

Class 7 – Pouring Out Seven Bowls Rev 15-16

Outline of Rev 15-16

- The New Song of Moses (15:1-4)
- Introduction to Seven Bowls: Consummating God's Wrath against Rome (15:1, 5-8)
- Bowls 1-4: God Punishes Evil People (16:1-9)
- Bowls 5-7: God Punishes the Beast/Babylon (16:10-21)

Overview of Rev 15-16

- John sees those who have conquered praising God beside a sea of glass
- Seven angels emerge with seven bowls of wrath which will finish God's wrath
- The bowls produce plagues that afflict evil people on earth, yet they do not repent
- The last three bowls specifically target the beast – producing darkness, a great battle, and an earthquake/natural disasters that destroy the city
- Major takeaway: It is easy for God to defeat great earthly powers like Rome, so we should serve God rather than earthly powers

Key Lessons in Rev 15-16

- Judgment is part of how God must establish justice (and holiness)
- There comes a time when God's patience with people is exhausted
- When it appears that God ignores our allegiance to (and worship of) evil, it is only because he is being patient
- We do not want to receive what we deserve
- Hardship is a time for self-examination
- We must be vigilant as we wait for Jesus – in both end-time and within-time judgment
- Evil will not always win

The New Song of Moses (15:1-4)

- 15:1 – John sees seven angels with seven plagues (later described as bowls) that will *finish* the wrath of God
- Before describing that vision, he breaks to another vision:
- 15:2-3 – This vision is strongly reminiscent of the Red Sea, after which the people worship God and celebrate victory over Pharaoh
- Here they have conquered the new Egypt (Rome, 11:8)
- The sea, once a source of evil (13:1), is calm
- John sees a vision of the victory that will come after what is about to happen (the plagues)
- The “song of Moses” (v. 3) is about God's dominion over earth's rulers (Ex 15:4, 7, 14-18) and here he is “king of the nations”

- 15:4 – God also intends his judgments to lead others to worship him

Introduction to Seven Bowls: Consummating God's Wrath against Rome (15:1, 5-8)

- 15:1 – This is not a statement of the end of all things, but the finishing of God's wrath against Rome
- We must keep this vision in its context of persecution, martyrdom, and the prayers of the saints for vindication
- The message of Revelation – particularly the judgment cycles – is that God will judge Rome with a devastating judgment in a way that will in some ways seem like the end of the world
- The fact that God will – after patiently waiting for the ungodly to repent – bring wrath to completion at end of ages is another story (2 Pet 3:8-10)
- The bowls are closely related to the other judgment cycles (seals and trumpets), but there is an intensification (compare 8:8-9 to 16:3)
- The seven bowls are “the total deconstruction of the empire of the beast...God has done all that can be done to bring the nations to a realization of his sovereign justice, and now the time for their decisive judgment has come. His wrath is complete” (Osborne)
- 15:5-6 – The angels proceed from the sanctuary, indicating that God is the author of this wrath
- 15:7 – God's wrath is often pictured as a cup full of wine (see 14:8, 10); here they are bowls
- 15:8 – God's wrath is so awesome that no one can be in his presence while he executes it

Bowls 1-4: God Punishes Evil People (16:1-9)

- The wrath takes the form of plagues that come from the earth to harm people
- Beale – If the way the plague is begun is metaphorical (pouring out a bowl), it is likely that the plague itself is metaphorical
- 16:2 – Produces sores (like the boils in Egypt), but only on those who worship the beast
- 16:3 – Sea turns to blood, kills all living things in the sea
- 16:4-7 – Water sources are contaminated, affecting what people can drink (v. 6) (as in Egypt)
- The angel and altar praise God because this penalty is poetic justice (v. 6)
- 16:8-9 – The sun is allowed to scorch people with fire/heat
- Rather than repenting, they curse God as the source of the plagues; what is intended to soften them instead hardens
- Many commentators try to assign a specific punishment to each of these symbols (eg economic hardships, end of maritime commerce, etc). I think we are intended to see it as God afflicting Rome (and the people who serve it), softening it up and weakening it, in anticipation of a final judgment

Bowls 5-7: God Punishes the Beast/Babylon (16:10-21)

- 16:10-11 – The fifth bowl is poured out on the throne of the beast, attacking the empire specifically
- This plague brings darkness (think Egypt) – probably in a figurative way
- The important part is that this plague affects the beast's ability to rule
- It reminds the ungodly that their persecution and idolatry are vain; they still do not repent (v. 11)
- 16:12 – The battle that ensues is at the behest of God

- In OT, the judgment of Babylon and restoration of Israel is portrayed as the drying up of the Euphrates (Isa 11:15, 44:27). The kings of the east can now come and act as God's instrument of judgment of latter-day Babylon
- It is possible that the "kings from the east" represent the Parthian/Persian threat against Rome – a military power they feared that God can use to humble and judge them
- 16:13-14 – The three evil beings speak evil things to deceive the kings of the whole world to fight with them. These are the same kings who commit adultery with Babylon (17:2), reign under Babylon (17:18), and give their power and authority to Babylon (17:12-14)
- Beale thinks that the "false prophet" implies Satan's work *within* the Christian community to deceive and lead Christians to support the beast
- The battle both sides prepared for is called the "great day of God the Almighty" because it is of supreme importance (as in Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, Ezek 34:12)
- It looks like a battle with an army, but it's really a battle with God
- 16:15 – John interrupts to give a message from Jesus urging vigilance in light of such alarming developments. Disciples are aware of the return of Jesus – both in earthly judgment and at the end
- 16:16 – Armageddon not intended literally – it is simply a famous battlefield. John "was not expecting a battle in Northern Palestine, but at Rome" (Caird).
- The outcome of the battle is not yet described – that will happen at 19:11-21
- 16:17-18 – It is done! Babylon is fallen, judged, conquered (14:8, 15:1).
- The lightnings and thunder echo Sinai
- The earthquake takes us back to the sixth seal (6:12-14) and the accompanying apocalyptic language that depicts the judgment of a nation
- 16:19-20 – The city is divided, the other nations fall, the islands and mountains flee away
- The people are tormented from the great hail
- The following chapters describe in further detail how Babylon will fall and the effects of its fall on the world
- The message is that God has acted in response to his people's cry for justice and vindication by defeating Babylon