TRUE AND JUST ARE YOUR JUDGMENTS

Revelation 16:1-11

Key Verse: 16:7

“And I heard the altar respond: ‘Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.’”

Thank God for showing us another great and marvelous sign of seven angels with the seven last plagues and another heavenly vision of a sea of glass clear as crystal and standing beside the sea those who have been victorious over the beast and full of joy and praise to God singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb. What a vision before the final outpouring of the last seven plagues! We pray again that we may have that vision in our hearts and be included into such victorious saints standing beside the sea of glass together.

Chapter 16 is about the seven bowl judgments, the seven last plagues. In this chapter the Greek word, “megas” is written 11 times, interpreted in NIV, “loud” (1, 10), “intense” (9), “great” (12, 14, 19, 19), “severe” (18), “tremendous” (18), “huge” (21, 21). So this chapter be called “megas”, great, chapter. Chapter 16 gives us the picture of the final destruction from God’s wrath immediately preceding the return of Christ. The nature of these judgments in this final destruction is very severe. They are very severe judgments and they are a good indication as anywhere in the Bible of how God feels about sin and rejection. We want to talk about a God of grace and goodness and mercy and love, but here we’re going to see the holiest and most extensive and final wrath of God against sin which will show us as clearly or more clearly than anywhere else how he feels about it. It is the epitome of God’s absolute total destruction of sinners. And it’s a fitting thing because at this particular time in human history men will be at the epitome of their worship of Satan. They will be at the epitome of their total absolute rebellion against God. They will be blaspheming, cursing God. And so they are at the apex of their sin and God is at the apex of His wrath. Today we will think about five bowl judgments, one through five. Let’s study this passage with the title, “True and just are your judgments.”

**First, the first three bowl judgments (1-4).** Verse 1 says, “Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, ‘Go, pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath on the earth.’” This loud occurs twenty times or so in Revelation. This great chapter starts with the great voice. There are some great things in this book, some great things happening. The great voice is surely the voice of God, as it was the voice of the Lord in 1:10, “On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet.” And in verse 17 of this chapter at the seventh angel’s pouring out his bowl into the air, out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, “It is done.” It is written in Isaiah 66:6, “A voice of uproar, a voice from the temple, the voice of the Lord who is rendering recompense to His enemies” (NASB). Here is that voice. From the throne, the holy place, the temple where God dwells, here comes the last activity on the earth. The seven-sealed scroll has fully unrolled. The seventh trumpet has blown. The final judgments are to fall.

And so God speaks to the seven angels. You remember them from chapter 15, they are the seven angels who hold the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests, and they were given seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. God commands them, “Go, pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath on the earth.” At this command the seven angels would directly pour out each one’s bowl on the earth like rapid fire consecutively, while for the seal judgment the Lamb opened each of the seals and for the trumpet judgment each of the seven angels sounded his trumpet.

Verse 2 says, “the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.” Now we see that for the first time God’s judgment poured out directly on the people, not through demonic locusts, demonic army or other means.

The word sore – helkos – is an ulcer, a running sore, a cancer, anything like that. It is called loathsome, foul, bad, malignant, wretched, growing, incurable. The same term is used in the Greek translation of the word “boil” in the Old Testament, for example in Exodus 9:11, “The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils that were on them and on all the Egyptians.” These ugly and painful sores are some kind of oozing sores all over the body. The whole world is going to have unbelievable pain in their physical bodies as they are hit with these sores. And it is written in Deuteronomy 28:27 as a judgment pronouncement for disobedience, “The LORD will afflict you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors, festering sores and the itch, from which you cannot be cured.” And in 28:35, “The LORD will afflict your knees and legs with painful boils that cannot be cured, spreading from the soles of your feet to the top of your head.” Oozing, cancerous, malignant, loathsome ulcers will be all over the bodies of the Christ rejecters.

Then verse 3 says, “the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.” We are reminded of the second trumpet judgment in 8:2-3: “The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was throne into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.” We see two different things between the second trumpet judgment and the second bowl judgment. For the second bowl judgment the blood is like that of a dead man, thick, black, dark, cooled, coagulated. And for the second bowl judgment affected the whole sea, while the second trumpet judgment one third of the sea: the whole sea turned red or one third of sea; and every living things in the sea died or one third of the creatures in the sea died. When every living thing in the sea is going to die – billions of creatures, where are they going to go? To the surface with an inconceivable stench. And the world’s seas will become putrid pools of death, testimony to the wickedness of man.

And verse 4 says, “The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.” It is related to 8:10, “The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water—the name of the star is Worm wood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and may people died from the waters that had become bitter.” Certainly, when the waters of the rivers and springs of water became blood, people could not drink it. Again, the third bowl judgment affected on the whole water source, while the third trumpet judgment affected on one third of the water supply.

We can think of three sets of plagues in the Bible. The first set of plagues recorded in Exodus 7-12 was local hitting only on one country Egypt. The second set of plagues, the trumpet judgments written in Revelation 8, extended beyond any one nation and covered one third of the world. It is partial though it is global. Now in Revelation 16 we se the total one. It is not limited to a nation. It is not limited to a fraction of humanity; it covers the whole globe.

Here we see that God’s judgment was gradual and then complete. Definitely these are not done by chance, but deliberate acts of God. As the creation was delicately designed acts of God, so is his judgment. For the creation God did his work of creation for six days, creating certain things progressively to the completion. His judgment was gradual and progressive to the completion.

In this part we thought of three bowl judgments, ugly and painful sores on bodies of people, the dying of every living in the sea, and no water to drink. God brought these terrible plagues so that people might feel the tangible hand of God’s punishment, acknowledge his living presence and turn to him,

**Second, true and just judgements of God (5-7).** In verses 5-7 it is written, “Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: ‘You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.’ And I heard the altar respond: ‘Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.’” This part is a very significant interlude before going to the fourth bowl judgment. In this world judgment system is so corrupt even in a most democratic country. While the concepts of good and evil and of right and wrong are gone, evil can win the court. God is the one who acquit the innocent and condemns the guilty (Dt. 25:1). However, in this world the innocent can be condemned and the guilty go free. But not with God’s judgment. Never.

The words in verses 5-7 are noteworthy. The angel in charge of the waters say, “You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One.” As we studied, God is the one who is, who was and who is to come. (1:4; 4:8). In chapter 11 when the seventh trumpet was sounded, there were loud voice in heaven, “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, the twenty-four elders fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was…” At the words of the elders, “who is to come” was omitted because he has already come when the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of Lord and of his Christ.” Here the angel said, “you who are and who were, the Holy One” in the same understanding. The eternal God is to judge justly, for one who is unjust cannot be eternal. The eternal God is the Holy One. This is the confession of the four living creatures in chapter 4. They day and night never stop saying, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come” (4:8). The Lord God Almighty is holy and eternal. Then it says in verse 5, “because you have so judged.” Such God, the eternal holy One, judged. So the judgments are just.

Yet, that’s not all. The angel says more, “for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.” The eternal holy Almighty God was silent while the enemies of God shed the blood of his saints and prophets. He did so until the number of the martyred was completed. He is truly the God of completion. He waited, enduring with his long suffering patience. He waited until the time of completion, to the end. Then he judged in the end. He did so by giving them blood to drink as they deserve. He is the God of vengeance for the evil. So he is just in his judgments, even to human sound mind and reasoning. In this way the angel doubly defended God’s justice in his judgment.

Then verse 7 says, “And I heard the altar respond: ‘Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.’” Interestingly the altar, being personified, responded. In 6:9-10 John saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” This was their prayer for God’s vengeance. Now the altar affirmed the answer of the angel, “Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.” Later on in 19:1-2 it is written, “After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.” How important it is to believe that true and just are his judgments as we live in this world. Abraham said in Genesis 18:25 as he prayed for Sodom, “Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?’ Based on this character of God Abraham prayed for Sodom, and God heard his prayer and rescued Lot from the catastrophe. It is also what we studied in Psalm 34:15-17: “The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.” We really thank and praise God, our eternal holy God, whose judgments are true and just. Because of him we can live by faith, though evil and fraud seems to rule the world.

As we studied in chapter 15, a part of the song of Moses and of the Lamb was, “Just and true are your ways.” This is the reason God wants us to live a life of faith, following his ways. The LORD said in Isaiah 55:8-9, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways, my ways…As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” When God leads us in hard ways, you should not be bitter toward him or compromise with our situation. Hebrews 12:15 says, “See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.” S. Ian applied for an assistant manger position and had an interview in his company. But he could not get the position against his wishes. However, he was not bitter but accepted it as God’s leading. I thank God for his faith in the sovereign God, who ways are just and true and higher than our ways. May God encourage him to continually learn to live by faith at each life situation. I also thank God that for M. Sara Rye has been fighting a good fight of faith. May she do this fight to the end because of the eternal holy God, whose judgments are just and true and see his power and glory revealed for his people.

**Third, the fourth and fifth bowl judgments (8-11).** In verse 8 and 9, it says, “The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.” The sun has always given the world light, warmth, energy. Now it becomes a deadly killer. According to a science article, the sun at its centre is filled with helium and if it were to expand, it could incinerate the earth as it would cause an expanding of the sun’s hydrogen gas. Maybe that’s what God will do. Maybe God in a millisecond or less will destroy all the protective ozone which shields us from deadly ultraviolet rays radiated off the surface. There is no water to drink; the sun is burning which humanity has never experience. It says, “The sun was given power to scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense/great heat.” Surely this is limited to the unbelievers, the followers of Antichrist. [Deuteronomy 32:22](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Deut%2032.22) says, “For a fire has been kindled by my wrath, one that burns to the realm of death/Sheol below. It will devour the earth and its harvests and set afire the foundations of the mountains.” The Lord is going to ignite the earth in some unbelievable way with burning heat, the kind of heat surely that will blow out whatever may be left of the earth’s cooling systems.

It is written in Isaiah 24:5-6, “The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumed the earth; its people must bear their guilt. Therefore earth’s inhabitants are burned up and very few are left.”  Malachi 4:1 looking at the day of the Lord says, “‘Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘Not a root or a branch will be left to them.’” In Revelation we see how these prophecies are fulfilled.

We remember in chapter 9:20-21, that at the sixth trumpet judgment 1/3 of remaining mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur, but the survivors responded this way, “The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worship demons…Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.” Now in their extreme suffering they cursed/blasphemed God. What a foolish defiance toward the LORD God Almighty! They invite judgment upon themselves. Cursing God they refused to repent and glorify him. Here we see one clear reason of refusing to repent was to glorify oneself. Self-glory seeking is a fundamental problem of mankind. One clear evidence of repentance is to give glory to God, fearing him as an angel proclaimed the eternal gospel, saying, “Fear God and give him glory.”

In verses 10 and 11, it says, “The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.”

The entire human system called Babylon is engulfed in darkness. The prophet Joel looks at this day and says , “…the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand—a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness” (2:2). Then he says in 2:10, “…the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine.” Jesus said in [Mark 13:24](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Mark%2013.24), “But in those days, following that distress, ‘the sun will be darkened , and the moon will not give its light…” All these prophecies are to be fulfilled.

At the fifth bowl judgment people’s response was that they cursed God. Revelation really reveals that sinners are unjust and untrue. Again, how foolish sinners are! They gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores. This expression is very graphic. Sometimes when you are having pain that is so severe, you hurt yourself somewhere else so you can redirect your attention. Here they literally bite, chewing on their own tongues to distract themselves from the other agony. And while they are chewing on their tongues, you might think they would repent, but no. They cursed/blasphemed God, the God of heaven. They refused to repent of what they had done. This is deliberate refusal of repentance. They are destroying themselves into eternity. By the way, this is the last reference to their unwillingness to repent. These first five plagues were sent by God to bring them to repentance. They didn’t repent. That’s the last mention of it.

Truly, the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the LORD. True wisdom is who God is and who I am. God is the God of heaven and the LORD God Almighty, and I am dust and ashes Abraham confessed (Ge. 18:27). Isaiah 40:6, “All men are like grass.” James 4:14 says, “What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.” And according to Isaiah 1:22, Man has but a breath in his nostrils. Truly repentance is the way of life before God. This is the reason Jesus said from the outset of his messianic ministry, “The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mk. 1:15). Jesus also said in Luke 13:3, 5, “Unless you repent, you too will all perish.” Jude 23 says, “Snatch others from the fire and save them.” God will be pleased when we do this snatching work.

We thank and praise God whose judgments are true and just and so are his ways. At each step of life it may be our confession and follow his ways in assurance or repentance, snatching others from the fire.