**Revelation**

*Lesson 30 – Revelation 15*

1. Chapter 15 begins the 5th cycle of Revelation. This cycle is composed of 15:1-16:21.
2. Verse 1 – John sees a new vision which he calls a “sign in heaven” and what he sees is 7 angels with 7 plagues. These plagues are said to be the “last” because with them “the wrath of God is finished.”
3. But we just saw that God’s wrath was poured out in Revelation 14 and we saw the end time harvest where the wheat (God’s elect) are reaped in to heaven and the chaff (unbelievers) are reaped into everlasting torment. God’s wrath was completed in Revelation 14 but now we’re back to talking about God’s wrath on unbelievers in Revelation 15. “The full portrait of God’s wrath will have been painted, so to speak, when the vision of the seven bowls is finished.” –Sam Storms
4. The word “last” here in verse 1 refers to the last in the series of visions, not necessarily that these bowls take place at the end of time. It’s last in terms of sequence of visions, not last as in the final judgments at the end of time. So these plagues will also run throughout the period between Christ’s comings just like the trumpets and the seals.
5. Verse 2 – Verses 2-4 are a kind of a parenthetical interlude. Before we actually get to the bowls, we’re going to see worship of the true God. Verse 2 begins with John seeing a “sea of glass mingled with fire.” What is this sea of glass?
6. Exodus 24:10 – “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**” Here the sea of glass is something under the Lord’s feet on which He walks.
7. Revelation 4:6a – “and before the throne there was as it were **a sea of glass, like crystal**.”
8. Ezekiel 1:22 – “Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of **an expanse**, **shining like awe-inspiring crystal**, spread out above their heads.”
9. This sea of glass is God sovereignly keeping under His feet all of His enemies that He has conquered in judgment. Here in Revelation 15 the sea of glass is an image of judgment over God’s enemies recalling God’s defeat of Pharaoh at the Red Sea.
10. Vern Poythress writes, “The Israelites stood on the far shores of the Red Sea and observed the death of their enemies through God’s power. In the last days, victorious saints likewise stand on the far side of their troubles and the persecutions of the Beast.” And just like Moses and the Israelites sang after Pharaoh’s defeat [Exodus 15], so too the saints who have overcome take up a song that is called in verse 3 “the song of Moses” and “the song of the Lamb.”
11. Verses 3-4 – The song begins in verse 3 with a focus on the works of God. His works are described as “great” and “amazing” aka “marvelous” or “wonderful.” In other words, when the saints in heaven see God preparing to pour out his wrath in the final condemnation of the wicked, it creates in them a sense of awe and wonder so that they begin worshipping God.
12. Notice also that the “great and amazing” deeds of God that are worthy of praise match how John describes this vision in verse 1 – “great and amazing.” But not only are the works of God great and amazing, but they are also “just” and “true.” There is no unfairness or injustice with God. Later on Revelation 16:7 which is part of this same cycle will also praise God and describe His works in the same way – “And I heard the altar saying, ‘Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!’” As Vern Poythress puts it, “God’s acts of judgment are never arbitrary or spiteful, but just payment for evil deeds.”
13. Verse 4 says that God’s acts are righteous and that He reveals them. So the first thing this song praises is the acts of God. But this song also praises God Himself. In verse 3, He is called “Almighty” and “King of the nations.” He is adored as “holy” in verse 4, worthy to be feared, and worthy to be worshipped as well.
14. And because He is king of the nations (verse 3), all of the nations will come and worship Him (verse 4). This doesn’t mean everybody is saved as some want to take it. This means that even unbelievers will be forced to submit and acknowledge God as king so that every knee will bow and tongue confess that Jesus is Lord [Roman 14:11; Philippians 2:10]
15. Verses 5-8 – In the final verses of this chapter, the vision shifts to the Temple and the 7 angels carrying the 7 plagues are given 7 bowls which are full of God’s wrath. Again, these judgments originate with God Himself and from His throne room.
16. These 7 angels are described with priestly language of white linens and golden sashes which points to holiness and priestly service before God. These angels are serving as priests in God’s heavenly temple and their description of clothing also closely matches what Jesus is wearing in Revelation 1:13 so that these angels are identified as representatives of Jesus carrying out His will.
17. Leviticus 16:4 – “He shall put on the **holy** **linen coat** and shall have **the linen undergarment** on his body, and he shall tie the **linen sash** around his waist, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water and then put them on.”
18. Following the description of their clothing, the angels are given 7 golden bowls full of God’s wrath. Remember back in Revelation 5:8, the prayers of the saints are described as golden bowls of incense. Revelation 6:9 says the prayers of the saints are coming from the altar asking God to vindicate them and God told them to wait and rest a little longer. Revelation 8:3-5 describes the prayers of the saints as being in a golden censer and the smoke rises before God. Then the censer containing the prayers of saints is filled with fire from God’s golden altar and thrown to the earth. It seems that these bowls in Revelation 15-16 are now God’s finally answering the prayers of the saints and vindicating them.
19. And God’s temple in verse 8 is described as filled with smoke. I think there’s a double meaning here. First, the smoke is the prayers of the saints asking God to vindicate them. This smoke rises before God as I just mentioned in Revelation 8. Second, smoke is associated with the presence of God.
20. Exodus 19:9 – “And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Behold, **I am coming to you in a thick cloud**, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever.’” Exodus 19:16 – “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.” There’s also the pillar of cloud that led the Israelites in the wilderness and that would settle upon the tabernacle whenever Moses went in to meet with the Lord [Exodus 33:9].
21. And God’s dwelling place is so filled with smoke from God’s glorious presence and power that “no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.” Why is nobody able to enter the sanctuary? God’s power and presence hasn’t changed or increase so why the sudden inaccessibility and unapproachability of God? Some have suggested it’s because God’s presence at this time is being revealed only in judgment and wrath. Others suggest that it means it’s too late for any mediator, angel or saint, to present prayers of intercession for God to have mercy on the world.
22. 1 Kings 8:10-11 – “And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, **11**so that **the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud**, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.” 2 Chronicles 5:13c-14 – “the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, **14**so that **the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God**.”

**Message for Us**

1. “Revelation 15:1–4 is a kind of respite that can comfort us when we are distressed by the cares of this life. Trumpets are sounding, foundations are crumbling, nations are in commotion, false prophets are misleading thousands, iniquity is rampant, and persecutions assail us. In such circumstances, drawing near to God and catching even a momentary glimpse of His goodness and greatness, and of the might of His kingdom, is just what we need to reassure us, to strengthen our faith, and to deepen our hold on the hope of glory.” –Joel Beeke
2. “Perhaps you have a loved one who is fighting cancer right now, and it seems as if your prayers for healing are not being answered. You should remember that disease is a part of life in this fallen world. Believers and unbelievers alike get sick. Perhaps your loved one won’t be healed, but will suffer and die. Pain is a part of life in this world. It affects us all. Everything contained in the seven vials in Revelation 15 and 16 affects us all. We must all pass through the Red Sea. The difference is that the Israelites go *through* and *out of* the water, while the Egyptians go *under*. Our comfort as believers is that when we face sickness, bereavement, disappointments, and losses, we will be led through it all by God.” –Joel Beeke
3. “I know there is much that God either does or permits that is confusing to you. You wonder why he strikes down a godly man in his youth and allows the wicked to live a hundred years. You wonder, as I do, why he tolerates one earthly tyrant who persecutes the Church and at the same time brings another crashing down in humiliation and shame. But one day we will see all God’s deeds and we will marvel and declare that everything he has ever done was both just and true!” –Sam Storms
4. “**Is God’s grace still amazing to you?** After hearing in Revelation 14 of the justice of God’s judgment and wrath against a sinful world, are you not shocked and overwhelmed by the reality of his saving grace and mercy, given that you and I only deserve judgment and condemnation? If grace has ceased to be anything less than amazing, it can only be due to your failure to properly grasp the justice of God’s wrath.” –Sam Storms
5. “The smoke of the incense (8:4) going up before God is met, as it were, by the smoke of God’s glory (15:8) coming down from His presence. So much happens between the offering up of the prayers and the answer — much suffering, much persecution, much apparent delay in respite and relief. Yet the certain fact presented here is that God will answer. Often many years pass between the offering of a prayer and its answer. This too involves the faith and perseverance of the saints (14:12) and requires wisdom from God (13:18). **How important it is as we pray to ask God for His perspective, not to mention His patience, in order that we keep on praying and never get discouraged**, at all times remembering Jesus’ instruction that we ‘ought to pray and not to lose heart’ (Luke 18:1).” –Greg Beale