

Lesson #36-The Seven Bowl Judgments

Revelation 16:1-8

I. Introduction

- a. Read
- b. (16:17–21)
- c. The **seven angels** were introduced in 15:1, 6–8.
- d. There they were given the seven bowls containing the final judgments.
 - i. Here God commands all seven of them, **“Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.”** As are all the judgments, the seven bowls will be supernatural acts of God.
 - ii. The text does not tolerate the attempts of some commentators to give them a purely natural, scientific explanation.
 - iii. They will hit far too rapidly for any explanation other than that they come from God Himself.
 - iv. In fact, there is only a brief pause, just long enough for one of the angels to affirm that the bowl judgments are just and righteous (vv. 5–7).
- e. The bowls are universal, more intense than the previous judgments, and are called “the last” judgments (15:1), showing they do not go back in time to repeat earlier plagues.

II. THE FIRST BOWL

- a. 16:2
- b. Responding immediately to God’s command, **the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth.**

- c. The bowls were actually shallow saucers. Their contents are not slowly, gradually poured out, but dumped all at once.
- i. The sloshing out of the first bowl results in a **loathsome and malignant sore** that afflicts people.
 - ii. **Loathsome** and **malignant** translate two general Greek words for evil (*kakos* and *ponēros*).
 - iii. Used together, they stress that the sores will be festering, painful, and incurable.
 - iv. **Sore** translates *helkos*, the Greek equivalent of the Latin word from which the English word *ulcer* derives.
 - v. It describes inflamed, oozing, ulcerous sores, such as those that affected the Egyptians (Ex. 9:9–11 LXX; cf. Deut. 28:27, 35), Job (Job 2:7), and the ones that covered Lazarus the beggar (Luke 16:21).
 - vi. They will bring unrelieved physical torment to those who have rejected Jesus Christ.
- d. The sores will not affect believers, whose names have been “written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain” (13:8).
- i. They will come only upon those who chose to follow Antichrist, received his **mark** to show their allegiance (13:16–17), and **worshiped his image** (13:12).
 - ii. That passage describes eternal judgment; the present one describes temporal judgment.
 - iii. Antichrist’s followers are suffering the consequences of having rejected the preaching of

the gospel and the warning of the angel given in 14:7: “Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come.” These inflamed, incurable sores may be similar to those Zechariah wrote about: “Now this will be the plague with which the Lord will strike all the peoples who have gone to war against Jerusalem; their flesh will rot while they stand on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongue will rot in their mouth” (14:12).

III. THE SECOND BOWL

- a. 16:3
- b. One of the reasons the bowl judgments will be so devastating is that their effects are cumulative.
- c. Before the sores of the first bowl could heal **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.**
- d. This judgment is similar to the first plague in Egypt (Ex. 7:20–24) and the second trumpet judgment (8:8–9).
 - i. But this time the effects will be much more intense and widespread; since the oceans cover approximately 70 percent of the earth’s surface, the effects of this judgment will be worldwide.
 - ii. After the angel dumped his bowl, the **sea**, which is vitally important to all life on earth, **became blood like that of a dead man.**
 - iii. To the amazement, horror, and despair of the world, the oceans will no longer be fluid, but will become thick, dark, and coagulated, like the pool

of blood from someone who has been stabbed to death.

- e. Exactly what supernatural means God will use to destroy the oceans is not revealed, but the effects will resemble those of the phenomenon known as the red tide.
 - i. Commentator John Phillips writes: From time to time, off the coast of California and elsewhere, a phenomenon known as “the red tide” occurs. These red tides kill millions of fish and poison those who eat contaminated shellfish. In 1949, one of these red tides hit the coast of Florida. First the water turned yellow, but by midsummer it was thick and viscous with countless billions of dinoflagellates, tiny one-celled organisms. Sixty-mile windrows of stinking fish fouled the beaches. Much marine life was wiped out, even bait used by fishermen died upon the hooks. Eventually the red tide subsided, only to appear again the following year. Eating fish contaminated by the tide produced severe symptoms caused by a potent nerve poison, a few grams of which, distributed aright, could easily kill everyone in the world. An unchecked population explosion of toxic dinoflagellates would kill all the fish in the sea. (*Exploring Revelation*, rev. ed. [Chicago: Moody, 1987; reprint, Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux, 1991], 190–91)
- f. The stench from the dead, decaying bodies of **every living thing in the sea** (only partial death occurred at the second trumpet) will be unimaginable. Henry

Morris writes: In this toxic ocean nothing can survive, and soon all the billions of fishes and marine mammals and marine reptiles and the innumerable varieties of marine invertebrates will perish, thus still further poisoning the oceans and contaminating the sea shores of the world. The oceans will have effectively completed their age-long function in the earth's physical economy, and will die. As God had created every living soul in the waters (Genesis 1:21), so now every living soul died in the sea. (*The Revelation Record* [Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1983], 298)

- g. The transforming of the world's seas into putrid pools of stinking death will be graphic testimony to the wickedness of man, and the reverse of the day when God originally gave life to all sea creatures (Gen. 1:21).

IV. THE THIRD BOWL

- a. 16:4–7
- b. When **the third angel poured out his bowl**, the same appalling judgment that affected the oceans was visited on **the rivers and the springs of waters ... they too became blood.**
- c. What happened to the Nile River in Egypt (Ex. 7:20–24; Ps. 78:43–44) now happens to the world's entire supply of fresh water.
- d. The contamination of the world's oceans will be an environmentalist's worst nightmare.
 - i. But the destruction of the world's remaining fresh water supply will be a catastrophic, staggering blow to fallen humanity.

- ii. By the time the third bowl is poured out, fresh water will be in critically short supply.
 - iii. The third trumpet judgment (8:10–11) will result in the poisoning of one third of the world’s fresh water.
 - iv. Additionally, the two witnesses will “have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying [the last three and a half years of the Tribulation]; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood” (11:6).
 - v. The temporary restraining of the earth’s winds (7:1) will also cause drought.
 - vi. With no wind to move clouds and weather systems, the hydrological cycle will be disrupted and no rain will fall.
- e. The destruction of what is left of the earth’s fresh water will cause unthinkable hardship and suffering.
- i. There will be no water to drink; no clean water to wash the oozing sores caused by the first bowl judgment; no water to bring cooling relief from the scorching heat that the fourth bowl judgment will shortly bring.
 - ii. The scene is so unimaginably horrible that people will wonder how a God of compassion, mercy, and grace could send such a judgment.
 - iii. And so there is a brief interlude in the pouring out of the judgments while an angel speaks in God’s defense.

- f. Appropriately, it is **the angel of the waters** who defends God’s righteous judgment in an echo of the overcomers’ song in 15:3–4.
- i. In contrast to the curses and blasphemies of men (cf. vv. 9, 11) the angel declares, “**Righteous are You, who are and who were** (cf. 11:17; 1:4, 8; 4:8), **O Holy One, because You judged these things.**”
 - ii. God’s judgment of sinners is unquestionably **righteous** because He is the **Holy One**.
 - iii. And although His wrath is terrifying and deadly, it is a just, deserved, and appropriate response to sinners’ rejection of Him.
- g. The angel declares that the Christ-hating, God-rejecting people receiving these judgments will bear an overwhelming burden of guilt.
- i. They will have rejected the clear, powerful, and persuasive preaching of the gospel throughout the Tribulation.
 - ii. More than that, the angel reminds the reader that **they poured out the blood of saints and prophets.**
 - iii. They will mercilessly persecute and kill believers throughout the Tribulation, beginning with the martyrs of the fifth seal (6:9–11).
 - iv. Later, John saw “a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands.... ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation,

and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' ” (7:9, 14).

- v. The two witnesses will be martyred (11:7), and the enraged nations (11:18) will be “drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus” (17:6).
- h. Fittingly, those who have spilled so much innocent blood will be **given blood to drink**.
 - i. In the angel’s chilling words, “**They deserve it.**”
 - ii. God is just and holy and will execute vengeance for His people (Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30).
 - iii. Having willfully rejected the knowledge of the truth (Heb. 10:26), there is nothing left for the unbelieving world but to receive what they **deserve**, “a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries” (Heb. 10:27).
- i. Then the apostle John **heard the altar saying, “Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.”**
 - i. The personified altar echoes the sentiments of the angel with words similar to 15:3.
 - ii. It may be that the very altar under which the saints were earlier seen praying for vengeance (6:9–11) now affirms that God’s **true and righteous judgments** are the answer to those prayers.
- j. That God’s **judgments** are **true** and **righteous** is the constant teaching of Scripture.
 - i. They are not like the capricious judgments associated with false pagan gods.

- ii. In Genesis 18:25 Abraham asked rhetorically, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?”
- iii. David wrote in Psalm 19:9, “The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether,” while in Psalm 119:75 the psalmist added, “I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are righteous.”
- iv. Paul wrote of “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom. 2:5).
- v. In 19:1-2 John “heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her.’ ”

V. THE FOURTH BOWL.

- a. 16:8–9
- b. In contrast to the first three angels, who poured out their bowls on the earth, the **fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun.**
- c. As a result the sun, which has since the fourth day of creation (Gen. 1:14–19) given the world light, warmth, and energy, becomes a deadly killer.
- d. Searing heat exceeding anything in human experience will **scorch men** so severely that it will seem that the atmosphere is on **fire.**
- e. Those who will be **scorched with** the sun’s **fierce heat** are the same “people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image” (v. 2).

- f. This fiery judgment is reminiscent of Isaiah 24:4–6: “The earth mourns and withers, the world fades and withers, the exalted of the people of the earth fade away. The earth is also polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant. Therefore, a curse devours the earth, and those who live in it are held guilty. Therefore, the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left.”
- g. Another serious consequence of the sun’s intense heat will be the melting of the polar ice caps.
- i. The resulting rise in the oceans’ water level will inundate coastal regions, flooding areas miles inland with the noxious waters of the dead oceans.
 - ii. Widespread damage and loss of life will accompany that flooding, adding further to the unspeakable misery of the devastated planet.
 - iii. Transportation by sea will become impossible.
- h. One would think that the unparalleled disasters of the first four bowl judgments would cause people to repent.
- i. God’s judgment is designed to call sinners to repentance (Rom. 2:4), or, like Pharaoh, to harden their hearts.
 - ii. Instead of blaming their sin, in the most shocking example of hardness of heart in history, **they blasphemed the name of God**, whom they know to be directly responsible for all their misery.

- iii. Amazingly, they know that it is **God who has the power over the plagues** that were afflicting them.
- iv. Yet, they will love their sin so much, and be so deceived by Antichrist, that **they will not repent so as to give God glory.**
- v. Until this point, only the Antichrist has been described as blaspheming (13:1, 5–6); here the world adopts his evil character.
- vi. Neither grace nor wrath will move their wicked hearts to repentance (cf. 9:20–21; 16:11).
- vii. In 11:13 the earthquake brought some to repentance, but not in this judgment series.
- i. Such blind, blasphemous hardness of heart is incredible in the face of the devastating judgments they will be undergoing.
 - i. But like their evil leader, Antichrist, they will continue to hate God and refuse to **repent**, which would give **glory** to God as a just and righteous Judge of sin (cf. Josh. 7:19–25).

VI. THE FIFTH BOWL

- a. 16:10–11
- b. As He did long ago in Egypt (Ex. 10:21–29), God will turn up the intense suffering of the sinful world by turning out the lights.
- c. After **the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, his kingdom became darkened** (cf. 9:2; Ex. 10:21–23).
- d. Commentators disagree over where specifically this **bowl** will be dumped.

- i. Some think it will be on the actual **throne** that **the beast** sits on; others on his capital city of Babylon; still others on his entire kingdom.
 - ii. It is best to see the **throne** as a reference to his kingdom, since the bowl poured out on the **throne** darkens the whole kingdom.
 - iii. Regardless of the exact location of where the bowl is dumped, the result is that darkness engulfs the whole earth, which is Antichrist's worldwide **kingdom**.
 - iv. The **beast** will be as helpless before the power of God as anyone else.
- e. The cumulative effect of the painful sores, fouled oceans, lack of drinking water, intense heat, all engulfed in thick blackness, will bring unbearable misery.
- i. Yet, incredibly, the wicked, unbelieving people of the world will still refuse to repent.
 - ii. John notes that they **gnawed their tongues** (lit. “kept on chewing”) **because of** the most intense and excruciating **pain**, yet with those same tongues **they blasphemed the God of heaven** (a frequent Old Testament title for God; cf. 11:13; Gen. 24:3; Ezra 5:11–12; Neh. 1:4–5; Ps. 136:26; Dan. 2:18, 19, 37, 44; Jonah 1:9) **because of their pains and their sores** (perhaps related to the lack of sunlight, as well as the effect of previous plagues) **and they did not repent of their deeds**—the ultimate act of defiance by those hopelessly engulfed in Antichrist's satanic system.

- iii. This is the last reference to their unwillingness to repent.
- iv. The first five plagues were God's final call to repentance.
 - v. Sinners ignored that call, and are now confirmed in their unbelief.
- vi. The final two bowls, containing the severest of all the judgments, will be poured out on hardened, implacable impenitents.

VII. THE SIXTH BOWL

- a. 16:12–16
- b. Unlike the previous five bowls, the sixth, like the fifth seal (6:9–11), has no specific assault on humanity but prepares for what is to come.
- c. When his turn came, **the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates.**
- d. The **Euphrates** appeared earlier in Revelation in connection with the sixth trumpet judgment (9:14), when 200 million demons who were bound near it were released.
- e. As the longest and most significant river in the Middle East, the **Euphrates** deserves to be called the **great river** (cf. 9:14; Gen. 15:18; Deut. 1:7; Josh. 1:4).
 - i. Its source is in the snowfields and ice cap high on the slopes of Mount Ararat (located in modern Turkey), from which it flows some eighteen hundred miles before emptying into the Persian Gulf.
 - ii. In ancient times the Garden of Eden was located in the vicinity of the **Euphrates** (Gen. 2:10–14).

- iii. The **Euphrates** also formed the eastern boundary of the land God gave to Israel (Gen. 15:18; Deut. 1:7; 11:24; Josh. 1:4).
- iv. Along with the nearby Tigris, the **Euphrates** is still the lifeblood of the Fertile Crescent.
- f. By the time the sixth bowl is poured out, the **Euphrates** will be very different than it is today or has ever been.
 - i. The blazing heat from the sun associated with the fourth bowl will melt the snow and the ice cap on Mount Ararat.
 - ii. That will vastly increase the volume of water in the **Euphrates**, causing massive damage and flooding along its course.
 - iii. The bridges spanning the river will surely be destroyed.
 - iv. Thus, the reason for the sixth bowl becomes apparent.
 - v. As the angel dumped his bowl, the Euphrates's **water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east.**
 - vi. The eastern armies will need to cross the Euphrates to reach their ultimate destination—Armageddon in the land of Palestine.
- g. God's drying up of the Euphrates is not an act of kindness toward the **kings from the east**, but one of judgment.
 - i. They and their armies will be entering a deadly trap.

- ii. The evaporation of the Euphrates will lead them to their doom, just as the parting of the Red Sea led to the destruction of the Egyptian army.
 - iii. Why they will make the daunting journey that will take them to their doom, through the drought, scorching heat, darkness, and their painful sores, is stated in vv. 13–14.
- h. Whatever the human motives of this invasion force, whether political rebellion or rabid anti-Semitism, the real reason behind their advance toward Palestine soon becomes evident.
- i. In a grotesque vision, like something out of a horror movie, John **saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits** (cf. Matt. 10:1; Mark 1:23; Acts 5:16) **like frogs**.
 - ii. From the **mouth** (symbolizing the source of influence) of each member of the unholy trinity (the **dragon** [Satan], the **beast** [Antichrist], and the **false prophet**) came a foul, **unclean spirit** resembling a **frog**.
 - iii. Frogs were unclean animals (Lev. 11:10, 41), but these are not literal frogs as in the plague in Egypt (Ex. 8:5; Ps. 78:45).
 - iv. John identified the froglike apparitions as **spirits of demons**.
 - v. This graphic, revolting, and disgusting illustration pictures the slimy, cold-blooded vileness of these demons, who seduce the kings from the east into making the difficult journey to

their doom at Armageddon under their deluding influence (cf. 1 Kings 22:19–22).

- i. As part of their deception, the **demons** will no doubt perform supernatural signs.
 - i. Earlier in the Tribulation, the false prophet performed “great signs,” even making “fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men” (13:13).
 - ii. As a result, he was able to deceive “those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast” (13:14).
 - iii. He was even able to persuade “those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life” (13:14).
 - iv. These unclean **spirits of demons** will work lying wonders to deceive the eastern **kings**.
- j. That these demons will have such powers of deception is not surprising.
 - i. Jesus predicted that “false Christs and false prophets ... will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect” (Mark 13:22; cf. 2 Thess. 2:9–10).
 - ii. Certainly these demons will have even greater powers of deception.
 - iii. Thus, they will have little difficulty in deceiving **the kings of the whole world, to gather them together**.
 - iv. The mission of the demons is to gather not just the eastern powers, but all of the world’s rulers

and armies to join the forces from the east **for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.**

- v. In their pride, arrogance, and folly, the demonically deceived nations of the world will converge on Palestine to do battle with God Himself at Armageddon.
 - vi. According to 17:12–14, ten kings will be involved.
- k. Joel prophesied of this time in Joel 3:2, 9–13:
- l. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. (Zech. 14:2–3)
 - m. The **war** will be over quickly: “These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings” (17:14).
 - i. In fact, it will not be a war; it will be a slaughter, as 19:11–21 graphically portrays.
 - ii. Amid all the horrors of judgment, deception, and war comes a parenthetical word of encouragement to believers: **“Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.”**

- iii. This gracious word from heaven will come before the pouring out of the seventh bowl and assure believers that they will not be forgotten.
- n. The word of comfort from the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 22:7, 12, 20) begins **“Behold, I am coming like a thief.”**
 - i. Like a thief comes, Jesus will come quickly and unexpectedly.
 - ii. But unlike a thief, He will come not to steal but to take what is rightfully His.
 - iii. The imagery of Jesus coming like a thief appears elsewhere in the New Testament. Earlier in Revelation Jesus warned the church in Sardis, “If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you” (3:3).
 - iv. In the Olivet discourse He added, “Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into” (Matt. 24:42–43).
 - v. The apostle Paul reminded the Thessalonians that “the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2), a truth that Peter also affirmed (2 Pet. 3:10). Jesus’ sudden, unexpected return will bring fear and dismay to His enemies, but hope and comfort to His people.
- o. Then the exalted Lord pronounced the third of seven beatitudes (blessings, benedictions) in Revelation (cf.

1:3; 14:13; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14): **“Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.”**

- i. This describes those who, like the five prudent virgins (Matt. 25:1–13), will be prepared for His arrival.
 - ii. The imagery here, however, is not that of bridesmaids preparing for a wedding, but of soldiers alert and on duty.
 - iii. Only a soldier **who stays awake and keeps his clothes** on is ready for combat.
 - iv. Those caught unprepared when the battle breaks out will **walk about naked and men will see their shame**—the shame of a soldier derelict in his duty.
 - v. Those whom God has “clothed ... with garments of salvation” and “wrapped ... with a robe of righteousness” (Isa. 61:10), who have “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 13:14), will be ready when the judgment comes.
 - vi. “Now, little children, abide in Him,” urged John in his first epistle, “so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming” (1 John 2:28).
 - vii. Those whom Jesus finds prepared when He returns will be blessed.
- p. After the brief interlude of encouragement for the redeemed, the prophetic narrative returns to the events of the sixth bowl.

- i. The deceiving demon spirits will have gathered the nations **together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon.**
- ii. **Har-Magedon** is a Hebrew word meaning “Mount Megiddo.”
- iii. Since there is no specific mountain by that name, and **Har** can refer to hill country, it is probably a reference to the hill country surrounding the Plain of Megiddo, some sixty miles north of Jerusalem. More than two hundred battles have been fought in that region, including Barak’s defeat of the Canaanites (Judg. 4–5; cf. Judg. 5:19), Gideon’s victory over the Midianites (Judg. 7; cf. Judg. 6:33; the “valley of Jezreel” is another name for the Plain of Esdraelon), and Josiah’s defeat at the hands of Pharaoh Neco (2 Chron. 35:22).
- iv. The Plain of Megiddo and the nearby Plain of Esdraelon will be the focal point for the Battle of Armageddon, which will rage the entire length of Israel as far south as the Edomite city of Bozrah (Isa. 63:1).
- v. Other battles will also occur in the vicinity of Jerusalem (Zech. 14:1–3).
- q. The “battle” will be over almost as soon as it begins, as the Lord Jesus Christ returns to rescue His people (cf. Zech 14:1–3; Joel 3:16) and defeat His enemies.
 - i. The resulting slaughter of the world’s armies will be almost unimaginable, with blood splattered several feet high and perhaps running in streams throughout a distance of two hundred miles (14:20).

- ii. The sixth bowl sets the final stage, but before the brief “battle,” the seventh and final plague will hit.

VIII. THE SEVENTH BOWL

- a. 16:17–21
- b. The **seventh bowl** is the final outpouring of God’s wrath on sinners in this present earth.
- c. After it Jesus will come and set up His millennial kingdom.
- d. At the end of that thousand-year period, there will be one final act of rebellion, which will be quickly crushed (20:7–10).
- e. But that judgment will not take place in the world as we know it, for the earth will be changed dramatically before the kingdom arrives.
- f. This final judgment of the present era will take place during the time when “the mystery of God is finished” (10:7).
 - i. It is the last of the “seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished” (15:1).
 - ii. The seventh bowl will be the worst calamity in the world’s history, the most complete and devastating catastrophe the earth will ever experience.
 - iii. Its effects carry all the way to the establishment of the earthly kingdom of Christ.
 - iv. Like the fourth angel, **the seventh angel** did not dump his bowl on the earth, but **poured it out ... upon the air.**

- v. Its first effects were on the earth's atmosphere, as if God were cleansing the former domain of Satan and his demon hosts (12:9).
- vi. The earth (v. 2), the sea (v. 3), the waters (v. 4), the sun (v. 8), and finally the **air** are the targets of judgment.
- g. As the angel dumped his bowl, **a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne.**
 - i. The voice is that of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth. His solemn declaration "**It is done**" announces the climax of the final Day of the Lord that will spread doom over the entire globe.
 - ii. The perfect tense verb *gegonen* (**it is done**) describes a completed action with ongoing results.
 - iii. It is similar to Jesus' final words from the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30). God's judgment of Christ on Calvary provided salvation for repentant sinners; the judgment of the seventh bowl brings doom to unrepentant sinners.
- h. The pouring out of the seventh bowl dramatically affected the atmosphere; **there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder.**
- i. Like the seventh seal (8:5) and the seventh trumpet (11:19), the seventh bowl is introduced with the imagery of a violent thunderstorm.
 - i. But those earlier storms were mere previews of the mighty storm of wrath that now bursts upon the earth.

- j. Though the seventh bowl was dumped on the earth's atmosphere, it will also have a devastating effect on the earth itself.
- k. God will punctuate this final judgment against sinners with an earthquake (cf. Isa. 24:19–20; Hag. 2:6), just as He did His judgment of sin at Calvary (Matt. 27:51–54).
 - i. This earthquake will be the most powerful one ever to strike the earth; John described it as **a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty**. While there have always been and will continue to be local earthquakes (Matt. 24:7), this **great earthquake** will be unique in that God will shake the globe, as prophesied in Haggai 2:6 and Hebrews 12:26–27.
 - ii. The shaking will be so severe that it will renovate and reconfigure the earth in preparation for the millennial kingdom, restoring it to something like its pre-Flood condition (v. 20).
- l. The first effect of this **great** and **mighty** earthquake was that **the great city was split into three parts**.
 - i. The great city cannot be Babylon, as some think, because it is distinguished from “Babylon the great” mentioned later in verse 19.
 - ii. A comparison with 11:8 clearly identifies the **great city** as Jerusalem, “the great city ... where also [the] Lord was crucified.”

- iii. That the **great city** is distinct from **the cities of the nations** offers further evidence that Jerusalem is in view.
- iv. The massive earthquake will **split Jerusalem into three parts**, beginning a series of geophysical alterations to the city and its surrounding region that will conclude when the Lord Jesus Christ returns.
- v. Zechariah 14:4–10 describes these changes in detail.
 - 1. The Mount of Olives will split in two, and a new valley running east and west will be created (Zech. 14:4).
 - 2. A spring of water will flow year-round from Jerusalem to the Mediterranean and Dead Seas (Zech. 14:8), causing the desert to blossom like a rose (cf. Isa. 35:1).
 - 3. Jerusalem will be elevated, and the surrounding region flattened into a plain (Zech. 14:10).
- m. Thus, the purpose of the earthquake as it relates to Jerusalem is not to judge the city, but to enhance it.
 - i. Jerusalem was judged earlier in the Tribulation by an earthquake, which led to the salvation of those who were not killed (11:13).
 - ii. Thus, there is no need for further judgment on that city.
 - iii. The physical changes will prepare Jerusalem for the central role it will play during the millennial kingdom, when Christ will reign there as King (Ps. 110:2; Isa. 2:3; 24:23; Mic. 4:7).

- n. Unlike Jerusalem, which was enhanced by the earthquake, **the cities of the nations fell**, perhaps simultaneously with the defeat of Antichrist by the Lamb (17:12–14).
- i. Naturally, such a powerful earthquake will cause massive, widespread destruction.
 - ii. Specifically singled out is **Babylon the great, which was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.**
 - iii. As the capital city of Antichrist’s empire, **Babylon** especially will be made to drink **the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.**
 - iv. The downfall of **Babylon**, mentioned here in passing, will be described at length in chapters 17 and 18.
- o. The final effect of the earthquake is to prepare the earth for the millennial rule of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- i. To that end, the earth’s topography will be drastically altered; **every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.**
 - ii. **Islands**, which are undersea mountains, will disappear and the **mountains** on land will be flattened (cf. Isa. 40:4), completing the process that began during the sixth seal (6:12–14).
- p. “The gentle rolling topography of the world as originally created will be restored. No more will there be great inaccessible, uninhabitable mountain ranges or deserts or ice caps. The physical environment of the millennium will be, in large measure, a restoration of the antediluvian [pre-Flood] environment” (Henry M. Morris, *The Revelation Record*, 321).

- q. That may leave Jerusalem as the highest point on earth, making it a fitting throne for the Great King who will rule there during the Millennium (Jer. 3:17).
- r. Those who somehow escape the devastation caused by the earthquake will face another catastrophe, one unprecedented in earth's history.
 - i. They will be pelted with **huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each**, that will hurtle **down from heaven upon men**.
 - ii. Unlike the seventh Egyptian plague (Ex. 9:23–24) and the first trumpet judgment (8:7), the force of these hailstones is unimaginable.
 - iii. The Greek term translated **about one hundred pounds** described the most weight a normal man could carry, anywhere from 90 to 135 pounds.
 - iv. The heaviest hailstones ever recorded weighed about 2 pounds; these gigantic chunks of ice will be fifty times heavier.
 - v. They will add to the devastation caused by the earthquake and crush humanity, who, because of the earthquake's power, have no adequate shelter.
- s. Fixed in their impenitence, the survivors of the hailstorm **blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe**.
 - i. Incredibly, tortured humanity defiantly remains hardened against God—a truth that should give pause to those who think that signs and wonders will convince people to believe the gospel.
 - ii. Those who reject the wonder, glory, and majesty of the Son of God, who spurn the gracious, free

gift of salvation, will not be convinced by any sign (cf. Luke 16:31).

- iii. It is too late for these hardened sinners; they have sold their souls to Satan; they are totally committed to Antichrist's blasphemous, idolatrous, anti-God system. Children of wrath they are, catapulting into hell.
- t. God's eschatological and eternal wrath is inevitable; no one can prevent or hinder it from coming (Isa. 43:13).
- u. But there is a way to escape it, because "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).
- v. Those who by faith trust in Christ alone for salvation will escape both God's eschatological wrath (3:10) and His eternal wrath (1 Thess. 1:10).
- w. They will not face judgment, because their sins were judged when Jesus died in their place on the cross (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24).
- x. In light of the inevitable judgment to come, the warning to all unrepentant sinners is "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Heb. 4:7).¹

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 12–22*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 2000), 139–154.