

Revelation 16 - Seven Bowls of the Wrath of God

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COURSE COMMENTARY

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16:1 - seven angels with the seven last plagues

- **go and pour out**
The *bowl* judgments, which are last in the sequence of seals, trumpets, and bowls, reflect many passages which indicate God will *pour forth* His judgment ([Ps. 79:1-7](#); [Jer. 10:25](#); [Dan. 9:27](#); [Zep. 3:8](#)). The context points to an ultimate judgment before a time of great blessing (the Millennial Kingdom).
- **bowls of the wrath of God**
These judgments are so *severe* that many commentators are unwilling to interpret them literally. These are not historic events from the past, such as the French Revolution, but future **literal plagues** just like those of Egypt in the Old Testament.

16:2 - the first bowl

- **foul and loathsome sore**
Dangerous and pernicious, painful and virulent wound-like ulcers or abscesses. Similar to the boils which Satan inflicted on Job ([Job 2:7](#)). Parallel to the plague in Egypt ([Ex. 9:8-11](#)). "Tumors, with the scab, and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed" ([Deu. 28:27](#)).
- **upon the men who had the mark**
The sore only targets those who have taken the mark of the Beast and who worship his image. The beast-worshippers are the "Egypt" of the end. They have violated the second commandment written on stone--the "testimony" in the ark of the covenant mentioned a few verses ago ([Rev. 15:5](#)) : "You shall not make for yourself a carved image... you shall not bow down to them nor serve them" ([Ex. 20:4](#))

16:3 - the second bowl

- **blood as of a dead man**
During the second trumpet ([Rev. 8:8](#)) a third of the sea became blood and a third of the creatures died. Now *all* of the sea and its creatures become not just blood, but like *clotted* (*coagulated*) blood. Again, similar to the literal plague of Egypt ([Ex. 7:18](#)). The essential life-supporting mechanisms in the sea, the base of the food-chain, is destroyed. The result is rotting carcasses piled high on the shores of the oceans.

16:4 - the third bowl

- **rivers and springs become blood**
During the third trumpet, *one third* of the rivers and springs of water became wormwood ([Rev. 8:10](#)). Now *all* of the rivers and springs become blood. Another parallel with the plagues of Egypt ([Ex. 7:20](#)).
- **the bowls and trumpets differ**
Although there are some similarities, the trumpet and bowl judgments are different judgments separated in time:

Trumpet Judgments	Bowl Judgments
partial effects (one-third)	complete effects (all)

recipients are to repent	recipients are already doomed (Rev. 14:9)
men are indirectly affected	men are the direct target
the temple remains open (Rev. 7:15 ; 11:19 ; 14:15 , 17 ; 15:6)	the temple is closed (Rev. 15:18)
no indication of completion	"It is done!" (Rev. 16:17)

16:5 - You are righteous O Lord

- You are righteous... because You have judged**

God is the perfect balance between mercy, grace, and judgment. He is *perfectly righteous*. His mercy and grace holds off judgment. His truth and righteousness make judgment *inevitable*. "The LORD is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works" ([Ps. 145:17](#)). "Righteous are You, O LORD, and upright are Your judgments" ([Ps. 119:137](#)).

- who is and who was and who is to be**

Literally, "the one who is and the *he was*, and the one to be." A Hebraism, similar to Revelation [1:4](#). The emphasis here is on His eternality. Only the *Textus Receptus* has "the one to be." Other manuscripts have "the holy."

16:6-7 - blood to drink

- shed the blood of saints and prophets**

The Harlot sits on *peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues* ([Rev. 17:15](#)) and she is *drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus* ([Rev. 17:6](#)). Israel shed the blood of her prophets ([Mat. 21:35](#); [23:35](#); [Luke 11:49-53](#)). 1900 years later, blood is still being shed. It is said more Christians have died in our own century than in any previous century.

- you have given them blood to drink**

God's retributive judgment is in kind. For spilling blood, they will drink blood. *I will feed those who oppress you with their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with sweet wine* ([Isa. 49:26](#)).

16:8 - the fourth bowl

- poured out his bowl on the sun**

In the fourth trumpet judgment *one third* of the sun was struck (along with the moon and stars).

- to scorch men with fire**

"Scorch" is *kaumati'sai* meaning "to be burned or scorched, of plants withering in heat." The sun, an object of worship throughout history, will now be the source of a curse. That which they have trusted in (the earth) and worshiped (the sun) are now sources of punishment.

16:9 - they blasphemed God

- men were scorched with great heat**

Numerous passages in the Old Testament speak of men being *burned up* and are thought to be figurative. It appears that not all aspects of such judgment passages are figurative--some are indeed literal descriptions of the time of the end ([Isa. 24:1-13](#); [Mal. 4:1](#)).

- they blasphemed the name of God... they did not repent**

We know they will not repent because they have taken the mark and are already doomed ([Rev. 14:9-11](#)). In the foreknowledge of God they were never written in the Book of Life. They follow in the pattern of

Jezebel on the church at Thyatira ([Rev. 2:21](#)) and will not repent ([Rev. 9:20-21](#)). Like Pharaoh, these continue to harden their hearts ([Ex. 8:15](#); [9:34-35](#)).

16:10-11 - the fifth bowl

- **on the throne of the beast**
May only affect the *leadership* of his kingdom. Or perhaps all those who have the mark--although these were identified differently in the first bowl.
- **his kingdom became full of darkness**
Like the plague which struck the land of Egypt ([Ex. 10:21-23](#)).
- **they gnawed their tongues**
This may indicate their frenzy at being unable to respond. Their suffering is intense and cumulative. "Their tongues have spoken blasphemies, and they themselves thus punish them."
- **they blasphemed God**
Their swollen tongues continue to agitate against God. They are completely unable to repent. Being guilty of *blasphemy*, God will soon *stone them* [Rev. 16:21](#).

16:12 - the sixth bowl

- **the Euphrates River dried up**
At the sixth trumpet, four angels bound at the Euphrates were released and a demonic invasion resulted. This sixth bowl is a *separate unrelated event* from the sixth trumpet. The demonic horsemen attack all mankind. These kings are part of a specific military campaign. Mention of the *Euphrates* indicates specific geographic movements and implies a literal city of Babylon on its banks. Men will cross over the Euphrates "dry-shod" ([Isa. 11:12-16](#) cf. [Zec. 10:8-12](#)).
- **kings from the east**
Literally, *from the rising of the sun*. All this denotes is *eastward* of the Euphrates. "East" is relative to the Promised Land, not necessarily our concept of "East" (China, the Orient). This is a separate event from the *two myriads of myriads* of demonic horsemen at the sixth trumpet.

16:13 - three unclean spirits

- **three unclean spirits like frogs**
These are demons (see next verse). According to the Law of Moses, frogs are "unclean," being aquatic and lacking scales and fins ([Lev. 11:9-12](#); [Deu. 14:9-10](#)). These also recall the plague of frogs in Egypt ([Ex. 8:2-13](#)).
- **out of the mouth of the dragon... beast... false prophet**
The unclean spirits *empower, influence, and promulgate* the message which the "antitrinity" speak. Their propaganda is not just persuasive and perceptive, it is *demonically empowered!*

16:14 - to the kings of the earth

- **spirits of demons**
These are among the angels which fell from heaven with Satan ([Rev. 12:4](#)). In the sovereignty and mystery of God, these demons gather the kings according to *God's purposes and timetable*. God has used unclean spirits throughout history (e.g., [1S. 16:14](#); [2K. 19:7](#); [1K. 22:10-23](#)). Paul informs us that "God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie" ([2Th. 2:11](#)).
- **performing signs**
This is part of the "unrighteous deception among those who perish" which Paul wrote about ([2Th. 2:9-10](#)). Signs themselves are no reliable indicator of their source. See our discussion on deceptive signs in

the class on [Revelation 13](#). The deception is so powerful that no amount of sophistry, education, power, or wisdom will prove adequate to resist. Only regeneration by the Spirit will be sufficient to resist.

- [to the kings of the earth and of the whole world](#)
"Earth" is *oikoume'nes*, the inhabited world. This includes the ten kings who are allied with the Beast and go to war against the Lamb ([Rev. 17:12-14](#)). Like Gog in Ezekiel [38](#) and [39](#), God draws the kings to their doom!
- [gather them to the battle of that great day of God](#)
They are gathered to "Armageddon" (see next verses). "That great day" is the [Day of the Lord](#) which we have discussed in a previous class. It begins with the Tribulation, includes the actual day on which Christ returns, and stretches into the Millennial Kingdom--a time of great blessing on earth. "Battle" is *po'lemon* which is more properly translated *war* (NASB). It is not a single battle, but a more extended engagement involving multiple locations.

16:15 - I am coming

- [I am coming](#)
Present tense, *I am presently coming*. His arrival is imminent--He is already on His way. Two possible interpretations:
1) The words are primarily for believers on earth during this time and relate to His Second Coming in judgment.
2) The words are for all the recipients of John's writing, like the promises to the seven churches ([Rev. 3:3](#)) and relate to His coming for the Church before this time.
- [as a thief](#)
He comes as a thief only upon those who are not watching ([Mat. 24:42-44](#); [Mark 13:33-37](#); [Luke 12:35-40](#)). Believers are to watch and pray to [escape](#) the things coming upon the whole earth ([Luke 21:34](#); [Rev. 3:10](#)).

16:16 - gathered to Armageddon

- [Armageddon](#)
From the Hebrew, *har* (mountain) and *megiddon* referring to the town of "Megiddo." *Megiddo* may mean "a place of troops."

Megiddo from the South



16:16 - Campaign of Armageddon

- **a campaign, not a single battle**

A series of battles stretching over almost 200 miles ([Rev. 14:20](#)) involving:

- 1) Edom/Bozrah ([Isa. 34:1-10](#); [36:1-6](#)).
- 2) Jerusalem ([Zec. 12:2-11](#); [14:2](#)).
- 3) Valley of Jehoshaphat ([Joel 3:2, 12](#)).
- 4) Plain of Megiddo (Jezreel Valley)?

- **judgment of man's rebellion**

The nations have attempted to throw off God all through history, but at the end there will be a specific concerted effort ([Ps. 2](#)). God will "cleanse the planet" in preparation for the Millennial Kingdom to follow ([Rev. 20:4-6](#)). This includes judging the nations for their treatment of **Israel** and her **Promised Land** ([Joel 3:2](#))!

16:16 - Armageddon: Jezreel Valley

Jezreel Valley

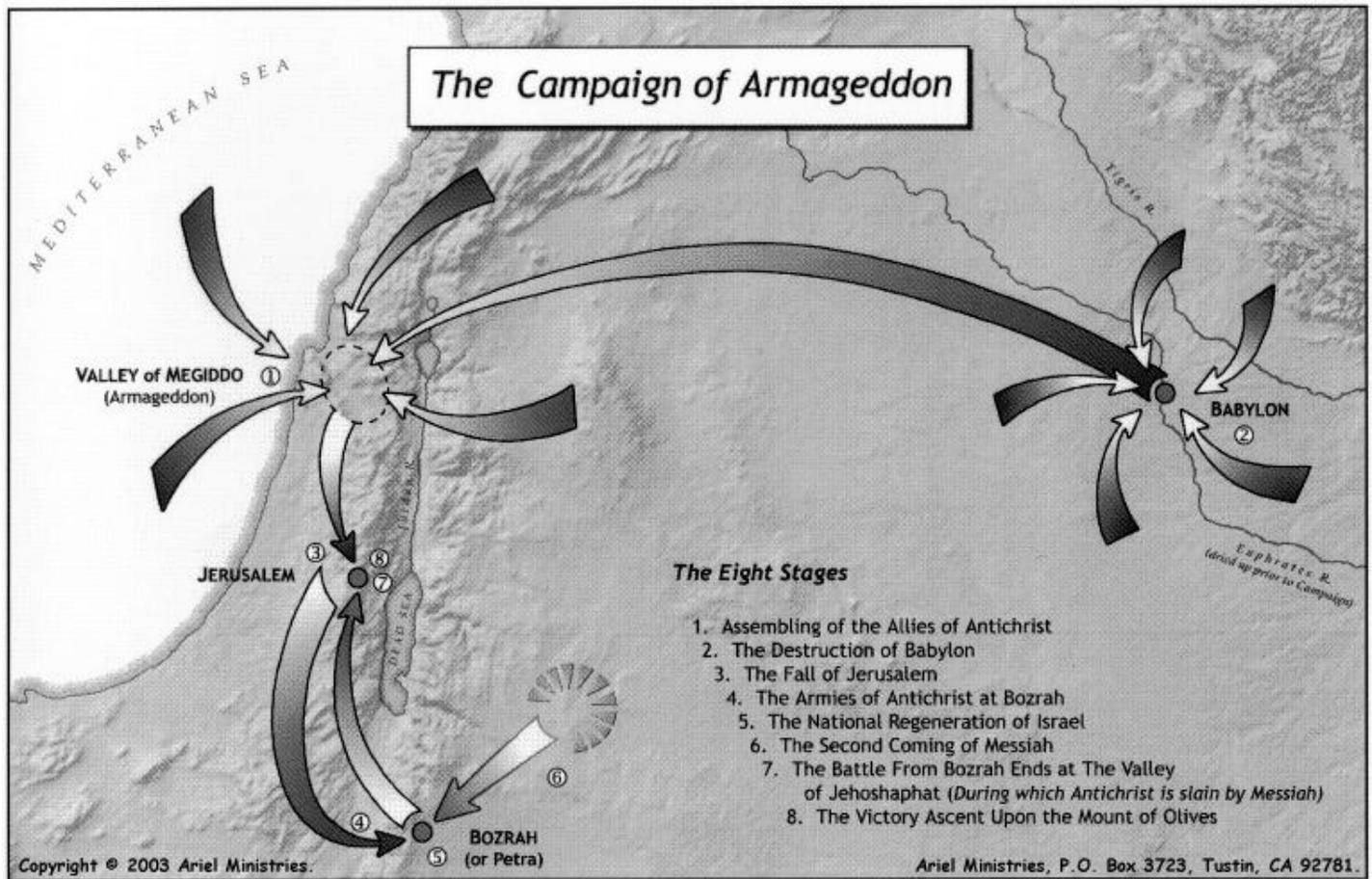


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16:16 - Armageddon: Sequence of Events

The Campaign of Armageddon



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[Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of Messiah*, 314.]

16:16 - Armageddon: Judgment Passages

- **All Nations against Jerusalem**

Isaiah describes a bloody slaughter involving *all nations* in Bozrah in the land of Edom ([Isa. 34:1-10](#)). Micah describes the threshing of the nations who are ignorant of what He is doing ([Mic. 4:11-13](#)). Zechariah describes Jerusalem as being a burdensome stone for *all nations* ([Zec. 12:1-12](#)). The Messiah shall arrive on the Mount of Olives with the saints and defend Jerusalem ([Zec. 14:1-5](#)).

- **Blood-Stained Garments**

Isaiah saw God coming *from Bozrah in Edom* with blood-stained garments ([Isa. 63:1-6](#) cf. [Gen. 49:11](#)). John will be shown the same event: the Second Coming of Messiah Jesus ([Rev. 19:11-18](#)).

16:17 - the seventh bowl

- **into the air**

This bowl brings about the Campaign of Armageddon—the previous bowl only brought about the gathering in preparation. Perhaps the air is the target because this judgment also overthrows Satan's throne, "the prince of the power of the air" ([Eph. 2:2](#)). The judgments of the seventh bowl extend all the way to the Millennial Kingdom and include the binding of Satan ([Rev. 20:1-3](#)) and the imprisonment of demons in what was once Babylon ([Rev. 18:2](#)).

- **It is done!**

The voice must be that of God the Father since the Temple was closed during the bowl judgments ([Rev. 15:8](#)). "In these seven plagues, the wrath of God is complete" ([Rev. 15:1](#)).

16:18 - a great earthquake

- **noises, thunderings, lightnings, earthquake**
These manifestations of judgment point back to the opening scenes in the throne room in Revelation 4:5. God has now delivered that which was threatening! Similar manifestations attended the angel of the altar's censer full of fire which was thrown to the earth (Rev. 8:5).
- **as had not occurred since men were on the earth**
There have been many earthquakes associated with the Tribulation period (Mat. 24:8; Rev. 6:12; Rev. 8:7-10; Rev. 11:13), but this is the big GRAND DADDY! This is probably when Messiah steps on the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem's topography is altered (Zec. 14:4).

16:19 - cities fall

- **the great city was divided into three parts**
Probably refers to Jerusalem. It is contrasted with the "cities of the nations (Gentiles)" and Babylon. Although used of Babylon, the phrase *great city* is also used of both Jerusalem (Rev. 11:8) and the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:10). Babylon's destruction is no mere dividing, but a total devastation *never to be inhabited again!*
- **all the cities of the nations fell**
"Nations" is *ethno'n* which is often translated "Gentiles." All other cities of the world are taken down by this earthquake! They supported the Harlot (Rev. 17:13) and now drink the "wine of the wrath of her fornication" from God's cup (Rev. 14:8).
- **great Babylon was remembered before God**
The phrase *great Babylon* alludes to Nebuchadnezzar's boastful statement immediately before he was struck by God for *seven years* (Dan. 4:30). Jerusalem is to be restored (Isa. 62) and serve as the capital of the Millennial Kingdom, whereas Babylon is destined for permanent catastrophic destruction becoming a prison for unclean spirits (Isa. 13:21-22; Rev. 18:2).

16:20 - islands flee, mountains fall

- **every island fled away and the mountains were not found**
There will be massive loss of life during this seismic convulsion (Jer. 4:23-28) and a radical alteration of the geography of the earth (Ps. 46:1-6).
- **regeneration of the earth**
Scripture records that there will be a "regeneration" (*palingenesi'a*), an "again Genesis" (Mat. 19:28 cf. Isa. 65:17-23) **before** the Millennium. Jerusalem will be literally lifted up above the surrounding lands (Zec. 14:10) to form the mountain of the Lord's House (Isa. 2:2; 27:13; 30:29; 56:7; Eze. 17:24; 20:40; 40:2; Mic. 4:1).

16:21 - great hail

- **great hail**
Similar to the Egyptian plague (Ex. 9:23-25). God uses large hail in a similar way numerous times in history. For example, in the long day of Joshua (Jos 10:11) and in the overthrow of Gog who attacks Israel (Eze. 38:22). This is the "treasury of hail which I have reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war" (Job 38:22).
- **stoned by God**
This hail, combined with the noises (or voices), lightnings, thunderings, and earthquake make up the **same manifestations of judgment** which we saw when the ark was revealed following the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11:19). This is the "delivery" of the judgment which was initiated in response to the "testimony" which resides in the ark: the Ten Commandments. The earth-dwellers are now stoned for blasphemy (Lev. 24:14-16).

- [about the weight of a talent](#)

Figures vary between about 58 and 135 pounds depending upon which talent and whose numbers are used.

For additional information on this topic, see the [commentary](#).