

## THE REVELATION TO JOHN

### THE THINGS FUTURE, REVELATION 4 - 22

#### INTRODUCTION

- The seven bowl judgments which were introduced by the seventh trumpet in chapter 11, are now about to take place. These seven bowls are an expansion of the seventh trumpet. These judgments are poured out rapidly just prior to the establishment of the millennial kingdom.
- Thomas Constable, *John recorded what he saw in this chapter in order to further heighten his readers' expectation for the climactic judgments of the Great Tribulation that we read about in chapter 16 (cf. 8:1–5). This chapter (15) continues supplementary revelation begun in 12:1 and the emphasis on preparation for the final judgments of the Great Tribulation begun in 14:1.*
- George Raymond Beasley-Murray, ... it is not the image of a domestic bowl which John wished to conjure up in our minds, but the cup of God's wrath, of which the prophets frequently spoke and to which John himself has already referred (in 14:8 and 10).
- Charles Swindoll, *Before recording the appalling visions of the seven bowls of wrath in chapter 16, John describes a snapshot scene of coming judgment (15:1), a glorious scene of triumphant joy (15:2–4), and a dreadful scene of wrathful doom (15:5–8).*

#### THE SEVEN BOWLS, REVELATION 15:1-8

- A. The arrival of seven angels with seven plagues (1), *Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.*
1. Introductory notes
    - a. Thomas Constable, *"Then I saw" (Gr. kai idou) again introduces a new scene, this time in heaven (cf. 13:1, 11; 14:1, 6, 14; 15:2, 5). The sign (symbolic forewarning) that John saw here signified, announced, and introduced God's last judgments on earth-dwellers during the Tribulation (cf. 12:1, 3). The previous signs were the woman (12:1) and the dragon (12:3).*
    - b. Charles Ryrie, *As with the trumpet judgments, angels are employed in the execution of these seven last plagues. When they have been poured out on earth, then the "wrath" (literally, "anger") of God is finished.*
    - c. John Walvoord, *The three signs taken together represent important elements in the prophetic scene: (1) Israel, that is, the woman; (2) the final world empire under the control of Satan and the beast, that is, the great red dragon; and (3) the seven angels having the seven last plagues, that is, the divine judgment upon the satanic system and political power of the beast.*
  2. *seven angels with seven plagues*
    - a. Thomas Constable, *This sign, however, was both great and marvelous, meaning especially awesome. It is awesome because it signifies the climax of the outpouring of God's wrath on nature, humankind, the dragon, and the two beasts. The sign itself is the seven angels who had seven plagues.*
    - b. John Walvoord, *Central in the vision given to John are seven angels, apparently another group of seven angels not to be confused with any other group of seven, as the article is not used with the expression. This new group of seven angels is described as having the seven last plagues ... That they are described as the last plagues shows that they are the final judgments preceding the second coming itself.*
    - c. Charles Swindoll, *These judgments are not long, drawn-out epidemics like influenza or HIV. Rather, these plagues come with sudden impact—swift, severe, destructive, and fierce.*
  3. *The wrath of God*
    - a. John Walvoord, *In view is not divine wrath as an attitude, but divine judgment as the expression of God's wrath ... the anger of God is the preliminary expression, the wrath of God is the final expression of divine righteousness.*
    - b. Charles Swindoll, ... *the seven bowl judgments will be the last expression of God's wrath toward the inhabitants of the earth. They will climax at the Battle of Armageddon and the return of Christ.*
    - c. Grant Osborne, *We must remember that a holy God is not only loving but just. When his justice is mocked and flaunted, he must respond with wrath. Sin demands judgment; it must be destroyed.*

B. The singing of Tribulation martyrs (2-4)

1. A description of their location (2), ***And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands.***
  - a. Charles Ryrie, *John saw as it were “a sea of glass mixed with fire.” ... perhaps referring to the fiery persecution these people had suffered under the Beast ... These martyrs are in heaven, not in purgatory, and they are singing (15:3), an activity that would be impossible if their souls were asleep between physical death and resurrection (cf. also 6:9-11).*
  - b. Thomas Constable, *The fire suggests the judgment that was about to come. Another view is that the fiery sea represents the persecution by the beast during the Tribulation ... Those who had been victorious over the beast who were standing on this sea appear to be the Tribulation martyrs (6:9–11; 7:9–17; 12:11; 14:1–5, 13) ... They had overcome the beast, his image, and the number of his name—three specific entities that combine to heighten appreciation for their victory ... Harps connote dedication to the service of God (1 Chron. 16:42; cf. Rev. 5:8; 14:2).*
  - c. John Walvoord, *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. The fact that the saints are able to stand upon it reflects the faithfulness of God in upholding His own in keeping with His divine character ... The harpers’ [the same group described in 7:9-17] privileged position before the throne contributing to the heavenly harmony of the chorus of the redeemed is their reward for refusing to worship the beast, receive his mark, bow to his image, or be identified with his number ...*
  - d. Charles Swindoll, *The redeemed standing on the sea of glass chose faithfulness to Christ—a foolish decision in the midst of unparalleled persecution. But to quote the famous line of missionary and martyr Jim Elliot, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.”*
  - e. William Barclay, *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 even to death.*
  - f. It has been recorded of the death of Perpetua (a married noblewoman, with a newborn. She was killed along with her slave girl Felicity, who also had just given birth, and others at Carthage), *The day of their victory dawned, and they walked from prison to the amphitheatre as they were walking to heaven, happy and serene in countenance.*
2. They sang two songs (3-4), ***And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”***
  - a. *the song of Moses . . . the song of the Lamb*
    - 1) Charles Ryrie, *The substance of both songs is the mighty works of God.*
    - 2) Thomas Constable, *Moses recorded two songs in praise of God’s faithfulness and deliverance of the Israelites. Of these, the one in Exodus 15 seems slightly more appropriate, for these martyrs to echo than the one in Deuteronomy 32, because it is a song of victory. Nevertheless, they both contain similar emphases ... The song of the Lamb seems to be a song not recorded elsewhere in Scripture, though some commentators have suggested several different Psalms as its basis. This song may be the one that follows in verses 3–4.*
    - 3) Mark Hitchcock, *In this chapter a heavenly choir, consisting of Tribulation martyrs, sings “the song of Moses” (verse 3). What is this song? There are two main songs of Moses in the Old Testament that could fit the context of Revelation 15, and they appear in Deuteronomy 32 and Exodus 15 . . . While either one could be in view, I favor Exodus 15 as the song of Moses in this context for two reasons: 1. Deuteronomy 32 deals with God’s punishment of Israel for unfaithfulness, while Exodus 15 focuses on god’s punishment of the wicked and the deliverance of His people. 2. The similarity in Revelation 15 between the seven bowl judgments and the plagues of Egypt points to the Exodus setting. The entire scene is reminiscent of what took place in Exodus.*
    - 4) William Barclay, *They sing the song of the Lamb, which, as we have seen, is the song which only they could learn (14:3).*
    - 5) Grant Osborne, *This song of Moses is also a “song of the Lamb” because the final victory was won by Christ on the cross, and that is the true exodus—deliverance for all eternity from the power of sin by the blood of Christ.*

b. Comments

- 1) Thomas Constable, *The song that follows seems to be one that combines the sentiments expressed in the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. The first part of the song extols God's works and ways. Specifically, God's works in judging His enemies are in view. His might makes His judgment possible. His ways of judging are just and faithful. His sovereignty makes His judgment necessary and certain.*
- 2) J. Ramsey Michaels, *Quite clearly, it is not a song about Moses or about the Lamb, but the song of both jointly about the Lord God Almighty, celebrating the power and justice of the God of Israel and "King of the nations" (v. 3 NRSV) and introducing the last series of God's righteous judgments.*
- 3) William Barclay, ... *the martyrs have their own song. Two things stand out about it. (1) It is almost entirely composed of quotations from the Old Testament. We set down first the words in the song and below them the Old Testament passages of which they remind us. (2) There is another thing which must strike anyone about the song of the triumphant martyrs. There is not one single word in it about their own achievement; from beginning to end, the song is a lyrical outburst on the greatness of God.*
- 4) Charles Swindoll, *Both songs praise God for who He is and what He has done. He is God the Almighty, the Righteous and true King, who alone is holy. His works are great and marvelous, His ways just, and He is worthy of worship by all nations. This passage points to a profound truth about worship. Whether the songs are old or new, the purpose of worship is to glorify God for His awesome Person and awe-inspiring works.*
- 5) Warren Wiersbe, *Revelation 15:4 is another anticipation of the kingdom, foretelling the time when all nations shall worship the Lamb and obey Him. This verse also announces that God's judgments are about to be manifested.*

c. Contents of the songs

- 1) *great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty!*
  - a) Psalm 92:5, *How great are your works, O Lord!*
  - b) Psalm 111:2, *Great are works of the Lord;*
  - c) Grant Osborne, *The same great deeds that took place in Exodus 15:1 when he hurled horse and rider into the sea have occurred again when he hurled Satan out of heaven and will take place when he hurls the enemies of his saints into eternal punishment.*
- 2) *just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!*
  - a) Psalm 145:17, *The Lord is just in all his ways, and kind in all his doings.*
  - b) Psalm 119:137, *Righteous are you, O LORD, and right are your rules.*
  - c) Charles Ryrie, *This attribute is particularly relevant in relation to the outpouring of these judgments ... the kingship is about to be exercised, for the setting up of the kingdom on the earth is imminent;*
  - d) Some manuscripts have *the ages* instead of *the nations*.
  - e) John Walvoord, *He is just, in that He is perfectly righteous. He is true, in that He keeps His promises ... God, the sovereign ruler of all men, is shortly to manifest this sovereignty and divine judgment to the wicked world.*
  - f) Warren Wiersbe, *God is the eternal King, but He is also in charge of history. Nothing happens by accident.*
- 3) *who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name?*
  - a) Psalm 66:4, *All the earth worships you and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your name."*
  - b) Psalm 86:9, *All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O Lord; and shall glorify your name.*
  - c) Thomas Constable, *It is inevitable that everyone will fear God and glorify Him. The rhetorical questions make this crystal clear (cf. 13:4). This will happen after He finishes judging (cf. Ps. 86:8–10; Jer. 10:7).*
  - d) John Walvoord, *Though the nations neither fear God nor glorify Him in their mad unbelief during the great tribulation, the day is to come soon when they will both fear Him and be forced to acknowledge Him as God.*
  - e) Grant Osborne, *When a person truly comes to understand God's sovereignty and power, fear is the natural response.*
- 4) *you alone are holy*
  - a) 1 Samuel 2:2, *There is no Holy One like the Lord.*
  - b) Psalm 111:9, *Holy and awesome is his name.*
  - c) Charles Ryrie, *He is holy, and for this reason people should fear and glorify Him (cf. 14:7);*
  - d) Thomas Constable, *One reason for this fear and glory is God's unapproachable majesty (Gr. *hosios*), which is associated with His holiness ("You alone are holy").*
  - e) Grant Osborne, *God is ultimate holiness, and that defines his true character.*

- 5) *All the nations will come and worship you,*
  - a) Psalm 86:9, *All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O Lord; and shall glorify your name.*
  - b) Psalm 65:2 *O you who hear prayer, to you shall all flesh come.*
  - c) Charles Ryrie, *He will be worshiped by the nations, again referring to the time of the establishment of the kingdom.*
  - d) Thomas Constable, *Everyone (“all the nations”) will worship God when Christ returns, because He will have purged the earth.*
  - e) Grant Osborne, *One of the purposes of the seals, trumpets, and bowls is to disprove the earthly gods and call the people to repentance, to make them realize they must choose between the God of mercy and the God of judgment.*
  
- 6) *your righteous acts have been revealed,*
  - a) Psalm 98:2, *The Lord has made known his victory, he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.*
  - b) Psalm 96:3, *Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!*
  - c) Thomas Constable, *God will reveal His righteous acts when He judges the earth.*
  - d) Grant Osborne, *It celebrates the revelation of God’s righteous deeds in pouring out his judgments and through them calling the nations to repentance, thereby resulting in the salvation of many (as in 11:13).*
  - e) H. B. Swete, *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 see the great issue of the world-drama, and we hear the doxology with which they greet their first unclouded vision of God and his works.*

C. The seven angels emerge from the sanctuary (5-8)

1. Their purpose (5-6a), ***After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues,***
  - a. Charles Ryrie, *A new vision opens that involves the commissioning of the outpouring of these plagues. It is a vision of the temple in heaven and particularly of the “tabernacle of the testimony” - that is, the Holy of Holies. It is opened to reveal seven angels coming out. This emphasizes that the judgments of God demonstrate and vindicate His holiness since they come out of the sanctuary itself.*
  - b. Thomas Constable, *The tabernacle of testimony refers to the temple as the building that housed God’s law, which the earth-dwellers had constantly disregarded. God was now going to hold them to it and judge them by it.*
  - c. John Walvoord, *It is described as “the tabernacle of the testimony” because of the presence of the tables of stone containing the ten commandments which were placed in the ark of the testimony in the Holy of Holies (cf. Exodus 32:15; Acts 7:44) and is mentioned frequently in the Old Testament (Exodus 38:21; Num. 1:50, 53; 10:11; 17:7-8; 18:2) ... The angels coming out of the sanctuary indicate that the judgments to be poured out stem from the holiness of God . . .*
  - d. William Barclay, *... these angels come out from the place where the law of God rests and come to show that no individual or nation can defy the law of God without having to suffer the consequences.*
  - f. Charles Swindoll, *Unlike the earthly temple, however, the “most holy place” or “holy of holies” in the heavenly temple was open ... For the saints in heaven nothing obscures God’s glory. For believers the heavenly tabernacle is a temple of unhindered access to God, but for unbelievers that same tabernacle becomes a temple of doom.*
  
2. Their dress (6b), ***clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests.***
  - a. John Walvoord, *The holy place, into which the high priests alone could go and only after proper sacrifices, does not exclude holy angels who have no sin. Each of the angels is carrying one of the vials containing the seven plagues and is described as being clothed in pure white linen and girded with a golden girdle.*
  - b. Thomas Constable, *The angels’ clean linen garments represent holiness and righteousness (cf. 19:8, 14), and their golden sashes identify them as important agents (cf. 1:13). Their clothing befits their purpose, which is to purify the earth.*
  - c. William Barclay, *They are clothed in a shining white robe and have golden girdles round their chests. The robes of the angels are symbolic of three things. (1) Their form of dress is priestly ... (2) Their form of dress is royal ... (3) Their form of dress is from heaven.*

3. A living creature delivers the bowls to the angels (7), ***And 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,***
  - a. Charles Ryrie, *To these angels comes one of the four living ones with “seven golden bowls” of these last judgments. ... The bowls contain the wrath, or anger, of God . . .*
  - b. Charles Swindoll, *One of the four living creatures mentioned in chapters 4–6 handed each of them a bowl “full of the wrath of God” (15:7) . . . These bowls of wrath also begin to answer the age-old question of why the wicked seem to go unpunished while the righteous suffer injustice. The truth is that God’s mercy during the tribulation delayed the full measure of judgment to give people an opportunity to repent (2 Peter 3:9). But we must never presume on God’s mercy. Judgment postponed is not the same as judgment denied.*
  - c. Thomas Constable, *It is interesting that God also described the prayers of the saints as being held in golden bowls (5:8). Those prayers are thus connected with the outpouring of these judgments in an implied cause and effect relationship . . . The reference to the living God who lives forever and ever adds more solemnity to an already solemn scene (cf. 10:6; Deut. 32:40; Heb. 10:31).*
  - d. John Walvoord, *The extent of the divine judgment is indicated by the word full indicating the devastating character of this divine judgment.*
  - e. Grant Osborne, *Here the living creature acts as an emissary of God and gives each angel a golden bowl, possibly the same censer from the table of showbread we saw in 5:8. This signifies 1) that the outpouring of judgment is a sacred offering to God; and 2) that the action comes as a result of the prayers of the saints from 5:8; 6:9–11; and 8:3–5. The golden bowls link divine retribution with the prayers for vindication.*
  
4. The sanctuary was filled with God’s glory (8), ***and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.***
  - a. Charles Ryrie, *... until they are poured out no one can enter the temple because of the “smoke” (probably a symbol of the judgment connected with these plagues, as in Ex. 19:18; Isa. 6:4). Certainly the smoke adds to the total picture of the terror of these imminent judgments.*
  - b. Thomas Constable, *No one could enter God’s presence until He had finished judging the earth-dwellers. This is another indication of the climactic nature of these judgments.*
  - c. John Walvoord, *Access into the sanctuary is made impossible by the smoke until the judgments contained in the seven plagues are fulfilled. It is an ominous sign of impending doom for those who persist in their blasphemous disregard of the sovereignty and holiness of God.*
  - d. Charles Swindoll, *As in the days of Moses, after the earthly tabernacle was completed (Ex. 40:33–35), the heavenly tabernacle was consumed by the glorious holy presence of God. Similarly, when Isaiah witnessed the Lord sitting on His throne, “lofty and exalted” (Isa. 6:1), he saw the heavenly temple “filling with smoke” (6:4).*
  - e. Grant Osborne, *Judgment is closely linked with the presence, glory, and power of God, and these are all connoted by the bowl judgments.*

<b>SUMMARY</b>
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- John Walvoord, *The judgments which are to be poured out (chap. 16) fully justify this ominous introduction.*
- Thomas Constable, *This chapter is really more of a prelude to chapter 16 than a conclusion to chapters 12–14 ... Chapter 15 is similar to 8:1 in that it prepares for the next set of judgments, in this case the bowls. It prepares the stage for the resumption of the chronological progression of events on earth that had ended temporarily in 11:19.*
- Grant Osborne, *This chapter signifies not only judgment but the celebration of the saints over the victory, namely the saving deeds of Almighty God as he rids the world of sin and redeems his people. “All nations will come”—finally, a racial reconciliation that will last for eternity! Divine judgment is an essential part of God’s majesty and of his saving work.*