

The Grace of Wrath

Studies in the Revelation of Jesus Christ

Text

Chapters 15&16

Topic

The seven-year Tribulation comes to its climactic end with the rapid pouring-out of the seven bowls of the wrath of God

Title

"Super Bowls VII"

Introduction

His superhero name is the Sphinx, and his super power among his fellow Mystery Men is to speak in predictable sayings.

Here are a few of them:

- "He who questions training only trains himself at asking questions."
- "When you doubt your powers, you give power to your doubts."
- "When you can balance a tack hammer on your head, you will head off your foes with a balanced attack."

If you think those are profound, they're not, so hold on before you tweet them, or post them to Facebook. The movie they are from is a parody, and they are intended to be funny.

I will risk a saying this morning: "The same sun that melts the wax, hardens the clay."

Pastors and Bible teachers sometimes (in fact, often) use it to point out the two very different responses people have to the Gospel in times of trial or trouble in their lives. Some lean on the Lord, and become better for it, while others loathe the Lord, becoming bitter.

The greatest time of trial and trouble the world will ever know is the future seven year Tribulation. As the judgments of God upon the earth and those who dwell upon it come to their conclusion with the pouring out of the seven bowls full of the wrath of God, there are two very distinct responses:

- Believers who were martyred during the Tribulation are described as blessing God by singing to Him a song of deliverance (15:3-4), while those yet alive as His final wrath is being poured-out remain faithful to the end (16:15).
- Nonbelievers, having refused to repent (16:11), are described as gnawing their own tongues (16:10), and as blaspheming God to the bitter end (16:21).

We've been calling the Tribulation "the grace of wrath," since God's judgment being carefully meted out upon the earth dwellers is designed to lead them to salvation.

Since God's grace is active all the time, we can see it in our trials and troubles now, prior to the Tribulation. That means we, too, who currently dwell on earth can bless Him; or we can scorn grace, and blaspheme Him.

I'll organize my thoughts around two questions: #1 Do You Bless God Seeing His Grace At Work?, or #2 Do You Blaspheme God Scorning His Grace At Work?

#1 Do You Bless God Seeing His Grace At Work?

(Chapter 15)

After a few chapters that filled-in some details, we arrive at the closing months of the seven-year Tribulation with the rapid pouring-out of what are called seven bowls of the wrath of God in chapter sixteen. Chapter fifteen sets it up, describing the ceremony in the Temple in Heaven as the bowls are brought forth.

Rev 15:1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete.

Put most simply, God's wrath is His necessary and proper response to human sin and disobedience. A.W. Pink said it is "the holiness of God stirred into action against sin."

His wrath will be "complete" reminds us that God will have done everything possible to save lost human beings from His wrath before He unleashes it upon the earth.

Rev 15:2 And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.

These are the believers who were killed during the Tribulation. Their "victory over the beast" was to die confessing Jesus Christ as their Lord. When the moment of decision came, they refused to worship the antichrist, and showed their worship of Jesus Christ with their blood.

Victory in the Christian life is often God's strength that is forged from your weakness. It looks like defeat until you see it from Heaven.

Rev 15:3 They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!

Rev 15:4 Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested."

Moses sang his song right after God swallowed up Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea. It really happened, but it also prefigured a greater victory to come, in the Tribulation. If you'll recall, a few chapters ago we read about Satan pursuing Israel into the Judean wilderness, but God protecting them. So it could be that these martyrs are singing about the fact that God protects, on earth, the remnant of Jews who will receive Jesus as their King at His Second Coming.

Commentators are all over the place trying to identify the "song of the Lamb." It's most likely verses three and four, being sung *by* the Lamb - by Jesus - to His Father. It anticipates His return to earth to rule and reign for one thousand years.

The Tribulation is elsewhere called "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:7). It is also known as the seventieth week of Daniel. It's a time especially for God to fulfill His promises to Israel. God will keep His promises to deliver Israel, and Jesus will return to establish the Kingdom.

Rev 15:5 After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened.

Rev 15:6 And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands.

Held back for centuries by God's longsuffering with sinners, the seven angels appointed this task will be released.

It struck me how beautiful, and how beautifully dressed, they are. The wrath of God, once released, is a beautiful thing, in that it brings all rebellion, all lawlessness, to an end. It clears the way for a kingdom in which righteousness and holiness are enforced.

Rev 15:7 Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever.

Rev 15:8 The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

For anyone - believer or nonbeliever - who ever wondered why God isn't doing something about all the bad things in the world, all the suffering, **this** moment in the future, in the closing months of the Tribulation, is the answer. He is waiting for men to repent and, when they absolutely show that they will not, God puts an end to sin by pouring out His wrath upon them.

He'd rather men realize that He already poured-out His wrath against sin upon Jesus, on the Cross. He'd rather men let Jesus be their Substitute and Savior.

But if they refuse, after so much prompting in the Tribulation, they will get what they deserve as sinners in the presence of a holy God.

It's been our goal, throughout this series, to emphasize that, even though it's the Tribulation, God's grace is powerfully at work seeking to save lost men and women.

We will not be in the Tribulation. While we are in the world, we will have tribulation - trials, troubles, tragedies.

Can you see, and even sing of, God's grace at work? The apostle Paul saw and sang about grace.

- In one place he declared that whether he was abounding in blessings, or being abased by buffetings, he learned to be content (Philippians 4:12). That's grace at work.
- In another place he said God's answer to his prayer about a physical affliction he was suffering with was that it was good for him, to keep him humble and depending upon God's strength. He rejoiced in it (Second Corinthians 12). That's grace at work.

Paul wasn't the apostle of grace just because he wrote so much about it. It wasn't something intellectual to him; it was something intimate.

Are you abounding? It's grace at work. Don't think for a minute it's because of anything you have done. Be thankful for it, rather than taking it for granted.

Are you abased - suffering or in some way struggling? Grace will lead you through it, with rejoicing.

#2 Do You Blaspheme God Scorning His Grace At Work?

(Chapter 16)

Speaking of sayings... Yogi Berra was famous for his odd sayings. Here is a sampling of them:

- "Baseball is ninety percent mental. The other half is physical."
- "I'm not going to buy my kids an encyclopedia. Let them walk to school like I did."
- "It gets late early out there."
- "You should always go to other people's funerals, otherwise, they won't come to yours."

The one I want to get to, one of his most quoted, is, "The game's isn't over til it's over."

In chapter sixteen, **it's over**. We've still got stuff ahead of us in the Revelation - great stuff. But the Tribulation comes crashing to its end as the bowls are rapidly poured-out.

Rev 16:1 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."

Again and again I want to point out that God has been busy throughout the history of the human race to let people know that this was coming, and could be personally avoided by faith in Jesus Christ.

Revelation 16:2 So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.

Sores, like boils, break-out, probably on the hand or head where the mark of the Beast is. The real nature of their decision to take the mark and follow the Beast is revealed. They thought his mark would save them, but his mark was a sign of their own spiritual rottenness.

Revelation 16:3 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.

Back in chapter eight there was a partial contamination of the seas. Now it is complete.

I don't think we can begin to fathom the effects of this judgment. "Blood as of a dead man" is a phrase describing the stench from all the dead creatures.

Revelation 16:4 Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.

Revelation 16:5 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.

Revelation 16:6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, And You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due."

Revelation 16:7 And I heard another from the altar saying, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments."

These who rejected Jesus also shed the blood of His saints; now in a moment of poetic justice, they are given blood to drink.

Revelation 16:8 Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire.

Revelation 16:9 And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.

The weather seems so important to us - the temperature, the humidity. In the Tribulation, when someone says, "It's a real scorcher out there," *it will be.*

Remember that in the middle of the Tribulation God dispatched an angel to warn men that, if they took his mark and worshipped the Beast, they would be lost, spiritually, forever. I therefore take their failure to repent here, in the end, to be the sad consequence of that previous decision.

Revelation 16:10 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.

Revelation 16:11 They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

Even while the sun is intensified, darkness covers the “throne of the beast” and his “kingdom.” It’s God’s way of calling the world's attention to the center of opposition to Him.

The verse speaks of an incredible “pain” associated with this bowl. Have you ever been in so much pain that you bit down on something? I remember biting down on my wallet as I was transported via van to the hospital after I had broken my leg.

Have you ever bitten your own tongue? *Man, does that ever hurt.*

OK, now put that together. The pain men will experience in the will be so intense that they will “gnaw” on their own tongues in some sort of failed effort to alleviate their suffering.

Sin is dark. Men like to hide their evil deeds under cover of darkness. But in the darkness we hurt others and we hurt ourselves.

Come out into the light. If you're sinning, **you** CAN repent.

Revelation 16:12 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.

The Euphrates is one of the prominent rivers in the world. It formed the eastern border of the old Roman Empire.

The Euphrates was the site of the worlds first great (and rebellious) city, Babel, after the global flood. It was the site of Nebuchadnezzar’s magnificent capital, Babylon. On its shores in the future there will be a New Babylon to serve as the capital for the antichrist. (We’ll read about it in the next two chapters).

Exactly how the sixth angel acts to dry up the river is not stated. It could involves shifts in the tectonic plates of the earth. A major earthquake is discussed a little later.

It’s interesting to observe in passing that the source of the water for the Euphrates is the perennial ice cap near the 17,000 foot summit of Mount Ararat. It’s where most researchers believe that Noah’s ark came to rest. It could be that God has kept us from discovering the ark so it could be revealed in the last days as a witness to the world of God’s impending return for judgment.

There is so much going on with these bowls, it's hard to get it all in. For example there are a ton of similarities to the ten plagues before the Exodus - like darkness over the land, and water turning to blood.

Then there is something Jews would immediately recognize. When the angels emerge from the Temple, they look a lot like the high priest emerging from the Temple once a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. But since those who dwell on the earth have rejected Jesus, God's wrath is poured-out on them.

The river is dried up to prepare a passageway for the “kings of the east,” literally, of the “sunrising.”

Revelation 16:13 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.

Revelation 16:14 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.

Yuk. The armies of the nations of the world come for what they think are their own political reasons. But, in reality, their movements are satanically inspired.

A lot of things that happen in the world, and throughout history, when it comes to governments, are satanic. The devil is, after all, the god of this world.

Why gather all the armies? The devil knows Jesus is coming back and wants to oppose Him.

But it's not his battle. It is “the battle of the great day of Almighty God.” Whatever strategy Satan devises, God has His own moves to overcome him.

Verse fifteen is a direct quotation from the Lord:

Revelation 16:15 "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."

The thief comes suddenly and unexpectedly resulting in your being plundered. Similar warnings are given in Matthew 24 and Luke 12. Those who are not ready will suffer loss.

The church will not be on the earth at this time, nor at any time during the Tribulation. The apostle Paul assured the Christians at Thessalonica that the Day of the Lord could **not** overtake them as a thief (First Thessalonians 5:4).

The Lord speaks these words to encourage believers on the earth during the final months of the Tribulation, to remain faithful.

Revelation 16:16 And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

Megiddo is a hill which overlooks the Jezreel valley. On the opposite side of the valley can be seen Nazareth, the home town of Jesus until His ministry began. Megiddo in Hebrew means something like *rendezvous*, or *place of troops*.

Armageddon is derived from the original Hebrew word pronounced *har-Megiddon*.

The plain there at Megiddo is fourteen miles wide and twenty miles long. Napoleon called it “the most natural battlefield of the whole earth.”

Jerusalem initially falls to the forces of the antichrist, prior to the return of the Lord. In Zechariah 14:2 we read,

Zechariah 14:2 For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; The city shall be taken, The houses rifled, And the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, But the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city.

But then:

Zechariah 14:3 Then the Lord will go forth And fight against those nations, As He fights in the day of battle.

Joel 3:16 The Lord also will roar from Zion, And utter His voice from Jerusalem; The heavens and earth will shake; But the Lord will be a shelter for His people, And the strength of the children of Israel.

Zephaniah 3:8 "Therefore wait for Me," says the Lord, "Until the day I rise up for plunder; My determination is to gather the nations To My assembly of kingdoms, To pour on them My indignation, All My fierce anger; All the earth shall be devoured With the fire of My jealousy.

Armageddon isn't a metaphor for some maybe-we-can-divert-it destruction. It's a place where mankind's centuries-long, Satan-led rebellion will be crushed.

Revelation 16:17 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!"

There were seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls. "It is done!"

Revelation 16:18 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.

A storm breaks out overhead. The earth shakes beneath. The next verses will describe some of the dreadfulness of these two things.

Weather can be terrifying and it can kill. The same with earthquakes.

Revelation 16:19 Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.

This is a global shaking; "the cities of [all] the nations fell."

What is "the great city?" It could be Jerusalem; or the rebuilt "Babylon" mentioned in the verse.

Jerusalem will, in fact, experience geographic alterations at the Second Coming of Jesus. For one thing, we know that Mount Zion will split in two.

I am one who thinks that Babylon will be rebuilt in Iraq and serve as the antichrist's capital.

Back to the earthquake itself:

Revelation 16:20 Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.

This is the Big One - the 10.0. (It's off the charts). This seems to indicate topographic changes all over the planet - not confined to the area around the Middle East. Creation scientists see this as a leveling of the planet. High peaks and low troughs and valleys level out so the entire planet is somewhat accessible during the reign of Jesus.

Everyone will be able to climb Everest.

Think of how terrifying a seismic event like this will be. If you've ever experienced a severe earthquake, multiply that by like a million.

Revelation 16:21 And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.

The largest hailstone recovered in the US fell in Aurora, NE on June 22, 2003 with a diameter of 7 inches and a circumference of 18.75 inches. Since its weight could not be determined, the hailstone that fell on Coffeyville KS in 1970 remains the largest on record at 5.7 inches and 1.67 pounds, with a circumference of 17.5 inches.

A “talent” is believed to be around one hundred pounds.

"The same sun that melts the wax, hardens the clay."

The Tribulation saints see the grace of God at work and they bless Him. Most are martyred, but some are alive during the bowls; Jesus lets them know He's not coming for them as a thief, but as as their Savior.

Nonbelievers blaspheme, using their tongues to gnaw upon rather than to acknowledge God's grace.

If you're a believer, it's doubtful you blaspheme God during your trials. But do you bless Him - for His grace in them?

If you're not a believer, that can be rectified by God's grace as He offers you the forgiveness of your sins through faith in Jesus Christ.

Rom 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Rom 5:9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

God already poured-out His wrath against sin upon Jesus for you. You cannot withstand it on your own.

Receive the Lord!

