

THREE THINGS WE MUST KNOW ABOUT THE WRATH OF GOD

15 And I saw another sign in heaven, [one that was] great and marvelous: seven angels with the seven last plagues—[last,] because with them the wrath of God is completed. ²I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and standing on the sea, those who were victorious over the beast and his image and the number [that represents] his name. They held harps [given them] by God ³and they sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb. They sang, “Great and marvelous are your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are your ways, O King of the ages. ⁴Who shall not fear you, O Lord, and glorify your name?—for you alone are holy. All the nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

⁵After this I looked, and the temple in heaven, [that is,] the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened. ⁶Out of the temple came the seven angels who have the seven plagues. They were dressed in pure and bright linen, and they wore golden sashes around their chests. ⁷Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, [the one] who lives forever and ever. ⁸The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

16 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, “Go, pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath upon the earth.” ²The first [angel] went and poured out his bowl upon the land, and it caused ugly and painful sores to break out on the men who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image. ³The second [angel] poured out his bowl upon the sea, and [the sea] turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died. ⁴The third [angel] poured out his bowl upon the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. ⁵Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, “You are righteous, you who are and who were, you who are the Holy One, because you have by these means executed judgment. ⁶They poured out the blood of the saints and the prophets, and [now] you have given them blood to drink. They deserve it.” ⁷And I heard the altar respond, saying, “Yes, indeed, O Lord God, the Almighty, your judgments are true and righteous!”

⁸The fourth [angel] poured out his bowl upon the sun, and [the sun] was granted permission to scorch men with fire. ⁹Men were scorched by the intense heat, yet they blasphemed the name of God, who has the authority over these plagues, and they did not repent and thereby give him glory. ¹⁰The fifth [angel] poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was darkened. [Men] gnawed their tongues in agony, ¹¹yet they blasphemed the God of heaven on account of their pains and their sores, and they did not repent of their deeds.

¹²The sixth [angel] poured out his bowl upon the great river, the Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings who come from the east. ¹³Then I saw three evil spirits* that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. ¹⁴They are the spirits of demons performing [miraculous] signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the battle on the great day of God, the Almighty. ¹⁵(Listen! I will come like a thief. Blessed is he who keeps watch and who

remains dressed, so that he does not go naked and be exposed to his own shame.)
¹⁶They gathered [the kings] together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

¹⁷The seventh [angel] poured out his bowl upon the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is finished!" ¹⁸Then there came flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on the earth, so tremendous was [the quake]. ¹⁹The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great, in order to give her the cup [filled] with the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. ²⁰Every island fled and the mountains could not be found. ²¹And huge hailstones, [each one] weighing about a hundred pounds,** came down out of heaven upon men; yet men blasphemed God on account of the plague of hail, for the plague was extremely severe. (Rev. 15:1-16:21)

*Literally, "unclean spirits."

**Literally, "a talent."

Introduction

We would much prefer to hear about the love of God, rather than the wrath of God.

The Bible speaks extensively about the love of God, consider especially John 3:16,

... for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

But the Bible also speaks about the wrath of God:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. (Rom. 1:18)

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. (Col. 3:5-6)

Because the wrath of God is a divine reality that is and shall be revealed against the world, we must understand what the Bible says about it. As we study Revelation 15-16, let us consider, "Three Things We Must Know about the Wrath of God."

I. The Wrath of God is an Expression of God's Righteousness

John reports that he now saw "*another sign in heaven;*" this sign consisted of seven angels with the seven last plagues (vs. 1.) It is explained that with the pouring out of these plagues upon the earth "*the wrath of God is completed.*" As the heavenly scene unfolds, the seven angels are given seven bowls filled with the wrath of God (vs. 7,) which they proceed to pour out upon the earth.

Sandwiched in between the introduction of these seven angels and their act of pouring out the wrath of God, there is found a hymn of praise testifying to God's righteousness:

*... [they] sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb. They sang, "Great and marvelous are your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; **righteous and true are your ways, O King of the ages.** ⁴Who shall not fear you, O Lord, and glorify your name?—for **you alone are holy. All the nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.**" (Rev. 15:3-4)*

The testimony, "*you alone are holy,*" is a reference to the fact that the LORD is altogether holy and, therefore, He is worthy to carry out the judgment. The statement, "*your righteous acts have been revealed,*" is referring to the outpouring of the seven bowls of wrath that is about to be described.

The appearance of the seven angels, coming directly out of the temple (or, sanctuary) of God (vs. 6) reflects the character of God: they are dressed in "*pure and bright linen.*" Their dress is a reflection of the fact that "*God is light; in him there is no darkness at all*" (1 Jn. 1:5b.)

The description of these seven angels indicates that they represent the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Their being dressed in "*pure and bright linen*" recalls the fact that at the time of His transfiguration, which was a revelation of His appearance in glory, the Lord Jesus is seen in clothes "*as white as the light*" (Matt. 17:2.) Across their chests they wore "*golden sashes;*" in Revelation 1:13 the Lord Jesus appeared wearing "*a golden sash.*"

In Revelation 16:5-6 an angel proclaims that the LORD is righteous and that He is the Holy One; and His righteousness is now being revealed in the fact that He is carrying out His acts of judgment:

Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, "You are righteous, you who are and who were, you who are the Holy One, because you have by these means executed judgment. ⁶They poured out the blood of the saints and the prophets, and [now] you have given them blood to drink. They deserve it." (Rev. 16:5-6)

The altar—representing those who have been martyred for the cause of Christ (Rev. 6:9-11)—responds, "*Yes, indeed, O Lord God, the Almighty, your judgments are true and righteous!*" (Rev. 16:7b.)

This whole scene of the seven angels with the seven plagues, which they pour out upon the earth, is depicting the carrying out of that of which God gives warning in such passages as Leviticus 26:21, "*If you continue to walk contrary to me and will not listen to me, I will bring seven times more plagues upon you, as your sins deserve.*"

The first thing we must know about the wrath of God is the fact that it is an expression of God's righteousness. Concerning the outpouring of the wrath of God, as it is depicted in the outpouring of the seven bowls of wrath, we hear the testimony of the angel: "*They deserve it*" (Rev. 16:6.) When the conduct and the attitude of those who are the object of this righteous judgment are revealed, it becomes evident that the angel's testimony is true:

Men were scorched by the intense heat, yet they blasphemed the name of God, who has the authority over these plagues, and they did not repent and thereby give him glory ... ¹¹... they blasphemed the God of heaven on account of their pains and their sores, and they did not repent of their deeds ... ²¹And huge hailstones, [each one] weighing about a hundred pounds, came down out of heaven upon men; yet men blasphemed God on account of the plague of hail, for the plague was extremely severe. (Rev. 16:9,11,21)

As an Old Testament example of the righteousness of God's judgment, consider what the LORD declared to the prophet Ezekiel:

When you see their conduct and their actions, you will be consoled regarding the disaster I have brought upon Jerusalem—every disaster I have brought upon it. ²³You will be consoled when you see their conduct and their actions, for you will know that I have done nothing in it without cause, declares the Lord Jehovah. (Ezek. 14:22-23)

II. The Wrath of God is Revealed in Both Temporal and Final Judgment

The first four plagues (Rev. 16:2-9) represent natural catastrophes and calamities. It is emphasized that the plagues are directed against those who have given their allegiance to the "beast," which has been previously identified as the anti-God kingdom of man. The first four of these last plagues correspond to the plagues God sent upon Egypt, a nation that set itself in defiance of God.

The First Plague consists of foul and painful sores upon man (vs. 2.) Likewise, the sixth plague upon Egypt consisted of boils upon man and beast:

Then Jehovah said to Moses and Aaron, "Take handfuls of soot from a furnace and have Moses toss it into the air in the presence of Pharaoh. ⁹It will become fine dust over the whole land of Egypt, and festering boils will break out on men and animals throughout the land." ¹⁰So they took soot from a furnace and stood before Pharaoh. Moses tossed it into the air, and festering boils broke out on men and animals. (Ex. 9:8-10)

The Second Plague consists of the sea being turned into blood and all marine life perishing (vs. 3.) Likewise, the first plague upon Egypt consisted of turning the water into blood:

Moses and Aaron did just as Jehovah had commanded. He raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood. (Ex. 7:20)

The Third Plague consists of the fresh waters being turned into blood (vs. 4.) Again, this plague, too, corresponds to the first plague upon Egypt, which affected all the waters of the land:

Jehovah said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, "Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt—over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs"—and they will turn to blood. Blood will be everywhere in Egypt, even in the wooden buckets and stone jars." (Ex. 7:19)

The Fourth Plague consists in the sun scorching men with fire (Rev. 8-9.) Whereas in the ninth plague upon Egypt the sun was darkened (Ex. 10:21-23, printed below,) here the sun's strength is intensified:

Then Jehovah said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness will spread over Egypt—darkness that can be felt." ²²So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. ²³No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived. (Ex. 10:21-23)

The Fifth Plague (vs. 10-11) appears to represent temporal judgments in the form of political and economic disruptions. The fifth plague is poured out upon "*the throne of the beast*"—i.e.; the center and heart of his empire. Consequently, "*his kingdom was darkened.*" We may understand this to mean the "darkness" of disruptions, chaos, and disintegration in the political and economic realm. Consider Isaiah 19, (a prophecy against the nation of Egypt,) as an example of such temporal judgments upon a nation and society. Isaiah 19:2 speaks of civil strife: "*I will stir up Egyptian against Egyptian—everyone shall fight against his brother, and everyone against his neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom.*" Isaiah 19:4 speaks of political tyranny and oppression, in this case by a foreign power: "*Furthermore, I will hand the Egyptians over to a cruel master, a fierce king will rule over them, declares the Lord, Jehovah of hosts.*" Isaiah 19:5-10 speaks of economic and social calamities resulting from natural disaster, namely, a severe drought. Verses 5 and 6 describe the draught itself: "*the waters of the River will dry up, and the riverbed will become parched and dry. ⁶The canals will stink. The streams of Egypt will dwindle away and dry up. The reeds and rushes will wither.*" Verse 7 describes the crop failure that results from the drought: "*The bulrushes along the Nile, by the edge of the Nile, and all the sown fields beside the Nile, will become parched, the topsoil will be blown away and vanish.*" Verse 8 describes the collapse of the fishing industry, another result of the drought: "*The fishermen will lament, and all those who cast their hooks into the Nile will mourn—those who spread their [fishing] nets upon the waters will pine away.*" Verse 9 describes yet another result of the drought, the collapse of the textile

industry that was dependent upon flax as a raw material: *“Furthermore, the manufacturers of linen made from combed flax and the weavers of white cloth will despair.”* What is described in verse 10 is the collapse of the nation’s entire economy, a great depression, with countless people lose their jobs: *“The [economic] pillars [of Egypt] will be broken in pieces; all the wage earners will be grieved in their souls.”*

The Sixth Plague produces the final battle of Armageddon (vs. 12-16.) This plague is poured out upon the Euphrates River, the origin of many of the great military powers of the ancient world, such as Assyria, Babylon, and Media-Persia. Spirits of demons incite the nations of the world to engage in the final battle of Armageddon.

The Seventh Plague depicts the Final Judgment (vs. 17-21.) With the pouring out of the seventh plague there comes a declaration from heaven, *“It is finished!”* That is to say, the final judgment of God, so long warned, has come, it has been carried out against the world of unrepentant mankind. There now follows *“a severe earthquake”* that causes the entire empire of man to collapse before the presence of God:

Then there came flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on the earth, so tremendous was [the quake]. ¹⁹The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great, in order to give her the cup [filled] with the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. (Rev. 16:18-19)

This “earthquake” brings about the destruction of the entire creation in its present form: *“Every island fled and the mountains could not be found”* (vs. 20.)

Note how each successive wave of temporal judgments comes with a greater degree of intensity. With regard to the catastrophes in the realm of nature: with the breaking open of the Seven Seals *“one fourth”* of the world was affected (Rev. 6:8;) with the sounding of the Seven Trumpets *“one third”* of the world was affected (Rev. 8:7;) now with the pouring out of the Seven Bowls of Wrath *“every living thing”* is affected (Rev. 16:3.) With regard to the judgments enacted against the political and social realm: they escalate from sporadic wars (Rev. 6:3-4,) to world wars (Rev. (9:13-19,) and finally to the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:12-16.)

Also, note that all the temporal judgments lead up to and finally culminate in the Final Judgment. Each cycle of temporal judgments concludes with a description of the Final Judgment, indicating that that is the final destiny of sinful mankind—in a sense, the temporal judgments are acts of mercy, warning men of what is coming if they do not repent.

The second important thing we must know about the wrath of God is that it is revealed in both temporal judgments and the Final Judgment.

III. The Wrath of God Shall Not Fall upon Those Who Belong to Christ

In Revelation 6:16-17 there was recorded the cry of sinful, unrepentant men as they are confronted by the Lord God on the day of Final Judgment, they cry out, *“Who is able to stand?”*

Then the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the generals, and the wealthy, and the mighty, and every slave and free man, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. ¹⁶They say to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, ¹⁷for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” (Rev. 6:15-17)

Then in Revelation 7:9 John saw a great multitude *“standing before the throne and before the Lamb,”* dressed in white robes, with palm branches (the symbol of praise and peace) in their hands. One of the elders identifies this multitude in these terms: *“They are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white by the blood of the Lamb”* (vs. 14.)

Now in Revelation 15:2 John sees the same scene he saw previously:

I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and standing on the sea, those who were victorious over the beast and his image and the number [that represents] his name. They held harps [given them by] God. (Rev. 15:2)

John sees *“a sea of glass mixed with fire”* stretching out before the throne of God, much the same as he saw previously (Rev. 4:6a)—the *“sea of glass”* represents the crystal purity and unfathomable holiness of God. *“Standing”* upon this glassy sea are those *“who were victorious over the beast”*—i.e.; those who have put their faith in Jesus the Messiah, receiving forgiveness by His cleansing blood and grace to be true to Him despite the opposition and allurements of the world. Whereas those who commit themselves to Christ the Savior are able to stand upon the crystal sea, those who remain unrepentant and aligned against the God of heaven are finally cast into the lake of fire:

And I saw the dead, the prominent and the insignificant, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and every man was judged according to what he had done. ¹⁴Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, [namely,] the lake of fire. ¹⁵If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:12-15)

The third thing we must know about the wrath of God is that it shall not fall upon those who belong to Christ:

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! (Rom. 5:9)

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; but whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, on the contrary, the wrath of God remains upon him. (Jn. 3:36)

Conclusion

Like it or not, the wrath of God is a divine reality that is and that shall be revealed against the world of sinful mankind. For the sake of our soul and its eternal welfare, we must have a biblical understanding of the wrath of God; and we must make sure that we are right with God through Jesus Christ the Savior sent by God.