

# *Revelation*

## *Lesson #13*

### *The Seven Bowls*

*(15: 1 – 16: 21)*

**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM

# Review

In direct contrast to the grotesque parody of the Trinity that we met in Lesson #11, Lesson #12 introduced the Lamb's companions: three angels and the 144,000 who have *"his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads"* (14: 1).

This is God's army who will cleanse the earth and engage the final, climactic battle with Satan and his minions on the plains of Megiddo: Armageddon.

# Preview

Before the final battle we unleash yet another set of plagues. This time seven angels pour out seven bowls, *“the seven bowls of God’s fury upon the earth”* (16: 1):

## The Seven Bowls

- 1—Ugly and painful sores (16: 2)
- 2—Blood, like that of a dead man (16: 3)
- 3—Rivers and springs of water turned to blood (16: 4-7)
- 4—Sun, scorching people with fire (16: 8-9)
- 5—Satan’s kingdom plunged into darkness (16: 10-11)
- 6—Euphrates River dried up (16: 12-16)
- 7—Massive earthquake—*“It is done!”* (16: 17-21)

After the seventh bowl, the earth is little more than a smoking cinder, wobbling in space!



**After the seventh trumpet sounded in 11: 15-19, John presented us with a series of visions, interludes which gave us the “back story” of Revelation.**

**Now, chapters 15 & 16 return to an earlier point in our story, resuming immediately after the sounding of the seventh trumpet.**

**Recall the structure of the 7 seals, 7 trumpets and 7 bowls:**

**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM

## The Seven Seals

1. White horse
2. Red horse
3. Black horse
4. Pale horse
5. Souls of the slain
6. Earthquake
7. Silence

## The Seven Trumpets

1. Hail and fire, mixed with blood
2. Huge mountain ablaze
3. Blazing star
4. Sun, moon and stars turned dark
5. Star, fallen to earth
6. Four angels, released
7. **Temple in heaven, opened**

**INTERLUDE →**

Woman clothed with the sun (12: 1-6)

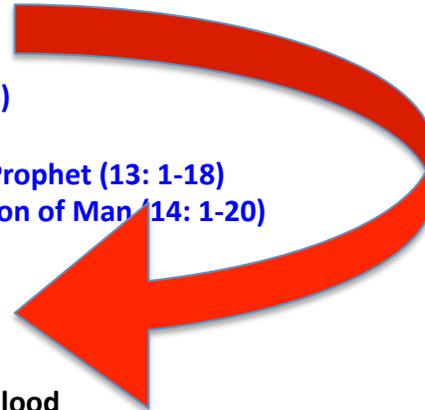
War in heaven (12: 7-17)

The enemy: Satan, Antichrist, False Prophet (13: 1-18)

The Heroes: 144,000, three angels, Son of Man (14: 1-20)

## The Seven Bowls

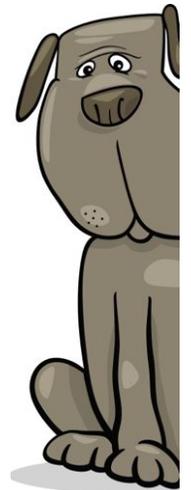
1. **Ugly and painful sores**
2. Blood like that of a dead man
3. Rivers and springs turned to blood
4. Sun, scorching people with fire
5. Satan's kingdom plunged into darkness
6. Euphrates River dried up
7. Massive earthquake



**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM

That's an intricate structure! Just as the seventh seal contained the seven trumpets, so does the seventh trumpet contain the seven bowls. The three sets of seven cascade downward, like a Slinky going down the stairs!

I got tangled up in a Slinky once. I'm afraid of them!



Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM

“Then I saw in heaven another sign, great and awe-inspiring: seven angels with the seven last plagues, for through them God’s fury is accomplished. Then I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire. On the sea of glass were standing those who had won the victory over the beast and its image and the number that signified its name. They were holding God’s harps, and they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb:

“Great and [awe inspiring] are your works,  
Lord God almighty.  
Just and true are your ways,  
O king of the nations.  
Who will not fear you, Lord,  
or glorify your name?  
For you alone are holy:  
all nations will come  
and worship before you,  
for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

(15: 1-4)



**“Harping Angels Standing on a Sea of Glass,” *Apocalypse***  
**(miniature illumination, Yates Thompson MS 10, fol. 25v), c. 1370-1390.**  
**British Library, London.**

**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM

“Then I saw in heaven another sign, **great and awe-inspiring**: seven angels with the **seven last plagues**, for through them God’s **fury** is **accomplished**. Then I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire. On the sea of glass were standing those who had won the victory over the beast and its image and the number that signified its name. They were holding God’s harps, and they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb:



- John sees another extraordinary “sign” in heaven [σημείον, “say-may’-on”], one “great and awe-inspiring” [μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν], the exact same phrase used in the opening of the “Song of Moses and the Lamb” in 15: 3b.

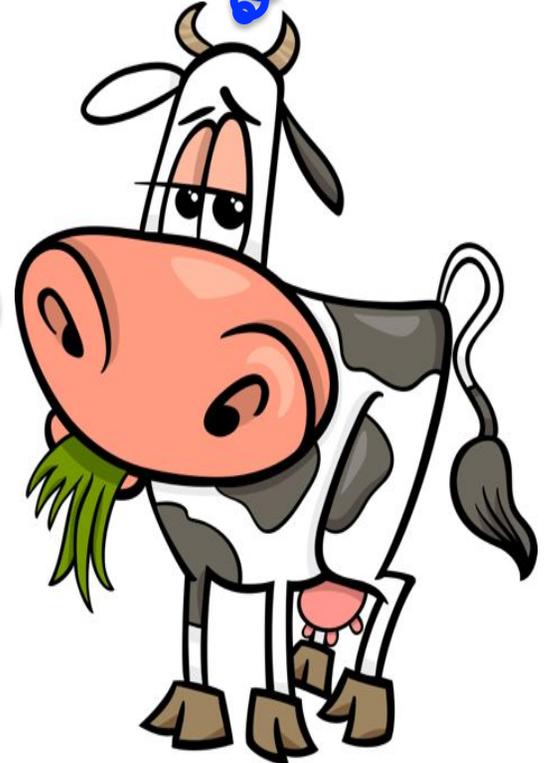
- The “sign” is seven angels with the seven last plagues. These are the seven bowls, of course, but the word “plague” [πληγή, “play-gay’] is interesting because they are the seven last plagues. There are only three plagues mentioned previously in Revelation, those accompanying the sixth trumpet: “*By these three plagues of fire, smoke, and sulfur that came out of their mouths [the four angels] a third of the human race was killed*” (9: 18).



If we have a total of ten plagues in Revelation, then we have a very nice parallel to the ten plagues in Exodus that God brings upon the Egyptians!



And those plagues in Egypt were really nasty!

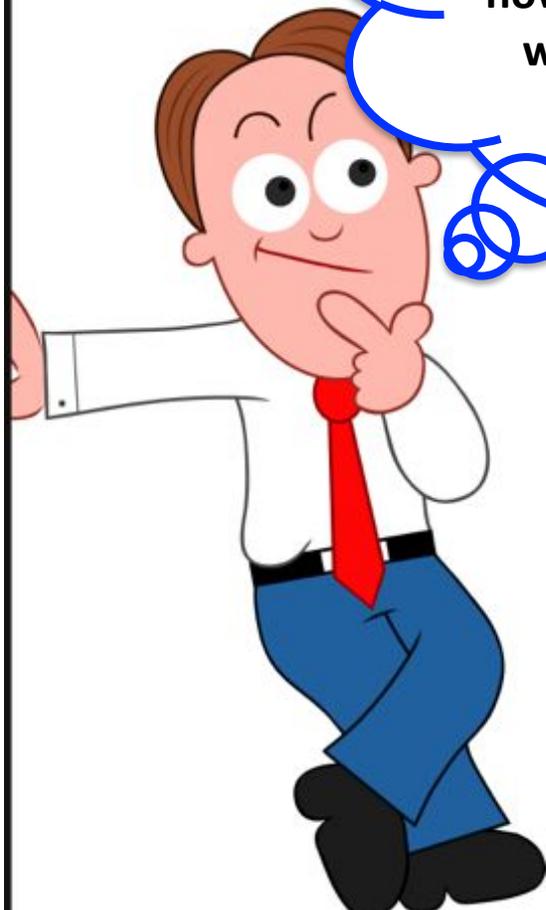


Especially the plague on cattle!

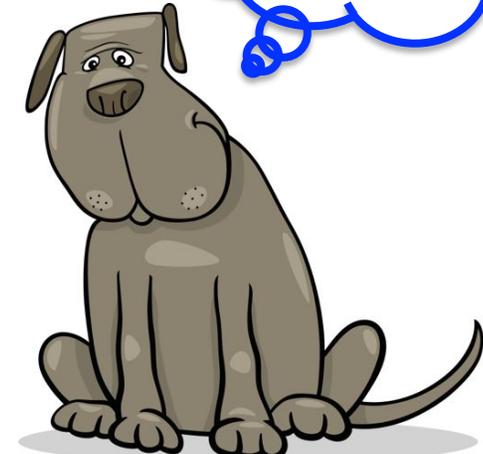


• With these last plagues, God’s “fury” or “wrath” is “accomplished.” The word “fury” is θυμός, “thu-mo’s,” a very graphic word that suggests “boiling over” or “panting while enraged.”

• “Accomplished” is τελέω, “te-leh’-o,” in the sense of “reaching the end” or “finished.” It is the exact same word John uses in his gospel at 19: 30 when Jesus expires on the cross: “*It is finished,*” τελέω (19: 30).

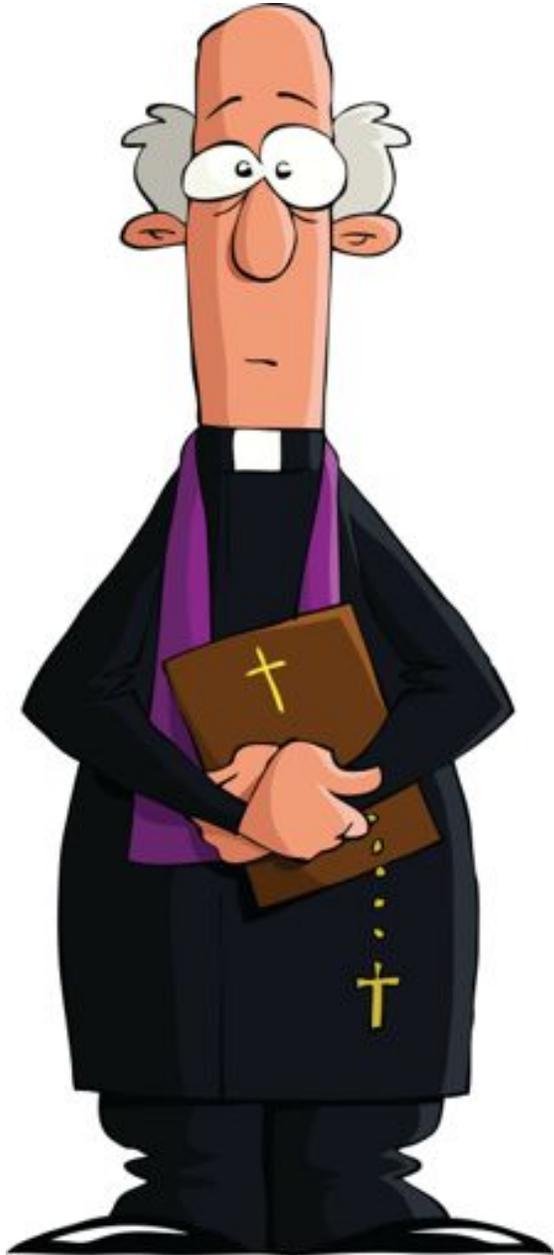


The “wrath” or “fury” of God runs throughout Scripture, calling to mind Jonathan Edward’s famous 1741 sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” But how do we reconcile this “wrath” of God with a God of infinite love, especially as we understand God today?



I’ve always wondered that myself.

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



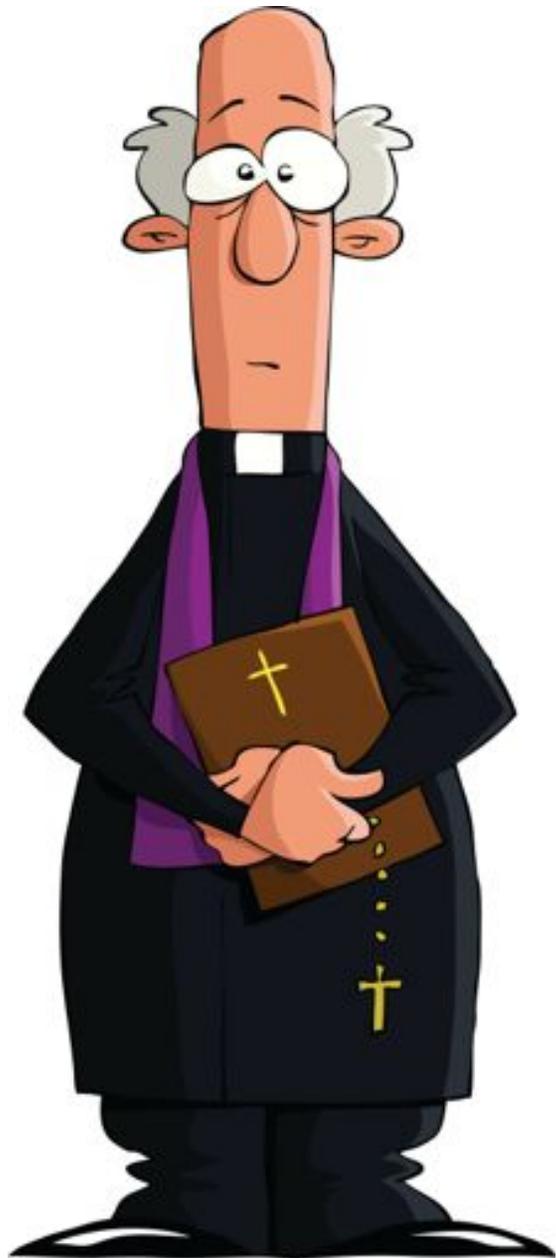
**That's a very good question!**

**The Hebrew Scriptures mention the “wrath” of God (or its synonyms) nearly 500 times, almost always the direct result of breaking God’s law, while the New Testament mentions the “wrath” of God (or its synonyms) 42 times. In the New Testament, for example, St. Paul observes that:**

***“The wrath of God is indeed being revealed from heaven against every impiety and wickedness of those who suppress the truth by their wickedness.”***

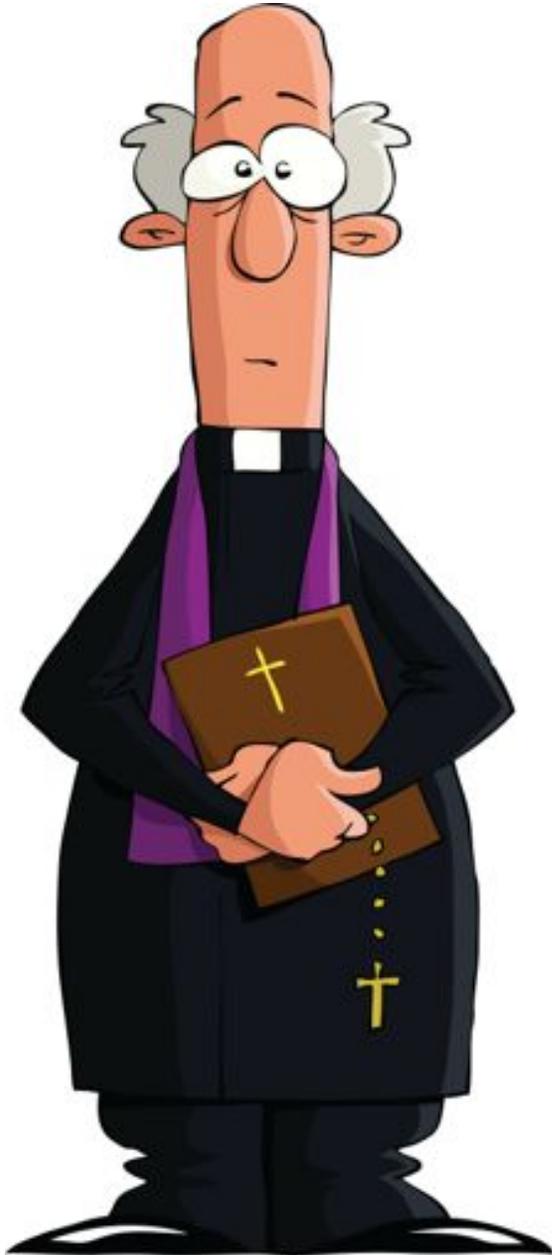
**(Romans 1: 18)**

**Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM**



To address God’s “wrath” we need to recognize that both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament often anthropomorphize God; that is, they attribute to him human characteristics, both physically and emotionally.

This helps us to understand God, but if we fail to recognize this as a literary device and we make the anthropomorphic literal, we can very easily misunderstand the intended message.

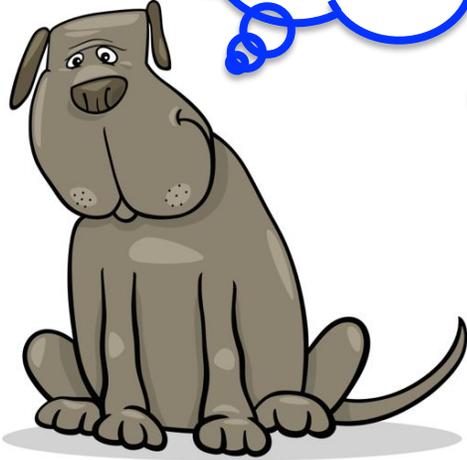


So, what exactly do we mean by the “wrath” of God? Pope Benedict XVI addressed this very question in *God in the World: Believing and Living in Our Time* (2000), p. 103-104:

*“The wrath of God is a way of saying that I have been living in a way that is contrary to the love that is God. Anyone who begins to live and grow away from God, who lives away from what is good, is turning his life toward wrath. Whoever falls away from love is moving into negativity. So that is not something that some dictator with a lust for power inflicts on you, but is simply a way of expressing the inner logic of a certain action. If I move outside the area of what is compatible with the ideal model by which I am created, if I move beyond the love that sustains me, well then, I just fall into the void, into darkness. I am then no longer in the realm of love, so to speak, but in a realm that can be seen as the realm of wrath.”*



I see! So, as we engage Revelation in its own historical and cultural context as a literary work of the Apocalyptic genre, recognizing its use of symbol, metaphor, simile and so on, so should we also engage the rest of Scripture, recognizing its various genres, its use of anthropomorphism and other literary techniques.



I knew that!



Yea, right!

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM

“Then I saw in heaven another sign, great and awe-inspiring: seven angels with the seven last plagues, for through them God’s fury is accomplished. Then I saw something like a **sea of glass mingled with fire**. On the sea of glass were standing those who had won the victory over the beast and its image and the number that signified its name. They were holding God’s harps, and they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb:



- Recall that in John's first vision of heaven, when he was "snatched up" in Revelation 4: 1-2, he saw *"in front of the throne . . . something that resembled a sea of glass like crystal"* (4: 6). This is the "floor" of heaven.

- In Genesis 1: 6-8, on the second day of creation, God said *"Let there be a dome [a "firmament"] in the middle of the waters, to separate one body of water from the other"* (1: 6). Looking up from earth, the firmament is the "sky"; looking down from heaven it is the "sea of glass like crystal." In this scene the sea of glass like crystal is "mingled with fire," a sign of imminent judgment.

- Standing on the sea of glass [ἐπί "on," not παρά "beside," as in many translations] *"were those who had won victory over the beast,"* those who had not been marked with its name or number.

**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM



**William Holman Hunt. *Portrait of Henry Wentworth Monk* (oil on canvas), 1858.  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.**

*Monk was an early supporter of a Jewish homeland, settling on a Kibbutz in Palestine in 1853. Many viewed him as a modern-day Christian prophet. Hunt, a founding member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, traveled to Palestine in 1854 to paint his famous "Scapegoat" of Leviticus 16. There Hunt met Monk. This portrait is rich in Revelation symbolism, including the window panes, which are meant to suggest the "sea of glass." Monk published a little-known book on Revelation, funded by John Ruskin, the leading British art critic of the Victorian era.*

**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM

“Then I saw in heaven another sign, great and awe-inspiring: seven angels with the seven last plagues, for through them God’s fury is accomplished. Then I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire. On the sea of glass were standing those who had won the victory over the beast and its image and the number that signified its name. They were holding God’s harps, and they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb:



•The harp [*kinnor* in Hebrew] was the national instrument of the Hebrews, invented, according to Scripture, by Jubal (Genesis 4: 21) in antediluvian times. King David was the most famous of Jewish harpists. We read that *“whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take the harp and play, and Saul would be relieved and feel better . . .”* (1 Samuel 16: 23).



This Jewish coin from the Bar Kokhba revolt (A.D. 132-135) has two trumpets on the obverse with the inscription, *“to the freedom of Jerusalem,”* and on the reverse a harp with the inscription, *“year two of the freedom of Jerusalem,”* the City of David.

**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM

**“Great and [awe inspiring] are your works,  
Lord God almighty.**

Just and true are your ways,  
**O king of the nations.**

Who will not fear you, Lord,  
or glorify your name?

For **you alone are holy.**

All nations will come  
and worship before you,  
for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

**(15: 3b-4)**



- As we noted previously, “**great and awe-inspiring**” [μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν, is the exact same phrase used in 15: 1.

- “**Lord God almighty**” is κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ. “Almighty” is παντοκράτωρ, [“pan-tah-krah’-tor”], God’s most solemn title, “ruler of all.” John uses it nine times in Revelation: 1: 8; 4: 8; 11: 17; 15: 3; 16: 7, 14; 19: 6, 15; and 21: 22. In the Byzantine Church it is Jesus’ most exalted title: “Christ Pantokrator.”



***“Deësis Mosaic,” depicting Christ Pantocrator (c.1261),  
South Gallery, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, Turkey.***

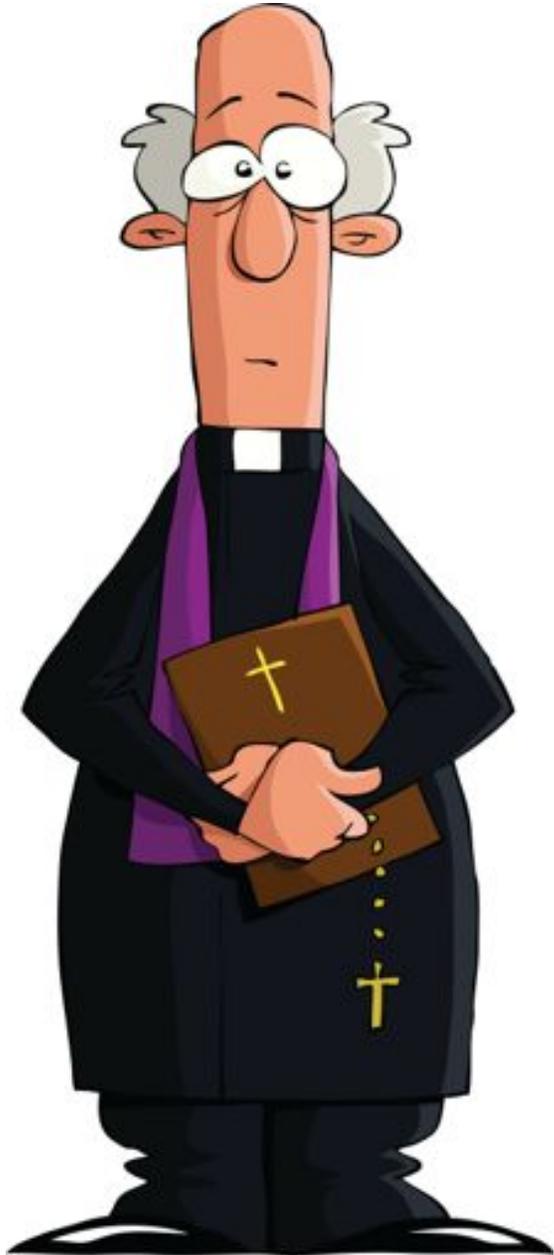
**Photography by Ana Maria Vargas**

**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM



• Jeremiah refers to God as “**king of the nations**” (10: 7) in contrast to the idols of the Gentiles who, “*like a scarecrow in a cucumber field . . . they cannot speak; they must be carried about*” (10: 5).

• When the angels sing “**you alone are holy**,” the word “holy” is ὅσιος [hos'-ee-os], not the normal ἅγιος [hah'-gee-os], a very deliberate and deft verbal allusion to the two “Songs of Moses,” Exodus 15: 1-18 and Deuteronomy 32: 1-43, the namesakes for this “song.”



And we should also note that the phrase, “*you alone are holy*” is taken up and recited in the Gloria of the Mass:

*“For you alone are the Holy One,  
you alone are the Lord,  
you alone are the Most High,  
Jesus Christ,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God the Father.*

*Amen.”*

“After this I had another vision. The temple that is the heavenly tent of testimony opened, and the seven angels with the seven plagues came out of the temple. They were dressed in clean white linen, with a gold sash around their chests. One of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven bowls filled with the fury of God, who lives forever and ever. Then the temple became so filled with the smoke from God’s glory and might that no one could enter it until the seven plagues of the seven angels had been accomplished.”

(15: 5-8)

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM

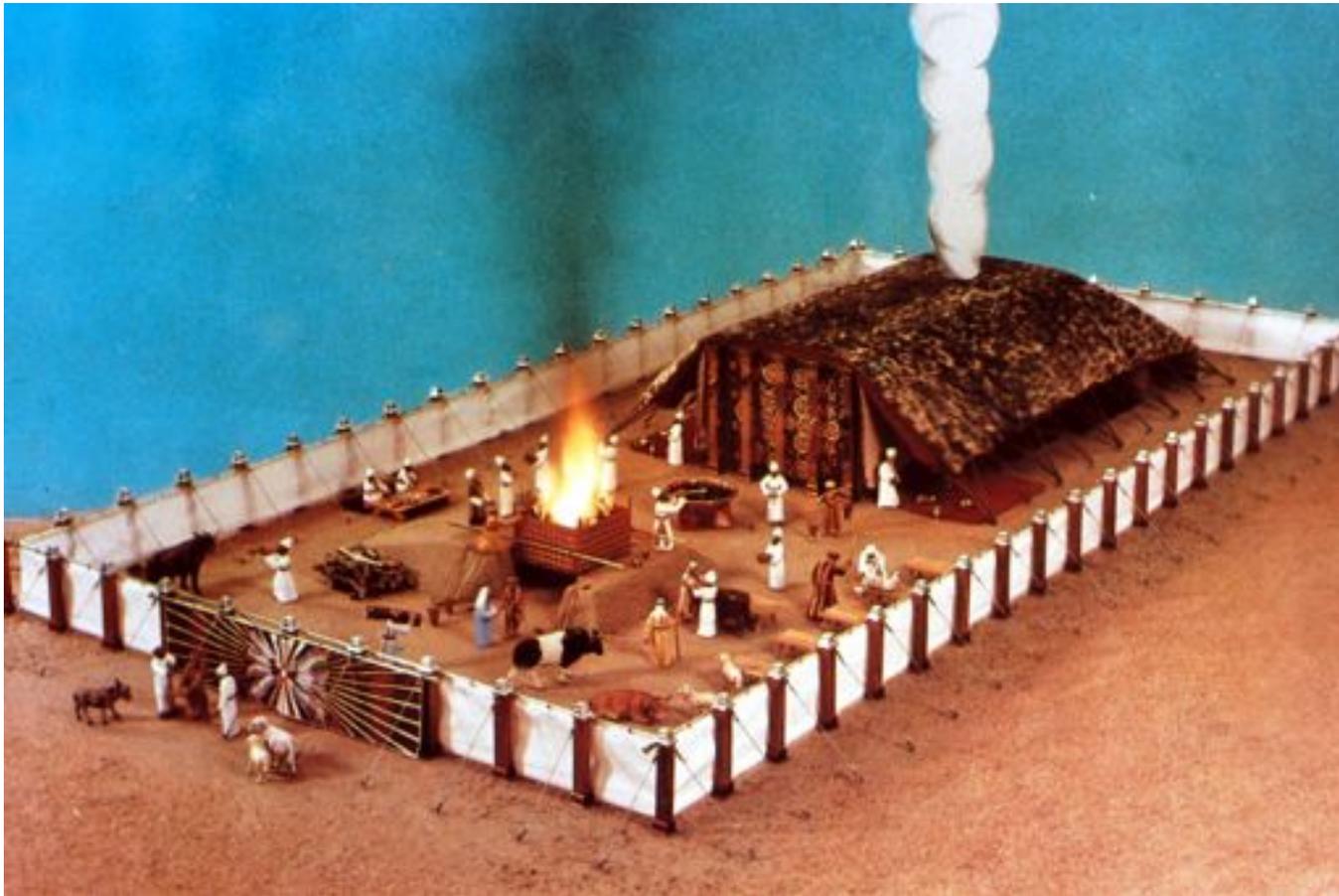


**When God gave Moses the blueprints for the Tabernacle in the second half of Exodus, Moses was told to build it to exact specifications, for the earthly Tabernacle was an exact *“copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary”* (Hebrews 8: 5).**

**We saw this heavenly Tabernacle—the real deal—opened after the sounding of the seventh trumpet, revealing the genuine ark of the covenant, followed by thunder, lightning, earthquake, and so on.**

**Now, we resume the narrative from 11: 16, the events that follow the seventh trumpet and the opening of the ark.**

# The Earthly Tabernacle



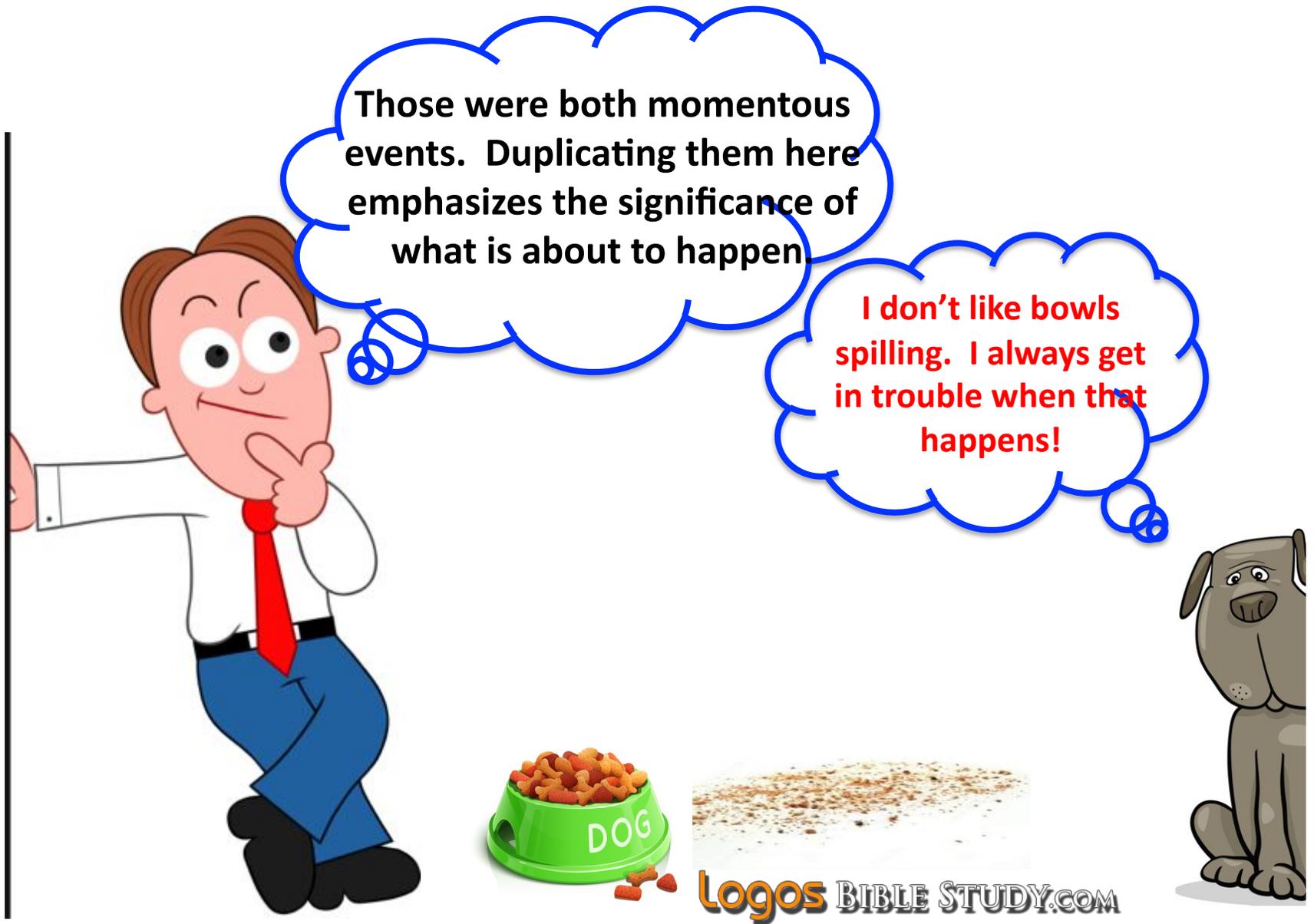
Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



When we ended Revelation 11: 16 we could see the ark of the covenant in the heavenly Tabernacle's Holy of Holies. Now we witness a dazzling liturgy, in which the four living creatures encircling God's throne lead the heavenly worship.

The scene's drama builds as one of the four living creatures gives seven bowls to the seven angels, the bowls of God's "fury" or "wrath" [θυμός, "thu-mo's"]. When the living creature presents the last of the seven bowls, the Tabernacle suddenly fills with smoke, smoke so thick *"that no one could enter it"* (15: 8).

This happened twice before. First, when the "glory" of God filled the Tabernacle in Exodus 40:35, and again when the "glory" of God filled Solomon's newly-built Temple in 1 Kings 8: 11.

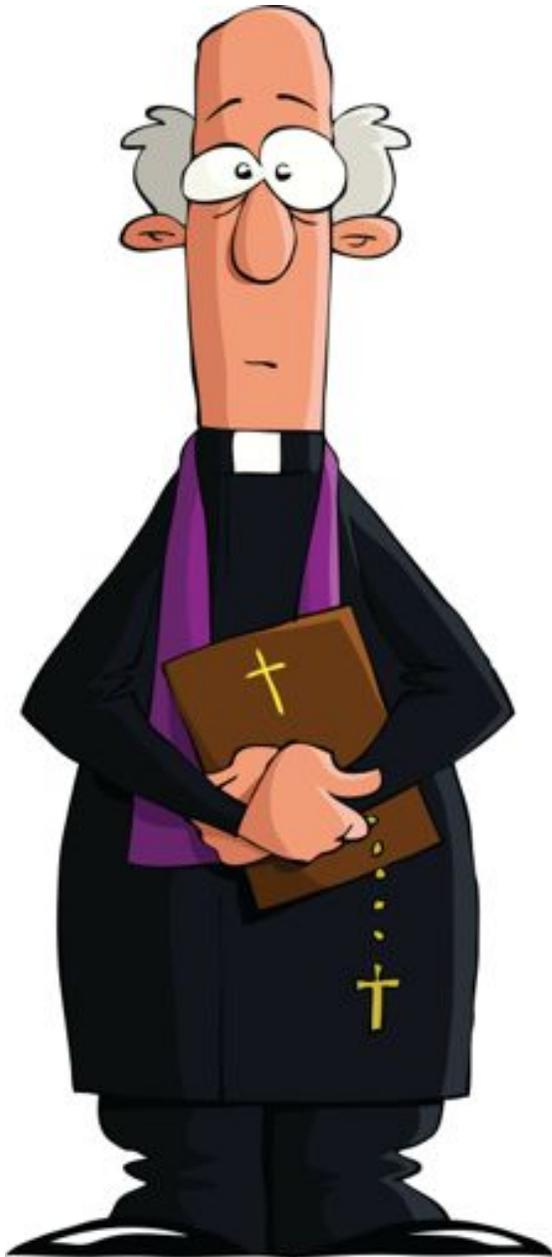


Those were both momentous events. Duplicating them here emphasizes the significance of what is about to happen.

I don't like bowls spilling. I always get in trouble when that happens!



Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



**Opening the seven seals and blowing the seven trumpets were increasingly dire warnings to sinful humanity to repent and turn to God.**

**The events that accompanied the seals and trumpets were typical of the human condition: conquest, violence and natural disasters. As Jesus warned in the Olivet Discourse, such disasters will occur, but they seem to worsen as history trends toward its conclusion.**

**Now the warnings stop—and judgment begins.**

**The seven bowls, like the previous fire, smoke and sulfur, are “plagues” [πληγή, “play-gay’], and they bear a resemblance to the ten plagues that God brought upon Egypt prior to the Exodus, but they are much more severe.**



Mathias Gerung. "The Giving of the Seven Bowls of Wrath," *Ottheinrich Bible* (illuminated MS, fol. 298r), c. 1530-1531. Bavarian State Library, Munich.

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM

“I heard a loud voice speaking from the temple to the seven angels, ‘Go and pour out the seven bowls of God’s fury upon the earth.’ The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth. Festering and ugly sores broke out on those who had the mark of the beast or worshiped its image. The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea. The sea turned to blood like that from a corpse; every creature living in the sea died. The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water. These also turned to blood.”

“Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say:

‘You are just, O Holy One,  
who are and who were,  
in passing this sentence.  
For they have shed the blood  
of the holy ones and the prophets,  
and you [have] given them blood to drink;  
it is what they deserve.’

Then I heard the altar cry out,

‘Yes, Lord God almighty,  
your judgments are true and just.’

“The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun. It was given the power to burn people with fire. People were burned by the scorching heat and blasphemed the name of God who had power over these plagues, but they did not repent or give him glory.”

(16: 1-9)



Like the first four seals and the first four trumpets, the first four bowls form a set. But unlike the seals and trumpets that affect only a portion of the earth, the bowls are global and all-encompassing, affecting all earth, air, fire [light] and water, the four physical elements of the universe recognized by virtually every culture in the ancient world.<sup>1</sup>

These are supernatural disasters on a cosmic scale!

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle added a fifth to the list, *aether* [αιθήρ], the element that fills the void above the terrestrial sphere.



- The “**festering and ugly sores**” are similar to the plague of boils that struck the Egyptians (Exodus 9: 8-12). And as the plague of boils struck only the Egyptians and not the Israelites, so do the “festering and ugly sores” affect only those “*who had the mark of the beast or worshiped its image*” (16: 2).

- The second and third plagues turn the sea, rivers and springs into blood, just as the first plague on Egypt turned the Nile River into blood. And as all the fish in the Nile died (Exodus 7: 14-24), so does every living creature in the waters die.

- In Leviticus 17: 11 we learned that “*the life of the flesh is in the blood*”; thus, turning water into blood that brings death is a stunning irony, and in the case of Revelation, the blood is like that “*from a corpse*” (16: 3), a chilling image.



- A pronouncement of praise follows the third plague, a pronouncement by the angel who poured out the third bowl, stressing God’s justice. As those on the earth who refused to repent shed the blood of the holy ones and the prophets, so is it infinitely just that they have only the blood (of a corpse) to drink!
- The fourth plague strikes with fire and heat, scorching and burning the people of the earth, who respond not with repentance, but with blasphemous words, an intransience that recalls Pharaoh “hardening his heart” with each increasingly severe plague on Egypt.

**“The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast. Its kingdom was plunged into darkness, and people bit their tongues in pain and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and sores. But they did not repent of their works.**

**(16: 10-11)**



• Each bowl offers increasingly severe and all-encompassing judgment. The fifth bowl brings supernatural darkness on “the throne of the beast” (16: 10). Like the ninth plague on Egypt — “darkness so thick it could be felt” (Exodus 10: 21-29)—the fifth plague overwhelms with terror: people bite their tongues in pain, and they blaspheme God.

The book of Wisdom aptly describes such a scene:

*“For they, who supposed their secret sins were hid under the dark veil of oblivion, were scattered in fearful trembling, terrified by apparitions. For not even their inner chambers kept them unafraid, for crashing sounds on all sides terrified them, and mute phantoms with somber looks appeared. No fire had force enough to give light, nor did the flaming brilliance of the stars succeed in lighting up that gloomy night.”*

(17: 3-5)

“The sixth angel emptied his bowl on the great river Euphrates. Its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings of the East. I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come from the mouth of the dragon, from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet. These were demonic spirits who performed signs. They went out to the kings of the whole world to assemble them for the battle on the great day of God the almighty. (‘Behold, I am coming like a thief.’ Blessed is the one who watches and keeps his clothes ready, so that he may not go naked and people see him exposed.) They then assembled the kings in the place that is named Armageddon in Hebrew.”

(16: 12-16)

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



**“John before the False Prophet, the Dragon and the Beast,” *Apocalypse* (Royal MS 15 D II, fol. 174v), c. 1300-1325. British Library, London.**

**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM









**Tel of Megiddo [Armageddon]. Jezreel Valley, Israel.**

*Photography by Ana Maria Vargas*  
**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM



**Atop Megiddo, looking out to the “Plains of Armageddon” (Jezreel Valley).**

*Photography by Ana Maria Vargas*  
**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM



**Dr. C. "Riding with the King," Tel of Megiddo [Armageddon].**

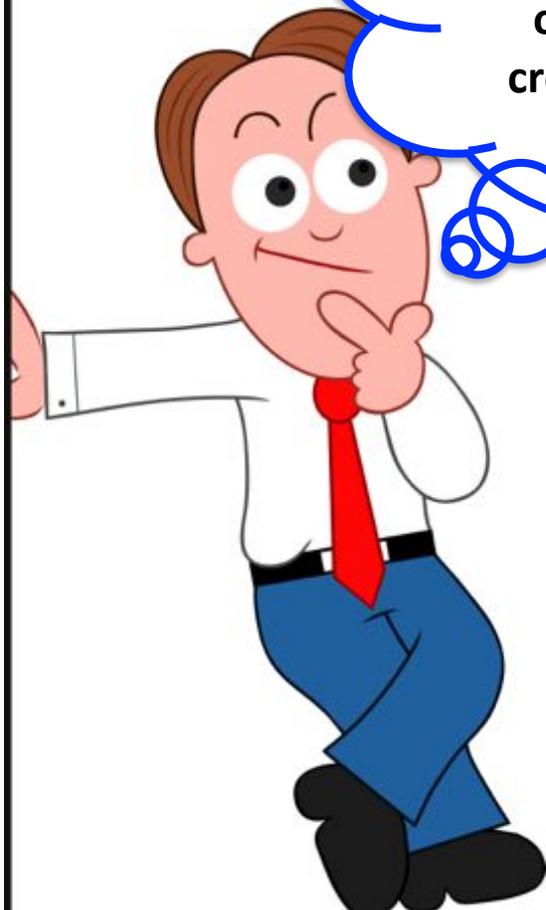
*Photography by Ana Maria Vargas*  
**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM



• Notice the close parallels between the sixth trumpet and the sixth bowl, a structural feature throughout Revelation:

- With the sixth trumpet, four fallen angels standing on the bank of the Euphrates River assemble a demonic army of 200 million cavalry (9: 15-16); with the sixth bowl poured on the Euphrates River, “the kings of the whole world” gather with their armies for the climactic battle of Armageddon.
- With the sixth trumpet, evils spew forth from the mouths of demonic creatures: fire, smoke and sulfur; with the sixth bowl, the dragon, the beast and the false prophet spew forth from their mouths demonic “unclean spirits” that look like frogs.
- With the sixth trumpet, one third of humanity is killed; with the sixth bowl, all of the dragon’s followers will be killed.

**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM



Those repetitive structural features are really interesting in Revelation. Clearly they are very carefully planned. With each repetition, the intensity or severity of an action ratchets upward, in a crescendo of demonic activity as we approach the end.



Good observation. You're so astute!



He's just a fancy talker!

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM

“The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air. A loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, ‘It is done.’ Then there were lightning flashes, rumblings, and peals of thunder, and a great earthquake. It was such a violent earthquake that there has never been one like it since the human race began on earth. The great city was split into three parts, and the gentile cities fell. But God remembered great Babylon, giving it the cup filled with the wine of his fury and wrath. Every island fled, and mountains disappeared. Large hailstones like huge weights came down from the sky on people, and they blasphemed God for the plague of hail because this plague was so severe.”

(16: 17-21)

Logos BIBLE STUDY.COM



- **“It is done”** [γίνομαι, “ghin’-om-ahee”]. Here in the active voice of the perfect tense, grammatically this verb indicates “the present state resulting from a finished action.” This is, indeed, the *final* judgment, powerfully expressed in a single word. **Wow!**
- There are five earthquakes in Revelation (6: 12; 8: 5; 11: 13; 11: 19 and 16: 18), each one functioning like an exclamation point, each one escalating in intensity and severity, culminating in *“such a violent earthquake that there has never been one like it since the human race began on earth”* (16: 18).
- The “great city” that splits into three parts is Rome. As Babylon laid siege to Jerusalem and destroyed Solomon’s temple in 586 B.C., so did Rome lay siege to Jerusalem and destroy the second temple in A.D. 70. Babylon is a code word for Rome, as we learned in Lesson #12.



• Reaching the apex of his crescendo, John brilliantly incorporates cosmic and apocalyptic imagery into this climactic scene:

- a massive earthquake splits Rome into three parts;
- the cities of the world collapse, those belonging to “the kings of the whole world” who have assembled at Armageddon;
- islands and mountains disappear as the very foundations of the earth split and crumble; and
- massive hail stones pummel the people, as if the very dome of the firmament itself fractures into a thousand shards.



Oh, my! I knew  
this was going  
to happen!





**The seventh bowl brings God's final judgment on those who refuse to repent, those who have pledged their allegiance to the infernal trinity: Satan, the Antichrist and the False Prophet.**

**The next three chapters (17-19) take us inside the seventh bowl for a close-up, ground-level view of the destruction.**

**Stay tuned!**

# Questions for discussion and thought

1. How many “plagues” are there in Revelation?
2. We saw heaven opened and the ark of the covenant at the end of Revelation 11. What then comes out of the Tabernacle, and what happens?
3. How do the seven bowls differ from the seven seals and seven trumpets?
4. Why do “the kings of the whole world” gather together at Armageddon?
5. In Revelation, where is “Babylon”?

**Logos** BIBLE STUDY.COM

## **Copyright © 2016 by Logos Educational Corporation**

**All rights reserved. No part of this course—audio, video, photography, maps, timelines or other media—may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage or retrieval devices without permission in writing or a licensing agreement from the copyright holder.**

**[All Tabernacle illustrations in these lectures are taken from:**

**Paul F. Kiene. *The Tabernacle of God in the Wilderness of Sinai*, trans. by John S, Crandall. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977. Used by permission.]**