

The Bowls Of Wrath

Revelation 16 Notes

Bowls Involving Nature (vss. 1-9)

- A great or loud voice has been heard many times before; however, this time the command comes from within the sanctuary, so it is from a divine source. The instruction is to all seven angels, and is not repeated; each angel carries out his order as directed. Being poured out "into the earth" signifies that all bowls would affect the world of unregenerate men.
- As in the human body where sores break out from an accumulation of impurities that permeate the whole body, so also in this case it is the corruption of the world breaking out. Only those are afflicted who participated in the false worship of the beast and his image and became corrupted by the immorality of pagan standards.
- The second bowl of wrath brings into focus the utter putrefaction of a dead society. This really reveals the true nature of the spiritually dead. The result is death to all who come into such society -- not inherited, but consequential death.
- The third plague is reminiscent of the first that befell Egypt when the waters of the Nile were turned to blood, became foul and killed the fish. At that time, however, the people could dig and find water to drink (Exodus 7:24); under the plague of the third bowl, even the underground springs are turned to blood.
- The "angel of the waters," who is over the rivers and fountains which are so essential to life, proclaims the righteousness of this judgment. It proceeds from the righteous character of God whose judgments and ways are always right, for they are expressions of His holy nature.
- "They" are the worshipers of Caesar, who cried for the blood of God's New Testament saints and prophets, for those of the Old Testament are not under consideration. Because they had been so eager for blood, they shall be satiated with blood; it shall be given them to drink, which is more than they had looked for. The retribution of a righteous judgment must finally overtake the wicked would-be destroyers of God's people.
- What will happen to God's people in a world where all fountains and rivers are turned to blood? Christians have a life-sustaining water unknown to the pagans to whom God had given blood to drink (Isaiah 12:3; John 4:14).
- Men had attempted to lead people astray and God responds with a

scorching fiery judgment (cf. Isaiah 47:13-15; 50:11). In contrast to these, those who had suffered martyrdom at the hands of the heathen were where "neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat" (7:16).

- Instead of recognizing their sin and repenting, men added two additional crimes. Their failure to repent indicates that in these plagues the final judgment has not been reached, for then there is no opportunity for repentance.

Bowls Involving The Moral And Spiritual (vss. 10-21)

- This throne was the seat of world power, which would have been thought of by the saints of John's day as the world rule from Rome. This throne should not be restricted to Rome only; for wherever world power is worshiped, there the beast has his throne. Instead of recognizing and acknowledging their own sins, they blasphemed God.
- The Euphrates mentioned in the sixth bowl is not a physical or geographical location; it symbolizes a barrier or deterrent to invasion, which is now removed. The "kings" are the forces gathered together as enemies of God's cause, mustered by the unclean spirits "to the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (vs. 14).
- John sees unclean spirits or messengers as frogs at work in the world. To the Egyptian, the frog was the symbol of the goddess Heqt, a goddess of resurrection and fertility. However, to a Jewish mind, such gods were "devils" (vs. 14), Satan's emissaries and inseparable from idolatry (9:20; 18:2; 1 Corinthians 10:20-21). These demons produce miraculous signs like the false prophet (13:13-14), and this connects their activity to the deception of the earth's kings. Their croaking probably symbolizes confusion.
- Their "signs," though, were not real miracles, for neither Satan nor his helpers can work a real miracle (12:1; 13:13-14). Since Christians had been warned (Matthew 24:24; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; 1 Timothy 4:1), only unbelievers would succumb to such delusions. "The great day of God Almighty" is a day of judgment, but not the final or ultimate judgment, for there will be no battle fought at that time -- all will be over.
- The idea of coming as a thief had been spoken by the Lord during His ministry to encourage constant watch and preparedness for His coming (Luke 12:39-40). The present tense, "watches" and "keeps," indicates a constant conflict necessitating a daily watchfulness; one must continuously be on guard. In the midst of the scene of the gathering army and decisive battle, there is a parenthetical warning and exhortation to the saints not to be deceived or led astray by what is taking place.

- John uses "Armageddon" symbolically to describe a great decisive spiritual battle between the army of Satan and the forces of God, which would determine the fate of each. This battle was fought and won by the Lord in the complete defeat of the Roman Empire and paganism behind which Rome threw its total power.
- It is reasonable to conclude that the seventh bowl would affect the whole sphere of Satan's operation. Air would be an appropriate emblem of the prevailing influence or surroundings of the realm in which the wicked live, move and breathe, being dominated by the devil. Satan's own realm receives a disastrous shock, together with the fall of Babylon and the empire of which she ruled.
- Babylon does not fall alone, for the scene pictures the collapse of the pagan city and its daughters, a description of which follows in chapters 17-18. As God had promised, He would give this cup to the worshipers of the beast and his image, so now he also gives it to Babylon.
- In this plague upon Babylon, the fleeing of the islands is parallel to the disappearance of the mountains (6:14). In the fall of this great world power there would be no place for refuge, for all such places will have been removed.
- The hail in vs. 21 was of a sufficient weight as to kill instantly. Hail had been a symbol of divine wrath and judgment since the plagues upon Egypt, for the seventh plague had been "a grievous hail" upon man and beast (Exodus 9:18-26; cf. Psalm 78:47; 105:32). However, God's judgment upon wickedness and idolatry failed to change the hardened hearts of wicked men. The severest of divine judgments had now been poured out upon wicked and ungodly men, touching all phases and realms of Roman society and power. Only the final judgment, which would bring all men, nations and wickedness to a total end, could surpass in intensity and finality judgments such as these.