

Revelation
Seven Bowls of Wrath (Part 1)
Revelation 16:1-21
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Revelation chapter 16. You know, there have been many times in human history when people thought the end of the world was near. That was certainly true during the Black Death. The Black Death was a plague pandemic that absolutely devastated medieval Europe from the year 1347 to 1352—five dark years. Untreated, the Bubonic Plague is fatal in between thirty to seventy-five percent of those who were infected often within 72 hours. It is estimated that between thirty and fifty percent of the population of those cities that were hit with the Bubonic Plague died from the Black Death. Estimates are hard to come by, but some believe in that time in medieval Europe twenty-five to thirty million people were killed. It would take two hundred years for the population of Europe to recover to the level that was seen prior to the Black Death. In fact, in just one year, the year 1349 the Black Death killed about half of all those living in London. From 1347 to 1351, it killed between thirty and sixty percent of all Europeans. With the Black Death and every other time in history when people believed the world was ending, in God's gracious providence it didn't. It recovered. But the end is coming. Not the end of this planet. After the Tribulation, Jesus has another plan for this planet, a thousand years in which He will establish His kingdom, renew this planet and reign over His people.

But the end of this age is coming. And it is described in the passage that we come to tonight in Revelation. Just to remind you of where we are, we are looking at that part of Revelation that covers the period of the Seven Year Tribulation. It's from Revelation chapter 6 through chapter 18. I won't take you back through the entire outline, but what happens in chapter 11, verse 15, is that the seventh angel sounds the seventh trumpet, and the blowing of the seventh trumpet initiates a rapid-fire series of catastrophic judgments that will come at the end of the Tribulation. When the seventh angel sounds, it will announce this finale of God's judgments and the

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imminent return and reign of Jesus Christ. It will announce and initiate the seven judgments described in chapter 16. Now, just to remind you that chapters 12 to 14 are an interlude and chapter 15 picks up the chronological flow of the events of the Tribulation. Chapter 15 describes the preparation in heaven for the bowl judgments—that's how chapter 15, verse 1 begins. Chapter 16 describes those bowl judgments as they unfold on earth. Let's read together just the first eleven verses of Revelation 16. You follow along as I read.

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to 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 it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image. 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. Then the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of the waters; and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters saying, "Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things; for they poured out the blood of the saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it." And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments." The fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch men with fire. Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory. Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain, and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.

This 16th chapter of the book of Revelation can be summarized like this: it describes a series of staccato-like, powerful, severe divine judgments that finish God's wrath and prepare for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Now, let me remind you again of the relationship between the seal judgments, the trumpet judgments and the bowl judgments. The seventh seal contains the seven trumpet judgments. The seventh of the trumpet judgments announces and contains the seven bowl judgments. These intense rapid-fire judgments that come at the very end of the Tribulation and immediately proceed and usher in Christ's return to the earth. These final intense judgments are described as the pouring out of Seven Bowls of Wrath. The image of a bowl, or maybe even, more realistically a shallow saucer being dumped, its contents being spilled out on the earth reveals a judgment that is unleashed not slowly and methodically and deliberately but a judgment that is suddenly, powerfully, irreparably poured out, dumped upon the earth, wreaking havoc everywhere it finds a place to land. They come quickly, one after another, and they are the most intense of the judgments of God that this world has ever experienced. As we will see, there is no break for the world to catch its collective breath. This is, in fact, the final hour of the Day of the Lord.

Chapter 16 begins with a command and God's command initiates the Seven Bowls. That is what we see in verse 1: "God's Command Initiates the Seven Bowls." Verse 1 says, "Then I heard a loud voice from the temple." This vision begins with John hearing this literally "a mega or a great voice." It is interesting that this adjective that is translated here as "loud," that is, "mega" literally or "great" occurs eleven times in this chapter as John attempts to describe the intensity and the magnitude of these judgments. This "mega voice" notice came from the temple. Now that makes it clear immediately that this is the voice of God Himself. How do we know that? Because remember last time we saw in chapter 15, verse 8 that no angel or man was able to enter the temple in heaven until these plagues were completed. And so, this has to be God Himself. This same loud voice accompanies the Seventh Bowl down in verse 17. So, this command then comes from God Himself. He is the One who initiates these judgments.

Verse 1 goes on to say, this voice was “saying to the seven angels.” Now we met these seven angels back in chapter 15, verse 1. Look there for a moment: “I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished.” And they were given these bowls of wrath down in chapter 15, verse 7: “One of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God.” Now, God commands these seven angels, verse 1 says of chapter 16, “Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.” With this single command God commands all seven angels to go and fulfill their assignment. He says, “Go away” or depart and pour out or rapidly dump the contents of your seven bowls on the earth. In general terms, the contents of all seven bowls is described here as the wrath of God. And again, back in chapter 15, verse 1: “in them the wrath of God is finished.”

Although the specific contents of each of the seven bowls bears some resemblance to the earlier sealed judgments and the earlier trumpet judgments, these seven bowl judgments are not simply a retelling, a recapitulation of those earlier judgments as some would argue. Why? Because while there are similarities, there are also very significant differences. The bowls are universal in their effects as opposed to some portion of the earth or some portion of the sea as was true of the earlier judgments. Also, the bowls were more intense in the level of suffering they inflict. In the first four trumpet judgments, there is no personal suffering, but with the very first bowl judgment, people are immediately suffering and in agony.

The fourth bowl judgment is also a unique judgment. Nothing like it appears in the seals or the trumpets. And then my last argument to say these are not a retelling, a recapitulation of the earlier seal or trumpet judgments is that these bowl judgments are called the “Last of God’s Judgments in which His Wrath is Finished.” Something that is not said of the others. So, the bowl judgments are not some new description of previous judgments. Instead, they describe a unique series of seven devastating judgments that come at the end of the seven-year tribulation just before Christ’s return. They are initiated here in verse 1 by God’s command, a loud voice

comes from heaven's temple commanding the seven angels to pour out their bowls containing God's wrath.

Now in the rest of this chapter, we see secondly the "Seven Angels Pour Out the Seven Bowls." God's command initiates and in verse 1, in verse 2 through 21, we see the angels obeying and carrying out God's command. Now the seven judgments that are contained in these seven bowls can be divided into two groups: the first four seem to focus primarily on individuals who suffer through God's supernatural intervention into His creation. The first four judgments target the human body, the world's oceans, the world's fresh water supply and the sky. But the last three bowl judgments, while they have individual and personal ramifications, they are really directed beyond individuals at something on international scale: Antichrist's empire, the kings of the earth, the world's great cities, and even the earth's tectonic plates. With that brief introduction, let's walk through and watch over John's shoulder as the seven angels pour out the seven bowls.

The first bowl contains a malignant sore that afflicts mankind. That's what we see in verse 2. Notice the judgment itself in verse 2: "So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore." The first angel dumps out the content of his bowl suddenly upon the earth and it becomes a sore. This Greek word for "sore" is used to describe the plague of boils in Egypt in the Septuagint back in Exodus 9. It describes the sores that Job had in Job 2:7. It describes the sores that afflicted the beggar Lazarus in Jesus' story in Luke 16. But the Greek word itself means "a wound," "a sore," "an abscess," "or an ulcer." In fact, the Greek word finds its way into Latin and eventually into English as the word "ulcer." John adds that these sores were "loathsome." Literally, the Greek word is "bad" or "evil." Probably here meaning "dangerous," "injurious." And he adds that they are "malignant." That is, they are inflamed. These are inflamed, painful, oozing sores that simply will not heal. That's the judgment.

Notice the intended target in verse 2, "it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshipped his image." Now you will remember that

only true believers will refuse to get the mark of the beast, so, in the greatest pandemic to ever hit this planet every single unbeliever will be struck with these sores. It is hard to know exactly what they are. I can't prove this, but I do think that it is very interesting that verse 2 says, "it became a sore." Singular. I think it is possible that man in his arrogance will think he has come up with a safe way to mark the bodies of those who worship the Antichrist, the mark of the beast, but God may very well cause that mark or digital chip or whatever form it may take in the future to become terribly incurably infected. And it may produce a painful open running sore on either the hand or forehead of all who have it. But regardless, whatever the nature of these sores, they will bring unrelenting pain to those who have rejected the Lamb and who have rejected His gospel through these seven years.

While they are still dealing with these painful sores, there is the second bowl in which the earth's oceans turn to blood. Notice the divine judgment in verse 3: "The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man." The sea—that describes the world's ocean. Of course, in John's experience the sea consisted primarily of the Mediterranean. But because of the universal language that is used here it is clear that this plague doesn't just affect the Mediterranean, it effects worldwide, the oceans of this world. Seventy-one percent of the surface of our planet is water: oceans. Some 139.5 million square miles. As a result of the second bowl judgment, all of the world's oceans will become blood. We don't know exactly what John means here. He may mean actual blood. God is more than capable to do that. Or it may be some substance like blood such as the red-tide phenomenon. But regardless, there will be a change in its appearance and there's also a change in its texture. John says, it was "blood like that of a dead man." In other words, the oceans will no longer be fully liquid and fluid, but they will become thickened, congealed like coagulated blood from a corpse that has been dead for some time. That's what the oceans will become. And because of that there will be a catastrophic result, verse 3 says, "every living thing in the sea died." Literally the Greek text says, "Every living soul in the sea died." Earlier in the second trumpet judgment, a third of the oceans were poisoned and a third of the living creatures died but here this is another order of magnitude. It is the destruction of all marine life. It is complete and catastrophic. Every living thing in the world's

oceans, billions upon billions of sea creatures will die. The surface of the ocean and all of its shores will be covered with dead and dying creatures, decaying corpses and the foul smell of death. And as with the earlier trumpet judgment, all commercial ocean travel and transport will be forced to come to a complete and abrupt stop. The oceans will be completely unusable.

That brings us to the third bowl. In third bowl, the earth's fresh water also turns to blood, verses 4 through 7. First of all, we see the divine judgment in verse 4: "Then the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters." The language that John uses here is almost identical to the third trumpet back in chapter 8, verse 10 where a third of the world's fresh water was poisoned. Here, the catastrophe is much greater. So, imagine this: the water, the fresh water sources on the earth are suddenly unusable. Now, you have to put yourself back in the context of what has already happened. Remember that the two witnesses we met back in chapter 11 will have the power to shut up the sky so that there is no rain during much of the last three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation and chapter 11, verse 6 says, that they will have the power to turn certain of the waters on this planet into blood. Then comes this judgment: no rain; drought conditions for three-and-a-half years; and after nearly three-and-a-half years of drought conditions on this planet comes this judgment. Notice first this bowl will affect all earth's rivers. In Exodus the first plague in Egypt affected the Nile but this judgment will affect every river in the world. To give you some glimpse of the magnitude of this, think about just in the U.S. In the U.S. alone there are over 3.5 million miles of rivers and streams. Every single inch of those rivers and streams will turn to blood and so will the rivers and streams on every other continent.

In addition, notice that this bowl will affect the springs of waters. This refers the fountains, the sources from which water comes. In other words, this judgment will affect every source of fresh water on Earth: verse 4 says "they became blood." Just as the second bowl affected the oceans, this third bowl will cause every source of fresh water either to become actual blood or some blood-like substance. Just think for a moment what it would be like to live at that time. It is impossible to fully imagine the havoc and the panic that will be caused by the realization that there are no sources of fresh water left on Earth. I remember when the '94 earthquake hit in

California and suddenly there was no useable water. I remember standing in line, in some cases there were lines miles long to get water. And it was much more readily available than this will be. Imagine no clean water to wash their sores, no water to drink.

This judgment is so horrible that some might be tempted to question how a good and compassionate God could inflict such devastation on an entire planet of people made in His image. And so, Heaven speaks in His defense. In verses 5 through 7 we see Heaven's response. Two separate voices from Heaven speak in God's defense. The first one is called "The Angel of the Waters" in verses 5 and 6. Notice verse 5: "And I heard the angel of the waters saying." That's a most unusual expression. It occurs only here in Scripture. However, it is true that Scripture does often connect angels with the forces and powers of the creation—of nature. For example, in Psalm 104, verse 4: "He makes the winds His messengers, flaming fire His ministers." In Hebrews 1:7 says, "Of the angels He says, 'WHO MAKES HIS ANGELS WINDS, AND HIS MINISTERS A FLAME OF FIRE.'" Revelation 7:1 speak of four angels who hold back the four winds of the planet. In Revelation 14:18, an angel has power over fire. And in Jewish thought, angels are often connected with the control of the creation—assignments that God has given to them. And here this angel is called "The Angel of the Waters." And notice He says in verse 5, "Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things." He begins by emphasizing that the justice of God in these bowl judgments is righteous—"Righteous are You." He is really saying what Abraham said in Genesis 18:25, when Abraham addressed God, "Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?" This angel of the waters says, "Oh yes! That is exactly what God is doing."

Notice that the angel describes God as "the One who is and was." We have met that title before. It is a title that expresses God's eternity. And He is the "Holy One." He is the One set apart—the sacred One. Now why is God righteous in this situation? Verse 5 says, "because You judged these things." That refers especially to the third bowl judgment. And the angel explains why it is righteous of God to do that in verse 6, "For" "because"—here's why it is righteous for God to do

this horrific thing that we have just seen Him do to the earth. “Because they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink.” Because those people living on the planet who are rebellious against God, who have the mark of the beast, they have participated together with Antichrist in the persecution and martyrdom of the saints. He says, “They poured out the blood of saints and prophets, You have given them blood to drink.” Do you see what the angel is saying? He is saying that God’s justice is in keeping with the Old Testament guideline of *lex talianos*. That is, that the punishment must appropriately fit the crime. The persecution and martyrdom of believers during the Tribulation, it will be the greatest at any time in human history. Because of the Antichrist and his worldwide kingdom, it won’t be in certain places on this planet. You know, you trace back through church history and you find that dictators and others think they can snuff out the church. They think the church is like a flame that you can snuff out when in reality the church is like a bird—you persecute it in one place, it flees to another and continues to grow and to prosper. But in the case of Antichrist and his kingdom that won’t be possible. It will be worldwide persecution. And they will pour out the blood of the saints. Countless believers will be killed. You have the martyrs of the fifth seal in chapter 6, verses 9 through 11. You have the tribulation martyrs described—go back to chapter 7, verse 9: “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude”—don’t miss this wording—“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; . . . saying, ‘Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’” Look down in verse 14: “I said to him, ‘My lord, you know’”—who these people are. John had asked, rather the elder had asked John and John had said, “I don’t know.” “And he said to me [verse 14], ‘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.’” Now with that in mind, go back to verse 9, “A great multitude which no one could count.” It will be the most horrific bloodbath of Christians in human history.

They will also kill the prophets. Back in our text. The angel says in verse 6: “they poured out the blood of saints and prophets.” Certainly, they will kill the two witnesses, you remember in chapter 11, verse 7. They will kill many of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists we have met in

chapter 7. And here is how it is described, turn over a couple of pages to chapter 17, verse 6: speaking of Antichrist's empire and kingdom, "I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus." Those in control of Antichrist's kingdom, those who are a part of it will have been responsible for so many Christian's deaths that it is as if they will have been drunk on the blood of the saints. Because they poured out the blood of His people God pours out the third bowl on earth's fresh water and that is certainly just because it leaves the blood-thirsty with only blood to drink.

The angel ends his song in verse 6 with these chilling words: "They deserve it." Literally the Greek text says, "they are worthy." Just as we saw back in chapter 5, the description of the Lamb was "He is worthy to take the scroll and break its seals" here the angel of the waters says, "they are worthy of what they are getting." The worshippers of the beast deserve exactly what they get because of what they have done. It is the story of sowing and reaping, the law of sowing and reaping, Galatians 6:7, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." Obadiah 15: "The day of the LORD draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head." Just like the Proverb "The one who digs a pit will"—what?—"fall into it."

The angel of the waters has now finished. But another voice from heaven speaks in defense of God's justice in verse 7 and it is a surprising voice: the altar. Verse 7 says, "And I heard the altar saying." Throughout the book of Revelation, this altar, and by the way, this isn't the brazen altar on which sacrifices were offered. Throughout the book of Revelation, this represents the altar of incense that was in the Holy Place, and it is closely related to God's judgment because it symbolizes God's answer to the prayers of His people for justice. We saw this back in chapter 6, verses 9 through 11. Here, that altar of incense, that represents the prayers of God's people as the incense is burned on it, it is personified as though it had life itself, as though it is praising God for His answer to the prayers of His people. "And I heard the altar saying [verse 7], 'Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.'" The altar first agrees with the words of the angel of the waters and says, "Yes! He is right! You are righteous in what you are doing."

And then he addresses God by the title “The Lord God, the Almighty.” These bowl judgments clearly demonstrate that He’s almighty.

And then the altar adds this, “true and righteous are Your judgments.” You see, God, our God never acts capriciously. His judgments are always justice and only justice. That is what is being celebrated here. So, understand if you are tempted to read these bowl judgments and see the devastation that God will wreak on this planet, you might be tempted to think less of God, don’t. He is perfectly just. They deserve it. They are worthy.

After that very brief interlude of praise, we come to the fourth bowl in which the sun scorches the earth. The sun scorches the earth: verses 8 and 9. First of all, you see the divine judgment in verse 8: “The fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch men with fire.” That is very interesting. You know, earlier in the fourth trumpet judgment the judgment had disrupted the sun by darkening its light and heat. But the effect of the fourth bowl is exactly the opposite. When the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, notice first of all, he says, “It was given to it.” That is a really important expression. That impression underscores that what is about to happen will happen solely because of God’s sovereign power. The sun has no power. It is completely under the control of God. So, God Himself will overrule the normal function of the sun to produce this plague. And the result is that it will scorch men with fire. The sun is such an amazing blessing in our lives. Since the fourth day of creation God has used the sun to provide us with light, heat, energy, cause plants to grow, to produce so much amazing fruit for us on this earth. But now under His direction, the sun which has been for all of these years so much of a blessing turns deadly. The word “scorch” here literally means “to burn up.” It is used of plants that completely wither and die under the scorching heat of the sun. But John goes even further, he adds “with fire” which only intensifies the sense of scorching and withering and burning heat. And notice “men” is literally in the Greek text “the men.” He is referring to specific men—he is referring back to those in verse 2 with the mark of the beast. This judgment will only effect those who have the mark of the beast. Notice this judgment will not only affect humans but it will affect the planets. As you think about it for a moment, imagine what this kind

of heat will produce in terms of catastrophe on this planet. This is true global warming. Polar ice caps will melt, causing the ocean level to rise, literally inundating the continents and flooding miles of coastlines and cities. Not with the ocean water as it now is, but with the bloody ocean water that has been caused by the earlier bowl judgment and with all of the dead marine creatures that are now floating on the surface of the water. Some of the world's largest cities will be inundated and destroyed.

Notice in verse 9, mankind's rebellious response: first of all, they blasphemed God. Verse 9 says, "Men were scorched with fierce heat. Again, I love the way the Greek text adds this sort of flavor to it. It says, "the men were burned up with great burning." This is no Texas heat wave. This isn't even Death Valley. This is closer to fire than the normal heat of the sun. It will be a worldwide heat wave like nothing the world has ever seen, and it will inflict massive suffering. As a result, verse 9 says, "They blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues. They understood and acknowledged that God was responsible for these first four plagues. But rather than owning their sin as the cause of their suffering, they blame God. And isn't that just like man? We all are tempted to do that, in fact, I suspect we have all done that at some point in our lives and every human being does that. They create catastrophe in their lives because of sin and when the worst happens, it's God's fault.

Not only do they blaspheme God, but they refuse to repent. Verse 9 says, "and they did not repent." By the way, this again reminds us that still the grace of God is extending an invitation to repent. This shows that one of the purposes even of these final bowl judgments was to give rebels on this planet yet another chance to repent. You just see the grace and mercy of God, the compassion of God even in His judgment. These are really invitations to turn from their sin; to humble themselves before God; to crush their pride and in humility cry out for mercy. But again, they refuse. And that is pretty remarkable. Think about where we are: we are near the end of the Tribulation here. After years of horrific devastating judgment that they will acknowledge is from God, they will still cling to their sin and stubbornly remain in their rebellion. As John MacArthur writes: "Neither grace nor wrath will move their wicked hearts to repentance."

And verse 9 goes on to say that they refused to glorify God: “They did not repent so as to give Him glory.” That would have been the result of their repentance. But sinful man rebelliously relentlessly refuses to give God the glory He deserves. Romans 1:21: “Even though they knew God,”—from the creation—“they did not honor Him as God.” Literally the Greek text says, “they did not glorify Him as God.” Even though they knew from the creation his existence, his eternality, His power, His deity, they refused to glorify Him or give thanks, “but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.” Romans 1:28: “They did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer.” Wow, do we live there!

That brings us to the fifth bowl. The fifth bowl brings us supernatural darkness that covers the planet in verses 10 and 11. He begins with the divine judgment in verse 10: “Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast.” Now this judgment is aimed, notice, at the throne of the beast. That is the place where his power and presence are centered: the seat of his rule. By the way, don’t forget that back in chapter 13, verse 2, John tells us that it was the dragon, that is, Satan himself, who gave Antichrist his throne. For most of those years he has seen himself as untouchable. This plague reminds him that he is touchable. Robert Thomas in his commentary on Revelation writes this: “So long untouched that throne through which the dragon has perverted all of human society into a demonic civilization is now the focal point of God’s anger.”

Now, although this judgment will begin in Antichrist’s capitol city, it will quickly expand to his entire kingdom. Notice verse 10 goes on to say, “and his kingdom became darkened.” This bowl extends to all of Antichrist’s empire. As we will discover in chapters 17 and 18, this kingdom is a geopolitical kingdom that covers the entire planet. So, this plague will cover the entire world in total darkness like the ninth plague did in the land of Egypt. In fact, go back to Exodus with me for a moment because I want you to see what this is going to be like. You can see it, sort of, foreshadowed in the plague in Egypt. Exodus chapter 10 and notice verse 21: “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, [notice this] even a darkness which may be felt.’ So Moses stretched out his hand toward

the sky, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days.” And here’s how bad it was: “They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings.” Almost certainly that is what it will be like not over one small portion of this planet but the entire planet. As in Egypt, it is likely the righteous remnant will still have light in their homes. But this darkness—this darkness—will be felt and it will be a darkness so deep that you can’t see other people. You won’t be able to see the hand in front of your face, and it will leave every sinner totally isolated, locked in his own misery. It will be absolute worldwide darkness. God will literally turn out the lights. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, there will be no light, only a thick darkness in which you cannot see anyone else. This was prophesied in the Old Testament in Joel chapter 2, verse 2, speaking of the day of the Lord: It is “a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness.” Joel 3, verses 14 and 15: “Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness.” The prophet Zephaniah again talking about the day of the Lord, said that the “day of the Lord is a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness.”

Back in our text in Revelation 16, this darkness that can be felt—this darkness that won’t allow you to see the hand in front of your face; that won’t allow you to move even around your own home—it will cause another effect as well, verse 10 says, “and they gnawed their tongues because of pain.” All the citizens of Antichrist’s kingdom—those who have his mark—literally, the text says, “kept on chewing their tongues because of pain.” And we understand this a little bit. When you think of even a small pain, like a toothache, it is so much worse at night; it is so much worse in the dark. And in this case, imagine the misery of the malignant sores on their bodies, the absence of drinking water and the raging burning heat, all of those will be intensified by the darkness.

Notice mankind’s continual rebellion in verse 11, first of all, they blasphemed God: “and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores.” Again, they blasphemed. This time we are told the “God of heaven,” that’s an Old Testament title for God. They

blasphemed Him because of the accumulative effect their sores and the rest of the pains that they are enduring: the lack of water, the heat, the unrelenting burning, searing heat. Instead of repenting they sink even deeper into rebellion, blasphemy and idolatry. They refused to repent of their deeds verse 11 says, “and they did not repent of their deeds.” They refused to turn from their sins, their idolatry and the worship of Antichrist, their immorality which is described in this book as well as their other sins. Again, John MacArthur writes: “The first five plagues were God’s final call to repentance. Sinners ignored that call and are now confirmed in their unbelief. The final two bowls containing the severest of all the judgments will be poured out on hardened, implacable impenitents.”

It is truly impossible to imagine the worldwide panic and hysteria that will be caused by those first four bowls. But it will get so much worse when the darkness falls in the fifth and yet there are still two bowls left.

So, what are the lessons for us from these first five bowls that we have studied together? There are three lessons I just want to point out to you briefly. First of all, God’s final judgments will be entirely righteous and perfectly fitted to the crime. Again, you remember Exodus 21 verses 23 to 25, called the *lex talianos*, “The Law of Retaliation” meaning that the judgment, the punishment a judge gave was to fit the crime. Here’s how it reads: “You shall appoint as a penalty life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.” Now that wasn’t some sort of ancient brutality. That was a way to keep the punishment from far exceeding what the crime deserved which the Code of Hammurabi and other ancient codes endorsed. So, God will fit the punishment to the crime.

And with the bowl judgments, God uses this legal principle—think about those that we have studied and the couple to come. Just think about this for a moment. In the first bowl, a malignant sore forms on those with the mark of the beast. In the second and third, mankind is forced to drink blood as they have poured out the blood of the saints and the prophets. In the fourth, they are burned by the sun who believed the false prophet who claimed to make fire fall down from

heaven. In the fifth, those who loved the spiritual darkness of their sin will be forced to live in literal, physical darkness. In the sixth, those who willingly believe the devil's deception about God will be deceived into war with God in which they will meet their destruction. And the seventh bowl, those who destroyed the earth, will experience its ultimate destruction. God's judgments will be entirely righteous and perfectly fitted to the crime. We need to respond like the angel of the waters, like the altar, and say, "Righteous are You O Lord."

Secondly, God will judge all unbelievers with perfect justice. Now, I'm not talking about solely what happens in the bowl judgments, I am talking about the final judgment. The judgment that is described in Revelation 20. Turn there for a moment. Revelation 20, here's the Great White Throne Judgment when according to verse 11 and verse 12, the dead, the unbelieving dead, are raised and stand before God at this judgment called The Great White Throne Judgment. Notice verse 12: "I saw the dead, the great and the small,"—no one is exempted from this—"standing before the throne,"—these are unbelievers who have been raised for this judgment, given bodies that can endure eternal punishment, and notice—"the books were opened"—the books, plural were opened—"and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds." God will judge all unbelievers with perfect justice. They will get only what they deserve—justice and only justice God told the human judges you are to do and that is what God Himself will do.

Romans chapter 2 says, "God will render to each person according to their deeds." This is the "day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." If you are here tonight and you are not a follower of Jesus Christ, you won't get anything you don't deserve but you will get the justice that your sins and rebellion against God deserve, unless, thirdly, you embrace the gospel. Christ endured God's justice for everyone who would believe in Him so that we who believe receive only grace. Look at Colossians chapter 2. I love this passage. Colossians chapter 2, verse 13: "When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions." How could a just judge just wipe away the record? How could He just pardon us when we deserve punishment? Here it

is, verse 14: “having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” The image behind this verse is that when Jesus died Pilate nailed to the cross of Jesus a sign that said, “Here’s what he is guilty of. This is Jesus the king of the Jews.” But God nailed something else to the cross. God nailed to the cross the list of every single sin of every single person who would ever believe in Jesus, has ever or will ever commit and Jesus died suffering the justice of God for those sins and therefore He can forgive our transgressions. And God can still be just because our sins were paid for in full because of Jesus Christ and we receive only grace.

Look at Revelation 1, verse 5, “Jesus Christ, the faithful witness,”—and He is described at the end of the verse as the one—“who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood”—that is, by His death; by His sacrificial death, He released us. Go to chapter 5, verse 9, in heaven, they sang this song to Jesus, to the Lamb saying, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nations.”

If you are here tonight and you don’t know the Lord Jesus Christ, the invitation for you is still open. In fact, this book that reveals these very judgments ends with an invitation. Go to chapter 22, verse 17. Here’s Jesus’ invitation to you. In fact, look at verse 16, “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star. The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears this invitation say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is [spiritually] thirsty [like those during the Tribulation. If your soul is thirsty:] come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.” You don’t need any money. You need nothing to get life from Jesus Christ. He gives it freely because of what He Himself has already done. My appeal to you tonight is believe in Him. Trust in Him. Turn from your sin. Do what these people didn’t do: repent; give glory to God and accept the invitation to come to Jesus Christ. Let’s pray together.

Father, thank You, thank you for allowing us to know what's coming. Lord, we thank you that we will not endure these judgments. We will not face them because You will take us to Yourself. And yet, Father, our hearts are heavy for those who will endure these judgments. And Lord, for those here who will face Your justice, perfect justice, You will render to them according to their deeds. Father, I pray that tonight they would turn in faith and embrace Your Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, for the rest of us, remind us even as we watch in Revelation 16, the world itself unravel, remind us that You are on Your Throne; that You are in control; and that You will judge the wicked, but You will preserve, protect and bring Your own into Your eternal presence where there is unending joy. Lord, fill our hearts with worship, adoration and even joy. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.