

REVELATION 15 – 16: THE BOWL JUDGMENTS

1. Introduction

- a. Chapter 15 is introductory and prepares us for the outpouring of the judgments, and then those judgments are described in detail in chapter 16. We're picking up the chronological storyline again after the angelic explanation given in chapters 12–14. So far we have seen two previous series of 7 judgments poured out on the earth to disrupt and hinder all that the Antichrist is seeking to do.
 - i Both the seals and the trumpets are preparatory for the full impact of God's judgment. They contain elements that are both disruptive and destructive, they do not get the job done. There is more to do before all is put right.
- b. We left the main storyline last time where Jesus has returned to the earth with all the saints, and is travelling up through the land of Egypt and Bozrah, which is modern day Jordan, towards Jerusalem, releasing many Jewish people who have been put into prison camps by the Antichrist.
 - i At the same time, during this 30-day period from the time of his arrival back on earth, Jesus is also pouring out bowl judgments. These bowl judgments are the final and decisive series of 7 judgments, and they are released with swiftness and suddenness one after the other.
- c. This fourth chronological section is one of the most straightforward to understand, but we must understand its context, otherwise we may not grasp the full implications of these events. Jesus will cleanse the earth from the evil and corruption of the Antichrist, and remove Satan from having direct influence over the earth; he is also coming to pave the way for heaven to come to earth. That is the ultimate purpose of all of the events of this book.
 - i When heaven comes to earth the basics of life on earth will continue. But the glory of God is going to fill the earth like the waters cover the sea, so the spiritual dimension and the natural dimension are going to come together in one. The natural dimensions of life will be significantly enhanced by the supernatural dimensions of the Spirit. Understanding this and the final process it will take to accomplish it, which is our subject for today, will bring clarity to our understanding of where all this is leading us to.

2. The 7 angels with the 7 plagues

Revelation 15:1 *Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.*

- a. Chapter 15 introduces us to these 7 final judgments, or plagues. The use of different terms is designed to display different aspects and character of these last judgments. They are plague-like calamities, and each is poured out suddenly, all at once as the contents of a bowl when it is turned over.
- b. The chapter begins with John's description of another sign in heaven.
 - i Signs may have some significance in themselves, their main purpose is to point towards something of greater significance. So we take note of what these signs are telling us, but at the same time we must look ahead to where they are pointing.
- c. This sign is "great and amazing" – awe-inspiring, startling, shocking, overwhelming – because of the awesome implication of these judgments both in their extent and in the degree of their effectiveness in accomplishing God's purposes. It had great impact on John; this series of events should cause our hearts to tremble before the holiness of God.

- i These plagues will demonstrate as never before the rebellious heart of man and the character of Satan and His kingdom. In so doing, they will vindicate the glory and holiness of God.
- d. What John sees are 7 angels with 7 plagues.

Hebrews 1:14 *Are they [angels] not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?*

- i John sees these 7 angels instead of being bringers of mercy and care, they have become agents of God's deadly wrath.
- e. Here the judgments are described as plagues. We tend to think of plague as some kind of deadly disease. The Greek word (*plege*) means a blow or a stripe that inflicts a wound or a scar.
- f. These judgments are the culmination, the completion of God's wrath, bringing it to completion. There will be no more after this, because their purpose will have been accomplished.
 - i There are two words used in the bible to describe God's wrath. The first emphasises his abhorrence of sin as it proceeds from his holiness. That word is usually rendered as God's anger.
 - ii The second word – used here – points to God's holiness in action, where his holiness is expressed in a consequential action of his wrath overflowing in righteous indignation.

3. Martyrs on the Sea of Glass

Revelation 15:2-4 *And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire---and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. ³And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! ⁴Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."*

- a. We encountered this sea of glass in Revelation in chapter 4. This is a broad expanse looking like the sea, consisting of a transparent glassy substance that is reflective.
 - i This is where the Father's throne is, and we will visit this place many, many times. It seems to be the gathering place of the saints before the Father's throne, which is the floor of the temple in the New Jerusalem.
- b. John sees people standing on this crystal sea. These are the triumphant saints who have come through the tribulation, who by faith had overcome the Beast. He highlights three areas where they had been victorious.
 - i These believers had been under great pressure to bow down to the Beast in worship, or to worship his image in whatever way it was manifested, and to take his mark which would enable them to buy and sell the necessities of life. Refusal carried the death sentence.
 - ii Ultimately they had paid the price with their lives. Now they are standing on this sea of glass and fully engaged in worship before the throne of God. In their hands they have harps of God.
- c. They were singing two different songs, the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb. He tells us the words of the Song of Moses, but not the Song of the Lamb.
 - i The full version of the song of Moses is found in Exodus 15 – it speaks of the devastation of the ungodly and the triumph of the righteous, and is sung by those who have been delivered.

- ii John in these verses picks out and highlights 6 phrases from the full song of Moses, each one rich in biblical truth and revelation:
 - (1) Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty
 - (2) Just and true are your ways, O king of the nations
 - (3) Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name?
 - (4) For you alone are holy
 - (5) All nations will come and worship you
 - (6) For your righteous acts have been revealed
- d. In this way all of these saints worship and extol the character of God. A great and mighty Creator, an omnipotent, almighty God can judge because He has the power. His character, therefore, demands that He do it and brings it to pass. If he lets sin go unpunished, He wouldn't be righteous, He wouldn't be true and He wouldn't be holy.

4. The heavenly sanctuary opened

Revelation 15:5-8 *After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, ⁶ and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. ⁷ And 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, ⁸ and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.*

- a. Now John sees right inside the heavenly temple. When he saw the heavenly temple opened and all that he describes in these verses, he understood their significance and what they meant.
- b. He describes what he sees as the sanctuary of the tent of witness. The sanctuary refers to the heavenly temple, the dwelling place of God. This was the true temple. The sanctuary was opened and John saw right inside to the holy of holies, the place containing the tent of witness.
 - i This tent of witness is another name for the Ark of the Covenant. The main purpose of this Ark of the Covenant was to contain the testimony, the revelation of the will of God, the tablets of stone on which God wrote the 10 Commandments with his own hand, revealing his own perfect holiness.
- c. John sees a connection between this temple and the multitude on the sea of glass – two sides of the same revelation. On the sea of glass, we see from man's side the necessity for God's wrath to vindicate his holiness as the cause of the Tribulation judgments.
 - i In the revelation of the opened temple the emphasis is on God's side, which reveals the source and the cause of what is about to happen.
 - ii God is a holy God and one of the great purposes of the Tribulation will be to demonstrate this. God is a God of love and of holiness and He must condemn the sinner who rejects His plan of salvation in Jesus.
- d. John saw this same heavenly sanctuary thrown open before, at the end of Chapter 11. Then it was opened to the faithful so that they could see in, to encourage the saints that they had direct and unhindered access to God. Now it is opened because of the unfaithful so that Judgment can come out. John sees 7 angels coming out of the sanctuary. They are proceeding from the very heart of the presence of God, acting on behalf of God's holiness, righteousness and justice.

- i These angels are clothed in bright linen coming out of the temple to carry out their priestly role as the bearers of the bowls of God's wrath.
- e. One of the Seraphim who surround the throne of God, comes and places into the hands of these 7 angels the golden bowls containing the wrath of God. These bowls are described as "full" of the wrath of God – the word literally means "filled to the brim."
- f. God is eternal, and his plan for mankind is to share in that eternity with him. That is why his wrath is necessary to bring to an end the reign of sin – God is not willing to allow sin in any form to be included in eternity.
- g. The sanctuary is filled with smoke, and no-one can enter the sanctuary until the bowls have been poured out. The writer to Hebrews describes God as a "consuming fire," and that fire comes from two sources, producing the smoke that fills the sanctuary.
 - i From the glory of God, manifested in different ways, one of which is like smoke, heavy and thick and all-enveloping. It is an outward manifestation of God's divine essence.
 - ii From God's power, a manifestation of his omnipotence, his fiery zeal and sovereign rule, focused on executing and carrying out the demands of his holy character.
- h. A turning point has been reached, and as the angels leave the temple no-one can enter. Access is denied because hearts have become so hardened against God that they will no longer be able to turn. The day of vengeance has come, the cry of "How long O Lord" is about to be answered. The final judgment of God is about to begin.
- i. Many who embrace a pre-tribulation rapture theology also see these bowl judgments as occurring before Jesus returns, hinging this on an interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 5:9 that we see as biblically incorrect, requiring the necessity of the saints' removal from the earth to protect them from the wrath of God poured out in these bowl judgments.
 - i Scripture shows that the bowl judgments are delivered by Jesus in the 30-day period after his return to the earth as he travels up through the land on his way to Jerusalem. Passages such as Habakkuk 3 and Isaiah 63 make no sense if the bowl judgments occur before Jesus' return.
 - ii The 7th and final bowl judgment concerns the battle for Jerusalem which concludes the Armageddon campaign, which has to be after Jesus has returned to the earth. By this time the saints will be on the earth with him in their resurrection bodies.
 - iii This is confirmed when we put Daniel and Revelation together. In Matthew 24 Jesus, using Abomination of Desolation is a timing marker, refers us back to see what Daniel said about it. In Daniel 12:11 he says the Abomination of Desolation will be in the Temple for 1,290 days.
 - iv But John in Revelation only speaks of events lasting 1,260 days. God will make provision for Israel in the wilderness for 1,260 days. The Two Witnesses will prophesy for 1,260 days. There will be persecution of the saints for 1,260 days. But the Antichrist will still be there for another 30 days.
 - v In those 30 days, the Abomination of Desolation is still functioning, the Antichrist is still active on the earth. The saints are not mentioned in the chronological events after the 1,260 days, so something of great significance must happen during those 30 days. This 30-day timespan is where the bible places those bowl judgments.

5. A little context to chapter 16

- a. If we do not approach chapter 16 having our hearts tutored by the word of God and guided by the Spirit of God, it will be to us the most offensive chapter in the whole of the bible. The bible is a book of

hope; it is also a book of judgment. Jesus himself is that instrument of judgment as surely as he is also the instrument of salvation.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 ...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.⁹ They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,¹⁰ when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at among all who have believed...

- b. Jesus does not change – he is the same yesterday, today and forever. So the Jesus of Revelation 16, releasing the bowls of God’s wrath is the same Jesus as he is right now and will be for ever. He is the perfect manifestation of the love and justice of God.
 - i Jesus has given us a mandate to proclaim the year of God’s favour, demonstrating his love and mercy and grace. But equally, we are mandated to proclaim the day of God’s vengeance, the turning point of history when God calls “time” on sin and unrighteousness, when he makes all wrong things right, bringing swift judgment on all who oppose him and hate him and reject his offer of salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus.
 - ii God cannot love righteousness and faith unless He hates sin and unbelief. He cannot love truth unless He hates lies. He cannot love goodness unless He hates wickedness. He cannot reward unless He also punishes.
- c. The rapture of the saints and the return of Jesus will have a great impact upon those who remain on the earth. The Antichrist will suddenly find that one of his main objects of persecution – the saints – has disappeared. And a new enemy has appeared – Jesus walking the earth once again.
 - i The Antichrist changes the focus of his strategy in a dramatic way. He focuses his energy on rallying the nations to gather together to make war on Jesus. (Revelation 17:14, 19:11, 19)
 - ii He is now totally under the control of Satan, and his plan now is to convince the nations of the world that he is the real saviour of the world and that it is Jesus who is the false Messiah.
- d. The Antichrist is in Jerusalem organising the arrival of armies from many nations who have come to battle against Jesus. Jesus is coming up through the land, releasing Jewish captives from prison camps as we saw last time, and now he is beginning to release the bowl judgments.
 - i These last seven judgments cause the further hardening of the hearts of men. These plagues will reveal the total rebellion and independence of unregenerate man towards God. These judgments will result in anger and blasphemy from the heart and mouths of men rather than fear and trust. They are hardening plagues which God uses to His own glory (cf. verses 9, 11, 21).
 - ii These seven bowls of wrath are not only destroying the Antichrist’s ability to oppress, they are destroying all of his institutions, tearing down all of his cities

6. The 7 bowls of God’s wrath released

- a. There are some similarities to two previous series of plagues. The first was in Egypt, (Exodus 7 – 12), which God brought on the nation of Egypt where Israel had been held captive. The second were the trumpet judgments (Revelation 8–11). There are some similarities and some differences.
 - i In Egypt they were local, confined to one nation and one locality. In the trumpet judgments, they were more universal, but were limited to one-third of the earth. The bowl judgments, are not limited to one nation or to a fraction of humanity – they cover the whole earth. They are a concentration of the most severe judgments in all of the history of God’s judgment of the earth.

- b. By this time the extent of worldwide devastation is inconceivable. We can't begin to understand what it will be like when all of the bodies in heaven are skewed, the earth is overrun by millions of demons who can bring plagues and kill; when two witnesses have been preaching for three and a half years and they shut up the heavens so there's no rain.
 - i The water supply and a third of fresh water are polluted through judgment. Worse is to come.
- c. The chapter begins and ends with the voice of God speaking from within the temple. It all begins with a loud voice from the temple instructing the angels to pour out their bowls on the earth. And it ends with a cry of "It is finished" from the temple.
 - i The Greek word "megas", meaning "great" is used 11 times in this chapter to describe its events, however the emphasis it is intended to convey is somewhat obscured in the English language by the contextual variations in translation.
- d. Isaiah saw this moment in his end time prophecy in chapter 66:

Isaiah 66:6 *The sound of an uproar from the city! A sound from the temple! The sound of the LORD, rendering recompense to his enemies!*

- e. Some commentators try to explain these judgments in some sort of natural way, but there is no natural explanation for these, there is no scientific process to explain them, because they are all supernatural. They go way beyond the observable natural processes of the earth. They are destructive because there is much on the earth that needs to be destroyed before Jesus rebuilds.

7. The first bowl (earth): loathsome sores

Revelation 16:2 *So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and **harmful and painful sores** came upon the people who bore **the mark of the beast and worshiped its image**.*

- a. Only the Antichrist "worshippers" and "reprobate" who took the "mark of the Beast" receive these tormenting sores. The unsaved "resistors" that do not worship the Beast will not receive them. This will strengthen their resolve in not taking the "mark of the Beast" (Revelation 14:9-11).
- b. These sores will be **foul** or revolting with an offensive odour, even as foul meat is rotten or putrid. They will also be **loathsome** in being so painful that men will loath life itself. God uses direct pain in man's flesh in the first, fourth and fifth bowls (Revelation 16:2, 8-11) and in the fifth trumpet (Revelation 9:1-11).
- c. This judgment is a physical affliction that is evil and malignant. It will be in the form of an ulcer that is open, a running sore that never heals.
 - i These are the people who did not heed the warnings given by angels in Revelation 14. They brought a warning that taking the mark of the beast and worshiping him would result in them drinking the wine of the wrath of God leading to eternal torment. This plague marks the beginning of that torment.

8. The second bowl (sea): sea turned to blood

Revelation 16:3 *The second angel poured out his bowl into the **sea**, and it became like the **blood of a corpse**, and **every living thing died that was in the sea**.*

- a. The sea will become thickened like the congealed blood of a dead man, killing all the marine life in the sea causing unimaginable stench and destroying the sea trade along with its food supply.

- b. When all the animals and fish die in the sea they will come floating up to the surface, and they end up on the shore. Dead and decaying marine life will cause a putrid smell and flies, and disease that comes afterwards.
- c. This second bowl brings fullness to the partial judgment that began at the second trumpet (Revelation 8:8-9).

9. The third bowl (water): poisoning the earth's fresh water

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

- a. The third bowl will cause drinking water to become blood. Populations of entire cities will be endangered as God poisons their water supply, causing a terrifying panic in the nations.
- b. God removes the source of all the fresh drinking water from the nations of the earth. Desalination plants converting sea water to fresh water will already have failed, and now the rivers and lakes and reservoirs that supply fresh water are contaminated.
 - i The Antichrist will not be able to solve this problem. Why God is doing this is because everybody will think the Antichrist is god, they will be deceived into thinking it, and when God starts to touch the created order, the Antichrist cannot solve this global problem. People are going to be woken up to the fact that maybe he's not God, causing some to turn to God for answers.
- c. Revelation 7:1 says that 4 angels were standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds. No wind means no clouds; no clouds means no rain. The earth has already been experiencing a long season of drought, and now what fresh water there was, has become contaminated.
- d. God is in control, and is able to reverse this process in selective places, such as happened at Marah when Israel was wandering in the wilderness. Moses was instructed to throw a log into the bitter water to make it drinkable (Exodus 15:23-27). Elisha prayed for bitter water to be healed (2 Kings 2:21, 4:40-43). These prophetic stories are helpful in giving us insight into how God can reverse these poisoned waters back to fresh again for His people.
 - i Jesus will supernaturally supply the captives of Israel with water as he releases them from their imprisonment while he marches up through the land. These Jewish captives will have to walk back to Jerusalem on foot. As they go, Jesus will open up rivers in the desert so they can drink.

Isaiah 43:19-20 *I will do a new thing... I will make a road in the wilderness and **rivers in the desert**... ²⁰ I give waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to My people.*

10. Angelic explanation – turning water to blood

Revelation 16:5-7 *And I heard the **angel in charge of the waters** say, "**Just [righteous] are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments.** ⁶ **For they [Antichrist and his followers] have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!**" ⁷ And I heard [another from] the **altar** saying, "**Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!**"*

- a. These three verses are an angelic explanation. The severity of destroying the drinking water will make the nations very angry at God (Revelation 11:18). The two oracles in this passage agree with God that His judgment was "just, true and righteous".
- b. This angel has specific authority over the waters. Different angels have assignments over various spheres of life. In Revelation we encounter several angels with specific assignments: some over the winds, some over the bottomless pit, some over fire, and this one over the waters. He speaks

prophetically over his area of authority. He is making it clear that he is in complete agreement with what God has done in this judgment, and call it just, true and righteous.

- c. The angel declares “You are righteous”, because God’s judgments are not only the consequence of the actions of the wicked, and necessary to stop them, but are also helpful in waking up sinners to their need of salvation. God’s judgments are never too lenient or too severe, never too late or too early. They are altogether right in every way.

Isaiah 26:9 *For when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.*

- a. There is no contradiction between the God of mercy and wrath, as He pours out these severe judgments to remove everything that hinders love (Zechariah. 3:8; Hebrews 12:25-29). The principle of God’s judgment is this: **God uses the least severe means to reach the greatest number of people at the deepest level of love without violating anyone's free will.**
 - i He refuses to violate anyone’s free will when it comes to love, otherwise it wouldn’t be love. It has to be your own choice otherwise it’s not genuine love.
- b. Jesus the Judge embarrasses many in the Church, because they have only a temporal perspective and not an eternal one. We don’t need to be embarrassed about Jesus the judge, it’s an act of his love, his mercy for the earth, and for people forever, and he removes the very things that are killing us.
 - i Jesus is the ultimate deliverer, the ultimate bringer of justice, he’s going to remove all those things, so we can live for eternity in the place of love for ever.
- c. The angel emphasizes God’s eternal nature as the “**One who is, who was and who is to be**”. By understanding the big picture of His eternal plan we can understand the necessity of His temporal judgments in waking men up to eternal salvation. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:32; 33:11), but desires all men to come to a knowledge of truth and be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), thus avoiding the coming **global blasphemy** in the 6th bowl, leading multitudes into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 14:9-11; 20:11-15).
- d. The angel interprets the reason for the blood of the 2nd and 3rd bowls. He says, “because they shed blood, you gave them blood to drink.” God’s justice demanded that blood be poured out, because the wicked poured out the blood of the saints. God makes them drink the very thing they thirsted for.

11. The fourth bowl (heavens): scorching heat and fire from the sun

Revelation 16:8-9 *The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. ⁹They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.*

- a. The fourth bowl is a supernatural act of God releasing power over the sun, making it more intense. The pain of this judgment comes through scorching fire that releases great heat from the sun to burn men with fire. This is God’s activity, prophesied by Malachi, not merely natural or satanic.

Malachi 4:1 *For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.*

- i This will cause men to blaspheme the name of God instead of taking responsibility for their sin and repenting. Strangely, they acknowledge God’s role in this judgment. Being followers of the Antichrist, whose “**mouth spoke great blasphemies**” against God for 42-months (Revelation 13:5-6), these men were influenced with similar hatred toward Him (Daniel 7:8, 20; Revelation 9:21; 16:9, 11, 21).

- b. This bowl will be a prophetic message to the earth that science will not be able to explain away. Its scorching fire and great heat will be a prophetic token of the fire that many will experience in the Lake of Fire.
 - i There will be many resistors that are saved because of this fire. God will be speaking in love to the human race, calling them to salvation instead of eternal unquenchable fire (Isaiah 66:24; Mark 9:43-44, 45-46, 48).
- c. This scorching heat will also melt the polar ice caps. All that ice will turn to water, adding to the water in the seas that is now full of rotten decaying marine life. Sea levels will rise by up to 200ft, and many will drown in this sudden rise in sea level.
 - i They knew who was doing this, and they still didn't repent. They know it's God, but they are so in love with sin, that though they see the hand of God, they feel the judgment of God, they will still not repent.
 - ii Even though they were scorched with fierce heat they blasphemed the name of God. They cursed Him, the one who has the power over these plagues. The "mystery of iniquity" working in the heart (2 Thessalonians 2:7) – sin – only gets worse.

12. The fifth bowl: darkness on the Antichrist's empire

Revelation 16:10-11 *The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish¹¹ and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.*

- a. All the bowl judgments target the Antichrist's governmental structure. The "**throne of the beast**" or seat of his government, includes his worldwide governmental infrastructure. The Antichrist will have several governmental centres, including Babylon and the city of Jerusalem in Israel (Daniel 11:45; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).
- b. The fifth bowl targets the geographic seat of the Antichrist kingdom causing great pain. Those sores are still the same sores from the first bowl, they haven't disappeared.
- c. Pouring this judgment out on the throne of the Antichrist is speaking of His dominion. The entire human system that the Antichrist rules over is now engulfed in darkness.
 - i This darkness is not just the absence of natural light, but will be heightened supernatural darkness caused by God, including the involvement of the demonic realm in the darkness itself, causing great pain. This is a **physical, spiritual** and **moral** darkness.
 - ii This is more than natural darkness, it will have a spiritual dimension of demonic torment that can be "felt" by unbelievers. God displays His love in this as a prophetic warning about hell.

Isaiah 60:2 *For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.*

- d. The Antichrist will be unable to solve or "explain away" this global problem. At one time his throne seemed invincible (Revelation 13:4). However, now he will be seen as helpless, weak and vulnerable against these judgments from heaven. Many will begin to ask, "I thought you said you were God?"
 - i Those in the Antichrist's government will "gnaw their tongues with unceasing pain". The unprecedented darkness will cause great pain because of the demonic activity aggravating their "sores" from the first bowl (Revelation 16:2). They will be filled with hopelessness and despair.

- e. Jesus is creating the optimum context for the hearts of men to be fully revealed. The heart that is revealed is not one that seeks forgiveness and repentance. Jesus is proving the point that in the day of testing the truth of the heart is revealed.
 - i We are created as eternal beings, which means we live forever. That's the problem for those who will not repent, we live forever. Jesus gives us the choice – obedience and faith, and we will live with him forever. Those who choose to rebel against him have to go somewhere – they go with Satan and the Antichrist to the lake of fire.
- f. So this is a final warning causing people to “gnaw their tongues” – a prophetic token of that place of outer darkness where many will “gnash their teeth” as they experience the lake of fire.

13. The sixth bowl (global guilt): gathering to Armageddon

Revelation 16:12-16 *The 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.* ¹³ *And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs.* ¹⁴ *For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.* ¹⁵ *("Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!")* ¹⁶ *And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.*

- a. This is the only place in scripture where Armageddon is specifically mentioned. Armageddon is a valley, where the campaign which lasts for 3½ years comes to a head –the battle for Jerusalem. The antichrist's armies are gathered in Armageddon, a valley just north of Jerusalem.
 - i Natural history doesn't end by a comet hitting the earth or the superpowers blowing up the world with nuclear weapons. This age ends with a battle with Jesus fighting against the Antichrist and the kings of the earth.
 - ii It will be a personal, close-quarter, physical military conflict as heaven collides with the earth. It is the Day of the Lord, long prophesied in the scriptures.
- b. The sixth bowl describes the nations being allured by demons “performing signs” that deceive them in coming to Armageddon to make war against Jesus. God's judgment in the sixth bowl is an “accelerant”, releasing delusion that will cause the fullness of man's rebellion against Him to be manifest openly.
 - i God releases a delusion in this bowl that causes all of the deep-seated hatred and arrogance and pride against God to come out into the open where everyone can see it. Satan's goal is to rally the resources of the nations to stand against Jesus, while he attempts to secure Jerusalem as his throne forever (Revelation 2:13; 13:2; 16:10).
- c. The kings from the east are a coalition of governmental leaders in Asia that have been resisting the Antichrist during his rise to power. But neither have they called upon the name of the Lord, they have not yielded their allegiance to Jesus, they have not received the love of the truth. God declared in a prophetic oracle by Isaiah that he will dry up the river:

Isaiah 11:15 *And the LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt, and will wave his hand over the River [Euphrates] with his scorching breath, and strike it into seven channels, and he will lead people [armies] across in sandals [dry shod].*

- d. The Antichrist will use this to convince the kings of the east to join his campaign; he tells them he will dry up the river so they can cross it on foot – he will claim he can do this because he is God.

- i The scorching heat of the sun that melted the polar ice caps would have caused the flood plains of the Euphrates to become an impassable barrier, all the bridges would have been washed away. God is also testing the hearts of these kings. The River Euphrates is dried up so the way is open for the kings to cross over and join with the Antichrist's armies. This miracle, which the Antichrist will claim to be his doing, will convince the kings to come and join him.
- e. Satan, the Beast and the False Prophet – will use supernatural signs epitomised by these three demons like frogs that issue from their mouths. They are lying spirits, sent out to rally the nations to stand against Jesus. God is the one drying up the river; the satanic trinity is releasing demons that perform supernatural signs to deceive the kings of the earth.
- f. The kings are convinced that defeating Jesus is not only necessary, but is actually doable, attributing his power as coming from demons, not from God. They're going to think Jesus is the antichrist operating in supernatural power, and they think they actually can beat him. They think he's a false messiah that's actually troubling the earth; they're going to make war against him thinking that their power is superior to his and that they're going to take him out.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-12 ...*the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,* ⁴ *who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God...*⁹ *by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders,* ¹⁰ *and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.* ¹¹ *Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false,* ¹² *in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

- a. God sends a strong delusion on those who have rejected the light of God's truth and wilfully bought into Satan's lies.
 - i This sixth bowl gives opportunity for all the hatred and rebellion that is deep within the hearts of men to find full expression and come to the surface openly. God gives the nations over to the full power of their wicked choices on a global scale.
- b. God will allow these "lying spirits" to operate in the mouths of **Satan**, the **Antichrist** and the **False Prophet** openly and visibly across the whole world. The situation is so desperate that Satan now operates openly for the first time.
- c. Natural history ends with a "global blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. The harvest of man's sin becomes ripe worldwide, as wickedness matures and transgressors reach fullness (Daniel 8:23; Matthew 13:29, 30).
 - i Understanding the severity and irreversible consequences associated with the sixth bowl, shows the mercy strategy of the first five bowls of wrath, as God continues to shake the nations, desiring to wake them up, before this great deception.
 - ii If they're still standing at this point and they're still resisting God, and they get swept away by the delusion of the 6th bowl, there's no returning.
- d. We will look at the 7th bowl when we come to chapters 19 and 20, the battle for Jerusalem and what happens after that.

14. Beware – Jesus will come as a thief...

Revelation 16:15 *Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!*

- a. Jesus gives us a **blessing with a warning**. It is an urgent warning to believers before the Tribulation to be prepared, so that they are not progressively swept away by the deception that culminates in the sixth bowl.
- b. A thief waits for when the occupants of the house are not paying attention. They wait till it is dark and people are asleep. The thief strikes and you suffer unnecessary loss because you weren't paying attention. Jesus is saying "Church, if you are not watching, if you are not prepared, you might find yourself being sneaked up upon like a thief, and I don't want you to suffer unnecessary loss".
- c. This is a timely message for us, and a reminder as to why we are studying these end times scriptures in such depth. They help to keep us alert, to sharpen our senses, to prepare us beforehand for trouble and difficulty that lies ahead.