
Revelation: A Vision of Glory

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Revelation 16

The Seven Bowls of God's Wrath

¹Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth." ²The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.

³The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.

⁴The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. ⁵Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say:

"You are just in these judgments,
you who are and who were, the Holy One,
because you have so judged;

⁶for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets,
and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve."

⁷And I heard the altar respond:

"Yes, Lord God Almighty,
true and just are your judgments."

⁸The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. ⁹They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

¹⁰The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony ¹¹and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

¹²The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. ¹³Then I saw three evil^[a] spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. ¹⁴They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

¹⁵"Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed."

¹⁶Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

¹⁷The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" ¹⁸Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. ¹⁹The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. ²⁰Every island fled away and the mountains could not be

found. ²¹From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

Context

Chapter 16 describes the great “bowl” judgments of God upon the earth.

Interpretive Views

As we mentioned last week, there are four major interpretive views when evaluating the book of Revelation. Not surprisingly, each takes a slightly different view of Revelation 14. They are listed here for your benefit:

The “Preterist” View¹

The book refers to events that were fulfilled in the first century AD, or shortly thereafter. It was written primarily to encourage the original readers. Its value for today would therefore be didactic (teaching the value of faithfulness to God). Proponents of this view thus contend that “the closer we get to the year 2000, the farther we get from the events of Revelation.”²

The Historicist View³

The book provides a panoramic view of the future of the church from as it goes through history. This view finds in the book such events as the rise of Catholicism, Islam, the Protestant Reformation, world wars, etc., ending with the return of Christ. As such it would encourage Christians no matter when they lived.

The “Futurist” View⁴

Apart from the first few chapters, the book depicts events which immediately precede the second coming of Christ. Therefore most of the book has yet to be fulfilled (or is being fulfilled now), and its value is primarily for Christians who will be living at the time Jesus returns.

The “Idealist” View⁵

The book does not deal with any specific historical situation. Instead, it is simply enforcing the principle that good will ultimately triumph over evil. As such, the book is applicable to any age.

¹ Description of view taken from: Storms, Sam. *Introduction to the Book of Revelation, Part II*.

² Gentry, *Four Views*, pg. 37 as quoted in Storms.

³ Copeland, Mark. *Introduction to Revelation*.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Commentary and Discussion⁶

The First Bowl (v. 1-2)

¹Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth." ²The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.

Historicist

- Describes God's wrath upon the followers of the Papacy, the Roman Catholic Church
- "Robert Flemming, in the first decade of the 18th century, published two books from a historicist viewpoint....Flemming informed the King of England that the bowls of judgment would begin to be poured out on the Latin kingdom in the year 1793-94 ...if not in Italy, in France. This he calculated by using the year-for-a-day method, beginning with the decree of Justinian that made the bishop of Rome supreme over all bishops (A.D. 533). Counting 1,2600 years forward....the beginning of the French Revolution [a century after his own time]."
- "Sores" refer to moral corruption, atheism, and societal disintegration.

Preterist

- Refers either to Rome or Jerusalem
- [Jerusalem camp] "Assuming that one of the themes of the Apocalypse is that Jerusalem has become the new Egypt and the church the new Israel, the plague pictured here parallels that which came upon Egypt in Exodus 9:8-12."
- Primarily views sores symbolically, but – in the siege and conquest of Jerusalem – not far-fetched to imagine such suffering

Futurist

- Principal question facing futurists: literal or figurative?
- Hal Lindsey: "The rash of malignant sores could easily be caused by the tremendous radioactive pollution in the atmosphere. After the bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima thousands of people developed hideous sores because of the radioactivity."
- Sores apparently incurable because the recipients still languishing when the fifth bowl poured out (v. 11).

Idealist

⁶ This section adapted from *Revelation: Four Views, a Parallel Commentary*. Steve Gregg, Ed.

- “This symbolic way of picturing judgment would comfort John’s contemporaries. But it also gives assurance to all believers throughout the ages who are persecuted by the devotees of political and material forces.”

The Second Bowl (v. 3)

³The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.

Historicist

- Represents the complete annihilation of the naval force sustaining the papacy: France, Spain, and Portugal
- “Meanwhile the great *naval* war between France and England was in progress; which, from its commencement in February, 1793, lasted for above twenty years, with no intermission....in which war the maritime power of Great Britain was strengthened by the Almighty Providence that protected her to destroy everywhere the French ships, commerce and small colonies....Altogether in this naval war, from its beginning in 1793, to its end in 1815, it appears that there were destroyed near 200 ships of the line, between 300-400 frigates, and an almost incalculable number of smaller vessels of war and ships of commerce. The whole history of the world does not present such a period of naval war, destruction, and bloodshed.” - Elliot

Preterist

- Possibly refers to a battle described by Josephus in which the Romans overtook the fleeing Jews in boats and massacred them in the waters of the Sea of Galilee.
- Josephus:

“But now, when the vessels were gotten ready, Vespasian put upon ship-board as many of his forces as he thought sufficient to be too hard for those that were upon the lake, and set sail after them. Now these which were driven into the lake could neither fly to the land, where all was in their enemies' hand, and in war against them; nor could they fight upon the level by sea, for their ships were small and fitted only for piracy; they were too weak to fight with Vespasian's vessels, and the mariners that were in them were so few, that they were afraid to come near the Romans, who attacked them in great numbers. However, as they sailed round about the vessels, and sometimes as they came near them, they threw stones at the Romans when they were a good way off, or came closer and fought them; yet did they receive the greatest harm themselves in both cases. As for the stones they threw at the Romans, they only made a sound one after another, for they threw them against such as were in their armor, while the Roman darts could reach the Jews themselves; and when they ventured to come near the Romans, they became sufferers themselves before they could do any harm to the ether, and were drowned, they and their ships together. As for those that endeavored to come to an actual fight, the Romans ran many of them through with their long poles. Sometimes the Romans leaped into their ships, with swords in their hands, and slew them; but when some of them met the vessels, the Romans caught them by the middle, and destroyed at once their ships and themselves who were taken in them. And for such as were drowning in the sea, if they lifted their heads up above the water, they were either killed by darts, or caught by the vessels; but if, in the desperate case they were in, they attempted to swim to their enemies, the Romans cut off either their heads or their hands; and indeed they were destroyed after various manners every where, till the rest being put to flight, were forced to get upon the land, while the vessels encompassed them about [on the sea]: but as many of these were repulsed when they were getting ashore, they were killed by the darts upon the lake; and the Romans leaped out of their vessels, and destroyed a great many more upon the land: one might then see the lake all bloody, and full of dead bodies, for not one of them escaped. And a terrible stink, and a very sad sight there was on the following days over that country; for as for the shores, they were full of shipwrecks, and of dead bodies all swelled; and as the dead bodies were inflamed by the sun, and putrefied, they corrupted the air, insomuch that the misery was not only the object of commiseration to

the Jews, but to those that hated them, and had been the authors of that misery. This was the upshot of the sea-fight. The number of the slain, including those that were killed in the city before, was six thousand and five hundred." (*Wars*, III: 10: 9)

Futurist

- If figurative, the “sea” represents the Gentiles.
- If literal, some pestilence (Stedman) or consequence of war – perhaps nuclear (Lindsey).
- Stedman: “We have already seen foreshadows of this phenomenon in the so-called “red tide” which scientists have occasionally observed in the Caribbean and other seas sheltered by land masses. There is a microorganism which, given the right set of conditions, multiplies precipitously, turning the water a deep scarlet. All sea life in the affected area dies.”

Idealist

- “Sea” refers to humanity. Therefore, this symbolically represents the putrefaction of society.
- Some suggest that this represents God’s destruction of the sources of physical sustenance in his judgments, and consequential death.

The Third Bowl (v. 4-7)

⁴The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. ⁵Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say:

“You are just in these judgments,
 you who are and who were, the Holy One,
 because you have so judged;

⁶for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets,
 and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.”

⁷And I heard the altar respond:

“Yes, Lord God Almighty,
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Historicist

- “France, not content to keep her revolutionary philosophy to herself, sought to impose it upon neighboring nations. Beginning in 1793, France launched invasions against Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Northern Italy.”
- Historicists note the Christian persecution of those areas (v. 6)

Preterist

- Siege of Jerusalem did involve pollution of water supply and blood literally flowing through the city
- Also, the shed blood of the saints *and prophets* compellingly argues for Jerusalem as subject of wrath

Futurist

- Consequence of war or pestilence

Idealist

- God can tailor judgment to suit crime. As the nations spilled the saints' blood, creating rivers, God can force them to drink blood.

The Fourth Bowl (v. 8-9)

⁸The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. ⁹They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

Historicist

- Implies diminishing of papal power, perhaps also Napoleon Bonaparte.

Preterist

- Scorching could refer to zealot sects terrorizing occupants of the besieged city, or also the Roman oppression.
- If Rome in view, could refer to ruthlessness of Gothic and Vandal kings that brought her downfall

Futurist

- Again, symbolic or literal?
- Consequence of nuclear war or cosmic imbalance

Idealist

- God turns the naturalistic driving force of human life into a curse

The Fifth Bowl (v. 10-11)

¹⁰The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony ¹¹and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

Historicist

- "Robbed of all defense, in 1798 Pope Pius VI, who was above eighty years old, was ordered to dispossess himself of all his temporary authority. Refusing this, he was forcibly removed, "dragged from the altar in his palace...."

Preterist

- Destruction and fall of Rome

Futurist

- Lindsey: "I believe there's a reason for God's blackout of this Revived Roman Empire: the darkness will allow the movement of 200 million Oriental soldiers into the area of the Middle East, the subject of the next judgment."

Idealist

- God darkens the earth, causing confusion and dread to reign

The Sixth and Seventh Bowls (v. 12ff)

¹²The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. ¹³Then I saw three evil^[a] spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. ¹⁴They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

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Historicist

- Much conjecture about the three spirits – paganism, papacy, Islam?
- Final breaking up of the papacy?

Preterist

- Reinforcements for Titus and ultimate fall of Jerusalem?
- Fall of Rome?

Futurist

- The Battle of Armageddon

Idealist

- Culmination of cosmic conflict