

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

REVELATION 15-16

Every December, our family has an annual tradition. We call it **The ABC... the Adams Bowl Championship.**

We have a trophy, T-shirts, rules, a scoring system. Over time, it's grown into a sophisticated competition.

Everyone tries to predict the winner of the college football bowl games. My daughter, Natalie, is the reigning champ... Some of us put a lot of time and thought into our prognostications. Others of us, mostly of the female variety, base our predictions on favorite colors... "Oh, I like blue over orange, I'll take Duke."

You have to be born an Adams, or marry an Adams, to compete. This year, the big concern is what impact Covid-19 will have on the bowls and on our contest...

*I said all that, to say this, Revelation 15-16 is about bowls, **seven bowls.** But these bowls aren't *bowl games*. There's nothing fun or festive about these bowls. There's no trophy or T-shirts associated with these bowls - only *peril* and *pain* and *punishment.**

These bowls are no contest. God's justice, His wrath, **will bowl the world over...** And it's not difficult to pick the losers in these bowls. *It's the people who rebel against Jesus and pledge their allegiance to the Beast.*

But I'm not sure you can point to any winners either. I know a loving God doesn't consider the judgment of sinners "*a win.*" His victory is our salvation. He grieves our *defiance* and the *death* and *devastation* it causes.

If there is a winner in these seven bowls, it's **God's righteousness**. His warnings prove true. His Word is verified... Evil gets punished. Sin is a debt that comes due. Creatures are responsible to their Creator. **In the end, earth's tenants are accountable to their landlord.**

Most of all, these seven bowl judgments teach us that **“God doesn't play.”** His judgments are no *game*.

There are issues more important to God than our happiness and good times. A holy God demands righteousness. There is a right and a wrong, and God is the arbitrator of both. He expects us to live and treat each other His way. God expects us to do what's right, which makes these bowls deadly serious business. They are the ultimate result of our *un-righteousness*.

Chapter 15 is a “bowl special,” a preview of what's coming. In **Chapter 16, the Lord and His angels go bowling!** Verse 1, “Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete.”

There are **21 judgments** mentioned in the book of Revelation... In Chapter 6, *seven seals are broken*. In Chapters 8-9, *seven trumpets blast*. Now in Chapter 16, *seven bowls brimming with judgment are emptied...*

There are Bible commentators who try to fit these 21 plagues into a nice chronological order. *I'm not so sure*. There's probably a lot of overlap. Especially, the closer you get to the end of the seven years of Tribulation.

Remember in Matthew 24, the Olivet Discourse, Jesus said, **“Unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved...”** In other words, the judgment will become so severe it can't last forever. That's what we see here. These bowls cripple the Earth to the point where the planet can no longer sustain human life. These 7 plagues have to be God's final judgments.

If you've ever been to a hockey game, you've seen a fight break out between players. In fact, most people go to a hockey fight and hope a game breaks out.

But when two hockey players get into a fist-a-cuffs, the first thing they do is pull off their gloves. When you really want to inflict pain, the padded gloves have to go.

Well, Revelation 15-16 could be titled, **“When God's Gloves Come Off.”** From this point onward, God is no longer cushioning His blows. He'll land a final flurry of combination punches. God is going for the knockout!

By Chapter 15, God has a rebellious planet on the ropes. Seven bowls are what drops it to the canvas.

Verse 2, **“And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire...”** The book of Hebrews reveals a fascinating insight. The Jewish Temple was really a small-scale model of God's throne room in Heaven.

Hebrews 9:24 makes the statement, **“For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us...”** If you want a glimpse of heaven; then examine the Temple on Earth.

And one of the features of Solomon's Temple was the bronze laver - a bowl of water where the priests tidied up. Well, here in Revelation 15:2, John sees its prototype - its heavenly equivalent. He calls it a sea... *"I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire..."*

John sees a body of water - it's motionless - it looks like glass... It has a fiery tint as if stained with blood.

And he sees *"those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God."* **They're standing where the priests once washed.** Heaven's inhabitants are already clean. That's why here, the martyrs - those who suffered for Christ's sake in the Tribulation - will be standing on the sea as a testimony to God's salvation!

John sees these people *"who have the victory over the beast..."* But you say, *"The Antichrist put them to death because they refused his mark of worship. How can you say they were victorious over the Beast?"*

Realize, **victory in the Christian life is sometimes won by escaping tribulation,** but at other times, it's won by **enduring tribulation!** God gives the Church an escape - *He raptures us.* Whereas, He'll give the tribulation believers endurance in the face of suffering.

Remember this the next time you're confronted with temptation, or fear, or doubt - don't just look for God's escape hatch. He might want to strengthen you for the trial. Rather than *"get out,"* He could say, *"go through."*

It's only through difficulty and trial that we find wings we didn't know were there. Through Him we overcome.

Here, in Revelation 15, on the eve of God's final judgments, God gives Earth a glimpse of Heaven and holds up the saints who stood for Jesus though it cost them their lives, as proof of His willingness to save.

Verse 3, and "they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying..."

You can check out the lyrics to Moses' song in Exodus 15. Verses 3-4 provide *the lyrics of the Lamb*.

But before we look at the lyrics, I want to clear up some confusion about the music in heaven... Notice verse 2, the musicians on the glassy sea have "*harps*."

And I know what some of you are thinking, "*No, no, not harps!*" There are folks, including myself, who can't bear the thought of spending eternity listening to the sound of a boring harp. That would not be heavenly.

But there are benefits to thorough Bible study. I did a little research. According to the Vines Expository Dictionary of NT Words, the Greek term "*kithara*" here translated, "*harps*," can also be rendered, "*guitar*."

Breath easy friends! The guys on the glassy sea could well be jamming with their electric guitars - their Les Pauls and Stratocasters. *Jesus is the rock that doesn't roll*, thus there's got to be rock-n-roll in heaven.

I will say this, **everybody in heaven is harping on Jesus.** He's all heaven talks about. Everyone is full of praise and love and adoration for *the Lion and Lamb*.

And they have no idea why we are so silent!

And here's what they sing, "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy.

For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested." **God is about to pour out scalding hot bowls of judgment.** We'll read later that wicked men respond with blasphemy.

But those in heaven praise the Lamb for the same judgments. His ways are "*just and true.*" God alone is holy. **Heaven praises what the world resents...**

It's what you see in a court. When the verdict comes down *the guilty squirm* while *the victims take heart*.

Verse 5, "After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands." These angels are wearing priestly garb.

"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." **These seven bowls are sloshing over with red-hot wrath. These bowls have been heated to a boil. It's finally the final Judgment!**

And notice the fireworks in heaven. “The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.”

Heaven fills with smoke, as the Earth is about to get smoked. It’s going to be lights-out for this wicked world.

“Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth.” So the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.”

People who proudly accepted the mark as a follower of the Beast will now be marked by God with a vile and festering sore. Their loyalty turns into a legion.

Some folks see these *“foul and loathsome sore(s)”* as having to do with nuclear radiation. When atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima, people who didn’t die in the blast were tortured from the radiation burns.

John Hersey in his book, *“Hiroshima,”* paints a vivid picture of the survivors, *“Faces where wholly burned, eye-sockets were hollow, fluid from melted eyes ran down cheeks, mouths were mere swollen, pus-covered wounds.”* The victims broke out with running sores and ended up dying slow, painful, torturous deaths.

Another possibility is that these sores could be a mass outbreak of melanoma or skin cancer caused by an over-

exposure to the sun. We'll see that the fourth bowl gives power to the sun to scorch human beings.

Whatever the cause, the first bowl sees to it that the worshippers of the Beast realize God is not pleased.

But watch out! Another bowl is emptied in verse 3, “**Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died.**” Notice, these angels have aim. They always hit their targets. The first angel had the worshippers of the Beast in his crosshairs.

Now, the second angel targets the seas. And here is an environmental disaster of unparalleled proportion.

It makes the Gulf Oil spill of a few years ago look like baby's drool. The Earth's oceans are poisoned.

The seven seas will turn toxic. Fish, seals, plankton die. Waters that teemed with life die... *No more sushi!*

In **Revelation 8:8**, when the second trumpet blasted, we're told, “**something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood.**” There we discussed the real possibility of the Earth being impacted by a meteorite or comet.

The mineral composition of an object from space would be high in iron. Thus, it could be that the iron injected into the oceans turn the waters a blood-red...

We've talked about this before; astronomers have detected over **18,000 NEOs, or near Earth objects.** Just last month, 244 new asteroids were added to the registry. With all due respect to global warming theorists, NASA director, Jim

Bridenstine, identified an asteroid strike as Earth's biggest threat. He suggested developing an asteroid defense as a bigger space priority than sending a man back to the Moon or Mars.

The Earth has been hit by cosmic projectiles before, and my reading of Revelation suggests it'll happen again. It could bring about many of these judgments.

Of course, there are other possible explanations...

Red-tide is a phenomenon caused by a saltwater parasite. It turns the ocean red and kills fish. Ironically, the organism has a nickname... "the cell from hell."

And God may use neither asteroid nor parasite. He can just say "Let there be blood, and there'll be blood." When you're God, you can do whatever you want.

The possible doomsday scenarios are endless. **How** it happens is conjecture. **That** it happens is a certainty.

"Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood."

This is why the bowl judgments have to occur within a few days of Jesus' return. Human beings can live a maximum of ten days without water. If all the bottled waters and cocolas sustain us a few more weeks, then earth's inhabitants will be able to survive maybe a month after the third angel pours out his bowl of wrath.

Now I know what some of you are thinking...

God has been so loving, and gracious, and merciful to me I didn't think He was capable of such judgment?

That's why the third angel offers an explanation as he pours out his bowl... John writes, "And I heard the angel of the waters saying: "You are righteous, O Lord, the One who is and who was and who is to be, because You have judged these things. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due."

In the wake of all the suffering, our tendency is to forget what this world did to deserve its punishment...

But God doesn't forget!

This Christ-rejecting world has innocent blood on its hands. "The blood of saints and prophets" certainly, but since 1980, 1.6 billion unborn, innocent children have been aborted. That would be 17% of the global population had those babies lived. Think of it, for every five people you meet there's one person missing.

And chances are they were murdered to avoid an inconvenience. God sees blood on this world's hands...

Recall the Jews who stood before Pilate and cried for Jesus to be crucified. They shouted the ominous words, "His blood be on us and on our children..." Did that crowd have any idea what they were asking?

Today, those martyred in Jesus' name - the innocent lives lost from war, and genocide, and vice, and hatred, *their blood joins in and cries out for God's vengeance.*

We might get squeamish in the face of judgment, **but not God.** His judgments are "just and true." "You are righteous, O Lord..." God doles out "their just due."

And Heaven isn't finished defending God's righteous wrath. In verse 7, John writes, "And I heard another (maybe an angel) from the altar saying, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments."

Don't make the mistake of seeing just one side of God's heart. Yes, He is kind and benevolent, merciful, and gracious. But His mercy comes at a steep price.

Understand, God created the world and us in good faith. He's a good God and loves us. *Why would He expect anything other than total compliance from his creatures?* But that's not how we reacted. Adam and Eve, then you and me, defied the Creator's authority.

What is God to do? Ignore it? Let sin slide? Let the puny little human mud-dobbers defy Him unimpeded?

If God were that ambivalent, who would respect Him? God has to cast down those who challenge Him.

Realize, there would've been no thought of mercy, only justice, had Jesus not stepped in between us and God. God decreed the wages of sin to be death. This is the price of God's mercy... *someone had to die for us.*

And Jesus assumes our penalty. He absorbed God's wrath. Jesus took upon Himself all that we deserved - *legally, and physically, and emotionally, and spiritually.*

When God sees a child molester, a wife beater, a rapist, a serial killer, a pimp... He gets really angry.

Yet, God stored up all His wrath for one strategic moment. At the cross, He poured out His feelings of disgust on His only

Son. The hammer intended for sinners fell on Jesus... And for one reason, so that God now could treat mankind with mercy - not judgment.

But if you reject or ignore Jesus and act as if God's mercy is no big deal, you find yourself under God's judgment. If you're **that** foolish and defiant, you deserve what you get. But you can't fault God - not at all.

As the angel from the altar cries out, *"Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments."*

Verse 8, *"Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire."* *Do I believe in global warming? Absolutely, when the fourth bowl is emptied, the world will heat up.*

And it's the result of human causes! Not greenhouse gasses, but sin and rebellion. This is God's judgment.

Say a meteorite rips through the ozone and leaves a hole - the sun would turn into a blow torch and scorch the planet like a prairie fire. It's global warming in a way we've never imagined. God's wrath is heating up.

Verse 9, *"And men were scorched with great heat..."*

You'd think they'd repent and cry to God for mercy. Instead, *"They blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory."* God obviously has the power to relieve the world of its suffering, but even *in the face of judgment, the world shakes its fist in God's face and insults Him!*

“Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast...” Again, when it comes to God’s judgments, these angels are sharpshooters. God is ordering precision strikes against deliberate targets. This angel has the throne of the Beast in his scope!

And when the bowl is poured out, “His kingdom became full of darkness...” It’s literally lights out for planet Earth. Thick darkness engulfs everything. It’s so dark the sufferers can’t perceive beyond their blisters and sores. They sit and sulk - and flail about in pain.

Verse 10 describes their favorite pastime. “They gnawed their tongues because of the pain. They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.” This seems unimaginable. How could they not repent? Why not tap out?... Why not give up, and yield to God?...

2 Thessalonians 2 answers this question. Paul writes of the end times, “The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason, God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” The Antichrist will capture people’s allegiance. He’ll be persuasive - even working miracles. Paul calls them “*lying wonders.*”

And to execute His judgment in an expeditious way, God will seal their rebellion by casting upon them “*a strong delusion.*”

The inhabitants of this earth will end up believing not just “a lie,” but Paul calls it “*the lie.*”

Recall what happened at the tower of Babel. The world came under the sway of another charismatic leader. Nimrod convinced the world that *God was the bad guy and he was the good guy.* Rather than hold people accountable for their sin, Nimrod taught them to ignore their sin and blame God for its consequences.

Big bad God was the person responsible for the global flooding. Nimrod would protect them from God.

I believe this is “*the lie*” - “*the strong delusion*” - that hardens the rebellion of the last days. It’s the age-old lie that *God is bad and man is good.* It’s how Satan tempted Eve. He told her God wanted to stunt her growth. If you eat of the fruit, “*your eyes will be opened, and you’ll be like God...*” God wants to deprive you. Defying God and following Satan brings enlightenment.

And this is the spirit of our day. Biblical Christianity is depicted as a repressive and intolerant, responsible for the last 2000 years of war, hatred, oppression, and prejudice. Satan is still selling the lie, “*Biblical Christianity is holding us back. Open your eyes! Find the god that’s you. Shed the shackles of Christianity.*” All that’s left is for the Devil to introduce the Beast...

Verse 12, “*Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared.*” Now from

this point on, the stage will be set for the final battle called, “the battle of Armageddon.”

It'll be a clash between the armies of this world and the army of Jesus. And one of the major players in this battle to end all battles are “*the kings of the east.*”

Daniel 11 is another prophecy that sees this same event. The Antichrist will invade Israel, and he'll be attacked by Syria from the north, and Egypt from the south, but to no avail. The only hindrance to the plans of the Beast is news of armies approaching from the East. *Is this the Chinese?... A confederacy of nations?*

All we're told is how they reach the battlefield.

They march into the plain of Meggido through a dried up river bed. Traditionally, the Euphrates River is the boundary between East and West. It's 1800 miles long. In places, it's two-thirds of a mile wide - thirty feet deep.

This river bed will be **the highway to Hell**. Here's the road the eastern armies take to Armageddon.

In 1990, Turkey finished a dam whereby they can now shut off the headwaters that fill up the Euphrates. The Ataturk Dam has diminished the water level in the Euphrates by a third. It's caused tremendous tension with Turkey's downstream neighbors, Syria and Iraq.

This dam might one day aid the kings of the east.

Again, as we mentioned last week. Everything in this section is leading up to the final battle of Armageddon.

In verse 13, John writes, “**And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the**

mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.” This is gross... demons like frogs issuing from a man’s mouth. *Makes you want to croak.*

Some of you ladies think if you kiss enough frogs you’ll find you’re Prince. You might also find a demon.

I think I’d pray and trust God to bring me a hubby.

It’s said of these frogs, “For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.” The demons deceive and coax the nations to the final showdown.

Jesus speaks in verse 15. It’s red letters in my Bible, “Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.” And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.”

Which literally means, “the Mountain of Megiddo.”

Megiddo is an ancient city that sat on the southern boundary of the Valley of Jezreel. This has been the site of numerous battles down through the centuries...

It’s where Deborah and Barak defeated the Canaanites... Where Gideon defeated the Midianites...

It’s where Saul died at the hands of the Philistines...

And it’s where the British, under General Allenby, defeated the Turks in WW1... The valley is presently a big expanse of farmland - *with one exception...* There’s now an Israeli Air Force base in the middle of the valley. Planes from Megiddo can fly sorties to Syria and Iran.

When Napoleon Bonaparte saw the plain of Megiddo, he remarked, “All the armies of the world could maneuver for battle here.” And one day soon they will.

The term “Battle of Armageddon” is a misnomer.

Megiddo simply serves as the staging area for the armies of the world as they move against Jerusalem.

The final conflict is really “the Battle of Jerusalem.” And we’ll talk about it in two weeks - in Revelation 19.

Verse 17, “Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air...” Again, notice the target - “the air.”

Remember who the Bible refers to as “the prince of the power of the air?” Ephesians 2:2 coins this term as a title for Satan. This is why Satan has such an influence on broadcast media, and hot spots, and wi-fi.

He spreads so much of his filth through *the air*.

And apparently, this seventh and final bowl judgment is aimed at Satan himself and his vast domain. God is going to defeat the devil at the pinnacle of his power.

“And a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” Or “It is finished.”

The wording harkens back to the cross of Christ.

On the cross, Jesus redeemed the creation. He bought it back. *But here He takes possession.* With this final bowl of judgment, Jesus will evict the squatters.

He secures for Himself what belongs to Him.

Verse 18, “And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth.” A great quake blows up the Richter scale! Finally, it’s the big one, but its epicenter isn’t San Andreas - it’s in the Middle East.

Verse 19, “Now the great city was divided into three parts...” “The great city” is probably Jerusalem.

Today, Jerusalem is a divided city... East Jerusalem is Arab - West Jerusalem is Jewish. But you think Jerusalem is divided now, here God splits it into three...

And this earthquake not only impacts Israel. There’s a ripple effect... “And the cities of the nations fell.” This geological event is enormous. It impacts cities around the world. Imagine, New York, London, Rome, Beijing, Moscow, Tokyo - all these cities turned to rubble.

It’s interesting that all the ancient calendars operated on twelve 30 day months - an annual total of 360 days.

Yet today’s solar year is an asymmetrical 365.25 days. *Something tipped the Earth’s axis and caused a wobble?* Geologists speculate that in Earth’s past we took a direct hit from a cosmic projectile. A comet or meteor or asteroid knocked the planet off its orbit.

And if it happened before, it can happen again.

John mentions the impact of this strike on another city. “And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath.” Jerusalem has

always been God's capitol on Earth - whereas Babylon has been the city of Satan.

Here, Babylon is made to gulp down a cup of the fierceness of God's wrath. She tastes His judgment.

Verse 20, "Then every island fled away..." The heat from the fourth bowl will melt the polar caps. Scientists say if that happened the sea level would rise 200 feet across the globe. Today's coastal cities will disappear.

"And the mountains were not found." Expect tidal waves and tsunamis when the continental plates shift. All the Earth's topography is in for a radical facelift.

Surveyors beware. All the Topo maps will be wrong.

Verse 21, "And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent." A talent was an ancient Hebrew measurement - the equivalent of one-hundred pounds. Think... 100-pound hailstones!

When my brother lived in Dallas, he complained about hail the size of golf balls denting his pick-up. But imagine hailstones the size of a beach-ball or bigger!

There are all kinds of theories of what might cause such a phenomenon - but again don't miss the obvious!

Recall the OT penalty for blasphemy? It was *stoning*! Here it's heaven that's throwing the rocks. This vile and wicked world has blasphemed God, and God is responding with a punishment that befits the crime.

And yet despite it all, “Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.” People fail to get the point!

The world’s reaction is proof of the hardness of their hearts. Rather than repent, they stiffen their necks and dig in their heels - and continue in die-hard rebellion.

I hope you get the point! *You are not God!* You are a creature made in His image and accountable to Him.

You are not free to do as you please and follow your heart. This is not the path to enlightenment - *but to darkness and death*. Revelation 16 teaches us that this world is going to follow its heart straight to Hell.

I’m sure you don’t want to go to Hell, but if the path you’re own is headed there, and you stay on that path; then don’t be surprised if that’s where you end up.

Repent means to turn. God’s bowls are not games. He isn’t playing. His bowls are serious business. Don’t you get bowled over... Turn to Jesus while you can!