

John Piper, “There is nothing warm and cuddly about these hours. They will bring stark terror and reprisal for all who are outside Christ. They will mark the end of all Divine patience for those who do not embrace the Gospel”.

While there are certain similarities between some of the seven vials of wrath and the seven trumpet plagues, the seven vials are more severe in their intensity. They are also cumulative, being poured out one after the other, with no time for the pain of their victims to be healed.

The sending out of the first vial (φιάλη, a bowl) is introduced, **Rev. 16:1** *And I [John] heard a great voice out of the temple [the voice of God] saying to the seven angels, Go your ways i.e. a particular direction allocated to each], and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.* ² *And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image *las distinct to the true believers who had not the mark and did not worship the image of the beast*. This first plague falls directly on the unsaved and is similar to the plague of boils in Egypt (sixth plague) which only affected the idolaters (Ex. 9:10,11). In the end times there will only be two categories of people, - either for Christ, or for the Antichrist.*

The second vial is an extension of the first plague in Egypt, where Moses turned the waters of the River Nile into blood (Ex. 7:17-21). Also, at the sounding of the second trumpet (Rev. 8:8-10), the mountain was cast into the sea and a third of its waters became blood, and a third of the creatures in the sea died. However, there is no limitation in the pouring out of the second bowl/vial, ³ *And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea.*

Similarly, whereas at the sounding of the third trumpet (8:10,11) one-third of the rivers and fountains of waters were polluted, there is no such limitation with the outpouring of the third vial, ⁴ *And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood. ... Because of their rejection of God, this is their rightful due,* ⁵ *And I heard the angel of the waters say [... as he defends God's perfect judgment ...], Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus.* ⁶ *For they have shed the *l*innocent/ blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy *l*they deserve it.* ⁷ *And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments. ... This is God's condemnation for their wickedness towards His people, as previously presented, **Rev. 6:10** And they *l*the martyrs/ cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?*

The fourth vial caused a plague of fierce sunstroke, ⁸ And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and *power was given unto him* to scorch men with fire. This was more than the heat of the sun for this was the judgment of God, and sinful mankind actually acknowledged it because they blamed God, ⁹ And men were scorched with great [*scaring*] heat, and *blasphemed the name of God*, which hath power over these plagues; and [*yet*] they repented not to give him glory. They claimed to deny God and His power, but they could not avoid His reality. They grudgingly affirmed His authority and control, but they would not accept it for they spoke irreverently against Him. ... They would neither believe Him nor receive Him. No matter how horrendous their condition, they will stubbornly refuse to acknowledge God as the sovereign Lord. They will curse His name and burn in Hell before doing so!

The fifth vial was aimed at the centre of the kingdom of the beast, ¹⁰ And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat [*θρόνος, power*] of the beast; and his kingdom [*βασιλεία, rule, realm*] was full of *darkness* [*Ex. 10:21-23, in Egypt, the ninth plague in Egypt ... cf. Jn. 3:19*], and they gnawed their tongues for pain, ¹¹ And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds. ... Even though they were in excruciating pain and unbearable misery, as they gnawed [*chewed*] their tongues, with every breath in their bodies, they will cry out blasphemies against God, giving Him the worst words they could utter, refusing to show the most minute trace of repentance. *They cursed God!*

The sixth vial was poured out, ¹² And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east *might be prepared*. The pouring out of this bowl does not inflict a plague, rather, it is preparation for the final eschatological battle. It dries up the great river Euphrates. It is similar to the sounding of the sixth trumpet (9:13-19) when four angels were released from beyond the river Euphrates to lead an invasion of two hundred thousand thousand [*two million*] (Rev. 9:16). ... The river Euphrates is the boundary of the land God promised to Abram, ^{Gen. 15:18} In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates. Therefore, hordes of heathen armies are prophesied to congregate on the border, on the other side of the river, waiting to invade the people of God. To facilitate their crossing, the deep waters of the Euphrates will dry up, leaving the invasion open to the vast multitudes of the fearsome enemy.

John then saw the sudden emergence of ¹³ three unclean spirits *like* frogs come out of the mouth of *the dragon*, and out of the mouth of *the beast*, and out of the mouth of *the false prophet*. Satan mistakenly believes he can establish himself as a viable opponent of God by presenting his own inaccurate version of a ‘trinity’, i.e. the dragon (Satan), the beast (the Antichrist), and the false prophet (Satan’s equivalent to the Holy Spirit). This Satanic ‘triumvirate’ (i.e. three separate entities) will

indulge every demon (the spirits of devils) to pile forth out to deceive the unsaved by working miracles ... with all power and signs and lying wonders, ¹⁰ And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved II Thess. 2:9). ... The kings of the earth and of the whole world (Rev. 16:14) will believe all and anything propagated by the enemy of God, ... and the evil 'triumvirate' (the 'pseudo-trinity') will gather to the battle of that great day of God Almighty (cf. Ps. 2:2,3; Is. 5:26-30; Jer. 6:1-5; Ezek. 38; Joel 3:9-15).

At this point, Jesus inserts both a warning and an assurance to His people. Firstly, the warning, ¹⁵ Behold, I come as a thief. ... He is coming when the world will not be expecting Him. However, believers who search His Word are shown the signs preceding His coming. He will come at a time after which those signs have been fulfilled, for example, *Mt. 24:4* And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. ... ⁶ And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. ⁸ All these are the beginning of sorrows. ⁹ Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. ¹⁰ And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. ¹² And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. ... ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; *and then shall the end come.* ¹⁵ When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) ¹⁶ Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains ... ²¹ For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be ... ²³ Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. ²⁴ For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. ... ²⁹ Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken ... Those are the warnings, and then secondly there are the blessings promised to the saints who 'keep awake' and spiritually diligent as they 'watch' and 'keep their garments' (Rev. 16:15) ... *Mt. 24:30* And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³¹ And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

And in this outpouring of the sixth vial, John returns his readers' attention to the battle being prepared, ¹⁶ And he *[they, - the evil triumvirate, v.13]* gathered them *[the kings of the earth and of the whole world, v.14]* together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.

‘Armageddon’ literally means ‘the mountain of Megiddo’. However, there is no *mountain* of Megiddo for Megiddo is a long flat plain in northwestern Israel between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea ... at the upper end of the Valley of Jezreel (‘Esdraelon’) with *hills* on either side. It was a famous battleground reputed to have been described by Napoleon Bonaparte as the perfect battlefield for the world’s armies. ... And indeed, many Old Testament battles were fought there (e.g. Judges 5:19; II Kings 23:29; II Chron. 35:22). One commentator counted no fewer than thirty-four battles being fought there from 2350 BC to 2000 AD. ... It is the ideal place for a major conflict of eschatological proportions!

The final outpouring of the seventh vial is again ‘proleptic’ – relating to Babylon, it describes a future event, as if it has already taken place. This will be described in greater detail in chapters 17 and 18. For now though, John outlines what he saw, ^{16:17} And the seventh angel poured out his vial *into the air* [cf. Eph. 6:12], and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne [the voice of God, as in v.11, saying, It [God’s judgment upon the beast’s capital] is done [proleptically, it has been consumed by God’s wrath and His Divine glory]. ¹⁸ And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great [cataclysmic destruction]. ¹⁹ And the great city [Babylon] was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell *L... the nations which have given their support to the beast are brought to and utter complete ruin!*: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God [He would not forget their rebellions and their blasphemies], to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath *L... in answer to the prayers of the saints, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? (6:10)]*.

John concludes his vision of the outpouring of the seventh vial by proclaiming, ²⁰ And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. ... They disappeared! This event will occur after the return of Christ (Rev. 19:11 ff.), and in preparation for the new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away (Rev. 21:1). ... At Christ’s return, which is again described by Peter, there is the ‘break-up’ of the present created order, ^{II Peter 3:10} But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, and he describes how the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. ¹¹ ... all these things shall be dissolved. Such will be the unimaginably horrific times for those who have refused Christ as Saviour! They face the outpouring of God’s holy and righteous wrath, as ^{Rev. 16:21} there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent; and *men blasphemed God* because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was *exceeding [extremely] great*.