

Text: Rev 16.1-21

Outline of Revelation:

1. The things you have seen (the vision of Christ) Rev 1
2. The things which are (the letters to the churches) Rev 2-3
3. The things which must come after these things (Rev 4-22)
 - a. The overture: the scene in heaven (Rev 4-5)
 - b. The seal judgements begin (Rev 6)
 - c. (Parenthesis): the believers of the Tribulation (Rev 7)
 - d. The seventh seal which reveals the seven trumpets (four in chapter 8)
 - e. The fifth and sixth trumpets (Rev 9)
 - f. (Parenthesis): Voices in heaven (Rev 10)
 - g. (Parenthesis): The Two Witnesses | the seventh trumpet (Rev 11)
 - h. (Parenthesis): The Long War Against God¹ (Rev 12)
 - i. (Parenthesis): The Beasts (Rev 13)
 - j. (Parenthesis): Triumph of the Saints foreseen (Rev 14)
 - k. (Prelude): Another Sign in Heaven (Rev 15)

I. The bowl judgements (Rev 16)

“Chronologically this chapter is close to the time of the second coming of Christ, and the judgments described fall in rapid succession.”²

“These plagues are not the expression of God’s wrath against sin in general, nor are they punishments for individual wrongdoing. They are the outpouring of his wrath upon him who would frustrate the divine purpose in the world — the beast — and upon those who have given their loyalty to him.

“These plagues are God’s answer to Satan’s last and greatest effort to frustrate the divine rule.”³

I. Opening announcement (1)**A. The voice of God**

1. Speaks to all seven angels at once
2. Suggests that these judgements occur in rapid succession

¹ I borrow the title of Henry Morris' book of this same name for our chapter heading here.

² John F. Walvoord, “Revelation,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 966.

³ Ladd, p. 209, quoted by Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Rev 16.1.

B. The connection with previous judgements

1. Some commentators have attempted to make these a repetition of the trumpet judgements – a different perspective on the same thing
2. However, there are so many differences this is difficult to do
3. Rev 15.1 says these are the last judgements and that the judgement is finished – suggesting that these follow as the contents of the seventh trumpet, just as the trumpets are contained in the seventh seal
4. The word “loud” is *μεγάλης* (*megalēs*, fr. *megas*), “great” – used 11 times in this chapter (1, 9, 12, 14, 18 [twice], 19 [twice], 21 [twice])

II. The first three bowls and a response (2-7)

A. The first bowl (2)

1. The first bowl is *personal* – it falls on man himself
2. The judgement is a form of loathsome boil (cancerous?) that marks those who received the mark of the beast
3. Believers appears to be immune (see 12.13-17)

B. The second bowl (3)

1. The second bowl is *environmental* – it falls on the sea
2. The sea turns to blood
3. Every living thing in the sea dies
4. Literal or symbolic?
 - a. The water of the Nile turned to blood (literally) when Moses led Israel out of Egypt
 - b. There is no scriptural reason to interpret this symbolically
 - c. All attempts at symbolic interpretation results in a wide variety of guesses — but none are exegetical or convincing to all

C. The third bowl (4)

1. The third bowl is also *environmental* – but this falls on the fresh water

2. The fresh water is turned to blood as well

3. This plague is likely temporary

D. A response to the three bowls (5-7)

1. The plagues are righteous judgements because of who God is (5)

2. The plagues are righteous judgements because of what man has done (6)

3. The altar in heaven speaks an “Amen” (7)

a. Constable suggests that these are the Tribulation martyrs under the altar (6.9, 15.3-4)

b. We might be tempted to recoil at this language, but God says the judgement is righteous

III. The next three bowls and Armageddon (8-16)

A. The fourth bowl (8-9)

1. The fourth bowl is *astronomical* – it falls on the sun

2. The heat of the sun intensifies so as to scorch (lit.) ‘the men’ – i.e., the men who worshiped the beast but not the saints (?)

3. Instead of repenting, the men react with anger towards God

a. They blaspheme the name of God

b. They do not repent and give God glory (comp. 11.13)

It appears that they are quite clear that this is the hand of God.

B. The fifth bowl (10-11)

1. The fifth bowl is *political* – it falls on the throne of the beast

2. As God darkened Egypt in the 9th plague, so here he darkens the kingdom of the beast

3. The darkness is painful, although the Scripture doesn’t explain how this is so

4. Again, men react with blasphemy and a refusal of repentance

C. The sixth bowl (12)

1. The sixth bowl is also *political* – it falls on the Euphrates River (again fresh water?)
2. This judgement is a preparation for battle rather than a specific plague in itself (compare Isa 11.15 for a similar prophecy)

“There has been endless speculation about “the kings from the East,” with many expositors trying to relate them to some contemporary leaders of their generation. A survey of 100 commentaries of the Book of Revelation reveals at least 50 interpretations of the identity of the kings of the East. The simplest and best explanation, however, is that this refers to kings or rulers from the Orient or East who will participate in the final world war.”⁴

D. Armageddon (13-16)

1. The figure of grotesque spirits coming out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet pictures the deception by which they gather the armies of the earth against Israel
 - a. The grotesque spirits may literally be the demonic entities that animate these figures
 - b. On the other hand, they may be a picture of the power of their deceptive speech
2. Parenthesis: the voice of Christ to his waiting saints (15)
 - a. The Lord’s coming will be sudden
 - b. Those who follow him are warned to stay awake, to stay firm in their testimony
3. Har-Magedon (Mount of Megiddo) is a hill in the valley of Jezreel, the apparent focal point of the gathering armies who assemble against Israel (16)

⁴ Walvoord, “Revelation in BKCNT,” 968.

IV. The seventh bowl (17-21)

A. The final bowl: all is done (17)

1. The seventh bowl is *environmental* – it is poured out on the air
2. The voice of God pronounces the end of judgements (as if it has already happened)

B. The effect of the judgement is a tremendous shaking of the whole earth (18)

1. This is the mother of all earthquakes, completely unprecedented
2. It is accompanied by thunder and lightning

C. The effects of the quake (19-20)

1. The great city is split into three parts
 - a. Some think the city is Jerusalem, see 11.8 where Jerus. is called “the great city”
 - b. Others that “Babylon” is a substitute for Rome
 - c. Still others take this as literal Babylon rebuilt “the capital of the final world government”⁵
2. The “cities of the nations” fall
3. Babylon is remembered by God to experience the fullness of his wrath
4. The earthquake will have tremendous physical effects world-wide, including sinking islands and flattening mountains (20)

D. The final defiance of men (21)

1. Despite tremendous environmental judgement (huge hailstones), men still blaspheme God
2. This last plague, the passage says, is “extremely severe”

⁵ Walvoord, 969 (See also Walvoord, *Revelation*, pp. 240-41).

Conclusion:

The description of this chapter is horrific. It is hard to imagine all that this means. However, it is one that ought to cause men to be sober and serious about the gospel for men now:

1. We ought to be earnest in our attempts to win folks to Christ
2. Those who hear the gospel desperately need to respond in faith