

**Series:** 7 Bowls with 7 Plagues (a study in Revelation 15-16)

**Sermon Text:** 16:17-21 Plague Bowl 7

(Use **app** to get

lesson/slides, ask questions)

So far in **Revelation 16**, we've found that **God's judgments are always true and just** and that **Some stubborn people will never turn to God**. If you missed those lessons on bowl plagues 1-6, you'll find notes and audio on our app or website. Today, we'll cover the 7<sup>th</sup> bowl and explore this larger...

**BIG IDEA: Judgment texts inspire us to live redemptively in modern Babylon.**

Let's start by reading *verses 17-18: The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake*. Ephesians 2 describes sin as, *"following the course of this world, the prince of the power of the air, the disobedient spirit now at work."* **The air** reflects the space between heaven and earth (a.k.a. the world) where the ways of God are constantly opposed by the satanic warfare that we started unpacking in **chapter 13**. This **bowl** being **poured into the air** seems to convey that God has ultimate power over this relentless spiritual war. Some may think God is too distant, weak, or loving to judge, but **the voice from the temple-throne** and the stormy Sinai images (cf. Exodus 19:16-18) prove otherwise--these judgments come directly from a God actively engaged in the world.

This truth sometimes troubles people, but the phrase **"it is done"** helps us digest these judgments by tying them to God's greater redemptive plan. The phrase **"It is done!"** is repeated later in **21:6** alongside God making all things new, but it also recalls John 19:30 where Jesus said, *"It is finished"* and died to initiate new creation. His cry from the cross set in motion this cry from **the throne** which places these judgments between His resurrection and return. This idea is also reflected in John's vision of the Dragon (Satan) being cast out in **Revelation 12** and in John 12 where a voice affirmed Jesus from heaven who alluding to His crucifixion said, *"Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. And when I am*

*lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.” My point is that these judgments between the 2 cries are part of a plan--God is restoring creation by redeeming all who worship the Lamb and to removing all traces of evil. I wonder, “How can knowing that help us process them?”*

Let's move on to **verses 19-21: *The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.*** Here some see allusions to the 3 factions of Rome's civil war, the plague of ***hail*** in Exodus, and even ***mountain*** moving faith (cf. Matthew 17:20) but remember... apocalyptic images can illustrate real events without being literal. So, ***hundred-pound hail*** may never occur, but blended images of ***Rome, Babylon, and Egypt*** do suggest an underlying connection. Professor Craig Keener (p. 379) explained that “*John's oracles recycle the language of judgment against literal Babylon in (Old Testament) prophecies (Jer. 51:7); but if Rome is a revived Babylon, later empires can also be a revived Rome. The connection is not geographical location but the fact that an empire oppresses God's servants.*” Another thing Professor Greg Beale (p. 349) noticed about **verse 19** is that “*It's not just Rome or some later great capital of evil which is decimated, but all the world's cultural, political, and economic centers, because they are part of the great city and world system of Babylon.*”

All this suggests Babylon is a timeless image of the satanic spirit working in this world (***the air***). In 1 Peter and Revelation, it represents power-abusing empires that multiply personal sin and selfishness on a global level. Thus, scholars read Revelation and conclude “*The biggest problem facing the seven churches was Babylon. And the biggest problem we still face in our churches is Babylon...When we read Revelation well, we develop our ability to discern the presence of Babylon in our world and in our own churches, and then we learn to resist its creeping powers.*” (McKnight, 50). It's in this way that Revelation offers precious perspective, not precise predictions. For example: In **14:12** saints were to see

judgments as a call to endure, obey, and have faith in Jesus. Here in **16:6-7** judgments are reframed as just, true, and deserved. Something else I noticed while pursuing *chapter 16's* point is the repetition...

*Verse 9 They did not repent and give him glory.*

*Verse 11 They cursed the God of heaven...and did not repent of their deeds.*

*Verse 21 They cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.*

Strangely, amidst all the repetitive cursing, Jesus interjected this blessing in *verse 15: Blessed is the one who stays awake*. If it were absent, believers might think this text applies to others but not us. Yet, just as we saw in **14:12**, John alerts us to why this terrible text should matter to us! It's the basis for our **BIG IDEA: Judgment texts inspire us to live redemptively in modern Babylon**. Let's discuss how that works...The *blessing* goes to those who *stay awake* and *remain clothed* in Christ. This implies we must intentionally resist *Babylon's* creeping powers! Ephesians 4:22-24 describes that level of intention like this: "*Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*" All this implies that *Babylon's methods* (strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions) don't mix with God's methods (peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control). Sometimes we try mixing the old with the new in hope that God will use it anyway, but consider this example from [Pastor Eugene Peterson](#): "*It's the difference, politically, between wanting to use the people around us to become powerful (or, if unskilled, getting used by them), and entering into covenants with the people around us so that the power of salvation extends into every part of the neighborhood, the society, and the world that God loves.*" One reason unbelievers are rightly suspicious of us is that they hear us condemning their systems while also using them to our advantage. We say hope comes from being overtaken by God's kingdom, yet we keep voting for Capitol takeovers. We've accepted *Babylon's* lie that faith is private and personal, but the gospel we preach [has political implications](#)

(i.e., Christ came to create communities which wisely care for our habitats and each other--a motive that's both public and political!).

My question is, “*If the gospel announces **Babylon’s** demise, how else might we bring redemption to this world apart from propping up a dying system?*” I’m not saying we can’t engage rulers like a Moses or a Daniel, but on [a recent podcast episode](#) I did hear Professor NT Wright propose that “*The church is called to act as a small working model of the new creation. By being itself, the church does inevitably political acts by showing up the world's systems as dehumanizing by modeling a way of rehumanizing society from our little cells outward.*” Here’s my point: Most of us won’t ever run for a powerful office and that’s okay if Christ provides all the authority needed to impact the world redemptively. Unlike the **curse** in this text, we can accept Jesus as is, repent of ruining creation, and partner with Him by living redemptively (e.g. correcting oppression; bringing justice to the fatherless, pleading the widow's cause, visiting the sick and imprisoned, not showing favoritism cf. Isaiah 1:17; Matthew 25, Hebrews 13:3; James 1:27-28). Consider a closing question: “How might a commitment to normal Christian disciplines bring the world to us for help with stuff they can’t fix?” That may seem unrealistic, but in nonprofit work I’ve seen state officials, public schools, and hospital systems ask churches for help because they realize laws, programs, grants, and resources are ineffective without the one thing Christ died to make us good at--relationships! As you ponder all this with God’s people, remember, next steps need not be taken alone--let Christ’s church be your supportive family!

**Sunday to Monday Connection:** The Gospel is a political movement because Jesus came to create communities that wisely care for our habitat and for one another. When we make God King, it changes everything. Even in a Babylon-like empire, we can live redemptively—partnering with God to recreate heaven on earth.

- **Question:** How have your priorities, the things important to you, shifted as you acknowledge that God is King?
- **Next Step:** Gather with others to do one small act that challenges the norms of empire—share a meal, give something away, pray together, or serve someone on the margins. These acts of love are how we begin to build God’s Kingdom here and now. Each month, Krista highlights a nonprofit that is serving people in our community. If you’re looking for a way to bring God’s Kingdom to earth, this could be a great opportunity for you—or your group—to step in and serve together.

- **Note:** If you are not a Christ follower and would like to investigate further what all this might mean for you, please come talk with any of our leaders, or the person who brought you.

**Takeaways to discuss with your people** (in addition to the underlined questions above!):

1. Read the examples found in Ephesians 4:25-32. What do they teach us about how God's methods can't be mixed with worldly methods, and what do they teach us about our need to be intentional in rooting out every trace of Babylon?
2. If the cry from the cross set in motion the cry from heaven, and both reflect God working redemptive purposes, then how might we participate in those in between?
3. What are Babylon's chief personality and character traits? What makes a place a new version of Babylon?
4. How can we discern the Babylons of our world and wisely expose the philosophies which undergird these devilish systems? Discuss specific ways that our willingness to go to people and places society rejects can change or have changed things from the "bottom" up.

**Quotes related to this passage:**

- **Context:** "We should not make the mistake, once more, of thinking that this chapter describes things that must happen before the events of chapters 17–20 take place. As with the three sequences of seven, so with the final scene of judgment upon Babylon, the monsters and the dragon: these are different angles of vision on the same ultimate reality. As the voice from the temple declares in verse 17: 'It is done!' It's happened. It's been completed. Those who fall under judgment here are those who have been given every chance to repent and have refused. They have chosen to go down with the monsters rather than to suffer and be vindicated with the lamb. In the language of chapters 17–22, they have chosen the way of the harlot rather than the way of the bride." (Wright, 146)
- **Timing:** "But we should not read too much into the sequence of individual judgments; they are meant to be read as a series. They presumably do not convey a timeline or history written in advance but summarize the sorts of judgments God inflicts on humanity; that is, the God who acted powerfully in the Exodus is the God who still acts in history. He still has his Moseses to speak for him (11:5–7), but sends his judgments as long as the world, like Pharaoh, hardens its heart and refuses to stop oppressing people." (Keener, 398)
- **16:17:** "This reminds us of the plague in Egypt that resulted when Moses threw soot into the air and boils came upon the Egyptians (Exod 9:8ff). It is finished! In light of the entirety of Satan's realm being disrupted by the holiness of God (the 'earth,' the 'sea,' Satan's throne, and the 'air'), this proclamation suggests that the rebellious realm has been totally impacted by God's holiness." (Mulholland, 549)

- **It is done:** “The pronouncement is a dramatic one, expressed in the Greek perfect (= already accomplished) tense, which in this case is nearly untranslatable, meaning something like ‘it has happened’; thus, It is done! By this announcement John probably meant something like, ‘The end of the Empire and its tyranny against God’s people has now come.’” (Fee, 225-226)
- **Hundred-pound hail:** “The Exodus plague of hail (Exod. 9:22–35) is duplicated, but this time it strikes not one nation but all nations throughout the world in opposition to God: And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men. The hail comes down from heaven upon the unfaithful as ‘fire came down from heaven’ upon the persecuting nations in 20:9, which also alludes to the conclusive punishment. The plague of hail, which was not the last of the original Exodus plagues, is being combined here with the cosmic phenomena surrounding the Sinai theophany of Exodus 19, alluded to in v. 18 above. Perhaps hail is easily associated with the lightning, thunder, clouds, smoke, and trumpet sounds of Sinai.” (Beale, 349-350)
- **The great city of Babylon split 3 ways:** “This image suggests a pertinent historical association for John and his readers. In AD 68, after the suicide of Nero, civil war broke out in Rome between three factions (cf. Tacitus Histories 1.2, 6; 2.8). The stability of the empire was threatened (the cities of the Gentiles fell). Since John saw the Roman Empire as the incarnation of fallen Babylon in his own day, it seems likely that John took advantage of the contemporary situation in Rome to illustrate that ‘God remembered all of Babylon’s sins.’ The ‘remembrance’ is the reaction of God’s holiness to Babylon’s unholiness.” (Mulholland, 549)
- **Symbols of reality:** NT Wright (148) said, “As in Zechariah 12, where Jerusalem is split apart by an earthquake, ‘the great city’ (Rome?) is split into three, and the other cities collapse as well, like Jericho before the trumpets of Joshua. Islands flee away, mountains disappear. John’s hearers would have no difficulty in getting the point. This is not the collapse of the physical earth. This is the only way to describe the collapse of the entire social and political system on the earth.” Craig Keener (397) said, “But the moving of islands and mountains, as in 6:14, is merely part of the image of dramatic, cosmic judgment (Isa. 42:15; 64:1–3; Nah. 1:5–6), especially appropriate to the end time (Ezek. 38:19–20; Mic. 1:3–4; Zech. 14:5; 1 En. 1:6–7).”
- **Universal scope:** “John’s vision takes the account of the historical fall of Babylon, relates it backward to the defeat of Pharaoh at the Red Sea, and uses it typologically to predict the fall of the latter-day Babylonian world system. At the same time, all the original elements of Babylon’s destruction (the city itself, its king, the river on which it sits, and the manner of its fall) are universalized. Failure to understand this leads many contemporary commentators to isolate particular people and places as the site of the last-day warfare, even to the point of predicting a rebuilding of Babylon, which would in fact nullify OT prophetic declarations affirming that Babylon would be decimated by the Persians, never to rise as a world power again (e.g., see Isa. 13:17–22; Jer. 50:13, 39; 51:62–64).” (Beale, 351)

- **Refusal to repent:** “As in 8:7, the ‘hail’ (16:21) recalls the plague against Egypt’s crops (Ex. 9:18–34), severe enough to kill those caught out in it (9:19). But this is a judgment at the end of the age, and one does not need training in modern physics to recognize that hailstones weighing ‘about a hundred pounds each’ will easily kill whomever they strike. Yet in contrast with the repentant of Jerusalem (11:13), Babylon’s inhabitants become harder and curse God all the more when judged (16:21), having learned nothing from their unrepentance during earlier plagues (16:11). The world dies in its sin, unwilling to repent.” (Keener, 397-398)
- **Babylon’s effect on its worshipers:** “The repetition of the three blasphemies of the beast (13:6) by the citizens of fallen Babylon (16:9, 11, 21) confirms the deep inner shaping of their being by the perspective of the beast. This perspective rejects God as having any relevant role in any aspect of individual or community life. The most dangerous aspect of this perspective, however, is how it creates an inability to respond to God’s love and holiness in ways that enable cleansing, healing, liberation, and transformation toward wholeness. When citizens of fallen Babylon begin to experience the destructive and debilitating consequences of their life without God, they rarely see this as a touch of God seeking to awaken them to their condition and call them out of their brokenness into God’s wholeness. Instead, they blame others or society or government or big business or technology or leading nations for either causing their plight or failing to resolve their problems. Citizens of fallen Babylon rarely ever realize that the root of their condition lies deep within their own life and not in the circumstances and conditions of the world around them. They believe it is the surrounding world that needs to change to make things better, not they. Such a perspective makes it extremely difficult to repent.” (Mulholland, 549-550)

### **Considerations for discussion leaders:**

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Single underlined sentences are for discussion, while key points are double underlined.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

### **Other Articles/Songs/Videos:** Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

- [5 Strategies for Reading Revelation](#) from the Bible Project (the first 17 minutes is GOLD!)
- [Heaven and Earth Theme](#) from the Bible Project
- [Other super helpful Revelation summaries](#) from the Bible Project
- [How Revelation mimics ancient Olympic games](#) by Marty Solomon

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