

January 7, 2024 by Steve Brandon



# Pouring Out the Bowls

## Revelation 16

- 1. Bowl #1: Sores (verse 2)**
- 2. Bowl #2: Death in the Sea (verse 3)**
- 3. Bowl #3: Blood in the Rivers (verses 4-7)**
- 4. Bowl #4: Scorching Heat (verses 8-9)**
- 5. Bowl #5: Darkness and Pain (verses 10-11)**
- 6. Bowl #6: Preparation for war (verses 12-16)**
- 7. Bowl #7: Final Wrath (verses 17-21)**

With my recent involvement in jail ministry, I was given a book entitled, "Outrageous Justice."<sup>[1]</sup> It was written by some folks at Prison Fellowship, the prison ministry which Chuck Colson began in the 1970s. I have been reading it recently in an effort to better understand what those who I have ministered to in the Winnebago County Jail are facing when it comes to their legal battles.

The book wrestles with the justice system in the United States. While admitting that "America has one of the best criminal justice systems in the world" (p. 34), the authors say that "Justice in our country often misses the mark" (p. 63). The authors are thankful for the rights provided to all of us by the Constitution of the United States, especially that our judicial system is founded upon Biblical principles of individual liberty and the rights of people. Yet, because of the "War on Drugs," which began in the 1970s and 80s (p. 41), and the political benefits of being known as being "tough on crime" (p. 4, 8), our country has greatly increased the number of laws that can land a person in jail (p. 44).

The result is that the United States incarcerates more people today than any other country (p. 12). The prison population in America "has grown exponentially over the last four decades" (p. 40). If you track the prison population from the 1970s until today, you will find that today we have six times the number of people in prison than we had 50 years ago (p. 40). All of this is despite the drop in violent crime by more than 45% in recent decades (from 1995 to 2016) (p. 33). So, our prison population is a problem for this country. The problem has to do with justice. We live in a fallen world and "Justice in our country often misses the mark" (p. 63). The writers say this, "The slogan 'punishment that fits the crime' sounds simple, but we must each wrestle through determining what this means, and our judgments are colored by our understanding of the purpose of punishment" (p. 64).

Indeed, this is complex. It's complex when every crime has a criminal and a victim who is impacted by the crime (p. 77). Yet, while the victim may have been the direct target of a crime, the victim's family is often a victim as well. Consider the case of a murder. When a family member is killed, the entire family suffers. Furthermore, when a criminal is punished with time in prison, their family often becomes a victim as well. As they lose their loved one to time in prison, and lose love and care at home, not to mention the potential earnings of the criminal. Society is a victim as well. As we foot the bill for time in prison, or even as we feel less safe because of the number of crimes that are committed.

Justice is complex. Consider all of the competing goals of the criminal justice system. The justice system seeks "retribution" for crimes committed. And trying to figure out a punishment proportional to the crime is often difficult. The justice system seeks "deterrence" for future crimes. Trying to figure out how much punishment is enough to "deter" future crimes is difficult, especially as criminals don't often think about the punishment that they will receive in the midst of their crimes. The justice system seeks "rehabilitation" so that crimes won't be committed again. Yet again, trying to discern when a criminal is "rehabilitated" is super difficult, as we can't read minds and discern the hearts of people. This all is compounded when those in prison often face the realities of a violent culture, which works against rehabilitation.

This book advocates for a restorative approach to justice, one that takes the criminal, the victims, and the society into account. Yet, it is all difficult. We live in a fallen world, and appropriate justice in the American criminal justice system will escape us. But it's not only justice in America that will fail. It's justice around the world that will fail. It's justice among nations.

I think about the war in Gaza. Those in Gaza have felt wrongly oppressed by the people of Israel, enough so that the attacks on October 7 were warranted, killing 1200 civilians and taking 240 hostages. For Gaza, this was justice. Israel felt wronged by the attacks, enough so that their military efforts are warranted, which has displaced 85% of the people of Gaza, many of whom are now living in refugee camps without proper sanitation and little food. This has meant the deaths of at least 22,000, most of whom are civilians, which includes many women and children. For Israel, this is justice.

Where is the justice in all of this? It is impossible to achieve. The only place where we can look to true justice is the Lord. Our hope is that come the end of the world, God will right all of the wrongs, and will execute perfect justice. As believers in Christ, we are called to let go of personal vengeance, and leave it in the Lord's hands. "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'" (Romans 12:19).

Well, as we turn to the Scriptures this morning we will see pouring out his wrath upon the earth, taking vengeance upon the earth. He does so in pouring out the bowls of his wrath. My message this morning is from Revelation 16. The title of my message is, "Pouring Out the Bowls." This is what we see in Revelation 16. We see God's wrath being poured out upon the earth.

Let's read the chapter.

### Revelation 16

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God." So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died that was in the sea. The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood.

And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, "Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!" And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!"

The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory. The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds. The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east. And I 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 like frogs. For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. ("Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!") And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.

We have finally come to the bowls and there are seven of them. Each of them brings a judgment upon the earth. If you have been here from the beginning of Revelation, you will remember that the backbone of Revelation is made up of the seals, trumpets and bowls. The seals are described in Revelation 6. The trumpets are described in Revelation 8-9. The bowls are described in Revelation 16.

When the seals were opened, judgments came upon the earth. When the trumpets were blown, judgments came upon the earth. This morning, we will see the bowls being poured out, which will bring judgments upon the earth.

Now, there are seven seals. There are seven trumpets. There are seven bowls. There are some who understand Revelation as if everything in Revelation is chronological. They believe that the seals happen first in time. Then the trumpets happen next. Then the bowls happen next.

There are others, who understand Revelation like this: with the seals, trumpets and bowls, all describing essentially the same event, from a different standpoint. Now, it's not that the seals and bowls correspond with one another. They describe roughly the same events, with the trumpet being worse than the seals, and the bowls worse than the trumpets.

If push comes to shove, I think that the second way is the better way to view the book of Revelation because there is a bit of overlap in the visions. The seals bring forth death and famine and war and earthquakes and darkness. The trumpets bring forth burning on the earth and death to the sea and darkness and plagues. The bowls bring forth death on the earth and sea, fire and plagues, darkness and cosmic battles, and the greatest earthquake there has ever been.

Yet with each of these judgments, they get worse and worse. The first several seals sees a fourth of the earth affected "with sword and with famine and with pestilence" (Revelation 6:8). The trumpets often bring judgment upon a third of the earth and sea and sky (Revelation 8:7-12). The bowls, however, see this destruction come upon the entire earth and sea. It's as if each of these judgments bring us closer and closer to the end.

Well, this morning, we are going to look at the pouring out of the seven bowls. Verse 1 helps to set the stage.

### Revelation 16:1

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God."

Now, I ask you, whose voice is this? Often in the book of Revelation we have heard these loud voices, coming and commanding events. Often we know who these voices are, whether they are angels or people. But there are many other times, when a voice simply comes from heaven, and we don't know who's speaking, like in Revelation 1:10; 11:12, 15; and 12:10. This is one of those cases. It's simply "a loud voice from the temple."

But if you go back a few verses, you can surely see the identity of this voice. Look back at chapter 15. "After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished" (Revelation 15:5-8).

There's only one being left in the temple, it's God, himself! This voice in chapter 16:1 is clearly the voice of God. Note what the Lord

commands these seven angels to do:

Revelation 16:1

"Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God."

Don't miss this. This is God commanding and directing his wrath to come on the earth, to bring judgment and justice to all humanity. This is not God leaving the world to itself. This is not God letting those in the world face their own natural consequences to their sin. No, this is God, himself, acting upon the earth, and commanding the bowls of his wrath to be poured out upon the earth. This is God's judgment upon those who dwell on the earth.

Let's work through these bowls. We see the first bowl in verse 2.

Revelation 16:2

So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

### **1. Bowl #1: Sores (verse 2)**

These sores came upon the enemies of God, those who had taken up the mark of the beast. those who had given allegiance to the beast. those who had hoped in the power of the beast. those who had worshiped the beast. This is God's wrath upon an unbelieving world, receiving their just judgment.

In verse 3, we see the second bowl.

### **2. Bowl #2: Death in the Sea (verse 3)**

Revelation 16:3

The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died that was in the sea.

Catch the destruction that is taking place here: "every living thing died that was in the sea." No more fish. No more whales. No more crabs or sea urchins or shrimp. No more boats. The water of the sea was so toxic that nothing was able to survive the sea. In the third bowl, we see this plague extend into all the waters of the earth.

Revelation 16:4

The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood.

### **3. Bowl #3: Blood in the Rivers (verses 4-7)**

We can only assume that this will bring similar death to every creature upon the earth. You can survive several weeks or months without eating, but you can only survive a few days without water. It shows the nearness of the judgment when the bowls are poured out on the earth.

Now, it's interesting here that before the fourth bowl is poured out, there is a bit of an interlude.

Revelation 16:5-6

And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, "Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!"

This is a declaration that the death coming upon the earth is the righteous judgment of God. It is fair of God to do this.

As I have been reading on the criminal justice system in America, there are often cases where the fairness of the judgment can be called into question because there are so many factors at stake: the crime, the victim, the extent of damages, the law, and the safety of the community. It is difficult to balance all of these factors. Sometimes the law seems unfair, enacting a large punishment for a small crime because of repeat offenses. Sometimes the sentence seems soft, when much harm was done for a mere slap on the wrist. Sometimes justice simply can't be achieved, especially when a murder has taken place. You can't bring back a loved one.

Perfect justice will escape us during our days upon the earth. But what we see here in the bowl judgments near the end of time, is perfect justice. That's what the angel here is pointing out: God is perfectly pouring out his judgments upon an unbelieving world.

Revelation 16:5

Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was,

By the way, this is not the deviation from the normal, "Who was and is and is to come," because at this moment in history, God has come.

Revelation 16:5

Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments.

Why is it just for God to kill off every sea creature and to pollute the waters of the earth?

Revelation 16:6

For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!"

It seems as if at this point in the history or future of the world, the righteous are no longer on the earth. They have endured until the end. It seems this way, as God's judgment is coming upon the entire world. (Yet we will see later that the righteous still seem to present upon the earth. See verse 15 below.)

Do you remember my message from last week? "Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus" (Revelation 14:12). In the next verse, there is mention of their death: "And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them'" (Revelation 14:13).

Certainly many of the righteous were killed at the hands of the wicked on the earth. Some also may have been reaped from the earth, as Revelation 14:14-16 speak about. Now, in chapter 16 with the bowls, comes the reckoning.

Revelation 16:6

It is what they deserve!

This is God taking vengeance into his own hand! They killed the saints, they deserve torture and death.

Revelation 16:7

And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!"

Do you remember when Jesus entered Jerusalem and the Pharisees were telling him to stop the crowd from worshiping him? Jesus said, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out" (Luke 19:40). At this point, it is the very altar of God that is crying out, vindicating God for his just judgment.

So, know this, church family, that these bowl judgments are as awful as they are and as terrible as they come. There are the manifestation of God's perfectly righteous judgment. But those facing God's wrath hardly think that it is fair. Look at the fourth bowl.

Revelation 16:8-9

The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.

#### **4. Bowl #4: Scorching Heat (verses 8-9)**

The power of God is on display as the bowl is poured upon the sun, seemingly fueling it more, to increase its intensity upon the earth, so much so that people are being scorched with fire from the sun! Those who were facing the burns on their flesh continued in their hardness of heart.

Revelation 16:9

...They cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues.

One would think that such suffering would cause people to turn to God for mercy. That's how it often works in this life. When people are on an airplane that's about to crash, or when people are caught in a fire, or when people are sick, they often will cry out to God for mercy. But that's not how it will work in the day of these bowls. Their hearts are so hard that they are beyond repentance.

Let this be a warning to all who presume upon the grace of God, that come their deathbed, they will repent. It's not the case here. It may not be the case in your day. Though they knew that God was the one with power over the plagues,

Revelation 16:9

... They did not repent and give him glory.

We see something similar with the fifth bowl:

Revelation 16:10-11

The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

#### **5. Bowl #5: Darkness and Pain (verses 10-11)**

We see darkness and pain in these verses. We see the kingdom of the beast thrown into darkness. We see people in pain, gnawing their tongues in anguish. This shows that the darkness here might be more than merely the extinguishing of lights. Somehow, it is bringing great pain upon people. Again, despite the darkness, and despite their pain, repentance was nowhere to be found!

This is an illustration of Proverbs 19:3, "When a man's folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the LORD." In the case of those here experiencing the effects of the fifth bowl, it is their deeds that have brought them to ruin. But rather than pleading the LORD for mercy, they curse him instead. This shows further how just God's judgment is here.

Let's move on to the sixth bowl.

### Revelation 16:12

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up,

At first glance, you might think that this sixth bowl is like the third bowl, in which it affected the rivers. In the third bowl, the rivers were turned into blood, which would render them useless. In this case, the great river Euphrates was dried up, which could bring great thirst upon the land. However, when you finish the verse, you see that the river was dried up so that the kings could come for the great battle of Armageddon.

## **6. Bowl #6: Preparation for war (verses 12-16)**

### Revelation 16:12

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east.

Drying up the water would allow the armies from the east to travel easier, to assemble for the great war. John sees the gathering of forces in verse 13.

### Revelation 16:13-14

And I 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 like frogs. For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.

In verse 13, we again see the unholy trinity. The dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. We saw the dragon in Revelation 12, making war on the saints. We saw the beast and the false prophet in Revelation 13, drawing people after themselves.

John saw frogs coming out of their mouths. This is apocalyptic imagery at its finest: Frogs coming out of the mouths of the dragon and the beast and the false prophet. Really, these frogs are "demonic spirits" whose task was to assemble all the kings of the earth for the great, final battle.

Then, we have this parenthetical thought in verse 15.

### Revelation 16:15

("Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!")

This gives us a clue that perhaps the righteous haven't all been removed from the earth after all. It seemed in the other bowls that God's righteous judgment was coming upon all on the earth, because all the earth was wicked. But here, we see the faithful ones being exhorted to stay true!

This message of keeping your garments on doesn't mean that you shouldn't go streaking on the field at the football game. It certainly is an apocalyptic picture of purity and not walking around unclothed and vulnerable. In Revelation 17:16, when Babylon falls, she is described as desolate and naked, that is, vulnerable and defeated.

Again, it's another subtle call for endurance! Then, we see, in verse 16, all of "the kings of the whole world" assembled for battle.

### Revelation 16:16

And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

This is in preparation for the final war of all wars. This is preparation for the war of Armageddon! This is the final conflict. This will be the war that ends all wars. It's not just an earthly war. It's a war of cosmic proportions. It's God against all of the "kings of the earth." It's God against the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. It's God against all of their demons. It's almost over before it starts.

### Revelation 16:17

The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!"

This is God talking smack, saying that he will win this final battle as it will bring an end to God's wrath. That's the reference here to "It is done." That is, it's the wrath of God that is completely poured out.

Back in chapter 15:1 we read, "Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished." When all of the bowls are poured out, this is the end of God's wrath upon the earth. His judgment will be complete. All that's left is the final sentencing, which we will see at the great white throne judgment in chapter 20:11.

This is probably the final "woe" of Revelation. The first woe came after the fifth trumpet in Revelation 9:12. The second woe came after the sixth trumpet in Revelation 11:14. The pouring out of all seven bowls of wrath here in chapter 16 is probably the final "woe" of Revelation.

## **7. Bowl #7: Final Wrath (verses 17-21)**

God says, "It is done!" I can't help here but to think about the final words of Jesus upon the cross. Do you remember the last words that Jesus said on the cross? He said, "It is finished!" (John 19:30).

Now, it's not that his work was done when he died. He came back from the dead to appear to his disciples. He taught them for forty days. He returned to heaven, where now he is seated to return a second time. But his work of redemption was completed. We can look to his finished work on the cross as the hope of our salvation. Jesus fulfilled the law for us and lived the perfect life that we were unable to do. By faith, his righteousness becomes ours!

In the same way here, the work of God's judgment is as good as done! It doesn't mean that God is finished pouring out his wrath. He does that in verse 18, and the battle is almost over before it begins.

Revelation 16:18-21

And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.

This is the cosmic battle at Armageddon. We only hear of one side of the battle. It's as if the dragon and the beast and the false prophet and their demon followers and the kings who came from the ends of the earth, put up no fight at all. The details of the fight will come in chapter 17 and 18, but here is the summary: The Lord is victorious!

We will read more about this when we come to chapter 18, which speaks about downfall of Babylon. "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great" (Revelation 18:2). "In a single hour all this wealth has been laid to waste" (Revelation 18:17). Then, the very earth will be destroyed, the islands will disappear, and the mountains will be flattened. Revelation 18:19 talks about Babylon, "for in a single hour she has been laid to waste." In one hour, God destroys Babylon.

Here in Revelation 16, we see the creation stirring with lightning and thunder, and the greatest of earthquakes that has ever been. It will be the earthquake of earthquakes. It will rip "the great city" (probably Babylon) into three parts. And the nations will be defeated and God will "drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath" (verse 19). And the astonishing thing here is in verse 21!

Revelation 16:21

And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people;

That's how God fights. He's got the weather at his command! Scores of people killed by hail coming down. What's even more astonishing is that those who survived cursed God. This is the clay shaking its fist at the potter, though the potter has all the right over the clay. But here the people are cursing God and they did not repent.

God is all powerful! God will win in the end! "They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is the Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful" (Revelation 17:14).

There are a couple of applications here. First, three times in this passage wrath is poured out and they didn't repent. It shows the hardness of hearts. Let us not have hard hearts and repent today. Let us be in a posture before the Lord where we realize all we have is by his mercy, grace and kindness to us in Christ Jesus. It's all we have, and we don't deserve it. Repent!

The second application is to trust the perfect justice of God. Trust that in the end, God will make all things right. He will pour his wrath upon an unbelieving world.

My friend Chris Brauns, the pastor of the Red Brick Church in Stillman Valley, has told me a phrase many times. "A strong eschatology makes a soft people." What does that mean? If you believe strongly in the end that God is going to be strong and firm and win the war of wars, we can be soft today. But if we believe that God is going to be soft in the end, a soft eschatology makes a hard people because we have to meet out our vengeance. But, God says "Vengeance is mine." Let us trust that God is going to repay all the wrongs. Whether wrongs are done to us or to society, God is the one who will ultimately make things right.

A strong eschatology makes a soft people. People who are filled with love and grace. Who realize they don't need to be the judge or the condemner or the one who brings punishment. A strong eschatology will create people who bring grace to others. That's who we need to be! We need to trust that God is going to bring the punishment perfectly.

As the angel of the waters and the angel of the alters said, "Yes Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgements."

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 7, 2024 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see [www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org](http://www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org).

---

[1] Craig DeRoche, Heather Rice-Minus, and Jesse Wiese, *Outrageous Justice* (Prison Fellowship, 2019). Page numbers of the quotes appear inline. You can get the free book (and other free resources) here: <https://www.prisonfellowship.org/outrageousjustice>.