

Valley Bible Church – Book of Revelation

"Prelude to the Bowl Judgments"

Revelation 15:1-8

The Bowl Judgments. (15:1-18:24)

The Prelude to the Bowl Judgments: (15:1-8)

"The events of God's wrath are centered on the seven seals opened by the Lamb of God (6:1-17; 8:1). With the opening of the seventh seal, seven trumpet judgments were unleashed on the earth (8:1-9:21; 11:15). With the blowing of the seventh trumpet, and after a lengthy textual interlude including chapters 10-14, the seven bowl judgments (16:1-21) are poured out just prior to Christ's Second Coming."⁴³¹ "Chapter 15 is introductory and prepares the reader for the execution of the judgments described in chapter 16. They are first described as the seven last plagues and then as seven bowls full of the wrath of God (vs. 7; 16:1). These seven plagues will chronologically bring to an end the ordered events of the Tribulation judgments in a dramatic crescendo. The plagues described here are extremely severe and occur in rapid succession, which adds greatly to their severity."⁴³² "Chapter 15 provides a needed introduction to this final phase of God's wrath. In this chapter, John was given two glorious visions from heaven in preparation for the coming bowl judgments. First he saw martyred saints, who were victorious over the Antichrist, singing the song of Moses and the song of Christ the Lamb (15:1-4). Then he saw seven angels proceeding from God's Temple in heaven with bowl judgments in hand, ready to pour out God's wrath (15:5-8)."⁴³³

A Vision of the Victorious Saints: (vv. 1-4)

The Introduction: {vs.1} Verse 1 serves as an introductory statement for chapters 15 and 16. "This is a summary, advance statement, a sort of a preface or descriptive title. Two signs were presented in 12:1 and 3. Now the third is recorded here. "Another" *allos*, (another of the same kind) refers back to the two preceding signs of chapter 12."⁴³⁴ "The sign is called "great" because of the awesome implication of these judgments in both extent and degree. "Marvelous" means "wonderful, awe inspiring," and shows the effect this sign had on the heart and soul of John."⁴³⁵ This sign is described as seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, literally: *having seven plagues, the last ones*. This literal arrangement in the Greek makes this an emphatic statement. These are the very last plagues. They are the final judgments preceding the Second Coming. They are called the last plagues *because in them the wrath of God is finished*. "The verb is *teleo* and means "to complete, bring to an end" in amount, number, degree, effect or purpose. It is in these last plagues that God's wrath finds its culmination and accomplishes His purposes."⁴³⁶

The Scene in Heaven: {vs. 2} **First**, John saw *as it were, a sea of glass mixed with fire*. This is a reference to the same sea as mentioned in Revelation 4:6. This is not a literal sea, but is metaphorical language. Revelation 21:1 tells us that there is no sea in heaven. The phrase, *as it were* could be translated "*something like*" and emphasizes that it is not really a sea. In fact from John's perspective he had no other way of describing what he saw but to associate it from something here on earth that he had experienced. We see similar terminology in Exodus 24:10 and Ezekiel 1:22. It is probably important to note that glass was a costly material in ancient times and in Job 28:17 crystal is ranked among the most valuable of all treasures on earth.

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This crystal clear floor/pavement added to the glorious splendor by reflecting the flashing many colored light from the throne in Revelation 4:6. Some have suggested that it may symbolize God as set apart, Holy & Pure. It is like a mirror reflecting the glory and holiness of God. "Here it is *mingled with fire*, symbolizing the divine judgment that is about to be manifested from a holy God."⁴³⁷ **Second**, after John got a glimpse of the throne room floor he noticed those who were standing upon that floor, *those who had come off victorious from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name*. This is a clear reference to the martyred saints of the Great Tribulation. These are the ones who were blessed in Revelation 14:13. These are the ones who had refused the mark of the beast (Revelation 13:16-18), refused to worship the beast (Revelation 13:15) and were thus killed by the beast and his false prophet. "The word for victorious is *nikaw* and means "to be a victor, conquer, to prevail." Biblically, the means of conquering is faith in Jesus Christ and the Word, but this is always a victory based on the victory accomplished by the Savior's death for us through the cross and His resurrection (John 16:33)."⁴³⁸ The context of this victory is really the idea of deliverance. "The preposition "from," *EK* means "out of, from, away from." It is used to introduce the person, place, or thing from which a separation takes place...Because of their victory in Christ, they were delivered *from* the beast, *from* his image, and *from* his mark."⁴³⁹ So John gets a glimpse of these victorious martyred saints standing before the throne of God. These saints are described as holding harps and they are preparing to burst forth with song.

The Song of the Saints: {vv. 3-4} The song of these saints are referred to as the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. "The song of Moses was sung by the people of Israel after their passage through the Red Sea and their deliverance from the Egyptian armies (Exodus 15:1-21; cf. Deut. 32:1-43), this was a song of victory and deliverance that the redeemed who overcome Antichrist and his system will readily identify with. The song of the Lamb is a reference to Revelation 5:8-14. These two songs celebrate two great redemptive events: 1) Deliverance of Israel by God from Egypt through Moses; and 2) Deliverance of sinners by God from sin through Christ."⁴⁴⁰ David Levy in His commentary notes the similarities between the song of Moses in Exodus 15 and the Song of the saints here in Revelation 15:

"The theme of both songs is victory of believers over their enemies.

"Both Songs speak of the Lamb. The Passover lamb protected and delivered Israel from judgment. Christ the Lamb of God, will provide a greater deliverance from judgment for Tribulation believers.

"Both songs speak of the Lord's marvelous works and ways in deliverance. (Exodus 15:6-7; Revelation 15:3).

"Both songs speak of God's holiness (Exodus 15:11; Revelation 15:4).

"Both songs mention similar plagues that would come upon the enemies of Israel and Tribulation believers.

"Both songs express apocalyptic-type judgments on Egypt and the beast's kingdom.

"Both songs refer to the nations' fear of God when they hear of His works.

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"Both songs speak of people giving triumphant praise to God for His glorious deliverance."⁴⁴¹

What a marvelous song of praise this song is! God is declared to be powerful in His works, omnipotent in His character, righteous and true in His ways, Sovereign in His control over the nations, deserving of reverence and glory, perfectly holy in character, deserving of the worship of all nations, and as one who has revealed His righteous judgments.

A Vision of the Seven Angels with the Bowls: (vv.5-8)

The Seven Angels: (vv. 5-6)

John now has an additional vision in heaven immediately after the vision described in vv. 1-4. David Levy accurately explains this scene in his commentary: "The scene changes as John is given another vision, focusing his attention back to the Temple of God in heaven and the seven angels holding bowls of judgment. He wrote, "And after that I looked and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened" (v. 5). The words "temple of the tabernacle of the testimony" refer to tablets of the Ten Commandments kept in the Ark of the Covenant that stood in the Holy of Holies where the presence of God dwelt. John saw the veil of the Holy of Holies part, and out of the inner sanctuary of the Temple appeared "seven angels" (v. 6) who had been selected to administer God's bowl judgments. They are holding "the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles" (v. 6). White linen is symbolic of the purity of the angels, their righteous character, and the righteous act of God in pouring out His wrath on earth. Golden girdles held the linen garments in place and were worn by the priests as they ministered in the Temple. Gold is symbolic of God's riches, beauty, greatness, and majesty. Christ wore the same apparel when He appeared to John (cp. 1:13)."⁴⁴²

The Seven Bowls: (vv. 7-8)

After noting the appearance of the seven angels, John goes on to describe the scene as the bowls of God's wrath are given to these seven angels. It is one of the four living creatures from Revelation 4:6-9, who distribute the seven bowls to the seven angels. "These are shallow saucers, familiar items often associated with various functions of the temple worship (1 Kings 7:50; 2 Kings 12:13; 25:15), such as wine (Amos 6:6) and blood sacrifice (Exodus 27:3). Their flat shallowness pictures how the divine judgments will be emptied instantly rather than slowly poured, drowning those who refused to drink the cup of salvation."⁴⁴³ Notice also that these bowls are full of the wrath of God. The term *full* means to be full to the brim. "The word *full* addresses the comprehensive, complete, and totally devastating character of this final set of judgments from God. The wrath spoken of here is not the normal term used for wrath. It is more intense and depicts a violent wrath from God against sin."⁴⁴⁴ A brief mention is made here to the eternal nature of God and then John notices the temple in heaven filled with smoke. Smoke throughout the Scriptures refers to the glory, power and holiness of God (cp. Gen. 15:17; Ex. 19:18; 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-11).

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It is noted in this text that this smoke is from two sources. It is from the glory of God and it is from the power of God. The smoke that fills the temple will be so thick and intense that no one was able to enter the temple until the seven last plagues of the seven angels were finished. "Smoke from God's glory made entering the Temple impossible until His seething indignation was poured out."
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God's hatred of sin is so intense and this hatred of sin will result in the pouring out of His intense wrath in the form of these seven bowl judgments referred to here in vs. 8 as the seven plagues. The stage is set and the world will soon feel the intense and burning anger of God as the seven angels are in position to pour out the seven bowl judgments of God.