

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Revelation 16:1-21 | Session 19 | The Seven Golden Vials of God's Wrath

In the book of Revelation, there are seven pairs of visions given to John. The first pair of visions pertains to events that are taking place in Heaven, and the second part of the pair concerns events taking place on Earth.

- The First Vision, in Heaven (4:1-5:14).
- The First Vision, on Earth (6:1-7:8)
- The Second Vision, in Heaven (7:9-8:6).
- The Second Vision, on Earth (8:7-11:14).
- The Third Vision, in Heaven (11:15-18).
- The Third Vision, on Earth (11:19).
- The Fourth Vision, in Heaven (12:1-12)
- The Fourth Vision, on Earth (12:13-13:18)
- The Fifth Vision, in Heaven (14:1-5)
- The Fifth Vision, on Earth (14:6-20)
- The Sixth Vision, in Heaven (15:1-8)
- **The Sixth Vision, on Earth (16:1-18:24)**

THE SIXTH VISION ON EARTH (16:1-18:24)

The Seven Vials (Bowls) of Judgment

The day is coming in which the prophet Joel calls, *The Great and Terrible Day of the Lord* (See Joel 2:31; also 2:11). That Day involves the Judgment of Jesus Christ upon all the wickedness of Earth and in the spiritual realm. It begins with the Fifth Seal, then the sounding of the Seven Trumpets (8:6), and then as the seventh trumpet is sounded (11:15), the Seven Vials of Judgment are poured out upon the inhabitant of the earth. In this Sixth vision that will occur on the Earth, John sees seven angels with the Seven Golden Vials. Contained within the vials are the final Great Judgments of God's wrath.

The word terrible that Joel uses is not in our passage, but in Greek (*phobos*), terrible means *something to fear*. In the book of Revelation, however, the word **Great** (Greek: *meegas*) shows up often. Eleven times it is used in chapter 16, the most uses of the word **Great** in any chapter. Chapter 18 contains the second most, where it occurs nine times. The Seven Vials will bring forth final judgments upon the Earth, which will be unprecedented and of an intensity never before experienced.

The ultimate recipients of the wrath of Christ's *Great and Terrible Day* will be The Dragon (Satan), The Beast (AntiChrist), and the False Prophet.

The Dragon (Satan) who made war with Israel will be attacked by Christ, the King of kings. He will also attack the two Beasts, i.e., the Antichrist, and the False Prophet, as they occupy their seats of authority.

ANGELS ARE INSTRUCTED TO POUR OUT THE VIALS OF GOD'S WRATH

Verse 1 —

As we have done throughout our study, we will take the effects of the judgments on the inhabitants of the Earth in the literal sense. What we read is exactly what will happen. There is no need to spiritualize them or call them figures of speech unless we can find evidence in the text. Even though these will be supernatural events exacted by God, *"When the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense."* Notice, too, how some of these plagues are the same as the plagues of Egypt in the book of Exodus (7:14-12:36).

Just as the literal judgments in the Book of Exodus happened, the coming Vial Judgments are also literal. Beyond that, just as the plagues in the Book of Exodus kept increasing in intensity, the same pattern occurs in the Book of Revelation. Similarly, as Pharaoh kept hardening his heart against God, mankind during the Tribulation will do the same.

What did those ten plagues in the Book of Exodus accomplish? In plague number ten, God finally broke Pharaoh's will, and God's people were liberated from the bondage.

God is doing something similar in the Tribulation. He is taking the whole earth out of the bondage that it's been in since the fall of man! The earth, Romans 8 says, is in a state of travail; it's groaning under a curse. It has been that way, going back to Adam and Eve in Eden, and God is performing the ultimate exodus; Satan is being evicted.

The light and the glory of Christ's kingdom, which will last a thousand years, will come to the earth. Things will be put in order with a rightly functioning Jerusalem, a rightly functioning temple, and a worshipful human race that will travel to Jerusalem to pay proper homage to the King.

Seven angels are commanded to **pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth**, one after another.

THOSE WITH THE MARK OF THE BEAST BREAK OUT WITH A HORRIFIC SORE

Verse 2—**The First Vial**

The first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth...there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon men which had the mark of the beast. The word **sore** is singular and means a wound with a discharge. *Noisome means an extremely offensive smell.* Speculation, but is this one sore that breaks out in the area where they received the Mark of the Beast? These people had been warned in chapter 14:9-11, but they did not heed the warning.

EVERYTHING DIES IN THE SEA, WHICH BECOMES LIKE THE BLOOD OF A DEAD MAN

Verse 3—**The Second Vial**

We should continue to take this literally. This word for sea: Greek: *thalassah* can be used for the sea in general, specifically of the Mediterranean or Red Sea. There is no reason to believe it is localized. **The blood of a dead man.** It's hard to know what this means, but when a person dies, his blood coagulates almost immediately. It changes from a liquid to something like a gel. There is no oxygen in the blood of a dead man. This perhaps means that the sea is choked off of all life and oxygen. But the point is, nothing will survive in the sea; every **living soul** means all creatures. Just as God created every living creature in the sea in Genesis 1:21, now every creature in the sea will die. The sea will be toxic.

FRESHWATERS TURN TO BLOOD

Verses 4-6—**The Third Vial**

The freshwaters became blood with the third vial, unlike the sea which became “like the blood.” Note also that angels have various spheres and titles that command God's will over nature; **The angel of the waters.** John **heard the angel of the waters** pronounce a divine comment regarding the righteousness of the Lord because of His judgment.

This divine comment speaks of God's judgment rather than grace—a different dispensation. We are not in the dispensation of God's judgment today. Are people judged for their sins today? No!

It is overlooked by most Christians, but Romans 5:13 states that *sin is not imputed when there is no law.* The word impute means to *attribute to or to count.* One might argue that Paul was talking only about *before the law, not today.*

In case someone is still not convinced that God is not holding people accountable for their sins today, it is important to note that 2 Corinthians 5:19 goes even further in stating that *God was in Christ, reconciling the world and not imputing their trespasses unto them,* which refers to all individuals in the world. The word *Reconciling* is, in Greek, the present active tense; meaning, right now, presently, *God is not attributing sins to the world in the dispensation of Grace.*

Yet even with those clear words, a person will continue to deny, deny, deny. Why? Because that is not what they have been taught. *Rather than trusting the Word of God,* they continue to trust what they read in a theological book or what a pastor ignorantly told them. The Bible teaches *Jesus paid it ALL. All sins were forgiven on the cross.* Mankind is separated from God by UNBELIEF, not sin. We either believe in GRACE or we don't.

But don't misunderstand, not all people have everlasting life. Only those who believe are saved. Likewise, we should strive to live a life free from sin. There are STILL earthly consequences for our sins.

With the third vial, why this judgment of freshwater turning to blood? **For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, Thou hast given them blood to drink** (e.g., Revelation 13:15; 17:6; see the prophecy in Psalm 79).

THE SUN INCREASES ITS INTENSITY

Verses 8,9—**The Fourth Vial**

Today's talk of global warming caused by man is a scam. When this fourth vial is poured out, we have the ultimate global warming, and it is not manmade!

Jesus spoke of signs in the sun taking place before his second coming (Luke 21:25). **Power was given to scorch men with fire and great heat.** Isaiah 24:6 spoke a prophecy of the inhabitants of the earth being burned, and few men left. Malachi 4:1 says, "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble...". The result is that men blasphemed the name of God...and they repented not to give him glory, vs.9.

MEN ARE THRUST INTO DARKNESS

Verses 10,11 — **The Fifth Vial**

The Beast (or antichrist) is the vice-regent of Satan, his power is delegated to him. We saw in session 5 (Revelation 2:13) that the Antichrist's seat of power would be in Pergamos. No matter where he rules from, he cannot keep the plague of darkness from his kingdom. The Day of the Lord is called *A day of darkness, gloominess, and a day of clouds and thick darkness.* In Mark 13:24,25, Jesus prophesied *the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light.*

Too much darkness can bring on depression and despair. While beautiful, Seattle, Washington, has long been called one of the most depressing places. Some think it is because of the dreariness, overcast skies, and darkness of the winter. People are more agitated and fearful at night.

In our passage, those thrust into darkness **gnawed their tongues for pain**; pain can mean great anxiety. Is this pain from a lack of vitamin D? That may sound crazy, but vitamin D deficiency can lead to depression, bone pain, impaired wound healing, muscle pain, and anxiety. We do not know how long the beast's **kingdom was** plunged into **full darkness**. How long, or how it happens, the result is men still **blasphemed the God of heaven...and repented not of their deeds.**

THE EUPHRATES RIVER DRIES UP AND DEMONS GATHER

Verses 12-14 — **The Sixth Vial**

The great river Euphrates...was dried up. The Euphrates River is 1,800 miles long and 30 feet deep in sections and flows through Türkiye, Syria, and Iraq. Because of drought and dams, portions of the river have seen a drop in water flow. It will be completely dry in the Tribulation to **make way** for the Antichrist's army to gather for the slaughter of the Jews. What this army doesn't know is that instead of wiping out the Jews, they will gather, never to return because of their slaughter by the King of kings.

Notice that unlike the plague of frogs in Egypt (Exodus 8:6), these **unclean spirits** are **like frogs**, not actual frogs. We see in verse 14 that **they are the spirits of devils** or demon spirits. These demons (compelled by God?) are responsible for gathering the anti-Christ's army **to the battle.**

JESUS ENCOURAGES THOSE WHO HAVE NOT TAKEN THE MARK OF THE BEAST

Verse 15 —

John hears and receives a blessing amid these horrific vials being poured out, and as he sees the armies gathering for battle against the Jews, Jesus speaks. He is speaking to those who have not worshipped the beast or his image and have not received the mark or the number of his name.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians (5:4), “But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should not overtake you as a thief.” One way to avoid the destruction of a thief is to keep the light on. Paul is addressing believers in Christ—Paul had already told them in the previous chapter that they would be *caught up together to meet the Lord in the air*. They need not be concerned about **that day**. It will not **overtake** them **as a thief**.

My point in showing that verse is we know that the Body of Christ, the Church, is not in this judgment scene because it is as a thief that Jesus is now coming. This blessing of assurance is for Tribulation saints, not the Church.

THE GATHERING AT ARMAGEDDON

Verse 16 —

And he gathered them together...Armageddon. **Armageddon** is from Har-Megiddo. It is an ancient town about sixty miles north of Jerusalem, overlooking the plain of Megiddo in the Jezreel Valley. It is a place of Biblical battles (Judges 5:19; 2 Chronicles 35:22). From here, the armies of the antichrist will gather for an assault on Jerusalem.

The KJV uses the third person, “he”, **and he gathered them together**...that is, God. But, other translations use the third person “they” gathered them together. Is it “he” or “they?” This is not a textual difference, but a translator’s preference. Translators who used the word “**they**” interpret this as *the demons who are doing the gathering of the armies*, as expressed in verse 14. However, **he** could also be correct in that this all flows from Satan, and Satan could be “**he**.” Option one is that *they, the demons, are doing the gathering*. Option two is that *Satan, who directs the demons, is doing the gathering*.

But there is a third option that satisfies the use of **they** and **he**. This option is that the “**he**” in verse 16 is God and that *God* is also compelling or directing *the demons* in verse 14. This is the option I take. If we let Scripture interpret Scripture, we find option three confirmed in the prophecy of Zechariah 12:2 and 14:2. The great deceiver thinks he alone has gathered the nations together against Jerusalem, but it is God who has used them to do so.

Later in chapter 19, we will see the outcome of this battle.

IT IS DONE

Verses 17-21 — **The Seventh Vial**

Verse 17—

There came a voice out of the temple of heaven. This is the last time we see the **Temple** in Revelation. In 21:22, we read, **And I saw no temple...The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple** in the new

Heaven and New Earth. **It is done.** All the judgments are accomplished. This is the last act, and it will bring on the opening of Heaven and the coming forth of the Son of God Himself to the battle (See 19:11).

Verse 18—

This is the earthquake spoken of by the prophets in Ezekiel 38:20, Isaiah 2: 19,21, and Haggai 2: 21,22.

Verse 19—

The great city was divided into three parts. What city is this? Some view it as Babylon, since it is referred to as *the great city* in Revelation 14:8. Others view it as Jerusalem, since it too is referred to as *the great city* in Revelation 11:8. The New Jerusalem is also called *that great city* in Revelation 21:10. Therefore, we can't identify it by that phrase.

I take it as being Jerusalem since, in chapter 18, Babylon won't be divided, it will be destroyed.

Why would God divide the city of Jerusalem? Because of the spiritual state of the city of Jerusalem. Revelation 11:8 calls the city "spiritually" Sodom and Egypt. [Revelation 11:8, And their dead bodies *shall lie* in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified."] Here is a spiritual application, "spiritually or mystically Sodom and Egypt." Sodom symbolizes depravity; Egypt symbolizes bondage and legalism, therefore God is going to divide it.

How it will be divided into three parts, we can only speculate

While divided, the city is not destroyed. It is the one eternal city. "For David said, The Lord God of Israel hath given rest unto his people, that they may dwell in Jerusalem forever." (1 Chronicles 23:25).

As the Tribulation ends and the Millennium begins, God's holy city will undergo a remodeling, and be more beautiful and perfectly situated than ever. Psalm 48:2.

Verse 20—

This earthquake is going to change the topography of the world. There is so much havoc that **every island** disappears, and **mountains** are leveled. John likely means **certain mountains** since there will be mountains in the millennium. See Psalm 72:3,16; Psalm 148:9; Isaiah 2:2; 44:23; Ezekiel 36:8).

The great prophecy of Isaiah will be fulfilled. "*Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the Lord hath spoken it*" (Isaiah 40:4,5)

Verse 21—Chapter 16 concludes with more devastation. **Talent.** The exact weight of one talent is not known. A common number is around 75 lb. The heaviest hailstone recorded is around 2.5 lb.¹ These stones, resulting from the fierceness of God's wrath (vs. 19), are beyond our comprehension. But surely God can do it. This concludes the great Judgments of the Seven Vials.

¹ Gopalganj district, Bangladesh – April 14th, 1986. <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/heaviest-hailstones>