

The First Six Bowls

A Series on Divine Judgment: Part 14

Since the fourth trumpet, there was considerable foreboding of the last three trumpets, because each caused the eagle to express a “woe” (Rev 8:13). Generating this expression of sorrow for those remaining on earth are the coming serious judgments of God. And as each trumpet sounds, a countdown of woes ensues.

After the fourth trumpet:

Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!” (Rev 8:13)

After the fifth trumpet:

The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things. (Rev 9:12)

The first woe was a response to the implication of opening the bottomless pit and the subsequent stinging torment of all human beings without the seal of God on their foreheads (Rev 9:1-12).

After the sixth trumpet:

The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly. (Rev 11:14)

The second woe was a response to the implication of releasing the four angels bound at the Euphrates River and the subsequent killing of one third of mankind (Rev 9:13-21).

After the seventh trumpet:

Because the eagle’s woe is for “those who dwell on the earth,” the third and last woe pertains to the only remaining judgments against those left on earth, which is the “reaping” by the angel (Rev 14:18-20).

The reaping figuratively speaks of gathering the “ripe” grapes and throwing them into the great wine press of God’s wrath “outside the city” (Rev 14:18-19), which is a reference to the bowl judgments that follow (Rev 16:1-21). This period of reaping includes the angelic assistance of carrying out Jesus Christ’s judgment at Armageddon, because it is Jesus who treads upon the grapes in the great wine press of God’s wrath (Rev 19:15-21).

When the Temple of God opens, revealing the Ark of the Covenant (Rev 11:19; 15:5; Ex 40:1-3), the apostle John perceives the appearance of the seven angels with the seven plagues as a “sign in heaven” that was “great and marvelous,” because “in them, the wrath of God is finished” (Rev 15:1). These plagues were significant, because no one could enter the Temple of God until the seven plagues were finished (Rev 15:8).

The appearance of these seven angels, inside the Temple of God, and what they represented caused the tribulation saints to sing praises to God.

The first song was the Song of Moses (Rev 15:3; Ex 15:1-18). The Song of Moses memorialized the deliverance of Israel from Egypt and the spectacular nature of the Exodus. Celebrating God’s victory over Egypt was public acknowledgment of God’s sovereign rule over the universe. In like manner, when Satan appears to be in control at this time as Pharaoh was in his time, the tribulation saints and 144,000 bond servants of God know otherwise as they sing in acknowledgment of God’s sovereign rule and judgment of evil.

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Amid the harps, the second song of praise was the song only the 144,000 sealed bond servants of God could sing (Rev 15:3; 14:1-3).

The third song of praise (Rev 15:3-4) places an emphasis on “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever” (Rev 11:15-18).

When the seven angels who had the seven plagues come out from the Temple of God, they receive from one of the four living creatures a bowl of God’s wrath (Rev 15:6-7), and it appears that each plague is mixed with each corresponding bowl (Rev 21:9).

When examining the first six bowl judgments, a chart is helpful to categorize observations of the text:

Bowl	Effect On Earth	The Response?
Plague 1 (Rev 16:2)	Poured on the earth Loathsome and malignant sores on people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image	
Plague 2 (Rev 16:3)	Poured into the sea The seas became blood and killed all living creatures in it	
Plague 3 (Rev 16:4-7)	Poured into the rivers and springs of water All fresh water became blood which implied that all living creatures in it died	With the poisoning of all fresh water, the angel of the waters said, “Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things; for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it.” The angel at the altar said, “Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.”
Plague 4 (Rev 16:8-9)	Poured onto the sun The sun scorched with fierce heat	People blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory.
Plague 5 (Rev 16:10-11)	Poured on the throne of the beast The beast’s kingdom darkened and people were in pain	People blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.
Plague 6 (Rev 16:12)	Poured onto the Euphrates River The Euphrates River dries up	

The bowls of God’s wrath and plagues are significant for the judgments they render:

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1. Because the surviving human beings are non-Believers (Rev 9:20-21; 13:8, 16-17), most, if not all, human beings are tormented with disfiguring and painful sores.
2. With the poisoning of all salt and fresh water, governments will be severely tested and societies could quickly collapse. Among numerous issues: drinking water is confined to limited supplies of packaged goods, personal hygiene is curtailed, and cooking is restricted. The second and third trumpet had already poisoned 1/3 of all salt and fresh water.
3. Increasing the heat of the sun to "scorching" critically exacerbates the problem of scarce safe water for any use and increases the risk of massive wildfires. The first trumpet already burned up 1/3 of the earth.
4. As people blasphemed God because of their pains and their sores, it was reminiscent of the Exodus, when the plagues hardened Pharaoh's heart so much so that he sought revenge:

"Thus I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord." And they did so. When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart toward the people, and they said, "What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?" So he made his chariot ready and took his people with him; and he took six hundred select chariots, and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he chased after the sons of Israel as the sons of Israel were going out boldly. (Ex 14:4-8)

5. The drying of the Euphrates River sets in motion the conflict at Armageddon by enabling the kings from the east to mobilize their troops over land.

Instead of repenting, amidst this great suffering, the people did not fear God, blasphemed His name and failed to recognize that He was Lord of all. People preferred to follow the "great men of earth" and would be unable to hear the gospel (Rev 18:23).

With the drying of the Euphrates River, a demonic spirit comes out of Satan, the Antichrist and the False Prophet (Rev 16:13). A literal reading of the text suggests that the demonic spirits were indwelling; but, a figure of speech is possible indicating that these demonic spirits were called forth. Regardless, these demonic spirits influenced human kings such that they would gather their armies at Armageddon (Rev 16:14-16). And then the seventh bowl is poured out...