



They called out to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the eyes of the one who sits on the throne and from the anger of the Lamb!...’ (Rev 6:16 GNB)

In this article, we would like to rejoin the conversation on Revelation by looking at the meaning of the sixth seal and “the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev 6:16).

Dr. Sigve Tonstad’s class on the book of Revelation has repeatedly outlined three main principles of interpretation. As we seek to understand God’s wrath in this passage, it is critical for us to have these principles firmly in mind:

1. **Become a re-reader.** The book of Revelation is not composed in a chronological manner. The seven seals, trumpets and bowls of wrath retell the same story but from different perspectives and with a different emphasis. The information we learn in chapters 15 and 20, for example, may allow us to understand chapters 3 and 5. When the reader has finished the book, she needs to apply the information learned at the end of the book to the beginning and vice versa.

We have previously compared the book of Revelation to a fugue by Bach in which the same theme is repeated but with a forward moving emphasis, crescendo, and with additional details and emphasis added with each repetition of the theme. Seen in this way, we become aware that the chronological narrative of Revelation actually ends with the opening of the seventh seal where “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev 7:17), and finally concludes with “silence in heaven” (Rev 8:1). When God “wipe[s] every tear from their eyes” in Revelation 21:4 we should associate this description with the concluding events of the seventh seal.

2. **Recognize Old Testament (OT) allusions.** The book of Revelation makes extensive use of the OT. These specific and brief allusions invite us to consider the full context of the OT passage. In fact, John’s methodology in Revelation requires that the reader take in the full scope of the context and meaning of each OT passage. We will give a specific example of this below.
3. **There is more than one acting subject at work.** Revelation not only tells the story of the Slaughtered Lamb, it also tells the Dragon’s story and we must wrap our minds around the fact that although God has unlimited power, He has chosen to win this conflict with Satan

by means other than physical force. For this reason, we should always consider the possibility that some of the events described in Revelation originate from the father of lies rather than from the throne of our Heavenly Father. In fact, it will become clear in Revelation 13 that the one who uses coercive power is Satan, not God.

The sixth seal (Rev 6 and 7) describes the contrast between those who are loyal to God (the 144,000) and those who have given their allegiance to the enemy. This direct comparison is made several times in Revelation – some have the mark of the beast, others the seal of God; some are tortured by God's presence, others experience peace and healing in God's presence.

Then everyone—the kings of the earth, the rulers, the generals, the wealthy, the powerful, and every slave and free person—all hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains. And they cried to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to survive?' (Rev 6:15-17)

Using principle #2 above, we need to find the OT references for this passage in order to understand what is being described.

One passage in Isaiah 2 is consistent with Revelation in associating God's wrath with people hiding under mountains and rocks:

People will hide in caves in the rocky hills or dig holes in the ground to try to escape from the LORD's anger and to hide from his power and glory, when he comes to shake the earth. When that day comes, they will throw away the gold and silver idols they have made, and abandon them to the moles and the bats. When the LORD comes to shake the earth, people will hide in holes and caves in the rocky hills to try to escape from his anger and to hide from his power and glory. (Is 2:19-21)

In a parallel Hosea passage, this same motif is used: "The hilltop shrines of Aven, where the people of Israel worship idols, will be destroyed. Thorns and weeds will grow up over their altars. The people will cry out to the mountains, 'Hide us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'" (Hos 10:8).

Beyond the mere identification of the OT references, it is helpful to understand the larger context of the words in Hosea and Isaiah and then apply this meaning to the passage in Revelation 6. For this article, we will concentrate on the passage in Hosea.

The book of Hosea describes the ten northern tribes of Israel as they are about to be lost forever in the Assyrian captivity. God pulls out all the stops in order to win His people back. He asks Hosea to marry a woman who will be unfaithful and tells him to pursue her – even in her unfaithfulness. This was to serve as a powerful illustration that God still loved his people and still wanted to marry them despite their unfaithfulness. "You must love her just as I still love the people of Israel" (Hos 3:1).

Although complying with certain religious rituals, Israel did not know the real God. "Even though they call me their God and claim that they are my people and that they know me, they have

rejected what is good...I hate the gold bull worshiped by the people of Samaria...The more altars the people of Israel build for removing sin, the more places they have for sinning!" (Hos 8:2,3,5,11).The people were married to idols rather than God, "...they began to worship Baal and soon became as disgusting as the gods they loved" (Hos 9:10).

These "gods" were traditionally worshipped in the hills which is the context for the people asking the hills to fall on them. The Psalmist would ask the rhetorical question, "Shall I look up to the mountains? Does my help come from there?" The implied answer is "No!" "My help comes from the Lord, who made the heavens, earth, and mountains." (Psalm 121:1)

Did the people literally ask for the hills to fall on them as the Assyrians took them into captivity? Probably not. Rather, it is likely that these words reflect their desire to rather die with their idols than to be embraced by God. Yet while the people had their heads stuck under rocks, God is crying as a lover who is losing His bride:

The LORD says, 'When Israel was a child, I loved him and called him out of Egypt as my son. But the more I called to him, the more he turned away from me. My people sacrificed to Baal; they burned incense to idols. Yet I was the one who taught Israel to walk. I took my people up in my arms, but they did not acknowledge that I took care of them. I drew them to me with affection and love. I picked them up and held them to my cheek; I bent down to them and fed them. They refuse to return to me, and so they must return to Egypt, and Assyria will rule them. War will sweep through their cities and break down the city gates. It will destroy my people because they do what they themselves think best. They insist on turning away from me. They will cry out because of the yoke that is on them, but no one will lift it from them. How can I give you up, Israel? How can I abandon you? Could I ever destroy you as I did Admah, or treat you as I did Zeboiim? My heart will not let me do it! My love for you is too strong. (Hos 11:1-8)

God wanted to embrace, not punish. God's wrath, as described in so many other places in scripture is perhaps best expressed in this Hosea passage, "How can I abandon you?" – Words that were echoed by Jesus as He died, "Why have you abandoned me?" (Mat 27:46).

God warned Israel of what would happen to them, "When I abandon these people, terrible things will happen to them" (Hos 9:12), but they refused to listen and God had no choice but to grant them the freedom to follow their own foolish course. This is the context and the picture of God we need to bring to the text in Revelation 6. In fact, the term "the wrath of the Lamb" is almost an oxymoron in itself? Have you ever seen a lamb exhibit "wrath"? Does God have wrath? Yes, but it does not look like human wrath and we need to use the entire Bible to define [God's wrath](#). The key words in Hosea that we should associate with God's wrath are "abandoned", "given up" and "handed over."

Another biblical reference for Revelation 6 are the words of Jesus as he was led out to be crucified:

Jesus turned to them and said, 'Women of Jerusalem! Don't cry for me, but for yourselves and your children. For the days are coming when people will say, 'How lucky are the women who never had children, who never bore babies, who never nursed them!' That will be the time when

people will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Hide us!' (Luke 23:28-30)

Most believe that these words refer to the coming destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Was this an act of God's wrath? "Yes" according to Paul who used these words to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem. "In this way they have brought to completion all the sins they have always committed. And now God's anger has at last come down on them!" (1 Thes 2:14-16).

How did Paul understand God's wrath? On this subject, Paul made himself very clear, "God's anger is revealed from heaven against all the sin and evil of the people who evil ways prevent the truth from being known. God punishes them, because what can be known about God is plain to them, for God himself made it plain" (Rom 1:18,19). Then Paul goes on to describe God's wrath three times as, "God has given those people over" (verse 24), "God has given them over" (verse 26), "he has given them over" (verse 28).

When we bring the entire Bible into the writings of Revelation, we begin to realize that "the wrath of the Lamb" in Revelation 6 is not an act of hostility from God toward His sinful children. Rather, people have chosen to separate themselves from Him by a mountain of idols and so reject God's embrace. But God desires for us is to be like the 144,000 who accept God's hand in marriage and live in relationship with Him. For these individuals, God "protects them with his presence" and "the Lamb...will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of live-giving water" (Rev 7:15-17).

Finally, God's wrath can also serve for the purpose of healing and purification. In Hosea, God's "pours out His wrath" by abandoning his people in the hope that they will return to Him. "I will abandon my people until they have suffered enough for their sins and come looking for me. Perhaps in their suffering they will try to find me" (Hos 5:14,15). And in the Isaiah, God also pours out His wrath for the purpose of refinement and purification. "So now, listen to what the LORD Almighty, Israel's powerful God, is saying: 'I will take revenge on you, my enemies, and you will cause me no more trouble. I will take action against you. I will purify you the way metal is refined, and will remove all your impurity'" (Is 1:24,25).

Unfortunately, Revelations description of God pouring out His wrath in the final plagues (i.e. - allowing people to experience the consequences of their own sinful choices) does not appear to result in refinement of character and a return to God, "They would not turn from their sins and praise his greatness" (Rev 16:9).

For more insights on the subject of God's wrath and the purifying fire of God's wrath, we encourage you to listen to an [excellent video sermon](#) by Greg Boyd on this subject

- Written by Dr. Brad Cole