

The Wrath of God in Seven Bowls

Author: Larry W. Wilson

[vc_row][vc_column][vc_column_text]

Why?

The wrath of God is a subject that has a colorful history. This topic probably has turned more people against God than any other. Many good people have been presented with a view of God that is, even by human standards, unfair and unjust. It is, therefore, understandable why some people feel justified in rejecting the authority and claims of God.

However, the real tragedy with their justification is that it is based on false teaching. Understanding the principles surrounding God's mercy and justice is paramount because they define the nature and character of the government of God. The Bible places God's love and God's wrath on three levels.

God can be angry with a person as He was with Moses. (Exodus 4:14) He can be angry with a nation, as He so often was with the nation of Israel. (Numbers 25:4; 32:13; Judges 2:14) He can be angry with the whole world, as was demonstrated in the days of Noah. (2 Peter 2:4-6) Understanding how God deals with each level of wrath requires a bit of study.

There are several schools of thought on the topic of God's wrath and it has been said that each view actually says more about the followers of that view than about God. Therefore, let me say at the beginning of this study, that I do not fully understand God nor the depths of His love or the reach of His wrath.

I am sure that my understanding of God's wrath is less than complete. However, there are certain basic truths about God's wrath that the Bible plainly states. It also stands to reason that if we understand the basics correctly, then our endeavor to find and understand the essential truths about God's coming wrath will produce better conclusions.

I hope you will regard this presentation as more than an academic investigation. This topic is very important because the Bible predicts that God will soon release His fiercest wrath on certain people who live during the end-time. This demonstration of God's wrath is identified in Revelation 15 and 16 as the seven bowls or the seven last plagues.

Since the Bible clearly indicates that these awful judgments are coming from God (Revelation 15:1; 16:1), should not we try to understand His righteous ways and the principles of His Kingdom, rather than suffer from His wrath?

God's Wrath is Revealed for Different Reasons

God's wrath can be understood and applied in several different ways. Some scholars claim that

God does not exercise wrath in an active sense. They say, "God does not bring harm, death or destruction upon people. He would not kill since His own commandment says, 'Thou shalt not kill.' " Instead, they claim, "God's wrath is passive – He simply turns rebellious people over to the destructive control of the devil or the power of sin."

A few texts in the Bible at first glance may appear to support this conclusion. (Ezekiel 20:25,26; 23:24; Romans 1:28; Acts 7:42) However, within the context of the entire Bible, these texts do not support the conclusion that God does not kill human beings. On the contrary, the Bible states that God has and will intentionally kill people! Actually, the previous texts confirm something quite different from what some people claim.

These texts reveal that God fully respects man's choice to do good or evil. God allows each person the right to have a totally rebellious mind *if he or she so chooses*. In fact, notice what the Sovereign God says of Himself: ". . . **There is no God besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand.**" (Deuteronomy 32:39)

When God says "***I put to death***," what rational being can argue with His claim?

Does God Break His Commandment?

You may ask, if this is so, then how can God kill people when His command to the human race is, "Thou shalt not kill?" As I wrote earlier, some people believe that God steps aside and allows the consequences of evil to reward those who do evil. Referring to certain Bible stories they say, "God turned people over to the devil and the devil killed them, but God never kills."

Personally, I believe the justification for this view of God is false. This position ignores the weight of evidence found throughout the Bible and exclusively focuses on two prominent aspects of God's character: Love and Law. Advocates of this view often say that God is love and because He is love, He cannot violate His character of love by doing evil (killing). (1 John 4:8; Deuteronomy 32:4) They also claim that God would not break His own law; namely, "**Thou shalt not kill.**" (Exodus 20:13, KJV)

These two points are used to prove that God neither destroys nor kills. They claim that God simply steps out of the way when people become totally evil. He either allows sin to take its natural, destructive course or He turns them over to the devil – allowing Satan to do whatever he wishes with them. Does God allow the devil to kill people?

Yes, indirectly. (See Revelation 12:4 and Matthew 2:16. These verses show how the devil attempted to kill Baby Jesus through Herod.) Does God allow human beings to kill one another? Certainly – we read that in the newspaper every day. Does God kill people? Absolutely. For a few examples, read the following texts: Genesis 6:7; Exodus 12:12; Ezekiel 14:12-21; 2 Kings 19:35; Matthew 10:28.

Yes, God is love and He has wonderful plans and purposes for His creatures. He loves the

human race and desires the best for each person. However, God also requires each of us, as part of the human race, to live within certain boundaries – both physical and moral.

For example, the law of momentum says that mass times velocity equals momentum. A 3,000 pound car traveling at 60 miles-per-hour (100 kph) has a significant amount of momentum. Suppose the driver is drunk and his car hits a concrete object, resulting in the driver's death.

Did God kill the driver? No, but the law of momentum did have irrevocable consequences. So, there is validity to the claim that consuming too much alcohol can lead to deadly consequences.

Yet, the question remains, did a "God of love" create the law of momentum that would eventually kill a drunk driver?

Yes, God created the law of momentum and He also wants us to respect His laws. Yet, if a person chooses to get drunk and violate the law of momentum, reason dictates that the drunk actually killed himself.

The Sixth Commandment

Now, let us return to the sixth commandment that says, "**Thou shalt not kill.**" Would God violate His own commandment and kill people? The answer to this question is very important, and to answer it, we must understand the *intent* of the sixth commandment. Within God's rules for life, certain situations can occur where death can be inflicted (capital punishment) *without breaking* God's commandment.

Notice what the Lord told Noah when he left the ark: "**And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.**" (Genesis 9:5,6)

This verse shows that God commanded Noah and his descendants to put murderers to death. Capital punishment is not the invention of man. The Bible reveals that capital punishment originated in the mind of God — not man. (See also Leviticus 20.)

When the children of Israel were in the desert, God not only spoke the Ten Commandments to them, He also elaborated on the terms and conditions for capital punishment. "**These are to be legal requirements for you throughout the generations to come, wherever you live. Anyone who kills a person is to be put to death as a murderer only on the testimony of witnesses. But no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness. Do not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer, who deserves to die. He must surely be put to death. -**" (Numbers 35:29-31)

God apparently does not break the Sixth Commandment by requiring men to put murderers to death. A person has to incorporate *all* that God has said about killing to understand His *intent*

for laws about life and death. So, the people who claim that God cannot kill, because He will not break His own Law, do not understand the *intent* of that commandment nor do they understand all that God has commanded about capital punishment.

When God said, "**Thou shalt not kill**," He did not want humans to murder one another. However, if an individual chooses to commit murder, God declares that the murderer must be put to death and the next of kin can kill the murderer *without incurring guilt*. Notice, "[If] **the avenger of blood finds him [the murderer] outside the city [of refuge], the avenger of blood may kill the accused without being guilty of murder.**" (Numbers 35:27)

If sinful man can kill man without incurring guilt under **lawful** circumstances, how much more a righteous God.

Three Levels of Love and Wrath

We will now examine three different forms of God's wrath. First, the Bible reveals that God's wrath can flare up with justifiable anger or hostility. God is made angry with injustice. (See Leviticus 26; Ezekiel 14; Isaiah 63:1-6.) The seven trumpets of Revelation are one example of this type of wrath.

Further, God's wrath can also include vengeance. (Micah 5:15; Hebrews 10:30) The seven last plagues or seven bowls are an example of this type of wrath. Finally, there is a form of wrath that is the final penalty for violating God's laws. (Romans 4:15; Colossians 3:5,6)

God's destruction of the wicked at the end of the 1,000 years is a sample of this type of wrath. These three forms of wrath are distinct and separate, but they are also related. Let us examine each exercise of God's wrath and notice what it says about the character of God and His government.

Justifiable Anger and Hostility

God has a range of emotions far beyond that of people. God is not an emotionless machine or a robot ruling over the universe. He is a living God who is deeply interested in all of His creations. God sees and feels for the condition of every living creature. (See Exodus 22:22,24; Deuteronomy 11:12; Proverbs 15:3 and Matthew 10:29-31.)

He even knows today's count of the dwindling number of hairs on the top of my head! When God created Adam and Eve, He gave each of them a wide range of powerful emotions that make life fulfilling, exciting, somber, instinctive, serious, happy and reflective. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

He also gave man (especially women) the unique ability to sense or interpret emotions in a way that goes beyond words. (I know I may be on dangerous ground in some places for emphasizing that women are superior to men in this area, but this has been my experience.) Perhaps you have been in a situation where you "knew" someone disliked you although no

unkind words were spoken. Unlike God, however, human emotions do not spring from a pure heart and an all-knowing mind.

Sometimes our emotions take over our reason and we end up in big trouble. Nevertheless, in our fallen state we can still understand a wide range of emotional responses. I make this point because God's wrath sometimes includes a display of strong emotion. (Deuteronomy 3:26; 1 Kings 11:9; Isaiah 57:16-18)

So, why does God sometimes exhibit emotions of anger and wrath when He is grieved with man? Perhaps the old adage, "actions speak louder than words," is more true than we realize. Here is a short quiz to prove my point. Which lasts longer: The words on a card or the act of giving the card? Which actually says more?

What will be remembered a week later – the specific words on the card or the *act* of giving and the emotional response it produced? I think you get the point.

The Bible clearly states that God is loving, long-suffering, patient, forgiving and not willing that any should perish. (1 John 4:16; Hebrews 8:12; 2 Peter 3:12)

The Bible also reveals that God is pure, righteous, consistent and always fair. (Malachi 3:6; Psalm 89:14; 97:2) He cannot be arbitrary, mean or vindictive and be righteous at the same time. So, how do we balance the equation of God's exhibition of anger and His loving character? First, we must realize that all God's actions are justifiable because God is righteous in everything He does! (Deuteronomy 32:4)

We may not fully understand His infinite motives and actions at a given moment, but be assured that His conduct is always under scrutiny by perfect beings that are far more intelligent than human beings. Further, we can be sure that God will be declared righteous in the end by all of His subjects as they study and review any and every situation. (Isaiah 45:23)

This brings us to an interesting point. God never justifies Himself – the evidence itself always exonerates His actions. This means that God is deliberate and purposeful in every situation, conducting Himself in a way that will not be less than fully righteous and generous, even under the closest scrutiny!

Bible writers label the exercise of God's wrath as "**His strange act.**" (Isaiah 28:21) It seems that God prefers to use the greatest force in the universe, the compelling power of love. But when hyperextended love cannot achieve its purpose, God is not afraid nor timid to use divine wrath to resolve the problem of rebellion. (Revelation 20:9,10)

In fact, the seven trumpets of Revelation are manifestations of God's emotional wrath. Why is God angry with our world? Observe the constant degenerate behavior of humankind – overall humans are extremely lawless.

God's kindness or generosity has a limit and that limit is reached when His mercy has no further redemptive effect. *There is no other Biblical reason for God's expression of anger than the fact*

that His hyperextended love reaches a point where it has no redemptive effect on the behavior of humankind. (Romans 1:28; 2:4)

For a few examples showing that God's kindness has limits, read the details regarding Babylon's fall in Daniel 5:17-28 and Jeremiah 50 & 51; the flood in Genesis 6; God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18; and Lucifer's expulsion from Heaven in Isaiah 14 and 2 Peter 2:1-11. These are a few examples (there are more) proving that God is both generous and responsible – generous in allowing His subjects freely to do as they choose, but also responsible in controlling the limits and destruction of sin.

In each case just mentioned, God was emotionally roused to action because the cancer of sin and rebellion had reached a point where corporate redemption was no longer possible. When God becomes indignant with the growth of sin, look out below!

God has Emotion

We have to agree that God has emotions. For example, in Genesis 6:6,7 the Lord was *grieved* at the degeneracy of man before the flood. After King Saul turned away from obeying the Lord, the Lord (who personally chose Saul to be king) was *grieved* in His heart. (1 Samuel 15:11) On another occasion, the Lord was ready to destroy Jerusalem when He had a change of heart. The Bible indicates that He was *grieved* at the thought of destroying the city where His temple would one day be built. (1 Chronicles 21:1-16)

Last, (and there are many more examples of God's grief in the Bible) the Lord was *grieved* at Israel's rejection of His kindness and salvation, although for a time, He did look upon them with *pity*. (Ezekiel 20:13-17; Matthew 23:37,38)

On the other side of the coin, God can be pleased with our actions. He personally spoke approval from Heaven to His Son at His baptism. (Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22) Balaam saw that it pleased the Lord to bless Israel. (Numbers 24:1) God is pleased when we place unconditional faith in Him. (Psalm 37:28; Hebrews 6:11) God loves a humble and contrite heart. (Isaiah 51:17; 57:15) God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:7)

God is pleased to reward those publicly who do deeds of kindness in secret. (Matthew 6:4) God is happy to forgive the sins of a repentant heart. (John 3:16; 1 John 1:9; 2:1) These few texts and a host of others prove that God has emotions! (Psalm 2:1-12 describes many of God's emotions.) We were created in His image and we have emotions – so, why shouldn't God have feelings too? (Genesis 1:26)

Summary Thoughts on God's Emotions

So far, we have discussed four important points.

First, God has emotion. As a righteous king, He can be made angry with defiant rebellion or pleased with deeds of righteousness.

Second, God's kindness has a limit. That limit is reached when extended mercy no longer has redeeming effect.

Third, God is righteous in everything He does, therefore, His anger is justifiable – even if we do not understand it!

Fourth, God's anger can be used for redemptive purposes or it can be totally destructive.

The Bible is clear. God does, from time to time, destroy people, nations and in Noah's day, the world. God is not selfish, moody or arbitrary. God's actions are based on eternal principles that reflect His infinite wisdom. He deals with people, nations and even the whole world, according to the same principles of fairness and righteousness that He uses throughout His universal Kingdom.

The Wrath of God's Law

There is a different manifestation of God's wrath that comes from violating His laws. This wrath is not like the emotional wrath presented above. Rather, this wrath is the fair and impartial administration of punishment required by His laws.

This wrath is like the outcome of the drunk smashing into the overpass. The law of momentum extracts a penalty if disobeyed. In a moral sense, God's laws have a penalty as well. Day after day a judge may sit on his bench and adjudicate the demands of the law toward those individuals convicted of wrong doing.

The judge does not (at least, should not) pass sentences based on personal emotions or feelings. Instead, the law that the judge represents defines the penalty for "law breaking" and within the scope of that penalty, the judge should be able to determine the appropriate punishment for violating the law. This is what Paul meant when he said "**the [violation of] law brings wrath.**" (Romans 4:15)

The day Adam was created, He was placed under the obligation of law. The Creator said, "**But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.**" (Genesis 2:17) Notice that the obligation of law also included the promise of wrath.

In other words, God told Adam, *when* you disobey this law, you will receive the wrath promised by the law, which is death by execution. According to this verse, Adam and Eve were to be executed the very day they sinned. (See Genesis 2:17 in the KJV for a sense of immediacy in the execution.)

Because their sin was not defiant and because God loved them, mercy and grace were extended to them. The penalty was delayed because Jesus stepped between the demand of the law and the guilty pair and further, the Father accepted Jesus' offer to be executed in their place.

In God's economy, the violation of His law always brings wrath. Although Adam and Eve did not suffer execution that very day as promised (Jesus offered His life, thus their execution day was delayed until the Plan of Salvation could be fulfilled), God will surely execute those sinners who do not accept Christ's offer of grace. (Revelation 20)

The reason understanding this aspect of God's wrath is important this: The legal basis for the coming judgments of God is based on God's offended law! God is Sovereign. His law is above all laws made by human beings. Because all of us have violated God's Sovereign law and much of the world has no respect for man's laws, the Bible predicts that Jesus is going to send a series of 14 judgments upon Earth. There will be seven first plagues and seven last plagues.

These plagues (judgments) are not wild or random manifestations of God's wrath. Yes, God is grieved with the sinful course of Earth. Yes, God's divine anger is aroused at the selfishness, greed, immorality and injustice that abound. Yes, God is incensed with our wicked behavior in a corporate sense.

However, God's coming judgments are not punishment for the sake of punishment. Instead, each coming judgment is thoughtfully designed to make its point. (What is the point of discipline if the problem for which the discipline is administered is not made clear?) The seven first plagues or seven trumpets (Revelation 8:2-9:21; 11:15-19) are selected judgments mixed with mercy.

During the 1,260 day time-period of the seven trumpets, God will gather all who love righteousness and truth and have responded to the preaching of the everlasting gospel. (This gathering process is discussed in the April 1998, issue of *Day Star*.)

God inflicts the seven last plagues (which are separate and distinct from the seven trumpets) on people who defy His law and receive the mark of the beast. To violate God's law brings wrath and the ultimate form of wrath required by law is death by execution.

Why is Execution Necessary?

When Adam and Eve sinned, their nature changed and they became anti-God. (Adam and Eve instantly changed from having a propensity toward righteousness to having a propensity toward rebellion against God the very day they sinned. They ran and hid from God because of this change in nature. Genesis 3:8; Romans 8:7)

From the beginning, God decreed that death by execution is the penalty for sin because sinful beings would attempt to destroy God and all that He has made if (a) they had enough power, (b) if they had enough time, and (c) if it were possible. (See Revelation 12: 7-9; 17:12-14; 19:19,20.)

Violators cannot escape the internal changes that sin brings. Being anti-God is natural for all sinners. The only way to maintain a universe free from the chaos and deadly infection of sin is to totally eliminate sin and all beings who choose to continue in lawlessness. (2 Thessalonians

2:2:12)

This is why God executes the wicked (including the devil and his angels) with fire at the end of the thousand years. (Notice, they are thrown into the lake of fire! Revelation 20:15) Dying from the consequences of sin (cancer, stroke, accident, illness, etc.) is not to be equated with paying the penalty for sin (death by execution).

If that were the case, the Father would only have had to wait for Jesus to grow old on Earth and die "a natural death." However, the penalty for sin is not natural death. *This is why Jesus was executed at Calvary.* This is also why the wicked are resurrected at the end of the 1,000 years.

God wants to accomplish three things with the wicked before He executes them: First, He wants to meet with His creation, face to face. Second, He wants to explain to each wicked person why they were not granted eternal life. Last, He wants to have them see the reality of His dominion and kingdom.

In the end, they must provide restitution for their evil deeds by suffering appropriately, and finally be executed by fire – for the wages of sin is death by execution. Then, the wrath of God's law will be finally satisfied.

The Vengeance of God

The Bible quotes God saying, "**To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.**" (Deuteronomy 32:35 KJV)

The idea of vengeance does not easily fit into the view of a loving God. If God requires us to forgive, shouldn't He? Notice this text, "**For we know him who said, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' and again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**" (Hebrews 10:30,31)

How does one harmonize God's character of love, patience, joy, long-suffering and forgiveness with vengeance? What is vengeance? How does vengeance fit within God's character of love?

Vengeance is Recompensation

In our physical world, there are many laws that govern the way things are. For example, one physical law explains that work input equals work output. In other words, whether the situation is mechanical leverage or baking a cake, energy and matter are not created by slight of hand or laboratory accidents.

God created our world with a set of physical rules that cannot be broken. I remember, as a child, being fascinated with the notion of perpetual motion. If only it worked, I thought! Yet, a physical law states, "Everything tends to return to a state of rest." In simple terms, we live in a world balanced by many rules. Folklore has a few catchy sayings that recognize these rules. For

example, "It takes money to make money." Another one says, "You cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear."

The physicists say, "One cannot produce energy or matter out of nothing." I hope you get the point – everything in this world operates within laws that may be known or unknown and human conduct is not exempt. God placed mankind under His highest law when He set forth the golden rule: **"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you . . . for it will be done unto you as you did unto others."** Unfortunately, the last part of the golden rule is rarely repeated or contemplated. (Matthew 7:2; Obadiah 1:15; Joel 3:7; 2 Corinthians 5:10)

God has placed man in an environment of judicial equilibrium. This means that whatever we do to or for someone, the same is returned to us. (Matthew 6:4-6) Sometimes, the return of justice may not be immediate, but be assured of this: Wicked people will receive what they deserve, although it may not happen until the time of the second resurrection! (For a comprehensive discussion on this topic, read the November 1996 *Day Star* issue.)

What should we do if we recognize we have wronged another person? Two things should happen. First, provide restitution to our brother. (Exodus 22:3-14; Matthew 5:23,24) Next, confess our sin and seek God's forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

When God hears the prayer of a repentant sinner, we can be sure that God will take care of our guilt by transferring our sin to the temple, and later to the "scapegoat." (For a comprehensive discussion on how God processes our sins, see Study # 5 – "The Sanctuary," from the *Five Essential Bible Truths* series.)

Seven Bowls

God's vengeance and the seven bowls are irrevocably intertwined. The seven bowls are actually "seven pay-backs" for those who received the mark of the beast. In other words, the ultimate purpose of the seven last plagues is vengeance. God inflicts vengeance on the wicked for the horrible crimes committed against His innocent people! (See Lamentation 3:64 and Revelation 18:6.)

The justification for the seven-bowl "pay back" is quite simple. God is the One who initiated the trumpet-judgments so that the gospel could be proclaimed and "heard" throughout the world during the end-time. (The trumpets create an environment that will sober every living person to the point where at least they will consider the gospel.)

The gospel call will attract everyone who is sincere in heart, but the gospel will also powerfully repel those who are in rebellion against God. The conflicting issues between those serving God and those rebelling against Him will cause a great controversy on Earth.

The wicked will severely persecute and torture people who love God and worship on His seventh-day Sabbath. Obviously, God will see the injustice suffered by His people and since He bears responsibility for the separation of people over the issue of truth, God waits until everyone

has decided for or against His truth before pouring out His vengeance. People who reject the most clear evidences of truth cannot be saved. Worse yet, they are the very ones who torture and kill His dear children.

For a time during the trumpets, it will appear as if the devil and his followers have won. (Revelation 13:7) But God sees all and He does not forget and He will pay the wicked back double the suffering they inflict on the innocent. (Revelation 18:6) This is a clear-cut example of vengeance. This is why the Bible says, **"I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God's wrath is completed."** (Revelation 15:1) God pays back. (Hebrews 10:30, 31)

It is His right to avenge the suffering of His people. Do not misunderstand, He takes no pleasure in doing this, but He requires that justice be served upon the wicked who are living at the time of the Second Coming by destroying them temporarily. (See accompanying article in this *Day Star* for a "bowl-by-bowl" explanation of God's vengeance.)

God's Anger is Building

"I the Lord have spoken. The time has come for me to act. I will not hold back; I will not have pity, nor will I relent. You will be judged according to your conduct and your actions, declares the Sovereign Lord." (Ezekiel 24:14) Just as it was in Ezekiel's day, so it is in ours. This generation's day is coming soon. God will break His silence with sin.

Great noise will suddenly sound and overwhelming signs and wonders will sever the past from the oncoming future. The Earth will shake with violence. Life as we know it will immediately and irrevocably change the day God shakes the Earth with signals of wrath.

The world has yet to witness anything like the coming judgments of God, nor can it sustain more than one visitation. God will act suddenly and powerfully, and all the inhabitants of Earth will be overwhelmed with His swiftness and intensity.

In this context, the authority, character and actions of God will become a subject of profound interest and a great controversy among all the people of Earth will crescendo to a climax. One consuming question will be asked in all nations. Everyone will want to know, "What can we do to appease God so that His wrath will cease?" If you read the March 1998, issue of *Day Star* on the four beasts, you already know the answer.

The second part of this article is [***A Short Paraphrase on the Seven Bowls***](#)

`./vc_column_text][./vc_column][./vc_row][./vc_row][./vc_column][./vc_raw_html]PHA+SSBhbSBYXcgaHRtbCBibG9jay48YnlvPkNsaWNrIGVkaXQgYnV0dG9uIHRvIGNoYW5nZSB0aGlzIGh0bWw8L3A+[/vc_raw_html][./vc_column][./vc_row]`