

Session 8

JESUS AND JUDGMENT DAY

Revelation 15–16

Memory Verse

“Look, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who is alert and remains clothed, so that he may not go around naked and people see his shame.”

– REVELATION 16:15, CSB



Jesus and Judgment Day

THEOLOGICAL THEME: The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

CALL TO ACTION: God does not turn a blind eye to sin. What sin do you need to repent of and bring to Christ today?

Think back to the exodus event in the Old Testament.

Remember what God said at the burning bush? Exodus 3:7-8 says:

Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people in Egypt, and have heard them crying out because of their oppressors. I know about their sufferings, and I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and to bring them from that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the territory of the Canaanites, Hethites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites."

Our God, whose throne is founded on justice and righteousness (Psalm 89:14), saw what His people had suffered and intervened. He sent Moses and Aaron to lead the people out of slavery in the land of Egypt and into something better: the Promised Land.

God sent mighty plagues on the Egyptians to reveal His character and power and show that He alone is the one true God (Exodus 7:5).

In the exodus, the people were delivered in a way that could only come about by God's hand. They left Egypt and entered the wilderness, where God cared for them and taught them to be in relationship with Him through the law, before bringing them into the abundant land He had promised.

Just like God made His character known and displayed His ultimate power and authority in the events of the exodus, He will do similarly in the judgments we will read about today. These passages contain many parallels to Old Testament events.

 What plagues do you remember from Exodus?

 Why do you think judgment is necessary? Why must God respond to sin?

Session Summary

Our passages today will cover the bowl judgments. In the pouring of these seven bowls, the unbelieving, unrepentant world will be judged. As we read what can be difficult passages, we can remember that God is good, just, and right, and that does not change in moments of His judgment.

Judgment day is coming. Are we ready? Are we seeking to prepare others also?

1. Preparation (Revelation 15:1-8)

 What is the tone of the song recorded here, and what is significant about that?

 What is challenging or confusing about this scene? What additional questions do you have?

This passage describes the preparation for the bowl judgment we will read about next and opens with the third sign in the Apocalypse. The first two signs were in our reading last week (the woman in 12:1 and the dragon in 12:3). In this sign, God is going to make a statement, and when He is done, everyone will know that He is the Lord.

Note the recurrence of seven in these verses. There are seven angels, seven plagues, and seven golden bowls. The bowls represent our third set of sevens (we have already studied the seven seals and seven trumpets). Remember, seven is a sign of perfection, fullness, and completion in Scripture, and our passage indicates the coming judgment will complete God's wrath (15:1).

In Revelation 4, John described the heavenly throne room as having a "sea of glass" (v. 6), and the mention of fire may be a reference to the lake of fire in Revelation 19.¹ The audience host here

(“those who had won . . . ” 15:2) represents God’s people, saved by Jesus’s work on the cross, who have overcome through faithfulness to Christ. Their song recalls the song the Israelites, led by Moses and Miriam, sang after God delivered them from Egypt (Exodus 15). As the Israelites were safe on the other side of the Red Sea, these believers are safe, delivered from their sin and suffering, now in heaven.

From the heavenly temple emerge “the seven angels with the seven plagues” dressed like Old Testament priests (Revelation 15:6).² They are given the bowls of wrath, and there is imagery like that of God’s glory filling the tabernacle in Exodus (40:34).

The bowl judgments not only call to mind the plagues in Egypt but also the trumpet judgments we read about in Revelation 8 and 9. Is this describing an event in the future? Are these events currently unfolding? Is it some mix of the two? As with many questions about the book of Revelation, commentators aren’t agreed on this point, and we can’t know for certain.

Still, as we read through the devastating judgments of the bowls, let’s remember that God is good, just, and right in all things, and that includes His wrath (whenever and however it plays out). We are sinners, all deserving of judgment. Christians are only saved due to the atoning work of Christ on the cross. The suffering we will read about today, however, is destined for those who ultimately reject the offer of salvation. This is heartbreaking and hard, yet God is still good.



What challenges you about seeing God’s goodness in His judgment and wrath? Why is it important to wrestle with this question?

2. The Bowl Judgments, 1-3 (Revelation 16:1-7)



What do the responses of the angels in this passage indicate is the point of the bowls of wrath?



What similarities do you see between these events and the plagues of Egypt?

The bowl judgments begin with a loud voice coming from the temple (likely the voice of the Lord), instructing the judgment to begin (v. 1).³

Note those who are targeted here: “the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped its image” (v. 2). The mark of the beast may not be a literal mark but is possibly symbolic of how a person chooses to live. It is crucial to consider if we are marked by obedience to Christ or marked by sin and idolatry—a rejection of God, His gift of salvation, and right living. Those with the mark of the beast fall into the latter category.⁴

The first bowl results in “severely painful sores” that remind us of the sixth plague from Exodus 9:8-11.

The second bowl results in the sea turning to blood, killing the sea life, reminding us of the first plague in Exodus 7:14-21.

Like the third trumpet (Revelation 8:10-11), the third bowl affects fresh water sources (16:4). The third bowl results in rivers and fresh springs of water (so, drinkable water) turning to blood.

After the third bowl was poured, an angel proclaimed God’s character, echoing the song in Exodus 15. Our passage emphasizes that God is just for punishing the wicked (Psalm 89:14), and this proclamation is echoed by the altar (Revelation 16:7) holding the prayers of the saints (Revelation 8:3).⁵

? At the end of the age, God will be just in pouring out wrath on all who reject Him. How should this give us urgency for sharing the gospel with others now? How much do you feel that urgency?

3. The Bowl Judgments, 4-7 (Revelation 16:8-21)

? How did the people respond to the bowls of wrath in this passage?

? What similarities do you see between these events and the plagues of Egypt?

The fourth bowl was poured on the sun and resulted in the people being scorched with fire and by intense heat (vv. 8-9).

Note the heartbreaking response. The people didn't cry out for mercy, repent, or view God rightly and give Him glory. They continued to reject God. They blasphemed. The NIV renders this verse as "they cursed the name of God" (v. 9). God reveals His ultimate power, but still, like the beast before them (Revelation 13:5), they refused to repent.

The fifth bowl was poured out directly over "the throne of the beast" (Revelation 16:10). The worldwide authority that was issued in Revelation 13:7 is about to come to an end.⁶

The pouring of the fifth bowl resulted in a painful darkness, recalling the ninth plague from Exodus 10:21-23.

Scholars speculate that the gnawing of the tongues in the fifth bowl might be because the darkness causes extreme cold, might be from the sores in the first bowl, might be related to the burns from the fourth bowl, or some combination of these factors.⁷

The sixth bowl resulted in the drying up of the Euphrates. This river is also mentioned in Revelation 9:14 as the launching point of the vast demonic army of horsemen. Another army is assembling in this passage. A demonic trinity of evil spirits emerges from the mouths of the dragon, beast, and false prophet and entices the rulers of the world to wage war against God on judgment day.

And I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs leap from the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. They are demonic spirits who work miracles and go out to all the rulers of the world to gather them for battle against the Lord on that great judgment day of God the Almighty. —Revelation 16:13-14 (NLT)

For this mighty river to dry up would be extreme, and proof of divine judgment. This idea of drying up bodies of water was mentioned by the prophets as a sign of judgment (Isaiah 50:2; Hosea 13:15; Nahum 1:4).⁸ Here, this drying up paves a clear path for the assembled armies to come. The Euphrates marked the eastern boundary of the promised land. Babylon and Assyria both crossed the Euphrates during the time of the exile, and the dry riverbed makes a way for this evil army to pass, too.⁹

When the seventh bowl was poured, a loud voice proclaimed, "It is done!" (v. 17). God has completed His judgment. Revelation 16:15 echoes Jesus's sentiments both in Matthew 24 and in the letters to the churches in Revelation 3, serving as a reminder to always be spiritually alert.

The lightning, thunder, and earthquake (v. 18) recall both God's glory being revealed on Mount Sinai in Exodus 19:16 and previous events in Revelation (6:12). The "great city" in verse 19 is probably Babylon, representative of Rome.¹⁰

We see glimpses of the Egyptian plagues in bowls six and seven, and we end with the perishing of the sinful, unrepentant world. But this isn't the end of the story. The rebellious human civilization will end, and Jesus will soon usher in His perfect, eternal kingdom.



It is vital to remember that those who trust in Christ will not face God's wrath but will receive His salvation. How can you keep this truth before you every day?

Conclusion

God's judgment vindicates the oppressed and is just and right. All people are sinners deeply in need of a savior, and as these chapters so clearly illustrate, we are unable to save ourselves.

Unlike those in judgment in our reading today, believers enjoy God's mercy. Jesus bore the brunt of God's wrath for us on the cross. We don't get the death we deserve because Jesus died for us. Instead, we get eternal life with God!

If you haven't trusted Jesus yet, today is a great day to do it. God loved us so much that He sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sins (John 3:16) so the wrath we read about today could fall on Jesus and not us. We are saved through God's grace by placing our faith in Jesus, believing He is the Son of God who died for our sins and was resurrected (Romans 10:9). Scripture says that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13), and that includes you.

For those who are already believers, consider how God might be challenging you to share your faith with others. Judgment day is coming; are we sharing like that's true?

 How does today's passage impact your desire to share your faith with the people God has placed in your life?

 How does today's passage renew your gratitude for Jesus?

 Who do you need to tell about Jesus today? How will you move in that direction?

Memorize

"Look, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who is alert and remains clothed, so that he may not go around naked and people see his shame."

- Revelation 16:15, CSB

References

¹Christopher A. Beetham and Nancy L. Erickson, eds., *The NIV Application Commentary on the Bible*, One-Volume Edition, NIV Application Commentary (Zondervan Academic, 2024).

²A. Boyd Luter, "Revelation," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).

³Ibid.

⁴Mark J. Keown, *Discovering the New Testament: An Introduction to Its Background, Theology, and Themes: General Letters & Revelation*, vol. III (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022).

⁵Beetham and Erickson.

⁶Luter.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Beetham and Erickson.

⁹Luter.

¹⁰Beetham and Erickson.