

JUDGEMENT FROM THE TEMPLE

16 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth."

2 So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.

3 Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead *man*; and every living creature in the sea died.

4 Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. **5** And I heard the angel of the waters saying:

"You are righteous, O Lord,
The One who is and who was and who is to be,^[e]
Because You have judged these things.

6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
And You have given them blood to drink.
For^[d] it is their just due."

7 And I heard another from the altar saying, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous *are* Your judgments."

8 Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. **9** And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.

10 Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. **11** They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

As we begin our next section of this Book let us take a look back real quickly to what has been happening recently. Our last couple of messages has dealt with harvest and judgment. Last week we talked about how the Lord Jesus Christ was putting His sickle into the earth because it was now time for the harvest. The Angel with the everlasting Gospel has sounded, and now the Gospel message that all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved are being harvested. There is also a harvest of bad fruit going on. In Matthew 21 our Lord told a parable that I think many people miss the meaning:

"Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. **34** Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his

servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. **35** And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. **36** Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. **37** Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' **38** But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' **39** So they took him and cast *him* out of the vineyard and killed *him*.

40 "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?"

41 They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease *His* vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons."

42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

'The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone.
This was the Lord's doing,
And it is marvelous in our eyes'?[¹¹]

43 "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. **44** And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."

45 Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them.

When our Lord asked these people what should happen to these wicked men, they proclaimed their own judgment. And the Scripture tells us that they knew it as well. They perceived he was speaking of them.

It is now time for these judgments to be meted out in their full fury. Before these judgments are poured out on the land, we need to remember that these judgments are being poured out from the temple in heaven. Before these chapters that deal primarily with judgment on the land of Israel remember at the beginning of chapter 14 we saw the saints of God atop Mt. Zion standing with the lamb. These are the ones who refused to worship the beast or to take his mark. These judgments that come from the heavenly temple are not only judgments on those who have rejected and thrown out the son, they are also being performed as an instructive example to the Saints.

One of the passages in the Scripture that is oft quoted but either ignored or misapplied is the passage that deals with the grant of authority that Christ gave to His disciples in Matthew 18:18

Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Some have tried to use this passage to grant themselves the ability to Lord over people and others have used it as an individual claim to authority. This Scripture use, however, has primarily an ecclesiastical function. The Church of Jesus Christ, when she calls forth judgment on the enemies of Christ, or when she calls forth blessings, these judgments or blessings, are also confirmed in heaven. The caveat is of course, that they are in line with God's prescribed Word.

Here in Revelation 16 as these judgments are poured forth from the temple of God, what we are seeing is the Lord fulfilling His promises to His covenant people. All the way back in Deuteronomy 28 the Lord promised blessings Israel if they would hearken unto Him.

Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God to observe carefully all His commandments, which I command to you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God.

Following these two verses there are thirteen verses of blessings that God promises to send upon the obedient in such a way that the blessings will overtake them. If they were to obey God then these blessings could not be missed.

But in verse 15 we see an interesting change of pace. God's promises are not a one way street. Where there are blessings that cannot be avoided to the obedient, beginning in verse 16 we see that there are also unavoidable judgments, or curses as they are called in the Book of Deuteronomy to those who are disobedient. I remember speaking to one man and he refused to use the word curse, because, "and I quote," His God was only a blessing God. Well, the God of Deuteronomy follows up these 12 verses of blessing with the following promise.

But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.

And therein follows 53 verses of judgment and curses that God promises to send to His disobedient children. The judgments that are going to be poured out in Revelation 16 are God's promises being fulfilled against unfaithful Israel.

2 So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.

One of the things we are going to notice in this passage is that many of these judgments have been poured out earlier in the Bible on specific enemies of God's people, will now be poured out upon disobedient and unfaithful Israel. As Egypt in Exodus became a persecutor of Israel, Now Israel is persecuting TRUE Israel, therefore God pursues them with curses. This specific judgment, the first bowl was poured out on Egypt at the beginning of the Exodus. In Deuteronomy 28:17 one of the very early promises to Israel for their disobedience was that:

The LORD will strike you with the boils of Egypt, with tumors, with the scab, and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed.

The LORD will strike you in the knees and on the legs with severe boils which cannot be healed, and from the sole of your foot to the top of your head.

Notice this judgment is specifically cast upon those who have the mark of the beast and worship his image. Those who reject true worship for any of its counterfeits will find themselves trusting in the beast for their salvation and there they will find none.

3 Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead *man*; and every living creature in the sea died.

This second judgment which is poured out from the angel in the temple seems similar to the 1st plague of Egypt, but there are some distinct differences which bear mentioning. The first plague on Egypt took place when Moses stretched his rod out over the Nile River, and the Nile and the land of Egypt became full of blood. Specific mention is made in that plague that all the fish of the land died. But here, this specific judgment poured out from the angel from the temple specifies that the blood is the blood of a dead man. This blood was clotted, coagulated, and putrefying. You will see as we go on that blood is mentioned multiple times in this passage and in each occasion it represents something a little bit different.

Most of these judgments are symbolic in their primary significance, but very often we will see they are also events that literally take place. The symbolic significance of blood covering the land is evident in that the blood of a dead man was a symbol of uncleanness. Now the entire land of Israel is said to be covered in this blood. The land that was meant to be an avenue of life for the world is now soaked in death and uncleanness. I want to emphasize that this is the primary meaning of this text, but I also want to point out that there were multiple incidents of mass slayings which resulted in the actual land being made as it were full of blood.

One such account is written of by the historian Josephus where he recounts the events of the massacre at Tarichaeae where thousands of Jewish rebels fled from the Romans to the Sea of Galilee. These rebels set out in small flimsy boats, they were pursued and overtaken by the sturdy rafts of Vespasian's superior forces. The Jews could not escape to land, because of the Roman soldiers that were there, and so all their little boats were sent to the bottom. Those who tried to escape were run through with lances. As certain men

would try to climb above the waves by using the corpses of those who were not floating the Romans drew near and ran them through with their swords. Other men who were further away were dispatched with arrows. According to Josephus, "The whole lake was stained with blood and crammed full of corpses, for not a man escaped. During the days that followed a horrible stench hung over the entire region and it presented an equally horrifying spectacle.

Remember, the physical blood and death that overwhelmed the land, was merely an acting out of the actual reality that the nation that was meant to stand for life was now a bloody and a stinking corpse.

4 Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. **5** And I heard the angel of the waters saying:

"You are righteous, O Lord,
The One who is and who was and who is to be,
Because You have judged these things.

6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
And You have given them blood to drink.
For[d] it is their just due."

7 And I heard another from the altar saying, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous *are* Your judgments."

The third judgment from the temple, has much more in common with the first plague upon Egypt. This is a plague of blood poured out upon the rivers and the springs of water.

In Genesis, the land of Eden we are told has a river flowing out of it to water the garden of God, and from there it parted and became four river heads. These rivers are said to water the world. The River of God is meant to be life to the world. Again, we see the land that God had chosen to bring life to the world is now only spewing forth death. In Ezekiel 40-48 we see Ezekiel's glorious vision of the true temple of God. It is presented as having water flowing forth from its gates and the further it flows the deeper it grows. It flows to the uttermost parts of the earth. God's true Israel is this river, but here we see apostate Israel, and it is a land that has poured out death and now it is becoming death.

This angel of the water who pours out this judgment then issues a statement:

"You are righteous, O Lord,
The One who is and who was and who is to be,
Because You have judged these things.

6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
And You have given them blood to drink.
For it is their just due."

In this statement, He declares that these judgments, as severe as they are, are coming directly from the throne of God. He has judged these things.

For they have shed the blood of the saints and the prophets, and you have given them blood to drink, for it is their just due. No other city or land is known for their slaying of the saints and prophets. This is clearly a judgment upon Israel. They have shed the blood of God's prophets and of his saints, and now they are becoming a nation of blood and of death.

Interestingly enough the only law that is repeated in each of the books of the Pentateuch is "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." The shedding of innocent blood will be punished. If man will not do it, as we showed last week, the blood cries forth from the ground for vengeance. God hears, and God will avenge. Why, Because He is righteous.

8 Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. **9** And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.

I am not going to go into a lot of detail on the specific details of this judgment, but what I want to look at here is the way in which this judgment is spelled out. There is a tendency by many people, even in the church, to believe in what are often called "natural forces." Let me explain what I mean. The Sun rises in the East, and it sets in the West. It did it yesterday, and it did it today, and so we rightly assume it will do so tomorrow. But what causes it to do this? You can, depending on how educated you are, probably tell me all kinds of things, about the earth's rotation, orbital patterns, and what not to great degrees. And while I do not deny the reality of these phenomena, I think this text makes it apparent, that one of the things we need to understand is that these events are not just random "natural" occurrences. God is in control of the Sun, the moon, the wind, and everything else in creation. In this passage we read that men were scorched with great heat. And that it is God, who has power over these plagues.

One of the passages in Scripture that is often quoted is from Matthew 5 where we read, it rains on the just and the unjust. Many people read this passage and they think that somehow this is saying that events like rain are natural, or dare I say random. But what this text is saying is that, so called natural events, are actually under the control of God. Disasters, droughts, famines, earthquakes, etc. are controlled by God almighty. The men of the land in this passage are condemned even further, because when these judgments are poured out upon them, they did not repent and give God glory.

Romans 1 speaks in similar words when it tells us:

For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not

glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

One of the things Israel is being condemned for is their unwillingness to glorify God in all things, and God uses so called natural events to judge them, and their response is further blasphemy.

10 Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. **11** They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

Up to this point the judgments upon the land have been primarily focused on the physical elements of the land of Israel. The Waters, the land, and of course the sun, the last three bowls focus on the political or governmental structure of the land. You will notice this fifth judgment is poured out on the throne of the beast. The primary reference to the beast in the Book of Revelation is the Roman Empire. Where most of the judgments up to this point have been poured out on apostate Israel, this judgment in particular is more broad in its scope.

This judgment is upon the kingdom or empire of the beast. And it is a judgment of darkness. It may seem ironic, that the 4th judgment is a judgment that causes the sun to scorch the flesh of mankind, and yet the fifth is a judgment of darkness. But when we understand the Biblical use of darkness we see that this is a familiar word for nations or empires that are undergoing great political or governmental turmoil. The judgments in this passage are still primarily focused on the land of Israel, but remember they have tried to replace the Son of God with the Roman Caesar. “We have no king but Caesar,” and now the place they are looking to for salvation is full of only darkness.

Another thing to notice about this judgment is that while they are plunged into darkness, they are still suffering the effects of the other bowl judgments, They are full of pain and still rather than repent and return to their God, they grow in their blasphemy of him.

There are still two bowl judgments left in this chapter. My thought was I could deal with the entire chapter in one message. But one of the topics that we deal with in the sixth bowl is Armageddon. I cannot think of a topic in the Book of Revelation that is more misunderstood than Armageddon. But what I want us to get more than anything else in this passage is that these judgments which are poured out from the temple of God serve a purpose. Their ultimate purpose is to cause us to glorify God. You will notice that in the last two judgments poured out that the land finds themselves in deeper trouble because of their unwillingness to repent. Because they know God and refuse to give Him thanks, their judgments are intensified.

It is fitting that today’s message comes at the beginning of the week, where we celebrate Thanksgiving. One of things that today’s passage brings to mind is how thankful as a people we should be. The Scripture tells us in 1 Peter 2:9-10

But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

We were once Not a people, but now we are the people of God, we have obtained His mercy. Knowing this should place within us a deep sense of reverence and awe. It should cause us to have a love for others, and want them to join with us in this pursuit of God's high calling, but it should also place us in a place, where we earnestly desire God's proper judgment from His temple. May God cause us to be thankful for the many blessings that He has so richly blessed us with, and may we always go to His throne for proper judgment and blessing upon all the peoples of the world.