

## **“The Wrath of the Lamb”**

(Revelation 6:9-17)

### **Introduction**

It sounds contradictory, paradoxical, oxymoronic, nonsensical: **The Wrath of the Lamb**. A lamb is passive and gentle, meek and lowly. Wrathful? That is hardly a word to be associated with a lamb and yet ... there it is, in Rev. 6:16: **The Wrath of the Lamb**. And, it must not escape our attention: this is not just any Lamb but a very particular one. It is the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Liberal and modernist theologians have been quick to extol and embrace the portrait of the meek and lowly Jesus, the gentle and compassionate man from Galilee. Now to be sure, He is all of these things: meek and humble, gentle and compassionate. However, this portrait is only a partial picture of the Savior. Scripture also portrays a Jesus who twice cleanses the temple (Matt. 21:12-17; John 2:13-22), who angrily condemned the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23:13-36) calling them “serpents” and “a brood of vipers,” and who said more about the eternal fire and judgment of *Gehenna* (Hell) than anyone else in the Bible.

A balanced view of the God of the Bible must hold in balance His love and His holiness, His compassion and His justice, His grace and His righteousness, His mercy and His wrath.

In Revelation, the wrath of the Lamb, the wrath of God is a reoccurring theme (11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15). Dr. Warren Wiersbe, former pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago, puts it all in perspective, “If men and women will not yield to the love of God, and be changed by the grace of God, then there is no way for them to escape the wrath of God.” (Wiersbe, 67).

### **Transition**

What will it be like and what should we learn when the wrath of the Lamb comes?

#### **I. Saints should seek justice.**

**6:9-11**

The 3 series of judgements in Revelation follow a similar pattern of 4-3 or 4-2-1 as the judgements unfold. The 4 horsemen of the apocalypse have ridden leaving death and devastation in their wake. John now sees the 5<sup>th</sup> seal opened. Though some Bible students believe this seal reveals martyrs throughout history, and others that it summarizes certain features of the first 4 seal judgements, based upon Matthew 24:9, it is better to see it as a record of events which begin in the first half of the tribulation and escalate in the second half, especially following what Jesus called the “abomination of desolation” in Matthew 24:15.

As Jesus opens this 5<sup>th</sup> seal, 3 truths leap from the passages of Scripture with reference to the perspective of His saints during these terrifying days.

#### **1. Their justice is deserved before God.**

**6:9**

John sees under the altar, souls of those who had been slain. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, the blood of the slaughtered animals was poured out at the base of the altar (Leviticus 4:7; Exodus 29:12). Leviticus 17:11 reminds us, “the life is in the blood.” The reason for their death, their martyrdom, is two-fold:

- 1) The Word of God.
- 2) The testimony (witness) which they hold.

Their sacrifice suggests their blood lies under the altar of burnt offerings.  
 Their prayers suggests their cry comes from under the altar of incense.  
 Mounce wisely notes, “There is no reason why in John’s vision the two should not blend together as one” (Mounce, 157). Martyrs for Jesus will appear again and again in Revelation (7:9ff; 13:15; 18:24; 20:4). Faithful to the Word and faithful in their witness for Jesus, they seal their testimony with their blood.

### **Transition**

Their justice is deserved before God.

### **2. Their justice is deferred to God.**

**6:10**

These martyrs for the Master cried (screamed) with a loud voice (*phone megale*).  
How long (“until when”) O Lord (*despotes*, a term used for the master of slaves, emp. absolute authority and power. Used only here in Revelation).

Holy and true (cf. Rev. 3:7 and its application to Jesus) until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? (cf. 3:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12; 17:2, 8;

Note: Those who murdered them are still alive on the earth! Clearly these are tribulation martyrs.)

This prayer seems all out of character given the prayer of Jesus in Luke 23:34 and Stephen in Acts 7:60.

Luke 23:34, “Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” And they divided His garments and cast lots.”

Acts 7:60, “Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”

Thomas Glasson says, “It should be frankly recognized that this is not a Christian prayer.” How should we respond to such a serious charge?

(1) Divine retribution/vindication is a prominent theme in the Old Testament.

Deut. 32:35, “Vengeance is Mine, and recompense”

Ps. 64:7-9, “But God shall shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly they shall be wounded. So He will make them stumble over their own tongue; all who see them shall flee away. All men shall fear, and shall declare the work of God; for they shall wisely consider His doing.”

Ps. 79:10, “Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?” Let there be known among the nations in our sight the avenging of the blood of Your servants which has been shed.”

Ps 94:1-2, 23, “O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongs – O God, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth! Rise up, O Judge of the earth; render punishment to the proud. ... He has brought on them their own iniquity. And shall cut them off in their own wickedness; the Lord our God shall cut them off.”

Mal. 4:1-2, “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves.”

(2) Divine retribution/vindication is an important theme in the New Testament.

Luke 21:22, “For these are the days of vengeance.”

Romans 1:18 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

Romans 12:19-20, “Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay*’ says the Lord.

Therefore ‘*if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.*’”

Hebrews 10:30, “For we know Him who said, ‘*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,*’ says the Lord. And again, “the Lord will judge His people.”

- (3) The prayer of these martyrs is not for personal revenge or vengeance but for divine vindication and justice. As Mounce well says, “This request does not rise from a personal desire for revenge, but out of concern for the reputation of God” (Mounce, 158). Vindication, not bitter revenge, is their prayer, and all of it they defer to God.

### **Application**

All response to evil done to us should be placed in the hands of God for His response and His timing. Vengeance belongs to Him not us.

### **3. Their justice is determined by God. 6:11**

White robe – speaker of blessedness, dignity, honor, victory, purity and the imputed righteousness of Christ. The speculation of an intermediate body or their immediate reception of a glorified body is misplaced and unnecessary. The symbolism does not require this. God (implied) gently tells them to rest a little while longer. The time will not be long, but something more must occur: until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed. Amazing. God has determined sovereignly by His own will exactly the number of martyrs. Not one less and not one more will die apart from His purpose. What does all of this mean for us in the grand plan of God?

- (1) God may and does call some to die for Him (Stephen, James, Paul, Peter, Polycarp, Michael and Margaretha Sattler, Jim Elliott, Rachel Scott, Cassie Bernall, Graham, Philip and Timothy Staines, and millions whose names we do not know.)
- (2) God knows each and every one who dies for Jesus. Their death is an appointment, not an accident.
- (3) God’s delay does not mean He does not know. Rest a little while longer. Justice has been determined. Justice will be done.

## **II. Signs will announce judgment. 6:12-14**

Jesus opens the 6<sup>th</sup> seal and the world begins to convulse and reel. Just as scripture promises, the entire cosmos and all of nature begins to unravel and come apart at the seams. While some fine students of scripture regard these judgements as symbolic and a reference to social and political upheaval, it is better to take these end time events as literal descriptions of God’s direct intervention and judgement upon a world in rebellion against its Creator.

### **1. There will be earthly disturbances. 6:12**

A great earthquake (*seismos megas*) – earthquakes are a common occurrence when there is a divine visitation: Sinai (Exodus 19:18), cf. also Isaiah 2:19; Haggai 2:6, Calvary (Matthew 24:7; 27:51). In the Revelation they occur again in 8:5 (before the

trumpet judgements), 11:13 (following the resurrection of the 2 witnesses) and in 16:18-19 (the 7<sup>th</sup> bowl). The judicial appearance of God is prefaced by an earthquake as the faults of the earth begin to crack and fracture simultaneously resulting in global chaos. The Lord shakes His creation in righteous judgement.

### **Transition**

There will be earthly disturbances.

## **2. There will be heavenly disturbances.**

**6:12-14**

Isaiah 13:9-10, “Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine.”

Joel 2:10-11, “The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble; the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness. The Lord gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?”

Joel 2:28-32, “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood. Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance. As the Lord has said, among the remnant whom the Lord calls.”

Joel 3:14-16, “Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness. The Lord also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the Lord will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel.”

Matthew 24:29-30, “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

With the opening of the 6<sup>th</sup> seal, the full fury of the **Day of the Lord** arrives. The earth is shaken at its foundation. Cosmic upheaval impairs the light of the sun so that it is darkened like a dark cloth made from goat’s hair and worn in times of mourning. The moon likewise is affected and appears the deep, red color of blood. Some have speculated that worldwide earthquakes will produce catastrophic volcanic activity spewing ash and smoke throughout the atmosphere, and that this causes the darkening of the sun and the reddening of the moon. Whatever the cause, all of this is a sign of God visiting His world in judgement and yet, there is more.

The stars fall. The word for star simply refers to any celestial body, large or small, having the appearance of a star. A monstrous meteor or awesome asteroid shower is possibly in view and they “fall to the earth like unripe figs” from a wicked winter wind.

Then the sky recedes (lit. splits apart) like an unrolled papyrus scroll which if broken in the middle, would quickly roll back on each side. Exactly what this means we can only guess, and yet we should note this cosmic calamity is accompanied by every mountain and island being moved out of its place. \*This is a total cosmic meltdown! The immediate causes are not altogether clear, but concerning the ultimate cause of it all there is no doubt: it is the **Day of the Lord** and the **Wrath of the Lamb**.

### Transition

Signs will announce judgement.

### III. Sinners should fear the judge.

**6:15-17**

You would think all of this would drive the world to their knees in repentance before God. Now to be sure some will turn to the Lord, as chapter 7 makes clear. But here, as in 9:20-21 and 16:11, there is no repentance, there is no sorrow over sin. In the absence of faith there will be fear in “the great day of His wrath” (v. 17).

#### 1. They will fear His presence.

**6:15-16**

John provides a 7-fold listing or classification of mankind, beginning with those who under normal circumstances would feel secure and safe, and ending with the less noble and less noteworthy. No one goes unnoticed! All will be utterly undone and seized by (ir)rational fear. As the guilty conscience of Adam and Eve turned them into fearful fugitives from God, they sought to hide from Him who sees all things, and they could not. As it was in the beginning so shall it be in the end. Sinful and rebellious humanity will fear and attempt to flee from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb and they will utterly fail.

\*Interestingly in verse 16 we find sinful humanity praying. But it isn't to the Rock of Ages but to the rocks of the mountains. It isn't in faith but out of fear. It isn't a cry for life but a cry for death. Why? Because when God comes in judgement sinners will fear His presence.

#### 2. They will fear His punishment.

**6:17**

The time of Jacob's trouble is here. Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week is upon us. The tribulation is in full swing. The Day of the Lord has arrived. The great day of the wrath of the Lamb has come. Only one question remains: Who is able to stand? The answer: No one! No one can stand! Rather than turn to Him in faith they try to hide in fear. And did you notice verse 16? **They know who has come and what has come!** Can you believe it? Knowing, knowing, knowing it is the Lord and the time of His judgement, they run rather than repent. They flee rather than turn in faith. The great and awesome Day of the Lord is here. The end has finally arrived. What will men do? What can they do?

### Conclusion

Every man, every woman, every teenager, every boy and every girl has a choice, a decision they and they alone will make. Will I find forgiveness through the grace of the Lamb or will I stand in fear before the wrath of the Lamb? I do not say this to scare you but I do say it to warn you. The great day of His wrath will come. Where on that day will you stand?