the bowls of the wrath of God

(Revelation 16)

In his book *The Problem of Pain,* C. S. Lewis said:

Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

The bowl judgments in Revelation 16 are God’s final attempt to awake those without Christ concerning their eternal destiny.

One of the things we have learned as we have systematically walked through the book of Revelation is that most people will reject God no matter how hard God tries to get their attention.

During the first half of the 7-year tribulation period He sends His two witnesses and they give perfectly accurate predictions of what God is doing in the earth.

They say nothing for 3.5 years that does not come to pass.

They do incredible miracles throughout the first 3.5 years of the Trib.

But does mankind listen?

Does it believe the words of the God they magnify and proclaim?

The **vast** majority of mankind does not.

Not only that, they turn to a fellow human being whom the Bible calls the Man of Sin and worship him as God.

With Satan’s help, the Man of Sin:

--- kills God’s two prophets (Rev 11)...

--- …and with their demise, ends the disasters they’ve unleashed on the earth for 3.5 years, and...

 --- helps the world find some semblance of peace and unity by instituting a cashless economy and a new religion.

So, things begin looking better in the world for a while.

The world has endured significant losses.

But now, under the leadership of the Man of Sin, things begin to get better for unsaved man.

Of course, not for believers in Christ.

Many of those who come to Christ will lose their lives.

Earth’s new god will not tolerate people who worship the God who—he will say—caused all of earth’s problems to begin with.

In a very sophisticated way, he will say to mankind:

*Why, who would want to follow a God who would cause disasters to destroy the earth and so many people? There’s no doubt that the God of the Bible is a deity from the dark side who doesn’t care a bit about mankind.*

So, once the Man of Sin takes the throne, he will have two major goals---

(1) To get rid of the followers of Christ, and…

(2) To get the world and its economy prospering.

He will accomplish both goals fairly well.

That is, until God steps back in the picture.

Yes, God will allow the Man of Sin and his kingdom to prosper, but only for a little while.

The entire time the Man of Sin is prospering, God is still bringing people to Himself, and yet, at the same time, humans are continuing to rebel and reject Him.

So one day, God will say to the 7 angels with the last 7 judgments: “Go!”

Look at verse 1.

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

We can’t say at what point in the last 3.5 years that these judgments will fall, but we do know from verse 2 that they will not strike the earth until the Man of Sin has had the opportunity to institute his mark and the resulting cashless society.

So, what happens first?

# #1---Painful Sores (v. 2)

2 So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul [harmful/dangerous] and loathsome [painful] sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.

**# 2 & #3---Ocean/rivers turned to blood** (vv. 3-4)

3 Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died. 4 Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.

**The First Intermission** (vv. 5-7)

5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying: “﻿**You are righteous, O Lord**, the One who is and who was and who is to be, because You have judged these things. 6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. For **it is their just due**.﻿” 7 And I heard another from the altar saying, “﻿Even so, Lord God Almighty, **true and righteous are Your judgments**.﻿”

As we will see, human will blaspheme God for these judgments, but heaven praises and magnifies Him.

**#4---Severe burns** (vv. 8-9)

8 Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. 9 And men were scorched with great heat [severely burned], and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.

# #5---Painful darkness (vv. 10-11)

10 Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. 11 They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

**#6---Euphrates dried up** (vv. 12-14)

12 Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. 13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14 For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

**The Second Intermission** (vv. 15)

Jesus pauses to speak with His local churches who are reading about the Tribulation Period.

15 “﻿Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.﻿”

If a believer is backslidden at the return of Jesus, it will be very embarrassing, like standing in His presence naked. Others will see **his shame** (*aschēmosunēn*), a euphemism for a person’s private parts (cf. Isa 47:3; Rev 3:18).

16 And they **(the three demons of v. 14)** gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

Satan and the Man of Sin know what is ahead.

They know what God’s plans are.

They know that He plans on sending His Son back to earth.

The Man of Sin will undoubtedly make this clear to the entire world.

In his speeches, he will prepare them mentally for this battle.

He will say things along the lines of,

*“Jesus is mighty, but we will dispose of Him once and for all (just as we did His two prophets). For centuries He has tried to keep the world enslaved to His strict commands, but we will, once and for all, destroy* ***Him*** *and* ***those who preach Him*** *and end His mistreatment of mankind.”*

But folks, no matter how hard he tries, he’s doomed. When God says something is going to happen, it’s going to happen. Satan tries to gather the whole world to fight against God. And Psalm 2 says, “He who sits in heaven shall laugh.”

# #7---Greatest earthquake/largest hail ever (vv. 17-21).

17 Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, “﻿It is done!﻿” 18 And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. 19 Now the great city [Jerusalem] was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon [Rome] was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. 20 Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. 21 And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent [100 lbs.]. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.

#4 & #5 “Men blasphemed God … did not repent…” Here in #7, “did not repent” is omitted. It is possible that humanity has crossed the point of no return and will not and cannot repent.

**Application**

---Remember that the judgment of God is inescapable.

---Remember that the injustices of this world will one day be undone.

**Chuck Swindoll: “**Reminding ourselves of this fact will help us come to terms with the brutality of the present world and the injustice that seems to reign. One day the tables will be turned and justice will be served.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll’s New Testament Insights (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)