

# IN RESPONSE - GOD'S PERFECT JUDGMENTS (Revelation 15:1-8)

by Dennis Prutow

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We continue to look at Revelation as a seven-fold view of the inter-advent period, the time between the first coming and the second coming of Christ. Different emphases are given to us as we progress through the sections. There is greater emphasis upon the end of this period as we approach the end of the book even as there is great emphasis on the first century at the beginning of the book. Note especially the letters to the seven churches.

Chapters 15 and 16 compose the fifth section of this great book of Revelation. In it we witness the seven last plagues in the seven bowls of wrath. Chapter 15 introduces the seven bowls of wrath. Chapter 16 displays them in all their fury.

And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished (Revelation 15:1).

Verse 1 is similar to Revelation 12:1, "And a great sign appeared in heaven." These two verses are the only ones in Revelation where the Spirit describes the *sign as great*. Revelation 12:1 obviously begins a new section of the book. The similarity of Revelation 15:1 argues it too begins a section of the book.

We again see the significance of the number seven. There are seven angels and seven plagues. These are the *last*. That is, in them, the wrath of God is perfected. No plague can be added to them.

These plagues also descend from heaven throughout the present age. Romans 1:18 tells us this.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, The wrath of God comes to perfection in different lives in various ways and at distinct times. This is the import of the number seven. Verse 2 continues.

And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God.

This is the sea of glass upon which we saw the throne of God (Revelation

4:6). The sea of nations is calm under God's acknowledged rule. The sea is also covered with the flames of affliction, trial and suffering. Compare 1 Peter 4:12.

There are individuals standing on the sea of glass in the midst of the flames of affliction. They stood against the beast, his image and the number of his name. They are victors. The beast is anti-Christian power manifest in government. The image of the beast is a complex of institutions built on ungodly principles. This image provides a mouth for the false prophet in schools, laboratories, museums, publishing companies, theaters, television networks, etc.

They overcame him [the dragon and his henchmen] because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death (Revelation 12:11).

One of the signs of their victory is that they are "holding harps of God." Because this is a picture, these are not literal harps. These harps symbolize the praise of God's people. Verse 3-4,

And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name for You alone are holy; for all the nations will come and worship before You, for Your righteous acts have been revealed."

Note the two-fold nature of the song sung by these saints. It is one song. It is a song of redemption. It is the same redemption viewed in prospect in the Old Testament and in fulfillment in the New Testament. There is one salvation and one salvation song. The song of Moses and the song of Jesus do not differ!

God is the Righteous One. He is King. His ways are true. His story as revealed by Christ is most righteous and holy. All peoples will one day acknowledge this either willingly in heaven or by constraint in hell (Philippians 2:9-11).

We now realize we have an extraordinary view of the sacred precincts of heaven open before us. Verses 5-6.

After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened, and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean and bright, and girded around their chests with golden sashes.

The seven angels were within the temple of God before His throne. Now we see a recessional. The angels come out from the central dwelling place of God. The testimony of God's grace and the testimony of God's judgments come from this temple. The angels bear the image of Christ (Revelation 1:13). They represent Him in His judgments. Verse 7.

Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever.

One of the living creatures closest to the throne distributes golden bowls of wrath. This wrath comes from God. Oddly, from a human perspective, the golden bowls show wrath is a valuable commodity. Can it be so? It is certainly of high value from God's perspective.

We see this as verse 8 continues the description and shows us again grace and judgment always accompany each other.

And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

The heavenly temple, into which we have been privileged to peer is now shrouded with smoke. We cannot see into it. The text says no one is able to enter it either. The plagues of God, His wrath poured out, must be completed. There is a perfect end for which this wrath is designed.

In Jesus Christ we see sin punished by wrath poured out *upon Him*. This is grace. Those who heed the warning trumpets of God turn to Christ. Wrath due to *them* falls *upon Him*. The temple is opened for us only when wrath against our sin is finished. For others, wrath for sin in hell is never finished.

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## IN RESPONSE - POUR OUT THE SEVEN BOWLS (Revelation 16:1-12)

by Dennis Prutow

We now turn directly to the seven bowls of wrath. These bowls of wrath are contemporaneous to the seven trumpets. How so? Those who refuse to heed the perfect warnings of God to repent (Revelation 9:20-21) experience the wrath of God perfectly brought to bear upon them as individuals and nations.

The bowls of wrath are more severe judgments descending upon the earth than we have seen in earlier cases. There are two reasons for this. Inevitably, the judgments of God become more severe and more pervasive as hearts harden and men and women refuse to repent. Witness the plagues against Egypt and Pharaoh's hardness. Revelation 16:1.

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

After the angels are prepared, God commands the pouring out of wrath. Is God the God of love. Yes He is. We must remember, the good God has a good reason for wrath. God is the God of justice. Perfect justice is being and will be meted out by Him. Wrath comes as a part of God's plans and purposes. Verse 2.

So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshipped his image.

Notice the similarity between the trumpets and the bowls of wrath. The first trumpet sounds a warning against the earth (Revelation 8:7). The first angel pours the first bowl of wrath on the earth. There is also dissimilarity. In this case, there is no restraint upon God's judgments. In the former case a third of the fruit of the earth was destroyed (8:7). Under the fourth seal, one fourth of the earth felt the brunt of God's discipline (6:8). When men and women do not have ears to hear God working in providence to call them back to Himself, He speaks progressively louder.

The earth symbolizes the world opposed to God. It is the kingdom of the devil. Men and women within it have the mark of the beast, they bear the fruit of the unholy spirit, the deeds of the flesh. These people have a deadly cancer of the soul which will never be healed.

The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died (verse 3).

Again, compare the second trumpet's warning against the sea (8:8-9). In Revelation, the sea is an image of the tumult of the nations without Christ. When the warning trumpet goes unheeded, peoples, tribes, tongues and nations are doomed. One third of the fruits of the sea are destroyed in the warning (8:8-9). Now, "every living thing in the sea died."

Verse 4 continues, "Then the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood." Once again compare the third trumpet where a third of the rivers and of the springs of waters became bitter (8:10-11). We recall the rivers and wells of Egypt were also turned to blood (Exodus 7:19-20). Water is absolutely essential to life. The water of the Spirit is absolutely essential to eternal life. Without it there is eternal death. Verse 5-6.

And I heard the angel of the waters saying, "Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things; for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it."

We have previously seen the angel having power over fire (8:5, 14:8). There were also the angels holding back the four winds (7:1). Now we see the angel of the waters. This angel sings a song of God's justice. The reprobate receive God's justice because they deserve it. This is always the case in God's economy. Mercy on the other hand is undeserved. Mercy on the basis of merit is not mercy (Romans 11:6). There are, much to our wondering eyes, vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy (Romans 9:22-23). Mercy is therefore properly understood against this backdrop of deserved wrath.

Verse 7, "And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments." The saints under the altar, fifth seal (6:9-11), rejoice at the judgments of God. We will see this joy over judgment in graphic relief after the description of Babylon's fall (19:1-6). The righteous avenging of evil is a vital part of God's divine plan. First

century saints needed to know this as well as twentieth century Christians.

The fourth angel now empties his golden bowl of wrath.

The fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch men with fire. Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory (verses 8-9).

Under the fourth trumpet, a third of the sun, moon and stars were darkened. Light from heaven was withdrawn. Common grace was diminished. As this occurs, violence increases.

We see the complement under the fourth bowl of wrath. God brings the heat of the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2) to bear upon unrepentant sinners. The result is burning consciences. There is vile enmity because of revealed sin. Further hardness follows the blaspheme. So it is among unregenerate haters of God. They love darkness rather than light. Their judgment involves light piercing their evil consciences and causing sharp pain.

Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain, and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds (verses 10-11).

The fifth trumpet involved locust from the abyss tormenting those of the earth. This was a warning. The torments were restricted and the warnings unperfected. There is no escape. There is no repentance. Those not loving light are given eternal darkness. Because they willingly wallowed in the deeds of the flesh in this life, they are given what they desire in the life to come, more of the same. Their consciences then burn forever. Their loathing of God and His people increase exponentially and eternally. This is perfect frightful judgment.

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## IN RESPONSE - ARMAGEDDON (Revelation 16:13-16)

by Dennis Prutow

The similarity between the first five bowls of wrath and the first five trumpets continues. The sixth bowl of wrath and the sixth trumpet refer to the Euphrates.

Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind (Revelation 9:13-15).

The Euphrates, the eastern extremity and boarder of the ancient kingdom of Israel, represents the boundary between the church and the world. When that border is moved or breached, the world floods the church.

The sixth angel of wrath reveals a similar picture. Verse 12.

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east.

Paganism is thus poised to flood the kingdom. When pagan, ungodly and anti-Christian ways push into the kingdom, war is inevitable. In the Old Testament the combat was often physical conflict. In the New Testament the accent is on spiritual battle. The opening of boarders, the lowering of defenses, the removal of the clear distinction between the world and the church inevitably leads to Armageddon. Verses 13-14.

And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.

We again meet the false trinity introduced in chapters 12 and 13. We reviewed the interpretation of the beast and false prophet in the lesson on chapter 15. The signs are seemingly miraculous outworkings of worldly wisdom in education, science and entertainment. The pseudo-trinity spews deception. The frogs are

deceiving spirits. Second Kings 22 gives an example of how evil spiritual forces may draw people into war.

The Lord said, "Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?" And one said this while another said that. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord and said, "I will entice him." The Lord said to him, "How?" And he said, "I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." Then He said, "You are to entice him and also prevail. Go and do so." (1 Kings 22:20-22).

Revelation 16:15 is the third of the seven beatitudes in Revelation. It is a call to be on guard, to seek the righteousness of God, to remain unspotted from the world *while under the fire of persecution*. The forces of the world are arrayed against God and His anointed (Psalm 2:2). Verse 15 is parenthetical.

("Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.")

Where do the princes and kings of the earth assemble with their armies? Verse 16 tells us. "And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon." The name means literally Mount of Megiddo. Megiddo is actually located on a broad plain. It was a place of significant and decisive battles in the Old Testament. These Old Testament conflicts and Armageddons are symbolic of cataclysmic spiritual battles in which we may all be involved. Judges 4 relates one of these battles.

Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, after Ehud died. And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan.... Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time.... Now she sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam.... So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. The Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak.

Where was this victory won? The song of Judges 5:19 tells us. "The kings

came and fought; then fought the kings of Canaan at Taanach near the waters of Megiddo." This victory at Megiddo was a decisive battle, an Armageddon.

A great renewal of Mosaic worship occurred under King Josiah.

Before him there was no king like him who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him (2 Kings 23:25).

Yet the sins of Israel were piled to heaven. "However, the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath with which His anger burned against Judah" (2 Kings 23:26). And so we read,

In his days Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up to the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates. And King Josiah went to meet him, and when Pharaoh Neco saw him he killed him at Megiddo. His servants drove his body in a chariot from Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem and buried him in his own tomb.

The judgment of God consumed king Josiah. The captivity of God's people ensued. This was a climactic battle at Megiddo turning the course of history for God's people. It was an Armageddon.

Armageddons are decisive climactic battles changing the course of personal, national or cultural history. These Armageddons are decisive climactic *spiritual* battles fought by saints and churches in our day.

Armageddon is symbolic of decisive climactic battles in which God destroys hypocrisy and Christ rides to victory in our lives. To reveal His grace, mercy power, holiness, righteousness and justice, God's purposes involve the revelation of evil, the sovereign salvation of sinners and the judgment of evil doers. Conflict and struggle may be and must be expected. Armageddons must come. In them saints are perfected. In them the reprobate are punished. In the midst of them we must stay our course remembering the beatitude, "Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes." 'In Response' is published by the Sterling Pulpit, Post Office Box 303, Sterling, KS 67579-0303. Copyright © 1996 by Dennis Prutow.

## IN RESPONSE - IT IS DONE (Revelation 16:17-21)

by Dennis Prutow

The seventh bowl of wrath brings us once again to the final judgment. We just had a brief interlude, Armageddon. Between the sixth and seventh seals there was also an interlude, the numbering of the 144,000, the church militant, and a vision of the church triumphant (chapter 7). Similarly, between the sixth and seventh trumpets we saw the victory of the gospel through the church militant.

The end comes under the sixth seal with these words, "And God shall wipe every tear from their eyes" (7:17). Compare Revelation 21:4. The seventh seal reveals the seven trumpets. Under the seventh trumpet, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever" (11:15). "And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened" (11:19). Again we are at the end of time. Revelation 16:17.

Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, "It is done."

The judgments of the Lord are perfect. They cover earth, sea and air. There is no escape. This symbolism ought not to escape us. With the pouring out of the seventh golden bowl, God's wrath is complete. "It is done."

That wrath is perfected implies eternal torment and agony continues. Wrath is complete and perfected even as salvation was fully affected by Christ. The effects linger for eternity. Our Lord Jesus uttered similar words on the cross. "Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit" (John 19:30). The work of redemption was complete. Christ lived the perfect life required by the Law on behalf of the elect. "So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the Lord" (Leviticus 18:5). Christ also died to pay for the sins of His people (Deuteronomy 21:23, Galatians 3:13). Christ's works of obedience were completed on the cross. "It is finished." Bliss ensues for the elect because Christ concluded His work. Eternal agony results because of God's judgments. Psalm 19:9 says of this wrath, "The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous

altogether." God makes no mistakes. He makes no errors in judgment. Pun intended. So the seventh angel exclaims, "It is done." The following verses describe this final cataclysmic judgment. Verse 18.

And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty.

We recall the flashes of lightning and peals of thunder in the throne room scene of chapter 4. "Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder" (Revelation 4:5). This was a foretaste of God's judgments. The four living creatures around the throne of God also speak with voices of thunder as they call forth the four horsemen of the apocalypse. The thunder sounds again in response to the prayers of God's people for the vengeance of God.

Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake (Revelation 8:5).

The earthquake is also a dramatic symbol of God's judgment and shaking of the created order. There is an earthquake under the sixth seal (6:12). There is an earthquake, as just seen, in response to the prayers of God's people for judgment. There is an earthquake when the temple in heaven is opened (11:19). Remember, "No one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished" (15:8). This is all symbolic of Christ's shaking this creation. In Haggai 2:21-22 God promised,

I am going to shake the heavens and the earth. I will overthrow the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the power of the kingdoms of the nations. Christ fulfilled this prophecy in part at His first coming. He will complete the fulfillment at His second coming. Here is the divine interpretation of Haggai.

And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven." This expression "Yet once more," denotes

the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:26-29).

The earthly gives way to the eternal, through Christ. "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever" (11:15). Verse 19.

The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.

The great city is Jerusalem "which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified" (11:8). It is the apostate visible church. Judgment begins here (1 Peter 4:17). Babylon is the capital of evil encapsulating the work of the dragon, beast and false prophet. Babylon is doomed (14:8).

Verses 21, "And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found." The way is prepared for the coming of Christ (Isaiah 40:4, Luke 3:5). He brings ultimate judgment and ultimate mercy. Verse 22.

And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.

God judged Egypt and Israel with hail (Exodus 9:18-26, Haggai 2:17). Here hail is *symbolic* of judgment. Hundred pound hailstones indicate the massive character of the wrath pour out. It is inescapable. May we heed the voice of God in providence when we see lightning, hear thunder, witness devastating hail. May we remember eternity looms large. May we therefore repent and align ourselves with the Lamb who was slain and yet lives.

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