

Chapter 15

Introduction: "THEME: Preparation for final judgment of the Great Tribulation

In this chapter we have another sign in heaven, seven angels with the seven last plagues. Chapters 15 and 16 belong together because they describe the pouring out of the seven bowls of wrath. We have already seen seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven personalities. Chapter 15, is the preface to the final series of judgments which come on the earth during the Great Tribulation. These judgments are the most intense and devastating.

The purpose of the Great Tribulation is judgment. It is not for the purifying of the church! These angels begin to pour out their bowls of wrath." McGee

15:1-4 "The more we know of God's wonderful works, the more we shall praise his greatness as the Lord God Almighty, the Creator and Ruler of all worlds; but his title of Emmanuel, the King of saints, will make him dear to us. Who that considers the power of God's wrath, the value of his favour, or the glory of his holiness, would refuse to fear and honour him alone? His praise is above heaven and earth." Matthew Henry

15:1, *And I saw another sign in heaven*, - Καὶ εἶδον ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ - "And I saw" assures us that John is still a spectator to these events. *In the first four verses we see that the Tribulation saints in heaven worship God because He is holy and just. This is an interlude. This will bring us to the end of the Great Tribulation period.* McGee

"Another sign" connects this chapter with Revelation 12:1, the first sign which, in the opening of chapter 12, was Israel. These seven angels of wrath are connected with the judgments to follow until Christ comes (see ch. 19). From chapter 12 to the return of Christ is a series of events which are related. They are not chronological but rather a logical order of retracing the same events with added detail.

great and marvellous, - μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν -

seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God. - ἄγγέλους ἑπτὰ ἔχοντας πληγὰς ἑπτὰ τὰς ἐσχάτας, ὅτι ἐν αὐταῖς ἐτελέσθη ὁ θυμὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ.

"The wrath of God" marks the final judgment of the Great Tribulation. God has been slow to anger, but here He judges. Judgment in the final stages of the Day of Wrath proceeds from God, not from Satan or the wild Beast. It comes directly from the throne of God.

15:2, **And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire:** - Καὶ εἶδον ὡς θάλασσαν ὑαλίνην μεμιγμένην πυρί -

"sea mingled with fire" represents the frightful persecution by the Beast during the Great Tribulation period. This is the period of time, as we have seen, where no man could buy or sell unless he had the mark of the Beast. It is going to be very difficult to get things to eat or drink in that day. That is the reason the Lord Jesus, speaking of this period in His Olivet Discourse, said that whoever would give a cup of cold water in His name would not lose his reward. You see, anyone in that day who would give even a cup of cold water to one of the 144,000 would put his life in jeopardy because the Beast would put him to death for harboring what he would classify as a criminal.

and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, - καὶ τοὺς νικῶντας ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου

and over his image, - καὶ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνας αὐτοῦ -

and over his mark, - καὶ ἐκ τοῦ χαράγματος αὐτοῦ -

and over the number of his name, - ἐκ τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ -

stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. - ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν τὴν ὑαλίνην, ἔχοντας κιθάρας τοῦ Θεοῦ. -

Here are the Tribulation saints who have come through the fires of persecution on the earth and yet have not lost their song. They have the harps of God, and in the next couple of verses we will see that they are able to sing. H. B. Swete puts it, "*the martyrs have come safely through the sea of martyrdom and have arrived at the shore of heaven.*"

There is something very significant here. The martyrs died the most savage deaths and yet they are said to have emerged victorious. It was the very fact that they had died that made them victors; if they had remained alive by being false to their faith, they would have been the defeated. Again and again the records of the early church describe a day of martyrdom as a day of victory. In the record of the martyrdom of Saint Perpetua we read: "*The day of their victory dawned, and they walked from prison to the amphitheater as if they were walking to heaven, happy and serene in countenance.*" Jesus said: "*Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it*" (Matt 16:25). The real victory is not prudently to preserve life but to face the worst that evil can do and if need be to be faithful to death." Barclay

*It is remarkable to see that these Tribulation saints who have lived through the horror of the Great Tribulation have kept their song!

Unanswered yet? Faith cannot be unanswered.

If these saints can come through the Great Tribulation and still sing, you and I certainly ought to have a song in our hearts regardless of our circumstances.

"The psalmist wrote, *"For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favor is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning"* (Ps. 30:5). I have learned over the years that God will never let anyone cross your pathway, not even an enemy, unless it will teach you a lesson. He permits it for a purpose, for the development of your character. We need to be in prayer that we not fall into the trap of Satan and lose the joy of our salvation." McGee

15:3, **And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God**, - καὶ ᾄδουσι τὴν ᾠδὴν Μωσέως τοῦ δούλου τοῦ Θεοῦ -

Song of Moses: "The victorious martyrs sing two songs. They sing the song of the Lamb which, as we have seen, is the song which they alone could learn (Rev 14:3). They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God. This was the song which Moses sang in triumph to God after the safe crossing of the Red Sea. *"The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.... Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods, who is like thee, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?... The Lord will reign for ever and ever."* This song was stamped upon the memory of the Jews. It was sung at every Sabbath evening service in the synagogue. At every Jewish service the recital of the Shema, the creed of Israel, was followed by two prayers and one of these prayers refers to this song: *'True it is that thou art Jehovah our God, and the God of our fathers, our King, and the King of our fathers, our Saviour, and the Saviour of our fathers, our Creator, the Rock of our Salvation, our Help and our Deliverer. Thy name is from everlasting, and there is no God beside thee. A new song did they that were delivered sing to thy name by the sea-shore; together did all praise and own thee King, and say, Jehovah shall reign, world without end! Blessed be the Lord who saveth Israel.'* The song of Moses commemorated the greatest deliverance in the history of God's people Israel, and the victorious martyrs, brought through the sea of persecution to the promised land of heaven, sing that song.

Cf. Exodus 15:1-21; Deuteronomy 32:1-43. Both songs speak of God's deliverance, salvation, and faithfulness. "The song of the Lamb" is the ascription of praise to Christ as the Redeemer. We have seen that in Revelation 5:9-12.

But the martyrs have their own song. Two things stand out about it. It is almost entirely composed of quotations from the Old Testament. Ps 92:5; 111:2; Ps 98:1; Ps 139:14; Ps 145:17; 86:9; 99; 111:9; 86:9; 98:2; I Sam. 2:2.

*There is not one single word in it about their own achievement; from beginning to end the song is an outburst regarding the greatness of God. Heaven is a place where men forget themselves and remember only God. R. H. Charles states, *"In the perfect vision of God self is wholly forgotten."*

Swete states, "In the presence of God the martyrs forget themselves; their thoughts are absorbed by the new wonders that surround them; the glory of God and the mighty scheme of things in which their own sufferings form an infinitesimal part are opening before them; they begin to...hear the doxology with which they greet their first unclouded vision of God and his works."

and the song of the Lamb, saying, - καὶ τὴν ᾠδὴν τοῦ ἀρνίου, λέγοντες, -

Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; - Μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά τὰ ἔργα σου, Κύριε ὁ Θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ -

just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. - δίκαιαι καὶ ἀληθιναὶ αἱ ὁδοὶ σου, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἁγίων.

The Book of Revelation is Christ-centered. Don't let the four horsemen carry you away, or be distracted by the blowing of the trumpets. Don't let your interest center on these bowls of wrath. Let's keep our eyes centered on Christ. He is in charge; He is the Lord. In this book we have the unveiling of Jesus Christ in His holiness, in His power, and in His glory. The Man Christ Jesus is wonderful and powerful as Almighty God!

"King of the ages" has two other renderings, King of saints and King of the nations. Any rendering indicates that Christ will be the object of universal worship and acknowledgment. There will be no place where He will not be worshiped.

15:4, **Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name?** - τίς οὐ μὴ φοβηθῆ ἔσε, Κύριε, καὶ δοξάσῃ τὸ ὄνομά σου; -

for thou only art holy: - ὅτι μόνος ὁσιος -

for all nations shall come and worship before thee; - ὅτι πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἤξουσι καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιόν σου, -

for thy judgments are made manifest. - ὅτι τὰ δικαιώματά σου ἐφανερώθησαν.

The day will come when nations will come and worship before the Lord Jesus Christ.

Psalm 2:8 we read, "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen [nations] for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession."

And in Isaiah 11:9: "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."

Jer. 23:5 *"Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth."*

Philippians 2:9-11 "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

"For thy righteous acts were made manifest." God is right in all that He does.

"For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright" (Ps. 11:7).

"O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever...He poureth contempt upon princes, and causeth them to wander in the wilderness, where there is no way...The righteous shall see it, and rejoice: and all iniquity shall stop her mouth"

15:5, *And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened:* - Καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ, ἡνοίγη ὁ ναὸς τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ·

"The "temple" is referred to fifteen times in the Book of Revelation. Its prominence cannot be ignored. In the first part of Revelation, through chapter 3, the church is the subject and there is no mention of a temple. Beginning with chapter 4 the scene shifts to heaven, and we see the temple in heaven; also there is a temple on earth patterned after the one in heaven. There is no temple in New Jerusalem where the church is going. Why? Because the church is not identified with a temple. This fact makes it abundantly clear that, beginning with chapter 4, God is dealing with people who have had a temple, and only to Israel had God given a temple, patterned after the one in heaven. In this instance, the reference is specifically to the tabernacle and the Holy of Holies in which the ark of the testimony was kept. In the ark were the tables of stone. Both the tabernacle and the tables of stone were duplicates of originals in heaven. Cf. Heb. 9:23; Rev. 11:19

15:6, *And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues*, - και ἐξῆλθον οἱ ἑπτὰ ἄγγελοι ἔχοντες τὰς ἑπτὰ πληγὰς ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ, -

clothed in pure and white linen, - ἐνδεδυμένοι λίνον καθαρὸν καὶ λαμπρὸν, -

and having their breasts girded with golden girdles. - καὶ περιεζωσμένοι περὶ τὰ στήθη ζώνας χρυσαῖς.

Angels: Previously, seven angels blew on seven trumpets. Here is the new series of seven angels who have the seven plagues of the seven bowls of wrath. The departure of the angels from the temple demonstrates that they depart from the throne of mercy, and now God acts in justice instead of in mercy.

"*Clothed in linen*." Their garments as studded and set with precious stones. Though their garments identify them in a priestly activity, they forsake that work of mercy for plagues of judgment.

15:7, *And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels* - καὶ ἓν ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων ἔδωκε τοῖς ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλοις -

seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever. - ἑπτὰ φιάλας χρυσαῖς γεμούσας τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων.

Again, let me call your attention to the repetition of the number seven. I sometimes hear it said that seven is the number of perfection, but is really the number of completeness, and sometimes completeness is perfection. For example, in six days God created heaven and earth and rested on the seventh day -- not only because it was complete, but because it was perfect. But here in the Revelation the series of sevens denotes a completion.

15:8, *And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God*, - καὶ ἐγεμίσθη ὁ ναὸς καπνοῦ ἐκ τῆς δόξης τοῦ Θεοῦ, -

and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, - καὶ ἐκ τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ· καὶ οὐδεὶς ἠδύνατο εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὸν ναόν, -

till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled. - ἄχρι τελεσθῶσιν αἱ ἑπτὰ πληγαὶ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλων.

"*The sanctuary (temple) was filled with smoke from the glory of God*." The very fact that this section continues to deal with the temple ought to indicate to anyone who is knowledgeable that the church is not involved. Neither the temple nor the tabernacle had anything to do with the church. They present marvelous pictures of Christ which have spiritual applications for us today, but that does not mean that the church should build a

temple or a tabernacle.

The *seven golden vials* represent the final part of the Great Tribulation period. These seven angels with priestly garments, having departed from the temple proper, are no longer engaged in a service of mercy but are beginning a strange ministry of pouring out bowls of wrath on a Christ-rejecting world.

A world that has rejected the blood of Christ must bear the judgment for sin. The prophets of the Old Testament used the figure of the cup of iniquity and wrath filling up and spoke of God's patience in waiting for it to fill. Then, when it is full, God moves in judgment.