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The Wrath of God in Revelation

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Description
This article examines the motif of divine wrath in Revelation, demonstrating a multifaceted presentation that complements and broadens the motif as it occurs elsewhere in the canon.

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Abstract

The book of Revelation presents a vivid and multifaceted depiction of the wrath of God that is both distinctive and harmonious with its occurrences throughout the Old Testament and the remainder of the New Testament. This study offers an exegetical analysis of the passages in Revelation that explicitly reference divine wrath, emphasizing its eschatological finality and irrevocable character as executed by the Father and the risen Lamb upon all who persist in rebellion. A comparative examination with canonical portrayals reveals Revelation's heightened apocalyptic imagery, such as the wine of God's wrath, the winepress of his fury, and the bowls of judgment, while affirming continuity with Old Testament types of historical and prophetic judgment. Additionally, divine wrath is briefly considered as a genuine expression of God's perfect emotional life in response to evil, consistent with the doctrine of divine impassibility. The study concludes with a consideration of Revelation's presentation of final punishment as eternal conscious torment.

Keywords: *wrath of God; book of Revelation; eschatology; hell; divine impassability*

INTRODUCTION

The central concept underlying this study is the divine wrath in the book of Revelation. Within the tradition of biblical theology, divine wrath is understood as an expression of God's justice against evil while simultaneously functioning as an integral component of Christian eschatology. Rather than being interpreted merely as an anthropomorphic emotion, divine wrath is more appropriately understood as a theological representation of God's judgment within the history of salvation. The book of Revelation offers a distinctive portrayal of divine wrath that complements the concept as developed in the Old Testament (OT) and in other parts of the New Testament (NT). In Revelation, divine wrath is communicated through apocalyptic symbolism—such as the bowls of wrath, cosmic judgment, and final punishment—which emphasizes the sovereignty of God and the ultimate victory of Christ over evil (Lietaert Peerbolte, 2021). The theme of divine wrath in Revelation therefore not only depicts God's response to sin but also represents the

culmination of the theological development of the motif of divine judgment within the broader canonical witness of Scripture (W. Ellis, 2021). Within this framework, Revelation presents the climax of this theological motif through eschatological imagery that underscores the finality of God's judgment against evil.

A number of previous studies have examined the motif of divine wrath in the book of Revelation from various theological and hermeneutical perspectives. Research on the portrayal of God in Revelation demonstrates that the text presents God as the sovereign ruler who will ultimately repay evil and establish justice at the end of the age (John - Wawa, 2021). Other studies highlight that the depictions of violence and punishment in Revelation should not be interpreted literally but rather as apocalyptic symbolism that communicates theological realities concerning God's victory over evil (Duvall, 2024). An exegetical study of Revelation 14:9–11, for example, interprets the metaphor of the "wine of God's wrath" as part of a sequence of apocalyptic judgments that lead to Christ's final victory over the forces of evil (Newall, 2022). Urbanek maps the terms *thymos* and *orgē* within the metaphors of the wine cup, winepress, and bowls (Rev 14–19), arguing that the bowl imagery represents historical disasters that still leave space for repentance, whereas the winepress imagery signifies the final judgment that eradicates evil (Urbanek, 2018). Warren investigates libation imagery—cups, bowls, and wine—and argues that Revelation contrasts Greco-Roman cultic practices with images of divine wrath rather than sacramental communion (Warren, 2018). Meanwhile, Martin approaches the violence of Revelation through a literary-critical lens, suggesting that the narrator functions as an "unreliable narrator," such that the gentle voice of God in Revelation 21–22 invites readers to reconsider the depictions of violence and wrath found earlier in the narrative (Martin, 2018). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that divine wrath constitutes a central theological theme in Revelation closely connected with eschatology, divine judgment, and the victory of Christ.

Methodologically, contemporary scholarship on Revelation increasingly employs apocalyptic-theological approaches alongside narrative-symbolic analysis in interpreting the text. These approaches emphasize the importance of understanding apocalyptic symbolism as a theological language that conveys a message of hope to communities experiencing suffering or persecution (Lietaert Peerbolte, 2021). Furthermore, several studies argue that Revelation should be read within the broader context of Jewish apocalyptic traditions, which emphasize a cosmic conflict between good and evil that ultimately culminates in divine judgment (Kuryliak & Kuryliak, 2024). Within this interpretive framework, divine wrath is understood not merely as punitive action but also as the theological consequence of humanity's rejection of God's authority and as part of the restoration of cosmic order within God's salvific plan (Alencar & Marcon, 2022).

Although previous scholarship has extensively explored the motif of divine wrath in the book of Revelation, such studies have predominantly emphasized its symbolic, ethical, or literary dimensions, often without adequately accounting for its theological integration within the broader narrative and canonical framework of Scripture . This dominant perspective, which tends to interpret divine wrath primarily as apocalyptic symbolism, proves insufficient when

confronted with textual evidence that underscores its eschatological finality, irreversibility, and theological coherence. Some scholars have explored the relationship between divine wrath and divine love in Revelation but have not yet offered a comprehensive exegetical synthesis of all passages that explicitly mention God's wrath (Dixon, 2020). Furthermore, the frequent separation of divine wrath from other divine attributes, such as justice, holiness, and impassibility, reveals a form of theological reductionism that limits a comprehensive understanding of the nature of God as portrayed in Revelation. These limitations indicate the need for a more integrative and systematically grounded approach that critically reassesses prevailing assumptions and reexamines their applicability across broader theological and canonical contexts.

In response, this study aims to provide a systematic exegetical analysis of all passages in Revelation that explicitly reference the wrath of God, situating them within a canonical framework that demonstrates their theological continuity with both the Old and New Testaments . The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach, which treats divine wrath not merely as symbolic or ethical discourse but as a coherent theological motif embedded within the narrative structure of Revelation and intrinsically related to doctrines such as divine impassibility and final eschatological judgment. Distinct from prior studies that approach the theme in a fragmented or thematic manner, this research offers a comprehensive exegetical, comparative synthesis that elucidates the internal relationship among key metaphors of divine wrath, such as the cup, the winepress, and the bowls of judgment as components of a unified theological vision. Accordingly, this study contributes original insight by advancing a more holistic, canonical, and theologically robust understanding of divine wrath as an integral expression of divine justice within the eschatological horizon of Revelation.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in biblical exegesis as its primary methodological framework. Such an approach is particularly appropriate given the study’s objective to analyze the theological motif of divine wrath within the apocalyptic discourse of the book of Revelation, which necessitates careful attention to historical context, literary structure, and theological meaning. Biblical exegesis enables a rigorous engagement with the text by integrating grammatical-historical analysis, literary sensitivity, and theological reflection, thereby allowing the researcher to move beyond purely symbolic or thematic interpretations toward a more comprehensive and textually grounded understanding. Moreover, the qualitative-exegetical approach is well suited to addressing the research aim of constructing a canonical and theological synthesis, as it facilitates the correlation of Revelation’s imagery with its Old and New Testament antecedents (Lietaert Peerbolte, 2021).

The object of this study consists of passages in Revelation that explicitly refer to the wrath of God, particularly those associated with eschatological judgment, including Revelation 6:12–17; 11:16–18; 14:9–11; 14:17–20; 15–16; and 19:11–21. The research proceeds through several systematic stages. First, relevant pericopes that explicitly reference divine wrath are identified within the text of Revelation, particularly those associated with eschatological

judgment. Second, each passage is subjected to a contextual exegetical analysis that considers its immediate literary setting, apocalyptic symbolism, lexical features, and intertextual connections with Jewish apocalyptic traditions and broader biblical theology. Third, the findings from individual pericopes are comparatively analyzed within a canonical framework to trace theological continuity and development across Scripture. Finally, the results are synthesized into a coherent theological interpretation that articulates the role and significance of divine wrath within the overarching narrative and eschatological vision of Revelation. Through this structured methodology, the study ensures both analytical rigor and theological depth, aligning methodologically with its aim to present an integrative and comprehensive account of divine wrath.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Revelation 6:12–17: The Wrath of the Resurrected Lamb

Christ's reception of the scroll in Revelation 5:8, together with the universal worship offered to him by all creation in verse 13, signifies his reception of universal and comprehensive lordship, in keeping with the vision of Daniel 7:13–14. Revelation 6:1–17 presents this lordship as an expression of sovereign dominion over the whole earth, particularly over all who dwell upon it (cf. Matt. 28:18; Heb. 2:5–8). As Christ opens the seven seals, the unfolding of divine judgment reveals not only the outworking of his royal authority but also the terrifying manifestation of his wrath against all his enemies, regardless of social status, extending alike to rulers and commoners.

In this respect, Revelation 6:12–17 may be understood as the fulfillment of the warning given in Psalm 2 to the kings and rulers of the earth: "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled" (Ps. 2:11–12). The psalm warns the nations, especially their leaders, that they must either render homage to God's appointed King or face destruction. As Craigie and Tate observe, the verb "to serve" (עָבַד) in Psalm 2:11 carries political overtones, implying that the nations are called to submit as vassals to Israel's God (Craigie, P. C., & Tate, 2004, p. 68). Revelation 6:15–17 develops this warning further by portraying the consequences of persistent rebellion against God's enthroned Son as final, irreversible, and inescapable judgment.

The cry of the condemned to the mountains and rocks—"Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:16)—demonstrates that the judgments associated with the first five seals function only as a prelude to the climactic terror of the sixth seal. The expression "the wrath of the Lamb" in verse 16 is closely associated with the cosmic upheaval described in verses 12–14, where the created order itself appears to collapse. This imagery draws heavily upon established Old Testament apocalyptic language, particularly Isaiah 13:10–13, and serves to depict a cosmic unmaking of creation. As Beale and Carson note, such imagery belongs to the stock symbolism of prophetic-apocalyptic judgment (Beale & Carson, 2007, p. 1104). Thus, Christ, through whom all things were made, is here portrayed as the one who can also dissolve creation itself, much as Hebrews 1:10–12 describes the created order as something that may be folded up like a garment.

Accordingly, the wrath of God and of the Lamb in this pericope is presented as definitive, final, and irrevocable against all who continue in rebellion. Revelation 6:17 describes this event as "the great day of their wrath," underscoring the unity of the Father and the Son in the execution of eschatological judgment. This plural expression is textually significant. Although some manuscripts read "his wrath" (*οργης αυτου*), including A, P, and 046, the reading "their wrath" is better attested in witnesses such as א, C, 1611, and 1854. Moreover, the plural form coheres more appropriately with verse 16, where judgment proceeds both from the one seated on the throne and from the Lamb. In this way, the passage emphasizes not only the severity of the final judgment but also the inseparable unity of the Father and the Son in bringing about the consummation of divine justice.

Revelation 11:16–18: The Hymn of the Elders

The hymn of worship offered by the enthroned elders is grounded in the reality of God's eschatological triumph accomplished in Christ. This passage presents a proleptic portrayal of the consummation of divine victory, depicting God as the one who has "begun to reign" (v. 17) and who now initiates the judgment of the dead (v. 18). Accordingly, the praise of the elders is not merely doxological in character, but also profoundly theological, since it celebrates the manifestation of God's sovereign rule in the final consummation of history.

The expressions "the nations raged" in verse 18 and "our Lord and of his Christ" in verse 15 strongly evoke the messianic and royal themes of Psalm 2, particularly the exaltation and lordship of the Son. Some interpreters who adopt a dual-fulfillment reading of Psalm 2:7 argue that the declaration, "Today I have begotten you," refers to the adoption of the Davidic king, with the verb יָלַד understood not as a reference to physical birth but to royal coronation, thereby marking a new covenantal relationship between the king and Yahweh. Nevertheless, the New Testament appropriation of this text indicates more clearly that the expression functions as a metaphor for exaltation through coronation rather than adoption (Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5; cf. Rom. 1:4; see also (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991, p. 29). Within this framework, Revelation 11 resonates with Psalm 2 by portraying the universal reign of God and his Christ as the culmination of the Son's royal enthronement.

Although John does not reproduce the Septuagintal wording of Psalm 2:1, as Luke does in Acts 4:25, the statement "the nations raged" (*τὰ ἔθνη ὠργίσθησαν*) nevertheless recalls the rebellious posture of the nations against God's anointed ruler. When this phrase is read together with the theme of eschatological judgment and Christ's possession of the nations (cf. Rev. 2:8), it also evokes Psalm 2:9, where the messianic king is promised authority to shatter the rebellious nations with a rod of iron. Thus, Revelation 11:16–18 situates the final judgment within the broader biblical pattern in which resistance to divine kingship inevitably results in decisive punishment.

The passage further establishes a striking correspondence between human rebellion and divine retribution: "the nations raged, but your wrath came" (v. 18). As Beale observes, God's response to the rage of the nations by means of his own wrath exemplifies the principle of judgment fitting the crime (Beale, 1999, p. 615). In the same way, God is said to be

"destroying the destroyers of the earth," thereby underscoring the justice and proportionality of divine judgment. Those who become the objects of God's wrath are condemned precisely because they have persistently corrupted and devastated the earth through their rebellion. Consequently, the hymn of the elders presents divine wrath not as arbitrary violence, but as the righteous and necessary expression of God's justice against those who oppose his reign and desecrate his creation.

Revelation 14:9–11: The Wine of God's Wrath

Revelation 14:9–11 presents one of the most severe portrayals of divine judgment in the Apocalypse, namely the destiny of those who worship the beast and receive its mark. Such persons are said to "drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger" (Rev. 14:10). This imagery conveys the full and unmitigated outpouring of divine judgment upon the ungodly. The metaphor emphasizes that God's wrath is no longer restrained or tempered, but is administered in its complete potency against those who persist in idolatry and rebellion. The consequence is torment "with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb," a description that underscores both the public character and the inescapable certainty of eschatological punishment.

The imagery of the "wine of God's wrath" and the "cup of his anger" draws upon a well-established Old Testament background, especially prophetic texts such as Jeremiah 25:15–18, in which the cup symbolizes the administration of divine judgment to the nations. In ordinary human practice, wine was commonly mixed with water or spices in order to moderate its strength. In contrast, the wine described in Revelation is poured out undiluted, signifying the concentrated intensity of God's holy indignation. The metaphor therefore communicates not merely punishment in a general sense, but the terrible fullness of divine retribution against all who align themselves with the forces opposed to God and the Lamb.

This judgment is further portrayed as having a public and vindicatory dimension, since it takes place "in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb" (Rev. 14:10). In this connection, some theological interpreters maintain that the glorified saints may also witness the execution of divine wrath upon the ungodly. Edwards, for example, argues that there is substantial evidence that the redeemed will behold God's judgment against the wicked (Edwards, 2009, p. 248). This perspective is often correlated with biblical passages that portray the righteous as perceiving the condition of the condemned, whether in the intermediate state, as suggested in Luke 16:19–31, or in the final state, where Jesus teaches that the wicked will experience "weeping and gnashing of teeth" as they see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God (Luke 13:28–29). On this reading, Isaiah 66:24 is understood not merely as a vision of lifeless corpses, but as a depiction of conscious beings undergoing the dreadful reality of divine judgment.

The passage proceeds by describing the enduring consequence of this wrath: "the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night" (Rev. 14:11). Here the vision portrays punishment as ceaseless anguish, marked by perpetual unrest and irreversible suffering. The imagery of ascending smoke functions as a symbol of the

enduring reality of judgment, while the absence of rest indicates the continuous and unrelieved nature of divine punishment. In this way, the text presents a picture not of temporary correction, but of final and ongoing condemnation.

Moreover, fire is a familiar biblical symbol of judgment, whether in cases of historical punishment or in depictions of final eschatological retribution (cf. Gen. 19:24; Exod. 9:23; Isa. 34:9–10; Matt. 3:12; 2 Thess. 1:8). In Revelation 14, however, this symbolism reaches one of its most terrifying expressions. The image is not merely that of destruction, but of unending torment under the righteous judgment of God. Just as the bush at Sinai burned without being consumed (Exod. 3:2), so this vision suggests a mode of punishment in which the objects of divine wrath remain under the abiding effects of judgment without relief or cessation. Accordingly, this pericope presents the wine of God's wrath as a vivid metaphor for the final, conscious, and unrelieved punishment that awaits those who reject the lordship of God and give their allegiance to the beast.

Revelation 14:17–20: The Winepress of God's Wrath

Revelation 14:17–20 presents a vivid apocalyptic portrayal of divine judgment through the imagery of harvest and the winepress. The passage introduces a sequence of angelic figures, one of whom is identified as "one like a son of man," and depicts the gathering of the earth's grapes to be thrown into "the great winepress of the wrath of God" (v. 19; cf. Joel 4:13). The title "Son of Man" and the surrounding imagery strongly suggest a reference to Christ as the eschatological judge who gathers the earth for judgment. In continuity with the symbolism of Revelation 14:9–11, the grapes represent the reprobate, that is, those who persist in rebellion against God. The vision therefore signals that the appointed time of judgment has arrived and that the execution of judgment belongs supremely to the Son (cf. John 5:22).

The metaphor of the winepress intensifies the depiction of divine wrath by drawing upon the familiar process of trampling grapes in order to extract their juice. In this context, however, the imagery is transformed into a representation of eschatological destruction. Just as grapes are crushed underfoot in the press, so Christ will subdue and destroy his enemies beneath his feet (cf. 1 Cor. 15:25). The resulting flow of blood, described in extraordinary proportions, conveys the overwhelming severity and totality of divine vengeance. Revelation 14:20 states that blood flowed "as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia," a hyperbolic and terrifying image that underscores the magnitude of the final judgment. A few witnesses diverge from the number presented above, including the original hand of א and 𝔓 [115]. Those MSS that diverge offer several alternative numbers (e.g., 1606, 1200) but are too poorly attested to be viable.

As Beale observes, the measurement of 1,600 stadia approximately corresponds to the length of the land of Palestine from Tyre to the border of Egypt, thereby suggesting a judgment of vast and comprehensive scope (Beale, 1999, p. 782). Whether understood symbolically or geographically, the point of the image is clear: divine judgment is neither partial nor restrained, but sweeping and absolute. The winepress motif therefore communicates not merely punishment, but the crushing defeat of all who stand opposed to God and his Messiah.

Revelation 15:1–16:21: The Song of Moses and the Bowls of God's Wrath

Revelation 15:1–16:21 presents one of the most extensive and climactic depictions of divine wrath in the Apocalypse through the imagery of the seven bowls of judgment. The section opens with the vision of seven angels bearing seven plagues, which are explicitly identified as the final expression of "the wrath of God" (15:1). Before the outpouring of these judgments, however, John first presents the victorious community of the redeemed, those who have triumphed over the beast and its image, standing beside the sea of glass and singing "the song of Moses…and the song of the Lamb" (15:2–3). This literary arrangement is theologically significant, for it places divine judgment and divine deliverance side by side, thereby emphasizing that God's wrath against evil is inseparable from his faithfulness in vindicating his people.

The song sung by the redeemed bears strong thematic affinities with both Exodus 15:1–18 and Deuteronomy 32:1–43. In both Old Testament backgrounds, the praise of God arises from his righteous acts of judgment and his saving intervention on behalf of his covenant people. In Revelation 15, this Mosaic and christological song celebrates the justice, holiness, and sovereignty of God as manifested in his eschatological acts. As R. H. Charles observed, just as the ancient song of Moses was sung by Israel after the deliverance at the Red Sea, so here the song is sung by the spiritual people of God in anticipation of final redemption (Charles, 1920, p. 34). The juxtaposition of Moses and the Lamb thus underscores the continuity between the redemptive acts of God in the Old Testament and their eschatological fulfillment in Christ.

Revelation 16 then narrates the pouring out of the seven bowls, each of which unleashes a catastrophic plague upon those who stand under divine judgment. The first bowl brings painful sores upon the worshipers of the beast (16:2), while the second and third bowls transform the sea and the rivers into blood (16:3–4), thereby extending judgment over the entire sphere of life. The fourth bowl brings scorching heat and fire upon the unrepentant (16:8), yet even under this severe affliction humanity persists in blasphemy rather than repentance. The fifth bowl is poured upon the throne of the beast, plunging its kingdom into darkness (16:10), while the sixth dries up the Euphrates in preparation for the final conflict (16:12). The seventh bowl culminates in cosmic upheaval and the pronouncement that the divine judgment has reached its appointed completion.

Taken together, these bowl judgments portray the absolute sovereignty of God over creation, history, and the fate of his enemies. The plagues are not random disasters, but deliberate manifestations of divine justice against persistent rebellion. Moreover, the repeated refusal of the wicked to repent demonstrates that the objects of God's wrath are not punished arbitrarily, but because of their sustained resistance to his authority. In this way, the bowls of wrath reveal both the righteousness and the inevitability of eschatological judgment.

Revelation 19:11–21: The Wrath of God the Word

Revelation 19:11–21 presents Christ as the theanthropic warrior who appears in royal majesty to execute final judgment upon his enemies. Bearing all the accoutrements of the King

of kings (v. 16), he is depicted as the one who will decisively overthrow every opposing power. His righteousness is symbolized by the white horse upon which he rides, while his title, "Faithful and True" (v. 11; cf. 3:14), further emphasizes the reliability of his character and the justice of his reign. This dual designation is likely an allusion to 3 Maccabees 2:11, where the high priest recounts God's judgment upon his enemies and his faithfulness toward his covenant people. In verse 12, Christ is described as having eyes "like a flame of fire" (cf. 1:14; 2:18; Dan. 10:6), an image that signifies his penetrating omniscience and perfect capacity to judge (Morris, 1987, p. 74). A relevant textual note should also be retained here: The NA28 reads "his eyes are like a flame of fire" (οἱ δὲ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλὸξ πυρός) and brackets the preposition because several important majuscules omit ὡς (א, P, 046, 051). Metzger argues that the inclusion of ὡς is likely due to harmonization with Revelation 1:14, although the manuscript evidence remains too evenly divided to be conclusive (Metzger, 1994, p. 686). His incomparable lordship is further conveyed through the many crowns upon his head, while the statement that he bears "a name written that no one knows but himself" (cf. 2:17) may be understood in relation to Isaiah 62:1–5, which portrays the eschatological restoration of Israel (Beale, 1999, p. 957; Osborne, 2002, p. 1112). In this sense, Christ's name will be fully known only to his people in the eschaton.

A central feature of this pericope appears in verse 13, where Christ is described as being "clothed in a robe dipped in blood." The significance of this blood has been interpreted in different ways. Some commentators understand it as the blood of his enemies (Beale, 1999, p. 957; Mounce, 1997, p. 501), others as the blood of the martyrs (Caird, 1966, pp. 243–244), and still others as a reference to Christ's own blood shed at the cross (Morris, 1987, p. 219). A further textual observation may also be preserved: A few manuscripts, including the original hand of א, P, and 2329, read "sprinkled with blood" using ῥαντίζω, perhaps alluding to the sin offering in Leviticus 6:27 LXX. Among these options, the interpretation that the blood refers to Christ's sacrificial death is especially compelling, since his definitive victory over the enemies of God was achieved through the cross. At the same time, the imagery bears strong thematic parallels with Isaiah 63:1–3, where the blood-stained garment is associated with divine judgment (Beale & Carson, 2007, p. 1143). Even so, the difficulty with reading the passage primarily through Isaiah 63 is that the robe in Revelation 19 appears to characterize the person of Christ as King. The passion narratives themselves are permeated with coronation imagery: the crown of thorns, the purple robe, the reed as mock scepter, the soldiers' mock homage, Pilate's declaration, "Behold your King," and the inscription placed above the crucified Christ (Matt. 27:27–37; John 19:2–3, 14, 18). These details suggest that the cross functions not merely as humiliation, but as coronation. The most shameful event in Christ's earthly life was simultaneously the moment of his exaltation and the restoration of divine glory (John 17:5). Thus, the cross is the very event for which a redeemed people beyond number will proclaim, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever" (Rev. 11:15; cf. Ps. 2:2, 7 LXX). Carson (1991, p. 554) captures this paradox well: "The very event by which the Son was being 'lifted up' in horrible ignominy and shame was that for which he would be praised around the world by men and women whose sins he had

borne … The hideous profanity of Golgotha means nothing less than the Son's glorification." Accordingly, the crucifixion may rightly be understood as Christ's coronation, and the blood upon his robe as the sign of his royal credentials.

Christ is further identified as "The Word of God," an obvious allusion to the prologue of the Fourth Gospel (especially John 1:1–3, 14, 18) and to Christ's role as the definitive revealer of God. In the Gospel, the Word reveals the mercy and saving purpose of God; here in Revelation, however, the same Word manifests the righteous wrath of the Father in eschatological judgment. The one through whom all things were created and are sustained is also the one through whom final judgment is executed.

After assembling the armies of heaven (Rev. 19:14), Christ is described as having a "sharp sword" proceeding from his mouth with which to strike the nations (v. 15). This image symbolizes the irresistible power of his word, the same divine word by which he created and upholds the universe (John 1:3; Heb. 1:2–3). The imagery also recalls Isaiah 11:4 and Isaiah 49, where the Servant of the Lord vindicates his people and judges the wicked through the power of his speech. Likewise, the phrase "he will rule them with a rod of iron" clearly alludes to Psalm 2:9. Whereas the Masoretic Text reads, "You shall shatter them with a rod of iron," John follows the Septuagint's rendering, "You shall shepherd them with a rod of iron." Yet this pastoral language does not weaken the judgment motif; rather, it underscores Christ's absolute sovereignty over the nations, both in rule and in retribution.

This judgment reaches its climax in the declaration that Christ "will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty" (v. 15; cf. 14:19). The winepress imagery, already introduced earlier in Revelation, here reaches its fullest christological expression: the final victory over evil is accomplished by Christ himself. Immediately thereafter, Christ is identified by the name written on his robe and thigh, namely, "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (v. 16). Although his coronation was inaugurated at the cross, it is here openly manifested in the conquest of God's final enemies and in the public vindication of his universal reign.

Verses 17–21 then portray the outpouring of divine wrath in graphic apocalyptic language. An angel summons the birds to gather for the great supper of God, where they are invited to feast on the bodies of the slain. This imagery conveys the totality and shame of divine judgment, as the enemies of God are either captured or destroyed. The beast and the false prophet are cast alive into the lake of fire (v. 20), while the rest are slain by the sword proceeding from Christ's mouth. Satan and all remaining forces of evil are finally thrown into the lake of fire after the thousand years (Rev. 20:10, 14–15). Thus, Revelation 19:11–21 presents the wrath of God not as an abstract attribute, but as the climactic and concrete execution of eschatological judgment through the exalted Christ, who is at once the crucified King, the victorious Word, and the final Judge of all creation.

The Wrath of God in the Old Testament

Although the precise expression "wrath of God" does not occur explicitly in the Old Testament, the reality of divine wrath is mentioned frequently and occupies an important place within the theological witness of the Hebrew Scriptures. These references may generally

be grouped into three broad categories. First, many passages describe God's immediate historical judgments within the earthly sphere, such as his direct punishment upon human wrongdoing (e.g., Exod. 22:24; Num. 16:46; Neh. 13:18). Second, divine wrath is often associated with covenantal judgment, particularly in relation to Israel and Judah, as seen in the prophetic portrayal of exile and national devastation (e.g., Isa. 51:17; Jer. 23:19; Ezek. 8:18; Zeph. 1:14–18). Third, certain texts extend the theme beyond historical judgment and anticipate a final or eschatological manifestation of divine wrath (e.g., Job 14:13; 20:28; 21:20, 30; Ps. 2:5). Taken together, these patterns indicate that the majority of references in the Pentateuch and the historical books concern God's judgments in history, whereas the writings and the prophets more frequently expand the theme to include judgment upon Israel, Judah, and the nations that oppose them.

The Old Testament also employs a wide range of vocabulary to describe divine wrath, with approximately twenty different terms used in various contexts. Many of these expressions carry concrete and often earthly connotations, thereby communicating divine anger through vivid anthropomorphic or experiential language. For example, the noun אַף, often translated as "wrath," can convey the sense of snorting or wheezing, comparable to the breathing of an enraged animal (Freedman, 1992, p. 990; Köhler, L., Baumgartner, W., & Stamm, 1994, p. 76). Another frequently occurring term is חֵמָה, which denotes heat, burning, or intense fury (Schunck, 1980, p. 464). Such terminology illustrates that the Old Testament portrays divine wrath not as an abstract doctrinal category alone, but as a dynamic expression of God's righteous response to sin, evil, and covenantal infidelity.

In light of the many allusions to Old Testament wrath passages in Revelation, particularly those drawn from the prophets, the historical manifestations of divine wrath in the Old Testament often function typologically in relation to the eschatological judgment depicted in the Apocalypse. That is, the temporal judgments recorded in Israel's Scriptures anticipate and prefigure the final judgment that will come upon the unrepentant world. The judgment against Edom, for instance, as described in Isaiah 63:1–14, may be understood as a typological portrayal of God's ultimate punishment of the nations. In this sense, the Old Testament provides not only the conceptual vocabulary for divine wrath, but also the historical and prophetic patterns through which the New Testament, and especially Revelation, articulates the final and universal outworking of God's justice.

The Wrath of God in the New Testament

The motif of the wrath of God appears in several forms throughout the New Testament and occupies an important place in its theological witness concerning judgment, salvation, and eschatology. The precise expression "wrath of God" occurs explicitly in John 3:36 and appears repeatedly within the Pauline corpus (Rom. 1:18; 5:9; 12:19; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6). Beyond these direct occurrences, the concept of divine wrath is also expressed indirectly in approximately two dozen passages, including several texts outside the Pauline letters. In the New Testament, divine wrath may refer either to the final eschatological judgment, as in all occurrences of the

phrase in Revelation and in passages such as Romans 2:5 and 5:9, or to the present manifestation of God's judgment upon an unbelieving world (Rom. 1:18; 13:4; 1 Thess. 2:16). It remains debatable whether any New Testament references to divine wrath should also be understood as encompassing the intermediate state in which the unbelieving dead experience torment, as may be suggested by Luke 16:19–31. It is possible that the biblical writers did not sharply distinguish between the intermediate state and the final judgment, insofar as the condemnation of the reprobate assumes an irreversible finality at death.

This theological tension is particularly evident in the writings of Paul, who presents the wrath of God as both a present reality and a future consummation. On the one hand, Paul declares to the Romans, "For the wrath of God is revealed [ἀποκαλύπτεται] from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom. 1:18), thereby indicating that divine wrath is already being manifested within history. On the other hand, he also warns of "the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed" (Rom. 2:5), directing attention toward a final and climactic eschatological disclosure of divine justice. In the same theological framework, Paul states that apart from Christ all human beings are by nature "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3), standing under judgment and awaiting the day in which God's justice will be fully revealed.

Within the book of Revelation, the phrase translated as "wrath of God" appears in two principal forms: θυμός τοῦ θεοῦ (e.g., Rev. 14:10) and ὀργή τοῦ θεοῦ (e.g., Rev. 19:15). This distinction is significant. The term θυμός is not used elsewhere in the New Testament in direct relation to God apart from Revelation. Instead, in Pauline vice lists it is commonly associated with sinful human passion or rage (e.g., Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8), and when attributed to human beings it consistently denotes disordered anger (e.g., Luke 4:28; Acts 19:28). By contrast, ὀργή, the more common noun for anger, is the term ordinarily used of God in the wider New Testament. According to Arndt et al, θυμός denotes "a state of intense displeasure…wrath" and carries the sense of fierce indignation arising from one's inner being (Danker et al., 2000, p. 341). In Revelation, therefore, the use of θυμός appears especially suited to the portrayal of eschatological judgment in its most intense and catastrophic form, whereas ὀργή functions more broadly as the standard term for divine anger. This lexical distinction suggests that Revelation intensifies the New Testament doctrine of divine wrath by employing language that emphasizes not only the certainty of judgment, but also its severity, finality, and eschatological concentration.

Accordingly, the New Testament presents divine wrath as a multifaceted theological reality. It is already revealed in history against ungodliness, yet it also points forward to a final consummation in which God's righteous judgment will be fully disclosed. In Revelation especially, the distinction between θυμός and ὀργή contributes to a heightened portrayal of wrath as the climactic expression of divine justice against all who persist in unbelief and rebellion. Thus, the New Testament develops the motif of divine wrath not as an incidental theme, but as an essential component of its broader proclamation concerning sin, judgment, and the saving work of Christ.

Wrath as Divine Emotion

Divine wrath, particularly as depicted in the book of Revelation, is presented as an expression that arises from God's perfect holiness, righteousness, and moral purity. Because God is just and cannot acquit the guilty without violating his own nature, wrath must be understood as a necessary aspect of his righteous response to evil. In this sense, divine wrath may be viewed as the convergence of God's holy perfections in the face of sin, covenantal unfaithfulness, and all forms of moral rebellion. It is therefore inseparably related to such realities as covenant loyalty, jealousy (Deut. 29:18–28), holiness, and the objective presence of evil in creation.

At the same time, the wrath of God should not be reduced to a mere anthropomorphic expression, as though biblical language concerning divine anger were only figurative accommodation with no grounding in the reality of God's being. Although Scripture at times speaks of God in anthropomorphic terms, including with respect to his emotional life (e.g., Gen. 6:7), such language should not be interpreted in a way that evacuates its theological significance. Rather, divine wrath testifies to the fact that God truly stands in righteous opposition to evil. While classical Christian theology affirms that God is impassible, that is, not subject to involuntary passions or fluctuating emotional disturbances, this does not imply that God is devoid of an emotional life. On the contrary, God possesses a perfect and righteous emotional life that is wholly consistent with his immutable nature.

Accordingly, John can speak of God as wrathful just as he can speak of God as love. Neither attribute should be interpreted as compromising the other; instead, both are expressions of the fullness and perfection of the divine nature. Divine wrath, therefore, is best understood as the perfect communication of God's holy character in response to the provocations of evil beings. It is not a sinful outburst, nor an irrational reaction, but the measured, righteous, and necessary expression of God's justice against all that opposes his holiness. In this way, the Apocalypse presents divine wrath not as a contradiction of who God is, but as an essential manifestation of his moral perfection in the face of persistent rebellion.

Revelation's Presentation of Final Punishment

The book of Revelation presents a multifaceted portrayal of the punishment of the damned. Broadly speaking, these depictions may be distilled into two principal characterizations. On the one hand, Revelation employs a range of images that emphasize the slaughter of God's enemies and the bloodshed that accompanies their destruction. On the other hand, it also contains passages in which divine wrath culminates in an ongoing and conscious punishment, expressed through the symbolism of fire and the language of torment. These two modes of depiction should not be set in opposition to one another. Rather, they are best understood as complementary images that together convey the reality and severity of final punishment.

This conclusion is especially supported by the descriptions found in Revelation 14:10–11 and 20:10, where the fate of the wicked is presented as analogous to that of the devil and the demonic powers. Such a reading is further reinforced by Christ's own teaching concerning

final judgment. Jesus declares that, at the judgment, the wicked "will go away into eternal punishment" (Matt. 25:46) and will enter "into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). These statements strongly suggest that the destiny of the damned is not mere annihilation or simple cessation of existence, but a form of enduring punishment corresponding to the fate prepared for demonic beings. Indeed, it is difficult to interpret Matthew 25:46 as referring to annihilation, since the verse establishes a direct parallel between the destiny of the wicked and that of the righteous: the former go "into eternal punishment," just as the latter go "into eternal life." The preposition **εἰς** used in both clauses conveys movement toward or into a state or realm, not extinction. As Louw and Nida note, the term denotes an "extension toward a goal which is inside an area," a nuance also reflected in Arndt and illustrated in Acts 1:25, where Judas "turned aside to go to his own place" (Danker et al., 2000, p. 288; Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, 1989, p. 722) On this basis, the language of Matthew 25:46 appears more compatible with entry into an enduring state than with annihilation.

At this point, however, conditionalist interpreters argue that the imagery of Revelation 14:11 should be understood against the backdrop of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and therefore interpreted as a portrayal of obliteration rather than perpetual conscious punishment (Bowles, 2014, pp. 139–142; Fudge, 2011, pp. 241–242). Certainly, there are substantial thematic parallels between the destruction of Sodom and the imagery of final punishment in Revelation 14:11. Nevertheless, to interpret the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as simply total extinction risks flattening the typological force of the biblical narrative and sits uneasily with Jude's own description. Jude 7 states that "Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities…serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire." The force of the verse is significant. Jude's argument is not merely that these cities once suffered destruction by fire, but that they presently "serve as an example" (πρόκεινται) by "undergoing" (ὑπέχουσαι) "a punishment of eternal fire." Since ὑπέχουσαι is a present active participle, the wording suggests an ongoing condition rather than a completed historical event. Accordingly, the eternal fire by which these people are punished is not merely a past occurrence, but a continuing reality (Atkinson, 2014, p. 108; Fudge, 2011, p. 64).

For this reason, Revelation's presentation of final punishment is best understood as integrating images of destruction with the language of unending torment. The slaughter imagery underscores the decisiveness, shame, and totality of divine victory over evil, while the imagery of fire and torment emphasizes the enduring and conscious character of eschatological punishment. Together, these images form a coherent apocalyptic theology of judgment in which the final punishment of the wicked is neither temporary nor merely symbolic, but the irreversible manifestation of divine justice against all who persist in rebellion against God and the Lamb.

Theological Synthesis of Divine Wrath in Revelation

The foregoing analysis demonstrates that the book of Revelation presents divine wrath as a unified and theologically coherent motif that unfolds through a series of interconnected

apocalyptic images, rather than as a collection of isolated symbols of judgment. The wrath of God in Revelation is revealed through multiple literary forms, including the wrath of the Lamb, the cup of anger, the winepress of fury, the bowls of wrath, cosmic upheaval, and final consignment to the lake of fire. Although these images differ in form and intensity, they collectively articulate a single theological reality: the holy, just, and eschatologically final opposition of God to evil. In this respect, Revelation does not merely multiply images of punishment for rhetorical effect, but develops a comprehensive theology of divine judgment in which each image contributes to an integrated vision of the end.

A central feature of this theological synthesis is the inseparable unity of the Father and the Son in the execution of eschatological judgment. Throughout Revelation, wrath is not portrayed as belonging exclusively to the Father or as merely delegated to Christ in a secondary sense. Rather, the Apocalypse repeatedly presents divine judgment as a shared and coordinated act of the one seated on the throne and the Lamb. This is especially evident in passages such as Revelation 6:16–17, where the condemned seek to hide "from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb," and where the great day is described as the day of "their wrath." Theologically, this shared agency of judgment underscores the full participation of the risen Christ in the divine prerogative of judgment and thus reinforces the christological depth of Revelation's doctrine of wrath. The Lamb who redeems is also the Lamb who judges, and his judicial activity is fully united with the righteous will of the Father.

The analysis further shows that Revelation structures divine wrath in a progressive and climactic manner. The seals, trumpets, bowls, and final judicial visions should not be read merely as repetitive cycles of catastrophe, but as a theological intensification of God's response to persistent rebellion. The earlier judgments function as anticipatory and warning-laden manifestations of divine displeasure, while the later visions disclose the irreversible finality of eschatological punishment. In this way, Revelation presents wrath not as arbitrary violence, but as a morally ordered and progressively unveiled expression of divine justice. The movement from preliminary judgments to final destruction, from warning to consummation, reflects the judicial logic of the Apocalypse: God's wrath is revealed in history, but it reaches its fullest concentration in the final overthrow of all evil.

This synthesis also clarifies the internal relationship among the major metaphors of wrath in Revelation. The image of the cup emphasizes the personal appropriation of divine judgment by those who worship the beast; the metaphor of the winepress stresses the crushing and public defeat of God's enemies; the bowls portray the comprehensive and catastrophic outpouring of judgment upon the impenitent world; and the imagery of fire, torment, and the lake of fire underscores the enduring and irreversible character of final punishment. These metaphors are therefore not merely juxtaposed symbols, but mutually interpretive images that together construct Revelation's theology of divine wrath. Each one contributes a distinct accent, yet all converge upon the same theological conclusion: the wrath of God is final, holy, just, and inescapable for all who persist in rebellion against God and the Lamb.

Moreover, Revelation's presentation of divine wrath is deeply continuous with the wider canonical witness of Scripture. Its imagery is firmly rooted in Old Testament patterns of judgment, especially those found in the prophetic and apocalyptic traditions, where divine wrath is manifested in historical judgments that also serve typologically to anticipate the eschatological end. The Apocalypse appropriates and intensifies these earlier patterns by placing them within a christological and cosmic horizon. At the same time, Revelation remains in continuity with the New Testament's broader teaching that divine wrath is both a present and future reality, already revealed against ungodliness yet awaiting its climactic disclosure at the end of the age. Thus, the book does not innovate by abandoning prior biblical theology, but by bringing the canonical motif of divine wrath to its fullest apocalyptic and christological expression.

At the theological level, the evidence surveyed in this study also supports the conclusion that divine wrath in Revelation must be interpreted in relation to God's holiness, justice, and perfect moral being. Wrath is not portrayed as a capricious or irrational reaction, but as the necessary expression of God's righteous opposition to evil. For this reason, the Apocalypse does not set divine wrath in tension with the divine nature, but presents it as fully consistent with God's perfection. In this respect, Revelation contributes to a theological understanding of wrath that is compatible with classical affirmations of divine impassibility. God's wrath is not a sinful passion or emotional instability; rather, it is the pure and holy expression of his moral opposition to sin. The book therefore portrays wrath as a real divine disposition toward evil, without reducing it either to mere anthropomorphism or to uncontrolled passion.

Finally, the cumulative witness of Revelation indicates that final punishment is best understood as both decisive and enduring. The imagery of slaughter, crushing, and destruction underscores the total defeat of God's enemies, while the imagery of torment, fire, and perpetual unrest points to the conscious and irreversible character of eschatological punishment. These are not contradictory depictions, but complementary modes of expressing the fullness of divine judgment. Accordingly, Revelation presents the fate of the wicked as the consummate realization of divine justice, in which evil is finally overthrown, the holiness of God is vindicated, and the reign of the Lamb is universally established.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that Revelation offers not merely a vivid doctrine of judgment, but a richly integrated theology of divine wrath. The novelty of this study lies precisely in showing that the diverse wrath-images of Revelation are best read not in isolation, nor merely as symbolic rhetoric, but as elements of a unified theological vision. Within that vision, divine wrath is eschatological in scope, christological in execution, canonical in continuity, and theologically coherent with the holiness, justice, and impassible perfection of God

Previous scholarship has made significant contributions to the study of divine wrath in Revelation by highlighting its symbolic, literary, and ethical dimensions. Studies that interpret Revelation's violent imagery primarily as apocalyptic symbolism have helpfully underscored the non-literal and theological character of the book's visions, while other approaches have

illuminated the narrative function of wrath imagery within the broader portrayal of divine justice and the defeat of evil. Such contributions remain valuable, particularly in clarifying the metaphorical and rhetorical force of images such as the wine of wrath, the winepress, and the bowls of judgment. Nevertheless, these approaches often leave insufficiently explored the extent to which such images together constitute a coherent theological motif integrated within the canonical witness of Scripture. In particular, the tendency to treat these images in isolation, or to focus predominantly on their symbolic or literary function, risks obscuring the systematic theological unity of divine wrath as it is revealed throughout the Apocalypse.

The present study has sought to address that limitation by demonstrating that divine wrath in Revelation is not merely a collection of dramatic apocalyptic symbols, but a theologically unified motif that is christological in execution, canonical in continuity, and eschatological in finality. Its contribution lies in showing that the wrath-images of Revelation—including the wrath of the Lamb, the cup of anger, the winepress of fury, the bowls of wrath, and the final consignment to the lake of fire—are mutually interpretive expressions of a single theological vision rooted in the holiness and justice of God. Moreover, this study has argued that Revelation's presentation of divine wrath is not only continuous with Old and New Testament patterns of judgment, but also coherent with broader doctrinal concerns such as divine impassibility and final punishment. In this way, the article advances beyond fragmentary or exclusively symbolic readings by offering an integrative exegetical and theological synthesis of divine wrath as one of the central motifs in the eschatological message of Revelation.

CONCLUSION

The book of Revelation presents divine wrath as a central and theologically coherent motif within its eschatological vision. Through a series of interconnected images—such as the wrath of the Lamb, the cup of anger, the winepress of fury, the bowls of judgment, cosmic upheaval, and final consignment to the lake of fire—Revelation portrays divine wrath not as a collection of isolated symbols, but as a unified expression of God's holy and righteous opposition to evil. The exegetical analysis of the major wrath passages demonstrates that this motif is eschatological in scope, christological in execution, and canonical in continuity. The Apocalypse repeatedly presents the Father and the risen Lamb as united in the enactment of final judgment, while also drawing deeply upon Old Testament patterns of historical and prophetic judgment and intensifying the New Testament witness to wrath as both a present and future reality.

At the theological level, this study has shown that divine wrath in Revelation must be understood in relation to God's holiness, justice, and moral perfection. Divine wrath is therefore neither a capricious passion nor a mere anthropomorphic expression, but the necessary and righteous manifestation of God's opposition to evil, fully consistent with the doctrine of divine impassibility. Moreover, Revelation presents final punishment as both decisive and enduring: the imagery of slaughter and destruction emphasizes the total defeat of God's enemies, while the imagery of fire, torment, and perpetual unrest underscores the irreversible and conscious character of eschatological punishment. Accordingly, the doctrine

of divine wrath in Revelation functions not as a peripheral theme, but as an essential dimension of the book's proclamation of judgment, salvation, and the everlasting triumph of God and the Lamb.

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