

VICTORIOUS LIFE CHURCH BIBLE STUDY
SERIES: THE BOOK OF REVELATION
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REVELATION 15 – PRELUDE TO THE BOWL JUDGMENTS

Revelation 15

And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God. 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. 3 And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. 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. 5 And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened: 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. 7 And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever. 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.

Revelation 15 is a short chapter, bridging two sections in John's series of visions. After the trumpet judgments, the focus of Revelation changed from a more-or-less chronological account to a description of certain people and events. Among these are infamous concepts such as the woman clothed with the sun, the Antichrist, the False Prophet, and the mark of the beast. Here, John will see one final vision before he is shown the rest of the tribulation judgments, represented by bowls. The first vision John sees here is that of seven angels. These carry the last judgments God will use during the tribulation. The scene is one of celebration, as redeemed believers sing a song of worship to God. This echoes similar songs of praise offered by Israel after their deliverance from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 15). The sea of glass mentioned here is presumably the same one referred to in Revelation 4 (Revelation 15:1–4).

Revelation presents God's final judgments on sin in three groups of seven. The first set of judgments was represented by the opening of seals on a scroll

Revelation 5:1

And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.

The second set was represented by trumpets

6 And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound. (Revelation 8:6).

This last pattern will involve bowls, symbolically filled with the wrath of God. This segment also indicates that the sanctuary in heaven was filled with smoke during this time, preventing anyone from approaching God until the judgments were completed (Revelation 15:5–8). After this brief interlude, Revelation will resume explaining the end-times judgments in chapter 16. There, the catastrophic bowl judgments will begin.

Those victorious over the beast.

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete.

Revelation 14 seemed to describe the consummation of all things, ending with the fury of the Battle of Armageddon. But now John will go back and describe God's judgment in more detail.

This idea of stating and re-stating in more detail is common with prophecy, and with Hebrew literature in general (see Genesis 1:1-2:7 and Genesis 2:8-25).

“As is the plan of the prophet, he reviews, he recapitulates, he enlarges upon the scene he has already sketched.” (Erdman)

Remember, we already saw what seemed to be the end in Revelation 6:12-17.

12 And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; 13 And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. 14 And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. 15 And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; 16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: 17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

Then John took us over the same material in greater detail again. This reminds us that Revelation is not strictly *chronological* in its arrangement.

Seven angels having the seven last plagues: This idea is also in Leviticus 26:21:

Then, if you walk contrary to Me, and are not willing to obey Me, I will bring on you seven times more plagues, according to your sins.

These **seven last plagues** are God's judgment on a disobedient and contrary world. **For in them the wrath of God is complete:** The ancient Greek word for **wrath** is *thymos*. As was the case in Revelation 14:10, there are two words for wrath or anger in Biblical Greek: *thymos* (a volatile, passionate anger) and *orge* (anger from a settled disposition). This is a place where God's anger flashes hot. *Orge* is the more common word for God's anger in the New Testament. *Thymos* is used only 11 times, and 10 of the 11 are in Revelation. It is the book that reveals the judgment of God against a Jesus-rejecting world. **Is complete:** The word **complete** (the ancient Greek word *etelesthe*) means, "to reach an end or an aim." Here, the hot wrath of God will fulfill an eternal purpose. God isn't just blowing off steam.

A multitude on the sea of glass.

And I saw *something like* a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark *and over* the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.

The sea of glass is **mingled with fire**. This may be a reminder of the “fires” of judgment.

“The sea is designed to reflect the glory of God. In chapter 4 its description ‘like unto crystal’ speaks of the holiness of God. Here the sea mingled with fire speaks of divine judgment proceeding from God’s holiness.” (Walvoord)

Because many of the images in this chapter are connected with the Book of Exodus, some simply see an indication of the color red, with it an allusion to the Red Sea and the deliverance from bondage. Also in this chapter we see plagues, Moses, the tabernacle, and the cloud of God’s glory. This chapter shows the ultimate Exodus, the freedom of God’s people from a sinful and persecuting world. **Those who have victory over the beast:** These are those who were victorious over the beast through their faithfulness unto death. They are the tribulation martyrs, described in Revelation 7:9-17. They are not those who *survive* the tribulation. As much as we can discern any sort of chronology from Revelation (which is difficult), we are still very much in the tribulation – the bowl judgments still wait. Therefore, even though the Antichrist kills them, they **have victory over the beast** – they are *not* losers. The early church consistently described the day of martyrdom as “a day of victory.” **Standing on the sea of glass:** The ancient Greek word for **on** (*epi*) can mean *on, over or beside*. Many believe that in the architecture of heaven, the sea of glass is a physical representation of the Word of God, connecting to the idea of the tabernacle’s laver and the *washing of water by the word* (**Ephesians 5:26**).

26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

Perhaps we could say that these saints are *standing on the Word*. **Having harps of God:** The only people seen with **harps** before were the twenty-four elders (**Revelation 5:8**).

8 And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

These tribulation martyrs are given the blessing of worshipping God with music in heaven.

Their song of praise.

They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying:

**“Great and marvelous *are Your* works, Lord God Almighty!
Just and true *are Your* ways, O King of the saints!
Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?
For *You alone are holy*. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested.**

Only one song is sung, but this song goes by two titles (the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb). The two titles refer to a single song. Here is a perfect union between law and love, between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. This song, deeply rooted in the Old Testament, gives praise to:

- God’s works (**Great and marvelous are Your works**).
- God’s ways (**Just and true are Your ways**).
- God’s worthiness (**Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy**).
- God’s worship (**all nations shall come and worship before You**). **Your... Your... You...**

Your... You... You... Your: These martyrs are only focused on God. They did not even focus on their own costly and glorious victory. They have the heart of true worship, understanding that it’s all about *God*, not about us.

Seven angels are given seven bowls of judgment.

(5-6) Seven angels, distinctively clothed.

After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands.

The temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven: Exodus 25:8-9 reminds us that the tabernacle God told Moses to build was based on a heavenly pattern.

Exodus 25:8-9

8 And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. 9 According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.

The **temple of the tabernacle** here refers to the heavenly reality of the **tabernacle**, not the earthly copy. **Out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues:** These angels bring God's judgment. It is significant that they came directly from heavenly temple, from the presence and throne of God. They do not act on their own authority, but God's. **Pure bright linen... their chests girded with golden bands:** Their clothing is a reminder that God's judgment is always completely pure and righteous. They are not like the modern anti-hero or vigilante, who sink down to the level of the criminals they fight.

The bowls are given; the cloud of God's glory fills the temple.

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. The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

These seven **bowls** are broad, flat bowls or saucers used ritually for drinking or for pouring libations in sacrifice. The contents of such a shallow bowl were quickly, easily, and completely poured out. The King James Version says that the angels had *seven golden vials full of the wrath*

of God. The word *vials* is really a poor translation. They are really “shallow, pan-like, golden bowls, or censers, such as were used in the temple to hold the fire when incense was burned.”

(Seiss)

The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power: When the cloud of glory fills the temple in heaven, no one can enter. It was the same when Moses could not enter the Tabernacle when the smoke of the cloud of God’s glory, sometimes called the *Shekinah* filled the tent

Exodus 40:34-35

34 Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 35 And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

Filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power: Both the **bowls** and the cloud came **from the glory of God and from His power.** This is a reminder of God’s special presence and glory, even in the midst of devastating judgment. **No one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed:** This declares that judgment was now irreversible. Nothing could hinder it any longer, because access to this temple in heaven would not long be denied.