

The Seven Bowls and the Completion of Divine Wrath

Revelation 15–16 | Wednesday, September 30

“Then I saw another great and awe-inspiring sign in heaven: seven angels with the seven last plagues; for with them God’s wrath will be completed.” (15:1)

“Then 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!’” (16:17)

THE BIG IDEA

The seven bowls complete the judgment cycles of Revelation—told as a new Exodus. The plagues that once exposed Pharaoh now expose the beastly order, while the faithful stand beside the sea, singing. The lesson: **present power is not ultimate authority.**

I THE VICTORS AT THE SEA (15:1–4) — EXODUS RECAST

“Another great and awe-inspiring sign” recalls the woman (12:1) and the dragon (12:3). Chapters 12–14 exposed the conflict; chapters 15–16 move to its resolution.

The seven plagues are “last” because with them God’s wrath is _____ — Greek *teleō*, to bring something to its intended end.

The sea of glass and the victorious saints

John sees “something like a _____ mixed with fire” (cf. 4:6). Beside it stand those who have _____ the beast, its image, and the number of its name.

The scene fuses the throne room with the Exodus: Israel passes through the sea, Pharaoh’s power is broken, and the delivered people sing (Ex 14–15). Note the **paradox**—the beast was allowed “to conquer” the saints (13:7), yet they have conquered him. The beast can kill the body; the saints keep their allegiance to the Lamb (12:11).

“The song of Moses and the song of the Lamb”

They sing “the _____ and the song of the Lamb” — one song marked by both.

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES Ex 14–15; 15:1–18 • Deut 32:4 • Ps 86:9–10; 111:2–3 • Jer 10:7 • Rev 4:6; 12:11; 13:7

II THE HEAVENLY SANCTUARY AUTHORIZES JUDGMENT (15:5–8)

John sees “the _____” opened—the wilderness sanctuary; “testimony” recalls the covenant tablets (Ex 25:16, 21; 31:18). Decisive events keep happening in this heavenly temple (6:9; 7:15; 8:3–5; 11:19; 14:15–18).

Seven angels, seven golden bowls

Greek _____ = a shallow bowl or basin—easily emptied, well suited to concentrated judgment.

The same golden bowls held the prayers of the saints in **5:8**. The juxtaposition is pointed: heaven once received the prayers of suffering saints; now golden bowls carry judgment upon the persecuting world.

Smoke fills the sanctuary

III THE FIRST FIVE BOWLS (16:1–11) — THE EXODUS PLAGUES UNIVERSALIZED

The first five bowls

Bowl 1 — painful _____ on those who bear the beast’s mark (Ex 9:8–12, boils). Judgment is tied to allegiance.

Bowls 2–3 — sea, rivers, and springs become _____ (Ex 7:14–21); the trumpets’ “a third” is gone (cf. 8:8–11).

Bowl 4 — the _____ scorches with fierce heat; humanity blasphemes God and will not repent.

Bowl 5 — _____ over the beast’s throne (Ex 10:21–29; Joel 2:1–2, 31).

Judgment interpreted — measure for measure

The refusal to repent (the Pharaoh motif)

IV THE SIXTH BOWL (16:12–16) — EUPHRATES, DECEPTION, ARMAGEDDON

The Euphrates dries up

The bowl dries up the great river _____, preparing a way for “the kings from the east.”

INTERPRETIVE OPTIONS — THE KINGS FROM THE EAST

1) Literal eastern rulers. Actual political powers moving west for a final conflict (Futurist). **Strength:** the text says “kings,” and the Euphrates was a real frontier. **Limitation:** the next verses universalize it to “the kings of the whole world” (16:14).

2) Symbolic forces of eschatological opposition. The eastern kings share in the nations’ gathering against God. **Strength:** fits the universal language of vv. 14, 16 and the Day-of-the-Lord traditions. **Limitation:** a purely symbolic reading can flatten the concrete geopolitical weight of the Euphrates.

→ **Balanced:** the Euphrates is both a real boundary and an apocalyptic symbol. John begins with a familiar direction of military threat, then universalizes it—demonic spirits gather “the kings of the whole world” for “the great day of God, the Almighty.”

Three unclean spirits “like frogs”

Three unclean spirits like _____ come from the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the _____ (the second beast of ch. 13, now named).

“Armageddon”

INTERPRETIVE OPTIONS — ARMAGEDDON (HAR MEGIDDO)

1) Literal Megiddo / the Jezreel Valley. A real site of decisive battles (Judg 5:19; 2 Kgs 23:29; 2 Chr 35:20–24). **Strength:** a natural symbol of decisive warfare. **Limitation:** there is no substantial “Mount Megiddo.”

2) Symbolic geography. A place-name evoking Israel’s memory of catastrophic battles, used as a theological symbol. **Strength:** fits John’s symbolic method. **Limitation:** leaves the “mountain” detail unexplained.

3) An allusion involving a “mount of assembly” / Jerusalem. Alternative Hebrew derivations explaining “mountain.” **Strength:** tries to account for har (mountain). **Limitation:** no proposal has achieved consensus.

→ **Balanced:** read Armageddon first by its literary function—a name saturated with the memory of decisive conflict, designating the climactic gathering of rebellious powers against God. The text stresses who gathers the nations, and why, more than battlefield coordinates.

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES Ex 8:1–15; 14:21–22 • Josh 3:14–17 • Isa 11:15–16 • Judg 5:19 • Rev 9:14; 13

V THE SEVENTH BOWL (16:17–21) — “IT IS DONE”

The bowl is poured into the air, and a voice from the throne declares “_____” — Greek gegonen (perfect of ginomai). The sequence begun in 15:1 has reached its endpoint (cf. 21:6 at the new creation—the two declarations frame the end of the old order and the birth of the new).

- The greatest earthquake, with lightning, rumblings, and thunder (cf. 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; Sinai, Ex 19:16–19).
- “The great city” splits; _____ the Great comes before God—her fall is announced here, then narrated in ch. 17–18 (a sign Revelation is not strictly chronological).
- Islands flee and mountains vanish—cosmic dissolution (Isa 13; 24; 34; Hag 2:6–7; Rev 6:12–14).
- Enormous hailstones (Ex 9:13–35; Josh 10:11; Ezek 38:22)—and still the people blaspheme.

VI HOW THE MAJOR SYSTEMS READ 15–16

THE FOUR SYSTEMS ON REVELATION 15–16

Preterist. Bowls = judgment on first-century enemies (Jerusalem, Rome, or both). **Strength:** keeps Revelation relevant to its first hearers and Roman setting. **Limitation:** the universal, cosmic language exceeds any single first-century event.

Historicist. Bowls = successive judgments across later church and European history. **Strength:** recognizes Revelation’s ongoing relevance. **Limitation:** no consensus on which events match which bowls.

Futurist. Bowls = judgments in a final period just before Christ’s return (Euphrates, eastern kings, Armageddon). **Strength:** takes the climactic, final character seriously. **Limitation:** speculative when symbols are pinned to modern nations or weapons.

Idealist. Bowls = symbols of God’s judgment on rebellious humanity, climaxing at the end. **Strength:** explains the heavy Exodus reuse and the bowl–trumpet parallels. **Limitation:** can understate the concrete first-century and eschatological reference.

→ **Balanced:** read with multiple horizons—intelligible in the Roman world, drawn from Israel’s Scriptures, describing recurring realities of idolatry and judgment, and pointing to a climactic judgment that completes the book’s conflict.

VII WHAT THIS PASSAGE TEACHES US

- Final judgment is a new Exodus — sea, song, tabernacle, sores, blood, darkness, frogs, and hail make coincidence impossible. Egypt becomes the rebellious world order; the redeemed are marked by allegiance to the Lamb.
- The bowls intensify the trumpets — same spheres (earth, sea, fresh water, heavenly bodies, darkness, the Euphrates, the world), but the “third” limit is removed. Strong support for recapitulation.
- Judgment is judicial — 16:5–7 answers the martyrs’ “how long?” of 6:9–10.
- The refusal to repent develops the Pharaoh motif — judgment discloses entrenched rebellion rather than producing repentance.
- Armageddon is a deception before it is a battle — the spirits deceive and gather the kings; ch. 16 never narrates the battle (it comes in 19:17–21). The emphasis is who gathers them, and why.
- Present power is not ultimate authority — the beast has a throne, hostile kings gather, evil inflicts real suffering, but none of them decides how the story ends.

TAKE-HOME TRUTH

The saints who suffered under the beast are standing beside the sea, singing. The judgments come from God’s temple, not the beast’s throne. The kings gather only because God permits the barrier to be removed—and their gathering leads to judgment, not triumph—until the voice from the throne says, “It is done.” Systems can be powerful without being permanent, and opposition can be fierce without being final.