

THE APOCALYPSE – A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew

THE SEVEN VIAL JUDGEMENTS – Rev. 16

Revelation 16:1, *“And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.”*

Go your ways and pour (16:1) -- The message is resoundingly clear. The sudden and startling loud voice (lit. a mega voice) is reminiscent of Isaiah 66:6, "A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the LORD that rendereth recompence to his enemies." It emphasizes the magnitude of God's judgement and the magnitude of man's sin in the final moments of man's existence.

Both these verbs are in the present imperative signaling the immediate command of God to go right now and delay no longer. The task is reemphasized with a command to pour out the vials of wrath of God upon the earth. No one will escape. It will be a global judgement the world has never seen before and will never see again. This final judgement will be the judgement of all judgements. It will even exceed the seven trumpet judgements in magnitude and scale. Man's final hour is Armageddon!

The First Vial Judgement (16:2) – **Revelation 16:2**, *“And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image.”*

The entire content of the vial were immediately cast onto the earth by the first angel. It was not a slow pouring but a quick and decisive act of flinging the content onto the earth. It was judgement time. The first group to receive the wrath of God was the men who had on them the mark of the beast and those who worshipped the image of the beast.

Noisome and grievous sore (lit. extremely harmful and malignant ulcers) will come upon all these idolatrous men.

Barnes comments, "The word "noisome" --*kakon*, evil, bad--is used here to characterize the plague referred to as being peculiarly painful and dangerous. The word grievous--*ponhron*, bad, malignant, hurtful--is further used to increase the intensity of the expression, and to characterize the plague as particularly severe. There is no reason to suppose that it is meant that this would be literally inflicted, any more than it is in the next plague, where it is said that the "rivers and fountains became blood." What is obviously meant is, that there would be some calamity which would be well represented or symbolized by such a fearful plague. Upon the men. Though the plague was poured upon "the earth," yet its effects were seen upon "men." Some grievous calamity would befall them, as if they were suddenly visited with the plague."

What do you think of Barnes comment? Barnes' figurative explanation of the text is uncalled for. This is the last moment of God's judgement upon sinful men. Men's sins are full in the eyes of God. This is the literal judgement of God on sinful men. It must therefore be interpreted literally. Barnes is in error here.

"Used together they stress that the sores will be festering, painful, and incurable. Sore translates *helkos*," the Greek equivalent of the Latin word from which the English word ulcer derives. It describes inflamed, oozing, ulcerous sores, such as those that affected the Egyptians (Exo. 9:9-11; Deu. 28:27, 35), Job (Job 2:7), and the ones that covered Lazarus the beggar (Luke 16:21). They will bring unrelieved physical torment to those who have rejected Jesus Christ (MacArthur, vol. 2, 139)."

What do you think of MacArthur's explanation? MacArthur's literal interpretation brings out the thrust of the meaning. The enforced painful sores will be the just retribution of God upon sinful men who persecuted God's children with pain and torture.

Do not confuse this judgement in Rev. 16 with the judgement of Rev. 14:9-11. Rev 16 is temporal and on earth even though it is global. Rev. 14:9-11 is eternal and will be in the Lake of Fire. The vials' judgements are so devastating because of the continuous overlap between successive vials. Unlike the ten plagues of Moses, the Egyptians were given relief by God. The ten plagues came one after the other without any overlap.

The Second Vial Judgement (16:3) – Revelation 16:3, *"And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea."*

What is the blood of a dead man like? "To the amazement, horror, and despair of the world, the oceans will no longer be fluid, but will become thick, dark, and coagulated, like the pool of blood from someone who has been stabbed to death." It is not blood per se but "like" blood. Blood carries oxygen and gives life. But the blood of a dead man is without oxygen. It is lifeless and frightfully dark in colour like night. Stench from rotting dead decaying flesh will emanates from this gigantic pool of liquid mess. The foul smell due to the copious deaths and decaying flesh inside this liquid mass will destroy the air and

environment of the world. With two third of the whole world turning dark red and dead bodies floating on this mass of water the earth will be robbed of every ounce of fresh air.

Unlike the trumpet judgement where one third of the seas were turned to blood and one third of the sea creatures died, in this instance, the Bible says that “every living soul died in the sea.” The end of the sea life has arrived.

The Third Vial Judgement (16:4-7) – Revelation 16:4-7, “*And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy. And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.*”

Fresh water will turn to blood. Like the first two vial judgements, this will also be global. There will be no more fresh water but blood only to drink. The reason for this judgement is that they have “*shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou [God] hast given them blood to drink.*” This is the just retribution of God. The equity of God’s justice is seen here. They reject the Saviour and have turned to the antichrist, now they pay the price for their rejection and sin. They drank the blood of God’s children now they will be forced to drink blood since they loved blood so much. Blood thirsty sinners will have the fill of blood. There will be no let up in the judgement of God until sinful men are finally removed from the face of the earth.

The previous trumpet judgements, and the testimony of the two witnesses which were accompanied by miracles should have the desired results but they were like water off a duck’s back. There was no impact in the hardened hearts of these wicked followers of Satan. They will remain in their sin for the judicial hardening of their heart will occur and their perpetual rejection of the grace and mercies of the Holy God will be answered by God with devastating destruction and punishment..

“The destruction of what is left of the earth’s fresh water to drink will cause unthinkable hardship and suffering. There will be no water to drink; no clean water to wash the oozing sores caused by the first bowl judgement; no water to bring cooling relief from the scorching heat that the fourth bowl judgement will shortly bring. The scene is so unimaginably horrible that people will wonder how a God of compassion, mercy, and grace could send such a judgement.”

Man may have his views on what justice is and what compassion ought to be. But the bottom line is that only God’s justice matters. Here we have an angelic perspective of what proper justice is like. The first angel testifies that “*Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.*” God is righteous to bring this horrendous judgement as an equitable judgement for the blood that was shed by these wicked men. God’s sons and daughters have been persecuted from day one by the followers of Satan. The amount of blood shed cannot be measured for this has been going on for millenniums. If wicked men repent of their sin, even this sin and crime against God they would be forgiven. But they refuse to repent and worse still they took the side of Satan and His two wicked sidekicks. The mark of the beast on them would seal them to this fate. It was to take the side of the Adversary against God’s.

Just in case anyone might think that God is not fair or He has over-judged, the angels came quickly and praising God for His justice. They are true i.e. very exact and correct, and righteous i.e. very right. Every sinner both young and old deserves what Christ will give to them.

The title of Jesus Christ is *“O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be.”* The eternity of Christ is emphasized here. He was there from the very beginning of time and saw everything. He heard and saw the first murder of Abel by Cain, to the many wives of Lamech and his arrogant boastings, and all the way to the sins of Israel in the days of Malachi and into the last seven years of the Great Tribulation were the unholy trinity will do their utmost to deceive and destroy. God not only saw and heard but He was there in total absolute control of everything. Nothing was done or allowed to be done without His sovereign permission.

Revelation 17:6, *“And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.”*

Then the testimony of another angel, this one is from the altar who said, *“Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.”* Not only is it a just retribution it is also a right retribution! God’s measure of justice is always true that is very fair and transparent. It is also very correctly meted out to all concerned. There will be no over or under punishment. The title of God is that He is called the Almighty by the angel from the altar. This is also very true. Thank God that the God who has all power at His disposal is also a God who is true and righteous.

No one will escape Him. They will all receive their just reward. This is the constant teaching of the whole Bible. It is just that as Christians we prefer to believe that vengeance is mine and not the Lord’s. To this end we have meted out our form of justice to our own hurt and loss. We live in a world of relativism and the days of the Judges rule. Is it not true that today every man will just do what is right in his own eyes?

Foolish man thinks that as long as the majority rules then it must be right. Truth is never measured by the majority. **Pr 16:5**, *“Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished.”* God will not allow the majority to dictate or turn a truth into a lie and get away with it. They will pay for their arrogance and deception.

The Fourth Vial Judgement (16:8-9) – Revelation 16:8-9, *“And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.”*

With painful boils, the stench of dead man's blood and no food, no water and now scorching heat, stubborn man still refuses to repent. The sun which had served man faithfully all these years by providing light, warmth and energy will now be turned into a global source of destruction and pain. This reminds us of . . .

Isaiah 24:4-6, *"The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish. The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left."*

Would not this global heat melt the polar ice caps on both ends of the earth? This will result in global flooding that is unparalleled. It will bring about waves after waves of tidal waves. Islands will be covered and coastal towns, cities and villages would be swept aside like they were matchsticks. This global deaths and destruction is phenomenal.

Would sinful men repent or would they raise their fist in continual defiance? They continue to blaspheme the name of God even though they knew that He is the One who has power over these plagues. What fools sinful wicked men really are. The harder they kick against the pricks the more blood the wound gushes out and the more intense the pain. Yet they persist in their kicking. They simply refuse to give God the glory and repent of their sins.

It is admitted that in the midst of these global devastations, Satan, the antichrist, and false prophet will continue do their greatest evil to deceive and confound the people so that they will not believe God. Their onslaught against God will probably leave the sinners in a quandary . . . who is right and who is wrong? Who is really telling the truth and who is really lying for both claim that there are from God? This was what happened throughout the history of mankind and is still happening today.

The Fifth Vial Judgement (16:10-11) – Revelation 16:10-11, *"And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds."*

The punishment from God will now focus on the headquarters of the evil one. The seat of the power of the antichrist will be the next target. Darkness will now prevail. The judgements will flow from the heat of the sun to the darkening of the sun. One moment intense heat, then the next moment it will be intense cold. The pain will cause him and his followers to chew on their tongues because of the pain. The chewing of one's own tongues as a form of distracting the rest of the body from the intense and great pain is an apt description of the violent nature of this punishment. These sinners are surrounded by bloody seas and bloody waters and now with blood oozing out from the pain-filled lips.

Mark 13:24-25, *"But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken."*

Luke 21:25, *“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring;”*

Acts 2:19-20, *“And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come:”*

Will they repent? No they would rather blaspheme God despite their agony. They refused to repent of their wicked deeds. The price was too high. Why do you think there were no good kings in the Northern Kingdom even though there were 20 kings who ruled the land from 930 to 722 B.C.? To repent means to “lose” the kingdom and the power and wealth that comes with it. Sinful men refused to repent and change. For the northern kingdom to repent and become a godly king, they must restore back the Aaronic line of priesthood which left the Northern Kingdom when Jeroboam the son of Nebat built the two golden calves, one in Dan and the other in Bethel. The king must also destroy the two places of worship. To do this would require the kings of the North to live by faith and trusting in the LORD to keep their kingdom from going back to the South. They did not have that faith. They opted for the way of man which led to their death and destruction just like the last days.

2 Chronicles 11:13-15, *“And the priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to him out of all their coasts. For the Levites left their suburbs and their possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem: for Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the priest’s office unto the LORD: And he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made.”*

The antichrist would have to reject Satan and repent of his sins. He will lose his power and his wealth and all his followers. It was too costly. He would rather blaspheme God than worship Him.

The Sixth Vial Judgement (16:12-16) – Revelation 16:12-16, *“And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.”*

The River Euphrates would be dried up. The river Euphrates during the Great Tribulation would be vastly different from the river Euphrates of today. With the melting of the snow capped mountains and the rising tides caused by the disappearance of the North and south poles it is not too far fetched to assume that there will be a great transformation to the topography of Mesopotamia. The necessity of the drying up of the River Euphrates is therefore evident. The

waters would have been overflowing her banks at that time before the drying up.

This was to prepare for something very different from the other five vial judgements. The drying up of the River Euphrates would allow the final battle on planet earth to begin. This sets the stage for the battle known as the Battle of Armageddon. God was not doing the kings of the east a favour by drying up the River. This was a death trap set for the wicked men. It is likened to the parted Red Sea which Pharaoh and his 300 charioteers rushed headlong into and drowned.

Three unclean spirits that look like frogs came out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. These are the spirit of devils. They would do miracles to deceive the kings of the east to assemble themselves and fight against the Almighty God. They would lose of course but with their insatiable appetite to blaspheme God they are probably too drunk by their blasphemous heart to see clearly or know better. Lies and evil ones will be to them as truth and God. These kings (note plural) from the east will probably include China, Japan, India, Pakistan, and the South East Asian Countries.

In the middle of this discourse and revelation, God turns His attention to the genuine believers. Jesus says that He will “come as a thief.” He will come unexpectedly and quickly. It is true that the phrase “Jesus coming as a thief” has been used before but why is it used here at this juncture of the Great Tribulation? A thief comes to steal. The comparison is not on the nature or character of a thief but the suddenness of his action. Jesus is not here saying that He is a thief. To arrive with that conclusion is faulty hermeneutics.

Matthew 24:42-43, “*Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what **watch the thief would come**, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.*” – The idea of suddenness is emphasized here in the use of the imagery “as a thief.” Every Christian therefore must be ready all the time for the return of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:2-4, “*For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh **as a thief in the night**. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.*” – This was spoken with reference to the Rapture and the First Resurrection of the believers.

2 Peter 3:10, “*But the day of the Lord will come **as a thief in the night**; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.*” – This is a reference to the Second Coming of Christ.

Revelation 3:3, “*Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee **as a thief**, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.*” – This was written to the church in Sardis as a warning to them that the LORD can return any time and they must reorder their lives in light of His return. They thought that they were saved but in reality they were not saved at all. They were living in self delusion. This is also a reference to the Rapture and the First Resurrection.

What it means here is that “the Day of the Lord” must be understood in its immediate context. It could refer to the beginning of the Great Tribulation i.e. the Rapture or the First Resurrection or it could refer to the end of the Great Tribulation i.e. the Second Coming of Christ.

In Revelation 16:15 Jesus referred to the Second Coming of Christ. Perhaps in the face of great chaos, calamity and destruction with the unholy trinity doing their utmost to kill Christians and the wrath of God pouring down upon sinful men, it was a global war scenario. The Christians who were being hunted down like wild animals and the 144,000 sealed Israelites must remain steadfast and unmoveable in their devotion to the Lord. To this end the Lord gave them this comforting note, “Behold I come as a thief.” When things look darkest and appear to be at its worst always look up. Christ’s return will never be too late or too early. It will always be just in time, God’s time.

“Blessed” is used in Revelation seven times (cf. 1:3; 14:13; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). This is the third occasion the Beatitude is used here. *“Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.”*

The word “watcheth” (the root word for Gregory) literally means “to be vigilant.” As it is in the present tense it means to be vigilant continuously. Since the participle is used the emphasis is also on the action of vigilance.

The word “keepeth” means to “hold fast and not let go.” The use of the present participle means that it is also a continuous holding fast without letting go. The imagery of holding fast to “his garments” is that of a soldier who is on duty. To keep one’s clothes on is to be ever ready for any attack. Anyone who is caught naked or with his pants down in an attack is not worth his salt as a soldier. He will die and his mates will die with him because of his un-preparedness. The Christian is here told in no uncertain terms that he would be considered blessed by God if he remains vigilant and hold fast to his faith and not let go no matter what he might be experiencing in this life. The world is coming to an end, literally. Always look up and not look around you like Peter who saw the wind and the waves in the storm rather than to focus his eyes on Christ. He sank into the sea when he did that.

God is in control. They may have the masses behind them but with God on the Christian’s side he has the majority. Who is the “he” used here in Rev. 16:16? Does it refer to the three demons? If it is then it should be “they” rather than “he”. I believe that it is a reference to God who has gathered the evil followers of Satan to Armageddon. The immediate instruments of deception were the three demons but the ultimate One who is in control is none other than God Himself. His sovereign control over all the affairs of mankind is clearly revealed throughout the entire Bible. If only the Christian would see it and believe it.

It will be a one sided battle. The outcome of the battle is never in doubt. Just as soon as it started, it will all be over within the blink of an eye. The Lord will come on His white horse and by His spoken Word all who are gathered at Armageddon will be destroyed instantly.

The Seventh Vial Judgement (16:17-21) – Revelation 16:17-21, “*And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done. And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.*”

The pouring out of the seventh vial is most unusual. This was poured into the air. This is followed by a great voice out of the temple of heaven and from the throne itself. The words are “it is done” not “it is finished.” “It is done” is also used in **Revelation 21:6**, “*And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.*” In Revelation 16:17 it refers to the climax of the final plague. In Revelation 21:6 it refers to the conclusion of all things **AFTER** the millennium including the Great White Throne Judgement.

Many great cities of the earth will be destroyed by this final plague. But two cities have been singled out for mention. It will be preceded by the voices, lightnings, thunders and a great earthquake. This will be the worst of all that had occurred before. It will be something that the world has never seen before. The great disasters of the world in the past would be considered a mere hiccup to what will happen at the end of days. The entire topography of the earth will be altered forever, the way it was altered **AFTER** the global flood in the days of Noah.

The first is Jerusalem. It will be divided into three parts. Jerusalem has become Sodom and Egypt, spiritually speaking. Therefore it must be cleansed i.e. destroyed before it can be rebuilt.

The second is known as Babylon. This city, which is the HQ of the antichrist, will receive “*the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath*”. It will be trampled upon like one would trample upon the grapes to make wine. The fierceness of God’s wrath would be concentrated on this wicked city which slaughtered myriads of God’s people during the Great Tribulation

Every island, including Singapore, and mountain would be destroyed. Perhaps the volcanic eruptions from mountains that were never known to erupt will erupt and spew into the air great hail stones. The size of these is about the weight of a talent i.e. about 81 pounds or 37 kg. These are like little bombs falling out of the sky!

But sinful men still refuse to repent. They prefer to blaspheme God. “Incredibly, tortured humanity defiantly remains hardened against God – a truth that should give pause to those who think that signs and wonders will convince people to believe the gospel. Those who reject the wonder, glory, and majesty of the Son of God, who spurn the gracious, free gift of salvation, will not be convinced by any sign (cf. Luke 16:13). It is too late for these hardened sinners; they have sold their souls to Satan; they are totally committed to the Antichrist’s blasphemous, idolatrous, anti-God system. Children of wrath they are, catapulting into hell.”

MacArthur has said it well.