

# THE BOWL JUDGMENTS DESTROY SATAN'S KINGDOM

## Summary and Historical Background

The Bowl (Vial) Judgments of Revelation 15-16 complete the chronology of the Tribulation; however, more information about the Tribulation will be given in the insets found in chapters 17-19. The seventh trumpet introduces the Bowl Judgments, which is the third woe (8:13; cf 9:12; 11:14). When the judgment of the seventh trumpet is finished, the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of Jesus Christ (11:15). However, this does not happen until the Bowl Judgments are completed. Hence, the Bowl Judgments are the woe of the seventh trumpet. These Bowl Judgments occur near the very end of the Tribulation in rapid succession. These judgments have a twofold significance: (1) they show that God's judgment is based upon His holiness and righteousness and not upon a fit of anger (15:2ff); and (2) they show that man's sin deserves these judgments; he is not being treated unfairly (15:2; 16:6, 9, 11, 21). The nature of the bowls is called the wrath of God (15:1, 7; 16:1, 9; cf. 14:10, 19). Some commentators claim the Bowl Judgments are a further explanation of the Trumpet Judgments because of their similarities. However, this cannot be accepted for the following reasons:

1. The Trumpet Judgments begin at the middle of the Tribulation while the Bowl Judgments at the very end of the Tribulation.
2. The Bowl Judgments are called the seven last plagues (15:1).
3. The similarities between the two sets of judgments are offset by distinct differences, for instance:
  - a. The 1<sup>st</sup> Trumpet (burning trees and grass), but the 1<sup>st</sup> Bowl (malignant sores).
  - b. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Trumpet (bitter water to drink), but the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bowl (bloody water to drink)
  - c. The 4<sup>th</sup> Trumpet (sun, moon and stars are darkened), but the 4<sup>th</sup> Bowl (sun burns people)
  - d. The 7<sup>th</sup> Trumpet (no judgment), but the 7<sup>th</sup> Bowl (great judgments) (cp 11:15; 16:17-21).
4. The judgment of the 7<sup>th</sup> Trumpet (3<sup>rd</sup> woe) include all the judgments of the seven bowls.

These Bowl Judgments conclude God's judicial outpouring of wrath with the words, "It is done" (16:17). These words announce the defeat of political Babylon along with the two beasts of Revelation 13.

## I. Introduction to the Bowl Judgments – 15:1-8

### A. Sign in Heaven – 15:1

15:1 – John sees another sign in Heaven that is great and marvelous. The seven last plagues make up the third great sign in Heaven. Two previous signs were the woman, identified as Israel (12:1), and the great red dragon, identified as Satan (12:3). These two signs plus this third sign make up the three most important elements of the closing days of the Tribulation, namely, the fierce persecution of Israel, the world kingdom of Satan and Antichrist supplanting God and His people, and the punitive wrath of God being poured out on Antichrist's kingdom. His kingdom will be completely destroyed when the Bowl Judgments are finished. Then Christ's Kingdom will be established. Thus, the sign of God's wrath is great and marvelous.

Seven angels are given the responsibility to administer the seven last plagues being poured out of bowls. There are two things to notice concerning these last plagues: (1) "Last" indicates there were previous plagues, i.e., the seal and trumpet plagues. The judgments of the seals, trumpets and bowls occur at different times; they are not the same judgments with new details. (2) "Last" also indicates that there will be no more plagues before Christ returns (cf. 6:17 with 16:17).

When the bowls of God's wrath are poured out, His wrath will be satisfied. God's wrath is based upon His holiness, which means His judgment is justified. The unbelievers speak of His wrath under the sixth seal

(6:16-17) and all the rest of the times that His wrath is mentioned, it is particularly related to the Bowl Judgments (11:18; 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19; 19:15). The expression of His wrath on Antichrist's kingdom is complete when it is fully destroyed. Then His Son's Kingdom can be established.

### **B. Vision of the Victors – 15:2-4**

15:2 – John sees in Heaven something like a sea of glass mingled with fire. The sea of glass was previously mentioned in 4:6 as symbolic of God's holiness in relation to Old Testament temple worship (1 Kgs 7:23). While the sea symbolizes God's holiness, the fire symbolizes His fiery judgment when His holiness is violated. Unrepentant sinners violate His holiness by their rebellion, so they are sent to the Lake of Fire (Rev 21:8). Disobedient believers violate His holiness by their stubbornness and will have their works burned up by fire (1 Cor 3:12-15). Fire produces purity, so it is appropriate for those who love God to strive to be holy. These martyrs will stand on the sea of glass mingled with fire and not be afraid. Instead they will be blessed (cf. 7:13-17; 12:11; 14:13). Antichrist seeks victory when he kills the martyrs, but the martyrs gain the victory, not Antichrist. This is a paradox. The believers are victorious because they did not yield to his command to worship him. These saints are given harps (lyres) which they are privileged to play before God (cf. 5:8; 14:3).

15:3-4 – The Tribulation martyrs will sing the song of Moses because their victory over Antichrist will be similar to the victory that Moses had over Pharaoh. The song of Moses praises God for His faithfulness to Israel (Ex. 15; Deut. 32). The martyrs also sing the song of the Lamb. This refers to Christ's sacrificial work on Calvary, which made it possible for them to have victory over the worship of Antichrist. When the Tribulation saints sing these two songs, they will tell why God is worthy of praise: (1) He is great and marvelous in His works; He is the Almighty God. (2) He is just and true in His ways; He is the Righteous God, the King of saints (some mss, "nations"). (3) He is without sin and will be worshipped by all nations; He is the Holy God (Ps. 2:8-12; Zech. 14:20-21). The nations will worship Him because His judgments are based on His righteousness and holiness.

### **C. Vision of the Temple – 15:5-8**

15:5 – John sees the temple in heaven is opened, where the Law was kept in the Ark of Testimony. This is the holiest of all places, the Holy of Holies. This is the throne room of God (cf. Rev 4). This is the same scene described in 11:19. After John was given several insets, the story of God's judgments resumes where it left off in 11:19.

15:6 – The seven angels carry the judgments of God from the temple in Heaven. This indicates the holy character of these judgments. Not only are the judgments holy, but so are the angels. They come from the very presence of God and are sent forth to execute His holy wrath upon Antichrist and his kingdom. Their white linen garments symbolize their purity and the golden girdles about their breasts reflect the glory of God that accompanies this judgment scene.

15:7 – One of the living creatures (cf 4:6ff) handed each of the seven angels a bowl of God's wrath which would be poured out upon the kingdom of Antichrist. The bowls are full (literally full to overflowing) with the wrath of God. This indicates that a severe judgment is about to come. The fact that this judgment will be initiated by God, who lives forever and ever, makes this judgment more certain and more solemn. It is important to remember that these men had repeatedly refused to repent of their worship of demons and idols, but also of their murders, sorceries, fornication and thefts. They did not want to change, so they deserved God's final judgment (9:20-21).

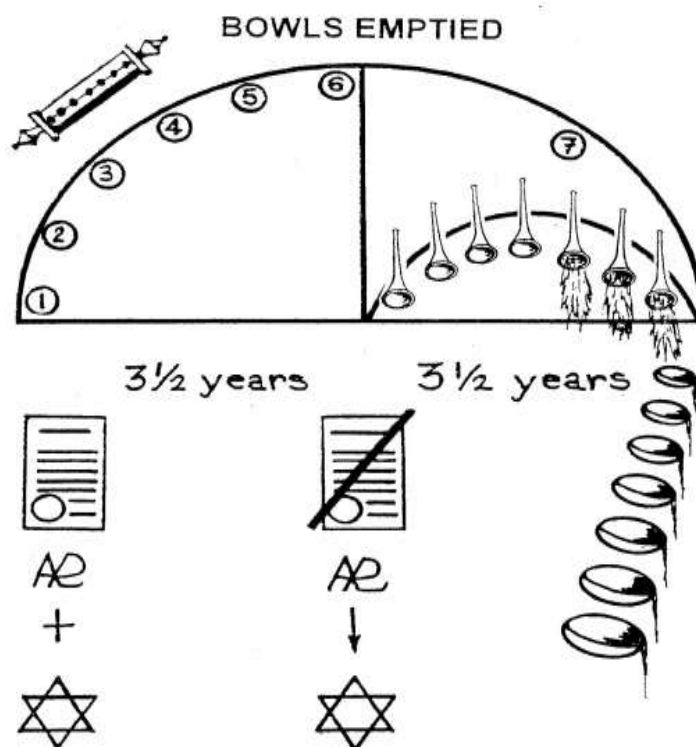
15:8 – When the bowls of wrath were given to the seven angels, the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power. The glory of God reflects God's righteousness and holiness. The smoke is reminiscent that God is unapproachable due to His holiness (cf. Ex. 19:18, 21; 40:34-35). No one will be allowed an entrance into the temple until the Bowl Judgments are completed.

## **II. Identification of the Bowl Judgments – 16:1-21**

### A. First Bowl: Grievous Sores – 16:1-2

16:1 – John hears a great voice from the temple in Heaven. This has been called “the great chapter” because the word “great” is used so often (16:1, 9, 12, 14, 18, 19, 21). It is God’s voice that John hears since it comes out of the temple. God instructs seven commissioned angels to pour out their bowls of His wrath on the earth. All of the Bowl Judgments are poured out in quick succession near the very end of the Tribulation.

16:2 – The first angel pours out his bowl of wrath on the earth and it produces a malignant ulcer. It is of such a nature that no one in Antichrist’s kingdom can heal it, not even Satan (16:11). It is reminiscent of the plague of boils that Moses inflicted on the Egyptians (Ex. 9:8-12; cf. Deut. 28: 27, 35). The sores are exclusively given to those who have the mark of the beast or worship his image. However, as bad as this judgment is, it is only the precursor of greater judgments to come (14:9-11).



### B. Second Bowl: Bloody Seas – 16:3

16:3 – The second angel pours out his bowl of wrath on the sea and it becomes blood like that of a dead man. Every living creature in the sea died. This is like the plague that Moses inflicted on the Egyptian when he turned the Nile into a river of blood and all the fish died (Ex. 7:20-25). The water in the sea will be as loathsome as the blood of a dead man, perhaps even coagulating. This is divine retribution upon the wicked men in Antichrist’s kingdom for shedding the blood of the saints. Imagine the stench and disease, which will accompany this horrible judgment.

### C. Third Bowl: Bloody Rivers – 16:4-7

#### 1. The judgment – 16:4

16:4 – The third angel pours out his bowl of wrath on the fresh water supplies from rivers and streams and they become blood. This attack on water supplies will produce a critical shortage of drinking water.

#### 2. The basis – 16:5-7

16:5-6 – An angel, who has some jurisdiction over the water, declares that this is a righteous retribution

for those in Antichrist's kingdom, because they had shed the innocent blood of believers and now they will have blood to drink in place of water.

16:7 – John hears another voice from the altar agreeing with the angel that God is righteous and true in giving these murderers blood to drink. Since this voice comes from the altar (of incense), it pertains to the prayers of the ones killed by these murderers (6:9; 8:3; 9:13; 14:18).

#### **D. Fourth Bowl: Scorching Sun – 16:8-9**

16:8-9 – The fourth angel pours out his bowl of wrath on the sun and it scorches the people of Antichrist's kingdom with fire from its intense heat. This global warming is not caused by burning fossil fuels, but by spurning God's holy rules. It is not caused by gaseous carbon pollutants, but by seditious corrupt insurgents. These men are so hardened in their sin that they blaspheme the name of God and refuse to repent. They do not believe in God when the weather is good, but they curse Him when it is bad. They glory in the power of Satan and Antichrist and despise the power of God and Jesus Christ.

#### **E. Fifth Bowl: Dreadful Darkness – 16:10-11**

16:10-11 – The fifth angel pours out his bowl of wrath on the throne of Antichrist and his kingdom is shrouded in darkness. This literal darkness is suggestive of the darkness that God brought upon Egypt in one of the plagues (Ex. 10:21-23). But this judgment also will include severe suffering from “their pains and their sores,” so much so that the wicked will gnaw their tongues. The darkness may include a darkness of their minds so they cannot alleviate their pains and cure their sores (cf. Eph. 4:18), but it is only a precursor to their eternal sufferings in hell (Mt. 13:25, 30). Yet these men only become more confirmed in their rebellion against God and they refuse to repent, but continue to blaspheme God. It is possible that their sores refer to their malignant sores (first bowl) and their pain to their sunburns (fourth bowl).

#### **F. Sixth Bowl: Armageddon Battle – 16:12-16**

##### **1. The bowl explained – 16:12**

16:12 – The sixth angel pours out his bowl of wrath upon the great Euphrates River and causes its water to dry up. This will enable the armies of the kings of the East to cross it easily and gather at Megiddo for the Battle of Armageddon.

##### **2. The forces at work – 16:13-16**

16:13 – John saw three unclean spirits coming out of the mouths of the unholy trinity: Satan, Antichrist and the False Prophet. The unclean spirits are likened to frogs, which are three demons. The symbolism of frogs to unclean spirits goes back to the plagues in Egypt where frogs were worshipped. God showed by the plague of frogs that He controls the unclean spirits (Ex 8:2-14).

16:14 – These three demons are sent out with power to perform miracles and entice the kings of the east to come to Megiddo to destroy Israel. Without confronting them, Antichrist apparently plans with deceptive skill to put these nations under his permanent authority in the battle as he did with the ten kings of Europe. The staging area for these nations is in the fertile Valley of Jezreel. This has been a place of many wars in the past (cf. Jud 4-5; 6-7; 1 Sam. 31:8; 2 Kgs 9:20-37; 23:29-30; 2 Chron. 35:22). Jezreel has a mountain pass on its western end called Megiddo. The “Battle of Armageddon” gets its name from this mountain pass. Armageddon means “Mount of Megiddo. These nations will assemble under the leadership of Antichrist to fight a war against Israel. This valley is approximately 70 miles north of Jerusalem.

The battle against Jerusalem soon becomes the battle against Christ, when He comes to defend Jerusalem. Scripture refers to three major battles in this war between Christ and the nations. Besides Megiddo, another major battle will be southeast of Jerusalem in Edom at Bozrah (Isa. 34:1ff; 63:1-6). But the main battle will be at Jerusalem. The main objective of Antichrist in this battle is the destruction of Jerusalem so Christ cannot rule the world from that city as God has promised Him (Ps 2:6-9). That is

why Jerusalem has been the center of world conflict.

Antichrist will gather these nations together to fight against Jerusalem (Zech 14:1-2), but contrary to his plans, God will use this gathering of the nations at Jerusalem to accomplish His purposes.

He will destroy the nations gathered to fight against His city (cf. Zech 14:3-4; Rev 19:11-21). Antichrist will be defeated and cast into the lake of fire along with the False Prophet and Satan will be cast into the abyss (bottomless pit) for 1000 years

16:15 – Jesus tells the Tribulation believers that He is coming as a thief. It will catch their enemies by surprise, but they will be blessed, if they keep alert. This is the third beatitude in Revelation. It is a word of comfort for them to remain steadfast, lest they lose their courage (1 Jn 2:28). The end of warfare is close at hand.

### **G. Seventh Bowl: Great Earthquake/Hailstorm – 16:17-21**

16:17 – The seventh angel pours out his bowl of wrath into the air and a great voice out of the temple says, “It is done.” God declared that this is the final judgment: all the Tribulation judgments are completed with the seventh bowl.

16:18 – The air is filled with the sounds (possibly from the wind) of a mighty storm coupled with thundering and lightning and hail (16:21), plus an earthquake so great that nothing like it has ever been experienced on earth. It probably will fill the air with great amounts of dirt and debris. This storm originates from the throne of God, the Holy of Holies. It is a storm of righteous judgment on the wicked kingdom of Satan and Antichrist. The divine storm has been increasing in strength throughout the Tribulation beginning only with lightning, thunder and sounds (4:5). It increases in strength with the addition of an earthquake (8:5). When the temple is open, hail is added as another element to the storm (11:19). Since the scene in 11:19 appears to be the same as this one (cp 11:19 with 15:5), the storm revealed under the seventh bowl has the same elements with more detail about the earthquake and the hail.

This earthquake will occur when Jesus Christ comes to fight against the armies battling against Israel at Jerusalem. When His feet rest on the Mount of Olives, overlooking Jerusalem on the east, the mountain will split in two parts from east to west to form a great valley toward the Dead Sea. Half of it will move to the north and the other half will move to the south. (Zech 14:1-4). It is from this mountain that Jesus ascended into Heaven and it is to this mountain that He will return.

16:19 – The great city must refer to Jerusalem, which fits the context best (cf. Rev. 11:8 where Jerusalem is called a great city). Jerusalem, no doubt, will suffer some damage from the earthquake when it will be split into three parts, but there is no evidence of Jerusalem being badly destroyed. However, other cities of the nations will fall at this time. Babylon will receive the full reward for her iniquity and will be completely destroyed. God will give her the cup of His fierce wrath in exchange for her golden cup of abominations (cf 17:4). A summary of her destruction will be revealed in chapters 17-18 and the destruction of her armies in chapter 19:11-21.

16:20 – Great topographical changes will accompany this bowl (cf Zech. 14:4-8).

16:21 – The hail that falls in this storm will be huge. The stones will weigh as much as 100 pounds. It will take supernatural updrafts to keep those hailstones in the air until they reach that size. These hailstones may well be the sword of Christ’s mouth (19:15, 21). When He speaks the word, those hailstones will drop on the armies of the Antichrist and decimate them. This is not the first time that God defeated His enemies with hailstones (cf. Josh. 10:11), but it will be the last time and the greatest of all victories. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone, but this time He chooses to destroy Babylon and His enemies with hailstones. When the ice melts the fowls of the air are invited to a supper consisting of the armies of Antichrist (19:17-21). Notice the hardness of men’s hearts: all the while they are being destroyed, they are blaspheming God.



## PROGRESSION OF THE JUDGMENTS: THE BOWLS

Storm from God's Throne [4:5]	Storm after the Seals [8:5]	Storm after the Trumpets [11:19]	Storm after the Bowls [16:18, 21]			
SEAL JUDGMENTS [Revelation 6:1-17; 8:1]						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Conquest by threat of War	War	Famine	¼ of All People Die	Martyrs Prayer	Lamb's Wrath	7 <sup>th</sup> Seal [Introduces the Trumpet Judgments]
TRUMPET JUDGMENTS [Revelation 8:2-9:21; 11:15-19]						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1/3 Plants Burned	1/3 Sea is Blood	1/3 Waters Bitter	1/3 Heavens Darkened	Locust Sting: 5 mos.	1/3 People Die	7 <sup>th</sup> Trumpet [Bowls]
				1 <sup>st</sup> Woe	2 <sup>nd</sup> Woe	3 <sup>rd</sup> Woe
SEAL JUDGMENTS [Revelation 6:1-17; 8:1-6]				TRUMPET and BOWL JUDGMENTS will occur in the second half of the TRIBULATION		
1 <sup>st</sup> SEAL: White Horse: Antichrist Conquers By Threats (6:1-2)				BOWL JUDGMENTS Revelation 15:1-16:21		
2 <sup>nd</sup> SEAL: Red Horse: Great War Destroys Peace (6:3-4)				1 <sup>ST</sup> BOWL: Malignant sore is given to those with the mark of the beast (16:2)		
3 <sup>rd</sup> SEAL: Black Horse: Great War Brings Famine (6:5-6)				2 <sup>nd</sup> BOWL: Sea becomes bloody and all sea life dies (16:3)		
4 <sup>th</sup> SEAL: Pale Green Horse:One Fourth of the People on Earth Die (6:7-8)				3 <sup>rd</sup> BOWL: Drinking water is turned to blood (16:4-7)		
5 <sup>th</sup> SEAL: Martyrs Pray for God to Judge Antichrist (6:9-12)				4 <sup>th</sup> BOWL: Sun scorches people with great heat (16:8-9)		
6 <sup>th</sup> SEAL: Lamb's Wrath Is Prepared for Antichrist's Kingdom (6:12-17)				5 <sup>th</sup> BOWL: Antichrist's kingdom is full of darkness (16:10-11)		
7 <sup>th</sup> SEAL: Introduces the Trumpet Judgments (8:1-6)				6 <sup>th</sup> BOWL: Euphrates is made dry to gather the kings of the East to Armageddon (16:12-16)		
				7 <sup>th</sup> BOWL: Powerful storm destroys Babylon (16:17-21)		
First Half of the Tribulation [3 ½ years] Antichrist Rules over Europe [Revived Rome]				Second Half of the Tribulation [3 ½ years] LAMB'S WRATH on Antichrist: TheGreat Tribulation		