

Lesson # 47 Preparation for the Bowl Judgments Revelation 15: 1-8

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Revelation 15: 1-8 (ESV)

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished. ²And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. ³And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

"Great and amazing are your deeds,
 O Lord God the Almighty!
 Just and true are your ways,
 O King of the nations!
⁴ Who will not fear, O Lord,
 and glorify your name?
 For you alone are holy.
 All nations will come
 and worship you,
 for your righteous acts have been revealed."

⁵After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, ⁶and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. ⁷And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, ⁸and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished. ①

I. The Sign in Heaven v. 1

Read **Isa. 13:6-9** & **Zeph. 1:14-18**. Much of OT prophecy is directed towards revealing the wrath of God as He judges the world on 'the Day of the Lord'. We have been seeing that this is not a 24 hour day but rather a 7 year period, the last 3 ½ years of which are filled with various plagues or judgments under the direction and purpose of a sovereign and angry God.

Chapter 15 is the shortest chapter in Revelation and serves as an introduction to the last series of 7 judgments as described in chapter 16, which comprise the "third woe" predicted by the flying eagle of Rev. 8:13 and cf. Rev. 11:14.

In v. 1, John now describes the 3rd 'sign' in heaven he has been shown (12:1; 12:3) and this time it is a 'great and amazing' sign, consisting at first of 7 angels with 7 plagues. This is a critical sign because in it we are about to see the final outpouring of God's wrath on earth. The plagues these angels carry and pour

onto the earth are not epidemics or disease, but the Greek word means ‘blows’ or ‘wounds’, and they are powerful and deadly – more so than can be imagined.

John says these are the last plagues, placing them in chronological order with the seals and trumpets which also expressed God’s wrath in sequence over the period of time we have already covered in our study. These are the worst plagues yet & John gives reasons for that, chiefly, “for with them the wrath of God is finished”. These are the dregs of the cup of wrath that the wicked are being forced to drink – the dregs Christ drank for the Elect at Calvary. There is now no question that the previous 14 plagues were also part of the demonstration of God’s wrath, even though some argue that the outpouring of God’s wrath is confined to the very end of the Tribulation rather than throughout it. This scene has the sense of impending finality about it.

God’s wrath is the root cause of this final outpouring of judgment against the sin of those on earth – a fierce rage against injustice and wickedness – cf. **Zeph. 3:8**.

II. The Song

vv. 2 - 4

John describes something “that appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire”, and he had seen in earlier visions – in **Rev. 4:6**, and Moses and the elders of Israel also reported a similar sight in **Ex. 24:10**, and Ezekiel got a glimpse of something similar in **Ezek. 1:22**. However, here in v. 2, it is mingled with fire, giving this picture an ominous overtone because the imagery of fire is frequently associated in Scripture with God’s wrath – cf. Heb. 10:27; 12:29; Isa. 66:15; II Pet. 3:7, etc. ②

The second part of John’s vision is “those who had conquered the Beast and its image and the number of its name”. These people appear beside the sea of glass with harps of Godⁱ – they are Tribulation martyrs, appearing now in heaven. They have been redeemed during the Tribulation and as a result, did not take the Mark. Their victory over the Beast, its image and the number of its name is found not in having escaped Antichrist’s reign of terror and survived until Christ’s return but in faithfulness to the death. Although Antichrist prevailed over them and killed them, the victory is really theirs – “to die is gain”...faith is the victory!

I listened to a sermon by Matt Chandler in May 2011 and he made kind of a humorous but very true point during that sermon regarding the faithfulness of a truly submitted life;

“I’ve never met a man as free as Paul is. You can’t touch him. If you tell him, “I’m going to kill you!”, “Great – it’s time to go home.” “All right, we’ll let you live.” “To live is Christ!” “OK, we are going to beat you.” “Well, you know, that’s sharing in the suffering of Christ.” “We’ll put you in prison.” “I’ll convert all your guards and the other prisoners.””ⁱⁱ

That's the attitude believers are to have when faced with persecution as a result of real faith. Complete trust in God – knowing that He will bring about our good and His glory even if that means we die in the process. Man can only kill the body, but God has our soul and a glorious future awaits us all in heaven. Contrary to recent book titles, our best life is not now! That is only true for unbelievers.

These martyred souls have harps – virtually always in Scripture emblematic of praising God and rejoicing. The pain of death is erased and eclipsed by incredible waves of joy which inspire a natural desire to sing and make music to praise the God who has promised and fulfilled your eternal hope.

They sing (v. 3) the song of Moses, the servant of God and the song of the Lamb. The text of the song is in v. 4. This is a song of great praise and deliverance – they are now way beyond the clutches of sin, temptation, Satan and his minions – untouchable and finally untemptable. We know from Rev. 6:9-10 that part of their desire is for God to wreak vengeance on His enemies and theirs. Note v. 4 – “Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your Name?” This anthem of praise has as its central theme the righteousness of God. Note the phrases:

- Just and true are Your ways
- You alone are holy
- Your righteous acts have been revealed

The song of Moses referred to here but not part of our text can be found in **Ex. 15:1-18**. It is a song of victory and deliverance. The song of the Lamb was recorded for us earlier in **Rev. 5:9-10**.

John Phillips comments;

“The song of Moses was sung at the Red Sea, the song of the Lamb is sung at the crystal sea; the song of Moses was a song of triumph over Egypt, the song of the Lamb is a song of triumph over Babylon; the song of Moses told how God brought His people out, the song of the Lamb tells how God brings His people in; the song of Moses was the first song in Scripture, the song of the Lamb is last. The song of Moses commemorated the execution of the foe, the expectation of the saints, and the exaltation of the Lord; the song of the Lamb deals with the same three themes.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The 2 verses song recorded for us here has a theme like the above 2 songs, but adds new words and virtually every line of it is drawn from OT verses.

Great & amazing are your deeds, --- Ps. 139:14

O Lord God Almighty ---- Gen. 17:1; 35:11; Rev. 1:8; 4:8; 11:17

Just & true are your ways --- Dan. 4:37; Deut. 32:4

O King of the nations --- Jer. 10:7

Who will not fear, O Lord and glorify your name --- Ps. 86:9

For you alone are holy --- I Sam. 2:2; Ps. 22:3; 99:5,9; 111:9; Isa. 6:3

All nations will come and worship you, --- Ps. 86:9; Jer. 10:7

for your righteous acts have been revealed. --- Judges 5:11; I Sam. 12:7

Because of God's nature, these martyrs know that He will seek vengeance & retribution. He will judge these sinners who killed His people. Notice again v. 4 and the Millennial anticipation, "All nations will come and worship You." Compare **Zech. 14:16**; **Isa. 66:23** & **Phil. 2:10-11**.

III. The Bowls Presented

vv. 5-8

"After this I looked..." – John now directs our attention to another scene in heaven, this time "the Temple of the tabernacle of testimony" (NASB) or "the sanctuary of the tent of witness" (ESV). The sanctuary refers to the Holy of Holies (Rev. 11:19) where God's presence dwells, and it is opened up so that John can see what is taking place. What is about to be revealed is the final, deadly Bowl judgments, the source of which is God, which is the point of referring to the Temple here, and which chapter 16 will describe in rapid fire succession.

Just as in Exodus, the plagues intensified until the final, 10th one was so brutally decisive that Pharaoh was compelled to give in and let God's people go. Here in Revelation, the final series of judgments will bring Antichrist, the False Prophet and Satan to their knees, and will wipe out most of the wicked on earth who remain alive by now.

Seven angels in pure bright linen with gold sashes around their chests, come out of the sanctuary. It is these 7 who have been given the task of pouring out their bowls of judgment on the earth's inhabitants. Their clothing and appearance denote purity and holiness, and they have been selected for this great & yet horrifying honour of bringing about the final vengeance on the historical earth. ④

Have you noticed as we've gone through Revelation how often angels are presented as the ones carrying out the judgments? Even though God spoke the universe into existence without assistance, throughout history & as recorded for us in this book and others, angelic beings are incredibly important in carrying out God's will. Some examples: releasing Peter from prison in Acts 12; striking Herod dead; killing 185,000 Assyrians in one night; confronting Balaam and his donkey; comforting Christ in Gethsemane; announcing Jesus' impending birth to Mary, Joseph & John the Baptist's to his father; bringing prophetic news to Daniel; announcing Jesus resurrection at the tomb; bringing judgment on Sodom & Gomorrah; bringing Philip to the Ethiopian Eunuch; etc.

One of the 4 Living Creatures (v. 7) who surround God's throne brings the 7 bowls out to the 7 angels, distributing to each one a bowl. The bowls are said to contain "the wrath of God who lives forever and ever" – the final dregs of the cup of wrath are about to be delivered. Because God lives forever and ever, He has the authority and might to do His will and to put an end to sin. He has allowed sin and evil to exist since the fall and to fester because it fulfilled His purpose (ie. Gen. 50:20), but now the finality of His purpose is near to being revealed, and when it is, sin and evil will be forever eradicated – Rev. 19:1-6. The wages of

sin is about to be paid to the remaining wicked people on earth in preparation for the return of Jesus Christ, who will not (as Post-Mils believe) return to a mostly converted world purged of the majority of evil, awaiting a kingdom for believers and hell for the wicked.

Smoke pours out of the sanctuary once the bowls are brought to the 7 angels. This smoke is an emblem of God's majesty and glory, and symbolized His presence in the tabernacle in the OT (cf. Ex. 40:34-35; Isa. 6:1-4). It is also a symbol of His wrath – where there is smoke, there's fire. No one is able to enter this sanctuary until the bowls are poured out. In a sense, perhaps, God alone with His thoughts as His final judgments are unleashed.

With these final 7 judgments, man will have been given warning after warning to repent and trust Christ. Incredibly, looking ahead to chapter 16, notice verses 8-9 & 21.

Today is truly the day of salvation. You do not want to be here on earth to witness any part of this scene from 'ground zero'. Chapter 16 will be rapid fire narrative of these 7 plagues, much like the finale in a fireworks display.

Next lesson – Lesson # 48 Rev. 16:1-2 The First Bowl

ⁱ “Harps of God”, according to some commentators, are simply harps provided by God which are then used in service to God. Most commentators did not even make a comment regarding these harps.

ⁱⁱ Matt Chandler, sermon at the 2011 Gospel Coalition Conference entitled “Youth”, based on Eccl. 11:7-12:14 – accessed MP 3 online

ⁱⁱⁱ John Phillips, Exploring Revelation, Moody, 1974, p. 196