

## Introduction

### **Revelation 16:1-7 ESV**

<sup>1</sup> Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, “Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.”

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood.

<sup>5</sup> And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, “Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments.

<sup>6</sup> For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!”

<sup>7</sup> And I heard the altar saying, “Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!”

We finished chapter 15 last week. We saw the saints standing by the sea of glass, holding their harps, singing the song of Moses and the Lamb. We saw the temple fill with smoke from the glory of God. We saw the seven angels come out of the sanctuary, bowls in hand, ready.

Now the waiting is over.

Chapter 16 opens with a command. A loud voice from the temple says, "Go." And the angels go. One by one, they pour out the bowls of God's wrath on the earth.

This is the final set of judgments in Revelation. Not a third of the sea. Not a third of the rivers. The language has changed. These are total, complete, final. The seals were broad. The trumpets were intense. The bowls are the end of the line.

Some people struggle with passages like this. They wonder how a good God can pour out this kind of wrath. That's a fair question. And [Revelation 16](#) actually answers it. Right in the middle of these bowls, two voices speak. An angel declares that God is just. And the altar says, "Yes. True and just are your judgments."

The chapter itself defends God's wrath before we even have a chance to question it.

So let's walk through it together, verse by verse.

## Verse 1: The Command to Pour

**[Revelation 16:1](#) (ESV) - "Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, 'Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.'"**

"A loud voice from the temple"

The command comes from the temple. Not from an angel. Not from some external force. From the temple, where God's presence dwells, where His glory fills the room so completely that no one can enter.

We saw in [Revelation 15:8](#) that the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and no one could enter. So who is speaking? It has to be God Himself. The voice that sends the angels comes from the very presence of God.

This matters. These judgments are not accidents. They're not random catastrophes. They're not the collateral damage of a chaotic world. They come from God. They are ordered, deliberate, and purposeful.

[Psalm 33:11](#) (ESV) says, "The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations."

What is about to happen has always been part of God's plan. The command has been waiting. And now it goes out.

## "Go and pour out"

The word "pour out" (Greek ekcheō) means to pour, to spill, to empty completely. It's the same word used throughout the Old Testament for God pouring out His Spirit and His wrath.

Joel 2:28–29 (ESV) says, "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh." The same verb. The same God. The Spirit was poured out at Pentecost. Now the wrath is poured out at the end.

And notice the command is given to all seven angels at once. "Pour out on the earth the seven bowls." They go one by one in sequence, but the command goes to all of them together. The whole set of judgments is authorized in one word: Go.

## "The wrath of God"

The phrase "wrath of God" makes a lot of people uncomfortable. Our culture tends to prefer a God of love who never gets angry. But the Bible does not give us that God.

The Greek word here is thymos. It refers to a settled, righteous indignation. Not a temper tantrum. Not blind rage. It's the holy anger of a perfectly righteous Judge who has watched sin, cruelty, idolatry, and bloodshed long enough, and who now acts.

Romans 1:18 (ESV) says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."

God's wrath is not a character flaw. It's a moral necessity. A God who never gets angry at evil is not a good God. He's an indifferent one.

And the saints in Revelation 15 understood this. They sang about it. "Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations." They worshiped God because His wrath is right.

## Application

The command of verse 1 sets the tone for everything that follows. These judgments come from God, they are authorized by God, and they express the settled wrath of God against sin.

Before we look at what the bowls do, we need to settle something in our minds: God's wrath is not a problem to apologize for. It's a reality to reckon with.

If you're in Christ, that wrath was poured out on Jesus at the cross. He drank the cup so you wouldn't have to. But if you're not in Christ, Revelation 16 is a picture of what is coming. Not because God is cruel, but because He is holy and just.

## Verse 2: The First Bowl – Sores on the Worshipers of the Beast

**Revelation 16:2 (ESV) – "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."**

"Harmful and painful sores"

The first bowl is poured on the earth, and the result is sores. The Greek word for "harmful" is *kakos*, meaning evil or bad. The word for "sores" is *helkos*, which refers to a festering wound or ulcer.

These are not minor irritations. The language suggests open, infected, painful wounds. The kind that won't heal. The kind that make sleep impossible.

Old Testament background: The boils of Egypt

The connection to the Exodus is impossible to miss. In Exodus 9:8–11 (ESV), God told Moses and Aaron to take handfuls of soot from a kiln and throw it in the air before Pharaoh. "And it became boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt."

The magicians couldn't even stand because of the boils. The whole nation suffered. Pharaoh's heart stayed hard.

Here in Revelation 16, the pattern repeats. As God once brought boils on Egypt for oppressing His people, He now brings sores on those who bear the mark of the beast. The Exodus plagues were a preview. The bowls are the full picture.

"The people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image"

This is critical. The sores fall on a specific group: those with the mark of the beast who worshiped its image.

This is not indiscriminate suffering. This is targeted judgment on those who chose to align themselves with the beast, who gave their loyalty to the world's system rather than to God.

Back in Revelation 7:3, God's servants were sealed on their foreheads before the judgments began. And in Revelation 9:4, the locusts were told to harm only those who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

God protects His own. The plagues fall on those who rejected Him.

This is the same pattern as the Exodus. The plagues fell on Egypt. Israel was spared. God makes a distinction between His people and those who oppose Him.

## Application

The first bowl tells us that aligning yourself with the beast has consequences. The mark was a choice. The worship was a choice. And the sores are the result of that choice.

We make choices about our loyalties every day. We choose what we bow to, what we give our lives to, what we trust for security and meaning. Revelation calls us to make sure that loyalty belongs to God.

The people who stand by the sea of glass in chapter 15 refused the mark. They paid for it. But now they're singing. The people with the sores in verse 2 took the mark. They thought it would buy them safety. It didn't.

## Verse 3: The Second Bowl – The Sea Becomes Blood

**Revelation 16:3 (ESV) – "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."**

"Like the blood of a corpse"

The sea becomes blood. Not the blood of a living creature. The blood of a corpse.

The Greek phrase is *haima hōs nekrou*. Corpse blood is congealed, dark, putrid. It's not just a color change. The sea becomes something dead. Rotting. Uninhabitable.

Old Testament background: The Nile turned to blood

In Exodus 7:17–21 (ESV), God told Moses: "Behold, I will strike the water that is in the Nile with the staff that is in my hand, and it shall turn into blood. The fish in the Nile shall die, and the Nile shall stink, and the Egyptians will grow weary of drinking water from the Nile."

The Nile was Egypt's lifeline. It was their source of water, food, and trade. When it turned to blood, it struck at the heart of their survival.

Here in Revelation 16, it's not just a river. It's the sea. Every ocean. Every body of salt water. And the scale is total.

"Every living thing died that was in the sea"

Compare this with the second trumpet in Revelation 8:8–9. There, a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea and a third of the sea became blood, and a third of the creatures died.

A third. Now it's everything.

The bowls are not a repeat of the trumpets with the same intensity. They are the completion of what the trumpets began. The trumpets were warnings. The bowls are the final answer.

Every living thing in the sea dies. The oceans that cover most of the earth's surface become vast graveyards. Can you imagine the stench? The silence? The total collapse of marine life?

This is what complete, unreserved divine judgment looks like.

## Application

The sea dying points to the collapse of the natural order under the weight of God's judgment. Creation, which was made good, has been twisted by human sin and idolatry. And now it groans under that weight.

Romans 8:22 (ESV) says, "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now."

Creation groans for redemption. And until that redemption comes fully, it bears the marks of humanity's rebellion. The bowls show what happens when God's patience finally ends and His justice fully arrives.

## Verses 4–7: The Third Bowl – Rivers to Blood, and the Righteousness of God

**Revelation 16:4–7 (ESV) – "The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, 'Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!' And I heard the altar say, 'Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!'"**

## Verse 4: Rivers and Springs to Blood

If the second bowl struck salt water, the third bowl strikes fresh water. The rivers. The springs. Every source of drinking water turns to blood.

The progression is deliberate. Bowl 2 takes away the sea. Bowl 3 takes away the rivers and springs. The water supply of the entire world is gone. What is left to drink?

This is total. It's global. And it mirrors Exodus 7 even more directly, since the Nile was a freshwater river.

But what makes verses 4–7 different from the first two bowls is what comes after the judgment is described. Two voices speak. And both of them say the same thing: God is just.

## Verses 5–6: The Angel of the Waters Speaks

**"Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments."**

An angel who is described as being "in charge of the waters" stops the action and speaks. He looks at what just happened, rivers and springs turned to blood, and he says: You are just.

The title "who is and who was" echoes the description of God in Revelation 1:4, where He is called the one "who is and who was and who is to come." The full title elsewhere includes "who is to come." Here it stops at "who was." Some scholars suggest this is because the coming judgment has now arrived. There is no more waiting for what is to come. It's here.

God is addressed as the Holy One. His holiness is the foundation for His judgment. Because He is holy, He cannot ignore sin. Because He is just, He cannot let evil go unanswered forever.

**"For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!"**

This is one of the clearest statements of retributive justice in the entire Bible.

The people being judged shed the blood of God's saints and prophets. They persecuted, tortured, and killed those who bore witness to Christ. And now they drink blood.

The punishment fits the crime exactly. They spilled blood. They get blood. Not out of cruelty. Out of justice.

This points back to the Old Testament principle found in [Numbers 35:33](#) (ESV): "For blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made for the land for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it."

And it reaches back to [Genesis 9:6](#) (ESV): "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."

The shedding of innocent blood cries out for justice. God hears it. He acts on it.

The phrase "it is what they deserve" (Greek *axios eisin*) is a legal verdict. It's the word of a court that has reviewed the evidence and rendered a sentence. The sentence is just. The verdict is right.

The "saints and prophets"

The phrase "saints and prophets" appears again in [Revelation 18:24](#) and echoes the long history of God's messengers being silenced, exiled, and killed for speaking His truth.

Jesus Himself said in [Matthew 23:37](#) (ESV): "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!"

And in [Luke 11:50–51](#) (ESV): "...so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah."

God does not forget the blood of His people. He keeps a record. And He will answer every drop.

## Verse 7: The Altar Speaks

**"Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!"**

The altar speaks. In [Revelation 6:9–10](#), the souls of the martyrs were seen under the altar, crying out, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

The altar is connected to those cries. And now the altar responds. It says yes. Yes to the justice of God. Yes to the rightness of these judgments. Yes to the answer that the martyrs waited and died for.

The word "yes" (Greek *nai*) is a strong affirmation. It's emphatic. Not a quiet nod. A full, ringing agreement.

"Lord God the Almighty" is the title we saw in [Revelation 15:3](#). Kyrios ho Theos ho Pantokratōr. The sovereign ruler over everything. The one with all power.

And "true and just are your judgments." The Greek words are alēthinai and dikaios. True means genuine, real, not false or deceptive. Just means righteous, fair, morally right.

God's judgments are not arbitrary. They are not emotional reactions. They are true. They are just. Heaven declares it without hesitation.

### Application: Is God Fair?

This is the question people ask most often about passages like this. Is God being fair?

The answer [Revelation 16](#) gives is: yes. And not just yes from God Himself, but yes from an angel, and yes from the altar where the prayers of the martyrs were stored.

Three witnesses confirm the justice of God: the command from the temple (v.1), the angel in charge of the waters (vv.5–6), and the altar (v.7).

But let's sit with the deeper question for a moment. Why does God's justice sometimes feel unfair to us?

Part of the answer is that we don't see the full picture. We don't know everything that was done. We don't hear every cry that went up. We didn't stand with every saint who was silenced. God did. He sees all of it. And His verdict comes from complete knowledge.

[Psalm 94:1–3](#) (ESV) says, "O LORD, God of vengeance, O God of vengeance, shine forth! Rise up, O judge of the earth; repay to the proud what they deserve! O LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult?"

The psalmist felt what we feel when we watch injustice go unanswered. He cried out. And God's answer in [Revelation 16](#) is: not forever. The day is coming.

## Putting It Together: What Does This Say About God?

These first three bowls reveal several things about who God is.

**He is sovereign over all creation.** He can turn seas and rivers to blood. He commands the sun and the waters. Nothing in the physical world is outside His authority.

**He is just.** The punishment fits the sin. Those who shed blood drink blood. Those who chose the beast bear the consequences of that choice. There is no randomness in God's judgments.

**He is patient, but He does not wait forever.** These are the final plagues. They come after a long period of warning. The trumpets came first. The seals before that. God gave opportunity after opportunity. The bowls are not the first word. They are the last.

**He hears the prayers of His people.** The altar speaks in verse 7. And behind that altar are the cries of every saint who prayed and suffered and waited. God did not forget them. He answers.

## Conclusion: What Do We Do With This?

Let me leave you with four things to carry with you.

### **1. God's wrath is real and it is right.**

We don't do anyone any favors by softening this. The bowls are poured out by holy angels, authorized by God, and declared just by heaven itself. God's wrath is not a problem to explain away. It's a reality to take seriously.

### **2. The blood of God's people is not forgotten.**

If you are watching Christians suffer in other parts of the world, or if you have paid a price for your own faithfulness, hear this: God sees. He keeps the record. The altar speaks for those who prayed and died with their prayers unanswered. They will be answered.

### **3. The suffering of the world is not meaningless.**

These bowls fall on a world that rejected God and His people. There is a connection between sin, idolatry, and the breakdown of the created order. When humanity gives itself to the beast, it loses the blessings that come from the Creator.

### **4. Jesus bore the cup so you don't have to.**

The bowls are "full of the wrath of God" ([Revelation 15:7](#)). But in Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" ([Matthew 26:39](#) ESV). He drank that cup. He absorbed that wrath. For everyone who trusts in Him, the bowls are not their portion. Christ already drank it.

If you are outside of Christ today, [Revelation 16](#) is a warning. Not to scare you, but to show you what is coming and to point you to the one who can shelter you from it. The door is still open. The invitation is still going out. Turn to Christ.