

CHAPTER 15

Revelation 15:1-4

[1] 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. [2] And 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. [3] And 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.”

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John's attention is turned once again to the heavens. And here he sees another sign, seven angels with seven plagues. In fact, this entire chapter uses a series of signs and symbols to make a point.

John says that these are the last plagues because with them, the wrath of God is finished. So these are the last of God's judgments as a consequence of the Old Covenant between Himself and Israel. If you remember back several chapters, we talked about these seventy sevens that were decreed in the book of Daniel. And the purpose of these seventy sevens were to address the sins of Israel under the Old Covenant.

The purpose of these judgments are due to Israel's disobedience under the Old Covenant and are not directed at believers. Hence this is the reason that the church is raptured prior to the Tribulation beginning. And also why the Jewish people who believed were taken to safety at Petra.

John talks about the sign he sees and it has multiple parts to it and it begins with a glass sea mixed with fire. John is trying to describe something that is just plain other-worldly, and this is the best way that he can describe it. So John is taking things that he can describe and combining them in an attempt to describe what he is seeing by using impossible combinations. Those who are standing on this sea are those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number its name.

Those who had been victorious are those who were martyred. Their death is called a victory over the beast. Death is a victory because it removes the person from the influence of the beast and brings them to a place of rest.

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These individuals overcame the beast because they didn't give in and show a love for their physical lives over the Lord. This is the type of eternal perspective that we are called to have as believers. There is nothing that we should love over the Lord.

We see these saints singing with harps and singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. The song of the Lamb is a song praising Christ that is referenced in verses 3 and 4. The song of Moses is a reference to a song in the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 32 or Exodus 15.

In Deuteronomy, the song is Israel becoming faithless and how in their rebellion, God brings them to a low point to break their rebellious hearts. The song is prophetic in that its ultimate fulfillment is in the events of Tribulation. The entirety of Exodus is a picture of the Tribulation. Ultimately through miraculous judgments, God brings Israel to Himself to dwell safely in the Promised Land. In a similar way, this is how the Lord brings Israel to the realization that Christ is the Messiah.

This is heavenly scene that communicates what is going to happen at the end of the Tribulation. The first song is about Christ returning to Earth and that His return is imminent. This gives the believer on earth something to hope for as they face intense persecution. The second song is a bit different and sung to a different group of people. This song is directed primarily at orthodox Jew who have yet to believe in Christ. The part of the song from Deuteronomy reminds God's people that the judgment of God is a part of the Old Covenant's demands. The second part of the song from Exodus reminds the Jewish people of God's faithfulness in the middle of attack.

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Revelation 15:5-8

[5] After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, [6] and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. [7] And 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, [8] and 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.

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There is a transition in verse 5 in which part of the sign transitions to the temple in Heaven and the tabernacle opening. In the heavenly realm stands a tabernacle similar to the one that Moses built for Israel under the Law. And Hebrews tells us that the earthly tabernacle was patterned after a heavenly version. In the tabernacle on earth resided an ark with a mercy seat which is given to the top or the lid of the ark. The Shekinah glory of God dwelt in the earthly tabernacle by resting on top of the mercy seat. But the Lord's presence left the temple shortly before the Age of the Gentiles began. And it won't return until the Kingdom begins and a new temple is built.

So as the Lord prepares to pour out His final wrath upon Israel and the world, He opens the tabernacle in Heaven as a sign. The glory of the Lord on the mercy seat becomes visible for a time alluding to the Lord's impending return to the tabernacle.

Finally, the seventh trumpet judgment is the seven bowl judgments, and now these bowls are being prepared. God's wrath is commonly depicted as something being poured out. God's wrath or judgment is also said to be being stored up as in filling a cup or a vessel. But now God's wrath is being accumulated in something greater than a cup, it's a bowl.

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Finally, something peculiar happens as the temple is filled with smoke representing the power and the glory of God. Additionally with this, no one could enter the temple. On earth, with Israel and the Law, the High Priest could only enter the Holy of Holies.

In heaven, this is reserved for Jesus, the Great High Priest. So the indication is that the Father has barred Jesus from entering the temple until the end of the bowl judgments. If Jesus cannot enter the temple, it would indicate that He cannot make intercession. And if no intercession is made, then no grace can be offered.

So the implication of all of this would be that no grace and no new faith will be found on earth during this time period. This chapter is a transition chapter that leads us out of the Mid-Tribulation period. The bowl judgements will take place toward the end of the second half of Tribulation.

In the next chapter we will talk about these bowl judgments and see how they play out on the earth.