

Ministry of Grace

Revelation Chapter 15

¹Then 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! ⁴Who 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. [ESV]

Notes

Revelation 15:1

¹Then 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.

“**sign**” – This is from the Greek word *sēmeion*, which means “a sign or miracle with a spiritual end and purpose.” Even though we are taking a literal interpretive view of Revelation this tells us that the following is not to be taken literally but figuratively. In other words, the sign has to be interpreted. In Revelation John refers to three different signs which he saw. The first two were:

And a great **sign** appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. (**Revelation 12:1**) [ESV]

And another **sign** appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. (**Revelation 12:3**) [ESV]

The only other mentions of “signs” in Revelation are those produced by the false prophet and demons.

It (the beast out of the earth, that is, the false prophet) performs great **signs**, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, (**Revelation 13:13**) [ESV]

For they are demonic spirits, performing **signs**, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. (**Revelation 16:14**) [ESV]

And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the **signs** by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. (**Revelation 19:20**) [ESV]

“**with seven plagues, which are the last**” – Literally this is “the seven plagues, the last ones.” This is an indication that these are the final judgments to be executed upon the earth.

“**plagues**” – “*plēgē*” This Greek word means a stroke, stripe, blow, wound or injury. Secondly, it means a plague, that is, a stroke or blow inflicted by God, a calamity

“**is finished**” – literally “was brought to an end.” With the pouring out of these seven bowls God’s wrath is completely demonstrated.

Revelation 15: 2

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.

“**of glass**” – This is from the Greek word *hualinos*, meaning transparent like glass. In John’s first vision of the throne room of God, he used the same word to describe the floor.

and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: (**Revelation 4:6**) [ESV]

On Mount Sinai, Moses and the elders of Israel were given a vision of God in His throne room with a similar description of the floor; clear, though blue in color:

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. (**Exodus 24:9, 10**) [ESV]

“**mingled**” – This is from the Greek word *mignumi*, meaning to mix or intermingle as wine is mixed with water. The image here is of this glassy clear floor of the throne room of God also being filled with flames of fire, or at least the color of fire. Fire is usually associated with God’s judgment. This is precisely what is about to occur as we will see in the next chapter.

“**those who had conquered the beast ...**” – By virtue of the fact that this is a heavenly scene and the seven bowls have not yet been poured out, these must be tribulation martyrs.

“**conquered the beast**” – Literally this reads, “the ones being victorious out of the beast and out of his image and out of his mark out of the number of his name ...” This grammatical construction is unique in Greek literature found only here. It does not signify “... victory over the Beast, over his image, and over his mark ...” but “coming triumphantly from under the control of the beast, from his image, and from his mark ...” These are the ones about whom in chapter twelve it was said:

And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. (**Revelation 12:11**) [ESV]

Revelation 15:3, 4

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! ⁴Who 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."

“**song of Moses**” and “**song of the Lamb**” – There is much discussion as to what is meant by these expressions. Some claim that there are two distinct songs being sung and others claim a single song. There are several songs attributed to Moses in the Old Testament but only one of them matches this song in subject matter; a song of God’s righteous judgment and victory over sin and sinners. The Old Testament song was sung by the Israelites after having been rescued from the Egyptian army at the crossing of the Red Sea:

Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD, saying, "I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. ... (**Exodus 15:1**) [ESV]

"Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them. "You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you

have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode. ...
(Exodus 15:11-13) [ESV]

Terror and dread fall upon them; because of the greatness of your arm, they are still as a stone, till your people, O LORD, pass by, till the people pass by whom you have purchased. You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O LORD, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established. The LORD will reign forever and ever."
(Exodus 15:16-18) [ESV]

There is no song recorded in Scripture as the “song of the Lamb.” However, there are a couple of songs which are sung about the lamb.

And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:9-10) [ESV]

saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:12) [ESV]

Assuming that one, or both, of these is the song of the Lamb, then both songs mentioned in this verse are praising God for having overcome the sinful world system, and both are songs of redemption and judgment over the world and of rescuing both Jews and Gentiles out of the judgment on the world. The judgment by God on the Egyptians was righteous and necessary and this judgment of the world is righteous and necessary. The rescue of the Jews out of Egypt is a “type” of the rescue portrayed here.

Revelation 15:5

⁵After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened,

“**After this**” – This is an indication that what John is about to describe is not part of the “sign,” but a further description of the heavenly events that occur during the tribulation period on earth.

“**sanctuary**” – This is from the Greek word *naos*, which we saw back in **Revelation 11:1** referring to the dwelling place of God. In the earthly temple, *heiron* is the word that is used to refer to the entire temple area, whereas *naos* refers to the single building containing the holy place and the holiest place (the Holy of Holies). In this verse, it is most likely a reference to the heavenly Holy of Holies of which the earthly one was a type. Within the earthly Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant which held the two tablets containing the Ten Commandments, the rod of Aaron, and the manna. On top of the ark was the mercy seat where God was said to reside. These were all testaments of the sovereignty, authority, and mercy of God.

“**tent**” – This is from the Greek word *skēnē*, meaning “a tent made from animal skins.”

“**tent of witness**” – Again we see the heavenly tabernacle (tent) of which the earthly one was only a type. In their wandering through the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt, the Jews were told to build a tabernacle (tent), which represented the dwelling place of God.

“was opened” – In the earthly tabernacle (and temple), the Holy of Holies (the most holy place) was separated from the Holy Place by a thick curtain. Only the High Priest was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies and only on one day of the year. Therefore, only the high priest could behold the Ark of the Covenant. Now that the redeeming work of Christ was done and God’s wrath was being poured out on the unbelieving “permanent earth dwellers,” the tabernacle was open to all who were cleansed by the blood of the Lamb.

Revelation 15:6

⁶and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests.

The fact that the seven angels come out of the Holy of Holies is evidence of the fact that these seven last judgments are coming directly from God. These were God’s judgments about to be executed on the Beast, the False Prophet, and all those who follow them.

“the seven angels with the seven plagues” – Notice that the seven angels already have the seven plagues. These plagues are executed by the action of the angels pouring out the “wrath of God,” which is contained within the seven bowls.

“clothed in pure bright linen” – The white linen represents holiness and purity.

“with golden sashes around their chests” – The word “sashes” is from the Greek word *dzonē*, meaning “something that is wrapped around.” The word “around” is from the Greek word *peridzōnnumi*, meaning “to wrap around.” Thus, this literally says, “having their upper bodies wrapped around with a wrap.” It is likely that this item was like a golden breast plate that went from their shoulders to their waist. These golden breast plates represent riches, royalty, and unblemished glory.

Revelation 15:7

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,

“four living creatures” – These are the four seraphim (seraphs) that surround the throne of God in the heavenly scene. One of these four delivered the bowls of God’s wrath to the seven angels.

“bowls” – This is the Greek word *phialas*, which refers to a broad, shallow bowl which we would call a saucer. It was typically used as a drinking vessel. In the temple ceremonies it was used to carry incense.

These bowls are filled with the wrath of God and are about to be poured out on the earth and its inhabitants, the “permanent earth dwellers.”

Revelation 15:8

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.

Smoke and clouds are repeatedly used as a symbols of the presence of God.

The exodus from Egypt

And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. **And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud** to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people. **(Exodus 13:20-22)** [ESV]

The presence of God on Mount Sinai

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a **thick cloud on the mountain** and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now **Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke** because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The **smoke** of it went up like the **smoke** of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. **(Exodus 19:16-18)** [ESV]

Isaiah's vision of God's throne room

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, **and the house was filled with smoke.** **(Isaiah 6:1-4)** [ESV]

The filling of the tabernacle upon its completion

And he erected the court around the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the screen of the gate of the court. So Moses finished the work. The Glory of the Lord **Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.** And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because **the cloud settled on it**, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their journeys, **whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle**, the people of Israel would set out. **But if the cloud was not taken up**, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. **For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night**, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys. **(Exodus 40:33-38)** [ESV]

The filling of Solomon's temple after its completion

And when the priests came out of the Holy Place (for all the priests who were present had consecrated themselves, without regard to their divisions, and all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, their sons and kinsmen, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, stood east of the altar with 120 priests who were trumpeters; and it was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the LORD), and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the LORD, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever," the house, **the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to**

minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God. (2Chronicles 5:11-14) [ESV]

“no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished” – As in the examples above, this may be an indication that there could be no priestly intercession for the inhabitants of the earth until the seven bowls are poured out and God’s wrath is completed.

In the Old Testament, only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies. Right now, Christians have access to this most sacred of places through the blood of Christ.

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. **(Hebrews 10:19-22) [ESV]**

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