

Intro. Have you ever tried getting a point across & the intended receiver just didn’t get it? Maybe your child just kept getting in trouble or the sports team kept running laps or the individual ended up under arrest again. As we continue our series on “God’s Great Wrath” in Revelation 15-16, today we look at the first five bowl plagues from chapter 16 & “What We Have Here Is a Failure to Repent” as the unbelievers keep getting pounded by God’s wrath but fail to repent.

Theme: God’s wrath

Background: Chapter 15 introduces us to the 3rd & final series of judgments in this book.

- As we begin to look at each of these bowls, we see many similarities with previous judgments in Revelation, especially with the trumpets—the first 4 of each set affect the earth, sea, inland waters & sky & the last 3 affect humanity.
- The greatest difference between the trumpets & bowls is the intensity—1/3 of the earth is affected by the trumpets & all the unbelieving world is affected by the bowls
- In many ways, these bowl judgments are plagues (cf. 15:1, 6, 8) & they remind the reader of the plagues Yahweh brought upon Egypt in order to redeem His people (Exodus 7-12). After exiting Egypt & just before entering the Promised Land, Moses warned Israel not to be unfaithful to Yahweh or He would bring similar plagues upon them as unbelievers (cf. Deuteronomy 28:27, 35)
- Moreover, just as many of the Egyptian plagues only affected the Egyptians & not Israel in the land of Goshen, so these bowl judgments are directed at unbelievers & not believers
- Those who bear the mark of the beast will be visited by the marks of God (Lilje in Mounce, 293)—those who accepted the mark of the beast for economic & physical protection now discover the antichrist is unable to provide the security from the wrath of God
- These bowls are poured out in rapid succession—both through the quick description & the fact the boils of the 1st plague & burns from the 4th plague are still active at the time of the 5th plague

Explanation of the Bowls:

#1 The 1st bowl is a kind of painful ulcer (16:2)—like the 6th plague of boils in Egypt (Exodus 9:10-11)

- Literally, the angel poured out his bowl “into” the earth—it may affect the ground & plant life & result in painful ulcers from the food taken from the ground
- Maybe this plague is like an incurable bacteria or virus (like E. coli, ebola, West Nile)
- kakon (corrupt, ugly, wicked, harmful, injurious) & poneros (unsound, evil, malignant, malevolent)

#2 The 2nd bowl kills sea creatures (16:3)

- The sea becomes like the blood of a dead man—coagulated & rotting (Mounce, 294)
- Many get their living on the sea—catching fish & various seafood & transporting goods—their livelihood will be greatly affected (cf. 18:17)

#3 The 3rd bowl renders drinking water useless (16:4)—these two bowls are like the 1st plague of turning the Nile River into blood in Egypt (Exodus 7:20-21)

- Animals & humans will begin dying from dehydration
- Notice the break in the text as attention is turned to the angel in charge of the waters (16:5-7)—maybe God places angels over the waters, land, winds [7:1], fire [14:18] & such
- He sings a song like that sung in 15:3-4—underscoring God’s justice & holiness
- The irony is that those who took the blood of the saints are now given blood to drink & it is what they deserve!

Illus: Isaiah said the oppressors of Israel would be fed with their own flesh & be drunk with their own blood (Isa 49:26)—cf. Wisdom of Solomon 11:16: “By what things a man sins, by these he is punished”—receiving blood to drink—it is what they deserve (the same word used for “worthy”

is the Lamb, 4:11 [who gave His life & then rose from the dead] is used of what they are worthy of)

Illus: In God's government, the punishment fits the crime. Pharaoh tried to drown the Jewish baby boys but his own army drowned in the Red Sea. Haman planned to hang Mordecai on the gallows but instead his hanging took place there. King Saul refused to obey God & slay the Amalekites so he was slain by an Amalekite (Wiersbe, 1071)

- The reference to the altar (16:7) reminds us of the believers who have died for their faith & asked the Lord to take vengeance (cf. 6:9-11)—they acknowledge God's judgments are true & just

#4 The 4th bowl includes scorching sunburns (16:8-9)

- Occasionally great flares of nuclear fire burst from the sun's surface & interact with the earth's magnetic field, causing disruption in radio communication—this may be all the more devastating with a depleting ozone layer
- Once the water system is useless, intense, scorching heat will be all the more troubling
- Believers are protected from the scorching heat (cf. 7:16; Matthew 24:22)

#5 The 5th bowl brings darkness to the kingdom of the antichrist (16:10-11)—like the 9th plague of darkness in Egypt (Exodus 10:23)

- This plague will be directed against the Antichrist's kingdom & may refer to literal darkness or spiritual darkness—I favor literal, because the other plagues appear to be
- While there is much electricity throughout the world to offset physical darkness, these plagues may affect hydro-electricity & such so there is great loss of power throughout the world
- Those in darkness will be blinded & gnaw their tongues in pain, possibly due to mental illnesses & hallucinations; maybe even from the effects of pain-killing drugs

Illus: All of creation has been affected by mankind's fall & sin entering the world (cf. Romans 8:20-22). Therefore, all of creation will be affected by God's judgment—unbelievers will receive painful sores, the seas & rivers become like blood (killing much of the water life & affecting land animals dependent on fresh water to drink), the sun will become more fierce & scorch with its heat, darkness will intensify (affecting plant growth), meteors (from the trumpet judgments in chapter 9), etc.

Application:

1. Be ready, because God's judgment will be swift & complete (16:3)

2. Repent from your sins now before it's too late (16:9, 11)

Illus: "If men & women will not yield to the love of God & be changed by the grace of God, then there is no way for them to escape the wrath of God" (Wiersbe in Life Application BC, 187)

Illus: "If you continually ignore God's warnings, you will eventually be unable to hear Him at all" (Life Application BC, 187)

Illus: A strange thing about mankind hardened in sin is they won't even believe the evidence, even though they will know God is sending the judgments (like the rich man in Luke 16 wanting to send someone from the dead to warn his relatives—they wouldn't listen)

Conc. Just before the death of actor & comedian W.C. Fields, a friend visited Fields' hospital room and was surprised to find him thumbing through a Bible. Asked what he was doing with a Bible, Fields replied, "I'm looking for loopholes" (sermonillustrations.com)—while we may laugh at that comedian's thinking, the truth of the matter is there are no loopholes in Scripture & God's judgment on sinners cannot be evaded. In the midst of all this bad news, I've got good news for you! How? We aren't there yet—the end when God pours out "Great Wrath" on the world. We may be close & Christ may return at any moment, but there's still time for you to repent. Don't even wait for the song, but cry out to God even now to be saved.