

“THE FINAL THREE BOWLS OF WRATH.”

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Scripture Texts: Revelation 16:10-21

Introduction.

A couple of months ago this plastic card arrived with a detailed prophetic time-line of the seven years of tribulation. Let me read just a few of the details listed here.

January 20, 2013 the first seal is opened at the presidential inauguration as the anti-Christ is sworn into office.

April 1, 2014 the 7 year tribulation began.

September 11, 2015 Black Friday, US dollar crashes followed by global financial collapse.

October 21, 2015 First Trumpet, Yellowstone super volcano erupts and earthquakes burn and destroy one third of trees and grass.

September 7, 2018 Black Friday US will be completely destroyed, one third of humanity killed.

August 25, 2020 First Bowl then one a month after that until January.

February 11, 2021 Jesus appears.

Another person on the internet says:

We can be confident the Tribulation is Sept. 14, 2015 to Aug. 7, 2022 and Jesus steps down on the mount of olives Aug. 7, 2022. First rapture is according to readiness on Sept. 14, 2015 (Rev. 7.9) according to the condition set out in Matt. 24.40-42, Luke 21.36 and Rev. 3.10). Amen.

How true Jesus' words were, "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Matt. 24.42) but we do know the day.

It's a good thing we are studying Revelation since apparently without knowing it we are already in the Tribulation. Unless of course all these prophetic interpretations which take most of Revelation literally aren't true. And the constant stream of failed predictions is a pretty clear indication they aren't true. That's the first sign of a false prophet.

Let me just quickly remind you what I said about the bowls in my last sermon. The seals, trumpets and bowls are not chronological or sequential. Rather they are examples of God's ways on the earth at different times and places and with different intents and purposes. They can come in any order and intensity.

Waves of trouble sweep over our earth again and again and again all through history.

Whenever suffering happens it is warning and when the warnings are ignored final destruction happens.

So when a disaster happens on the earth or in the sky or on water, it can be at the same time a trumpet warning for those who survive (8:8) and a final bowl of wrath for those who don't survive (16:3).

The tsunamis in India (2004) and Japan (2011) were warnings to survivors and final judgment to those who died.

When these events happen to Christians, afflictions of the flesh or any other kind of suffering, they are not God's judgment for sin (remember Job) but God's testing, refining, purifying, building character and endurance. They are expressions of God's love and care and ways in which He manifests to us His mercy, grace and power.

The first four bowls were on the four major regions of the earth, land, oceans, rivers and sky.

The final three bowls indicate a shift in time from the present to the future. The last three bowls describe events at the end of the Gospel age, just before Christ returns. They may not be chronological but concurrent, happening more or less all at once.

In each of the previous cycles, seals and trumpets, when we got to the fifth there was a turning of the screw, a raising of the bar. Not only would the earth suffer, but so would Christians.

The Fifth Bowl: Torment (16:10-11).

The fifth bowl reminds us of the ninth Egyptian plague of darkness. This bowl effects everyone on earth.

Remember in Revelation 13 we talked about the beasts in Daniel's vision that described successive world empires, idolatrous kingdoms. They are interpreted as four great kingdoms or empires with four great kings.

Daniel 7:17 'These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth.

The beast represents anti-Christian government, tyrannies, dictatorships, and oppressive regimes, state-controlled and state-sanctioned persecution. There have been many in history and there are many on earth now.

Satan counterfeits the church on earth through a human system of government and society set up in opposition to Christ. This godless society is thrown into darkness at the end, into the same chaos and confusion as at the Tower of Babel.

The darkness is not literal since the suffering is not directly related to darkness. The darkness is spiritual or emotional or psychological, some kind of disruption that causes chaos and suffering in life for those who were depending of the godless social system.

Just as the darkness in Egypt showed the impotence of Egypt's sun god so this darkness will be a direct assault on Satan's sovereignty and ability to rule over people. His failure will entail internal strife, rebellion, or loss of political power.

Whatever was so proudly build by human hands, and was declared to be a great and better alternative to the church will fail. God is king of kings and lord of lords, the king of heaven rules over all the kingdoms of men.

It has been lights out for every great and proud nation, whether Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, the Roman Empire, the Ottoman Turks, Germany, Japan, or even the United States.

Pride, disobedience and idolatry marks the end of all nations.

But rather that admit their idolatry and sin, they will curse God. Rather than do the one thing that would bring relief, they bring even greater judgment on themselves by cursing God.

The Sixth Bowl: Destruction (16:12-16).

The sixth bowl prepares us for the final assault against God which will be put down with the seventh bowl. Verse 12 gives a summary of this bowl and the verses 13-16 give the details of how it comes to pass. Chapters 17-18 will be even greater detail.

This bowl of wrath sets up the final great battle. Notice, it is God's doing. But they don't see the trap, or seeing it they rush blindly and foolishly into their assault against God Almighty.

As death followed darkness in Egypt, so death follows the darkness of bowl five here.

Clearly this is the end times. Verse 15 speaks of the coming of Christ and verse 16 a great battle.

We meet again the *unholy Trinity of evil* that we first saw in chapter 13.

The dragon who is Satan.

The beast who is the godless political state, all anti-Christian government.

The image who is anti-Christian religion.

Satan's has many tools for deceit. Our secular, humanistic, materialistic, narcissistic culture is awash in lies and deception, in idolatry. He raises up others to help him, deceivers, false prophets and false teachers. He uses human instruments, human institutions, human governments to spread his lies.

He uses religions and cults, mass media and social media, culture and advertising, movies and books, television and the internet, politicians and governments.

John's image for Satan's work is *frogs*. To the Jews frogs were unclean and a source of great destruction. Remember the plague of frogs in Egypt in Exodus 8.

They aren't literal. The frogs are Satan's workers, demonic spirits, Satan's lies, deceit, godless slander and blasphemy and hatred for all things holy and true. Their main target is political leaders, which has always been Satan's strategy. Get the shepherd and you have the flock. The frogs are everything Satan uses to persuade kings and leaders and people to follow him and join the great battle against Christ.

Think about all the people in the world who are convincing people that God is dead, or Jesus is a joke or holy living is for losers, world leaders, politicians, celebrities, the media, university professors, teachers, false pastors, relatives. People convincing others that Christianity is a dead end, a waste of time; that the church is a dinosaur; that the Bible is irrelevant, fueling intolerance and hate.

The *drying up of the Euphrates* is a symbolic way of saying that at the end all barriers or hindrances to Satan's final attack will be removed. Whatever political or religious constrains there might have been, will fall, and Satan's attack on the church will be unhindered.

The "*kings of the east*" was OT symbolic language for any enemy of Israel.

Armageddon means mountain of Megiddo. This is the only mention of this word in the Bible. There is no such place as the Mountain of Megiddo, only a city on a 70 foot hill. There is a Valley of Megiddo. It was a crossroads of many of the most important trade routes in the Middle East. Many great battles in ancient history had been waged in this area.

It makes sense that this is a name of symbolic significance to point to a final eschatological battle between good and evil. There will be a great and final struggle between Satan and God, this is the name given to it. It is a symbolic location for the great and final battle. It is spiritual, not physical or geographical.

Countless interpreters of Revelation have connected Armageddon with various armies or the movements of troops or political powers. There has been no end to the predictions of who these armies would be.

In the 19th century it was the Ottoman Turks.

In the 20th century it was Japan, then China, then communist Russia.

Now it's the Muslims, maybe Iraq or Iran, especially with their nuclear power.

The battle is not between armies of nations but between the people of God and the enemies of God. Remember all these bowls are about God and not about Satan, they are about God's judgment, not Satan's victory.

Satan's goal is to rule and if he can't rule, as bowl five and six, make clear, then he will destroy. But in seeking to destroy he brings down destruction on himself. Satan is an instrument in God's hands for God's justice.

Those who interpret Revelation chronologically have the challenge of explaining all the last battles. There was one in the seventh seal and another before the seventh trumpet and at the beginning of Chapter 13. There are further descriptions in 17, 19 and 20.

But if taken as cycles, all of which happen all through history with varying intensity, then we know that all the battle descriptions are of the final judgment, on the great day of God Almighty.