**Revelation**

*Lesson 31 – Revelation 16:1-11*

* We are in the middle of the 5th cycle of Revelation which is Revelation 15-16. And now Revelation resumes a series of 7s, this time described as “bowls” whereas earlier they were “seals” and “trumpets.”

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **First Seal** – White Horse: General Representation of God’s Judgment upon the Wicked | **First Trumpet** – Hail & Fire; 1/3 of the land burned |
| **Second Seal** – Red Horse: War (Lack of Peace) | **Second Trumpet** – Blood; 1/3 of the waters and ships |
| **Third Seal** – Black Horse: Famine & Inflation | **Third Trumpet** – Bitter Water (Wormwood); 1/3 of the rivers and springs |
| **Fourth Seal** - Pale Horse: Death (1/4 of Earth) | **Fourth Trumpet** – Darkness; 1/3 of the heavenly bodies |
| **Fifth Seal** – Souls Under Altar: Praying for God’s Justice against their persecutors | **Fifth Trumpet/First Woe** – demons (“locust”) who spiritually and psychologically torment unbelievers |
| **Sixth Seal** – Cosmic Undoing of the World (2nd Coming) | **Sixth Trumpet/Second Woe** – demons (“angels riding scary looking horses) who kill and wound 1/3 of unbelievers |
| **Seventh Seal** – Silence in Heaven | **Seventh Trumpet/Third Woe** - A Song of Praise for the Great Day of God’s Wrath & Final Judgment |

*Verses 1-2: The First Bowl*

1. The Father speaks with a loud voice in verse 1, commanding His angels to pour out the 7 bowls which are called “bowls of the wrath of God.” These are the same 7 angels that John sees in Revelation 15:1. They are introduced in Revelation 15 but they do not begin to carry out their commission until now. Greg Beale says, “The bowls go back in time and explain in greater detail the woes throughout the age and culminating in the final judgment.” If we believe Revelation is cyclical for the time period between Christ’s comings, then that means that at this moment and until Christ’s return, seals, trumpets, and bowls are all being carried out right now as a precursor to God’s final judgment.
2. The first bowl in verse 2 is described as “harmful” and “painful” sores poured out on the earth, specifically unbelievers. These unbelievers are described as “people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.” This bowl of God’s wrath is specifically upon unbelievers because of their idolatry. They are worshipping the image of the first beast (directed by the 2nd beast, the false prophet) behind whom stands the dragon instead of worshipping the Son (directed by the Holy Spirit) who is the image of the Father
3. Exodus 9:10 – “So they took soot from the kiln and stood before Pharaoh. And Moses threw it in the air, and it became **boils breaking out in sores on man** and beast.”
4. There is some debate as to whether these boils are literal like the ones in Exodus or symbolic as we are understanding the book of Revelation. It might actually be both. Infectious diseases have plagued mankind throughout history, especially the Black Death of the 14th century. But these might also represent some sort of spiritual or psychological agony just as Pharaoh’s magicians were in such agony they couldn’t even stand before Moses.

*Verse 3: The Second Bowl*

1. Exodus 7:17-18 – “**17**Thus says the Lord, ‘By this you shall know that I am the Lord: behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood. **18**The fish in the Nile shall die, and the Nile will stink, and the Egyptians will grow weary of drinking water from the Nile.’”
2. The sea oftentimes in the OT is used as an instrument of destruction. Psalm 78:53 – “He led them in safety, so that they were not afraid, but the sea overwhelmed their enemies.”
3. In terms of creation, this is the second major region in biblical terms. In Hebraic thinking, creation is divided into the major sections of heavens, earth, and waters. The first bowl affects people on the earth and now the second bowl affects the waters so that all upon the land or upon the water and in the water.
4. This bowl parallels the 2nd trumpet which was a mountain falling into the sea so that 1/3 of the water became blood and 1/3 of the ships were destroyed and 1/3 of the fish in the waters were killed. Here the bowl is not partial but complete. Greg Beale writes, “The primary difference is that the former trumpet has partial effect and the latter corresponding bowl has total effect. The second bowl shows that what can be applied partially in the trumpets can also be applied universally at times throughout the inter-advent age.”
5. The 2nd trumpet also focused on judgment upon Babylon so too this bowl in parallel fashion has reference to Babylon. Revelation 18:3d – “the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living” Revelation 18:17-18 – “And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off **18**and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning….”
6. Also Babylon is associated with spilling the blood of the saints (17:6) and being drunk with wine of sexual immorality (17:2), so now God will make spiritual Babylon drink of his bowl of wrath and get drunk with it in a manner that associates God’s wrath with blood. The blood affects Babylon and means in which she makes herself great and is God’s eye for an eye punishment for spilling the blood of saints and eye for an eye punishment for drinking of the wine of sexual immorality.

*Verses 4-7: The Third Bowl*

1. The third bowl also affects waters and turns rivers and fountains/springs of water into blood. In response to this, God’s people praise Him for His justice. It begins with God’s holiness and sovereignty in bringing judgment in verse 5. It shows how God’s punishments fit the crime in verse 6 which I just talked about in the 2nd bowl. God’s punishments are never too severe or not severe enough unlike man’s punishments which sometimes can be overly harsh so that the punishment goes beyond the crime, or the punishment is not severe enough to fit the crime. As verse 6 says, with God’s punishments it is what they deserve.
2. Then the saints who are under the altar join the chorus and reaffirm what the angel was singing. With God who is Sovereign (Almighty), His judgments are always just and always true or
3. Deuteronomy 32:4 – “The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he.” Deuteronomy 19:21 – “Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”
4. “Both the individuals and nations that persecute and kill Christians will be held accountable before God. They may not suffer retributive justice in this life, but they will most certainly face it when they stand before God’s throne in the final judgment. And as v. 7 makes clear, you can rest assured that there will be no miscarriage of justice. God’s punishment of those who have oppressed and slaughtered his people will be in perfect harmony with truth and justice.” –Sam Storms

*Verses 8-9: The Fourth Bowl*

1. The 4th bowl is poured on the sun which was allowed to scorch people with fire and extreme heat.
2. Judgment by fire is found promised in the OT, especially the prophets. Isaiah 66:15-16 – “For behold, the LORD will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire will the LORD enter into judgment, and by his sword, with all flesh; and those slain by the LORD shall be many.” Malachi 4:1 – “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.” See also Jeremiah 7:20 and Ezekiel 22:21-22.
3. Unbelievers curse the name of God and they do not repent and give Him glory. This speaks to the utter hardness of the hearts of unbelievers. They are unrepentant and angry at God because of His judgments. Rather than becoming repentant and letting God’s fire sanctify them, they blaspheme and heap more wickedness upon themselves. See the response to the trumpets in Revelation 9:20-21.
4. “It bears witness to the hardness of the human heart in sin that not even the inescapable recognition that God is the source of their misery leads to repentance!” –Sam Storms

*Verses 10-11: The Fifth Bowl*

1. In the fifth bowl, God makes a direct assault on the beast’s kingdom by pouring out the 5th bowl upon the beast’s throne and the whole kingdom is plunged into darkness. This throne is those world rulers who oppress the saints and led people into idolatry.
2. This bowl parallels the plague of darkness that fell upon Egypt in Exodus 10. There, the darkness was so dense that the Egyptians could not see one another. In other words, the darkness created a separation and sense of separation. In a spiritual sense, this darkness is a reminder to unbelievers of their eternal separation from God due to their sin and rebellion. This darkness also represents everything that God does to remind the ungodly that their persecution and idolatry are in vain.
3. Amos 5:20 – “Is not the day of the LORD **darkness**, and not light, and **gloom** with no brightness in it?” Joel 2:1b-2a – “Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near, **a day of darkness and gloom**, a day of clouds and **thick darkness**! **Like blackness** there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people;” Zephaniah 1:15 – “A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and **anguish**, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of **darkness and gloom**, a day of clouds and **thick darkness**,”
4. This sense of being separated from God and a sense of impending doom is described in verse 10 as the unbelievers “gnawing their tongues in anguish.” They are also cursing God for their pain and sores. The judgments of God are only hardening them in their unbelief. Rather than seeking relief by turning to Christ, they remain in their pain and anguish.
5. Joel Beeke writes, “The fifth vial boldly asserts Jehovah’s sovereignty over Satan and his forces.”