

CHAPTER 16

In this chapter we have an account of the pouring forth of these vials that were filled with the wrath of God. They were poured out upon the whole antichristian empire, and on every thing appertaining to it.

I. Upon the earth (v. 2).

II. Upon the sea (v. 3).

III. Upon the rivers and fountains of water (v. 4). Here the heavenly hosts proclaim and applaud the righteousness of the judgments of God.

IV. The fourth vial was poured out on the sun (v. 8).

V. The fifth on the seat of the beast.

VI. The sixth on the river Euphrates.

VII. The seventh in the air, upon which the cities of the nations fell, and great Babylon came in remembrance before God.

~~661~~ REVELATION 16:1-7

THE SEVEN VIALS

We had in the foregoing chapter the great and solemn preparation that was made for the pouring out of the vials; now we have the performance of that work. Here observe,

I. That, though every thing was made ready before, yet nothing was to be put in execution without an immediate positive order from God; and this he gave out of the temple, answering the prayers of his people, and avenging their quarrel.

II. No sooner was the word of command given than it was immediately obeyed; no delay, no objection made. We find that some of the best men, as Moses and Jeremiah, did not so readily come in and comply with the call of God to their work; but the angels of God excel not only in strength, but in a readiness to do the will of God. God says, *Go your ways, and pour*

out the vials, and immediately the work is begun. We are taught to pray that the will of God may be done on earth as it is done in heaven. And now we enter upon a series of very terrible dispensations of Providence, of which it is difficult to give the certain meaning or to make the particular application. But in the general it is worth our observation that,

1. We have here a reference and allusion to several of the plagues of Egypt, such as the turning of their waters into blood, and smiting them with boils and sores. Their sins were alike, and so were their punishments.

2. These vials have a plain reference to the seven trumpets, which represented the rise of antichrist; and we learn hence that the fall of the church's enemies shall bear some resemblance to their rise, and that God can bring them down in such ways as they chose to exalt themselves. And the fall of antichrist shall be gradual; as Rome was not built in one day, so neither shall it fall in one day, but it falls by degrees; it shall fall so as to rise no more.

3. The fall of the antichristian interest shall be universal. Every thing that any ways belonged to them, or could be serviceable to them, the premises and all their appurtenances, are put into the writ for destruction: their earth, their air, their sea, their rivers, their cities, all consigned over to ruin, all accursed for the sake of the wickedness of that people. Thus the creation groans and suffers through the sins of men. Now we proceed to,

(1.) The first angel who poured out his vial, v. 2. Observe,

[1.] Where it fell — *upon the earth*; that is, say some, upon the common people; others upon the body of the Romish clergy, who were the basis of the papacy, and of an earthly spirit, all carrying on earthly designs.

[2.] What it produced — *noisome and grievous sores on all who had the mark of the beast*. They had marked themselves by their sin; now God marks them out by his judgments. This sore, some think, signifies some of the first appearances of Providence against their state and interest which gave them great uneasiness, as it discovered their inward distemper and was a token of further evil; the plague-tokens appeared.

(2.) *The second angel poured out his vial*; and here we see,

[1.] Where it fell — *upon the sea*; that is, say some, upon the jurisdiction and dominion of the papacy; others upon the whole system of their

religion, their false doctrines, their corrupt glosses, their superstitious rites, their idolatrous worship, their pardons, indulgences, a great conflux of wicked inventions and institutions, by which they maintain a trade and traffic advantageous to themselves, but injurious to all who deal with them.

[2.] What it produced: It turned the sea into blood, *as the blood of a dead man, and every living soul died in the sea*. God discovered not only the vanity and falsehood of their religion, but the pernicious and deadly nature of it — that the souls of men were poisoned by that which was pretended to be the sure means of their salvation.

(3.) The next angel poured out his vial; and we are told,

[1.] Where it fell — *upon the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters*; that is, say some very learned men, upon their emissaries, and especially the Jesuits, who, like streams, conveyed the venom and poison of their errors and idolatries from the spring-head through the earth.

[2.] What effect it had upon them: *It turned them into blood*; some think it stirred up Christian princes to take a just revenge upon those that had been the great incendiaries of the world, and had occasioned the shedding of the blood of armies and of martyrs. The following doxology (v. 5, 6) favours this sense. The instrument that God makes use of in this work is here called *the angel of the waters*, who extols the righteousness of God in this retaliation: *They have shed the blood of thy saints, and thou hast given them blood to drink, for they are worthy*, to which another angel answered by full consent, v. 7.

REVELATION 16:8-11

THE SEVEN VIALS

In these verses we see the work going on in the appointed order. The fourth angel poured out his vial, and that fell upon the sun; that is, say some, upon some eminent prince of the popish communion, who should renounce their false religion a little while before his utter downfall; and some expect it will be the German emperor. And now what will be the consequence of this? That sun which before cherished them with warm and benign influences shall now grow hot against these idolaters, and shall

scorch them. Princes shall use their power and authority to suppress them, which yet will be so far from bringing them to repentance, that it will cause them to curse God and their king, and look upward, throwing out their blasphemous speeches against the God of heaven; they will be hardened to their ruin. The fifth angel poured out his vial, v. 10. And observe,

1. Where this fell — *upon the seat of the beast*, upon Rome itself, the mystical Babylon, the head of the antichristian empire.

2. What effect it had there: The whole kingdom of the beast *was full of darkness* and distress. That very city which was the seat of their policy, the source of all their learning, and all their knowledge, and all their pomp and pleasure, now becomes a source of darkness, and pain, and anguish. Darkness was one of the plagues of Egypt, and it is opposed to lustre and honour, and so forebodes the contempt and scorn to which the antichristian interest should be exposed. Darkness is opposed to wisdom and penetration, and forbodes the confusion and folly which the idolaters should discover at that time. It is opposed to pleasure and joy, and so signifies their anguish and vexation of Spirit, when their calamities thus came upon them.

⌘ REVELATION 16:12-16

THE SEVEN VIALS

The sixth angel poured out his vial; and observe,

I. Where it fell — *upon the great river Euphrates*. Some take it literally, for the place where the Turkish power and empire began; and they think this is a prophecy of the destruction of the Turkish monarchy and of idolatry, which they suppose will be effected about the same time with that of the papacy, as another antichrist, and that thereby a way shall be made for the conveniency of the Jews, those princes of the east. Others take it for the river Tiber; for, as Rome is mystical Babylon, Tiber is mystical Euphrates. And when Rome shall be destroyed her river and merchandise must suffer with her.

II. What did this vial produce?

1. The drying up of the river, which furnished the city with wealth, provisions, and all sorts of accommodations.

2. A way is hereby prepared *for the kings of the east*. The idolatry of the church of Rome had been a great hindrance both to the conversion of the Jews, who have been long cured of their inclination to idols, and of the Gentiles, who are hardened in their idolatry by seeing that which so much symbolizes with it among those called Christians. It is therefore very probable that the downfall of popery, removing these obstructions, will open a way for both the Jews and other eastern nations to come into the church of Christ. And, if we suppose that Mahomedism shall fall at the same time, there will be still a more open communication between the western and eastern nations, which may facilitate the conversion of the Jews, and of *the fulness of the Gentiles*. And when this work of God appears, and is about to be accomplished, no wonder if it occasion another consequence, which is,

3. The last effort of the great dragon; he is resolved to have another push for it, that, if possible, he may retrieve the ruinous posture of his affairs in the world. He is now rallying his forces, recollecting all his spirits, to make one desperate sally before all be lost. This is occasioned by the pouring out of the sixth vial. Here observe,

(1.) The instruments he makes use of to engage the powers of the earth in his cause and quarrel: *Three unclean spirits like frogs* come forth, one *out of the mouth of the dragon*, another *out of the mouth of the beast*, and a third *out of the mouth of the false prophet*. Hell, the secular power of antichrist, and the ecclesiastical power, would combine to send their several instruments, furnished with hellish malice, with worldly policy, and with religious falsehood and deceit; and these would muster up the devil's forces for a decisive battle.

(2.) The means these instruments would use to engage the powers of earth in this war. They would work pretended miracles, the old stratagem of him *whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness,* ⁵¹⁹⁹2 Thessalonians 2:9, 10. Some think that a little before the fall of antichrist the popish pretence of power to work miracles will be revived and will very much amuse and deceive the world.

(3.) The field of battle — a place called *Armageddon*; that is, say some, the mount of Megiddo, near to which, by a stream issuing thence, Barak overcame Sisera, and all the kings in alliance with him, ~~<0169>~~Judges 5:19. And in the valley of Megiddo Josiah was slain. This place had been famous for two events of a very different nature, the former very happy for the church of God, the latter very unhappy; but it shall now be the field of the last battle in which the church shall be engaged, and she shall be victorious. This battle required time to prepare for it, and therefore the further account of it is suspended till we come to the nineteenth chapter, v. 19, 20.

(4.) The warning which God gives of this great and decisive trial, to engage his people to prepare for it, v. 15. It would be sudden and unexpected, and therefore Christians should be clothed, and armed, and ready for it, that they might not be surprised and ashamed. When God's cause comes to be tried, and his battles to be fought, all his people shall be ready to stand up for his interest and be faithful and valiant in his service.

~~<0167>~~ REVELATION 16:17-21

THE SEVEN VIALS

Here we have an account of the seventh and last angel pouring forth his vial, contributing his part towards the accomplishment of the downfall of Babylon, which was the finishing stroke. And here, as before, observe,

I. Where this plague fell — *on the air*, upon the prince of the power of the air, that is, the devil. His powers were restrained, his policies confounded; he was bound in God's chain: the sword of God was upon his eye and upon his arm; for he, as well as the powers of the earth, is subject to the almighty power of God. He had used all possible means to preserve the antichristian interest, and to prevent the fall of Babylon — all the influence that he has upon the minds of men, blinding their judgments and perverting them, hardening their hearts, raising their enmity to the gospel as high as could be. But now here is a vial poured out upon his kingdom, and he is not able to support his tottering cause and interest any longer.

II. What it produced,

1. A thankful voice from heaven, pronouncing that now the work was done. The church triumphant in heaven saw it, and rejoiced; the church militant on earth saw it, and became triumphant. It is finished.

2. A mighty commotion on the earth — an earthquake, so great as never was before, shaking the very centre, and this ushered in by the usual concomitants of thunder and lightnings.

3. The fall of Babylon, which was divided into three parts, *called the cities of the nations* (v. 19); having had rule over the nations, and taken in the idolatry of the nations, incorporating into her religion something of the Jewish, something of the pagan, and something of the Christian religion, she was as three cities in one. God now remembered this great and wicked city. Though for some time he seemed to have forgotten her idolatry and cruelty, yet now he gives unto her *the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath*. And this downfall extended further than to the seat of antichrist; it reached from the centre to the circumference; and every island and every mountain, that seemed by nature and situation the most secured, were carried away in the deluge of this ruin.

III. How the antichristian party were affected with it. Though it fell upon them as a dreadful storm, as if the stones of the city, tossed up into the air, came down upon their heads, like hailstones of a talent weight each, yet they were so far from repenting that they blasphemed that God who thus punished them. Here was a dreadful plague of the heart, a spiritual judgment more dreadful and destructive than all the rest. Observe,

1. The greatest calamities that can befall men will not bring them to repentance without the grace of God working with them.

2. Those that are not made better by the judgments of God are always the worse for them.

3. To be hardened in sin and enmity against God by his righteous judgments is a certain token of utter destruction.