

# Revelation

## Escape the Coming Wrath!

Lesson 16

Revelation 16:1-21

The Final Outpouring of God's Wrath!

1. Read verses 1-7.

The Bible provides the only true beacon of light and hope in the darkness and despair of the world. In its pages are comforting, encouraging, and affirming words of the peace, goodness, joy, and love of salvation. Believers are reassured as they read of God's love and promises and of their eternal inheritance in His kingdom.

But while the Bible is a book of hope, it is also a book of judgment. Because God loves righteousness and faith, He must hate sin and unbelief. He cannot love truth unless He hates lies. He cannot love goodness unless He hates wickedness. He cannot reward unless He also punishes. The Old Testament repeatedly warns of coming judgment, particularly in those passages that describe the final Day of the Lord judgments (e.g., Joel 2:28-32; Zech. 14:1; Mal. 4:1, 5).

The New Testament also reveals God's judgment of sinners. John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah, preached a confronting, even harsh message of judgment...

The wrath of God against sin and His final, eschatological judgment of sinners, recurring themes in the Bible, take center stage in Revelation. That wrath, displayed earlier in Revelation in the seal and trumpet judgments, reaches its devastating climax with the bowl judgments described in this chapter. Those rapid-fire judgments will take place in a very short period of time, marking the final hour of the Day of the Lord. They are the final outpouring of God's wrath on the unbelieving world before the return of the Lord Jesus Christ (15:1). They are the last expression of divine wrath against the sin, unrighteousness, and blasphemy that is rampant on the earth.

The return of Jesus Christ described in chapter 19 immediately follows these seven judgments. Chapter 17 and 18 go back in time to describe the destruction of Antichrist's worldwide political and religious empire of Babylon...Immediately following the seven bowl judgments, the Lord Jesus Christ will return, destroy the world's armies at the Battle of Armageddon, and establish His universal rule on the earth. In fact, the bowl judgments foreshadow the Battle of Armageddon. The drying up of the Euphrates River as a result of the sixth bowl will pave the way for the forces of the east to come to that destruction.

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. Despite years of horrific judgments (which they will acknowledge as coming from God—6:15-17), sinners will stubbornly cling to their sin and persist in their rebellion (9:21). Nor will the powerful preaching of the gospel by the 144,000, the two witnesses, countless other believers, and an angel from

heaven bring them to repentance (vv. 9, 11). Instead, their rebellion, defiance, and rejection of God will increase until the final judgments fall. This worldwide rebellion of sinful mankind will bring the worldwide judgments of holy God.<sup>37</sup>

- (a) Whose voice do you think John hears in verse 1 (Isaiah 66:6)?
  
- (b) What are the angels instructed to do? Who is ultimately behind the bowl judgments about to be poured out upon the world?
  
- (c) What is the result of the first bowl judgment (Exodus 9:9-11)? Who does this judgment affect?
  
- (d) What is the result of the second bowl judgment (Exodus 7:20-24)?

Exactly what supernatural means God will use to destroy the oceans is not revealed, but the effects will resemble those of the phenomenon known as the red tide. Commentator John Phillips writes:

From time to time, off the coast of California and elsewhere, a phenomenon known as “the red tide” occurs. These red tides kill millions of fish and poison those who eat contaminated shellfish. In 1949, one of these red tides hit the coast of Florida. First the water turned yellow, but by midsummer it was thick and viscous with countless billions of dinoflagellates, tiny one-celled organisms. Sixty-mile windrows of stinking fish fouled the beaches. Much marine life was wiped out, even bait used by fishermen died upon the hooks. Eventually the red tide subsided, only to appear again the following year. Eating fish contaminated by the tide produced severe symptoms caused by a potent nerve poison, a few grams of which, distributed aright, could easily kill everyone in the world. An unchecked population explosion of toxic dinoflagellates would kill all the fish in the sea. (*Exploring Revelation*, rev. ed. [Chicago: Moody, 1987; reprint, Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux, 1991], 190-91...

The transforming of the world’s seas into putrid pools of stinking death will be graphic testimony to the wickedness of man, and the reverse of the day when God originally gave life to all sea creatures (Gen. 1:21).<sup>38</sup>

- (e) What is the result of the third bowl judgment?

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 136-138.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 141.

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.<sup>39</sup>

- (f) Someone might say, "How can a God of love and mercy cause such horrible suffering for the people He created?" Someone might even question the justice of God in sending such judgments. In response to these possible objections, what does the angel in charge of the waters declare?
  
- (g) What did many of these inhabitants of the earth do to the saints of God (6:9-11; 7:9, 14; 17:6)?

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. Pharaoh tried to drown the Jewish boy babies, but it was his own army that eventually drowned in the Red Sea. 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 (II Samuel 1:1-16).<sup>40</sup>

- (h) What is the response that comes from the altar? Who do you think this voice represents (6:9-11)?

2. Read verses 8-16.

- (a) Read Isaiah 24:4-6. What is the result of the fourth bowl judgment? What is the response of the people of the earth?
  
- (b) Don't you find it amazing that people still refuse to repent and turn to God? What do you think is the main purpose of these judgments (II Peter 3:19)?
  
- (c) Read Acts 3:19 and Romans 2:4-5. God's desire is that all repent. Repentance simply means to agree with God that what you are doing is sinful, and then, turn away from it. What is in store for all who refuse to repent?

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 142.  
<sup>40</sup> Wiersbe, 610.

- (d) What is the result of the fifth bowl judgment? Once again, what is the response of the people of the earth?

The cumulative effect of the painful sores, fouled oceans, lack of drinking water, intense heat, all engulfed in thick blackness, will bring unbearable misery. Yet, incredibly, the wicked, unbelieving people of the world will still refuse to repent... This is the last reference to their unwillingness to repent. The first five plagues were God's final call to repentance. Sinners ignored that call, and are now confirmed in their unbelief. The final two bowls, containing the severest of all the judgments, will be poured out on hardened, implacable impenitents.<sup>41</sup>

- (e) Read Exodus 7:22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 35; 10:1, 27. Initially, Pharaoh would not listen to Moses and hardened his heart towards God. The more Pharaoh refused to repent the harder his heart became. So, in Exodus 10, what did God finally do to Pharaoh's heart? What is the eternal danger that people face who continually refuse to repent?

- (f) What is the result of the sixth bowl judgment?

- (g) Read Joel 3: 2, 9-13 and Zechariah 14:2-3. What do you think is the purpose of God in drying up the Euphrates River (v. 16)?

- (h) What will God use to deceive the armies of the world to gather for the Battle of Armageddon?

Har-Megdon is a Hebrew word meaning "Mount Megiddo." Since there is no specific mountain by that name, and Har can refer to hill country, it is probably a reference to the hill country surrounding the Plain of Megiddo, some sixty miles north of Jerusalem. More than two hundred battles have been fought in that region, including Barak's defeat of the Canaanites (Judg. 4-5; cf. Judg. 5:19), Gideon's victory over the Midianites (Judg. 7; cf. Judg. 6:33; the "valley of Jezreel" is another name for the Plain of Esdraelon) and Josiah's defeat at the hands of Pharaoh Neco (II Chron. 35:22). The Plain of Megiddo and the nearby Plain of Esdraelon will be the focal point for the Battle of Armageddon, which will rage the entire length of Israel as far south as the Edomite city of Bozrah (Isa. 63:1). Other battles will also occur in the vicinity of Jerusalem (Zech. 14:1-3).

The "battle" will be over almost as soon as it begins, as the Lord Jesus Christ returns to rescue His people (cf. Zech 14:1-3; Joel 3:16) and defeat His enemies. The resulting

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<sup>41</sup>

MacArthur, 145.

slaughter of the world's armies will be almost unimaginable, with blood splattered several feet high and perhaps running in streams throughout a distance of two hundred miles (14:20). The sixth bowl sets the final stage, but before the brief "battle," the seventh and final plague will hit.<sup>42</sup>

- (i) What word of comfort and encouragement (beatitude) does the Lord offer in the midst of all the horrors of judgment and war?
  
- (j) Read Isaiah 61:10; Romans 13:14; and, I John 2:28. What do you learn from these verses?

3. Read verses 17-21.

The seventh bowl is the final outpouring of God's wrath on sinners in this present earth. After it Jesus will come and set up His millennial kingdom. At the end of that thousand-year period, there will be on final act of rebellion, which will be quickly crushed (20:7-10). But that judgment will not take place in the world as we know it, for the earth will be changed dramatically before the kingdom arrives.

This final judgment of the present era will take place during the time when "the mystery of God is finished" (10:7). It is the last of the "seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God finished" (15:1). The seventh bowl will be the worst calamity in the world's history, the most complete and devastating catastrophe the earth will ever experience. Its effects carry all the way to the establishment of the earthly kingdom of Christ. Like the fourth angel, the seventh angel did not dump his bowl on the earth, but poured it out...upon the air. Its first effects were on the earth's atmosphere, as if God were cleansing the former domain of Satan and his demon hosts (12:9). The earth (v.2), the sea (v.3), the waters (v.4), the sun (v.8), and finally the air are the targets of judgment.<sup>43</sup>

- (a) Whose voice does John hear and what does he hear?
  
- (b) Read John 19:30 along with Isaiah 53:5-6, 10-12. What did Jesus "finish" at the cross? What has God "finished" with the seventh bowl judgment?
  
- (c) Describe what John witnesses in the unfolding horror of verses 18-21.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 150.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 151.

- (d) Read Zechariah 14:4-10. Zechariah describes in detail the changes that will take place when the Lord returns. Connect this passage to Revelation 16:17-21.

The final effect of the earthquake...is to prepare the earth for the millennial rule of the Lord Jesus Christ. To that end, the earth's topography will be drastically altered; every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. Islands, which are undersea mountains, will disappear and the mountains on land will be flattened (cf. Isa. 40:4), completing the process that began during the sixth seal (6:12-14). "The gentle rolling topography of the world as originally created will be restored. No more will there be great inaccessible, uninhabitable mountain ranges or deserts or ice caps. The physical environment of the millennium will be, in large measure, a restoration of the antediluvian [pre-Flood] environment" (Henry M. Morris, *The Revelation Record*, 321). That may leave Jerusalem as the highest point on earth, making it a fitting throne for the Great King who will rule there during the Millennium (Jer. 3:17).<sup>44</sup>

- (e) Once again, what will be the response of the inhabitants of the earth?
- (f) As you gain understanding of future events (eschatology), how does it affect your view of life and the world around you (Matthew 6:19-21; I Corinthians 7:31b; II Corinthians 5:16; I John 2:15-17).