

**Revelation**  
**Lesson X**  
**Revelation 15:1-16:21**

**The Bowls of God's Wrath**

**Introduction:**

1. All preliminary judgments against Rome are finished, and nothing remains but the execution of God's full wrath against her.
  - a. The seven seals were assurances that the church could be protected during the time of persecution by Rome. Rev. 4:1-6:17
  - b. The seven trumpets were partial judgments of Rome and contained the possibility of repentance and salvation.
2. At the beginning of chapter 15, we see "seven angels having seven plagues, which are the last, for in them is finished the wrath of God. "
3. In this lesson, we shall witness a series of frightening scenes which reveal God's attitude toward sin.

**Body of Lesson:**

**I. A Preliminary Vision: Rev. 15:1-4**

**A. Seven angels are holding the "last" plagues of the Apocalypse.**

1. Because of Rome's refusal to repent, God had no alternative but to visit his full wrath.
2. With these plagues, God's wrath is "finished" (i.e. reaches its end) in the final and complete overthrow of the wicked empire.

**B. John also saw the martyrs of the Roman persecution before God.**

1. They were singing the song of Moses and the Lamb.
  - a. Moses and Christ are the two great deliverers of biblical history – one from physical bondage and the other from spiritual.
  - b. The song in praise of them must be one with the them of deliverance.
2. Their song praised God's mighty and just works in dealing with men and nations according to righteousness.
3. "For thou only art holy" emphasizes again the singular honor which God alone deserves, as opposed to the claims of the emperor of Rome.

**C. The martyrs before God do not intercede for him to spare Rome but praise him for his justice in the wrath he is about to pour forth.**

**II. The Commissioning of the Seven Angels: Rev. 15:5-16:1**

**A. Calling the seven angels with the seven plagues from the "temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven" underscores the point that Rome's overthrow was to be seen as a judgment from God and not as a mere accident of history.**

**B. The angels are pure and spotless, and their mission is a holy one.**

**C. One of the four living creatures delivered the "seven golden bowls" of God's wrath to the angels John had seen.**

1. Does it seem incredible that wrath should be held in such beautiful containers?
2. God's wrath is as pure as his love!

**D. No one was allowed to enter the temple until the seven plagues were finished.**

1. This emphasizes the finality of the plagues.
2. None could come before God to intercede or ask for delay for those about to be punished; the day of Rome's opportunity to be spared has long since gone.

**E. The seven angels were told to pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath "into the earth". Rev. 16:1**

1. This is not final Judgment at the end of time.
2. It is God's final judgment upon Rome in the ongoing events of history; it is the overthrow of a proud and sinful nation.

**F. As the bowls are poured out, notice what a close resemblance their plagues have to those visited upon the Egyptians in the Old Testament.**

**III. The Pouring Out of the Bowls of Wrath: Rev. 16:2-21**

**A. The First Bowl: earth. Rev. 16:2**

1. It affected all men involved in the worship of the beast.
2. It is described in ways reminiscent of the plague of boils in ancient Egypt. Cf. Ex. 9:10f

**B. The Second Bowl: sea. Rev. 16:3**

1. The entire sea is represented as turning to blood; everything in it died.
2. This reminds one of the Nile being turned to blood.

**C. The Third Bowl: fresh waters. Rev. 16:4-7**

1. Land waters also turned to blood.
2. The "angel of the waters" said in effect that men on earth are reaping what they have sown.
  - a. Rome spilled the blood of martyrs, so now they will have to drink blood.
  - b. "They are worthy" of the torment they are to receive. Cf. Rev. 5:9
3. The heavenly altar praised God for his true and righteous judgments.
  - a. The souls under this altar had cried out for vindication. Rev. 6:9; 8:3-5
  - b. When judgment came upon those who had slain the martyrs, the very altar is represented as replying to praise the event!

**D. The Fourth Bowl: sun. Rev. 16:8-9**

1. A frightening picture is presented of torment coming upon sinners.
2. Yet they did not repent and gave God no glory for his holiness; they blasphemed his name.

**E. The Fifth Bowl: the beast's throne. Rev. 16:10-11**

1. The first four bowls affected the earth in general; this bowl affects on the beast's throne and kingdom.
2. The "throne of the beast" is the center of his empire in Rome.

3. That his kingdom was “darkened” refers to the weakening and diminishing of Rome’s hold on the world.
4. These difficulties might have caused humble men to recognize their errors and repent, but they caused the proud Roman tormenters to compound their sinfulness.

**F. The Sixth Bowl: the Euphrates River. Rev. 16:12-16**

1. The drying up of the Euphrates signifies that the last obstacle to the fall of Rome has been taken out of the way.
  - a. Rome had long regarded the East (beyond the Euphrates) as a land of terrible unknown dangers.
  - b. Drying up the Euphrates is a way of saying that Rome’s worst fears will materialize!
2. From the mouths of the dragon, beast, and false prophet come “three unclean spirits, as it were frogs.”
  - a. The lies and deceptions told by these three unholy allies are represented appropriately.
  - b. These unclean spirits “go forth unto the kings of the whole world.”
3. These unclean spirits serve to gather men together for Armageddon.
  - a. Armageddon (Har-Magedon) signifies “mountain of Megiddo.”
  - b. The plain of Megiddo is an identifiable place where some decisive battles in Jewish history were fought. Cf. Judg. 5:19-20
  - c. There is no geographical location on earth identified as the mountain of Megiddo, and all those modern “prophets” who anticipate a literal Battle of Armageddon on earth are defying the spirit of apocalyptic literature and missing the point of Revelation. (Note: If literal, the battle is headed by three frogs!)
4. What is the Battle of Armageddon?
  - a. The battle envisioned here is “a symbol for the final overthrow of all the forces of evil by an almighty God” (Morris).
  - b. The name stands for an event, not a place, and signifies the overthrow of the terrible enemy (i.e. Rome) which has set itself against Christ and his church.
5. Note the parenthetical exhortation of Rev. 16:15.
  - a. With the forces of evil entrenching themselves, the Lord injects a note of warning of his coming.
  - b. The “coming” is not his personal coming at the end of time but in the events of historical judgment against Rome.

**G. The Seventh Bowl: air. Rev. 16:17-21**

1. “It is done” = Everything is ready for the conclusion of the apocalyptic frame relative to Rome.
2. The earth trembled, great cities fell, and Rome herself was divided into three parts!
3. “Babylon the great was remembered” by the Almighty; he had taken notice of her sin and was repaying her justly.

4. The pummeling of Rome with great hail signifies something of the terror which would come upon this wicked nation in the days of her demise.

**Conclusion:**

1. The fifth, sixth and seventh bowls of divine wrath contain Rome's complete doom.
2. So momentous is the event of her overthrow that it will be traced out in its gory details in these chapters to follow.

**READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT LESSON:**

Read Rev. 17:1-20:10. This will conclude the apocalyptic drama of the fall of Rome under the figure of "Babylon the Great".