

## WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOD DOING: REVELATION, VISION 4

**Ch 15:5 – Ch 16 The Road to Final Judgment.**

Last week we had a look at one of the longest visions in this series of seven that tells of what life will be like from Jesus ascension to his return. We saw the beasts of oppressive states, govt., and false religions working in tandem. Both are manifestations of the dragon Satan. We considered the challenge of how to live under such oppression. This is one of the shortest visions. Again starts in heaven. Has 7 elements. We have had seven trumpets, seven seals. This time seven bowls of wrath poured out by seven angels. They are almost identical to Rev 8 and the 7 Trumpets. But this time everything seems much worse. No longer do we have fractions (1/3 = warning.) but complete devastation. We see God bring judgment to the world.

We do need to see that judgment is part of the character of God and come to terms with this. We have seen throughout revelation that war, famine, disease, destruction of the environment have all been calls for people to turn to God. When you turn on the news and see the latest disaster, you must understand what you are watching. God is calling people to turn to him and to turn away from the notion that they are their own bosses and make their own destiny. God is their creator and is calling us to himself. Not in anger but in love. The heart of God is love.

But this vision says there is a time coming when despite the repeated calls of God to repent, people will harden their hearts and refuse to repent. There come a point when people refuse to bow the knee to God and judgment comes. This is very similar to Exodus where the people of God are in slavery in Egypt. God spoke to Pharaoh repeatedly through very similar judgments but he hardened his heart.

Bowls are also called plagues. Lev 26:21 is the only other time we read this phrase. Bowls in the OT linked to the priestly service. Also connected to the prayers of God's people. And to judgement. Is 51:22. The judgements are such that no one can be in God's presence.

**First bowl Ch 16 :2.** Sores come on people with intense suffering. If we violate the principles of God for life we will suffer. Maybe some sexually transmitted diseases are examples of this, or a foretaste of this.

**Second bowl Ch 16:3** The seas die. Previously just part of the sea was affected. Now it is all the sea.

**Third Bowl Ch 16:4-7** Rivers are turning to blood. Fresh water is affected.

**Fourth bowl. Ch 16:8-9** This affects the sun and allows it to scorch people with its fire. The depletion of the ozone layer could well be an fulfilment of this. It has caused an increase in cancer, and has destroyed plankton. Maybe global warming is a foretaste of this with the current forest fires around the world.

**Fifth Bowl Ch 16: 10-11** Darkness poured on the throne of the beast. Beast is states, govt. that set themselves up and demand allegiance. Some see this as instability in leadership, with coups etc. Some see this as economic collapse.

**Sixth Bowl Ch 16:12-16** We see 3 evil spirits from the dragon, beast and false prophet. (a false trinity) These 3 were introduced last week. They release frogs, mirroring the plagues of Egypt. They combine together to wage war. In the past, wars involving Japan, China and Iraq have been seen as fulfilment.

Some see this as a literal war centred around Israel. Some say there will literally at some future point in time be a war at Armageddon. But all other names in Rev are symbolic, so safe to see this as symbolic too. Armageddon is a place where over 200 battle fought over history. Symbolic of war. Euphrates was boundary between Roman and feared Parthian empire. So something is released that allows terrible war to happen. Satan thinks he is winning. If he can't win the world, he will destroy it. But actually God is releasing his judgment. This mirrors the cross where Satan thought he was winning by putting Jesus to death. But actually God was working out his purposes.

So there is some kind of terrible show down between the forces of darkness and God. How it will be worked out is not clear. Often only after events that we can see how Scripture has been fulfilled.

Rather than always looking for clues. Clearly says here what we are to do: speculate. "Take note. I will come as unexpectedly as a thief. Blessed are those who are watching for me, who keep their robes ready so they will not need to walk naked and ashamed."



Remain dressed is not literal. It means to be prepared. Notice it is sudden. Unexpected. So we will not be able to predict this. Maybe it is sudden nuclear war. Maybe it is some other form of conflict.

**Question:** Are these bowls events that happen at the end of time. Just before final judgment or are they events we can look for throughout history. Answer is probably both. Particularly as the trumpets are so very similar but talk of only affecting a portion of the earth. Maybe these are an intensification of judgments just before the final curtain is drawn. But we can see portions of these happening now.

**Seventh Bowl.** There is a loud shout from the Temple It is finished. Echoes of Jesus on the cross. Earth is ripped apart. Massive earthquake affects the whole world. Seems to indicate all the tectonic plates of the world moving at once. Massive hailstorm. (More about Babylon in the next vision)

Some kind of terrible event is sketched here. Not given all the details. But it is the final judgment. Seems to bring things as we know it to an end. Only vision that does not end with a scene in heaven. Ends with final judgment of the earth.

God will

Not Allow injustice to continue for ever  
Not allow exploitation and poverty to continue  
Not allow human slavery to continue  
Not allow the earth to continue to be raped.  
Not allow people to continue to brazenly thumb their noses at him  
Not allow his name to continue to be made a mockery of  
There will come a time when God will decisively act in history.

One day we are all going to have to stand before God and God is going to ask us what we have done with our lives. WE know of God's love WE know of God's heart for the poor We know of God's concern for the earth. He will examine our lives to see if we have responded with obedience. Have we orientated our lives towards him? Or to the systems of the world?

We can be fearful of all of this and these kinds of events. We can worry about what is to come. We can bunker down and wait it out. Hide in church bunkers with our Christian friends. Rush into latest conspiracy theory that points with glee to the evil we see around us. Or we can respond by living lives that proclaim that Jesus Christ will one day return.

In the midst of darkness we are to tell those around us that one day we will all be held to account for our lives. There is a day coming of judgment.

Deeply sobering message that we would prefer to ignore. Much more fun to focus on a God of love who is all warm and fuzzy and is not really that concerned about what we do. But we need to hear the God who is a God of judgment too. Not a contradiction of a God of love. True love always requires justice. If I allow my children to continually disobey me with no consequences is that love? No True love says I warn them and call them back to the right way.

If say my 18 year old continually rebels and leads a destructive lifestyle, I might be forced to get them to leave my home. While they would always be welcome to come home, it would be with an understanding of what they need to do. If they continued to reject those rules, they would remain outside our home.. That would never mean I would stop loving them. We understand this as parents. God is no different.

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## REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

1. Discuss how you react to the idea of the "wrath of God" How do you reconcile God's love and wrath? Do we focus too much on a God of love at the expense of other attributes?
2. Is judgment fair?
3. How do you feel about the idea of standing before God and being accountable for our lives?
4. How should judgment and the wrath of God affect how we live our lives?
5. When we see evidence of God's judgment around us, or on the news, how can we communicate God's warning to others?
6. What does it mean in practical terms to live "ready for his return"?
7. Using this passage and other parts of the Bible you are aware of, what does the Bible teach about what will happen at the end of time as we know it?



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