

Lesson # 51 The Fourth Bowl Judgment Revelation 16: 8-9

Date: May 6, 2012

Revelation 16: 8-9 (ESV)

⁸The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. ⁹They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.

I. Scorching Heat From the Sun v. 8

Most commentators on these 2 verses bring in a scenario of intense heat on earth, melting polar ice caps, rising ocean levels and flooded coastlines; then extreme evaporation of all water bodies, drawing water up into the atmosphere and saturating the air with moisture.

In the 4th Trumpet judgment, 1/3rd of the sun was struck, causing less light from the sun and from the moon since it reflects the sun's light. It said that the stars were also darkened by 1/3rd so that judgment may be an atmospheric problem as a result of the meteorites hitting earth in the 2nd & 3rd Trumpets, rather than actually affecting the sun itself.

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However, now there are a couple of options to explore – 1.) the sun itself is affected and its' heat & light intensify; or 2.) earth's defenses, which normally filter out most of the sun's harmful radiation & heat, are weakened or made ineffective. For those who dwell on earth, however, the result is the same – scorching, deadly & unrelenting heat.

One interpretive problem through this section of Revelation is that we are given no time marks as reference points for the sequential timing of the bowls or the duration of their effects. We know that the series of these 7 judgments precedes the return of Jesus Christ by a brief period of time, but does that mean they occur over a course of weeks, a few months or up to 2 years? It would be helpful with this 4th bowl to know, because the 3rd bowl turned all fresh water into blood, and the 2nd had done the same to the oceans. So are we dealing now with blood or water? Have the oceans, rivers and springs returned to water again already or are they still blood? There is simply not enough information presented by John to tell us.

As was already noted in the last lesson, the previous judgment, which turned the water into blood, could not last for months or weeks because all life would die, and we know that many survive to the end. So the effects on water levels, ice caps, etc. are legitimate only if there is some time between the 3rd & 4th bowls, the blood dissipates and the water returns.

Options for Scorching Heat

1.) The Sun Itself Changes

- a.) Scientific theory has for many decades^① considered that the source of the sun's power is generally nuclear fusion in nature, which means it sort of refuels itself as it burns so that it lasts for a long time. The sun is thought to be made up of cosmic gases of helium & hydrogen – helium at the core and fusing hydrogen on the surface. The helium core is expected at some point to expand, causing the center of the sun to get hotter and eventually the helium will begin a fusion process too, expanding the sun until it becomes a “red giant”. When that happens, the heat from the sun will be unbearable on earth and water will boil off and life will cease on land^②. That is possible, but based on observations of other stars in other solar systems, this is not an event that occurs in days, but over thousands of years (it is assumed). God could still do it this way supernaturally of course.
- b.) Something more current and that can develop very rapidly is the phenomenon of solar flares. There are ‘weather’ patterns on the sun's surface and tongues of flame often erupt from the surface – probably plasma or super-heated gases which stream outward containing x-rays, radio waves, light waves, light clouds and high energy protons - in all directions, including towards earth. These flares can disrupt electronics, communications and given the right combination of radiation and heat could easily do what the 4th bowl judgment describes. I believe this is the most likely of the 3 items listed ^② here. The effects of these flares can be felt for a week or more.^③ There have been some lately, and a very bad batch in November 1960.

2.) Earth's Defenses Go Down

The sun does not heat the earth in a direct heat sort of way. Although it is many millions of miles away from earth, the surface of Mars is actually much hotter than earth, because of the differences in its' atmosphere and other planetary defenses. Heat comes from the sun in a stream of high energy particles which hit earth at 3 million mph. The earth is surrounded by its' own radiation, called the magnetosphere which protects earth against the sun's radiation, and any radiation that gets past this is trapped by the Van Allen Belts. Some of this energy exchange is seen in the Northern Lights.

Scientists believe that there are times when these planetary defense mechanisms are reduced to 15% efficiency or less, and that the polarity of the earth switches – perhaps every 5,000 years or so. Since scientists began to measure the earth's magnetic field, it is believed that there has been a 15% loss in strength since 1670 AD.^④ Again, however, this seems to be a more gradual rather than overnight sort of transformation, as does the disappearance of the ozone layer made famous by Al Gore and his global warming cronies.

Whatever scientific method God uses to carry out this judgment, the result is worldwide scorching heat, the likes of which will not be matched in any event preceding the 4th Bowl. This verse says that people will be scorched by fire, not heat, so it is possible that the heat will be so intense that it could actually set fire to bushes, trees, grasses, etc.

II. God's Sovereignty Recognized & Cursed v. 9

If by this time the reader is not convinced of man's utter depravity, this verse stands as one of the strongest evidences of it. Here, late in the Tribulation, close to Christ's return, with only 3 more judgments to come, John again records that man recognizes that these judgments are from God's hand. By now, this is too orchestrated to be random, it has been prophesied & is being shouted about by the 144,000 evangelists, and so cannot be seen as coincidental. So, what is the response then to these obvious outworkings of God's wrath? Do they cry out for God's mercy? No. They curse & blaspheme God's Name – cf. 9:20; 6:16-17 – Before this, only the Beast is said to have blasphemed God's Name – 13:6 – but now his followers join in. What a contrast to the praise we keep being referred to in heaven, even just above this in 16:5-7.

Verse 9c adds to this thought as we are told that not only did they blaspheme God's Name but “did not repent and give Him glory.” Cf. Romans 1:18ff. This is hard-heartedness at its' most revealing. When some people are put into the furnace of affliction, they respond in submission, repentance and faith, but the sun which softens or melts the wax also hardens the clay. What makes the difference? Why do some respond negatively to pressure God applies and others respond in faith? ③

We have to realize that the Biblical answer supports the sovereignty of God in salvation. Just as faith is a gift of God's grace – Eph. 2:8-9 – so is repentance – cf. Acts 11:18; II Tim. 2:25, Rom. 8:7-8, etc. Some will repent when this judgment hits, and God has decreed BFTFOTW who will respond in faith. Others will not, and will be left in their state of rebellion.

One by one, God has been hammering His creation, knocking the blocks out from under those who count on “Mother Nature”, man, technology, CNN, MSNBC and all other idols man has concocted over the many years of history. There is no realm of human habitation and scientific arrogance that will not be shattered by the very God who created all there is to be studied. Rather than honour and glorify God for what He has done, man continually, if left to his own devices, chooses to glorify the creation instead – cf. **Romans 1:18-32**.

Next lesson – Lesson # 52 Rev. 16:10-11 The Fifth Bowl

① Lately, other theories are being put forth to suggest that the process is more chemical than nuclear.

② John Phillips, Exploring Revelation, Moody Press, 1974, p. 203

③ Phillips, p. 203

④ IBID, pp. 202-203