

Lesson 26: Chapter 16

Revelation 16 marks a sobering and climactic moment in the book. After the heavenly prelude in **Revelation 15**—where the saints sing the song of Moses and the Lamb and the 7 angels prepare to pour out the final plagues—we now witness the full outpouring of God’s wrath. These are not partial judgments meant as warnings, like the trumpets, but full and final acts of retribution upon the unrepentant. The bowls reflect the righteous judgment of God against the beast’s kingdom and those who have aligned themselves with it. As such, they intensify the conflict between the holy God and the rebellious world system.

It is crucial to read these judgments symbolically but not dismissively. The bowl judgments echo the plagues of Egypt, reinforcing a typological pattern in which God delivers His people through acts of judgment upon their oppressors. Yet, unlike in Exodus—where Pharaoh’s heart was hardened and then softened for a moment before being hardened again—here the recipients of wrath persist in their rebellion to the bitter end. The judgments touch every aspect of the created order—earth, sea, rivers, sun, air. But remember that each symbol must be “brought through the wardrobe” into the manifest world.



[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.”

[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.

[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.

[4] The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. [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.

[6] For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink.

It is what they deserve!”

[7] And I heard the altar saying,

“Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!”

[8] The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. [9] 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.

[10] The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish [11] and cursed the God of heaven for their

pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

[12] The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way 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 demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. [15] (“Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”) [16] And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

[17] The seventh angel poured out his bowl into 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, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. [19] The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. [20] And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. [21] And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.

(Revelation 16, ESV)

The First 4 Bowls (vv. 1-9)

These first 4 bowls parallel the pattern we saw with the seals and trumpets: the judgments unfold in a 4-fold structure touching the major spheres of the created world—earth (v. 2), sea (v. 3), rivers (v. 4), and sky (v. 8). As with the trumpets, there is a clear echo of the plagues on Egypt. But unlike the trumpets, which were partial and served as warnings, the bowls are total and final. The wrath of God is no longer restrained.

Each bowl targets a different realm of created life, symbolizing God’s comprehensive judgment on the world order that supports and serves the beast’s kingdom, rather than the Lamb.

In [Revelation 16:2](#), the 1st bowl causes painful sores on those who bear the mark of the beast—striking their bodies in a way reminiscent of the 6th Egyptian plague. This is not a literal skin disease, but rather is likely symbolic of spiritual and psychological torment. Those who have given their allegiance to the beast begin to experience the consequences of their idolatry in a manifest and personal way. Sin frequently brings physical consequences in This Age.

In [Revelation 16:3-4](#), the 2nd and 3rd bowls affect the sea and fresh water, turning them to blood. This not only recalls the 1st plague of Egypt but also reflects economic judgment. In the ancient world, water—especially the sea—was tied to commerce, travel, and prosperity. The judgment here portrays the collapse of systems that sustain worldly power. Notably, in [Revelation 16:5-7](#), we hear an angel and the altar itself affirm that these judgments are just: those who shed the blood of saints now drink blood themselves. God’s justice is not arbitrary—it is measured, righteous, and proportionate.

In [Revelation 16:8-9](#), the 4th bowl turns the sun into an agent of destruction. Rather than giving light and life, the sun scorches men with fire—a symbol of intensified judgment and unrelenting exposure. As in [Romans 1](#), there is no repentance here, only blasphemy and rebellion. The more the truth of God is revealed, the more the unregenerate heart resists it.

Here is a call for wisdom and understanding. Many people look at loved ones who do not follow Christ and think “if only they had more revelation from God, they would believe!” These verses show that this is not so. Without a work of the Holy Spirit replacing a heart of stone with a heart of flesh ([Ezekiel 36:26](#)), opening eyes ([Acts 26:18](#)), granting repentance ([2 Timothy 2:25](#); [Acts 11:18](#)), granting belief ([Philippians 1:29](#)), and bringing new, spiritual life ([John 3:3-8](#)), the *only* human response to God’s revelation is blasphemy and rebellion. We have seen several times throughout just this book of Revelation how “*those who dwell on the earth*” refuse to give up their sin to embrace the Lamb. Even here, suffering under great judgment, they are not only *unable* but also *unwilling* to repent and bow the knee to Christ. It is sad. It is sobering. But it also informs us about the nature of spiritual realities. Therefore, let us thank God all the more for choosing us, not because we are better or smarter or wiser or “righteous-er”, but simply because He graciously chose to love and redeem us.

Taken together, the first 4 bowls show that God’s wrath is not limited to spiritual realities—it touches every part of life in this fallen world. Yet even under such severe judgment, the beast’s followers do not repent. These judgments expose their hardness of heart and the futility of rebellion, setting the stage for the more targeted judgments that follow.

The 5th Bowl (vv. 10-11)

With the 5th bowl, the focus of judgment shifts from the created order to the beast’s throne—the symbolic center of satanic and worldly power. As with the earlier bowls, this judgment is not arbitrary or isolated; it is cumulative. The first 4 bowls unraveled the infrastructure of the beast’s kingdom—land, sea, rivers, and sky. But now, the very seat of his dominion is struck, and the result is darkness: “*his kingdom was plunged into darkness*” ([Revelation 16:10](#)).

This darkness recalls the 9th plague on Egypt ([Exodus 10:21-23](#)), in which the land was enveloped in a darkness so thick it could be felt. But this 5th bowl also draws a theological line straight through the Cross of Christ. When Jesus bore the wrath of God on behalf of His people, the sky went dark for 3 hours ([Matthew 27:45](#)). That darkness was not a sign of divine abandonment—there was no rupture

in the Trinity, no “the Father turns His face away” from the Son. As James White rightly argues, there was Trinitarian harmony in the atonement: the Father, Son, and Spirit together willed and accomplished the redemption of the elect. Regarding [Matthew 27:46](#), where Christ cries out “*Eli, eli, lema sabacthani?*” that is “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*”, he rightly observes:

Whatever else Jesus was saying, He was not saying that, at the very time of His ultimate obedience to the Father, the Father abandoned Him. Rather, it seems much more logical to see this as a quotation of Psalm 22 that is meant to call to mind all of that Psalm, which would include the victory of v. 19ff, as well as verse 24, which states, “For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither has He hidden His face from him; but when he cried to Him for help, He heard.”¹

The darkness at Golgotha was not a breakdown in divine fellowship—it was a visible sign of divine judgment falling on the perfect Substitute in full covenantal unity.

Here in [Revelation 16](#), the symbolism is reversed. The darkness no longer falls on Christ as He bears the sin of others. It now falls upon those who have no representative substitute—those who chose the beast and refused the Lamb. The throne of darkness is swallowed in greater darkness. The false kingdom is judged, not by external attack alone, but by internal collapse, blindness, and disintegration. And still, there is no repentance—only anguish and blasphemy. “*They gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven... they did not repent of their deeds*” ([Revelation 16:11](#)).

The Scriptures absolutely SCREAM about Penal Substitutionary Atonement from Genesis through Revelation.

- *Adam was a federal head for all of mankind.*
- *In the garden, God provides skins from animals (representative substitutes) to clothe Adam and Eve, pointing forward to the shadows of the sacrificial system under Moses that itself points forward to Christ.*
- *Noah was a federal head for all of mankind.*
- *Abraham was a federal head for the line of the chosen seed.*
- *Judah redeems himself in the Genesis narrative by offering himself as a representative substitute for Benjamin.*
- *The priests were federal heads for the entire people of Israel.*
- *The people would place their hands on the head of the sacrificial animal, transferring their sins to their representative substitutes.*
- *The kings were federal heads for the nation of Israel. Saul was a failed representative substitute. David and Solomon were more successful, yet their failures still pointed forward to the need for a True King: Jesus.*
- *Christ was a federal head for His people as True Israel, which we join by being united to him in faith.*

Moving back to [Revelation 16:10-11](#), we see the deep horror of sin. Even when every worldly light goes out and every false hope is exposed, the unregenerate heart remains defiant. This is not merely inability—it is unwillingness. The judgment does not cause the spiritual condition of those outside of Christ; it reveals it. It is a sobering reminder that, as noted above, apart from grace, no amount of pain, revelation, or exposure will lead to repentance. Only the sovereign work of the Spirit—opening blind eyes, giving new hearts, granting repentance and faith—can turn rebels into worshipers.

The 6th Bowl (vv. 12-16)

The 6th bowl introduces a vivid and ominous scene: the drying up of the Euphrates River to prepare the way for the kings from the east ([Revelation 16:12](#)). This imagery recalls God’s historic judgments on Babylon. In the Old Testament, the Euphrates was not only a geographical boundary but a symbolic marker of imperial might. When Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 BC, he diverted the Euphrates, allowing his armies to march into the city and bring its downfall. That event was orchestrated by God Himself ([Isaiah 44:27-45:7](#)). Likewise here: the drying of the river is not the result of human ingenuity or demonic power, but a divine act of preparation—God is setting the stage for the collapse of the final Babylon, the beast’s kingdom. It is a judgment in motion.

¹ James R. White, *The Forgotten Trinity*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2019), 215n1.

Yet even as God clears the path, what follows is a flurry of demonic activity. **3** unclean spirits like frogs come from the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (**Revelation 16:13**). These are not literal frogs (“*unclean spirits like frogs*”, emphasis mine), but symbols of deceptive, unclean, persuasive influence—spirits of demonic propaganda that echo the magicians of Egypt in the 2nd plague (**Exodus 8:1–15**). These unclean spirits go out to the kings of the earth and gather them for battle. But the battle is a farce. The enemy assembles not to defeat God but to be defeated by Him. As with Pharaoh, the hardening is divine. The preparation is divine. And the judgment is divine.

Revelation 16:14 names this conflict “*the great day of God the Almighty*”. This is the final confrontation, the consummate “*Day of the Lord*” that has echoed throughout redemptive history (cf. **Joel 2:1–11**; **Zephaniah 1:14–18**; **2 Thessalonians 1:7–10**). The enemies of God are lured into confrontation—not because they can win, but because God will glorify Himself in their defeat.

Before the battle is named, Christ speaks:

“Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!” (**Revelation 16:15**)

This interjection is pastoral and urgent. It is not merely a narrative aside; it is a call to vigilance. The reference to a “*thief*” recalls Jesus’s own words in **Matthew 24:43–44** and Paul’s teaching in **1 Thessalonians 5:2–6**. The focus is not on the secretive nature of His return—as if the parousia will happen in stealth—but on its suddenness and unexpectedness. The world will not be ready. But believers must be. To be “*awake*” is to be alert in faith, and to have one’s “*garments on*” is to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ, living in spiritual sobriety and holiness (cf. **Revelation 3:18**; **7:14**).

The danger is not missing Christ’s return—it will be visible and cosmic (**Revelation 1:7**; **Matthew 24:27**). The danger is being found spiritually naked—unclothed, unrepentant, and unprepared. This call is reminiscent of Jesus’s words to the churches in **Revelation 2–3**: “*To the one who conquers...*” He speaks not to frighten but bless—to encourage perseverance even as the world rallies against Him.

Finally, **Revelation 16:16** names the location: Armageddon (or more accurately, Har-Megiddo). While much ink has been spilled trying to identify a precise geographical site, the point is symbolic. This is not a literal battlefield in northern Israel. The name itself translates to “the mountain at Megiddo”, but there is no mountain there. Rather, it echoes the pattern of cosmic conflict seen in passages like **Judges 5** (Deborah’s song), **2 Chronicles 20** (Jehoshaphat’s prayer), **Zechariah 12–14**, and **Joshua 10**. In each case, God’s people are surrounded, yet the Lord Himself fights for them—whether by throwing their enemies into confusion, raining down hailstones from heaven, or lengthening the day so judgment may be complete. The same will be true in the end. The beast’s kingdom will gather for war, and God will answer—not with fear, but with final justice.

The 7th Bowl (vv. 17–21)

The 7th bowl brings the climactic outpouring of God’s wrath. As the angel pours the final bowl into the air—the realm of demonic and spiritual powers (cf. **Ephesians 2:2**)—a loud voice comes from the throne in the temple, declaring: “*It is done!*” (**Revelation 16:17**). This echoes Christ’s final cry from the Cross: “*It is finished*” (**John 19:30**). *There*, redemption was accomplished. *Here*, judgment is complete. The work of God reaches its telos, its end, its consummation—first in grace, now in wrath.

The accompanying signs are unmistakably apocalyptic: lightning, thunder, a great earthquake unlike any in human history. These signs echo the 7th seal and 7th trumpet (**Revelation 8:5**; **11:19**), underscoring once again that we have arrived at the end. The shaking of the earth is not just geological—it is cosmic. The very foundations of the fallen order are being undone.

Revelation 16:19 describes the great city—Babylon—split into **3** parts. This fracture symbolizes the unraveling of the entire rebellious world system. The cities of the nations fall, and Babylon receives the cup of the fury of God’s wrath. As we will see in **Revelation 17–18**, this judgment on Babylon will be further expanded in a visionary flashback. But here we are given the end result: total collapse.

Even nature itself is undone. Islands flee. Mountains vanish. (*Exactly* like the 6th seal.) A storm of hailstones—each weighing about a talent (roughly 75 pounds)—falls from heaven. This final plague mirrors the 7th Egyptian plague ([Exodus 9:13–35](#)) but with unmatched fury. And yet, despite the terrifying scope of this judgment, “*they cursed God*” ([Revelation 16:21](#)). As before, “*those who dwell on the earth*”, those unbelievers who do **NOT** “*keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus*” ([Revelation 12:17](#)) show no repentance—only defiance, rebellion, and blasphemy.

Conclusion

With the 7th bowl, we have reached another end-of-history moment in the book of Revelation. Just as the 7th seal and the 7th trumpet brought us to the brink of final judgment, so now the 7th bowl brings the full and final outpouring of God’s wrath upon the earth. This is not a chronological sequence following the previous visions, but a parallel unveiling—a recapitulation of the same great drama from a new vantage point.

The cyclical structure of Revelation does not weaken its message—it deepens it. Each cycle intensifies the focus, bringing new angles on the same eschatological reality: the Lamb conquers, the beast falls, the Church is vindicated, and the world that rejected Christ is judged.

Here, at the end of [Revelation 16](#), the earthly order is dismantled, Babylon is collapsing, and God’s wrath has been poured to the dregs. The stage is now set for the vision to shift once again—from the symbolic end to a symbolic rewind. [Revelation 17–19](#) will take us back through the story of Babylon’s rise and fall in greater detail. But in terms of finality, the declaration has already been made:

“It is done.”

This Age, governed by the beast and marked by rebellion, is brought to a crashing end. What follows, after judgment, is glory: the vindication of the Bride, the return of the King, and the dawn of the eternal state in the New Heavens and New Earth. This is the blessed hope of all who have washed their robes and kept their garments on ([Revelation 7:14; 16:15](#)). The bowls are not the end of the story—but they bring the end of This Age, and the beginning of forever.