

# Study 17: Revelation Chapter 15

## **Introduction**

*“...The trumpets affect only a third of society; but the bowls of wrath indicate completeness or totality of judgement. Trumpets warn the earth-dwellers, while at the same time they draw God’s people into a holy nearness to Himself. On the other hand, bowls of wrath bring final judgement...”*

## **Body of the Study**

### **Introduction**

### **The Last Plagues**

### **The Tabernacle in Heaven**

## **Homework and preparation for next week:**

*Re-read chapter 15*

*Read the notes as a review of the study*

*Read chapter 16 in preparation for the next study*

*Why do “those who have the victory” sing the Song of Moses and the Lamb as if it has already happened, when God has yet to pour out the bowls of wrath?*

*How does chapter 15 fit in with the story in the book so far?*

*How does the chapter fit into where the story is going?*

## Notes for study 17: Revelation Chapter 15

“...The trumpets affect only a third of society; but the bowls of wrath indicate completeness or totality of judgement. Trumpets warn the earth-dwellers, while at the same time they draw God’s people into a holy nearness to Himself. On the other hand, bowls of wrath bring final judgement<sup>1</sup>...”

### Introduction

The seven bowls of wrath are announced, and we are led towards them being poured out in the next chapter.

Chapter 15, a sort of celestial interlude before the final judgment, prepares for the execution of the bowl series (ch. 16), while chs. 17-18 elaborate the fall of Babylon. What has already been anticipated under the three figures of the divine final judgment--the cup of wine (14:10), the harvest of the earth (14:14-16), and the vintage (14:17-20) is now further described under the symbolism of the seven bowls. In typical Hebrew fashion, each cycle repeats in new ways the former events and adds fresh details. (NIVBC).

### The Last Plagues

John announces *another sign*, which is similar to the last two occasions when a special revelation is revealed (c/f 12:1; 3). “...I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues--last, because with them God’s wrath is completed...” (15:1 NIV). Clearly this is a move towards the completion of the story, with destruction and judgement becoming inevitable. Hailey notes<sup>2</sup>:

In previous visions the condition and judgement of the wicked was contrasted to the victory and joy of the saints. For example, the sealing of the saints and their prayers before God (chap. 7; 8:3-5) precedes the sounding of the trumpets; the vision of the redeemed host on Mount Zion (14:1-5) is seen before the voices of the angels are heard. So now, before the bowls of wrath are poured out, the victorious saints are manifested, standing on the sea of glass singing God’s praise.

Whilst the angels are introduced in this verse, they will pour out the bowls of wrath later on. Other judgements and punishments had previously been made but these ones are said to be the last *because with them God’s wrath is completed*.

God’s judgment does not come in isolation of His people, and they appear in the scene. “...And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name...” (15:2 NIV). The sea of glass appeared in God’s Throne Room (4:6), but this time it is mixed with fire. This is probably a metaphor for the fiery trials suffered by the Christians. They had been victorious, and were now standing in God’s Throne Room, where He is worshipped night and day. “...They held harps given them by God<sup>3</sup> and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb:...” (16:2-3 NIV).

Firmly planted "beside" (or "on") the sea are those who were "victorious over the beast." They are the same ones who are seen throughout Revelation as having won out over the idolatrous beasts through their faithful testimony to Christ, even to the extent of martyrdom (e.g., 2:7, 11, 26; 12:11; 21:7; cf. 3:21; 5:5). They are the 144,000, the elect of God (7:4; 14:1), the completed company of martyrs (6:11), those who did not have

---

<sup>1</sup> Hailey, p. 318

<sup>2</sup> Hailey, p. 318

"the number of his name" (13:17). Suddenly in this dazzling scene the sound of harps and singing is heard. (NIVBC).

They were singing *the song of Moses ... and the song of the Lamb*. Hailey notes<sup>3</sup>:

"The song of Moses" is the song sung by Moses and the children of Israel after crossing the Red Sea (Exod. 15), praising God for their deliverance from the Egyptians. Pharaoh's army lay dead in the sea; Jehovah had redeemed His people and would bring them in "and plant them in the mountain of [his] inheritance." And now, under the same mighty hand of God, the Lamb had given deliverance and victory to those who had overcome the forces of the dragon.

The NIV Bible Commentary adds:

In the ancient synagogue it was sung in the afternoon service of each Sabbath to celebrate God's sovereign rule over the universe, of which the redemption from Egypt reminded the Jew. As the deliverance from Egypt, with its plagues of judgment on Israel's enemies, became for the Jew a signpost of God's just rule over the world, so God's final judgment and the deliverance of the followers of the Lamb bring forth from the victors over the beast exuberant songs of praise to God for his righteous acts in history. (NIVBC).

John writes out the song for us, so that we can have no doubts about what it was that he heard in heaven. The song is different to the Song of Moses, as it emphasises God's redemption for all peoples, not just the Israelites from the Egyptians:

*"... "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty.  
Just and true are your ways, King of the ages.  
4 Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name?  
For you alone are holy.  
All nations will come and worship before you,  
for your righteous acts have been revealed."..." (15: 3-4 NIV).*

### ***The Tabernacle in Heaven***

John did not see the Tabernacle of the wilderness, nor Solomon's Temple, nor Herod's Temple. He saw the Heavenly Tabernacle. "...After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened..." (15:6 NIV). The Hebrew writer reminds us that Christ (as our High Priest) "...has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us..." (Heb 9:25 NKJV). The earthly Tabernacle and Temple were only a physical manifestation of the dwelling place of God. John looked (through his visions) into the true dwelling place of God. The way into the holiest place was made open to all through the sacrifice of Jesus (Mt 27:51; Heb 9:8; 10:19-22). John's visions give us great insight into what is happening in heaven.

The seven angels appear "...Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests..." (15:6 NIV). There is much textual debate on the rendering of *shining linen*, (*pure bright linen* NKJV), or, *with precious stone, pure and bright* (ASV). The early texts have both renderings. However, fine linen clothes were the clothes that the High Priest wore when he went into the holy of holies, (Lev 16) so fine white linen fits the context under discussion. The dress is priestly, and the golden bands emphasise this.

The angels are each handed a bowl as they proceed from the Heavenly Temple. "...Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever..." (15:7 NIV). The twenty four elders and the four living creatures had "...golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints..." (5:8 NKJV), so there

---

<sup>3</sup> Hailey, p. 320

is a possible connection here between the prayers that have gone up to God, and His response in bringing the His wrath against those who have fought against God and His people. Hailey quotes from Lenski, and notes<sup>4</sup>:

Lenski has well observed that the seven seals reveal, the seven trumpets announce and warn, and the seven bowls execute (p. 461).

God is ready to bring on the judgement of the beast “...*And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed...*” (15:8 NIV). This is a sign that things are ready. The smoke has filled the house – it is a sign of war, and is consistent with similar events from the Old Testament. Hailey notes<sup>5</sup>:

When the tabernacle was erected, the glory of Jehovah filled it, and Moses was not able to enter it (Exod. 40:34f.). Likewise, when Solomon had completed the temple, the glory of Jehovah filled the house, “so that the priests could not stand to minister” (1 Kings 8:10f.). And so now, until the seven plagues would be finished, no one could enter the temple. The smoke from His glory was being vindicated by the smoke of His anger, demonstrated in expressions of His great power.

The New International Bible Commentary adds:

The "smoke" (GK G2837) that filled the temple refers to the Shekinah cloud first associated with the tabernacle and then with the temple (see comment on 7:15). It symbolizes God's special presence and the One who is the source of the judgments (Ex 40:34ff.; 1Ki 8:10-11; Eze 11:23; 44:4). His awesome presence in the temple until the plagues are finished (16:17) prohibits even angels from entering it (cf. Isa 6:4; Hab 2:20). (NIVBC).

The rest of the book reveals the final scenes of the apocalypse. Harkrider<sup>6</sup> says:

From this point to the end of the book all of the participants are presented step by step: (1) the full wrath of God is poured out with the seven bowls, revealed in chapters 15 and 16; (2) the destruction of the great Babylon is described in chapters 17 and 18; (3) praise is given to Christ who led the victory in the battle of the great day of God Almighty, recorded in chapters 19 and 20:1-10; and (4) in conclusion, the final judgement and the beauty of the new heaven and the new earth are portrayed in 20:11-15 and chapters 21 and 22:1-5.

The finality of the judgement that God is about to bring on is evidenced by the statement *no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues were completed*. Harkrider<sup>7</sup> comments:

No one who is ripe for judgement can enter into the sanctuary because the time of repentance has passed. God is longsuffering and gives man opportunity to repent; but once the hour of judgement is come it will be too late to come knocking, for the door to safety will be closed (Matt. 25:10-13).

---

<sup>4</sup> Hailey, p. 324

<sup>5</sup> Hailey, p. 324

<sup>6</sup> Harkrider, p. 172

<sup>7</sup> Harkrider, p. 177