

Revelation 15 - Preparation for the Seven Bowls of Wrath

IV. After These Things (Rev 4:1–22:21)

- (2) During the Tribulation (Rev 6:1–19:21)
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Now that the parenthesis covered in Rev 12-14 has concluded, Rev 15 gets back into the chronology of events that paused at the end of Rev 11.

Revelation 15

- (K) The Bowl Judgments (15:1–16:21)
 - (a) Bowl Judgment Preparation (15:1-8)
 - (i) The Manifestation of the Seven Plagues (15:1)

1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished.

1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished.

1 I saw another sign in heaven. It was both spectacular and amazing. There were seven angels with the seven last plagues, with which God's wrath is completed.

1 And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.

- Now, a scene in heaven precedes the Bowl series of judgments as happened before the Seal series (Rev 4-5) and the Trumpet series (8:2-6)

— This chapter is a celestial interlude to introduce the seven Bowls of wrath of Rev 16. It is time for the "cup of wine" (14:10), the harvest (14:14-16), and the vintage (14:17-20) to see their chronological fulfillment. This chapter helps us better understand Rev 16 (the seven Bowl judgments).

- "Then I saw" - *Kai idou*, introduces another new scene in John's vision, this time in heaven

- "...another sign" - connects this with the series of signs that began with 12:1 (woman clothed with the sun) and 12:3 (fiery red dragon)

— The sign itself was "seven angels" who control "seven plagues"

- "...great and marvelous" - John describes this part of his vision positively because it represents the end (summation) of God's judgment of the earth. The sign of the "woman" (12:1) was "great"; this sign is "great and marvelous."

— The "great and marvelous" nature of this sign stems from the goal of their mission, which is the completion of God's wrath

- "...who had" - *echō*, carries the sense of having the duty of inflicting

- "...seven angels" - as with the Seals and Trumpets, "angels" were God's agents in pouring out His wrath in this series of judgments

— Each of the seven angels held a bowl, which represent the seven last judgments of God upon the earth

— As each angel pours out the bowl, another horrific judgment will come upon the earth (Cf. Rev 16)

— These seven angels appear 7x as a group (15:1,6,7,8; 16:1; 17:1; 21:9) and 9x individually (16:2,3,4,8,10,12,17; 17:7; 21:9)

— John only introduces them here; they don't begin to act until v6 (Cf. 8:2; 12:6; 21:2)

- "...seven plagues" - five of the seven recall five of the ten Egyptian plagues (Ex 7-10)

- 1st Bowl (Rev 16:1-2) = Sores — 6th Plague (Ex 9:8-12)
- 3rd Bowl (Rev 16:4-7) = Rivers to Blood — 1st Plague (Ex 7:19-21)
- 5th Bowl (Rev 16:10-11) = Darkness — 9th Plague (Ex 10:21-23)
- 6th Bowl (Rev 16:13) = Frogs — 2nd Plague (Ex 7:25—8:15)
- 7th Bowl (Rev 16:17-21) = Hail — 7th Plague (Ex 9:22-26)

— Besides the Bowls, other features of this context that resemble God's previous deliverance in the Exodus include:

- The crossing of the sea (16:12)
- The song of Moses (15:3)

- The giving of the law among the smoke of Sinai (15:8)
- The erection of a tent of testimony (15:5)
- "...the last" - the Seal and Trumpet judgments were also plagues (Cf. 9:20), but these seven are the last ones God will thrust upon the earth
 - The earlier plagues were temporal punishments to warn people of the severity of God's wrath, but these are the climax of them all
 - The Bowls also comprise the third "woe" announced in 11:14, but there is no announcement that the third woe has passed because by the time it has passed, human history will have reached its end
 - "...the wrath of God is finished" - 10:7 says, when the 7th Trumpet judgment was about to be unleashed, that the "mystery of God is finished."
 - It's easy to understand how the "mystery of God" could be finished after the 7th Trumpet if you understand the "telescoping" nature of the judgments
 - The 7th Trumpet judgment unleashes the seven Bowl judgments; the seven Bowl judgments are included as part of the seventh Trumpet judgment
 - Amillennialists use this argument for their recapitulation theory, due to the fact the Great White Throne judgment (which they classify as God's wrath) occurs after the close of the 7th Bowl

[OT reference: Lev 26:21]

(ii) The Martyrs (15:2-4)

(a) Their identity (15:2)

2 And I saw *something* like a **sea of glass mixed with fire**, and **those who were victorious** over the beast and **his image** and the number of his name, **standing** on the sea of glass, holding harps of God.

2 And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God.

2 Then I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire. Those who had conquered the beast, its image, and the number of its name were standing on the sea of glass holding God's harps in their hands.

2 And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, *and* over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.

- "...sea of glass" - in Rev 4, the saints were standing on it
- Modeled in the tabernacle as the bronze laver, where the priests washed
- Modeled in Eph 4 as the Word of God, washed in the water of the Word
- Here, the saints are standing on the Word of God...mingled with fire (judgment)

- "...mixed with fire" - John has described heavenly scenes before, including the sea of glass (Cf. Rev 4), but this time he described the sea of glass mixed with fire
 - It's likely that this fire describes the fire of the Tribulation period happening on the earth
 - Our trials on earth as Christians are analogized to a refiner's fire (1 Peter 1:6-7); a refiner's fire cannot destroy, it can only purify
 - This is the proper way to look at adversity that comes into our lives. God uses adversity (trials) not to make us bitter, but to make us better.
 - If you don't have this vantage point or outlook as a believer, you have no reference for why certain things are happening in your life. You're left to your own devices.
- "...those who were victorious" - those believers who resisted worshiping the beast and his image, did not take the mark of the beast, and were eventually martyred for their belief
 - These people escaped the Tribulation period by martyrdom and this verse calls them "victorious" because they are free from having to see and endure the seven Bowl judgments and are now in the presence of God (Cf. 14:13)
 - This group likely includes the 144,000 Jewish evangelists from Rev 7:2-8
 - "...his image" - the image of the beast set up in the temple; those who do not worship this image will be killed (13:15); these martyrs came out of the second half of the Tribulation (13:11-18)
 - "...standing" - the posture of victory

- (b) Their Praise (15:3-4)
 - (1) Song of Moses (15:3a)
 - (2) Song of the Lamb (15:3b)
 - (3) Doxology (15:3c)

3 And they *sang the **song of Moses**, the **bond-servant** of God, and the **song of the Lamb**, saying, **"Great and marvelous** are Your works, Lord God, the **Almighty; Righteous and true** are Your ways, **King of the nations!**

3 And they *sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations!

3 They sang the song of God's servant Moses and the song of the lamb: "Your deeds are both spectacular and amazing, Lord God Almighty. Your ways are just and true, King of the nations.

3 And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.

- "...the song of Moses" - there are two songs of Moses in the OT:

1. Ex 15 - when Moses (age 80) led the Israelites out of Egypt, after they had crossed the Red Sea and drowned the Egyptians
2. Deut 32 - Moses, just before his death (age 120), sung this song on Mt. Nebo as he considered the faithfulness of God throughout his life
 - The question is...which song are these martyrs singing? Likely Deut 32 (32:4 resembles v3); in addition, 31:21 states that this song will not be forgotten.
 - "...bond-servant" - *doulos*, servant, or better translated "slave"; someone who exists to do the will of his Master. John described himself using this word (1:1).
 - The biblical authors never describe their credentials or education; they always describe themselves as servants of God
 - "...song of the Lamb" - where does Jesus sing a song? Matt 26:30, just before He went to the Mount of Olives
 - Scripture does not share the words of this hymn (maybe one of the Psalms?), but evidently the martyrs here in heaven are aware of it
 - Note that there never is any word about the *martyr*'s achievements. The only pronouns refer to God. The achievement here is by God, not the saints; anything the saints did was Him doing it through them.
 - "...Great and marvelous" - same Greek words used to introduce this vision (v1); now these words are used to describe the works of God
 - "...Almighty" - we praise God for His might because He has an attribute that we do not have: omnipotence; He is all-powerful
 - "...Righteous" - perfectly upright
 - "...true" - God cannot lie; He *is* truth (Heb 6:18)
 - "...ways" - the way God does things; how He carries out His plan
 - God made known His ways to Moses, but His acts to the Israelites (Ps 103:7)
 - To know God's ways, His manner of doing things, His purpose, how He thinks, His reasoning, is much more personal and intimate than simply knowing His acts
 - Knowing His ways allows one to understand how we can recognize God's hand in something
 - "...King of the nations!" - Jesus is indeed the King of the nations, but His reign hasn't materialized yet
 - This is a proleptic statement: Jesus does not yet rule the nations, but He will shortly!
 - King of the nations is not just His identity, it's His destiny
 - Kingdom Now uses this verse as evidence that Jesus is reigning now, however check "WILL COME" (v4)...

[OT reference: Ex 15:1-18; Deut 31:30–32:44; Ps 92:5; Ps 111:2; 139:14]

The first part of this song extols God's "works" and "ways." Specifically, God's "works" in judging His enemies are in view. His might makes judgment possible. His "ways" of judging are just and faithful. His sovereignty makes His judgment necessary and certain.

4 "Who will not **fear** You, Lord, and **glorify Your name**? For You alone are **holy**; For ALL THE NATIONS **WILLCOME AND WORSHIP BEFORE YOU**, For **Your righteous acts have been revealed.**"

4 "Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For all the nations will come and worship before You, For Your righteous acts have been revealed."

4 Lord, who won't fear and praise your name? For you alone are holy, and all the nations will come and worship you because your judgments have been revealed."

4 Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for *thou only art* holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.

- "...fear" - not terror, but respect; if you have a fear of God, you have knowledge (Prov 1:7)

- "...glorify Your name" - the doxological purpose of man: to glorify God

— The worship of these martyrs is not a casual spiritual experience...it's laser focused on God Himself (Acts 4:12)

- The angel who flew in the heavens proclaiming the eternal gospel (14:7) also commanded people to "fear God and give Him glory"

- "...holy" - perfect uprightness; the martyrs are praising God for His holiness, His dominant attribute (Is 6:3; Rev 4:8)

- "...WILL COME" - *hēkō*, future tense

- "...WORSHIP" - *proskyneō*, future tense

— Jesus Christ is destined to sit on David's Throne in Jerusalem and rule the entire world with a rod of iron, and all the nations of the world will come to Jerusalem to worship Him

— The people who don't want to come and worship Him will not receive rain for their crops (Zech 14:16-18)

— He is absolutely King of the nations, but He's not ruling in the kingdom sense at the present time

— Another reason is that everyone ("all the nations") will "worship" Him when Christ returns, because He has purged the earth. He will *reveal* His "righteous acts" when He judges the earth.

— The martyrs do not refer to what they did in overcoming the beast, but to *who God is* and *what He did*

- "...Your righteous acts have been revealed" - God's actions in history are righteous; they have been "revealed" in the Bible, specifically in the Book of Revelation

— Why are the martyrs praising God for His righteous acts, after they arrive in heaven? It has to do with the fact that the judgments of Revelation are so severe that humanity is

raising its collective fist against God and arguing against God's right to judge.
[OT reference: Ps 86:9; Is 66:23; Jer 10:7]

- (iii) The Heavenly Tabernacle (15:5-8)
 - (a) Tabernacle opened (15:5)

5 After these things I looked, and the temple of **the tabernacle of testimony** in heaven was opened,

5 After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened,

5 After these things, I looked, and the Temple, which is the Tent of Testimony in heaven, was open!

5 And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened:

- "After these things" - *meta tauta*, the scene moves from the martyrs to the heavenly tabernacle (temple)

- The scene changes because the coming Bowl judgments in Rev 16 will emerge from the heavenly tabernacle

- "...the tabernacle of testimony" - John uses this phrase to describe the heavenly temple because that particular room was the location of God's Law so blatantly disregarded by the earth dwellers (Cf. 9:20-21)

- God is about to enforce these standards on a rebellious earth through the judgments of these last seven plagues

- But this scene is in heaven? Yes, and one of the amazing things that we see throughout Revelation is that where there is an earthly reality in God, there is a heavenly counterpart (Cf. Heb 8:5).

[OT reference: Ex 38:21]

- (b) Angels emerge (15:6)

6 and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, **clothed in linen, clean and bright**, and their **chests wrapped with goldensashes**.

6 and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean and bright, and girded around their chests with golden sashes.

6 The seven angels with the seven plagues came out of the Temple wearing clean, shining linen with gold sashes around their chests.

6 And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles.

- In this passage "temple" and "tabernacle" are used interchangably; the tabernacle was simply a mobile temple. Both have a correspondence in heaven.

- Each of these seven angels who emerge from the heavenly temple will have a corresponding Bowl; it is from each of these Bowls that the Bowl judgments are brought upon the earth
- God has given angels numerous assignments in the past (see note: **Activities of Angels (Past)** below
- God desires to give us assignments, just as He gives angels assignments...God has chosen to not do everything on His own, but to assign certain tasks to both angels and people
- Notice the tasks that God gives to these angels are not a menial tasks...they are huge tasks, to bring judgment upon the entire earth, affecting every person alive on the earth, and wrench the occupation of the earth from Satan once and for all
- In 20:1-2, God assigns an angel to bind Satan and throw him into the abyss for 1000 years
- "...clothed in linen, clean *and* bright" - the Church in heaven is clothed in the same way (Cf. 19:8)
- "...chests wrapped with golden sashes" - Jesus is clothed the same way (Cf. 1:13)
- These angels are perfectly identified with Jesus Christ and His purposes, right down to their clothing
- God only trusts His tasks/assignments to those who are perfectly aligned with His purposes. Many times, we're trying to pursue our own way and our own agenda rather than God's. This is why we're not given more assignments.

[OT reference: Lev 26:21]

Activities of Angels (Past)

- Witnessed creation (Job 38:7)
- **Brought judgment (Gen 19:22; Acts 12:22-23)**
- Accompanied the Law (Gal 3:19)
- Announced births of John and Christ (Luke 1:11-13,26-27)
- Strengthened Christ (Matt 4:11)
- Announced Resurrection (Matt 28:1-7)
- Observed Ascension (Acts 1:11)
- Brought messages (Luke 1:13)

(c) Angels given the bowls (15:7)

7 And one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven **goldenbowlsfull** of the **wrath** of God, who lives forever and ever.

7 Then 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.

7 One of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven gold bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever.

7 And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever.

- "...golden bowls" - *phialas*, shallow bowls or saucers; may be similar to the cups or goblets in Is 55:17,22 that are full of the wrath of God

— Bowls were important instruments in the worship of God in the temple (Cf. 1 Kings 7:50)

— Our prayers are held in heaven in golden bowls of incense (Cf. 5:8); this shows that our prayers have as much value to God as the judgments that He's about to pour out on the earth in Rev 16

- "...full" - filled to the brim with the hot anger of God. The fullness speaks to the devastating character as well as the finality of the coming judgment

- "...wrath" - *thymos*, not *orgē*; we get sexual imagery from *orgē*, which means "passion without limits"; in Revelation, instead of being used in the sexual sense, it's used in the anger sense, describing the judgment of God coming upon the earth

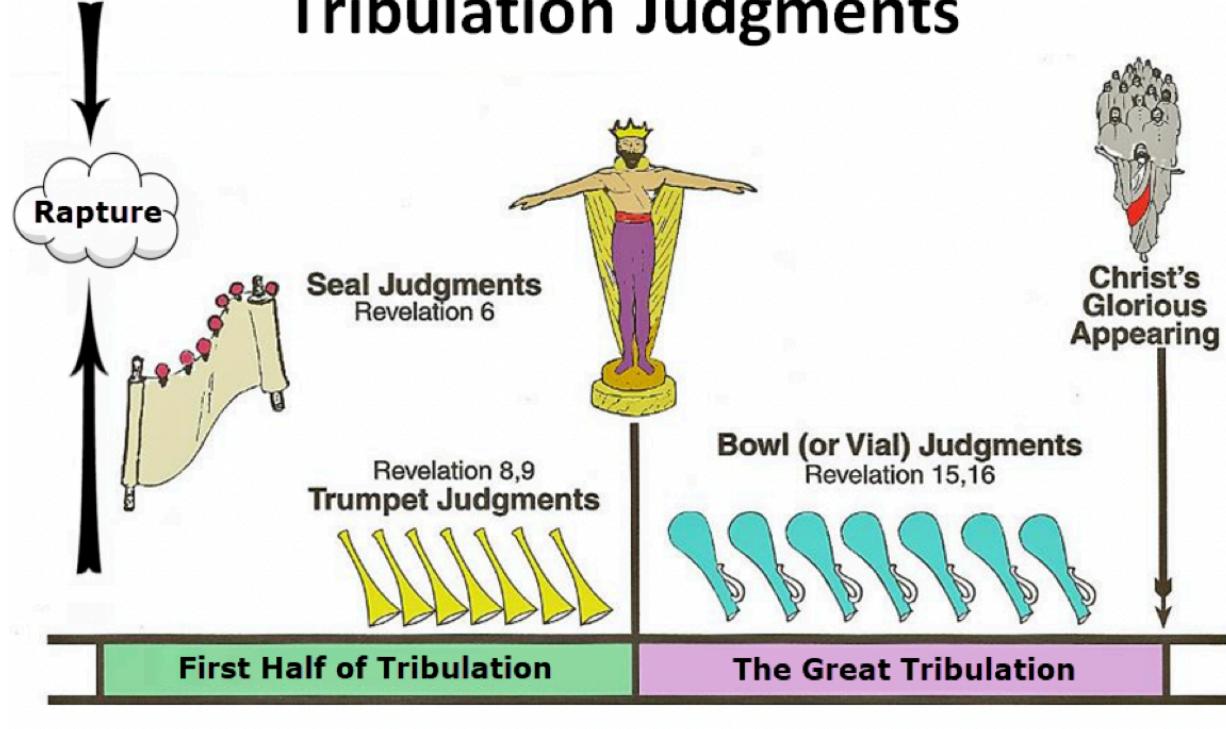
— *thymos* is defined as "the state of anger with the implication of passionate outbursts"

— This is the same word used when the people of Capernaum were so angry with Jesus that they tried to throw Him off a cliff (Luke 4:28; Cf. Rom 2:5; Rev 12:12; 14:8,10)

— This does not *start* the wrath of God like some people believe (pre-wrath rapturists). The wrath of God began with the 1st Seal judgment (Cf. 6:16-17). The entire seven-year Tribulation period is the wrath of God.

[OT reference: Jer 25:15]

Tribulation Judgments



(d) Tabernacle filled with God's glory (v15:8a)

(e) Barred entrance into Tabernacle (15:8b)

8 And the temple was **filled with smoke** from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

8 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

8 The Temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and his power, and no one could enter the Temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels came to an end.

8 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.

- "...filled with smoke" - represents the glory and power of God (Cf. Ex 19:18; 40:34; 2 Chr 5:13-14; Is 6:1-4)
- As the Bowls are given to the angels, the smoke of God's magnificent, holy presence fills the temple
- No one is able to transgress God's boundaries in heaven...
- Man is always transgressing God's boundaries on earth: Gentiles will tread the Holy City under foot for 42 months (11:2); in the OT, you couldn't bring a Gentile into the temple (the Jews accused Paul of doing this in Acts 21:28-30)

- But no one, even angelic beings, dressed in fine linen and golden sashes, or the 24 Elders or the four living creatures, cannot transgress God's boundaries in heaven
- God's plan includes the coming of God's wrath, and *it will be fulfilled* (completed)
- Until it is finished, no one could enter the temple in heaven, dramatically emphasizing the importance of these seven last plagues in the overall plan of God

[OT reference: Ex 40:34-35; Lev 26:21; 1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chr 5:13-14; Is 6:1-4]

God's judgments are always rooted in His righteousness and never stem from empty fury.



John F. Walvoord

John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 230.

“As the angels emerge from the sanctuary, it is filled with smoke proceeding from the glory of God and His power, a pointed reminder of the ineffable holiness of God. The scene can be compared to that when the cloud filled the Tabernacle in Exodus 40:34–35. Access into the sanctuary is made impossible by the smoke until the judgments contained in the seven plagues are fulfilled. It is an ominous sign of impending doom for those who persist in their blasphemous disregard of the sovereignty and holiness of God.”