

The Seven Vials

Revelation 16:1-21

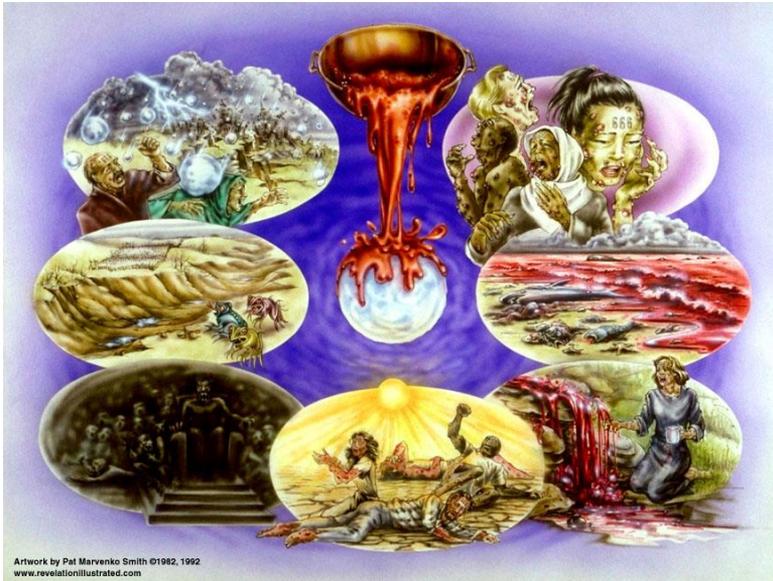
This chapter describes the seven “last plagues,” as mentioned in chapter 15. The plagues are seen as contained in “vials,” or bowls, and are “poured out” on the earth.

Some say these are the same as the seven trumpet judgments, for they describe the same series of events – the earth, the sea, the rivers and fountains of water, the sun, darkness, the Euphrates River, and the last being lightnings, thunders, and a great earthquake. These events are in the same order for both the trumpet judgments and the vials of the wrath of God. However, just because they are similar does not make them identical. The trumpets dealt with only a third of these things while the vials deal with the entire world. These last plagues take place right at the end of the Great Tribulation and happen in rapid-fire succession, ending with the great Battle of Armageddon.

Verse 1 gives us the “great voice out of the temple” giving the order to the angels holding the vials to “pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.” The voice, although not stated, would be the voice of God Himself. Since the vials are the wrath of God, it would be safe to consider the voice with the command that they be poured out come from the One whose wrath they contain.

One author called this “the *great* chapter in the Bible” (J.B. Smith) because the word “great” is found 10 times. It is the Greek word we get our word “mega” from. In fact, “mega” is a transliterated word in the Greek and Latin and English. It simply

means “great” in size and scope.



I. THE FIRST VIAL – VS. 2

A. *“A noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast”*

1. The word for “sore” mentioned here is found one other time in the NT in Luke 16 where the dogs licked Lazarus’ “sores”
2. It is used in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament each time our English Bible renders it “boil” – as the plague of Egypt (Ex. 9:8-9)

[Exodus 9:8-9](#)

(8) And the LORD said unto Moses and unto

Aaron, Take to you handfuls of ashes of the furnace, and let Moses sprinkle it toward the heaven in the sight of Pharaoh.

(9) And it shall become small dust in all the land of Egypt, and shall be a boil breaking forth *with* blains upon man, and upon beast, throughout all the land of Egypt.

3. It properly means sore, ulcer or boil – and it is referencing an excruciating painful open sore all over the body

B. This plague was only on those that had the mark of the beast – it was not on those that held true to the Lord

C. It can be seen in these plagues that this "wrath of God" was primarily on those that were God's enemies, and not on His servants. Most of them were gone by now anyways, but there was still a remnant that remained, and they were preserved from this "wrath."

II. THE SECOND VIAL – VS. 3

A. This vial, or plague, was on the sea – that is, all the oceans and large bodies of water on earth

B. "Became as the blood of a dead man"

1. Not just blood, but that of a "dead man"
2. The blood of a dead man is putrefied and stagnant and clotted – this type of blood is deadly to animal life – that's why it all dies

C. "And every living soul died in the sea"

1. The word "soul" here is simply speaking of the living creature part – not necessarily the soul as in man that never dies. This is seen in the Genesis account of creation where the Hebrew word translated "soul" is also translated "living creature" for animal life. The word "life" is also translated from the same word, speaking of the physical life of man. (Gen. 1:20, 24; Ps. 78:50)

Genesis 1:20

(20) And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl *that* may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.

Genesis 1:24

(24) And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.

Psalms 78:50

(50) He made a way to his anger; he spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence;

2. "Every living soul...in the sea" – that would mean all marine life and any people that would have been in the water at that time – it all dies
3. Considering how much the majority of the world relies on sea life for their very food, this would have catastrophic affects – not

to mention that it would create one of the biggest health disasters the world has ever known. Just consider the tsunami that hit Indonesia in 2004 or Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath.

III. THE THIRD VIAL – VS. 4-7

A. This vial was on the drinking waters – the fresh waters – of the world. They became “blood” – not that of a dead man, just blood.

B. Vs. 5 mentions the “angel of the waters”

1. Nothing else is mentioned about this angel so all we can determine is that this angel had a special authority over the waters
2. This is the “angel that presides over the water” – the one God put in charge over that element of water
3. There are other references to angels having powers over other elements, so this is not an unprecedented Scripture (Rev. 7:1; 14:18)

Revelation 7:1

(1) And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.

Revelation 14:18

(18) And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried

with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.

C. The latter part of vs. 5 and vs. 6 give us what that angel said in response to the judgment poured out on the waters – it was for the judgment of the ones who slew the "saints and prophets" (that is, during the Tribulation) for they were "worthy" to die – this is God's vengeance poured out (Rom. 12:19; Deut. 32:35, 43; Ps. 94:1-3; Nah. 1:2-3)

Romans 12:19

(19) Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Deuteronomy 32:43

(43) Rejoice, O ye nations, *with* his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, *and* to his people.

Psalms 94:1

(1) O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself.

Nahum 1:2-3

(2) God *is* jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and *is* furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth *wrath* for his enemies.

(3) The LORD *is* slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit *the wicked*: the

LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds *are* the dust of his feet.

D. Vs. 7 mentions "another angel" – this is not the angel with the vial nor the angel of the waters – this is yet another angel praising God for His righteous judgment

IV. THE FOURTH VIAL – VS. 8-9

A. The fourth angel's vial was "poured out...upon the sun" – that is, the angel himself was given the scorching power of the sun to hurt mankind with

B. Again, no reason to take this in any way but literally – vs. 9 says that "men were scorched with great heat"

1. The heat of the sun simply burned them alive
2. Maybe not to death, but they would certainly have wished they were dead (Jonah 4:8)

Jonah 4:8

(8) And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, *It is* better for me to die than to live.

C. Vs. 9 says that they "blasphemed the name of God" and "repented not to give him glory"

1. If they had taken the mark of the beast,

they could not repent – grace was taken from them

2. This isn't indicating that God gave them a second chance – quite the opposite, in fact – this is saying that God would not allow them to repent, and all they could do was blaspheme His name – all the while they suffered (Jer. 5:3; Ezek. 24:13-14)

Jeremiah 5:3

(3) O LORD, *are* not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, *but* they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return.

Ezekiel 24:13-14

(13) In thy filthiness *is* lewdness: because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee.

(14) I the LORD have spoken *it*: it shall come to pass, and I will do *it*; I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I repent; according to thy ways, and according to thy doings, shall they judge thee, saith the Lord GOD.

V. THE FIFTH VIAL – VS. 10-11

A. *The fifth vial was poured out "upon the seat of the beast" – that is, upon the city and nation from which he ruled the world – most likely the restored city of Babylon*

B. *"His kingdom was full of darkness" – that*

would be, more than likely, the whole earth since his kingdom would have been world-wide

C. "And they gnawed their tongues for pain" – the word "gnawed" means to chew, and is referring to chewing their tongue in pain – the pain they were in was so severe that chewing on their own tongue would help relieve, at least for a moment, the terrible pain they felt elsewhere

D. Vs. 11 says, again, that they blasphemed "the God of heaven" because of that great pain, as well as their sores

E. All this was done in absolute darkness – the word "full" in verse 10 would indicate that there was no light allowed – if fire was built it would go out, no artificial light would shine – no light at all anywhere would be allowed by God

Exodus 10:21-23

(21) And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness *which* may be felt.

(22) And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days:

(23) They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days: but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings.

VI. THE SIXTH VIAL – VS. 12-16

A. This angel pours his vial out on the "great river Euphrates" – this is the literal river – and it dried up

B. The purpose of this judgment is to allow the armies of the east to prepare for a battle

1. This battle may have actually been to fight against the Beast
2. What is clear is that once they were in the land, they joined together to fight against the God of heaven

C. Vs. 13 mentions "three unclean spirits like frogs" come out of the mouth of the dragon (the Devil), the beast (the antichrist) and the false prophet – that is, not three from each, but one from each – three in all

D. Vs. 14 says they are "the spirits of the devils" – what we would consider as demons today

E. Their purpose is to work miracles, showing their power and authority, and they are to go around the world and gather the kings, and their armies, together "to the battle of that great day of God Almighty" – the Battle of Armageddon

F. Vs. 15 is a pause, or a parenthetical, in this to show that the return of Christ to earth will "come as a thief"

1. That is not the Rapture, but His second coming when He returns to set up His kingdom
2. This is the second beatitude of the book of Revelation and is speaking of the ones that are on earth waiting for the Lord's return – they are to endure to the end, and be found watching, with their garments pure

G. Vs. 16 mentions "Armageddon" – that is the Mount of Megiddo, from which is seen the valley of Megiddo

1. This valley is 14 miles wide and 20 miles long
2. This "Armageddon" seems to be the central point for this great battle, which will extend, according to 14:20, some 200 miles where the armies will be destroyed
3. The actual valley of Megiddo isn't large enough for millions of soldiers to gather – it should be seen as the central point, perhaps the staging grounds for the armies of the East

VII. THE SEVENTH VIAL – VS. 17-21

A. The seventh angel poured out his vial "into the air" – out of this was heard a "great voice out of the temple of heaven" – the same voice as in vs. 1 – the voice of God Almighty

B. He cried "It is done" – this is the end

where God finishes what He started, ultimately defeating the Devil once and for all

1. This is one word in the Greek
2. It is in the perfect tense, indicating action accomplished
3. It is the final act of God preceding the second coming of Christ (Walvoord)

C. Great storms came from this vial ("the air") – "voices, and thunders, and lightnings" – the "voices" are just terrible noises (the Greek word is where our word "phonic" comes from)

D. Along with all that is the worst earthquake the world's ever felt – it will be global, literally changing the face of the earth – perhaps preparing it to go back to the state it was before the flood, where all the land mass was one – vs. 20 would indicate something along those lines

E. Along with this great earthquake is "hail out of heaven" about the "weight of a talent" – that is about 60 pounds

Conclusion: No matter one's view of these judgements, there is no debate that they represent an awful time on earth. What will we do to prevent lost people from enduring this?