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# Revelation: A Vision of Glory

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## Revelation 15

### Seven Angels with Seven Plagues

<sup>1</sup>I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God's wrath is completed. <sup>2</sup>And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God <sup>3</sup>and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb:

"Great and marvelous are your deeds,  
Lord God Almighty.  
Just and true are your ways,  
King of the ages.

<sup>4</sup>Who will not fear you, O Lord,  
and bring glory to your name?  
For you alone are holy.  
All nations will come  
and worship before you,  
for your righteous acts have been revealed."

<sup>5</sup>After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened.

<sup>6</sup>Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. <sup>7</sup>Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. <sup>8</sup>And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

## Context

Chapter 15 serves as a prelude to the great “bowl” judgments described in Revelation 16-17.

## Questions for Discussion

1. With what (if anything) did you wrestle most last week, in our study of Chapter 14?
2. After reading Chapter 15, what immediately grabs your attention?

## Interpretive Views

As we mentioned last week, there are four major interpretive views when evaluating the book of Revelation. Not surprisingly, each takes a slightly different view of Revelation 14. They are listed here for your benefit:

### The “Preterist” View<sup>1</sup>

The book refers to events that were fulfilled in the first century AD, or shortly thereafter. It was written primarily to encourage the original readers. Its value for today would therefore be didactic (teaching the value of faithfulness to God). Proponents of this view thus contend that “the closer we get to the year 2000, the farther we get from the events of Revelation.”<sup>2</sup>

### The Historicist View<sup>3</sup>

The book provides a panoramic view of the future of the church from as it goes through history. This view finds in the book such events as the rise of Catholicism, Islam, the Protestant Reformation, world wars, etc., ending with the return of Christ. As such it would encourage Christians no matter when they lived.

### The “Futurist” View<sup>4</sup>

Apart from the first few chapters, the book depicts events which immediately precede the second coming of Christ. Therefore most of the book has yet to be fulfilled (or is being fulfilled now), and its value is primarily for Christians who will be living at the time Jesus returns.

### The “Idealist” View<sup>5</sup>

The book does not deal with any specific historical situation. Instead, it is simply enforcing the principle that good will ultimately triumph over evil. As such, the book is applicable to any age.

<sup>1</sup> Description of view taken from: Storms, Sam. *Introduction to the Book of Revelation, Part II*.

<sup>2</sup> Gentry, *Four Views*, pg. 37 as quoted in Storms.

<sup>3</sup> Copeland, Mark. *Introduction to Revelation*.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

## Commentary and Discussion<sup>6</sup>

### Seven Angels with Seven Plagues (v. 1-5)

<sup>1</sup>I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God's wrath is completed. <sup>2</sup>And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God <sup>3</sup>and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb:

"Great and marvelous are your deeds,  
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<sup>4</sup>Who will not fear you, O Lord,  
 and bring glory to your name?  
 For you alone are holy.  
 All nations will come  
 and worship before you,  
 for your righteous acts have been revealed."

### Historicist

- That these are the *last* plagues does not necessarily mean that they are the last of history, only those pertaining to the beast and his image
- Scene of the vision is the throne room of God – i.e. the sea of glass (v. 2 compared with 4:6)
- Sea of glass mingled with fire, suggesting imminent judgment and wrath
- Those standing before the throne have victory over the beast, representing “those who in the long dominion of the Papal power, and amidst all its arts and corruptions – its threats and persecutions – had remained steadfast in the truth, and who might thus be said to have gained *a victory*” (Barnes).

### Preterist

- Similar preludes of heavenly victory in chapter 4 (just prior to the breaking of the seven seals), and 8:1-6 anticipating the seven trumpets
- The “last” plagues bring the end of the once faithful city of Jerusalem
- The timeframe is the end of the Jewish War (A.D. 70). Chilton: “There is no reason to assume that these must be the “last” plagues in an ultimate, absolute, and universal sense; rather, in terms of the specifically limited purpose and scope of the Book of Revelation, they comprise the

<sup>6</sup> This section adapted from *Revelation: Four Views, a Parallel Commentary*. Steve Gregg, Ed.

final outpouring of God's wrath, His great cosmic Judgment against Jerusalem, abolishing the Old Covenant world-order once and for all."

- The singing company of victors are Christian martyrs
- "It is, of course, the Lamb, and not Moses, who was instrumental in the deliverance of which they sing, but the reference to Moses calls to mind again the Exodus and reminds us that Jerusalem had become the new Egypt (Rev. 11:8).
- The original "Song of Moses" was a song of deliverance regarding the Israelite liberation from Egypt through the Red Sea. Now, the first century believers receive deliverance through a virtual sea of blood (14:20).

#### **Futurist**

- Seven angels appear in heaven, ready to execute God's wrath upon the earth
- The *sea of glass* shows us the heavenly nature of this scene; the mixture of fire, the imminence of God's wrath
- According to the Dispensationalist, the church was previously "raptured" prior to the rise of the Antichrist. Therefore, those with victory over the beast cannot be the "church," but rather those converted during the Tribulation period
- Most understand the victorious to be martyrs under the reign of the beast – living in heaven, either as disembodied spirits or, as Ironside suggests, "raised from the dead and raptured during the tribulation period."
- Song of the Lamb celebrates God's work of *spiritual* deliverance. Song of Moses celebrated God's work of *earthly* deliverance.

#### **Idealist**

- Some view these as the *final* judgments of human history, others as the final of *personal* history – i.e. every unrepentant sinner eventually exhausts God's patience and receives the full measure of his wrath
- The *sea of glass* implies that the scene is heaven
- The "song the redeemed sing is one song, not two. Yet it is called the song of Moses....and the song of the Lamb (v. 3) because the deliverance God wrought through Moses in the Exodus foreshadowed the salvation accomplished by Christ at the cross.
- The song of the redeemed shows us that all nations will come and worship God when history culminates in unmitigated judgment.

#### **The Tabernacle of the Testimony (v. 5-8)**

<sup>5</sup>After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened.

<sup>6</sup>Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. <sup>7</sup>Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. <sup>8</sup>And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

**Historicist**

- The bowls given to the angels will be poured out in Chapter 16.
- Though emptied in rapid succession, they represent earthly events that unfold over a period of two or more centuries, beginning with the French Revolution in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and continuing to this day.
- The events represented by the bowls are designed for the punishment and ultimate destruction of the beast, that is, papal Rome.
- John sees the temple in heaven filled with smoke from the glory of God (v. 8). This is an allusion to the Shekinah cloud.
- As on those occasions, none could enter or minister in the sanctuary (Ex. 40:34f; 1 Kings 8:10f). Here, no one can enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels culminate.
- Barnes: “The meaning here seems to be, that no one would be permitted to enter to make intercession – to turn away his wrath – to divert him from his purpose.”

**Preterist**

- Agreement with the historicist regarding the cloud and prohibition of intercession
- None will avert the wrath poured out on Jerusalem

**Futurist**

- “The mention of the tabernacle of the testimony brings Israel again before us, and reminds us that these judgments are in order to the carrying out of God’s covenant with his ancient people Israel, when the nations that oppressed them must be punished.”
- Some, like Mounce, point us to the fact that the “golden bowls” of 5:8 contain incense, representing the prayers of the saints. Here, the “golden bowls [are] full of the wrath of God.” Could there be an implied relationship between the prayers of God’s people and the vengeance poured out on their enemies, God’s enemies?

**Idealist**

- The temple is not opened that any might go into it; it is opened so that the angels of God’s wrath might come forth from it.
- Moffatt: “Smouldering fires of indignation are now on the point of bursting into punishment from the arsenal of anger. Hence, till the plagues are over, God’s presence is unendurable.”