

## PRELUDE TO THE SEVEN PLAGUES

### Chapter 15:1-8

I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God's wrath is completed. And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb:

"Great and marvelous are your deeds,  
Lord God Almighty.

Just and true are your ways,  
King of the nations.

Who will not fear you, Lord,  
and bring glory to your name?

For you alone are holy.

All nations will come  
and worship before you,

for your righteous acts have been revealed."

After this I looked, and I saw in heaven the temple—that is, the tabernacle of the covenant law—and it was opened. Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests.

Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever.

And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

If we consider that the sets of seven judgments are angles of the one great tribulation, it makes sense that the bowls come last. The first set of the seals emphasizes the tribulation man unleashes on man, the second, the trumpets highlights the work of Satan, and the third we are now on, the bowls emphasizes the place of God.

It is pointed out, these are the last plagues. It is God's final word that is being completed. The sea like glass that was an ethereal place of worship in earlier imagery is now glowing red with fire. This is serious business.

The ***ultimate authority of God is one theme*** of the chapter. A ***second theme is the ultimate power***. The ***victory*** over the beast, its image, and the number is complete victory- it is the victory over Satan, it is also the victory over the human system that formed from Satan's manipulation and our own fallen state.

***Often, the real emphasis of 666 is totally missed***. It is the mark of the beast, but remember; the second beast is our ***own humanist system***. We are told plainly, this is the ***mark of man***; more precisely, it is the mark of FALLEN man. So the victory is so complete that it is not only over Satan and his works, it is victory even over ***ourselves***. Our fallenness, finally falls!

Then comes another thread that we can easily overlook; ***the largest part of the chapter is a victory song*** sung by the saints. But whose victory are they singing? If you look through the song, there is not one mention of the saints' victory. The victory is completely God's; His people simply enjoy the benefits. This has incredibly important implications. In this battle against evil forces, we will never win! Our victory, even now only comes from holding to the One who will!

The vision points out that the song is a ***perfect merging of the Old and New Testament***. Once again, an important implication for us right now. We must never stop seeing the Bible as one continuous story. There is no “Old Testament” God and a “New Testament” God, anyone who drifts into that line of thinking doesn’t understand either.

In the song, there is a word in the Greek that was the subject of some debate among Greek scholars, “for your righteous acts have been revealed.” “Righteous acts”, “***dikaiomata***” which in a nutshell means; *judgments based on perfect justice and purity*.

And that brings us to the great theme of chapter 16, set up by the imagery of chapter 15.

## THE SEVEN BOWLS OF GOD’S WRATH

### Chapter 16:1-21

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, “Go, pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath on the earth.”

The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly, ***festering sores broke out*** on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it ***turned into blood like that of a dead person***, and every living thing in the sea died.

The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and ***springs of water, and they became blood***. Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say:

“You are ***just in these judgments***, O Holy One, you who are and who were; for they have ***shed the blood of your holy people*** and your prophets, and you have ***given them blood to drink*** as they deserve.”

And I heard the altar respond:

“Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.”

The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was allowed to scorch people with fire. They were ***seared by the intense heat*** and they ***cursed the name of God***, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was ***plunged into darkness***. People gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they ***refused to repent of what they had done***.

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the ***great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up*** to prepare the way for the kings from the East. Then I saw ***three impure spirits that looked like frogs***; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are ***demonic spirits that perform signs***, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

“Look, I come like a thief! ***Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed***, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed.”

Then they ***gathered the kings together to the place*** that in Hebrew is called ***Armageddon***.

The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, “It is done!” Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since mankind has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. ***The great city split into three***

**parts**, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. From the sky huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, fell on people. And they ***cursed God on account of the plague*** of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

***The bowls are not new imagery for us.*** The bowl of incense, which was found on the Jewish Altar, represents one of the most holy items in the Temple. In Revelation, the smoke from the incense was the prayers of the saints. Righteous prayer is portrayed as a very powerful thing.

***The bowls are the standard of God,*** they represents His holiness, His purity, His majesty, and the measure against all things. When its burning embers are hurled at the earth, the suffering of the earth is the consequence of its unholiness. The undeniable truth is, whatever the pain or punishment it is deserved; not just for what humanity has done, but for what it is, even at that very moment; and that comes out in humanity's response. What we see happen here is in stark contrast to the song of praise and victory of the earlier chapter.

This fits in with the focus of this morning; ***everyone carries one of two marks***- the beast or the lamb. And that means, ***everyone responds to God in one of two ways***. We respond the way that we ***do*** because that's what we ***are!*** And therefore, everyone will ultimately experience God's presence in one of two ways. –And the chapter highlights the finality of that experience.

Beyond the other angles of the tribulation, there is a ***real accent on God's perfect justice***. The plagues are a direct reflection of the people who receive them. They willingly carried the mark of the beast, now they carry the mark of sores. They had spilled the blood of the innocent and now the plagues upon them are like blood. ***"you have given them blood to drink as they deserve."***

But the stress here, isn't simply on what they have ***done***, but for what they presently ***are***; that is, ***hardened beyond repentance***. Even as they suffer what they deserve and realize it, their response is:

- They cursed God and refused to repent.
- They refused to repent of what they had done.
- They cursed God on account of the plague.

The main emphasis of these plagues is the tension between ***God's perfect standard***, and justice against the ***steadfast refusal to repent***. At the human level, it is the stark contrast of ***those who suffered unjustly*** at the hands of fallen humanity who now enjoy God's blessing, to those who had ***lived in unjust comfort*** but now suffer at the hands of God's perfect justice.

## DISCUSSION

Here is further significant symbology found in these plagues, consider what they might mean:

- Seared by the intense heat-
- Plunged into darkness-
- The great river Euphrates dried up-
- Impure spirits like frogs (From the dragon, beast, and false prophet)
- Armageddon-

- The great city split into three parts (cities of nations collapse)-