

Things are not what they seem; glimpses from Revelation

The World Faced with God

Chapters 15:5—16:21

The bowls now poured out are bowls of wrath.

- We have encountered dread of the Lamb's wrath when the sixth seal was broken (6:16).
- We have seen the heavenly elders give praise to God that his wrath brought opposition to him and his people to an end (11:18).
- The wrath revealed here is not different to what has been spoken about before. It is a revelation of how wrath exposes the hatred of Satan and fires up the power of the beast and deception by the false prophet.
- The dragon's opposition the God and the world's servile acceptance of this become absolute and bitter.
- The bowls of wrath bring these powers to an end, together with the fawning of the world and seductions of Babylon.
- The outpouring of these bowls shows that God's wrath is final and implacable.
- The whole story has come down to a face-to-face encounter between God and Satan. The final question for us all is: 'Is God really God?'
 - Satan, and the world under his tutelage, suggest to Christians that their 'God' is a projection required by their insecurities and longings.
 - The world believes and feels that God is irrelevant.
 - Christians need to know that God is not disestablished, muted or mocked by Satan or by the world he has sought to have as his kingdom.
 - God is the fountainhead, sustainer and judge of all things, not the product of our faith.
- All this is revealed to us, to establish our faith in what is true.

God's temple (*naos*) in heaven is opened again (15:5), as it was at the beginning of the previous scene (11:19).

- Here it is called 'the tent of witness', perhaps suggesting that God has borne witness to himself through Israel and the church. All nations should heed what God has revealed in Old and New Testaments.
- The beast conquerors are already rejoicing in God as king of the nations (15:2-4), so the wrath to be revealed here is not so the church will be persuaded by a show of power, or even relieved from their trials, but to demonstrate God's sovereignty to those who have identified with the beast and the world.
- Earthly kingdom builders, like the inhabitants of Babel, cannot finally prosper.
- The seven angels with seven plagues were *seen* at the end of the last vision (15:1); now they *come* and are *given* bowls of God's wrath (15:7).
- Plenty will come from heaven, but no-one will be able to enter there. The time for debate is over. God's eternity is stressed (15:7); we are frail flesh—as the world is about to see. Cf. Luke 12:4-5.
- We are told that with this outpouring, God's wrath is finished (15:1; 16:17)—finished, that is, in this present world's history—on earth (16:1). At the end, there is still the wrath of the Lamb on rebellious nations (19:15) and the lake of fire for the Devil and those whose names are not in God's book (20:10, 15).

Wrath is not our affair (Rom. 12:19 with Deut. 32:35) but it is God's.

- Without this doctrine, we are left with our wrath and this is cruel, selfish and unbalanced.
- Without this doctrine the truth of God's sovereignty is dead—God can't manage his world.

- Without this doctrine, the church is emasculated—it cannot have any real hope that God can fix what has gone wrong.
- Jesus taught that catastrophic events in this present world should lead us to fear God (Luke 13:4-5).

The bowls of wrath are poured out. They affect...

- those who bear 'the mark of the beast' (16:2),
- those who kill God's chosen messengers (16:6),
- those who curse rather than repent (16:11, 21),
- those who do not care to wear what Christ provides for covering (3:18)
- and they fall on the throne of the beast himself (16:10).

Bowls one to four affect nature—earth, sea, rivers and sun—not one third of them as by the trumpet judgements, but in their entirety. There is nowhere to escape.

Bowl five ravages the centre of world power—the beast's throne—causing darkness. We may imagine a global power outage, a total collapse of the internet, and the simultaneous collapse of all functioning nation-states.. Nothing will work. Suffering is immense.

Bowl six dries up the Euphrates, like God dried up the Red Sea, but this time to remove the geographic obstacle to a massive attack from the East. For Rome, in the first century, enemies from the East were their terror. Here, the threat is from God. Babylon is feeling the heat.

- The dragon-beast-false prophet 'trinity' goes into a demonic frenzy, even working miracles, to make a final stand against God.
- We may recall the ranting of Joseph Goebbels in the final days of the Third Reich—a call for desperate heroism and an expectation of miracles.

The army gathers at Armageddon (the valley of Megiddo in Israel where many famous battles had been fought), but no epic struggle ensues.

- The forces of this world have been fully spent fighting God.
- We are called to look up, and towards God's future (cf. Luke 21:28).

Bowl seven completes what God must do in this world. All nature is affected and Babylon drinks the cup appointed to her.

- The cup Christ drank (Matt. 26:39) shows how needless all this suffering is.
- These bowls poured out have highlighted that God has made his Son's engagement of the powers of darkness on the cross, and the judgement of the world in his sufferings, the central issue of all human history. Finally, no one can avoid his coming and his victory.
- The issue for the world is God. He lives. He reigns. He judges. He is good.
 - The world wants us to discuss issues on its own terms, but God has set the terms.
 - Chinese church leader Wing Mangdao's story is told in *Acquainted with Grief*. He insisted on answering his interrogators in terms of Christ's lordship over the church, not in terms of state ideology.

*Sovereign Judge the world is aching
Through its shame and wrongful ways.
You are showing your displeasure
In the tumults of our age*

*Yet your wrath is righteousness,
Purging our pollution,
Wishing not we be condemned,
But that we be chastened.*