

The Sixth and Seventh Bowl Judgments (Revelation 16:12-21)

God will justly pour out His divine wrath on a wicked and deserving world. The fact that He warns about these future judgments is an ongoing reminder that He is first and foremost a God of grace, a God who offers redemption and deliverance through His own Son, Jesus Christ. The future judgments leading up to the return of Jesus Christ to the earth will include seven Seal Judgments, seven Trumpet Judgments, and seven Bowl Judgments. The last two Bowl Judgments will culminate in Christ's return (although Revelation 17-18 presents significant aspects of earth's entrenched resistance to God that precede the description of Jesus' return). The final Bowl Judgments lead to a final battle between earth's inhabitants and their Creator, a battle called Armageddon. That battle will finally break humankind's resistance to God and open the door for the Messiah's kingdom on earth. Once again we must remember that because the Lamb is Lord all resistance to His reign, even in our hearts, must be overthrown.

The Sixth Bowl Judgment—God will justly draw the kings of the earth to the final battle of Armageddon (16:12-16).

God's justice in pouring out His wrath had previously been reinforced by angelic declarations (Revelation 16:5-7). The final two Bowl Judgments rightly display God's justice. The sixth Bowl Judgment will pave the way for the battle of Armageddon.

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the Euphrates River (16:12a).

Following quickly on the heels of the previous five Bowl Judgments, the sixth angel will pour out his bowl of judgment. The focal point of this judgment will be the "great river Euphrates." The Euphrates River is one of earth's prominent waterways, significant in ancient as well as modern times. About 1,900 miles long, the Euphrates flows from modern day Turkey through the countries of Syria and Iraq and empties into the Persian Gulf. Its length and location served as an ancient boundary between the Roman Empire and the east. It's first mentioned in Genesis 2:14 and its final mention is found here in relation to the sixth Bowl Judgment.

The waters of the river dried up, preparing the way for the kings from the east (16:12b).

When the angel pours out his bowl of divine wrath on the Euphrates River its waters will dry up. What had been a barrier to eastern armies will no longer prohibit their movement toward Israel. Isaiah 11:15 likewise predicts this future event. Previously, the sixth Trumpet Judgment saw the release of four demonic beings from the Euphrates River who were empowered to kill one-third of the population at the hands of an army of 200 million soldiers (Revelation 9:13-16). The sixth Bowl Judgment will bring additional troops into the picture by drying up the Euphrates River. The drying up of the Euphrates River will prepare the way for "the kings from the rising

sun” to make their way to the final battle of Armageddon. Apparently these kings and their armies will be perched in anticipation of this great conflict.

John saw three demonic spirits that looked like frogs come from the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (16:13).

The sixth Bowl Judgment will not only prepare the way for the kings from the east to approach Israel, it will also include demonic enticement to engage in battle. In John’s vision he saw three unclean spirits, three demonic beings emerge from the mouth of the dragon, the mouth of the beast, and the mouth of the false prophet. This evil trinity—Satan, the Antichrist, and the false prophet—will command these three demons to carry out their purpose.

The demonic spirits gathered the kings of the whole world to a place called Armageddon (16:14-16).

The three demonic spirits will perform signs, miraculous events that will catch the attention of the kings of the entire inhabited world. Their actions will entice these kings to gather for war (compare 1 Kings 22:19-22). Some see this gathering as an intention on the part of the kings to engage in battle against each other, but the Antichrist will apparently have such a stranglehold on the world in that day that this gathering more likely refers to an intentional attack on Jesus Christ at His return. Ten specific kings will team up with the Antichrist in that final hour and lead the charge against Christ (Revelation 17:12-14). The war they will wage is called “the great day of God Almighty,” great because of its intensity and finality. God, who is limitless in power, will overcome His enemies through His reigning Son, Jesus Christ.

In the midst of this prophecy Revelation 16:15 serves as a confidence building promise that Jesus will indeed return. The words must be those of Jesus Himself: “Behold, I am coming as a thief!” Jesus used this same image regarding His unexpected return in Matthew 24:43-44 and Luke 12:39-40. Attached to this promise of Christ’s unexpected and instantaneous return is the promise of blessing on those who are watchful and who guard their clothing, referring to those who are prepared spiritually to receive Jesus at His return. These individuals would be those who rejected the Antichrist and his mark. Such faithful believers during that future period of trial are described as not walking naked and thereby avoiding shame, meaning that they have clothed themselves by faith with Jesus Christ and have no shame in their actions or attitudes due to their faith (compare Romans 13:14; Galatians 3:27).

Using a singular verb and therefore referring to God’s ultimate role in controlling the nations of the earth, John states that “he gathered” these resistant kings in the place designated for this final battle. John states that the name of the battle field in Hebrew is Armageddon, a name used only here in the Bible. The Hebrew words behind this name include “mountain” or “hill country” and “Megiddo.” Megiddo was an ancient city located on the edge of a major plain in Israel called the Valley of Megiddo and prophetically the Valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:2, 12). It was the site of several ancient battles (Judges 5:19; 2 Chronicles 35:22) and will be the location of that future battle (Zechariah 12:10-11). Some prefer to view the name Armageddon as a reference to Jerusalem, but the name itself points more specifically to the plain and surrounding hills identified with the city of Megiddo. The troops advancing on Jerusalem will be

stopped at Armageddon in a decisive battle led by the returning Jesus Christ. The sixth Bowl Judgment will pave the way for the gathering of armies for the final battle of Armageddon.

**The Seventh Bowl Judgment—God will justly bring
humankind’s control over the earth to a cataclysmic conclusion (16:17-21).**

The final Bowl Judgment will conclude the sequential series of judgments that will take place during the future Tribulation Period. At that point Jesus will return and humankind’s rebellious grip on the world will at last be broken.

The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air (16:17a).

The seventh angel poured out his bowl of God’s wrath, this judgment falling on the air. The “air” may be a reference to the physical, atmospheric heavens. The subsequent natural disasters—lightning, thunder, and hail—lend support to this interpretation (compare Revelation 9:2). However, the “air” could be a reference to the arena of Satan’s influence since he is called “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). Because the previous Bowl Judgments fell on natural elements—the land (Revelation 16:2), the sea (Revelation 16:3), the rivers (Revelation 16:4), the sun (Revelation 16:8), and the Euphrates River (Revelation 16:12), it’s best to view the final Bowl Judgment as affecting the atmospheric heavens.

A voice from the temple declared the end (16:17b).

As with the introduction to the seven Bowl Judgments (Revelation 16:1), John heard a voice coming from the temple in heaven. This time the origin of the voice is also said to be the throne in heaven. Obviously this is the voice of God. God Himself declares, “Done!” His final judgment has come and with it the end of humankind’s control over the earth.

The earth experienced its most severe earthquake in history (16:18).

With God’s declaration of completion came lightning, voices, and thunder. These visual and audible signs will announce the completion of God’s judgments. Accompanying them will be a great earthquake unparalleled in human history (compare Haggai 2:6-7; Hebrews 12:26-27).

Cities collapsed and Babylon the Great came under God’s wrath (16:19).

The force of this future earthquake will level the cities of the earth. Specifically, John refers to three distinct targets of this upheaval. First is “the great city” which will be divided into three parts. Revelation 11:8 refers to Jerusalem as “the great city” and its division into three parts may be connected with the prophecy of a physical realignment of the area around Jerusalem that will take place when Christ returns (Zechariah 14:4-5). Second, John refers to

“the cities of the nations,” a general reference to the leveling of the cities around the globe. Third, John mentions “Babylon the Great.” This city, great in influence and wickedness, will be remembered by God in the sense that it will then receive its final judgment, the cup of the wine of the anger of His wrath. Revelation 17-18 will go into more detail about the nature of Babylon the Great, which may be a reference to the literal city of Babylon on the Euphrates River or a cryptic reference to the city of Rome. Either way, Babylon will fall under the future wrath of God.

The islands and mountains of the earth were destroyed (16:20).

During this cataclysmic judgment by such a severe earthquake islands will be engulfed by the sea and mountains will crumble to the point of being unrecognizable. Such an upheaval of the physical properties of the earth will reinforce awareness of the power and sovereignty of God.

Huge hailstones fell from the sky causing people to curse God (16:21).

Finally, the earth will be bombarded with great hailstones. The atmospheric heavens will release these stones on humankind in an act of divine judgment. John states that these hailstones will weigh over a hundred pounds (a “talent”). These final acts of God’s wrath will prompt people once again to blaspheme God (compare Revelation 16:9, 11) rather than repent. At that point it will be too late. God’s judgment will fall. God’s Son will return. Those who have rejected Jesus will face eternal punishment while those who put their faith in the Lamb will enter into His earthly kingdom. Because the Lamb is Lord all resistance to His reign, even in our hearts, must be overthrown. But through faith in Jesus Christ we have assurance of His salvation, His deliverance, His redemption.