

Revelation 16
The Seven Bowls of Judgment

<p>First Bowl: Loathsome Sores</p> <p>Second Bowl: The Sea Turns to Blood</p> <p>Third Bowl: The Waters Turn to Blood</p> <p>Fourth Bowl: Men are Scorched</p> <p>Fifth Bowl: Darkness and Pain</p> <p>Sixth Bowl: Euphrates Dried Up</p>	<p>Revelation 16 (NKJV)</p> <p>¹ Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth.”</p> <p>² So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.</p> <p>³ Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead <i>man</i>; and every living creature in the sea died.</p> <p>⁴ Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.</p> <p>⁵ And I heard the angel of the waters saying: “You are righteous, O Lord, The One who is and who was and who is to be, Because You have judged these things.</p> <p>⁶ For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, And You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due.”</p> <p>⁷ And I heard another from the altar saying, “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous <i>are</i> Your judgments.”</p> <p>⁸ Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire.</p> <p>⁹ And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.</p> <p>¹⁰ Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain.</p> <p>¹¹ They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.</p> <p>¹² Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared.</p> <p>¹³ And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs <i>coming</i> out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.</p> <p>¹⁴ For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, <i>which</i> go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that</p>
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<p>Seventh Bowl: The Earth Utterly Shaken</p>	<p>great day of God Almighty. ¹⁵ “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.” ¹⁶ And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon. ¹⁷ Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” ¹⁸ And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. ¹⁹ Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. ²⁰ Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. ²¹ And great hail from heaven fell upon men, <i>each hailstone</i> about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.</p>
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The Voice of Fulfillment (Rev. 15:5–16:21)

The “great voice” out of the temple commands the seven angels to pour out the contents of their vials (Rev. 16:1), after which he announces “It is done!” (Rev. 16:17) The “mystery of God” is finished! (Rev. 10:7) The martyrs in glory had asked, “How long?” (Rev. 6:9–11) and now their cry would be answered.

The seven angels emerge from the heavenly temple (see Rev. 11:19), because their work is holy as are the judgments they bring. The angels’ clothing reminds us of the priestly garments, for their service is a divine ministry. When the Old Testament tabernacle and temple were dedicated, these earthly buildings were filled with God’s glory (Ex. 40:34–35; 2 Chron. 7:1–4); but now the *heavenly* temple is filled with smoke (see Isa. 6:4; Ezek. 10:4). This smoke likewise is evidence of God’s glory and power.

Each of the angels has a specific “target” for the contents of his vial. The earth-dwellers have already suffered from the seal and trumpet judgments, but this final series of judgments will climax God’s plan, leading to Babylon’s fall and Jesus Christ’s return to earth.

Grievous sores (v. 2). This vial judgment reminds us of the sixth plague in Egypt (Ex. 9:8–12; note also Deut. 28:27, 35). Only those who have submitted to “the beast” and who have rejected the warning of the first angel will experience this judgment (Rev. 14:6–7).

Revelation 16:10–11 suggests that these sores do not disappear; for by the time of the fifth vial, people are still in pain from the first judgment. Yet their pain will not cause them to repent (see Rev. 9:20–21). William R. Newell used to say, “If men are not won by grace, they will never be won.”

It is an awesome thought to consider almost the entire population of the world suffering from a painful malady that nothing can cure. Constant pain affects a person's disposition so that he finds it difficult to get along with other people. Human relations during that period will certainly be at their worst.

Waters turned to blood (vv. 3–6). The second and third vials parallel the first plague in Egypt (Ex. 7:14–25). The second vial will center on the sea, and the third will turn the inland waters (rivers and fountains) into blood. When the second trumpet judgment occurred, a third part of the sea became blood; but with this judgment, the entire system of seas and oceans will be polluted. The third trumpet made a third part of the inland waters bitter as wormwood; but the third vial will turn all of those bitter waters into blood.

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 (2 Sam. 1:1–16).

Great heat from the sun (vv. 8–9). All earthly life depends on the light of the sun. In previous judgments, a part of the sun had been dimmed (Rev. 8:12), but now the heat of the sun is increased. Anyone who has been on the desert knows how merciless the sun's heat can be. Remembering too that the water system is now useless, you can imagine how people will suffer from thirst. Alas, even this judgment will not bring men to their knees! (see Mal. 4:1)

Darkness (vv. 10–11). This is not worldwide darkness; only "the beast," his throne, and his kingdom are affected. This reminds us of the fifth trumpet (Rev. 9:2) and the ninth plague (Ex. 10:21–23). Where is the throne of "the beast"? His image is in the temple in Jerusalem, so that may be the center of his operation. Or perhaps he is ruling from Rome, in cooperation with the apostate church headquartered there.

When God sent the ninth plague to Egypt, the entire land was dark, except for Goshen where the Israelites lived. The judgment of the fifth vial is just the opposite: there is light for the world, but darkness reigns at the headquarters of "the beast"! Certainly this will be a great blow to his "image" throughout the earth.

The Euphrates dried up (vv. 12–16). This famous river was mentioned earlier in Revelation, when the sixth trumpet sounded (Rev. 9:13ff) and the angels were loosed who were bound therein. At that time, an army of demonic horsemen was also released. Now, an army from the nations of the world gathers for the great battle at Armageddon. The drying up of the river will make it possible for the army of the "kings of the East" to come to Palestine and invade the Holy Land.

We often speak of "the battle of Armageddon," but nowhere does the Bible use that phrase. On September 2, 1945, when General Douglas MacArthur supervised signing the peace treaty with Japan, he said: "We have had our last chance. If we will not devise something greater and more equitable [than war], Armageddon will be at our door."

The name *Armageddon* comes from two Hebrew words, *har Megiddo*, the hill of Megiddo. The word *Megiddo* means "place of troops" or "place of slaughter." It is also called the Plain of Esdraelon and the Valley of Jezreel. The area is about fourteen miles wide and twenty miles long, and forms what Napoleon called "the most natural battlefield of the whole earth." Standing

on Mount Carmel and overlooking that great plain, you can well understand why it would be used for gathering the armies of the nations.

It was on this plain that Barak defeated the armies of Canaan (Jud. 5:19). Gideon met the Midianites there (Jud. 7) and it was there that King Saul lost his life (1 Sam. 31). Titus and the Roman army used this natural corridor, as did the Crusaders in the Middle Ages. British General Allenby used it when he defeated the Turkish armies in 1917.

From a human viewpoint, it appears that the armies of the nations are gathering on their own; but John makes it clear that the military movement is according to God's plan. The satanic trinity, through demonic powers, will influence the nations and cause the rulers to assemble their armies. They will even work miracles that will impress the rulers and cause them to cooperate. But all this will merely fulfill the will of God and accomplish His purposes (see Rev. 17:17). The Gentile nations will look on Armageddon as a battle, but to God, it will be only a "supper" for the fowls of the air (Rev. 19:17–21).

Zechariah 12 and 14 describe this event from Israel's point of view. Since "the beast" has set up his image in the temple at Jerusalem, and since many of the Jews will not bow down to him, it is natural that the Holy City should be the object of attack. However, not only the Jews are involved; for God has a purpose for the Gentile nations as well. Joel 3:9–21 parallels the Zechariah references, and Joel 3:19 makes clear that God will punish the Gentiles for the way they have treated the Jews (see also Isa. 24; Zeph. 3:8ff).

The outcome of the "battle" is recorded in Revelation 19: the Lord returns and defeats His enemies. Obviously, the assembling and marching armies create no problem for Almighty God. When the nations rage and defy Him, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure" (Ps. 2:4–5).

"It is done!" (vv. 17–21) The devil is "the prince of the power of the air," so perhaps this seventh vial has a special effect on his dominion (Eph. 2:2). But the immediate result is a devastating earthquake that affects the cities of the nations. Satan's entire system is now about to be judged by God: his religious system (the harlot, Rev. 17), his political and economic system (Babylon, Rev. 18), and his military system (the armies, Rev. 19).

The "great city" (Rev. 16:19) is probably Jerusalem (see Rev. 11:8). The Prophet Zechariah prophesied an earthquake that would change the topography of Jerusalem (Zech. 14:4). But the key idea here is that Babylon would fall (see Jer. 50–51). "The beast's" great economic system, which subjugated the people of the world, would be completely destroyed by God.

Added to the earthquake will be a hailstorm with hailstones of tremendous weight. (A talent of silver weighs about 125 pounds!) This judgment is reminiscent of the seventh plague in Egypt (Ex. 9:22–26). Just as Pharaoh and the Egyptian leaders did not repent, so the earth-dwellers will not repent; in fact, they will blaspheme God! No wonder the hail comes, for blasphemers are supposed to be stoned to death (Lev. 24:16).

Reviewing these three chapters, we see the encouragement they give to suffering Christians. The sealed 144,000 will arrive on Mount Zion and praise God (Rev. 14:1–5). The martyrs will also be in glory, praising God (Rev. 15:1–4). John's message is clear: it is possible to be victorious over "the beast" and be an overcomer!

Movements of armies, confederations of nations, and worldwide opposition to God cannot hinder the Lord from fulfilling His Word and achieving His purposes. Men think they are free to do as they please, but in reality, they are accomplishing the plans and purposes of God!

Every generation of Christians has been able to identify with the events in Revelation 14–16. There has always been a “beast” to oppress God’s people and a false prophet to try to lead them astray. We have always been on the verge of an “Armageddon” as the nations wage war.

But in the last days, these events will accelerate and the Bible’s prophecies will be ultimately fulfilled. I believe the church will not be on the scene at that time, but both Jewish and Gentile believers will be living who will have to endure Antichrist’s rule.

The admonition in Revelation 16:15 applies to us all: “Behold, I [Jesus] come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.” Jesus Christ may return at any time, and it behooves us to keep our lives clean, to watch, and to be faithful.¹

15:5 The temple of the tabernacle links the powerful imagery of the heavenly temple in 11:19 with the strong parallels in ch. 15 to the Exodus period, when the majestic presence of God was clearly seen in the tabernacle. The tabernacle **of the testimony** calls attention to the Law or the tablets of testimony given to Moses (see Ex. 31:18; 32:15). In the new heaven and new earth the tabernacle of God will be with believers because He will dwell eternally with them (21:3).

15:6 Seven angels come forward to administer the **seven plagues**, which are the last plagues (v. 1) God will send forth before Christ returns. **clothed in pure bright linen . . . golden bands:** Because their garments signify purity and righteousness, the angels are representatives of spotless justice.

15:7 The **golden bowls** of wrath recall the similar golden bowls that in 5:8 hold incense, representing the prayers of the saints.

15:8 The **smoke** that **filled** the **temple** had its source in the power and glory of God and prohibited access into the most holy place. The smoke signified God’s resolve to act in judgment as an expression of His character and authority. Judgment was now irreversible, with no place for intercession (see Lam. 3:44).

16:1 The **loud voice from the temple** is likely the voice of God, since no other heavenly being could enter the heavenly temple “till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed” (15:8).

16:2 The effect of the **first . . . bowl** being **poured out** is a terrible **sore** upon all **who had the mark of the beast** (13:16, 17). The Egyptians faced a similar affliction during the sixth plague of the Exodus (see Ex. 9:9–11). Just as God’s great power could not be denied by the Egyptians and their magicians (see Ex. 9:11), so unbelieving people will be unable to deny God’s sovereign justice as the bowls of God’s judgments rapidly progress (vv. 9, 11, 21).

16:3 The **second . . . bowl** turns the **sea** into **blood**, as did the second trumpet (8:8). However, only a third of the sea was affected by the trumpet (8:8, 9). This bowl brings about the death of **every living creature** in the sea. This verse is similar to Ex. 7:17–21, in which the Nile River is turned to blood; however, the judgment here is infinitely worse because of its global scope.

16:4 The **third . . . bowl**, like the third trumpet (8:10), targets **the rivers and springs of water**. This time, however, the impact is worldwide (compare 8:10, 11), and the water sources turn to **blood** instead of just becoming “bitter” (see 8:11).

¹Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Re 15:5

16:5 The angel of the waters is probably the same angel who poured out the third bowl (v. 4), and not a separate figure. Because God is eternally **righteous**, His judgment of the inhabitants of the earth (v. 10) and their violent, unrighteous works is completely just.

16:6 God forces the unrepentant (v. 9) unbelievers who **have shed the blood** of God's people to **drink** blood in order to avenge the deaths of the martyrs, as some of them requested in 6:10.

Saints refers to those who are set apart because of their relationship with Jesus Christ. In Revelation, saints may be Christians in general (5:8), or those believers facing persecution and martyrdom (13:7). **Prophets** may refer to all of God's spokesmen who have been killed as a result of persecution, or specifically to the two witnesses who prophesied for three and a half years (11:3–13, 18).

16:8 The fourth . . . bowl is reminiscent of the fourth trumpet in its effect on the **sun** (8:12). But in this plague, the sun's heat is intensified instead of diminished.

16:9 Those who followed the beast here blaspheme **the name of God**, just as the beast himself did (13:5, 6). They cannot argue against the existence or **power** of God, but even so they will **not repent and give God glory** (v. 11, 21). The Good News of Christ is still in effect even just before His return (19:11–21), though it is apparently rejected by all unbelievers who are still alive.

16:10, 11 The fifth . . . bowl is focused against the **throne of the beast**, apparently referring to his worldwide **kingdom** and authority (13:7). The phrase "Satan's throne" is used in 2:13 to speak of the satanic foothold in Pergamos as a result of the prevalence of emperor worship there. (All other uses of *throne* in Revelation refer to the Lord's throne.) The **darkness** in 6:12–17 caused even world leaders to fear "the wrath of the Lamb" (6:16). At this late date, the beast and his followers still blaspheme **the God of heaven** and refuse to **repent of their deeds**. **Pains** and **sores** may be roughly parallel to the torment suffered by those stung by the demonic locusts during the fifth trumpet judgment (9:5–10). However, it is more likely that *pains* refers to the scorching by the sun in vv. 8, 9 and *sores* to the effects of the first bowl (v. 2).

16:12–14 The sixth bowl involves the Euphrates River, as does the sixth trumpet (9:14). Both judgments deal with demonically inspired military forces. The army of two hundred million (9:16) will kill a third of all humankind (9:18); the army in vv. 12–14 will do battle against God (19:19–21).

16:12 With the **water** of the **river Euphrates** completely **dried up**, invasion from the east would be much easier. **The kings from the east** have been understood as the Parthian armies that menaced the eastern half of the Roman Empire, though any powerful force from the Asia would fit the wording of this verse.

16:13, 14 Unclean spirits spread forth the authoritative words of **the dragon** (Satan; 12:9), **the beast**, and **the false prophet**—an unholy trinity. There will be great deception involved in the **signs** (13:13, 14) that are used to persuade **the kings of . . . the whole world** to gather for battle against **God**. In 6:15, 16, the kings of the earth recoil in fear before the judgment of the Lamb. Here the kings are willing to wage war against God. The difference seems to be their confidence in the power of the beast, since they reason, "Who is able to make war with him?" (13:4). **The battle of that great day** takes place at Armageddon (v. 16; 19:17–21).

16:15 Blessed indicates that this is the third of seven beatitudes in Revelation (see also 1:3; 14:13; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). **Coming as a thief** looks back to Jesus' warning to believers to be vigilant because of the unexpected timing of His return (see Matt. 24:43, 44).

16:16 The **place** of the battle spoken of in v. 14 is **Armageddon**, a Hebrew word literally meaning “Mount of Megiddo.” Some believe that this is not an actual place, but rather a symbol of the final battle between good and evil.²

The Seven Bowl Judgments (Chap. 16)

16:1, 2 **A loud voice from the temple** orders **the seven angels** to **go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth**. These judgments are similar to the trumpet judgments in nature and sequence but they are greater in intensity. The first bowl causes **foul and loathsome** sores to break out on **those who worshiped** the beast and **his image**.

16:3 The second plague turns the waters of the **sea** to **blood**, like that of **a dead man**, and all marine life dies.

16:4 The third **bowl** causes all **water** sources to become **blood**.

16:5, 6 At this point, **the angel of the waters** defends the justice of God’s judgments. Men are only receiving the just recompense of their own sinful deeds. They had **shed blood** in abundance; now they are rewarded with **blood to drink** instead of water. **It is their just due**.

16:7 **The altar** probably symbolizes the souls of martyred saints (6:9). They had waited long and patiently for their persecutors to be punished.

16:8, 9 The fourth plague causes men to suffer severe sunburn or solar radiation. This does **not**, however, cause them to **repent**. Instead they curse **God** for sending this scorching heat on them.

16:10, 11 **The fifth angel** pours **out his** plague of **darkness** on the **kingdom of the beast**. This adds to men’s suffering because they are not able to travel for relief from the preceding afflictions. But it does not soften their hearts. They only become more settled in their hatred of God.

16:12 When the sixth bowl is poured out, the **water** of the **Euphrates** dries up, permitting the armies **from the east** to march toward the land of Israel.

16:13, 14 John sees **three** frog-like **spirits** issuing from **the mouth of the dragon, ... the beast and ... the false prophet**, Satan’s counterfeit trinity. These are demonic **spirits, performing** miracles to deceive the world’s rulers, and to lure them to a climactic **battle** on the **great day of God Almighty**.

16:15 At the mention of that battle, the Lord interjects a special blessing on the tribulation saints, those who are watching for His Return, and who have kept themselves pure from the idolatrous worship of that day. He will come to the unsaved **as a thief**, unexpectedly and causing loss.

16:16 The armies of the world will gather at a **place called in Hebrew Armageddon** (NKJV margin, Megiddo).²⁸ This is commonly associated with the Plain of Esdraelon, with Megiddo on the southern rim. It is reported that Napoleon called it the cockpit of the world, that is, the ideal battlefield.

²Radmacher, Earl D. ; Allen, Ronald Barclay ; House, H. Wayne: *The Nelson Study Bible : New King James Version*. Nashville : T. Nelson Publishers, 1997, S. Re 15:5
NKJV New King James Version

²⁸ (16:16) “Armageddon” comes from Hebrew “Har” (Mount) Megiddo. The majority text reads simply “Megiddo.”

16:17 That this is the final bowl judgment is indicated by the **seventh angel's** announcement, **“It is done!”** The wrath of God is finished as far as the Tribulation Period is concerned.

16:18 When the last bowl is poured out, there are violent convulsions of nature: explosions, **thunderings, lightnings**, and an **earthquake** of unprecedented proportions.

16:19 **The great city of Babylon, divided into three parts**, drinks **the cup** of God's fury. He has not forgotten her idolatry, cruelty, and religious confusion. At this same time **the cities of the nations** are laid flat.

16:20 **Every island and the mountains** disappear as the earth reels.

16:21 One-hundred pound hailstones bombard the earth, but **men** blaspheme **God** rather than repent.³

Armageddon

(Gk. *armageddōn*) (16:16) Strong's #717: This Greek term, which appears only here in the New Testament, appears to be derived from the word *har*, which means a mountain, and the word Megiddo, a name of a city in Manasseh. In this area, God overthrew the Canaanite kings by miraculously aiding Deborah and Barak (Judg. 4). Josiah, the ally of Babylon, was also defeated and slain here. The name Megiddo comes from a Hebrew root meaning to “cut off” and thus means “slaughter” (see Joel 3:2, 12, 14). Just the mention of the famous battleground of Armageddon to a Jew would suggest a horrific slaughter.

³MacDonald, William ; Farstad, Arthur: *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995, S. Re 16:1

⁴Radmacher, Earl D. ; Allen, Ronald Barclay ; House, H. Wayne: *The Nelson Study Bible : New King James Version*. Nashville : T. Nelson Publishers, 1997, S. Re 16:17