of the saints which reside there and called down God's judgments on their adversaries. Most likely this is the prayers of the Tribulation martyrs which began in 6:9-10. Obviously, they would agree with the *judgments of Lord God Almighty*. Since their blood was shed by them God is *true and righteous* to give them blood to drink (also see Rev 19:2 for God's judgments are true and righteous).

People often shirk from these terrifying judgments. "How can a loving God" is always the question. We struggle with this in our present condition. This question has many applications. People wonder how there can be no tears in heaven if they find out that a loved one was not saved. I can tell you this. When we are in heaven, our emotions will be so thoroughly cleansed that our desires will be perfectly aligned with God's desires. Our wills will be in perfect conformity to His will. I call this emotional purification and it comes with the resurrection body. It's a new attitude and mentality that reflects God's attitude and mentality toward sin. So, we will mirror this same attitude saying, *"Yes, Lord God Almighty, Your judgments [are] genuine and righteous."* It matters not whether it is loved ones or one's we did not know. We will understand more fully than that God gave them every opportunity to believe in His Son and that He is therefore fully justified because they are fully at fault for rejecting Him. As difficult as it is to imagine we will rejoice in their destruction. We will rejoice because justice is being upheld. His judgments are not arbitrary or vengeful; they are fully in line with His just nature.

d. The Sun: Scorching (16:8-9)

Revelation 16:8 *And the fourth poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch (kaumatizo) the men with fire.*

Revelation 16:9 And the men were scorched [with] great heat [kauma], and they blasphemed the name of God, the One having authority over these plagues, and they did not change their minds to give to Him glory.

The 4th Bowl is similar to the 4th Trumpet judgment where 1/3 of the sun, moon, and stars were darkened so that they would not shine for a 1/3 part of the day or night (Rev 8:12). The difference is that here the sun's light is not decreased but increased so that it scorches men. Another difference is that the 4th Trumpet only affected 1/3 while this judgment affects the entire **sun**. Again, the judgment is on nature but its effects are devastating for man. God judges man and nature. We rely on the earth for heat to survive but here the heat is beyond the physical limitations of man to withstand.

The mention of the word **men** likely refers back to **men** who took the mark of the beast and worship his image of verse 2 and shows that perfect discrimination is in order under this judgment. The faithful do not experience the scorching effects of the sun. This is obviously a supernatural protection (we might call it supernatural sunblock).

Even though the effects of the **sun** will **scorch men with fire** it will not have its desired effect. God wants these men to repent but they will not repent so as **to give to Him the glory**. These scorching effects will continue under the 5th plague even though they will be in darkness. Pentecost said, "Now at this point his [the beasts] kingdom is a universal kingdom, and so while the sun is scorching men with heat, it is not giving its light, so that men are stumbling around in darkness." So, somehow the sun begins to emit something that scorches men but does not give light.

The sun is one of the primary idols of worship among pagans. It rises and sets daily and seems to be immutable and eternal. But here it is shown to simply be a creation of God and the object of His judgment. In the new heavens and new earth there will be no sun for the glory of God will illumine it (Rev 21:23; 22:5). But there is no reason to think that this same sun that is judged here will not be restored to illuminate the earth during the earthly Millennial Kingdom.

Now, verse 9 indicates that the **men** are well aware of the source of these judgments. They know it is God. But they are not going to change their minds. Their allegiance is to the beast and they have taken on their gods character and **blaspheme God's name** (cf where the beast blasphemed God's name in 13:1-10). So, they did not repent, that is, change their mind. They continue to give glory to the beast and worship him. This is evidence of their hardness of heart and reminds us of Pharaoh in Egypt's negative

responses throughout the plague sequence and how God eventually hardened Pharaoh and then used him as an instrument to make His power known and to proclaim His name through the whole earth.

CONCLUSION

In concluding the first four bowls, they are a unit, each pouring out on some aspect of nature; 1) the earth, 2) the sea, 3) the rivers and springs of waters, and the 4) sun but they have serious consequences for mankind; 1) sores, 2) congealed bloody oceans and death of all marine life, 3) bloody drinking water, and 4) darkness. They come in sequence but one on top of the other. This is different from the seals and trumpets where each judgment began and ended before the next began. But these will come in rapid succession. They have as their design to cause men to repent, have a change of mind regarding their works but it doesn't work, in verses 10-11 we find them blaspheming God, taking on the attitude of their god, the Antichrist. They blame God for the severity of the judgments but it is actually their sin that has prompted God to judge. When God judges He judges both man and nature. This is a lot like the Exodus plagues because we see how their hard hearts have hardened to the point of no return and most likely God has judicially hardened them to demonstrate His power and majesty. So, these judgments are true and righteous because these men are thoroughly hardened against Him and they refuse to repent toward God and have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). Since they refuse Christ's work on their behalf all that is left is to implement the legal principle of *lex talionis* or "Law of retaliation". They "poured out the blood of saints and prophets" thus God will give them "blood to drink". Measure for measure, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; it is much better to be found in Christ. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved (Acts 16:31).

ⁱ Dwight Pentecost, *Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (classroom notes from DTS, 1988).

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