

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## REVELATION 15-16

If you're a college football fan you know December is **bowl season**. Winning teams from opposite regions of the country are matched up in exhibition games.

And each year my family competes to see who can predict the winner and point spread of each game. We call it the **ABC**, or **Adams Bowl Championship**. We've got a trophy, T-shirts, rules, even print-outs. For 27 years the champ has had his or her name engraved on the coveted trophy - *which is in the shape of a bowl...* And if you're wondering, yours truly has won a total of three times in 27 years. *Not a good showing!*

In fact, most of the time, Adams 'men base their picks on exhaustive research... Other contestants (*usually the female variety*) decide on games based on "*cutest mascot*" or "*team colors...*" Even the grandkids compete. And a child, not yet old enough to drive, has won the ABC two of the last four years... Obviously, skill or knowledge has little to do with who prevails.

Yet, this Bowl Championship is still serious business. The competition among Adams can definitely heat up.

And so do **the bowls** in Revelation 15-16! These are not "*bowl games.*" There's nothing *fun and games* about these bowls. These are actual bowls sloshing over with God's wrath and judgment. They're poured out on a world that's defied and rebelled against God.

These bowls teach us that "**God don't play.**" One day God will "**bowl over**" this wicked world. These seven bowls are associated with peril and punishment.

The bowl judgments prove that sin is a debt that comes due. Creatures are responsible to their Creator. Earth's tenants **are** accountable to their landlord.

In the end, evil will get punished. There is a right and wrong. God's Word proves true. His judgments are no "*game.*" God expects us to treat Him and each other a certain way. God is deadly serious about our attitudes.

Chapter 15 is a "**bowl preview**" of what's coming. In Chapter 16 God and His angels actually **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.**"

Twenty-one judgments are in the book of Revelation. In Chapter 6, *seven seals get broken*. In Chapters 8-9 *seven trumpets blast*. Now in Chapter 15-16, *seven bowls or basins 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.* I think there's plenty 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..."** The judgment will become so severe it won't be able to 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. And when hockey players get into a fist-a-cuffs the first thing they do is pull off their gloves. If you 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 lands 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. It tells us the Jewish Temple on Earth was really just a small-scale model of God's throne room in Heaven. Hebrews 9:24 states, **"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..."**

To understand heaven examine the Temple. And one feature of Solomon's Temple was the bronze laver. It sat in the outer court. It was a bowl of water where the priests tidied up... Well, here 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 a piece of glass, with 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."** John tells us these are people who said *"no"* to the beast, his image, his mark, his number - *the tools of his power grab in Chapter 13.*

These martyrs stood firm in their faith. They *suffered* on earth, but are now *standing* in heaven. Where the OT priests washed, these are seen standing in victory.

John sees those *“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 gives these 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.

So here in 15:2, on the eve of final judgment, we're shown the martyred saints who stood for Jesus on earth, now standing in heaven, as proof of God's justice and righteousness. *They're suffering at the hands of the beast justifies the coming judgments.*

Verse 3, and *“they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying...”* In Exodus 15 you can check out the lyrics to Moses' song... Verses 3-4 provide *the lyrics of the Lamb...*

But before we look at lyrics, I just want to clear up some confusion about 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, 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're benefits to thorough Bible study. I did a little research. And according to the Vines Expository Dictionary of NT Words, the Greek term *“kithara”* that's translated here, *“harps,”* can also be rendered, *“guitar.”*

*Breath easy my 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 will be **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.” It’s interesting, God is about to pour out scalding hot bowls of judgment. We’ll read later, 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. They’re on a sacred, holy mission to render judgment.

“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. The 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 Antichrist, will now be marked by God with a vile and festering sore. Their *loyalty* will turn into a *lesion*.

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 take exact aim. They always hit their target. The first angel had the worshippers of the Beast in his crosshairs. The second targets the seas, and causes an environmental disaster of unparalleled proportion.

This will make the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf, the largest marine oil spill in history, look like baby's drool. All earth's oceans will be poisoned. The seven seas turn toxic. Fish, seals, plankton die. Waters that teemed with life now die... *No more sushi!*

In Revelation 8:8 when the second trumpet blasted, we were 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 extremely high in iron. It could be that the iron injected into the oceans turn the waters blood-red.

We've talked about this previously, but astronomers have detected over 18,000 **NEOs**, or **near Earth objects**. In fact, every month newly-discovered asteroids are added to the registry. With all due respect to global warming theorists, former NASA director, Jim Bridenstine, identified an asteroid strike as Earth's biggest existential threat. He considers developing an asteroid defense a bigger priority than a manned mission to the Moon or Mars. The Earth has been hit by cosmic projectiles before, and my reading of Revelation suggests it'll happen again. And in the process it'll bring about many of these bowl judgments.

Of course, there are other possible explanations...

A red-tide is a phenomena 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 or 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. At some point our Earth is headed for a grim future.

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

This is why these bowl judgments have to occur within a few days of Jesus' return. Humans can live a maximum of ten days without water. If all the bottled waters and soft drinks sustained us a few more weeks, then earth's inhabitants could survive maybe a month after the third angel pours out his bowl of wrath.

*And I know what some of you are thinking... God has been so loving, gracious, and merciful to me I just didn't think He was capable of such brutal 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 wicked world did to deserve its punishment...

**But God won't forget!** This Christ-rejecting world has innocent blood on its hands. “*The blood of saints and prophets*” certainly, but since 1973, when abortion became legal in America, almost 63.5 million unborn, innocent children have been aborted. Today, that's 20% of our population had those babies lived. For every five people you meet there's one person missing.

And in many cases they were murdered to avoid an *inconvenience*. God sees the blood on our hands...

Remember the Jews who stood before Pilate and cried for Jesus to be crucified. They shouted 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 God doesn't.** 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 mankind in good faith. He's a good God and loves us. *Why should He expect anything other than total compliance from His creatures?* But that's not how we've treated Him. Adam and Eve, then you and me, defied His authority.

*What is God to do now? Ignore it? Let sin slide? Let puny humans defy Him unimpeded? If God were that ambivalent who'd respect Him, let alone worship Him? And it's cruelty to us if sin is allowed to go unchecked. God has to judge those who challenge His authority.*

*In fact, justice is so vital to God's there would be no thought of mercy had Jesus not stepped between us and God. God decreed the wages of sin to be death. This is the price of His pardon... someone has to die. And Jesus assumed 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 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 in response to His Son, God can now could treat mankind with mercy, not judgment.

That's why if you reject or ignore Jesus - and act as if God's mercy is no big deal - you'll find yourself under God's judgment. And if you're **that** 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 is 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 would think mankind would repent after this, and cry 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 has the power to relieve the world of its suffering, but even in 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 He orders precision strikes. This angel and his bowl is directly aimed at the throne of the Beast!

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. There 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 a charismatic leader. Nimrod convinced mankind 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 responsible for the global flood. Why else would people gather afterwards in a desert to build a tower coated with pitch, a water-proof tower to heaven.

Nimrod convinced people that God was against them and wouldn’t keep His rainbow promise. Nimrod sold the idea it was up to him to protect humanity from God.

And I believe this is “***the lie***” - “***the strong delusion***” - that hardens the rebellion of the last days. It’s the age-old lie: *God is bad, man is good*. It’s how Satan tempted Eve in the garden. He told her God was out to stunt her growth. Satan said, “Eat of the fruit **and your eyes will open, you’ll be enlightened, as smart as God**.” He tried to convince Eve *God wanted to deprive her. Hold her back. She should break free of His restraints*.



And this is the spirit of our day. Biblical Christianity is depicted as repressive, intolerant, and responsible for 2000 years of war, hatred, oppression, and prejudice.

Satan is still selling the lie, *“Open your eyes! Reject the God revealed in Scripture. Find the god that’s within you. Shed the shackles of Christianity...”* **And 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 is being set for a 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 is *“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 2/3rds of a mile wide and 30 feet deep.

This river bed will be **the highway to Hell**. Here’s the road the eastern armies will 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 previously. Everything in this section is leading 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 your Prince. You might also find a demon. *I think I’d just pray and trust God to bring me a husband.*

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 rim of the Valley of Jezreel. When we visit Israel we look north over the impressive valley. This is the site of numerous battles fought down through the centuries...

*It was here that Deborah and Barak defeated the Canaanites... where Gideon conquered Midian... and where Saul died at the hands of the Philistines... And it was in this famous valley - the Valley of Megiddo - that the British General Allenby defeated the Turks in WW1.*

Today, the Valley of Megiddo is presently a big expanse of farmland - *with one exception...* There is 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.

But 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 should really be called "the Battle of Jerusalem." We'll study it in two weeks - 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 now wi-fi, and the cloud. So much of His filth is spread 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 finally takes possession.* With this final bowl

of judgment, Jesus evicts the squatters. He is finally securing 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, the big one hits*, 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 largely Arab. West Jerusalem is Jewish. But you think Jerusalem is divide now, here God splits it into three...

And this earthquake not only impacts Israel. There's a ripple effect... Notice, “**And the cities of the nations fell.**” This geological event is enormous. It impacts cities worldwide. Imagine, New York, London, Rome, Beijing, Moscow, Tokyo - all these cities turn 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 created a wobble!* Some 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 also 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 - while Babylon is Satan's city. And 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 melts the polar ice caps. Scientists say when that happens the sea level will rise 200 feet. Coastal cities and beach towns will disappear. Tidal waves and tsunamis will occur when the earth is assaulted from space and the continental plates shift.

“**And the mountains were not found.**” All the Earth's topography is in for a radical face lift. Surveyors beware. All the current topography 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're all kinds of theories of what might cause such a phenomena - **but 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.**" Even in the end, when God takes the gloves off, **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.

But I hope you get the point! *You are not God!* You are a creature made in His image and accountable to Him for your attitudes and actions. You are not free to do as you please and follow your own 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 nobody in their right mind wants to get anywhere near hell - but if the path they're on is headed there, and they stay on that path; don't be surprised if that's where they end up.

Repent means to turn. God's bowls are not games. **God don't play.** His bowls are serious business. Don't you get bowled over... Turn to Jesus while you can!