

REVELATION

Chapter 16

The Seven Bowls of God's Wrath

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth."² The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.³ The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.⁴ The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.⁵ Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged;⁶ for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve."⁷ And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments."⁸ The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire.⁹ They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.¹⁰ The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony¹¹ and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.¹² The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East.¹³ Then I saw three evil^a spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet.¹⁴ They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.¹⁵ "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed."¹⁶ Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.¹⁷ The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!"¹⁸ Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake.¹⁹ The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath.²⁰ Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found.²¹ From the sky huge

hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

16:1–21† The seven bowls. This vision also is a symbolic representation of another aspect of the entire NT era. It symbolizes the pouring out of God's judgment on an impenitent world. There is a close parallelism between this vision and that of the seven trumpets. Both visions, therefore, no doubt refer to the same problem—false teachings of religions, corrupted philosophy and heathenism—that lead people astray. Prophetic messages repeated in two visions and pointing to the same event are not unusual—e.g., two dreams of Joseph (Ge 37:5–10), two dreams of Pharaoh (Ge 41:1–32), Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Da 2:1–45) followed by Daniel's vision (Da 7:1–28). (CSB)

16:1 A LOUD VOICE – The speaker of the voice in 16:1 is unidentified (Cf. Rev. 9:13; 11:12; 12:10; 14:13). Since the voice comes from the temple, it is probably the voice of God himself, for no one else can enter the temple until the plagues are completed (15:8). In Is 66:5–6 Yahweh's word is a roar or crash from the temple which recompenses his enemies. Here in Rev 16:1 the "great voice" of God commands the seven angels to begin their task of pouring out their censers, which are full of God's wrath. (CC)

GOD'S WRATH ON THE EARTH – The seven plagues that the angels are to pour out on the earth have similarities to some of the ten plagues of Egypt (Ex 7:14–11:9) and to the calamities upon the earth that the trumpet-angels introduced (Rev 8:6–9:21; 11:15–19). In all three cases the plagues and calamities come from God with the purpose of moving hardened hearts to repentance. (CC)

The severity of God's judgments will increase as the end of this world at Christ's return draws nearer. In fact, *this is the overall emphasis in this third vision of earthly events. While some of the events presented in this third vision repeat those in the second, in the third vision they are all intensified in order to portray God's final warning of the seriousness of his judgment at the End.* For example, in 8:8–9, one third of the sea is contaminated and one third of ocean life perishes, but in the corresponding plague in 16:3, *all* seawater becomes blood and *all* sea creatures perish. Thus the plagues of God's wrath in the third vision urge the human race to repent before it is too late since *no one* will escape the final judgment. (CC)

In 8:1–5, when the trumpet-angels were preparing to introduce the calamities about to strike the earth, smoke from the incense altar and the prayers of the saints were involved in the preparation. Here, in the preparation of the censer-angels, the majesty of God and his heavenly temple are involved. The trumpet-angels acted on behalf of God at the prayerful behest of his saints. The censer-angels act on behalf of God at his direct command and on his own initiative, and not primarily in response to prayer. (CC)

16:2 Christians are spared from this first plague, since it only falls upon those bearing the mark of the beast (cf 13:16–17). (TLSB)

land. Compare the first four bowls (vv. 2–9) with the first four trumpets (8:7–12). (CSB)

ugly and painful sores.† Cf. the boils and abscesses of the sixth Egyptian plague (Ex 9:9–11; see also Job 2:7–8, 13). These may very well be spiritual disease. (CSB)

Yet another allusion to the exodus (see notes, 8:7–12; 15:2–5), since this is similar to the sixth plague suffered by the Egyptians, which involved boils. (TLSB)

The plague of the first censer-angel strikes all those who, in opposition to God and his saints, worship the beast and its image (13:14) and who bear its mark or brand of recognition. The plague is described as a “grievous and painful sore” (16:2). This is reminiscent of the plague of boils or blisters that struck Egypt (Ex 9:8–12). The boils were so grievous that the magicians of Egypt could not stand before Moses. While the plague of boils in ancient Egypt was for a short period of time, the plague of the sore or boil from this first censer-angel will strike the human race all through the time period covered by the prophetic message of Revelation, from Christ’s ascension up to the End at his return. This painful sore could manifest itself as festering ulcers or abscesses that will cause unending pain, be repulsive to the sight, and have a necrotic (dying) stench. So terrible can these boils become that people will be covered over large parts of their bodies and as a result will be moved to curse God and each other. It is not that all people at any given time will be plagued by them, not that an individual will suffer from throughout all of life, but they will be a constant menace and many will suffer from them. In general, the plagues will grow worse as the time of Christ’s return draws near, even as the ten plagues on the Egyptians grew worse before the exodus. (CC)

mark of the beast.† See 13:16 and note. If these were physical plagues, they would afflict also the true believers. (CSB)

16:3-4 SEA...BLOOD – The plagues poured out of the second and third bowls evoke memories of the first plague to strike Egypt (cf Ex 7:14–25), since in these cases aquatic creatures die and water is turned to blood. (TLSB)

16:3 ON THE SEA – The plague of the second censer-angel strikes the seas and the bodies of water so that they become “blood as from a corpse” (Rev 16:3). The flow of blood (not yet coagulated) is such that only a very recent corpse could produce it, a person who has just died. While the human race itself is not directly struck, this “blood as from a corpse” is a horrifying plague that strikes the seas. Whatever form this plague takes at any given time, it will affect all life in the

seas. The first plague upon ancient Egypt turned the waters of the Nile into blood (Ex 7:19–21). As a result the fish died, and water turned into blood was everywhere. The stench of the Nile was so bad that the people could not drink the waters. In Rev 8:8–9 when the second trumpet-angel sounded his horn the seas were struck so that a third of them became blood and caused a third of the fish and of the creatures in the seas to die. As in 8:8–9, the specific earthly forms of this plague here in 16:3 can be left to the imagination. Whatever is involved, it certainly suggests that increasingly the seas, the bodies of salt water, will be made unfit for people or beasts, and that some of the basic requirements for sustaining human life will be severely hindered. For example, the food chain that supplies human food and the cycle by which ocean water evaporates and then provides rain to water the earth could fail. All life in the seas will die in this plague (in contrast to just one third of the sea's living things in 8:8–9), indicating that as the time of judgment at the End draws nearer, more and more of the seas of the earth will be so plagued. (CC)

16:4 *rivers and springs of water*. Cf. 8:10–11; see also Ps 78:44. (CSB)

When the third censer-angel empties his censer, the rivers and bodies of fresh water are struck by a plague so that they also become blood (16:4). In 8:10–11, when the third trumpet-angel blew his horn, the fresh water supplies of the rivers and the springs were hit so that they became bitter and poisonous and thus unfit to drink. As a result many people died from drinking such polluted water. But only one third of the rivers and springs were embittered. Here in 16:4 *all* the fresh water supplies are plagued. It is difficult to imagine how all the rivers and springs would be so polluted, for that would seem to imply that no drinking water would be safe for human consumption. Life would thus become impossible. Probably what is suggested is that at any given time during the period from Christ's ascension up to the End, the waters will be so affected that increasingly they will become dangerous for people to drink. And at various places on earth the waters will become so dangerous that no life can survive there. As in the case of the seas (16:3), the closer the end of this world draws near, the more the supplies of fresh water will become so unhealthy that many people will die. Whole regions of the earth may become uninhabitable. (CC)

16:5 ANGEL IN CHARGE OF THE WATERS – Between the plagues of the third and fourth censer-angels John hears “the angel of the waters” (16:5) proclaiming a response to these acts of God's fury. In 7:1 angels of the four winds appeared, and 14:18 spoke of an angel with authority over the fire on the incense altar in heaven. Within Judaism angels under God's authority were understood to be in charge of the elements of creation. They controlled the elements, dispensing them or restraining them, all at God's direction for the punishment or the care of humanity, especially for the sake of God's own people. Here in 16:5 John sees another such angel, an angel of the waters that have just been plagued. Whether or not this angel was in charge of these waters in the

sense of Jewish tradition, he evidently has some responsibility for oversight and care of the waters. (CC)

As the waters over which he is the ministering angel are plagued, he cries out in response to these acts of God's judgment. It is an acclamation, a cry of worship in which the angel acknowledges the justness of God in dispensing and pouring out on the earth his anger. The angel's words of worship can be understood as an "antiphon" to the canticle of worship of God in 15:3–4, "the song of Moses ... and the hymn of the Lamb." In that song the saints of God were victoriously singing even as they were suffering earthly defeat and death, because at the same time they were emerging victorious over the beast (15:2). The saints acknowledged that God was righteous and just in declaring his punishing judgments on their enemies—the acts of judgment about to be introduced by the seven censer-angels. Now, as these acts or plagues of God's fury are poured out, the angel of the waters cries out a similar word acknowledging the righteousness of God's judgments. (CC)

you who are and who were. See note on 11:17; cf. Ex 3:14. (CSB)

The angel confesses that God, "the One Who Is and Who Was, the Holy One," is "righteous" (δικαίος) in so judging the human race. This holy name of God, "the One Who Is and Who Was," is an explanatory form of the name of Yahweh. This is the fifth time that a form of this holy name has appeared in Revelation (1:4, 8; 4:8; 11:17; 16:5). Three times it is given in a fuller form: "the One Who Is and Who Was and Who Is Coming" (1:4, 8) or "the One Who Was and Who Is and Who Is Coming" (4:8). In 11:17 and here in 16:5 it is given as "the One Who Is and Who Was." The "Who Is Coming" part of the holy name is probably absent in 11:17 because Yahweh, the Lord God, is no longer the Coming One, since in 11:15–19 the seventh trumpet-angel introduces the seventh and last scene of the second earthly vision, which is the scene of the end of this world. Here in 16:5 "Who Is Coming" is also absent. Though John will see a scene of the End in 16:17–21, the element in the holy name that looks toward the future is absent probably because the angel of the waters recognizes that these plagues of the seven censer-angels are the *last* plagues, which give God's third and *final* set of warnings—warnings that illustrate and inaugurate the final judgment at the End. (CC)

16:6 *given them blood to drink.* Punishment is tailored to fit the crime (see Isa 49:26). (CSB)

Yahweh, "the Holy One," is just and "righteous" in judging the earth by these plagues (16:5). In the canticle of 15:3–4 it is because God, who is the Holy One, is also true in all his ways and works as the Redeemer that he has the right to so judge the human race. Here in the antiphon of 16:5–6 "the Holy One" is just in his acts of anger because he is judging the enemies who had shed the blood of his "saints and prophets" (16:6). The judgment takes the form of exacting vengeance

by shedding the blood of those enemies. In Is 49:26 the prophet says that God will make the enemies of his people eat their own flesh and drink their own blood when he punishes them. So here in Rev 16:6: in the same way and measure that they persecuted the “saints and prophets,” so also in that same way and measure the persecutors will be judged and punished (cf. Mt 7:2). This is their righteous punishment as judged in the scales of God’s justice. (CC)

WHAT THEY DESERVE – A grisly example of the punishment fitting the crime. For shedding the innocent blood of the righteous, the wicked are forced to drink the blood of the plague-infected rivers and springs. (TLSB)

16:7 *altar*. Personified. (CSB)

Personified altar speaks on behalf of the martyrs. (TLSB)

YES – The amen is a resounding yes to Yahweh, the Lord God Almighty. It confirms his acts of anger because God is true and righteous in his judgments as they are revealed (15:3–4). These acts of judgment will be even more visibly displayed in the following four plagues. CC)

16:8 *sun ... scorched*. Previously, the sun was darkened (cf 8:12). Here, its strength is intensified. (TLSB)

fire. Often connected with judgment in Scripture (see Dt 28:22; 1Co 3:13; 2Pe 3:7). (CSB)

In the second vision of events on earth (8:6–11:19) in the scene introduced by the fourth trumpet-angel, a third of the sun was struck (ἐπλήγη, from πλήσσω, 8:12). Also a third of the moon and a third of the stars were smitten. As a result, a third of the sun, moon, and stars was darkened, and thus a third of the day and night did not have light (8:12). Here in the fourth scene of the third sevenfold vision of events on earth, when the angel pours out his censer upon the sun, it burns people with an extreme heat. This extreme heat caused by the brightness and burning rays of the sun is just the opposite from the plague of partial darkness (an eclipse?) of the sun and the other heavenly bodies in 8:12. In both cases part of the created order is disrupted so that humankind is endangered. (CC)

Under God’s sovereignty and authority over all creation, the sun is now given such power and authority with its own inherent ability to scorch human beings and inflict extreme burning pain (cf. 7:2). One can only imagine how this might take place, in the natural phenomena in the heavens above the earth. (CC)

The 1930s were a period of extreme heat and drought in the United States. (The south central U.S. was hit with such severe dust storms during this time that it was often called the Dust Bowl.) Toward the end of

the twentieth century A.D., worldwide attention has been given to the depletion of the ozone layer in the upper atmosphere. This depletion allows more of the ultraviolet radiation from the sun to reach the earth's surface. Such radiation may cause serious abnormalities and even death for humans as well as animals. (CC)

In various periods mankind has suffered from excessive heat from the sun. But in this scene of the fourth censer-angel, it appears that this excessive heat from the sun will not kill humanity but only increase to the point that at various times many people will cry out in their suffering without any apparent relief. (CC)

16:9 *refused to repent.* In 11:13 the nations were dazzled into homage by the great earthquake. Here they curse the name of God. (CSB)

Another example of recalcitrant people refusing to repent, even when severely afflicted (cf 9:20). This repeatedly happened during the exodus as well. (TLSB)

When humanity suffers in this way under God's judgment, people blaspheme the name of God and do not repent of their sins by giving him glory (16:9). Regardless of whether they attribute this judgment to the true God, or to some supposed supernatural power, in their idolatrous state of unbelief they vent their anger and express their hatred toward God. This idolatry would include ascribing their suffering to fate or random chance or a false god or religion. Whether or not they recognize the hand of God in this judgment against their sins and unbelief, they do not have the wisdom to understand that God is doing it for their own eternal well-being. Instead they blaspheme God and his name—that name by which alone mankind can be saved (Acts 4:12; cf. Phil 2:10–11). (CC)

These are general statements about *humanity as a whole*; they do not preclude the possibility that *some* may repent and believe in the true God. These general statements also are primarily about unbelievers—those with the mark of the beast (16:2). Christians too might suffer along with the rest of humanity but would be penitent. However, most people will mock God (cf. Rom 2:24) and refuse to acknowledge their sin and shame and turn in repentance to God for mercy. Their unrepenting hearts only grow worse in their sin and idolatry and in their refusal to acknowledge and worship the true God (cf. Rom 1:18–32). This they do in spite of all that God does to turn them from their rebellion and so rescue them from their eternal shame and ruin. As Caird says, “They have wholly taken on the character of the false god they serve,” that is, the beast and its image (Rev 16:2). Revelation mentions repeatedly this hardness of heart in refusing to repent (Rev. 9:20, 21; 16:9, 11; cf. Ex. 7:22-23; 8:15, 32; 9:12, 34-35; 10:20, 27-28; 11:10). (CC)

16:10 *throne of the beast.*† A change of emphasis. It is no doubt the beast out of the sea (13:1–10), which is a symbol of civil government in its antichristian

aspect. “Throne” occurs 42 times in Revelation. The other 40 references are to the throne of God. (CSB)

When the fifth angel pours out his censer, the kingdom of the beast becomes “darkened” (ἔσκοτωμένη, 16:10). Since the worshipers of the beast and its image (see 13:12–15) refuse to repent, even though struck by these various plagues, God now strikes the object of their worship and allegiance. Even though it is not stated here how or in what form this judgment of the beast and its kingdom takes place, in Revelation 18 John gives a graphic picture of this judgment when he describes the fall of Babylon and the destruction of the harlot. However, in Revelation 18 the picture is more about the *final* judgment and destruction of this enemy of God’s people which the world worships. That final judgment will be at the End, when Christ returns in glory. Here in 16:10 John sees the beast and its kingdom being struck by God, however and in whatever ways he does it, *throughout the whole time period covered by the prophetic message of Revelation* (the time between Christ’s first and second advents). They are struck by God’s actions of judgment in order to warn *the people* to cease their worship of the beast and to come instead to the only true God and Savior of the human race (cf. 18:4–5). (CC)

plunged into darkness. This fifth bowl produces plagues similar to the ones described in Ex 10:21–29 and Rv 8:12. *They did not repent of their deeds.* Cf v 9; 9:20–21. (TLSB)

gnawed their tongues. Cf. the scene in 6:15–17. (CSB)

As the adherents of the beast see the judgments of God strike the beast’s throne, they also suffer, in turn, because they are members of the beast’s kingdom. Their suffering is such that they bite their tongues (16:10). (CC)

16:11 *God of heaven.* Used in Da 2:44 of the sovereign God, who destroys the kingdoms of the world and establishes his universal and eternal reign. (CSB)

The worshipers of the beast and its image do not listen nor take heed. Instead, they only grow more vehement in their anger and hatred toward God. The more they suffer from the consequence of their sins and their worship of the beast, the more they blaspheme “the God of heaven” (16:11). And even though they see the kingdom of the beast crumbling around them, and even though they at least should have recognized the futility of their allegiance, they still refuse to repent (cf. 18:9–10). (CC)

16:12 **SIXTH ANGEL Poured out his bowl** – The sixth censer-angel introduces a scene that is parallel to the scene introduced by the sixth trumpet-angel: the last battle between the forces of evil and the church. The devil’s war against the church continues throughout the entire NT era (as portrayed in 12:13–17), but it culminates in one last and greatest battle before the End at

Christ's return. In 9:13–21 John received his first visionary view of this last battle. There, when the sixth angel sounded his trumpet, he saw a terrifying host gathered and poised at the River Euphrates. This host was about to be unleashed on the human race, and when let loose, it would kill a third of the human population. That vision revealed that this evil force was positioned to be let loose at a definite and certain time, “this hour and day and month and year” (9:15), just before the End (see 10:5–7; 11:15–19). This evil host is described in such nightmarish terms that it is clearly of demonic origin. Here in 16:12–16 John receives a second view of the last battle, but in greater detail as the imagery is developed further. For it is designated as “that war of the great day of God, the Almighty” (16:14), and the place of battle is designated as “Armageddon” (16:16). A third and final time John will see a scene of this last battle when, in connection with the final defeat of the devil, he sees the forces of Gog and Magog destroyed (20:7–10). (CC)

Euphrates. See note on 9:14. (CSB)

When the sixth angel pours out his censer, it is upon “the great river Euphrates” (16:12). It is the same Euphrates River as in 9:14, where John previously saw an evil host gathered and about to be unleashed. The fact that God here (16:12), through the sixth censer-angel, strikes the Euphrates suggests that he will use the occasion of this last battle to judge and destroy the enemies of his saints on earth (cf. 20:8–9). This will be their final and utter defeat on earth, followed by their eternal punishment in hell (20:10). (CC)

kings from the East.† To be distinguished from the “kings of the whole world” (v. 14), who wage war against Christ and the armies of heaven (19:11–21). (CSB)

Some of the most formidable enemies of God's people during the OT times came from the east: (1) The Assyrians destroyed and exiled the 10 northern tribes in 722 BC (2Ki 17:24–41). (2) The Babylonians overthrew Jerusalem and took captive its citizens in 587 BC (2Ki 25:1–26). (3) The Medo-Persians ruled over Judah from 539 to 333 BC. (4) The Seleucids conquered and controlled Judea from 198 to 164 BC. In John's day, there was a widely held fear that Nero would arise from the dead, come from the east, and again wreak havoc on the empire. (TLSB)

The great river is dried up in order to prepare the way for the evil host from the east to invade and surround the people of God (cf. 20:9). This drying up of the Euphrates is somewhat reminiscent of the dividing and drying up of the Red Sea, which furnished the escape route for Moses and the Israelites and also prepared the way for Pharaoh and his army to pour forth in pursuit of God's people, though they were destroyed in their effort (Ex 14:21–31). It is also reminiscent of the miniature reenactment of the exodus miracle when God split the waters of the Jordan River so that Israel could cross into the Promised Land (Josh 3:9–17).

Moreover, Rev 16:12 fulfills the prophecy of Is 11:15. Envisioning the future day of deliverance in terms of the past, God promised a greater exodus when he would dry up “the tongue of the sea of Egypt and wave his hand over the river” so that his people could cross over in sandals, just as he did “for Israel on the day he [Israel] came up from the land of Egypt” (Is 11:15–16). As recognized by most translations and commentaries, “the river” (Is 11:15) is a reference to the Euphrates. God will do all this for his people as a result of the righteous “Branch” coming from the “stump of Jesse” (Is 11:1–14; cf. Is 51:9–10; Zech 10:10–11). (CC)

On this prepared highway the kings would come from the east. The enemies of ancient Israel often came from the east, from Mesopotamia, the region between the Tigris and the Euphrates. At the time of John’s own ministry the Parthians in the east were a constant threat and danger to the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire. A rumor at the time said that Nero had not died but had escaped to Parthia, from where he would lead a Parthian army to retake his imperial throne. Andreas (sixth century) in his Greek commentary on Rev 20:7–10 suggested that the invasion of Gog and Magog is reminiscent of the Scythian invasion. Possibly John himself might have remembered how Cyrus captured Babylon by marching across a drained river bed of the Euphrates. Primasius (sixth century) in his Latin commentary compared the coming of the “kings from the east” with the prophetic promise that the Christ would come from the east. He referred to Zech 6:12, which in the Vulgate says that a man whose name is “Rising Sun” will secretly arise. Perhaps Primasius also had in mind Is 11:1–16, a prophetic message about the Davidic Messiah, the “Branch” and “Root of Jesse” (Is 11:1–2, 10–11), in which, as discussed above, Yahweh promises a new exodus deliverance; he will dry up the gulf of the Egyptian sea and “the river,” the Euphrates (Is 11:15). (CC)

FROM THE RISING OF THE SUN – CONCORDIA COMMENTARY TRANSLATION – In Rev 16:12 John uses the phrase “from the rising of the sun” symbolically. Geographically the east, in particular the region of the Euphrates, was the direction from which Babylon, the great enemy, which in Revelation represents all the enemies of God’s people, came to destroy Judah and take her into the captivity of the Babylonian exile. John now recalls this historic circumstance and uses the east (“the rising of the sun”) and the Euphrates (16:12) as symbols. He suggests to the minds of his hearers that another and greater enemy will hurl itself at the church of Christ in one last battle in the attempt to destroy her. The origin of this evil host will not be a *geographic* location but rather a *spiritual locus*. (CC)

Because the physical sun makes earthly life possible and “the rising of the sun” means the dawn of a new day, the sun can readily be used as a metaphor of God and his blessings. It is for this reason that the One whom God promised to send “with healing in his wings” is called “the Sun of righteousness” (Mal 4:2 [MT 3:20]). In a deceptive sense the enemies of God’s people will also come from “the rising of the sun,” not with life and healing, but with torment and death (cf. 2

Cor 11:13–15). To counter the deceptive appearance of the enemies who come “from the rising of the sun” (Rev 16:12), God’s protection of his people in their warfare is also pictured as coming from “the rising of the sun” (7:2–3). And at the End the judgment of Babylon, the enemy host, will be announced by an angel whose glory (like the sun) will light up the earth (18:1; see also 10:1). (CC)

16:13 *frogs*. Lev 11:10 classifies the frog as an unclean animal. The imagery suggests the deceptive propaganda that will, in the last days, lead people to accept and support the cause of evil. (CSB)

This unholy trinity empowers the human hosts that John now sees unleashed at the River Euphrates. Three “unclean spirits like frogs” were leaping out of the mouths of the three partners of this unholy trinity (16:13). The “three unclean spirits” motivate the kings under the influence and control of the unholy trinity. That these unclean spirits are likened to frogs may be due to the fact that in Lev 11:9–11 (cf. 11:41) all creatures living in water who do not have fins and scales were to be considered unclean and unfit for human consumption. Surely John was also reminded of the plague of frogs in ancient Egypt (Ex 8:1–15). Like the frogs that covered everything in Egypt (Ex 8:3–4), so this host under demonic influence will cover the entire earth. (CC)

THE DRAGON, THE BEAST AND FALSE PROPHET – The power and influence behind the kings and their hosts are identified as “the dragon ... the beast and ... the false prophet” (16:13). This is the same unholy trinity which is found in Revelation 12–13, and which is symbolized by the number composed of three sixes: 666. “The dragon” (16:13) is the “great red dragon” (12:3) of Revelation 12, who is Satan himself. He attempts to destroy the male Child (Christ Jesus) of the woman, who represents the Christian church (12:3–4). After the Child is taken to heaven (12:5), the dragon pursues the woman in order to destroy her and the rest of her offspring—the Christians (12:13–17). “The beast” (16:13) is the “beast ... of the sea” (13:1) described in 13:1–10. The third partner of this unholy trinity is identified here in 16:13 as “the false prophet.” (CC)

This is the first time in Revelation that this “false prophet” is mentioned. In 13:11–18 the third partner of the unholy trinity was the “beast ... of the earth” (13:11), who bore the number 666. It appears that the evil spiritual entity previously called the “beast ... of the earth” is here called “the false prophet.” This identification becomes a certainty when one compares 13:13–14 to 19:20. Rev 19:20 says that it was the false prophet who made the signs by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and who worshiped the image of the beast (that is, the image of the beast from the sea). In 13:13–14 it was the “beast ... of the earth” (13:11) who deceived the inhabitants of the earth by producing the signs and who motivated the peoples of the earth to “make an image to the beast” (the beast from the sea). Revelation will mention “the false prophet” one more time: in 20:10 the beast (that is, the beast from the sea, 13:1–10) and the false prophet are with the dragon after he is cast into the lake of fire. Furthermore, this third

spiritual entity, called the beast from the earth and the false prophet, will also be called the harlot in Revelation 17, 19. Therefore, while the dragon and the first beast (the beast from the sea, 13:1–10) remain the same throughout Revelation, the second beast (the beast from the earth, 13:11–18) appears in three different guises: as the second “beast” (13:11–18), as “the false prophet” (16:13; 19:20; 20:10), and as the “harlot” (17:1, 5, 15–16; 19:2). (CC)

In the economy of this unholy trinity, the dragon is the mastermind. He works through the beast from the sea and the false prophet (the beast from the earth) in order to deceive the peoples of the earth in his warfare against the woman—the church (12:13–13:1). In this warfare the beast from the sea represents all political, social, and economic powers that are harnessed by the devil. As Swete says, it represents “the brute force of the World-power represented [at John’s time] by the Roman Empire.” For that reason this commentary labeled it “the political beast.” The beast from the earth, now called the false prophet, is “the false spiritual power which made common cause with the temporal power in doing Satan’s work.” It represents all false religions and also the corrupted and apostate elements within the Christian church—those that may be called “Christian” but which really are not. For that reason this commentary referred to the second beast as “the religious beast.” This false spirituality of the beast is emphasized all the more when (as here in 16:13) it is referred to as “the false prophet.” (CC)

Reappearance of the second beast (13:11–17, esp vv 13–14). *three unclean spirits*. Each member of the evil anti-Trinity goes forth, intent on mustering additional allies against God and His people. (TLSB)

16:14 *miraculous signs*.† Cf. 13:13. Predicted by Jesus (Mt 24:24). (CSB)

By means of miraculous “signs” (σημεῖα) the unclean spirits, which in 16:14 are called “spirits of demons,” “go forth upon the kings of the whole inhabited earth to gather them together” for the great battle, “that war of the great day of God, the Almighty” (16:14). In his earthly ministry Jesus warned that in the last days before the End (τέλος, Mt 24:6, 13–14), “false messiahs and false prophets” would produce “signs” (σημεῖα) by which they would deceive many (Mt 24:23–28). Here in Rev 16:14 the kings and their hosts are so deceived by the “signs” produced by the demons that they gather together for war in order to destroy God’s saints on earth. Rev 20:7–9 portrays this same sequence of events but ascribes the deception to Satan himself and pictures the attackers as all the nations of the earth under the leadership of Gog and Magog. Rev 20:9 also makes explicit that *the war is against God’s saints and against his beloved city* (CC)

kings of the whole world. See 6:15 (CSB)

great day of God.† See 19:11–21 for this battle. This is the day of judgment. (CSB)

The war will take place on “the great day of God, the Almighty” (16:14). As Mounce suggests, “It is the day when God will reckon with the ungodly nations of the world.” The people of God were told in the OT that such a war would take place (e.g., Ezekiel 38–39). The prophet Joel stated, “Great is the day of Yahweh, and utterly terrifying,” so much so that no one will be able to “endure it” (Joel 2:11; cf. Zeph 1:14). It is a day when the Lord God “will gather all the nations for judgment in the Valley of Jehoshaphat” (Joel 3:2). All the previous days of judgment—such as Assyria’s conquest of Israel, the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon, and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70—and all the persecutions and calamities suffered by Christians and churches throughout history up until the present time pale in comparison to that terrifying day. At the same time, those calamities and the present warfare of the church militant portend that coming day. They also remind the church that even when she seems defeated, she is not, for the Lord himself ultimately will crush her enemies and by grace she shall emerge victorious (cf. Rev 15:2–4). (CC)

16:15 An aside within the unfolding drama. Here, Jesus interrupts the vision with an oracle about His second coming and a promise of blessing for those remaining faithful to the end. (TLSB)

Blessed. The third beatitude (see note on 1:3). (CSB)

While the suddenness and unexpectedness of the coming of the Lord Christ at the End is a warning which all Christians need to heed at all times (Rev 3:3), *it is also a promise of encouragement and hope* (3:11). This is the reason why the prophetic message of Revelation to John concludes with this promise, “Yes, I am coming quickly,” to which John answers, “Amen, come now, Lord Jesus” (22:20). In 16:15 this word of promise is attached to a beatitude, which is the third of seven beatitudes in Revelation. The beatitude here is an encouragement for the Christian to keep watch and guard his garments, that is, the clothing washed in the blood of Christ (7:9, 13–14), the garment of righteousness (Job 29:14; Is 61:10; Zech 3:4) worn by all who believe and have been baptized into Christ, since in Holy Baptism a person is clothed with Christ. It is a word of promise that encourages the people of God on earth to remain faithful in the midst of the fearful days of this last battle before the End. For the fear of suffering in the battle could be a temptation to surrender to the enemy and thus forfeit Christ’s garment and stand “naked” in one’s “shame” (Rev 16:15). For this reason the Lord urges his church in Laodicea to remain clothed in white garments so that the shame of her nakedness would not appear (3:18). But especially this is a word of promise which engenders hope, for the Lord is coming quickly (1:3; 22:6–7). The battle will soon be over and the victory will extend throughout eternity! (CC)

thief ... stays awake. † Associated with the second coming of Christ in NT: thief (Mt 24:43; Lk 12:39; 1Th 5:2; 2Pe 3:10); stay awake (Mt 24:42; Mk 13:35; Lk 12:37; Ro 13:11; 1Th 5:6). (CSB)

“The great day of God, the Almighty” (16:14) is not only described in terms of the gathering of the evil hosts for war against God’s people, but also as a time when the Lord Christ will come “as a thief” (16:15). In the midst of the visionary imagery of the last battle before the End at Christ’s return, John hears a voice speaking in the first person, “Behold, I am coming as a thief” (16:15). This is the voice of the Lord Christ, for elsewhere in Revelation *only he* declares in the first person, “I am coming.” In the letter to the angel of the church in Philadelphia, the Lord Christ urges the saints to hold on to his Word (3:8, 10) so that they would not lose their crown, reminding them, “I am coming quickly” (3:11). In the letter to the church at Sardis, the exalted Lord says, “I will come [ἦξω] as a thief” (3:3). His coming will be so unexpected that no one will be able to predict the moment of his arrival. In Mt 24:36–44 Jesus describes the coming of the Son of Man at the End, saying that it will be like the coming of a thief (Mt 24:43). In 1 Thess 5:2 Paul says that “the day of the Lord will come like a thief coming in the night.” (CC)

16:16 *Armageddon.* † Probably stands for Har Mageddon, “the mountain of Megiddo” (see note on Jdg 5:19). There is no specific geographical reference in the designation; it is a symbol of the final overthrow of evil by God. Megiddo was near Mount Carmel, where Elijah met and defeated the prophets of Baal (1Ki 18:16–40), a contest which could well serve as a pattern for the last great battle between the truth of God and the lie of Satan and antichrist. (CSB)

Hbr *har megiddo*, “the mountain of Megiddo.” Though an important city named Megiddo actually existed (see color map 1; Solomon had his stables there; see note, 1Ki 9:15), this is a symbolical rather than geographical reference. Because Megiddo was an important battlefield, it came to be associated with the final great battle between God and the forces of evil. (TLSB)

The enemy hosts are assembled “at the place which is called in Hebrew Armageddon” (16:16). While Armageddon is a geographical place name, John lifts it out of any particular historical context and uses it as a symbol for this last battle before the End. The natural environment surrounding Megiddo offered springs and supplies of fresh water, as well as forage and spatial expanse, so that armies could sustain themselves and be deployed easily. Thus it was one of the few suitable places in ancient Israel where vast armies could assemble for battle. As Mounce declares, “It is one of history’s famous battlefields, having witnessed major conflicts all the way ‘from one fought by Tuthmosis III in 1468 B.C. to that of Lord Allenby of Megiddo in 1917.’ ” Familiar in the biblical tradition are the battles of the Israelites under Barak and Deborah with the hosts of Sisera (Jdg 4:14–24) and the warfare between the Israelites and the Egyptians in which King Josiah was killed (2 Ki 23:29–30). It was also at Megiddo that Ahaziah king of Judah died after having been mortally wounded in a battle with

Jehu (2Ki 9:27). Also Joram king of Israel was killed in the battle there (2 Ki 9:23–29). As mountains have often witnessed great events (Is 44:23; Ezek 6:3–13; cf. 35:12; 36:1–7), so here in Rev 16:16 the mountain of Megiddo will witness this final battle on the great day of the Lord. (CC)

Thus Armageddon is used here not as the designation of a particular geographic place, but as a terrifying metaphor of a war that will cover the expanse of the entire earth, since the whole human race will be caught up in it (see 20:9). And the enemy's intent in this last battle before the End will be the destruction of the people of God, the church of Jesus Christ (20:9; cf. Ezek 38:7–16). But the enemy shall not prevail (Rev 16:19; 20:9–10), and the kingdom shall belong to the Lord forever and ever (Obad 21; 1 Chr 29:11). (CC)

16:17–21† Not a description of conditions shortly before the end of the world, as many claim, for that was treated in the six preceding plagues. It is a representation of the last judgment—the very end of the world. Note: (1) “the great day of God Almighty” (v. 14); (2) “It is done!” (v. 17); (3) a unique “severe earthquake” (v. 18), also in the vision of the sixth seal (6:12), which concerns the day of judgment; (4) total destruction of city (v. 19), islands and mountains (v. 20) and huge hailstones fell on people who had no protection (v. 21). (CSB)

16:17 LOUD VOICE – When the seventh censer-angel pours out his plague, John again hears “a great voice” (16:17). In 16:1 a “great voice” came forth from the temple. This time the voice is from “the throne” within the temple. As in 16:1, the speaker of the voice is not directly stated, but it seems to be the voice of God. The “voice ... from the throne” (16:17) could be that of an angel speaking on behalf of God (as seems to be the case in 19:5 and in 21:3), but here it most likely is the voice of God himself, for throughout the chapter it is God who is the source of the plagues. The only place in Revelation where God the Father is explicitly identified as the speaker in the first person is in 21:5–6. In 21:6 God says, “It has come into being” (literally, “they have come into being” [γέγοναν], the plural of the same perfect verb in 16:17, “it has happened” or “it is completed”). Therefore it appears that the speaker here in 16:17 is also God. Whether it is an angel speaking on behalf of God or God himself, the voice shouts out that the final act follows: this is the End. (CC)

IT IS DONE – “It is completed” (16:17). All preparation has been accomplished. Now comes the End itself. This is the fourth time that John receives a view of the End. In the first vision of earthly events (6:1–8:5), when the Lamb opened the sixth seal, John saw the End in terms of the fear and the terror it evokes (6:12–17). In the second vision of events on earth (8:6–11:19), when the seventh angel blew his trumpet, John again saw the End, but in terms of the joy that it brings to God's people (11:15–19). John saw the End for a third time in the interregnum (12:1–14:20), that great interlude which overarches the three sevenfold visions. The interregnum concludes with a depiction of the great harvest at the End (14:14–20). Now for a fourth time John is given a prophetic

picture of the End in the seventh scene of this third vision of events on earth, the scene introduced by the seventh censer-angel. (CC)

As the angel pours out the seventh plague “upon the air” (16:17), the plague is accompanied by this great voice of God, thus indicating that this is the final plague, the very End itself. “The air” that is struck is the entire atmosphere that surrounds the earth, including the air that people breathe. This last plague encompasses and impacts the entire earth and all the human race, much more than did the first six. Not only are the earth and the sea and the fresh water supplies and the sun struck, but now the necessary element of human existence is blighted, the air which surrounds people and which they breathe, without which they would quickly die. John is not shown or told *how* the air is struck or how the plague prevents people’s ability to breathe. But what he is shown in 16:18–21 is a cataclysmic and violent disturbance that shatters the entire earth’s surface. This would suggest that in these verses we have an explanation of the result of the “air” being plagued. (CC)

The voice from the heavenly throne shouts out that everything necessary has been accomplished so that the End can now come. The phrase “it is completed” (γέγονεν, 16:17) not only refers to that which has been displayed and brought to a completion (that is, the first six plagues), it also points to the final act, the last plague. For the first six plagues of God’s wrath have shown to mankind his displeasure and anger over their allegiance to the dragon and his partners, the beast and the false prophet. Through those plagues God has given the reason why humankind should repent, and he has also given people the time to do so. But the seventh plague proclaims emphatically that the time is up, for the End is here and it is time for the final judgment. The cry from the cross “It is finished” signalled the end of Jesus’ suffering and as a result also signalled the completion of everything necessary for the new beginning of a new life at the resurrection. So here this cry in 16:17 signals the end of the time for repentance and an end of God’s merciful patience. It also signals that the judgment at the End has begun and indeed has come. One more time (21:6) John will hear the voice of God cry out the same perfect verb (but plural, γέγοναν) when he is shown the new heaven and earth (21:1–8). This would suggest that while the penultimate “it is completed” is the final judgment at the End, the ultimate completion of that cry is the creation of the new heaven and new earth and the beginning of resurrection life in the eternal state. (CC)

16:18 When the voice cries out, it is accompanied by phenomena similar to what occurred when God descended and spoke on Mt. Sinai: lightning flashes, thunder, and a violent shaking (Ex 19:16–20). Deborah states in her song (Judg 5:5) that “the mountains quaked” before the God of Sinai. In his song of praise David said that the earth and the heavens were shaken by a quake because God was angry (2 Sam 22:8). The version of that song of praise recorded in the psalms declares that at the anger of God the earth as well as the mountains were shaken (Ps 18:7 [MT 18:8]). In Rev 4:5, in the scene of God’s heavenly glory,

“lightning flashes and noises [φωναί] and thunders” came out from the heavenly throne of God, accompanying and manifesting his awesome and fearful presence. When the angel of the incense altar poured out his censer of fire onto the earth (introducing the seven trumpet-angels), “thunders and noises [φωναί] and lightning flashes and an earthquake” attended his action (8:5). At the conclusion of the scene of the End introduced by the seventh trumpet-angel, “lightning flashes and noises [φωναί] and thunders and an earthquake” were present (11:19). When these natural storm-like phenomena, which Moffatt calls a “storm-theophany,” occur in Revelation in the scene of the *heavenly* sphere of God’s presence (4:5), the “earthquake” is not present. But in the scenes where God’s actions of judgment *strike the earth and the human race* (8:5; 11:19), the “earthquake” is a result. So here in 16:18, at the final judgment at the End, the “earthquake” also occurs together with the other natural phenomena. This suggests that when the awesome and fearful presence of God (indicated by the “lightning flashes and noises and thunders”) descends *to earth* for the purpose of *judgment*, then the “earthquake” demonstrates that God is now present in his fearful majesty for the purpose of executing the judgment of the human race. But the earthquake that attends the majesty of God’s presence at the End is much greater than the ones referred to in the OT and in 8:5 and 11:13—greater than any that has ever been. It is so much greater because this is the final quake to shock the human race, thus portending the enormity of God’s *final* reckoning in the judgment at the End. (CC)

16:19 BABYLON THE GREAT – These natural phenomena, signifying God’s majestic presence for the purpose of judgment, now strike the earth as cataclysmic occurrences, and as a result “the cities of the pagan nations fell” (16:19). “Babylon the great” is singled out in particular. At the End all the cities and everything they represent (civilizations, culture, commerce, wealth, and the social life and ambitions of the human race) come to an end in God’s judgment. Especially the “great city” (16:19), here identified as “Babylon the great,” is “remembered in the presence of God” so that she will drink “the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath.” Imperial Rome represented the epitome of worldly power and wealth. All the Mediterranean peoples strove to possess or share in Rome’s glory and influence. Especially to John Rome represented satanic powers opposed to Jesus Christ and his church. But Rome, here signified by “Babylon the great” (16:19), became a type or example for all future time of every human institution—in particular political, economic, and social orders, and pagan spiritual philosophies—which, under the dragon’s influence, attempts to destroy God’s saints on earth. Because of Nebuchadnezzar’s destruction of Jerusalem and the resulting Babylonian captivity, the ancient city of Babylon became a type of all future enemies of God’s people (in both the OT and NT eras). In the same way, because of the Roman conquest of Judea in 63 B.C., the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by the Romans in A.D. 70, and the Roman persecution of the early church, Rome became an umbrella-like type for all future enemies of the Christ and his church. Thus for John, Rome was the modern Babylon. (CC)

The fact that “the great city was broken up into three parts” (16:19) suggests the totality of its destruction in God’s judgment. Lenski envisions that “the whole city and every structure in it fell in a heap in utter ruin. Every structure collapsed, one wall falling to the right, another to the left, the roof and the floors falling down between them. ‘Three parts’ indicates this form of disintegration.” In Rev 11:13 only “a tenth of the city fell” because of an “earthquake.” Here the entire city was demolished. So sudden and total was the destruction of the city that there was no longer time for change of heart and repentance. (CC)

16:20 ISLANDS FLED...MOUNTAINS COULD NOT BE FOUND – Not only were the pagan cities and the great city of Babylon destroyed, but also the topography of the earth’s surface was altered by the great earthquake. For “every island passed out of sight, and mountains vanished from view” (16:20). Apparently these topographic features were leveled and abolished so as to be no longer discernable to the human eye. Christ’s first advent is portrayed as transforming creation in a similar way: “Every valley shall be filled in; every mountain and hill shall be made low” (Lk 3:5, quoting Is 40:4). But Christ’s second advent, which brings this world to its end, alters the creation radically, violently, and completely. In the scene of the End in the first sevenfold vision, the sixth scene (6:12–17), “every mountain and island were moved from their places” (6:14). In the scene of the judgment at the End in 20:11–15, before the fearful and majestic presence of God, “the earth and the heaven fled” (ἔφυγεν, as in 16:20). Certainly this indicates that the earth and its immediate environment will be greatly altered, to say the least. In intertestamental writings there is a similar thought. At the final judgment of God, because of the fear of his wrathful presence, the whole earth will violently shake and the mountains will crumble. As a result the earth will be torn apart and all life will perish (e.g., 1 Enoch 1:1–9; Testament of Moses 10:3–7). This climatic change of the old earth and sky opens up the way for the creation of the new heavens and the new earth (Rev 21:1–22:5). CC

16:21 PLAGUE OF HAIL – Finally, the enormity of the destruction caused by God’s judgment is emphasized by the unimaginable depiction of fantastic hailstones so large that they each weigh a hundred pounds. While the earth’s surface and its cities are being shaken and demolished, so that human beings flee in terror for safety but find none, the earth and its inhabitants are further afflicted by hailstones so large that it is difficult to think any human being or animal or plant could survive. (Yet some people apparently do, for they blaspheme God in 16:21.) Whether such hail is only a metaphor for God’s punishing judgment or whether such physical hail attends his coming presence in judgment—or both—the result is the same. For the hail emphasizes the climax of God’s divine wrath in his anger over the sins and rebellion of humankind. In the OT God sometimes punished the enemies of his people on earth with hail. In imagery that is close to what John sees here in the plague of the seventh censer-angel, Ezekiel saw how God promised to destroy Gog and his evil host just before the End (Ezek 38:18–23). When Gog will be judged and destroyed, God in his wrath will send an earthquake so that all life on the face of the earth will

tremble, mountains will be thrown down, and torrents of rain, accompanied by hailstones and burning sulfur, will pour down upon this great enemy of God's people (Ezek 38:22; cf. Rev 20:8–9). (CC)

Despite all the evidence furnished by God's plagues, signifying the punishing actions of his judgment, the enemies of his saints do not repent. Even at the very punishing presence of God coming to bring this world to its end, climaxed by the hailstones, there is no change of heart toward God. For people "blasphemed God" (16:21) on account of his judgment at the End. Their adherence and allegiance to the dragon and his henchmen is unshaken. They stubbornly hold to what the unholy trinity represents, even to the bitter end. "Their Faustian bargain has transformed them into blasphemers who carry out to the end the beast's hatred of God." And they even do this in the face of eternal suffering in hell (cf. 19:20–21; 20:10). (CC)