

We must keep in mind the way in which Revelation unfolds. In Revelation 15:5 there was a change of scene. The new stage of the vision was marked by John's looking into the heavenly 'holy of holies'¹. He saw seven angels² about to be called to pour out God's anger upon a wicked world. They were given golden bowls full of the wrath of God³. The temple was filled with smoke⁴. In Revelation 16:1-21 the seven bowls of wrath are poured out. We may set it out as follows:

The Everlasting God – and Seven Bowls of His Anger

The Everlasting God – and Seven Bowls of His Anger¹

The smoke-filled temple²

The seven bowls³

Wrath on the earth⁴

Wrath at sea⁵

Wrath in the rivers⁶

Wrath in the sky⁷

Wrath in the beast's kingdom⁸

Wrath on the Euphrates⁹

Draining the cup of wrath to the end¹⁰

• *At the moment sin is still very powerful in the world*

• *Satan has not yet been removed altogether*

The age in which we live is a time when sin has not yet been totally conquered. Jesus must reign until he has put all enemies beneath his feet – but he has not done so yet! At the moment sin is still very powerful in the world. Satan is thrown down from his position of power in heaven¹ and cannot stop the gospel going forward, but he has not yet been removed altogether. Sin continues, and this means that God's anger continues to hang over the world. Only the saved are reconciled to God. The lost still experience the judgements of God.

God's judgements may show themselves in calamities in the sky and in outer space

God's judgements may show themselves in calamities in the sky and in outer space. The judgements of God take place – in this gospel-age – on the land and in the sky and at sea. John sees a fourth angel pouring out judgements in the sky. ⁸*The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to burn the people with fire.* ⁹*They were scorched by the intense heat but they cursed the name of God, who had authority over these plagues. But they did not repent so as to give glory to God.* In the case of the fourth trumpet the sky was affected; something similar happens with the fourth bowl of God's anger¹. In this case a judgement takes place in our world which affects the sun. It makes us think of the 'global warming' which is affecting our planet. And it makes us wonder: how much worse will it get? John no doubt could not precisely have imagined our 'global warming' but it was revealed to him that God's judgements could affect the very sun that shines upon us.

• *It makes us think of 'global warming'*

God's judgements may show themselves in calamities coming directly upon men and women

God's judgements may show themselves in calamities coming directly upon men and women. In the case of the fifth trumpet the human race is tormented¹. Now again in the fifth bowl of God's anger something similar happens². The trumpets and the bowls are still running along parallel lines. ¹⁰*The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was in darkness. Men and women gnawed their tongues in anguish.* ¹¹*They cursed the God of heaven for their pains and sores, and they did not repent of their deeds.* It often happens in the book of Revelation that when we have a group of seven it is divided into four and three. Often four of a group of seven will be somewhat different from the other three. So it was with the trumpets and so it is with the bowls of God's anger. The vision has shown us the judgement upon land, sea, rivers and sky (the four standing for the planet). But the last three are somewhat different. Now, as a result of the fifth bowl of God's anger, the human race is attacked not via their environment but directly. The very human race which has (in large measure) become 'the beast' – in its

• *First four judgements on the planet*

1 15:5
2 15:6
3 15:7
4 15:8

1 15:5-16:21
2 15:5-8
3 16:1-21
4 16:2
5 16:3
6 16:4-7
7 16:8-9
8 16:10-11
9 16:12-16
10 16:17-21

1 12:9

1 8:12; 16:8-9

1 9:1-12
2 16:10-11

- *Last three – direct judgements on the human race*
- *Immense anguish, terrible diseases*
- *Sinners who do not wish to repent – hearts hardened*
- *The Book of Revelation is mainly about the whole gospel age*

persecution of God's people – now suffers directly. They are plunged into darkness. They find themselves in immense anguish. Terrible diseases come upon them. Ungodly

society collapses in chaos and immense suffering. Despite the great power of the beast its kingdom cannot retain its kingly power. To make matters even worse, the blessing of repentance is withheld from them. Sin is punished by hardening so that the sinner does not wish to repent. No amount of suffering changes his heart – unless God intervenes. One thinks of Pharaoh and the many judgements which fell upon him, none of which changed his heart. God judges sin by abandonment to more sin. He allows extreme hardness of heart.

We must remember the purpose of the book of Revelation. It gives us a basic description of what is happening in our world **today**. It is not entirely about the past. It is not entirely about the future. It is mainly about the gospel-age. We are seeing even now the anger of God upon the world. Again and again the world's projects and schemes are blasted. War after war takes place, disaster after disaster. The earth itself is plunged into ever-increasing calamity. This kind of picture given to us in the book of Revelation ought to do at least four things to us.

Conclusions

1. Safety in Jesus alone

1. It ought to remind us that our safety is found in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. The book of Revelation is not intended to make us afraid. The book began, we remember, with a vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is the divine Priest-and-King who cares for his churches. He keeps the light of his church burning brightly. He is the Son of Man of Daniel 7:13, the humane-and-kindly King who shares the Father's throne. He wants his churches to be light-bearers to the world. His face is like the sun shining in full strength. He is the First and the Last, the One who was present at the beginning and will be superintending his kingdom until the very end.

2. Sorrow for the world

2. It ought to make us feel very sorry for the world. What terrible disasters the wicked bring upon themselves because of their ignorance and their folly.

3. Gratitude for salvation

3. It ought to make Christian people so grateful for their salvation. We ourselves would be doomed to experience these terrible judgements if it were not for God's amazing grace in our lives.

4. Preaching the gospel is the best thing we can do

4. It ought to make us know that the best thing we can do for our world is to preach the gospel. Of course we must be involved in our world. We must take our place in society and Christian influence will modify and adjust and restrain some of the disasters that fall upon the nations. But we must not be too over-optimistic that our social-involvement will bring lasting change. Alongside our involvement in the lives of men and women must be the preaching of the gospel. Nothing really touches the terrible plight of men and women except the preaching of the gospel. The bowls of God's anger fall upon sin again and again. There is change and rescue only where the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ prevails and is powerfully applied.



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