

Revelation — Chapters 15 & 16

The Seven Vials of God's Wrath

An Outline of "The Revelation" — Walter Scott From The Faith and The Flock, 1910–1911

The Vials of God's Wrath In the Vials, we witness the outpouring of God's righteous and holy vengeance upon the guilty world, to be followed by the wrath of the Lamb—personally-executed judgment at His Coming.

Will the careful reader and student of these prophecies notice that in the Seventh Vial or bowl (16:19), Babylon, the corruptress of the earth, is singled out for special judgment. We connect, therefore, the last vial with the fall of Babylon—the third of the series of events noticed in the fourteenth chapter. This is important, as it enables us to fit into the Apocalyptic history the place, character and doom of Babylon. Chapters 14:8, 16:19, 17, 18, 19:1-3, give in full the Story of Babylon, and should be read as one connected whole.

After the fall of Babylon, the solemn events recorded in Chap. 14:9- 20 have each their successive fulfilment, that is after the pouring out of the seventh vial.

It is a common mistake to regard the seventh vial as bringing us down to the end of the age. The closing acts of judgment upon Christendom are the Harvest and the Vintage, and these with other events have their place after the pouring out of the seventh vial upon Babylon. That iniquitous system is destroyed by the Beast (17:16), a short time before the advent of the Lord in power. The Beast is itself destroyed by the Lord in Person, and the ten kingdoms forming the territorial strength of the Empire, crushed to atoms (Rev. 19:20, 21; Dan. 2:35, 7:11, 26).

The first verse of this section intimates that the series and sum of providential judgments are to be closed up in the pouring out of God's wrath. By providential judgments, we mean those inflicted prior to the Lord's return, which have all more or less this character. But the Wrath of God concentrated in the Vials gives place to the yet more awful chastisements openly inflicted, and spoken of as "the wrath of the Lamb." The "sea of glass" (v. 2) is not, of course, an actual sea of that material, for the Seer writes, "I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire," nor is the "sea of glass like unto crystal" (4:6) and spread out before the throne of the Eternal, a veritable sea. It is what they represent which concerns us. In the earlier vision is intimated a fixed state of purity, the solid calm of a scene of unsullied light (chap. 4).

But in our chapter, the crystal is omitted, and “the glass is mingled with fire.” In the former scene, the saints above had not emerged out of the fiery tribulation under the Beast. In fact, the saints in heaven seen in chap. 4 had not been in the Coming Tribulation at all; being expressly exempted from it (3:10). But those of a later day—a large company of Martyred Saints under the Beast—are here witnessed standing on the sea of glass. “Mingled with fire” refers to the cruel persecutions endured in that awful period yet future. Pagan persecutions and the more refined torments under the Papacy are to be surpassed in the horrors of “The Great Tribulation” (Mark 8:19, 20).

Did the Beast really triumph (8:7) over the Martyrs of the Lamb? He is doomed to the lake of fire, while the victims of his cruelty are here witnessed in harp and song celebrating the works and ways of the Lord God Almighty (vv. 2-4).

Next, the Temple comes into view (vv. 5-8), not the Temple on earth which at the very time contemplated in this vision will be occupied by the man of sin (2 Thess. 2:4), impiously claiming Divine Worship; nor is the Temple here seen in heaven a material one, for, says the Seer in a later vision, “I saw no Temple therein,” i.e., in the heavenly City. The Temple opened in heaven is a scenic representation of the Righteousness and Holiness befitting the presence of the God of Light. God is about to judge the earth, not from the Throne as in the Seal and Trumpets judgment, but from the Temple.* In this respect, the Vial chastisements stand alone. These latter are necessarily more severe than either those under Seal or Trumpet. God’s Holy Nature is here seen roused to judicial action.

The thought is God judging evil according to His nature. Both Throne and Temple are seen united in the execution of judgment in chap. 16:17.

First Bowl of Wrath, Chapter 16:2

God is angry with the wicked, and He is about to express His just indignation in a series of rapid strokes, much more severe than any yet inflicted. The Holy Nature of God is roused to action. The very Holiness of God demands stern and inflexible judgment. “The earth” is the scene of these plagues. Need it be said, that the term “the earth” is not to be understood in its wide geographical His people; this, God’s judgment upon His and their enemies. Verse 4 explains why the Temple is referred to. The effect of the judgment will be that all nations will come and worship before God. The judgment will accomplish what the gospel has failed to do. sense, but prophetically viewed as the whole of the guilty scene coming within the range and scope of prophetic vision. The first four Trumpets are in their operation restricted to the Roman world, Western Europe; but the Vials sweep in their range

a much wider area, and of greatly increased severity.

What a solemn reflection that the vials or bowls sacred to the use of Temple service and worship are here seen devoted to purposes of judgment!

The judgment here inflicted is spoken of as a “noisome and grievous sore,” or ulcer, causing intense mental anguish. The sixth Egyptian plague (Exod. 9:10, 11) was of a similar character, only there it was an actual bodily infliction, here in keeping with the symbolic character of those plagues, the judgment is of a moral kind (not that physical suffering is absent). Torment in the soul and conscience is the prominent thought. The adherents and worshippers of the Beast are the specific objects of this God-inflicted judgment.

This terrible chastisement precedes the fall of Babylon (v. 19), whereas the everlasting torment of the Beast-worshippers (14:9, 10) succeeds that mighty event. All who bow to the Beast are thus tormented in time and eternity.

Second Bowl of Wrath, V. 8

The “Sea”—i.e., those nations and peoples in revolutionary disorder, outside the Roman world—becomes “blood, as of a dead man.” The Egyptian plague of the waters turned to blood (Exo. 7:17) was, of course, literally accomplished, but here moral death is signified.

The apostasy from God, from truth, from Christianity, is complete.

All religious profession and even external relation to God is abandoned. The masses are regarded as “twice dead” (Jude 12)—dead in sins, and dead in apostasy, and this even when physically alive. “Every living soul died in the sea.” Individual shipwreck of faith, conscience, and truth is here intimated. We have had the pagan world, later the papal world, now the apostate world—worst of all.

Third Bowl Of Wrath, Vv. 4 to 7

God’s wrath is poured on the “rivers and fountains of waters, and they became blood.” The third Trumpet (8:11) corresponds to the third vial. In both, the waters and fountains are similar in judgment.

But in the earlier reference they became wormwood, here they are turned into blood. In the former, national life and character are morally poisoned—both in their sources (fountains), and ordinary course (rivers) of political and social government. Here, the corruption is deeper. It is moral death (blood), complete alienation from God. Utter apostasy from every principle of right, and the open and distinct avowal of Atheism. Nations and peoples without God, without any principle of right, truth nonexistent.

Verse 5. The Universe, men, nations, and the elements and forces of nature are all under Angelic control. “The Angel of the Waters,” i.e., the peoples (17:15), justifies God in this awful and retributive judgment (v. 6). The peoples had “shed the blood of saints and prophets,” hence in righteous retribution they are doomed to drink blood, that is to realize the awfulness of death in the soul and conscience. The brazen altar of judgment vindicates God in these holy and righteous dealings (v. 7).

Fourth Bowl Of Wrath, Vv. 8, 9

The first four vials correspond to the first four Trumpets. In both, the order is the same: earth, sea, rivers, and sun. But as has been already observed, the judgments under the vials are more severe and searching in character, and also embrace in their operation a wider area than those under the Trumpets.

The sun, the governing authority on earth, becomes the instrument of intolerable anguish to men. There is no necessity for understanding literal fire, either here or in Matt. 25:41. What is signified is intense mental anguish, an agony endured, far exceeding that caused by literal fire. What is the effect of this and previous Divine chastisements upon men? Do they glorify God in these visitations of wrath? Are they humbled and crushed under the hand of God? No. These judgments harden men. They “blasphemed the God of heaven, which hath power over these plagues.” Unlike the Ninevites of old, who repented under the threat of judgment, these “repented not to give Him glory.” Alas! Alas! what is man! Had repentance instead of increased hardness of will, been produced, no doubt the advancing torrent of Divine wrath Would have been rolled back, for God “had authority over these plagues.” The control of the Universe, down to the tiny insect and least atom, is under the governing hand of God. He is the source and author of all the Apocalyptic judgments.

Fifth Bowl Of Wrath, Vv. 10, 11

The throne of the Beast is next smitten by judgment, not its personal head, that is reserved for the Lord to deal with at His Coming (19:20). It is important to notice that the executive of the Empire is here the subject of judgment. Neither the last emperor, nor his subjects and worshippers are specially contemplated, although all suffer from the highest down to the lowest. The throne, the source and stability of the Empire is reached by this all-searching judgment. The Devil had established the Kingdom (13:4). God smites it in judgment, in its very center and strength, too. It is here that the persecution of the Beast against the Saints of God ceases.

How can the Beast further persecute the saints when itself is being dealt with by the heavy hand of judgment? The Kingdom of the Beast was “full of darkness” not physical, but what is infinitely worse, moral. Such is the horror, the intolerable anguish created thereby, that “they gnawed their tongues for pain”—such the excruciating agony. But the proud and suffering spirit refuses to bow in repentance. Under the previous vial, men blasphemed the Name of God—here they blaspheme God Himself.

Sixth Bowl Of Wrath Vv. 12 to 16

We have had judgment poured out on the West. Now, the East is to be reached. “The sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river, Euphrates, and the water thereof was dried up that the way of the Kings from the East might be prepared.” Rome never pushed her conquests beyond that famous river, the Euphrates. It bounded and secured their conquests on the East. The Euphrates is also the prophetic limit of enlarged Palestine in millennial days. Bearing this in mind, we can see the force of that great Asian river being literally dried up, so that the powers on its eastern side may come to Armageddon—God’s appointed rendezvous for the Kings and nations of the whole world. Not only will the East mingle with the West in deadly strife in the vicinity of Jerusalem, but God Himself will pour out upon the assembled nations the fury of His wrath. The most guilty of all—the West—is first visited in dire judgment. But how and by what means could the Kings and peoples of earth be gathered to one common camping ground? Satanic agency accredited by miracle is employed to gather the vast assemblage (vv. 13, 14). God controls the vast movement. “He gathered them together” (v. 16).

Seventh Bowl Of Wrath, Vv. 17 to 21

“The seventh angel poured out his vial into the air.” This is the most penetrating and universal judgment yet disclosed; that under the sixth seal is universal in its effects (6:12-17), but the earthquake under the seventh vial exceeds in horror anything hitherto witnessed or felt on earth (v. 18), which, with other attendant circumstances constitutes this judgment the most appalling of all which has yet come before us. “The great city was divided into three parts.” That is, the empire is broken up into a tripartite division; its utter ruin to follow in due course. “The cities of the nations fell,” signifying the smashing up of the seats and centers of commerce outside the Roman world. Next, great Babylon is specially singled out for judgment. Her history and causes of her downfall are written in the two following chapters. Islands and mountains are next the objects of God’s unsparing wrath. By the former is meant independent interests apart from and outside any human

confederation.

Mountains are seats and sources of authority deemed stable and lasting. Both islands and mountains completely disappear in the general wreck. Under the sixth Seal these “were moved out of their places,” here, they “were not found.” In addition to all this, the climax is reached, “there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven,” such a hurricane of heaven-sent judgment in its weight and disastrous effects is beyond anything that history records.” Every stone about the weight of a talent,” i.e., 125 lbs. How crushing! How overwhelming the judgment! Men suffering under the mighty hand of God again blaspheme that Blessed One How patient is God!

How perverse is the creature!