

Living Word Fellowship Church

An Expository Explanation of Revelation Chapter 15

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A. Introduction

1. Up through 14:20 only six visions of the sevenfold series have been presented since the beginning of the series in 12:1. The seventh vision does not come in 15:1 but in 15:2–4, as argued earlier (see the introductory comments on ch. 12). The presentation of the seventh vision is interrupted by the introduction of the seven bowl angels in 15:1. However, the new series of judgments is not picked up again until v 5. Therefore, the introduction to the bowl judgments comes between the sixth (14:14–20) and seventh (15:2–4) segments of the preceding sevenfold series. [\[1\]](#)

2. John saw the believers from the Tribulation who had overcome “the beast” and his system. These are the people who “loved not their lives unto the death” (Rev. 12:11). Since they did not cooperate with the satanic system and received the mark of “the beast,” they were unable to buy or sell (Rev. 13:17). They were totally dependent on the Lord for their daily bread. Some were put into prison, and some were slain (Rev. 13:10), but all of them practiced faith and patience. [\[2\]](#)

B. General Description:

1. Seven angels—each having a plague, which all together was described as the seven last plagues—were introduced as the final step in the outpouring of God’s wrath on the earth. This final “sign” relates to the preceding great signs of the woman in 12:1 and the red dragon in 12:3. These seven angels should not be confused with the two groups of three angels in the preceding chapter (14:6–20) or any other previous group of angels. [\[3\]](#)

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of the woman in 12:1 and the red dragon in 12:3. These seven angels should not be confused with the two groups of three angels in the preceding chapter (14:6–20) or any other previous group of angels.^[4]

2. The clear sea of glass that John saw before the throne in 4:6 now has a fiery red hue. The color is ominous, foreboding the coming judgments of fire that will complete God’s wrath (16:8; 18:8; 20:15). The victors find their ultimate deliverance at the sea of glass, just as Israel was delivered through the Red Sea. They have triumphed over the beast, the historical equivalent of the pharaoh.^[5]

3. The phrase “king of saints” can also be read as “king of ages.” God is the eternal King and is also in charge of history. Nothing happens by accident. The singers seek to glorify God and honor Him, the very praise the first angel proclaimed in Revelation 14:7. Antecedents of this song may be found in Psalms 86:9; 90:1–2; 92:5; 98:2; 111:9; and 145:17.^[6]

a) “King of the ages” (NIV) or “of the world” was a common Jewish title for God. Greco-Roman rhetoricians praised gods who were universally recognized, but as Judaism also emphasized, God would be universally and solely worshiped on the final day of judgment (cf. Zech 14:9).^[7]

4. 15:1-4. Chapter 15 is still occupied with introductory matters and a scene in heaven. It presents one of the great songs of the book, this time sung, apparently, by those who have triumphed over the evil forces of the last days, who have come off victorious from the beast, and from his image, and the number of his name (ASV; v. 2). This is called the song of Moses the servant of God, and . . . the Lamb (v. 3; on the former, see Ex 14:31; 15; Num 12:7; Deut 32). “The song in which Moses celebrated the deliverance from Egypt is now renewed and receives its perfect close when God’s people are finally delivered by the Lamb” (Lee). The song is a mosaic of material from Exodus, from the Psalms (86:9; 111:2; 145:17), and from Isaiah (2:2-4; 66:23, etc.)^[8]

a) **15:2.** The saints celebrate their vindication in 15:2–4. Jewish texts often spoke of rivers of fire proceeding from God’s throne, based on Daniel 7:9–10; this image is mingled here with the imagery of the heavenly temple (on the “sea” see comment on Rev 4:6). Their triumph over their oppressor may also suggest another connotation of the “sea”: as Israel delivered from the Egyptians, who were slain in the Red Sea, they offer God praise (15:3–4).^[9]

b) This description of praise to God and prediction of universal worship is in keeping with many other Scriptures and relates, of course, to the second coming of Christ and worship of God by the entire world in the millennial kingdom (Pss. 2:8–9; 24:1–10; 66:1–4; 72:8–11; 86:9; Isa. 2:2–4; 9:6–7; 66:18–23; Jer. 10:7; Dan. 7:14; Zeph. 2:11; Zech. 14:9). The awful hour of wickedness and blasphemy against God, which will characterize the period leading up to the Second Coming, will be followed by a complete vindication of God’s judgment and holiness in the next period.^[10]

c) The victorious saints **sang** with harps **the song of Moses ... and the song of the Lamb.** These may be two separate songs, the first referring to God’s faithfulness to Israel and the second to their present situation in the Great Tribulation. Some, like Walter Scott, refer to the song of Moses in Exodus 15, where Israel triumphed over the Egyptians (*Exposition of Revelation*, p. 315). Others, such as J.B. Smith, suggest that this is the song of Deuteronomy 32, which comprehensively reviews God’s faithfulness to Israel (*A Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 224–25). In this song in Revelation 15:3–4, God is praised for His marvelous deeds, justice, truth (cf. 16:7), glory, and holiness (see 4:8 for a chart of the 14 doxologies in Rev.). Then, a prediction is made that all the nations will worship God.^[11]

· The Tribulation saints whom John saw and heard were standing by the “sea of glass” in heaven (Rev. 4:6), just as the Israelites stood by the Red Sea. They were singing “The Song of Moses” and “The Song of the Lamb.” “The song of Moses” is recorded in Exodus 15, and its refrain is: “The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation” (Ex. 15:2). The 144,000 sang a song that nobody else could sing, but this is a song *all* saints can sing.^[12]

5. This temple is also called the Tabernacle of Testimony, a name that recalls the portable tabernacle that accompanied Israel in the desert (Ex. 38:21; cf. Acts 7:44). The Testimony refers to the two tablets of stone containing the ten commandments that were inscribed by the finger of God (Ex. 31:18). These stones were housed in the ark of the covenant along with the gold jar of manna and Aaron's staff that had budded (Heb. 9:4).^[13]

6. 5-8. John says that he saw the sanctuary of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven (v. 5). This is the last occurrence of the word translated sanctuary in this book (cf. 11:19). Out from this most holy place proceed seven angels, with the seven plagues which are now to be poured out upon the earth, bowls full of the wrath of God (v. 7). Just before this series begins, we are told that the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from His power (v. 8), which recalls to mind the unapproachableness of God at Sinai (Ex 19:21), and in Isaiah's vision (Isa 6:4, 5). The great exegete of a former century, John Albert Bengel, remarked on this passage: "When God pours out His fury, it is fitting that even those who stand well with Him should withdraw for a little, standing back in profound reverence till by and by the sky becomes clear again" (*Introduction to the Exposition of the Apocalypse, in loco*).^[14]

a) Being in the very presence of God is the goal for the exhortations to be "victorious" throughout the book. "God's Tabernacle" in heaven (15:5) is the true tabernacle after which the earthly one was patterned (Heb. 8:5; 9:23-24). In Revelation 15:5-8 the temple is opened, the four living creatures again appear (cf. 4:6), and the temple becomes unapproachable in God's judgment glory (cf. Isa. 66:6). Judgment is an expression of God's righteous character (15:4; 16:7; 19:2). This chapter evokes images from the Exodus: the plagues, the sea, the song of Moses, the tabernacle of testimony, and smoke.^[15]

7. The golden bowls in 5:8 and 8:3-5 are full of incense, representing the saints' prayers . This second set of golden bowls has a different function in earthly and heavenly temple rituals. The use of the verb "pour out" in chapter 16 suggests that they are not censers but libation bowls. Moses made such sprinkling bowls for use at the altar of burnt offerings (Ex. 27:3; Num. 4:14). For worship in the temple, Solomon had a hundred gold sprinkling bowls made for holding wine, which often accompanied sacrifices to God (2 Chron. 4:8; Hos. 9:4). These

libation bowls now function as cups containing the wine of God's wrath (Rev. 14:10; 16:19).^[16]

8. When this was done, smoke filled the temple, making it impossible for anyone to enter it until the seven plagues were poured out on the earth (cf. Ex. 40:34–35). Taken as a whole, Revelation 15:5–8 presents a fearful picture of impending divine judgment on a wicked world. The judgments which are to be poured out (chap. 16) fully justify this ominous introduction.^[17]

9. The “loud voice” out of the temple commands the seven angels to pour out the contents of their vials (**Rev. 16:1**), after which he announces, “It is done!” (Rev. 16:17) The “mystery of God” is finished! (Rev. 10:7). The martyrs in glory had asked, “How long?” (Rev. 6:9–11), and now their cry would be answered.^[18]

^[1] Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 784). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

^[2] Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 2, pp. 608–609). Victor Books.

^[3] Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 965). Victor Books.

^[4] Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 965). Victor Books.

^[5] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [*Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*](#). (Vol. 4, p. 336). Zondervan.

^[6] Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 609). Victor Books.

[7] Keener, C. S. (1993). [The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament](#) (Re 15:3–4). InterVarsity Press.

[8] Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). [The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament](#) (Re 15:1). Moody Press.

[9] Keener, C. S. (1993). [The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament](#) (Re 15:2). InterVarsity Press.

[10] Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 966). Victor Books.

[11] Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 966). Victor Books.

[12] Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 2, p. 609). Victor Books.

[13] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation](#). (Vol. 4, pp. 337–338). Zondervan.

[14] Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). [The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament](#) (Re 15:5). Moody Press.

[15] Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). [Tyndale concise Bible commentary](#) (p. 745). Tyndale House Publishers.

[16] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation](#). (Vol. 4, p. 338). Zondervan.

[17] Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 966). Victor Books.

[18] Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 2, p. 609). Victor Books.