

# Revelation Chapter 15

## Doomsday Prelude – Study Notes

In the present world, we worry about many things – global warming, terrorism, economic conditions, environment issues, moral decay, political unrest, etc. Although these are important issues in our day, they pale in light of the impending judgment to come. One-day God's grace will end, and God's fierce wrath will begin on an unrepentant, godless world.

Chapter 15 opens and closes with the wrath of God. Although this is the shortest chapter in Revelation, it does not diminish its importance because it depicts the scene in heaven, immediately before the seven bowl judgments of God are released upon the earth. As this chapter unfolds, three reasons are given for the final outpouring of His wrath.

### I. The Vengeance of God [vs. 1-2]

#### A. A Sign

John is given a third sign. The first two signs [wonders] are given in chapter 12 – the woman, Israel [12:1] and the great red dragon, Satan [12:3]. This third sign is the “seven angels having the last seven plagues.” This sign is said to be “great and marvelous.” This is the most significant of all for it reveals the final set of judgments filled with God's wrath.

#### B. The Seven Angels

Central in John's vision is a group of seven angels. The same beings that minister to and care for God's people [Heb. 1:14] will bring God's wrath to a sinful world [Matt. 13:37-42]. The word plague means “blow” or “wound.” The seven plagues that the angels carry are deadly blows that strike the world with killing impact. These last plagues follow after the seal judgments [ch. 6] and trumpet judgments [chs. 8-9], but immediately before the second coming of Jesus Christ. These final, devastating plagues, which are filled [to overflowing] with God's fierce wrath, [16:19; 19:15] are released in the last 3½ years known as the great tribulation [Is. 13:6-9; Matt. 24:15-22].

#### C. The Sea of Glass

John sees a sea of glass similar to the one he saw in Revelation 4:6. However in this chapter, the sea was mixed with fire. Some scholars believe this represents God's divine judgment that proceeds from God's holiness [Is. 66:15-16; Zeph. 1:18] while others believe it can represent the fiery trials of the believers during the tribulation. Standing on the sea of glass are the martyrs that are killed by the beast during the great tribulation. They are victorious over the beast because of their undying faith in Jesus Christ [Rev. 20:4-6]. This sea is not an ordinary sea for the

martyrs are standing on it. It reflects God's faithfulness in upholding His own by His divine character and precious promises. These victorious saints are holding harps of God, which indicates that they are rejoicing and singing praises to God. The harps they hold are associated with praise [Ps. 33:2; 71:22]. These martyred believers are rejoicing in that God is about to answer their prayers for He is about to take vengeance on their enemies [6:9-11].

## II. The Character of God [15:3-4]

These saints in heaven are singing a song of praise to God. God's righteous character is the motive behind His wrath in judging sinners. It is God's holy nature that motivates this song of the redeemed. They express their gratitude in the combination of two songs – the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb.<sup>i</sup>

### A. The Song of Moses

The historical setting of the song of Moses comes from the time of the Exodus from Egypt. Moses led the Jewish people out of Egypt. God then parted the Red Sea and the Israelites found deliverance on the other side from their enemies. This song was a song of victory for God's people but a song of judgment on their enemies [Ex. 15:1-18].

### B. The Song of the Lamb

Just like the song of Moses, the song of the Lamb expresses the same theme of God's faithfulness, deliverance of His people and judgment on their enemies. The song of the Lamb was first heard in Rev. 5:8-14. This song praises God for the Lamb's marvelous works of Creation. His just ways and acknowledges Him as the King of Saints.<sup>ii</sup>

### C. The Age-Old Question

This song of praise closes with the martyred saints asking a question and answering it on the basis of God's holiness. This is in stark contrast to the question raised by the earth dwellers in Rev. 13:4. For a short time, power was given to the beast to make war with the saints and to overcome them [13:7]. Now God is about to answer the prayers of His martyred saints [6:9-11] and bring judgment on the Antichrist and his followers. The bowl judgments are so destructive that the earth is brought to the brink of disaster. In that day, no one will be able to stand against God and His Lamb

Question: Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name?

Answer: 1) For thou only art holy [His judgments are wholly righteous because they are based on His holiness].

- 2) For all nations shall come and worship before thee [All men will bow and confess Jesus – either as their Savior or as their Judge - Is. 45:23; Phil. 2:9-11].
- 3) For thy judgments are made manifest [His judgments are wholly deserved because they refused to accept God’s Lamb – Jesus Christ].

### III. The Plan of God [15:5-8]:

God’s angelic beings will carry out all their duties according to God’s plan. What is God’s plan? Because of God’s holiness, it has always been His purpose to judge sinners and destroy sin [Matt. 13:41-42, 49-50]. In this vision, these angels are given the instruments of bring execution upon the earth. They are given seven golden vials filled with God’s wrath.

#### A. The Temple of the Tabernacle of the Testimony [v. 5]:

John’s attention is now drawn away from the singing of the redeemed saints. He sees the temple of heaven open. The word *temple* refers to the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctuary where God dwells. The tabernacle of the testimony [Numbers 1:53-54] was so named for the most important object placed in the ark of God, the tablets of the Ten Commandments [Heb.9:1-4].

#### B. The Seven Angels [v. 6]:

This group of angels is not to be confused with the previous group of seven angels [1:20; 8:3]. These angels are unique because they hold the last seven plagues to come upon the earth. The angels coming out of the inner sanctuary of God’s temple indicate that the judgments they hold come from the holiness of God. The white linen represents righteousness [19:8] as the holy angels carry out God’s will. The symbolism of the golden sashes is not clear, but the gold sashes would be fitting attire for God’s majestic beings. Some Bible scholars say the gold may represent God’s glory as they carry out his righteous judgments.

#### C. The Seven Golden Vials [vs. 7-8]:

##### 1. One of the Four Living Cherubim [v. 7]:

As the seven angels come from the inner sanctuary of God’s holy temple, one of the four living creatures [cherubim] give the angels the instruments to bring forth God’s final judgment. They are given seven golden bowls. These bowls are full of God’s wrath indicating the devastating character of these judgments. The fact that God lives forever and ever is a solemn reminder that His wrath will continue even in the lake of fire.

## 2. The Temple Filled with Smoke [v. 8]:

Just as the bowl judgments are filled with God's wrath, now the temple of God is filled with the smoke of God's glory and power. This cloud of glory and celestial smoke [known by the Hebrews as the "Shekinah" glory of God] is associated with God's presence at times of great crises in God's dealings with men. Although no one can enter this temple nor stand before Him, the Shekinah glory assures men of His divine presence and the certainty of His divine judgments [Exodus 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-11]. This glorious cloud will remain in the temple until the bowl judgments are accomplished on earth to purge, cleanse and prepare for the true King and His kingdom.

### **Conclusion:**

This chapter of Revelation establishes the background and the righteousness of the rapid-fire bowl judgments that are about to be released on the earth. By the time this judgment are poured out, the earth dwellers will have experienced the unprecedented devastation of the seal and trumpet judgments. Not only that, but they have heard the gospel message of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists, the two witnesses, and the testimonies of countless numbers of Jews and Gentiles saved during the tribulation. In all this, God once again shows His mercy by placing an angel in mid heaven to proclaim the gospel so everyone can hear and be without excuse. This chapter is a clear warning of impending doom to those who willfully continue to reject God's message of salvation and their hardened disregard for His sovereignty and holiness.

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<sup>i</sup> The Revelation of Jesus Christ by John F. Walvoord, pg. 227-228 comments on the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb:

The hymn of praise sung by the martyred saints in glory is identified as "the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb." The fact that "song" (Gr., *oden*) is repeated with a definite article in both cases would lead to the conclusion that two songs are in view rather than one, both being sung by the martyred throng. The former recounts the faithfulness of God to Israel as a nation in recognition that a large number of Israelites are among these martyred dead. The song of the Lamb

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speaks of redemption from sin made possible by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, and would include all the saints.

ii The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Revelation 12-22 by John MacArthur, pg. 130-131 speaks about the song of the redeemed saints:

The song of these redeemed saints extols God's character as the omnipotent, immutable, sovereign, perfect, and righteous Creator and Judge. Because He is all that, God must and will judge sinners; if He ignored their sin, He would not be holy, righteous, and true to His nature. The prophet Habakkuk, speaking to God, put it this way, "Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You can not look on wickedness with favor" (Hab. 1:13). "Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert what is right?" asks Job 8:3. Psalm 19:9 answers, "The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether."