

The Seven Bowls of God's Wrath

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The seven bowls (also called the seven last plagues) are puzzling to many Christians. When do they occur? What is their purpose? Who receives them? Who tortures the wicked? Jesus or the devil? The seven bowls are not discussed very often because people do not think they will be affected by them. Of course, the bowls will occur in the future, but they are important right now because they reveal more information about God's character. Before we examine the seven bowls, please notice that they can be divided into two groups:

Plagues on Evil Individuals **Plagues on Evil Corporate Entities**

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| 1. Ugly and painful sores | 5. Painful blindness affects Lucifer's officials |
| 2. Oceans turn to blood | 6. Kings of Earth gather for Armageddon |
| 3. Rivers and springs turn to blood | 7. Hailstones weighing 100 pounds each fall and a sword comes out of Jesus' mouth kills the remaining evil people |
| 4. Scorching heat | |

The seven last plagues are called seven bowls (or vials in the KJV) because God wants us to understand that near the end of the Great Tribulation, He will force the wicked to "drink and swallow" His wrath. The result will be a very painful and eventually, a deadly experience. In Bible times, experiences were sometimes described as drinking from a *phiale*. * For example, filled with overflowing gratitude for God's protection, King David wrote, **"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.**

You anoint my head with oil; *my cup overflows* [with joy]." (Psalm 23:5, italics and insertion mine) Centuries later, Jesus cried out from the Garden of Gethsemane, **" 'Abba, Father,' he said, 'everything is possible for you. *Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.*' "** (Mark 14:36, italics mine)

The ancients often used the imagery of a cup to describe a human experience because they observed that once something is swallowed, the results become inescapable. Everything from euphoria and joy to excruciating pain and death came in a cup and being forced to drink a cup of poison was the worst possible experience. (See Jeremiah 25:15-30.)

*Note: The Greek word *phiale* describes a broad shallow cup, a saucer, or a bowl. The KJV transliterates *phiale* into the English word "vial," but this choice of words does not convey the proper meaning in today's English.

The seven bowls can be listed in two columns because the first four bowls serve a different purpose than the last three. Everyone who receives the mark of the beast will experience the first four bowls. The last three bowls will impact corporate entities that Jesus intends to destroy.

For example, Jesus will impose the fifth bowl on Lucifer's theocracy (his officials and employees). Jesus will impose the sixth bowl on the kings of Earth and their armies, and finally,

the seventh bowl will affect Earth itself. Fiery hailstones will destroy some of the wicked and the rest will be destroyed by the sword that comes out of Jesus' mouth. This will occur at the close of the seventh bowl. (Revelation 16:21; 19:19-21)

Note: If you have read my book, *A Study on the Seven Trumpets, Two Witnesses and Four Beasts*, you should recall that the seven trumpets can also be divided into two columns. The first four trumpet-judgments will fall upon notably wicked places and wicked people will experience the last three trumpet-judgments.

The First Five Bowls Examined

I believe the seven last plagues will occur over a period of seventy days – each bowl is poured out for ten days. It is interesting that the first four bowls focus on food, water, and shelter because prior to the seven last plagues, wicked predators will deprive God's children of these same necessities! The following is a short paraphrase on how I believe the first five plagues will unfold. Hopefully, this will help you better understand the story:

{Revelation 16:1} Then I heard a loud voice in Heaven say to the seven angels, "Go now and make the wicked drink from the cup of God's wrath." Jesus said to the first angel, "Lucifer controls the world. He will not permit my people to buy or sell because they will not wear his mark.

He intends to starve my people to death. Do to the wicked as they have done to my people. Go and poison their food. Let those wearing the mark of the beast eat the food and suffer the horrible boils that will follow."

". . . The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head." -Obadiah 1:15

{2} The first angel poured out his bowl of poison on *the land* and ugly and painful sores broke out on everyone who had the mark of the beast, but the saints were not affected. When the wicked realized that their food supplies were the source of their boils, they rushed to the ocean to find food. Then Jesus said, "Neither shall the sea provide food for the wicked. Poison the oceans of the world!"

{3} The second angel poured out his bowl upon the oceans and the water turned into a thick blood-like fluid, like the blood of a dead man. *Every* living creature in the sea died. The remains of the sea creatures floated to the surface and washed onto the shores. Nothing from the sea could be eaten, but again, the saints were not affected. God provided food for them.

Jesus said to the third angel, "Many of the wicked participated in the slaughter of my servants, the 144,000. Since they are bloodthirsty, take away their water and give them blood to drink."

{4} The third angel poured his bowl of poison on the rivers and springs of water, and the springs of water became like blood, just like the oceans. Even more, the drinking water became

poisonous for everyone who had participated in the murder of God's people. The agony suffered by the murderers was intense. They were hungry and thirsty, and the agony they suffered was unbearable.

{5} The angel with the third bowl spoke to Jesus: "Eternal God, you are just and fair in these judgments, for you have judged righteously; {6} for these devil worshipers shed the innocent blood of your saints and prophets – and you have given them blood to drink."

{7} Then, the mighty angel who stood at the Altar of Incense also responded: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, your vengeance is righteous and your actions are justifiable."

After the third bowl was poured out, the wicked were in great anguish all over the world. The devil, who pompously masqueraded as Almighty God, could not prevent or cancel the effects of the first three bowls. To keep his masquerade intact, the devil stalled for time by promising to improve food supplies and the availability of fresh water, but his promises remained unfulfilled.

To further divert the attention of the wicked from his failure to save them, Lucifer directed the wicked to utterly destroy the remaining saints because, he claimed, they were aligned with "the devil." Lucifer cleverly led the wicked into thinking the saints were the reason for the great curse upon Earth and if the saints were eliminated, the curse would end.

Immediately, the wicked agreed to kill the saints on a specific day (the 1,290th day of the Great Tribulation) and great rewards were promised to everyone who captured and killed one of God's saints. Instead, Jesus protected His saints. Not one single saint perished. Jesus said, "The wicked intended to kill my people, now let them feel the heat of my wrath."

{8} The fourth angel poured his bowl on the Sun. The Sun became so hot that it scorched Earth with unbearable heat. The stench rising from the dead sea creatures was so unbearable that no one wanted to go outdoors, but the situation indoors was worse. There was no water or electricity.

{9} Objects became so hot that people were badly burned by merely touching them. Millions of wicked people, exhausted from their efforts to survive, died from hunger, thirst, and heat exhaustion. Even the devil's highest ranking officials had no food, water, or protection from the searing heat. Nevertheless, the wicked refused to repent of their wickedness and worship the Creator of Heaven and Earth, the only true God. They cursed the saints along with their God and refused to glorify Him.

The wicked cried out to Lucifer, "If you are Almighty God as you claim, stop these curses. Ever since you became king of kings and lord of lords (during the sixth trumpet), our condition has only become worse and worse. Use your miracle working powers to end the suffering! Show us again that you are Almighty God!" These requests put the devil in a predicament. He no longer had power to stop anything, including the effects of the first four bowls.

{10} A few days later, the fifth bowl was poured out. Suddenly, a painful plague afflicted everyone who worked for the devil. His officials and employees became dysfunctional. They had

willingly closed their eyes to the light of God's truth (presented by the 144,000); therefore, Jesus removed their eyesight.

When the fifth bowl was poured out, a painful blindness fell upon Lucifer's officials and employees, and his theocracy ended. The only thing the devil's officials and employees could do was to sit on the ground and gnaw their tongues in agony. {11} They cursed the God of Heaven (Jesus) because of the pain, but they refused to repent for what they had done.

The fifth plague, directed specifically at Lucifer's government, stunned the remaining wicked. Suddenly, they began to question the identity of the glorious being who claimed to be Almighty God. Why would he give a curse of painful blindness to his officials and employees? Why would he destroy his entire work force and kingdom with painful blindness? Why would he treat his loyal followers with such horrifying contempt . . . unless he *really* was an imposter? Could he actually be the devil?

The fifth bowl will be the game changer. The wicked will be forced by unavoidable circumstances to admit that the 144,000, who they ridiculed and murdered as "false prophets," are the true prophets of Almighty God after all. As events unfold, one bowl at a time, the wicked will be forced to admit that the glorious being masquerading as Almighty God is the devil, the dreaded Antichrist. He is *the* "false prophet" – just as the 144,000 claimed. The wicked will be crushed by unspeakable disappointment and guilt.

They will realize, too late, that they were duped. They were duped because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12) Instead of placing their faith in Jesus and submitting to the authority of a God of love, they temporarily avoided persecution. They placed their loyalty and trust in the father of lies — a cunning devil who told them all kinds of lies while performing endless miracles to win their confidence and loyalty.

God Is Love

If God is love, then God's behavior defines love in action. In other words, whatever God does must be perfectly within the boundaries of love. God's love can be defined as a perfect balance between justice and mercy. According to infinite wisdom and changeless consistency, God knows when mercy is appropriate and when the demands of justice are required.

This balance is always perfect because God is love personified! *The actions of God always demonstrate what love is and what love is not.* Given this eternal truth, the seven bowls have to be understood as an action of love. Much more can be written about this topic, but time and space will not permit it. Please consider these three purposes for the seven bowls: Vengeance, exposure, and discovery. A few words about each might be helpful.

1. Vengeance

There is an important distinction between vengeance and revenge. Vengeance is a righteous process that achieves justice. Vengeance is exercised when a disinterested party (having no

relationship with the parties involved) lawfully punishes a predator or perpetrator of a crime on behalf of an injured party.

On the other hand, revenge is retaliation. Revenge is exercised when someone having a personal interest in an injury punishes another party. The problem with revenge is that the limits of justice are usually ignored or abandoned in order to satisfy passion. In other words, left to his own devices, a person seeking revenge will often go beyond justice and become a predator himself.

During the Great Tribulation, the wicked will drink the wine of Babylon and treat God's saints with contempt and hatred because God's saints will not cooperate. Babylon will unjustly persecute the saints, taking their possessions and ultimately, their lives. The wicked will impose a stunning amount of cruelty and hardship on the saints.

Of course, Jesus will not miss a single event, faithfully recording every thought, word, and action because He will execute justice at the appointed time. Every ounce of suffering imposed on the saints will be repaid to the wicked. In fact, they will be repaid with a double portion of suffering by a God of love! (Revelation 18:6)

*Note: A double portion of restitution is required when malicious intent is premeditated and carried out. (Exodus 22:4-9)

After Noah's flood, God imposed a system of law and order on mankind. (Genesis 9:5,6) Later, God expanded the role of law and order at Mount Sinai: **"But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise."** (Exodus 21:24,25)

God set up civil authorities to administer justice and to execute vengeance as necessary (Romans 13) and when lawfully applied, *God's system of justice is a deterrent to crime*. God requires everyone to respect the person and property of others, just as they respect their own person and property.

God's system of justice protects the weak from the strong and the innocent from the ruthless. Every society has builders (those who contribute to the advancement and well being of society) and predators (scoundrels who abuse the weak by depriving them of their possessions and/or lives).

To a great extent, a child's character is determined by the presence or absence of parental training and childhood associations. In Bible times, if a teenager observed the execution of a convicted murderer, that experience and the importance of another person's life would not be soon forgotten.

Because God closely identifies with children and the weaker people in society, God demands the execution of vengeance on murderers to protect society from predators. Therefore, we should not be surprised to learn that God, who loves every person equally, demands that murderers be put to death.

God has a golden rule. **"Do to others as you would have them do to you."** (Luke 6:31) When this law is violated, God's justice requires restitution. If a predator does not make amends and he is not caught and punished during his lifetime, God will resurrect the predator at the appointed time and personally see to it that restitution is extracted. This shows God's fairness and love for justice! The inverse of the Golden Rule is iron clad. It says, "It will be done to you as you did to others."

Vengeance is the lawful execution of justice, and one day, restitution will be extracted from every wicked person who failed to provide restitution. In fact, restitution is one of the purposes for the lake of fire that will consume the wicked at the end of the 1,000 years.

The wicked will suffer in the lake of fire in direct proportion to the suffering they imposed upon their victims. This is why Paul warned, **"Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord."** (Romans 12:19) We should never forget this phrase:
". . . I will repay, says the Lord."*

*Note: If a murderer is caught and executed for his crime, the demands of the law – life for life – have been met. However, restitution for the suffering he created during the crime has not been met. This, too, must be paid in full. God's law includes punitive action (punishment), as well as compensatory action (restitution).

If a murderer repents of his sin before execution, his death will satisfy the punitive requirement of God's law and the compensatory requirements for suffering will be transferred to the scapegoat (Lucifer). On the other hand, if a murderer does not repent of his sin and he dies a natural death, the murderer will suffer in the lake of fire at the end of the 1,000 years, according to the amount of compensation imposed upon him. Only then will he die, thereby satisfying the punitive requirement, because the penalty for his sin remains upon his own head.

We have examined the concept of vengeance because the seven bowls contain God's vengeance. During the Great Tribulation, desperate circumstances will separate the people of Earth into two groups. The sheep (God's people) will embrace the testimony of the 144,000, worship the Creator, and love one another.

The goats (the wicked) will rebel against God's authority and submit to Babylon's authority. The contest between the two authorities will be sharp and distinct. The wicked will do whatever it takes to survive – only to end up as slaves of the devil. There will be no justice for God's saints during the Great Tribulation, so God Himself will execute vengeance upon the wicked with the seven bowls during the final seventy days of the Great Tribulation. God will lawfully punish the wicked according to the way they maliciously treated His children.

2. Exposure

Another purpose for the seven bowls is exposure. Jesus will expose the devil's masquerade during the fifth bowl! Here's the story: About a year *before* the fifth bowl occurs, God will permit

Lucifer to leave the spirit realm and physically appear before mankind. He will lead the wicked into total rebellion against the authority and will of God. The devil will masquerade as Almighty God and he will perform many magnificent miracles – even calling fire down from Heaven! Many of the wicked will embrace the devil as though he was God. When the devil gains enough followers, he will demand that everyone on Earth worship as he dictates or be killed. The devil will set up a false theocracy and rule over Earth as king of kings and lord of lords. This pompous despot will reign over the whole world for about nine months. During the fifth bowl, Jesus will strip away the devil's masquerade and He will expose the great deceiver for who he really is (evil incarnate).

The fifth bowl will be poured out on a specific group of people. Those who serve as officials and employees in Lucifer's government (false theocracy) will be struck down with excruciating pain, a blindness that renders them dysfunctional, and Lucifer's empire will immediately shut down.

Ironically, those who refused to see any light in the gospel of Jesus Christ will no longer be able to see the god of darkness they serve. When the rest of the wicked realize that Lucifer is powerless to stop the painful blindness and "heal" his administrative staff, the devil will be exposed for who he really is.

The wicked will be paralyzed by great fear. Not only will they hate the devil, but they will also loathe themselves. They will remember the 144,000's testimony, but it will be too late. Finally, the wicked will realize they cannot escape the coming doom.

3. Discovery

When the wicked discover that the glorious being who masqueraded as Almighty God is the devil, they will also discover that they have no Savior and no refuge from Almighty God. They will have no one to worship, no divine being in whom to trust, and no hope for the future.

The fifth bowl will force the wicked to discover their true condition before God, the Creator of the universe. In an attempt to lessen the impact of this awful discovery, Lucifer will send miracle working demons to the ten kings of Earth during the sixth bowl. These demons will perform miracle after miracle before the kings of Earth and then, with sophisticated cunning, they will present their demonic proposal. They will tell the kings that Jesus will arrive soon to ultimately destroy the entire world. They will suggest to the kings of Earth that they must join forces with Lucifer to stop Jesus! They must make war on Jesus as He appears – the demons contend it is their only chance of survival.

Two interesting facts will emerge: First, the Bible predicts that Earth's ten kings will join forces with Lucifer's demons, even though they know that Lucifer is the devil and his angels are demons. Consider the ramifications of this union for a moment. To save self, sinners would rather join forces with the devil and attempt to destroy the Creator of the universe than to confess their sins and repent.

Let me be clear – the power of sin within sinners is entirely delusional. Second, the desperate

actions of Earth's ten kings prove that ultimately, sin has the same effect on human beings as angels. Under the right circumstances, both would attempt to destroy the God of love if possible. A sinner's love for his own life speaks volumes.

On the other hand, the cross proves that the Creator of the universe, Jesus Christ, was willing to cease to exist so that sinners might be saved. This is love in action! Contrast this with the war against Jesus at the Second Coming. This final revelation demonstrates why sin and sinners cannot be tolerated in God's universe ever again. Given the time, power, and opportunity, every sinner eventually becomes a predator. This fact would be very hard to accept were it not for the "discovery" made possible during the seven bowls.

Vengeance, exposure, and discovery have been briefly discussed to help you understand that the seven bowls have several important purposes. During the Great Tribulation, the inhabitants of Earth will experience a period of increasing distress. As circumstances become more desperate, a sharp distinction between the sheep and the goats will appear. One group will choose the way of divine love, worship the Creator, and love one another. The other group will grasp at every straw to save themselves from suffering, hardship, and death – only to face God's wrath, extended suffering, and finally death.

Love for God will take the sheep in one direction and love for self will take the goats in the opposite direction. As the Great Tribulation escalates, the wicked will prey on the saints to survive. The wicked will take the saint's possessions and treat them with contempt.

The wicked will torture and imprison the saints of God for rebellion against the laws of Babylon. Many of God's people will die in the process. When every person has reached his or her spiritual destination, that is, either *sealed* as a sheep or *marked* as a goat, salvation's offer will end.

At that time, God will execute vengeance on behalf of His helpless saints. He will lawfully punish the wicked with seven plagues, and holy angels will declare that God's actions are righteous! Justice will be served. Unrepentant predators will suffer according to the suffering they caused. **"For we know him who said, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' and again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."** (Hebrews 10:30,31)

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