

OBSERVATION STUDY SERIES

REVELATION

THE FIRST THREE
BOWL JUDGMENTS

16:1-7

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Revelation 16:1-7

The First Three Bowl Judgments

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.” Revelation 16:1

Consider the previous scene—the smoke-filled temple, into which no one is able to enter until the seven plagues of the seven angels are finished. John then hears a loud voice from the smoke-filled temple. We cannot know for sure whose voice John heard because there have been so many “loud voices” in the book of Revelation—a voice like the sound of a trumpet in Revelation 1:10, a strong angel in Revelation 5:2, many angels around the throne, the living creatures and the elders in Revelation 5:12, an angel with the seal of the living God in Revelation 7:2, the great multitude out of the tribulation in Revelation 7:10, an eagle flying in midheaven in Revelation 8:13, another strong angel in Revelation 10:3, a loud voice from heaven in Revelation 11:12, loud voices in heaven in Revelation 11:15, a loud voice in heaven in Revelation 12:10, and four different angels in Revelation 14:7, 9, 15, and 18.

Even more “loud voices” will be heard as we continue our observation of the book of Revelation—a loud voice coming out of the temple *from the throne* in Revelation 16:17 (hmmmm... Now that’s a voice we can figure out!), a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven in Revelation 19:1, another angel in Revelation 19:17, and a loud voice from the throne in Revelation 21:3 (Again, we can *know* Whose voice comes from the throne!). Whew! That’s a lot of loud voices! What we can be sure of is that whoever spoke, his message was sent and sanctioned by the One Who sat on the throne in that temple!

John heard the loud voice from the temple command the seven angels to go and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God on the earth. The seven angels are the ones whom John saw in a sign in Revelation 15:1—they had seven plagues, which would be the last because in them the wrath of God would be finished. They are the same angels who (in real time) came out of the temple wearing clean, bright linen and golden sashes and who were given seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God in Revelation 15:6-7. The bowls and the plagues are synonymous. It is reasonable to visualize the bowls holding God’s wrath, which, when poured out will result in plagues upon the earth.

It’s been awhile since we have looked at our simple chart showing the pattern of the seals, trumpets, and bowls; perhaps now, before we embark on observing the bowls, would be a good time to view it once again.

(Seals)1 2 3 4 5 6 7=(Trumpets)1 2 3 4 5 6 7=(Bowls)1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Remember that the first seven numbers on the chart represent the seven seals. That's what the book is called. The book is never called "the scrolls", it is never called "the scroll of the seals and the trumpets", nor is it called "the scroll of the seals and the bowls". It is always called "the scroll of the seven seals". The first seven seals have been broken (by the Lamb) and have released their judgments. The seventh seal contained, not just an individual judgment, but seven trumpets, the seventh of which contained seven bowls.

Before we observe those seven bowls, it might be a good time to tweek our perspective on the wrath of God which fills them. There are several Greek words used for "wrath" in the New Testament—Revelation uses two of them—*orge* and *thumos*. The entire New Testament uses only one of these words when referring to the wrath of God—*orge*. The Greek word *orge* refers to a settled abiding hatred of unrighteousness with appropriate actions, while *thumos* is more of a violent outbreak which results in a subsiding anger.

The book of Revelation uses the word *thumos* in a very specific way—it always refers to the time we are about to observe—the final wrath of God poured out during the seventh trumpet (the seven bowls). This makes absolutely perfect sense considering what the words convey. God's settled abiding hatred of unrighteousness is eternal and He always handles it with appropriate actions—including and culminating in His final outpouring of wrath (which will take place in the not too distant future) at which time His wrath will increase to an intensity we cannot truly fathom.

It begins at the great big intersection of events, which will usher in the second half of Daniel's 70th week (familiar to us as the Great Tribulation) and the Day of the Lord. We have not talked about the Day of the Lord during this study series but it is part and parcel with the pouring out of God's great wrath in the final days, although it continues through the time when the heavens and the earth will be destroyed. His *thumos* will be righteous and will completely consummate His great and holy anger toward sin.

So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image. Revelation 16:2

What happened when the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth? It became a loathsome (think leprosy-like) and malignant (think cancerous) sore on—now, note this—the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image. God's wrath is poured out with amazing accuracy—the first bowl only affects the earth-dwellers who follow the beast. It won't be worth taking that mark, will it? The plague will not affect those who do not take the mark of the beast and who do not worship his image.

The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died. Revelation 16:3

This is not a figure of speech—this is blood. He's telling us what *type* of blood is poured out into the sea—blood like that of a dead man. When a person dies their blood gets thicker and thicker. The result of this severely coagulating blood will be that every living thing in the sea will die—every single living thing... The intensity of God's wrath will rise to an amazing level at this juncture.

Then the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood. Revelation 16:4

During the trumpet judgments the salt waters (seas) were affected first and the clear waters (springs and rivers) were affected next. We see the same pattern here in the bowl judgments. When the third angel pours out his bowl of wrath, it will cause the rivers and the springs of waters to become blood.

And I heard the angel of the waters saying, "Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things; for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it." And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments." Revelation 16:5-6

The third angel is called the angel of the waters. It's interesting, sometimes the angels are pointed out, the one who had the power over fire, for instance—other times they are not identified for us. Notice what the angel of the waters (the one that pours out a bowl of wrath which causes the fresh waters of the world to become blood) says. *"Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things; for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it."*

God is named as the Holy One—indeed it is true, for He alone is holy, and He remains so even as He pours out the judgment of death upon the inhabitants of the earth. Another title is given to God, "You Who are and Who were". This is the same title given in Revelation 11:17, which is exactly the same time frame—the Great Big Intersection of events—which ushers in the seventh trumpet (the seven bowls). The phrase "You Who are and You Who were" definitely refers to the One and only Eternal God—Jehovah! He has always existed and He exists now!

A very similar phrase is used earlier in Revelation 1:4; 1:8 and 4:8. The main difference between the earlier phrases and the later ones, Revelation 11:17 and 16:5, is the absence of the words "Who is to come". God remains the same, but the time frame has changed since the earlier portion of the book. The first chapters dealt with events pre-breaking of the seals or before the judgments began. The phrases found in chapters 11 and 16 both deal with the time when the One Who "is to come" in judgment has done so.

Listen to some of the statements made at the Great Big Intersection of events. Revelation 11:15-17 says, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our

Lord and of His Christ”, and “You *have taken* Your great power and *have begun* to reign”. Revelation 12:10 says, “Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of Christ *have come*...”. Revelation 14:7 says, “Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment *has come*.” Even though the last seven judgments (plagues) were not yet discharged upon the earth, the starting gun had sounded and nothing was going to stop the forthcoming judgments. At that point in time, in God’s economy everything is as good as done—in other words, the One Who was to come in judgment *will have come in judgment* so it will no longer be accurate to add the phrase “the One Who is to come” to the title of the Holy One!

Once again, in the book of Revelation, God is not praised for His creation or His forgiveness or any of the things that we are so used to praising Him for. He is praised for his judgments! He is not ashamed of His wrath and oh, how I wish that His people weren’t either.

God is not ashamed of His holiness. When Jesus walked through the churches He showed His authority and the righteous demands that He puts on people who claim His Name. He is not ashamed of any part of His character—including His hatred of sin and His wrath. Revelation praises Him for exactly that!

The angel of the waters declares in no uncertain terms that God is righteous *because* He judges the deeds of men! And the altar echoes that glorious and irrefutable truth!

I put a little drawing of the “scales of justice” in my Bible beside Revelation 16:5-7. The idea is that the deeds of a person would go in the bowl on one side and the exact same weight of righteousness would go into the bowl on the other side, thus creating perfect justice when the two bowls are counterbalanced—in other words the weight of justice is righteous and true according to the measurement or weight of the deeds in the opposing bowl. God’s justice, His judgments, are not too little; they are not too much—they are exactly the right justice for the deed. The deed determines the judgment and God perfectly administers it.

In the end, the suitability of the punishment to the deeds are clearly seen—they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, so... God will give them blood to drink. The Greek word for “deserve” is *axios* and means worthy of, corresponding to, comparable, of equal value, suitable, or due. When the times comes, God will mete out His judgments in perfectly equal value and worth to the deeds they have done.

Let’s remember that John is on the isle of Patmos because he has been a witness of Jesus Christ and the Word of God. He knows that in the years to come many martyrs will follow. You cannot escape the fact that martyrdom will become (and is already becoming) a far too commonplace occurrence in the last days... As the times continue to worsen for Christians, consider that God is the One Who was and the One Who is and is the One Who will come in judgment against those who persecute His Own... They will take the blood of His saints and His prophets... but He will give them blood to drink. They deserve exactly that...

We join with the altar in saying, *“Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments!”*