The Book of Revelation

Zanesville, OH | Wednesday/Sunday Bible Study

**Chapter 15**

* **15:1-4– Victory over the Beast and Doxology**
  + The events of chapter 15 reiterate the victory of chapter 14 with a doxology to God all while anticipating the pouring out of the seven bowls of wrath in chapter 16. The seven angels that come forth from God’s presence will execute His wrath on the earth-dwellers in chapter 16 via the seven bowls.
  + **Verse 1**– John sees another great sign (cf. 12:1-3) which produces a response of awe. He sees seven angels having seven plagues which are the fullness of the wrath of God. This scene introduces what will further be talked about in vv. 5-8 and later in chapter 16.
  + Seven angels and seven plagues denote a sense of completeness and totality in terms of God’s wrath/judgment. The judgment within the seven seals and seven trumpets were partial and not total. Therefore, the seven bowls represent total and complete judgment indicated by the phrases: *“which are the last”* and *“wrath of God is finished.”*
  + This is the third and final “seven” in the series related to judgment. The seals and trumpets have sort of paved the way for the seven plagues/bowls. The word “plague” itself points to the reality of destruction and desolation (cf. Ex. 7-12; Rev. 9:18, 20; 11:6).
  + These particular “plagues” do not only occur at the end of human history. God incites these plagues throughout human history to destroy and leave in complete desolation those who are His enemies. This will find its greatest fulfillment at the consummation.
  + **Verse 2**– John sees a sea of glass mixed with fire (cf. 4:6) and those who are victorious over the beast standing on it holding harps of God. The harps no doubt reference praise to God (cf. 5:8). There are a couple of options as to what the sea of glass mixed with fire is.
  + It may refer to the state of the saints in the presence of God after they have gone through fiery trials (Zech. 13:9; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 1 Pet. 1:7). It may also refer to the saints in God’s presence and the fire is used to hint at the judgment to follow in chapter 16.
  + Another possibility is that this is a way of describing the victory of God and His people over their enemies. The “sea” is a way of referring to evil (cf. 13:1; 21:1) and this comes primarily from the OT story of the Red Sea and how God conquered the Egyptians in the water. God swallowed up the evil in the sea.
  + Several OT scriptures use the “sea” to talk about this idea of God defeating evil and redeeming His people with reference to Egypt (Psa. 74:12-14; Isa. 51:9-11; Ezek. 32:2). And because the “plagues” spoken of in chapter 15 to be executed in chapter 16 is similar to the plagues in Egypt, this idea seems to be well supported.
  + Furthermore, the fire mixed with the sea points to God’s judgment over the oppressors of His people. In a state of victory, the saints are pictured as conquerors since they stand on the sea (on their enemies) because of the blood of the Lamb and their faith/perseverance in Him (Rom. 8:37).
  + **Verses 3-4**– In v. 3, just as Moses is pictured as praising God for their deliverance from Egypt and their oppressors through the Red Sea (Ex. 15:1-20), even so the true Israel is pictured as offering up songs of praise and thanksgiving to God.
  + Just as Moses led the Israelites to safety because of the power of God, even so Jesus leads true Israel to spiritual safety from the bondage that is sin through His blood and the power of God (cf. 5:9-12). Jesus’ deliverance is the greatest release from bondage anyone can ever hope for!
  + The words in the song of praise in vv. 3-4 are taken from Ex. 15:1-20 and a host of other OT passages which acknowledge God as the Almighty and the One who has the indivisible power to deliver from any and all situations (Ex. 15:11; Deut. 32:4; Job. 5:9; Psa. 40:5; 92:5; 111:2; 145:6, 17; Isa. 45:21; Jer. 10:7).
  + Verse 4 is a list of rhetorical questions that begs only one true answer. God is a force to be reckoned with precisely because of His ability to conquer His foes and deliver His people. Whether or not one chooses to willingly fear Him, all will bow down and acknowledge Him one day (Isa. 45:23; Phil. 2:9-11; Rev. 5:13).
  + Some qualities of God that is mentioned in this song include: Righteousness, Creator, Almighty, King of kings and Holy. These are some of God’s overarching qualities that are ascribed to Him time and time again especially in contexts where He is pictured as saving and judging (cf. Psa. 86:9; 89:7; Jer. 5:22; 32:17; Rev. 4:8).
* **15:5-8– The Seven Angels and Seven Bowls of Wrath**
  + **Verses 5-6**– John’s attention now reverts to the angels and the bowls as they gear up to execute judgment in chapter 16. The angels are seen coming forth from the “holy of holies” so to speak (temple of the tabernacle of testimony).
  + The idea of the tabernacle of testimony comes from Israel’s time in the wilderness when the people built the “tent of meeting” (Num. 1:50; 9:15; 10:11; 17:7; 18:2). In the inner sanctuary was the “holy of holies” where the ark of the covenant rested. In it were the two tablets of testimony which God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai (Deut. 10:5).
  + The point is that the angels come forth from the very presence of God whose testimony cannot be altered or destroyed. His desire will be done. The angels proceed forth from the very presence of God clothed in linen clean and bright (cf. Matt. 28:3; Mk. 16:5; Jn. 20:12; Acts 1:10) and golden sashes around their chest (cf. 1:13).
  + These images may be used to indicate a sort of priestly function. That the plagues which will be poured out on the earth are pictured as coming forth from the presence of God is indicative of God’s seal of approval on the judgment that will take place. Because of God’s qualities in vv. 3-4, this must be done.
  + **Verse 7**– That the angels are serving in a priestly function is further seen here by their receiving golden bowls (censers; Ex. 38:23-26; 1 Chron. 28:17) which are full of the wrath of God. It is interesting to note that golden bowls were filled with incense in 5:8 which represented the prayers of the saints.
  + This scene and what follows is an answer to the petition of the saints (6:9-11; 8:3-4). One of the four living creatures (4:6) give the angels the bowls which contain the wrath of God that shall be poured out on the earth-dwellers (cf. 2 Thess. 1:7-9).
  + **Verse 8**– The anticipation of what is being described in these verses and what is to follow is galvanized by the revealing of the glory of God. God often revealed Himself in smoke or a cloud (Ex. 19:18; 40:34). God will be glorified and exalted by the execution of these plagues (Isa. 6:4).
  + In another sense, His presence and power is being revealed by these very plagues. In the OT when priests ministered to God and carried out their duties, smoke filled the temple (1 Kings 8:10-11). No one can enter His presence until these judgments are executed. No one can thwart His will (Job 42:2).