Revelation 16

The Seven Bowls of Wrath

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION

"These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."
Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

God's patience has an end, and when it comes, His judgments are complete, righteous and unanswerable — yet hearts that refuse grace still refuse to repent under wrath.

Ed Smith · Started 10 October 2026

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00 The Text

REVELATION 16 (KJV), MARKED

▲ Gold God — His character & actions
Green Command / instruction
Sky Key repeated word
⚠ Rose Sin / warning
★ Violet Promise / blessing
Amber Time / place / contrast

1 And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the ▲ wrath of God upon the earth.

2 And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the ⚠ mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image.

3 And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea.

4 And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood.

5 And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art ▲ righteous, O Lord, which art , and wast , and shalt be , because thou hast judged thus.

6 For they have shed the ⚠ blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.

7 And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, ▲ true and righteous are thy judgments.

8 And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire.

9 And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they ⚠ repented not to give him glory.

10 And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain,

11 And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and ⚠ repented not of their deeds.

12 And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.

13 And I saw three ⚠ unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.

14 For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

15 Behold, I come as ▲ a thief. ★ Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.

16 And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.

17 And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, ▲ It is done.

18 And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.

19 And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.

20 And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.

21 And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.

Marked in the text

- **v1** pour out
- **v1** wrath of God
- **v2** poured *(every occurrence)*
- **v2** mark of the beast
- **v5** righteous
- **v6** blood of saints and prophets
- **v7** true and righteous
- **v9** blasphemed *(every occurrence)*
- **v9** repent
- **v11** repent
- **v12** Euphrates
- **v12** the east
- **v13** unclean spirits like frogs
- **v14** great day of God
- **v15** a thief
- **v15** Blessed is
- **v16** Armageddon
- **v16** Har-Magedon
- **v17** It is done
- **v19** Babylon
- **v19** wrath

Marks are drawn on the KJV text. KJV "vials" are the NASB95's "bowls"; "Armageddon" is "Har-Magedon"; "a talent" of hail is "about one hundred pounds." Marks appear on whichever wording matches.

01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · REVELATION 16:1 (KJV)

1 And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.

Setting

Heaven's temple, filled with smoke from God's glory so that no one can enter (15:8). A loud voice from the temple sends the seven angels: "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God" (v1). This is the last series of judgments — the bowls complete God's wrath (15:1).

The seven bowls

1. **Earth** — a loathsome, malignant sore on those who have the mark of the beast and worship his image (v2).
2. **Sea** — it becomes blood like that of a dead man; every living thing in the sea dies (v3).
3. **Rivers and springs** — they become blood (v4). Interlude: the angel of the waters declares God righteous, because those who shed the blood of saints and prophets are given blood to drink; the altar answers, "true and righteous are Your judgments" (vv5–7).
4. **Sun** — it scorches men with fierce heat; they blaspheme the name of God and do not repent to give Him glory (vv8–9).
5. **The throne of the beast** — his kingdom goes dark; men gnaw their tongues in pain, blaspheme the God of heaven and do not repent of their deeds (vv10–11).
6. **The Euphrates** — dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the east (v12). Three unclean spirits like frogs come from the mouths of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet; they are spirits of demons performing signs, gathering the kings of the whole world for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty (vv13–14). Parenthesis from Jesus: "Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes" (v15). They gather at the place called in Hebrew Har-Magedon (v16).
7. **The air** — a loud voice from the throne: "It is done." Lightning, thunder, the greatest earthquake since man has been on the earth (vv17–18). The great city splits into three parts, the cities of the nations fall, and Babylon the great is remembered before God to receive the cup of His fierce wrath (v19). Islands flee, mountains vanish (v20), and huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds fall; men blaspheme God because of the plague (v21).

Repeated words

poured out, bowl, great/loud (Greek *megas*), blasphemed, did not repent, wrath, righteous, voice.

Contrasts

the angel and the altar declare Him righteous (vv5–7) ⟷ the earth-dwellers blaspheme His name (vv9, 11, 21). The demonic trinity's mouths send out frogs ⟷ the throne speaks "It is done."

Parallels with the trumpets (ch. 8–9)

earth, sea, waters, sun, darkness, Euphrates — but the trumpets struck a third, and the bowls strike everything.

Parallels with Egypt

sores (Ex 9:10), water to blood (Ex 7:20), darkness (Ex 10:22), frogs (Ex 8:6), hail (Ex 9:23).

Chapter theme (my words)

God's patience has an end, and when it comes, His judgments are complete, righteous and unanswerable — yet hearts that refuse grace still refuse to repent under wrath.

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · REVELATION 16:5–7 (KJV)

5 And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art ▲ righteous, O Lord, which art , and wast , and shalt be , because thou hast judged thus. 6 For they have shed the ⚠ blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy. 7 And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, ▲ true and righteous are thy judgments.

Who speaks (v1)?

Guzik reasons that the loud voice is God Himself, since no one else could be in the temple (15:8). The bowls are the last of the three woes (11:14), and Guzik places them at the very end of the seven years, just before Christ returns. They answer the martyrs' cry "How long?" (6:10).

Literal, not just symbolic

Guzik answers commentators who make "earth," "sea" and "sun" mean something else (Poole, for example). His point: if earth doesn't mean earth, no one can say what it means. The Exodus plagues are the pattern, and the reality will be worse than the symbols, not milder.

Bowls 2–3 — total, not partial

The second trumpet turned a third of the sea to blood (8:8–9); the second bowl turns all of it. Guzik notes that "blood like that of a dead man" is congealed and rotting — the ocean as a corpse. With fresh water gone too (v4), the world's ecology collapses. That is one reason Guzik thinks the time from these bowls to Christ's return must be very short.

God is just (vv5–7)

Those who poured out the blood of saints and prophets are given blood to drink — Guzik, quoting Clarke: they thirsted for blood, and now they have it. The voice from the altar (where the martyrs' souls were, 6:9) says "Yes" (v7). Judgment is not God losing His temper; it is God being exactly right.

Bowls 4–5 — pain without repentance

The sun, God's gift, becomes a weapon (vv8–9). Darkness falls on the beast's throne — a preview of the "outer darkness" (Matt 25:30). Twice John says they did not repent. Guzik's key lesson, citing Spurgeon: suffering by itself does not produce repentance, and pain and poverty are not evangelists. Those who are not won by grace will not be won by wrath. Guzik also distinguishes the fear-driven regret of a man who only hates the consequences from true repentance, which hates the sin.

Bowl 6 — the stage is set (vv12–16)

The Euphrates was the eastern boundary of the Roman world and of the land promised to Abraham (Gen 15:18). Drying it removes the last barrier to the armies of the east. The frog-like spirits are unclean and noisy, all croak and no substance. Guzik, citing Swete: Christ cast out unclean spirits; His

enemies send them out. They work signs to deceive the kings into gathering, but it is God who gathers them, to their own destruction (compare 19:19–21; Joel 3:2; Zech 14:2–3).

Armageddon (v16)

Har-Magedon = "mountain of Megiddo." Megiddo guarded the pass into the Jezreel Valley (the plain of Esdraelon), the most fought-over ground in Israel — Deborah's victory (Judg 5:19), Josiah's death (2 Kings 23:29). Guzik takes it as a literal place where the armies assemble before marching on Jerusalem. He distinguishes three end-time battles: Gog and Magog against Israel (Ezek 38–39), Armageddon against the returning Christ (Rev 19), and the final rebellion after the Millennium (Rev 20:7–10).

The parenthesis (v15)

In the middle of the gathering armies, Jesus speaks to His own: "I am coming like a thief." Guzik reads the garments as practical righteousness. The blessed believer is awake, dressed, and not spiritually exposed (compare 3:18; Matt 24:42–44; 1 Thess 5:2–6).

Bowl 7 — "It is done" (vv17–21)

Greek *gegonen*, "it has come to pass." On the cross Jesus said *tetelestai*, "It is finished" — salvation's work completed (John 19:30). Here judgment's work is completed. Babylon is "remembered" (v19), and chapters 17–18 now zoom in on exactly how. The hailstones weigh about a talent each (NASB: "about one hundred pounds"), and still men blaspheme.

The "great" chapter

Guzik notes how often "great" (*megas*) appears: great voice, great heat, great river, great day, great earthquake, great city, great Babylon, great hail. It is great evil met by a great God.

Word study (Greek)

- **bowl — *phialē* (G5357):** a wide, shallow bowl. It empties all at once rather than trickling.
- **wrath — *thymos* (G2372) and *orgē* (G3709):** *thymos* is passionate, boiling anger; *orgē* is settled, steady anger. In v19 both appear together ("His fierce wrath"). Walvoord, quoted by Guzik, calls the combination the strongest kind of outpouring of divine judgment.
- **sore — *helkos* (G1668):** an ulcerated, festering sore; the same word the Greek Old Testament uses for Egypt's boils (Ex 9:9–11).
- **righteous — *dikaios* (G1342):** just, right — the angel's verdict on God (v5).
- **blasphemed — *blasphēmeō* (G987):** to speak injuriously, to slander God's name.
- **repent — *metanoeō* (G3340):** to change one's mind, turn around. Twice: "they did not."
- **frogs — *batrachos* (G944):** used only here in the New Testament; the Law made such water creatures detestable (Lev 11:10–12).
- **Har-Magedon — *Harmagedōn* (G717):** "mountain of Megiddo."
- **It is done — *gegonen*** (perfect of *ginomai*, G1096): "it stands accomplished."
- **talent-weight — *talantiaios* (G5006):** used only here; a talent weighed about 100 lb.

Cross-references

Ex 7–10; Rev 8:6–9:21; Rev 15:1, 7–8; Ps 79:6; Joel 3:2, 12–14; Zech 14:2–3; Rev 19:11–21; Matt 24:42–44; John 19:30.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · REVELATION 16:15 (KJV)

15 Behold, I come as ▲ a thief. ★ Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.

Promise to trust

"Righteous are You … true and righteous are Your judgments" (vv5, 7). When I can't make sense of the evil done to God's people — to believers in prisons overseas, to the men I know whose lives were wrecked by others — this chapter tells me that God keeps the books. Not one drop of the blood of saints and prophets is forgotten. I can leave vengeance with Him (Rom 12:19).

Warning to heed

Three times men blaspheme, and twice they "did not repent." Pain didn't change them, and it won't change anyone without grace. That rescues me from a common lie in ministry: "He just needs to hit bottom." Bottom doesn't save anyone; Christ does. Suffering can open a door, but only grace walks a man through it. So I keep preaching grace *before* the bowls fall, while it is still "today" (Heb 3:15).

Command to obey

"Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes" (v15). Right in the middle of the armies gathering for Armageddon, Jesus speaks to me about my own wardrobe. Am I awake spiritually? Am I clothed in practical righteousness, or have I let something expose me? For men in recovery, "stay awake" is very practical: guard the late night, the lonely hour, the old places.

Sin to confess

The frogs come out of mouths. Deception travels by speech: slick, noisy and persuasive. Lord, guard what goes into my ears and what comes out of my mouth, and keep my teaching clean of hype.

Worship

"It is done." The same Lord who said "It is finished" over my sin will one day say "It is done" over all evil. Because He drank the cup of wrath for me at Calvary, I will never drink this one. That is the gospel in the middle of the bowls.

Prayer

Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments. Thank You that Jesus drank the cup I deserved. Keep me awake and clothed, keep my mouth clean of deception, and make me urgent to tell men about grace while it is still today. Amen.