

Studying the book of Revelation (18)

Concord Community Church on 31/8/25

Prelude to Destruction & Final Judgments (Chapters 15 & 16)

Revelation 15:1-8 (*Prelude to Destruction*)

The Agents of Wrath [15:1-4](#)

The Attire of Wrath [15:5-6](#)

The Attitude of Wrath [15:7-8](#)

Setting Up the Section

Chapters 15-16 include another sevenfold image. In this instance, the image is of seven angels pouring out the contents of bowls. The contents contain God's wrath—His final judgment.

15:1-4

The Agents of Wrath

This is the third time in Revelation that John introduces a sign. The first was the image of a woman that represented Israel ([12:1](#)). The second immediately followed: Satan in the form of a red dragon ([12:3](#)). This third sign is the angels of destruction with seven final plagues ([15:1](#)). These angels hold the wrath of God, which will be used to destroy Satan—it will settle the issue of sin once and for all. After this, the judgment of God will be complete.

An area that resembles a sea of glass appears in [Revelation 4:6](#) and now here in [15:2](#). This time, though, it is mixed with fire. Some have speculated that this “sea” represents the evil in the world, with those who have overcome that evil standing beside it. Others have supposed that this “sea” is the same one mentioned in [Revelation 4:6](#)—a glasslike platform that surrounds the throne of God offering an image of His purity—with the added feature here of God's anger (fire).

The victorious ones described in [verse 2](#) had endured three things:

1. The beast—the evil of the man himself
2. The beast's image—the power of the image that would draw attention to the beast

3. The number of his name—the identification with his teaching and worldview

In John's vision, these conquerors are standing before the throne of God holding harps. They are prepared to worship God. The song that they sing is referred to as the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb ([15:3-4](#)). While the words to this song are not the same as the song attributed to Moses in [Exodus 15](#), it is a similar theme—deliverance and justice. Through their song, those who have avoided the wrath of God are worshiping Him because He will make Himself known in the world. The next section in this prelude to final destruction is the description of the angels who will do the destroying.

[15:5-6](#)

The Attire of Wrath

In [verse 5](#), John includes what is actually an Old Testament reference to the presence of God. The tabernacle was the portable temple the Israelites used for their worship as they were traveling. The innermost part of the tabernacle, a shrine to the one true God, was the place where His Spirit resided. This innermost chamber was called the Holy of Holies, and it was a room off-limits to everyone but the high priest, and he could enter only once a year on the Day of Atonement. Understanding this reveals the significance of the fact that this room was now opened.

Critical Observation

In [Exodus 38:21](#), this inner room is referred to as the “tabernacle [tent] of the Testimony” because it held within it the ark of the covenant, which contained the Ten Commandments. When this room is opened, as described here, it not only reveals God's presence but also His moral code. It is out of this moral code that people will be judged—it won't be an irrational or emotional moment, but a moment based on basic moral standards.

The seven angels with the seven plagues enter the main stage ([15:6](#)). Everything about the description of this scene implies that these angels and these plagues are sanctioned by God Himself. The angels are dressed in clean linen cloths that reflect purity. (The cleanliness of linen often refers to the holiness of the person.) The golden sashes allude to the sashes worn either by priests or warriors. Both would have meaning within this context of exercising God's judgment.

[15:7-8](#)

The Attitude of Wrath

In [verse 7](#), the four living creatures that exist close to the throne of God give the seven angels bowls filled with judgment. The word translated *bowls* is the same word used for the bowl that contained the prayers of the saints in [Revelation 5:8](#).

Demystifying Revelation

Understanding the temple is a key to understanding many of the terms John uses to describe his visions in Revelation. For instance, there were bowls in the temple that served a significant role in worship. In the sin offering ([Leviticus 4](#)), blood was put in a bowl and then sprinkled and poured out during the ceremony. The bowls are used similarly here in the vision of the seven angels with seven plagues. In this case, the angels do not receive bowls with blood; instead, they receive bowls with anger and judgment. The eternal God who cannot be in the presence of sin will fill these bowls with His wrath, and they will be poured out on the earth.

[Verse 8](#) describes the temple as filled with smoke. In the scriptures, smoke has often accompanied majesty and power. It was one of the signs of the presence of God ([Exodus 40:34-35](#)) and one of the signs of the awesome wrath of God. In this closing verse of chapter 15, God's glory, all the attributes of His character, and His power fill the temple, and there is no room for anything else until the plagues are poured out by the angels. All must stop and watch the mighty power of God on display.

Revelation 16:1-21

Final Judgment commences

The First Six Bowls [16:1-12](#)

Preparations for War [16:13-16](#)

The Seventh Bowl [16:17-21](#)

Setting Up the Section

In the judgments up to this point, there has been partial destruction. A portion of the stars, a portion of the earth, or a portion of the sea was destroyed, but not the whole of anything. In this case, total destruction will begin. All of the people who worship the beast are affected, all of nature is affected, and the end is destruction.

Seven bowls of judgment are described in the upcoming chapters, and they symbolize the final events of God's punishment of those who reject Him.

16:1-12

The First Six Bowls

In [verse 1](#), John describes a loud voice from the temple. This means that the actions that are about to take place are being driven and controlled by God directly. In the same way, the

judgments that are about to fall are falling upon those who have directly scorned God. For these people, following the beast is a conscious attack against God.

Critical Observation

[Isaiah 66:1-6](#) has a warning for Israel. The warning is to any of the Jews who refuse to accept the message of the Lord and instead serve the sin of the world. That message is simply that the Lord will call out from heaven and kill the rebels. [Isaiah 66:6](#) describes the sound of the Lord destroying people.

This points out that God the Father is the One who will avenge His honor and name. Thus, in the following verses in Revelation, we see Him shouting from heaven about the coming wrath. God made a promise that He would destroy the dragon/serpent and its power over the earth in [Genesis 3:14-15](#). At the cross, the power of sin had been broken in the lives of those who call out to God by faith. But still, God plans on removing the power of evil from the earth altogether.

The First Bowl ([16:2](#)): The first bowl is a physical attack against all of the people who worship the beast. This wrath is not just anger; it is actual punishment in the form of pain—ugly and painful sores. This attack will render those who worship the beast useless. Then, once those who are opposed to God are out of commission and the beast is unable to help them, they are available to watch the judgment of God fall upon the earth.

The Second Bowl ([16:3](#)). Not only do the people get sores, but the water is turned to blood, much as it had been in the famous plagues of Egypt ([Exodus 7:17-21](#)). Earlier in Revelation, during the second trumpet ([8:8-9](#)) the water was turned to blood, but this is a little different. In this case, *all* the water of the world is turned to blood, which means that life can no longer be sustained. Also, this is the blood of a dead man, meaning the blood has already coagulated. It is thick and stale and useless. As a result, all of the creatures of the sea die. Not only has the water supply ended, but also a major source of food.

God has rendered the people useless and in agonizing pain. Now the water supply is corrupted and so, too, all of the life that depended upon it. Any hope of survival is diminishing.

The Third Bowl ([16:4-7](#)). When the third bowl is poured out by the angel, the rest of the water supply is affected—the rivers and the streams. There is nothing to drink. When this happens, an angel offers up a word of praise, but it is praise for the retribution. As this angel expresses it, God’s retribution has been justly poured out on those who shed the blood of God’s followers and even opposed God Himself.

The “angel of the waters” (NET) mentioned in [verse 5](#), the one who spoke the praise, is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. We can’t know details of his identity other than this designation.

Notice in [verse 7](#) that it is the altar that speaks. Earlier in Revelation, a voice came from the horns of the altar ([9:13](#)), but in this case, it’s the actual altar offering praise.

Critical Observation

The third trumpet also dealt with the water supply ([8:10-11](#)), but in that case, only a part of the water became toxic. In this case, all the waters were ruined.

The Fourth Bowl ([16:8-9](#)). In some of the past judgments described in Revelation, the sun has been diminished ([6:12](#); [8:12](#); [9:2](#)). But in this judgment, the intensity of the sun increases so much that it is scorching people.

Unfortunately, rather than crying out to God, the hearts of the people are unchangeable. They blaspheme the name of God. This means they degrade His character and call Him evil.

While the first four plagues poured out by angels affected the natural world, the next plague is more political in nature.

The Fifth Bowl ([16:10-11](#)). The fifth angel turns his attention upon the beast. In fact, he pours his bowl on the beast's throne and darkness takes control. John doesn't give a specific explanation for what caused the people's pain. Their sores are still present according to [verse 11](#). Also, there could be many who were burned from the scorching sun but were not killed by it. While all the details are not known, it is obvious that people are miserable, in pain. Yet they curse God rather than acknowledge Him as the One who could ease their suffering and the One who has the power to control the plagues.

The Sixth Bowl ([16:12](#)). The sixth plague removes the water from the Euphrates. This might not seem like such a bad thing given the fact that the river is filled with blood. But it is important because the next judgment is the great war of Armageddon that will destroy the armies of the beast once and for all. Drying up the riverbed removes an important obstacle for attacking armies.

John mentions that the kings from the East are the threat that will come across the dry riverbed left behind in the path of the Euphrates, but this is the only time these kings are mentioned. The Euphrates River did serve as the boundary of the Roman Empire, so in the minds of John's readers, assaulting enemies could easily lay beyond the river. And without the river to block them, the empire was much more open to attack. Still, as for these kings from the East, no more explanation is given than is mentioned in [verse 12](#).

[16:13-16](#)

Preparations for War

As with the previous sets of seven events in Revelation, there is a pause between the sixth bowl and the seventh bowl. (There is a pause between the sixth and seventh seals and the sixth and seventh trumpets as well.) In this case, the pause allows the armies of the world to gather in one place.

Out of the mouths of the dragon, beast, and second beast, come demons that go to all of the kings of the world ([16:13-14](#)). These demons are spirits that perform remarkable miracles to

entice the enemies of God to gather. Why would these armies need to be enticed to wage war against God? Because they are infested with sores, their water supply has dried up, and the sun is scorching people to death. The only way these people are going to move is by some form of deception. The deception is that the beast is stronger than the One doing this to them, and if they unite they will be victorious.

Critical Observation

The fact that the three demons are compared to frogs ([16:13](#)) is an interesting element in Revelation. Some have supposed that this is actually a form of mockery aimed toward Satan and his armies.

Before the seventh seal and the seventh trumpet an announcement is made. The series of bowl visions contain the same kind of element. In the case of the seals and trumpets, an announcement of salvation was made to the world. In this case, an announcement is made that the coming of the Day of the Lord is like a thief in the night ([16:15](#)). The reality is that no one will know the day when the fury will strike. Therefore, those who are ready and know that this day will come are the ones who walk through life prepared. Those who do not account for this day are the ones who walk around the world vulnerable and naked—which means that at the very least they will be ashamed when they are caught unprepared. This announcement is the final act of judgment upon these people.

The froglike spirits are successful, according to [verse 16](#), and the armies of the beast gather in one place—Armageddon. The name probably stands for Har Mageddon, which means “the mountain of Megiddo.” There is no known mountain with this name, so some have considered it to be merely an element of John’s vision—a symbol of God’s judgment. Others, however, identify it as the plain that lies beside the ancient city of Meggido.

Demystifying Revelation

Megiddo was a much-desired spot because it was a junction for roads running north and south as well as east and west—with control of these trade routes the location was a boon to merchants of all kinds. Because it was such an advantageous location, many battles were fought in the vicinity.

[16:17-21](#)

The Seventh Bowl

When the seventh angel pours his bowl of wrath upon the earth, a loud voice comes from the throne in the temple shouting, “It is done” ([16:17](#)). While the speaker is not identified, it is likely that it is God, even if simply based on the fact that the voice came from the throne. This is similar to the announcement of Jesus at His death—“It is finished” ([John 19:30](#)). When Jesus uttered those words, He was saying the payment for sin was paid in full. When God expresses these words, He is saying there will be no more judgment—the serpent and all evil are being punished on the earth.

God uses two things to destroy the earth. The first is a severe earthquake ([16:18](#)). Notice the precision with which John describes just how severe this earthquake is. There has never been an earthquake like it. The earthquake does several things: It kills people and rearranges the landscape of the earth, islands disappear, and mountains fall into the opening where the ground split into three parts (6:19-20).

The great city that the earthquake destroys may refer to humanity in general. The fact that it breaks in three parts (as opposed to simply dividing into two parts) implies complete destruction. The whole picture here, including the second reference John makes to Babylon (which serves as an excellent picture of human arrogance, see [Genesis 10:10](#); [11:9](#)), builds a picture of more than specific cities, but of the destruction of the part of civilization that demands to remain godless ([Revelation 16:19](#)).

Next come hailstones that weigh up to one hundred pounds according to some translations. They fall from the sky, crushing the people beneath. And while these people are receiving their judgment, they are cursing God ([16:21](#)).

Take It Home

Two things about this passage are important to understand. First is the destruction of sin. Sin is rebellion that disconnects us from our Creator.

The second is how quickly and simply God can destroy those who follow after sin. He requires no nuclear holocaust, no human-made weapons. The Creator of the universe can use His creation to destroy those who have rejected Him. He has the power to rearrange the earth, which reveals His true sovereignty.

We fear or worry about many things in life—things that can't hurt us. When we truly acknowledge God's power, it should give us pause. We should respect the power that could crush us yet offers us the opportunity over and over again to change our ways and be treated as beloved children.

Eighteen Kinds of Seven Things in Revelation (The word "Seven" is used 54 times in the book of Revelation)

1. Churches ([Rev. 1:4,11,20](#))
2. Spirits ([Rev. 1:4](#); [3:1](#); [4:5](#); [5:6](#))
3. Golden Candlesticks ([Rev. 1:12,13,20](#); [2:1](#))
4. Stars ([Rev. 1:16,20](#); [2:1](#); [3:1](#))
5. Lamps ([Rev. 4:5](#))
6. Seals ([Rev. 5:1,5](#))
7. Horns ([Rev. 5:6](#))
8. Eyes ([Rev. 5:6](#))
9. Angels ([Rev. 8:2,6](#); [15:1,6-8](#); [16:1](#); [17:1](#); [21:9](#))
10. Trumpets ([Rev. 8:2,6](#))
11. Thunders ([Rev. 10:3-4](#))

- | | |
|---|--|
| 12. Thousand men (Rev. 11:13) | |
| 13. Heads (Rev. 12:3 ; 13:1 ; 17:3-8) | 14. Crowns (Rev. 12:3) |
| 15. Last plagues (Rev. 15:1,6,8) | 16. Golden vials (Rev. 15:7 ; 17:1 ; 21:9) |
| 17. Mountains (Rev. 17:9) | 18. Kings or kingdoms (Rev. 17:10-11) |

Twenty Things Done under the Seventh Vial

1. The earthly events between the rapture and second coming end ([Rev. 4:1](#) to [Rev. 19:21](#))
2. The 70th week of Daniel ends ([Dan. 9:27](#))
3. Great tribulations ends ([Rev. 11:15](#) -- [Rev. 19:21](#); [Mt. 24:15-22](#); [Dan. 12:1-7](#))
4. The judgments of the seals, trumpets, and vials end ([Rev. 6:1](#) -- [Rev. 19:21](#))
5. Wrath of God started in the 6th seal ends ([Rev. 6:12-17](#); [16:17](#) -- [Rev. 19:21](#))
6. Two witnesses end their earthly career ([Rev. 11:3-14](#); [Rev. 16:17](#) -- [Rev. 19:21](#))
7. Israel is liberated from Gentiles under Antichrist ([Rev. 12:1](#) -- [Rev. 19:21](#); [Zech. 14](#))
8. Jerusalem delivered from Gentiles ([Lk. 21:24](#); [Rev. 11:1](#) -- [Rev. 19:21](#); [Zech. 14](#))
9. Martyrdom of saints ends ([Rev. 6:9-11](#); [7:9-17](#); [15:2-4](#); [20:4-6](#))
10. Beast worship ends ([Rev. 13:1-18](#); [19:20](#))
11. Babylon is destroyed ([Rev. 16:17-21](#))
12. The times of the Gentiles end ([Lk. 21:24](#); [Rom. 11:25-29](#); [Rev. 19:11-21](#))
13. Gentile world powers defeated at Armageddon ([Rev. 19:11-21](#); [Zech. 14](#))
14. Many cities of the nation's fall by an earthquake ([Rev. 16:17-21](#))
15. Great physical changes on earth take place ([Rev. 11:13](#); [16:17-21](#); [Zech. 14:4](#))
16. First resurrection is completed ([Rev. 11:12](#); [7:9-17](#); [15:2-4](#); [20:4-6](#))
17. Day of the Lord begins ([Rev. 20:1-10](#))
18. Antichrist's reign ends ([Rev. 19:11-21](#))
19. Satan's reign on earth ends ([Rev. 19:11](#) -- [Rev. 20:3](#); [Isa. 24:21-22](#))
20. Second coming; eternal reign of Christ begins ([Rev. 19:11-21](#); [20:1-10](#))

Adopted from: Dake's Annotated Reference Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments of the Authorized or King James Version Text.