

Revelation 15 Commentary

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Revelation 15:1

Revelation 12⁺, 13⁺, and 14⁺ formed an interlude during which the scenes depicting the series of judgments being poured out by God upon the earth are interrupted to illustrate other important events associated with the Tribulation. Now at Revelation 15⁺, the scene shifts back to the judgments—specifically the preparations for the final set of seven judgments to be poured out upon the [earth dwellers](#) and the kingdom of the [Beast](#). This chapter describes the scene in heaven which initiates the final seven bowls of God's wrath, to be poured forth in the next chapter (Rev. 16⁺). The event which led to the scene before us now was the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11:15⁺). The sounding of the seventh trumpet was met with the announcement that the Lord's kingdom would be underway as a result of the judgments under that trumpet. The bowl judgments introduced here are the final plagues from God which bring about the establishment of His kingdom on earth. See [Literary Structure](#).

The accomplishment of the Harvest and the Vintage [Rev. 14:14-20⁺] brings to the end of this present world. The next in succession would be the setting up of the eternal Kingdom, and the evolution of the new heavens and earth. But the Harvest and the Vintage do not adequately set forth all that we need to know about these closing scenes. Further particulars included in this momentous period require to be shown in order to complete the picture. The fate of the internal Trinity,—the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet,—and what pertains to them, is to be more fully described before we come to the Millennium, the descent of the new Jerusalem, and the planting of God's Tabernacle with men.¹

another sign in heaven, great

Another is [λλο](#) [allo], *another of a similar kind*. This points back to the sign of the woman with the sun and moon, which was also said to be "great" (Rev. 12:1⁺). The fiery red dragon was also seen as a sign in the heaven (Rev. 12:3⁺).

marvelous

[Θαυμαστόν](#) [Thaumaston], "beyond human comprehension, wonderful, marvelous, remarkable."² Not in the sense that the seven plagues are *wonderful*, but that the scene is one that inspires wonder.

seven angels having the seven last plagues

These are the seven angels which come out of the [Temple](#) and are given the seven bowls of wrath by the living creature (Rev. 15:6-7⁺). These seven will pour forth their bowls in the next chapter (Rev. 16:1-17⁺). Seven angels also initiated the seven trumpet judgments (Rev. 8:2⁺, 6⁺). The responsibility given to these angels reflects their great authority and intimate access to the throne. One of these seven angels subsequently shows John two women: the harlot (Rev. 17:1⁺) and the bride, the Lamb's wife (Rev. 21:9⁺). "That these are the last plagues proves again that they are not mere reiterations of former plagues. The seals and trumpets and bowls are sequential, not parallel."³

in them the wrath of God is complete

In these seven plagues under the sounding of the seventh trumpet, itself part of the opening of theseventh seal, the last of the three woes—the three last trumpets—will be completed (Rev. 8:13⁺). "No announcement that the third woe has passed is in the offing, because by the time it has passed, human history will have reached its culmination."⁴ At the pouring forth of the last of these seven bowls, a voice from the Temple announces, "It is done!" (Rev. 16:17⁺). Then "the indignation is past" (Isa. 26:20) and the woman who fled to the wilderness will be free to leave her hiding place (Rev. 12:6⁺) for her great persecutor, the Beast, will have been vanquished and her Shepherd will be in her midst. This period of God's wrath was already underway by the sixth seal judgment (Rev. 6:16-17⁺). See commentary on [Revelation 6:17](#). The church, which will not see the wrath of God (Rev. 3:10⁺), has long before been taken in the [Rapture](#). As the judgments progressed from the seals, to the trumpets, and now to the bowls, their level of intensity has steadily increased. These are the final set of judgments which conclude with the Second Coming of Christ, when the "great winepress of the wrath of God" is "trampled outside the city" (Rev. 14:19-20⁺). "He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness

and wrath of Almighty God" (Rev. 19:15⁺).

On the conclusion of the Vials, the wrath of the *Lamb*, even more terrible than the wrath of *God*, is openly expressed on the subjects of vengeance. "Commission to act is given to Christ as soon as the ministration of the Vials ends." The secret, providential dealings of God are brought to an end with the Vials or Bowls of wrath, after which the Lamb in Person publicly assumes the government of the world. But as the nations at His Coming are in armed rebellion—apostate and wicked, moreover, beyond all human conception—the wrath of the Lamb burns in its fierceness. The wrath of God is finished in the Vials, to be succeeded by the wrath of the Lamb.⁵

Many years previously, an angel replied to the question of how long the final period would be: "It *shall be* for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people [Israel] is completely shattered, all these *things* shall be finished" (Dan. 12:6). These plagues will complete the last half of the Tribulation. See [Events of the 70th Week of Daniel](#) Preterist interpreters deny the finality of these judgments because they must find their fulfillment in the events of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70:

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 final outpouring of God's wrath, His great cosmic Judgment against Jerusalem, abolishing the Old Covenant world-order once and for all.⁶

How the final pouring forth of His wrath to the point of completion can be said to be obtained in a "great cosmic Judgment against Jerusalem," which in fact was a relatively minor battle on the scale of global history is impossible to see. Much of the world had no notion of the overthrow of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. As significant an event as it was from the perspective of the Jews then living in Jerusalem, we dare not venture with Chilton in a vain attempt to find the events described here, the final outpouring of God's wrath upon the [earth dwellers](#), in such a relatively minor historical event! This is the same error as is made by the [historicist interpreters](#):

Yet some gravely tell us that the first bowl is the French Revolution; the second bowl, the naval wars of that Revolution; the third bowl, the battles of Napoleon in Italy; the fourth bowl, the tyranny and military oppression of Napoleon; the fifth bowl, the calamities which befell the city of Rome and the Pope in consequence of the French Revolution; the sixth bowl, the wane of the Turkish power, the return of the Jews to Palestine, and the subtle influences of infidelity, Popery and Puseyism; and the seventh, some further war with Romanism and disaster to the city of Rome. But can it be possible that God Almighty from His everlasting seat, the temple in heaven, all angels and holy ones on high, should thus be in new and unexampled commotion, with the mightiest of all celestial demonstrations, over nothing but a few occurrences far less in meaning or moment than many others in other ages! According to such interpretation mankind have been living for the last 100 years amid the extreme terrors of "the great and terrible day of the Lord" without ever knowing it! yea, dreaming the while that we are happily gliding into the era of universal liberty and peace!⁷

Revelation 15:2

a sea of glass

This sea of glass is under the throne of God and is analogous to the river of life. Ezekiel saw it above the heads of the cherubim, under the throne of God above (Eze. 1:22). It is clear as crystal (Ex. 24:9-10; Rev. 4:6⁺; 22:1⁺). The transparency of the glass is similar to that of the streets of pure gold in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:21⁺). The clarity of the glass speaks of purity and perhaps washing (as in water). These have come through a time of intense tribulation and now stand upon the sea, reminiscent of the salvation of Israel from the Pharaoh of Egypt (Ex. 15).

Long before even that deliverance, there had occurred an event greater judgment and redemption by the waters of the sea, "when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, . . . wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water" (1 Peter 3:20). The same waters which had destroyed all the ungodly world also saved the believing remnant from destruction by that world. It is interesting also that the waters of baptism, symbolizing death to sinfulness and resurrection unto holiness, are compared both to the waters of the Red Sea (1 Corinthians 10:1, 2) and to the waters of the Great Flood (1 Peter 3:20, 21). Thus will the sea at the heavenly throne perpetually call to remembrance the waters of the Flood, the waters of the Red Sea, and the waters of baptism, all speaking both of God's judgment on the wickedness of rebellious men and His great salvation for those who trust Him and obey His Word. This last company of persecuted believers had experienced these also.⁸

See commentary on [Revelation 4:6](#) and [Revelation 21:1](#).

mingled with fire

Mingled is [μεμιγμένην](#) [memigmenēn], indicating a mingling together of two or more substances blended into one.⁹ Used to describe the "hail and fire . . . mingled with blood . . . thrown to the earth" (Rev. 8:7⁺). The sea is clear like glass, but also sparkles or radiates brilliant light. *Fire* is [πυρ](#) [pyr]. A similar word elsewhere denotes "fiery red," [πυρόος](#) [pyrros] (Rev. 6:3⁺; 12:3⁺). If red, it could reflect the purging and redemptive power of Christ's blood. Or, like the purity of the glass, the fire may speak of purity. Having come

through the flames of adversity, those standing upon the sea of glass have been refined (1Pe. 1:7; 4:12). A more ominous possibility is that the fire denotes the redness, not of Christ's blood, but of the *martyrs themselves*, shed as part of their testimony:

When the believers of the Church period are removed at the beginning of the tribulation period their laver is seen as a sea of crystal [Rev. 4:6⁺]. Some of them may have suffered martyrdom, but the maintenance of their fellowship was by the Word alone. In the tribulation period, the Lord has seen fit to demand, for His honor and glory, that they maintain their fellowship at the price of their sufferings. Their laver is crystal, mingled with fire. In the time immediately preceding the overthrow of the Antichrist and his power, there will be a sore trial of faith. . . . In sea mingled with fire the Lord recognizes these sufferings and commemorates the faithfulness of this martyr group in this beautiful way.¹⁰

Here the sea is "mingled with fire," evidently referring to the fiery persecution under the Beast—a trial exceeding far in its combination of suffering anything hitherto experienced (Mark 13:19). The pagan persecutions of early times, and the still more exquisite and refined torments under papal Rome, come short of the horrors of the Great Tribulation.¹¹

There may also be an allusion to the Red Sea:

Allusion is made to the Israelites standing on the shore at the Red Sea, after having passed victoriously through it, and after the Lord had destroyed the Egyptian foe (type of Antichrist) in it. Moses and the Israelites' song of triumph (Ex. 15:1) has its antitype in the saints' "song of Moses and the Lamb" (Rev. 15:3⁺).¹²

Perhaps *mingled with fire* does not speak of red, but of God's judgment—the "baptism with fire" (Mat. 4:11-12), about to be poured out upon the earth.¹³

those who have victory

[τος νικῶντας](#) [tous nikōntas], *the overcoming ones*. These are the overcomers! The text does not say that they are martyrs, but this is almost certain. They appear in heaven prior to the end of the Tribulation (before the final seven bowls come forth from the [Temple](#)) and their victory involves refusing to worship the [Beast](#) which subjected them to the death penalty. "Physical death with eternal salvation or physical life with eternal damnation—that had been their bitter choice, and multitudes had opted for the brief continuation of their wretched lives on the earth, enduring all the judgements of God rather than the executioners appointed by the beast."¹⁴ Like the church at Smyrna, these had been tested and remained true to the exhortation of The Overcomer (1Jn. 4:4; Rev. 3:21⁺; 17:14⁺). "You will have tribulation . . . Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10⁺). They obtained their victory "by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death" (Rev. 12:11⁺). *victory over the Beast* [κ το θνπλου](#) [Ek tou thēiou] : "The expression is peculiar. Literally, 'conquered out of.' The construction is unique in the New Testament. The phrase signifies, not as the King James Version, victory 'over,' but 'coming triumphant out of.'"¹⁵ Although the Beast thought himself to be overcoming the saints and was granted authority to kill them (Rev. 6:2⁺; 11:7⁺; 13:7⁺), they ultimately achieved the victory because their physical death proved to be their escape into God's presence where they would forever enjoy Him. After the Beast and his minions outlive these upon the earth, their ultimate destiny is the Lake of Fire (Rev. 19:20⁺; 20:15⁺) so these have victory over him. They did not bow to his will, but did the will of the Father (John 4:34). These may be among those who came "out of the great tribulation" which John saw in Revelation 7:13-17⁺. See commentary on [Revelation 12:11](#). See [Who is the Overcomer?](#).

over the beast

They refused to worship the first beast which rises from the sea, the [Antichrist](#) (Rev. 13:3-4⁺). See commentary on [Revelation 13:4](#). See [The Beast, #16 - Beast](#).

over his image

They also refused to worship the [image of the Beast](#) which the False Prophet caused the [earth dwellers](#) to make (Rev. 13:14-15⁺). Because of their refusal to worship the image, the image had ordered their execution. See [#19 - Image of Beast](#). See commentary on [Revelation 13:14](#).

over his mark

The [NU](#) and [MT](#) texts omit this phrase. These overcomers refused to take the mark of the Beast (Rev. 13:16-17⁺). Not only were they at risk of losing their lives, but they were also completely cut off from the world's system of commerce. See commentary on [Revelation 13:16](#).

over the number of his name

The mark relates to "the name of the beast, or the number of his name" (Rev. 13:17⁺). By refusing his mark, they also refused the

number of his name. See commentary on [Revelation 13:17](#). These heard and responded to the warning given by the third angel in the previous chapter. They had not worshiped the beast or his image or received his mark (Rev. 14:9-11⁺).

standing

[ἑστῶτες](#) [Estōtas], perfect tense participle, they took their place prior to John seeing them. Although they had been slain, even beheaded (Rev. 20:4⁺), they themselves were not overcome for now they stand erect in worship.

having harps of God

These harps were evidently given them by God. Like the twentyfour elders, they use their harps in worship of God (Rev. 4:8-9⁺). Since this scene occurs prior to the end of the Tribulation, it probably precedes John's vision of the Lamb and the 144,000 standing on Mount Zion (see commentary on [Revelation 14:1](#)). If so, these could be among those who play their harps in heaven which John heard "the sound of harpists playing their harps" (Rev. 14:2⁺). Although these sing a different song, they are no doubt similar to the heavenly worshipers in that scene.¹⁶

Revelation 15:3

they sing

[ᾄδουσιν](#) [Adousin], present tense, *they are singing*.

the song of Moses

Some take the song of Moses to commemorate the victory which God gave Israel at the crossing of the Red Sea when Pharaoh's troops were destroyed in the sea (Ex. 15:1-18). The motivation for the song was the miraculous intervention of God on the singers' behalf.

Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the Lord, and spoke, saying: "I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea! The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will exalt Him." (Ex. 15:1-2)

The song recognizes the *uniqueness* of God. "Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Ex. 15:11) and brings to mind the blasphemous parody of these words as attributed to the [Beast](#) (Rev. 13:4⁺). The lyrics of the song before us also recognize God's uniqueness: "For *You alone are holy*" (Rev. 15:4⁺). Both songs indicate that God is to be revered and feared (Ex. 15:14-16 cf. Rev. 15:4⁺). There is another *song of Moses* which may also apply to the period currently underway. This is the song he wrote to the children of Israel prior to his death. For he knew they would not follow the LORD in his absence. "For I know that after my death you will become utterly corrupt, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you. And evil will befall you **in the latter days**, because you will do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands" [emphasis added] (Deu. 31:29 cf. Rev. 9:20⁺). Although that song was given to the children of Israel, it contains elements which apply to the global situation at the time of the end and are reflected by the lyrics found in this chapter. Moreover, the song is sung to all who would hear:

Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth (Deu. 32:1) . . . For I proclaim the name of the LORD: ascribe greatness to our God. *He is* the Rock. His work is perfect: for all His ways *are* justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He (Deu. 32:3-4) . . . For their vine *is* of the vine of Sodom and of the fields of Gomorrah; their grapes *are* grapes of gall, their wine *is* the poison of serpents (Deu. 32:32 cf. Rev. 11:8⁺; 14:18⁺) . . . Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; their foot shall slip in *due* time; for the day of their calamity *is* at hand, and the things to come hasten upon them (Deu. 32:35) . . . Now see that I, *even I, am* He, and *there is* no God besides Me (Deu. 32:39) . . . Rejoice, O Gentiles, *with* His people; for he will avenge the blood of His servants, and render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land *and* His people (Deu. 32:43).

We call your attention to the final verse of the song which distinguishes between *O Gentiles* versus *His people*. Furthermore, it states that He will provide atonement for *His land and His people*. In the context of the verse, *His people* can only be the Jewish nation. *His land* is the Promised Land. Thus, we see that the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 is intended to be heard more broadly than merely by the children of Israel. It spans a period of time which culminates with the restoration of the Promised Land to Israel: the [Millennial Kingdom](#).

The Deuteronomy song is not entirely unrelated to the events of these seven last plagues, in that the words "just and true" in Rev. 15:3⁺ are part of the central theme of the song (cf. Deu. 32:3-4). It also predicts the ultimate subjugation of all nations to God (Deu. 31:1-8; 32:44-33:29), which is the hope of this song too. Specific points of similarity to the Deuteronomy song include Rev. 15:4a⁺

with Deu. 32:3; Rev. 15:3b⁺ with Deu. 32:4; Rev. 15:4b⁺ with Deu. 32:4b; the fire of God's anger with Deu. 32:33; and plagues of hunger, burning heat, pestilence, wild beasts, vermin, the sword with Deu. 32:23-27 (Ford).¹⁷

We see a pattern of application and extension throughout the book of Revelation. Principles which are illustrated by God's interaction with Israel in the OT are amplified and extended to apply more broadly to the population of the entire globe during the Tribulation.¹⁸ Although it seems as if elements from both of Moses' songs apply to this time of the end, the more immediate context speaks of victory and praise and most likely points to the song of victory upon escaping Egypt (Ex. 15:1-18) rather than the song of judgment. "There was also another song of Moses (Deuteronomy 31:30), now preserved as Deuteronomy 32:1-43, which might well also be sung appropriately by these tribulation martyrs. . . . However, the most appropriate [song] seems to be the actual song at the Red Sea, praising God for His great salvation."¹⁹

Commentator John Phillips compares and contrasts the two songs: "The song of Moses was sung at the Red Sea, the song of the Lamb is sung at the crystal sea; the song of Moses was a song of triumph over Egypt, the song of the Lamb is a song of triumph over Babylon; the song of Moses told how God brought His people out, the song of the Lamb tells how God brings His people in; the song of Moses was the first song in Scripture, the song of the Lamb is the last. The song of Moses commemorated the execution of the foe, the expectation of the saints, and the exaltation of the Lord; the song of the Lamb deals with the same three themes." (*Exploring Revelation*, rev. ed. [Chicago: Moody, 1987; reprint, Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux, 1991], 187)²⁰

the servant of God

Although Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land, at his death he was recorded to be "the servant of the LORD" (Deu. 34:5 cf. 1Chr. 6:49; 2Chr. 24:6). Perhaps Moses' greatest service of God was the part he played in the giving of the Law, the *Law of Moses* (Ne. 9:14; Dan. 9:11; John 1:17; Heb. 3:5). The law given through Moses forms the *testimony* referred to in the "tabernacle of the testimony" which follows (Rev. 15:5⁺).

the song of the Lamb

Since the lyrics recorded next do not match the Song of Moses nor do they explicitly mention the Lamb, it may be that these sing three different choruses: (1) the song of Moses (Ex. 15:1-18 or Deu. 32:1-43); (2) the song of the Lamb (Rev. 5:9-14⁺); and the song recorded here which speaks of God the Father. The mention of Moses (and subsequently, the *tabernacle of the testimony*, Rev. 15:5⁺) is an intentional allusion to the parallels between the liberation of the children of Israel under King Pharaoh and the release of all believers from the kingdom of the Beast (Rev. 13:2⁺).

There is surely no conflict, as some have taught, between the dispensations of Moses and the Lamb. The written law was given by Moses, and grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17); both are integral components of God's will for man.²¹

Great and marvelous

Job wrote that God "does great things, and unsearchable, marvelous things without number" (Job 5:9), "God thunders marvelously with His voice; He does great things which we cannot comprehend" (Job 37:5). One of the marvelous things that God did was his division of the seas in the Exodus from Egypt (Ps. 78:12-13). Another is His creative work as manifest in marvels of the human body (Ps. 139:14-15). God told Israel, "Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation; and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the Lord" (Ex. 34:10). These marvel especially at their preservation through death from the midst of horrendous persecution of the saints upon the earth. See [#20 - Saints](#).

Almighty

[Παντοκράτωρ](#) [Pantokratōr], see commentary on [Revelation 1:8](#), [Revelation 4:8](#).

just and true are Your ways

These attributes are fundamental to the person of God:

For I proclaim the name of the LORD: ascribe greatness to our God. *He is* the Rock, His work *is* perfect; for all His ways *are* justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright *is* He. (Deu. 32:3-4)

Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed. Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Yes, the LORD will give *what is* good; and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before Him, and shall make His footsteps *our* pathway. (Ps. 85:10-13)

When God passed by Moses and proclaimed His character, He said, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious,

longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth” (Ex. 34:6). Since all His ways are just and true, it is not possible for God to lie (Num. 23:19; Rom. 3:4; Heb. 6:18; Tit. 1:2). This is why Jesus could claim His self-witness was true: “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am going’ ” (John 8:14). Even unbelieving Gentiles witness to the truth of God:

Pilate therefore said to Him, “Are You a king then?” Jesus answered, “You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?” And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, “I find no fault in Him at all.” (John 18:37-38)

King of the saints!

The [NU](#) and [MT](#) texts have *King of the nations*.²² Both are true. “Who would not fear You, O King of the nations? For this is Your rightful due” (Jer. 10:7a). The Lamb is said to be “Lord of lords and King of kings” (Rev. 17:14⁺ cf. Rev. 19:16⁺). Another textual variant has “King of the ages” (cf. Jer. 10:10; 1Ti. 1:17).²³

Revelation 15:4

Who shall not fear

Not is emphasized by the double-negation, ο μὴ [ou mē], followed by the subjunctive aorist φοβῆθῃ [phobēthē], *he should fear*.²⁴ The fear and reference given to God applies to *all*, even His own saints (Ps. 89:7-8). It is His rightful due (Jer. 10:7). Fear of the LORD is called the “beginning of wisdom” (Ps. 111:10) because, along with love, it is a vital motivator leading to the obedience of those who seek to please Him.

glorify Your name

These who stand on the sea of glass responded to the warning of the first angel in the previous chapter who cried, “Fear God and give glory to Him” (Rev. 14:7⁺). The response to God’s mighty works often involves fear and results in glory being given to Him. This was the response of those within Jerusalem in response to the great earthquake at the resurrection of the two witnesses (Rev. 11:13⁺).

All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and shall glorify Your name. For You *are* great, and do wondrous things; You alone *are* God. (Ps. 86:9-10)

If Israel refused to glorify His name, they would live under a curse (Mal. 2:2). To attribute glory to His *name* is to recognize His holy *character*, for His many names describe His glorious character. Each name is like another facet of a gem, reflecting a unique aspect of Who He is. His name is above all names (Php. 2:9) because His character alone is holy.

You alone *are* holy

Holy is ἁγιος [hōsios], a term which speaks “of the inherent nature of God and Christ *holy* (Heb. 7:26).”²⁵ Thus, Isaiah’s seraphim cry with John’s cherubim, “Holy, holy, holy” (Isa. 6:3 cf. Rev. 4:8⁺). He is “the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name *is* Holy” (Isa. 57:15). Although the term *holy* denotes purity, it also speaks of uniqueness. Holiness is that which is uniquely God’s, which sets Him apart. It is an attribute which only the Creator truly has. All other creatures which are said to be *holy*, derived their holiness from their association with God and His righteousness. It is a reflected, secondary holiness, but not essential to their nature apart from God. Another way to express this phrase might be, “You *are matchless, incomparable, peerless, unequalled, unparalleled, unrivaled!*” There is no other like God because *He alone is Creator*, all else is *creature*. “So Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God’ ” (Luke 18:19). What would this world be like if God had been a capricious and evil personage who took pleasure in wickedness and loved iniquity? We are immensely blessed that He is otherwise (Ps. 5:4)!

all nations shall come and worship before You

Although their declaration is certain, it awaits the future for fulfillment. Then many passages which speak of the entire world acknowledging God and worshiping before Him will be consummated. “I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” (Ps. 46:10). “All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and shall glorify Your name” (Ps. 86:9). Aspects of such worship are already underway—He receives worship from *many* in every nation of the earth today, who offer up prayer as incense before him:

“For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name *shall be* great among the Gentiles; in every place incense *shall be* offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations,” says the LORD of hosts. (Mal. 1:11)

But the complete fulfillment awaits Christ's physical return to rule upon the throne of David.

The conversion of *all nations*, therefore, shall be when Christ shall come, and not till then; and the first moving cause will be Christ's *manifested judgments* preparing all hearts for receiving Christ's mercy. He shall effect by His presence what we have in vain tried to effect in His absence. The present preaching of the Gospel is gathering out the elect remnant; meanwhile "the mystery of iniquity" is at work, and will at last come to its crisis; then shall judgment descend on the apostates at the *harvest-end of this age* (Greek, Mat. 13:39, 40) when the tares shall be cleared out of the earth, which thenceforward becomes Messiah's kingdom.²⁶

Their declaration is in agreement with the heavenly chorus which attends the sounding of the seventh trumpet: "The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Rev. 11:15⁺). Although the kingdoms are legally His now, the nations will not willingly bow and worship Him until after His Second Coming. This global worship is finally His at the [Millennial Kingdom](#). Global worship will be centered in Jerusalem at a time when Israel has been restored to prominence among the nations in her relationship to God:

Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Peoples shall yet come, inhabitants of many cities; the inhabitants of one *city* shall go to another, saying, "Let us continue to go and pray before the LORD, and seek the LORD of hosts. I myself will go also." Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD.' Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard *that God is with you*." ' (Zec. 8:20-23)

Then, His house will be called "a house of prayer for all nations" (Isa. 56:7; Mark 11:17). Ultimately, in the eternal state "they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it" (Rev. 21:26⁺). See [The Arrival of God's Kingdom](#).

For Your judgments have been manifested

These judgments have two results. *First*, every individual who refuses to turn to God in faith will be removed from the earth. *Second*, the remainder who see His power and glory manifested in the judgments will respond in faith and be saved. These are the intended results of the Tribulation period when God's wrath is poured out in the most visible series of judgments ever known to history. "For when Your judgments *are* in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isa. 26:9).

Revelation 15:5

After these things

[Μετ τα τα](#) [Meta tauta], the standard phrase John uses to demarcate sections of his vision (Rev. 1:19⁺; 4:1⁺; 7:1⁺, 9⁺; 9:12⁺; 15:5⁺; 18:1⁺; 19:1⁺). The worshipers upon the sea of glass are seen *after* the [Beast](#) has initiated his mark, but *before* the pouring forth of the final seven bowls of wrath. If the worship of the Beast and institution of his mark occur at the mid-point of [The 70th Week of Daniel](#), this indicates that the bowls of wrath are poured forth as part of the last half of the Tribulation. See [Events of the 70th Week of Daniel](#).

the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven

[Tabernacle](#) is [σκήνη](#) [skēnē], which denotes God's *dwelling place*. *Of the testimony* is [το μαρτυρίου](#) [tou martyriou], which can also be translated *of the witness* (Num. 18:2). The term *testimony* or *witness* referred primarily to the tablets of the Ten Commandments which stood as a witness of the Mosaic Covenant and the entire body of Mosaic Law which Israel came under at Mount Sinai. "And you shall put into the ark the Testimony which I will give you" (Ex. 25:16). This testimony set forth God's law, especially as embodied by the Ten Commandments, and now stands as a *witness* against the immoral actions of the nations in their rejection of God. The "tabernacle of the Testimony" (Ex. 38:21) was the meeting place, also called "the tabernacle of meeting" (Ex. 30:26), where God would meet with the children of Israel. It contained "the ark of the Testimony" (Ex. 30:26; 21:7) from which it derived the name *tabernacle of the Testimony*. The Levites were entrusted with the service of the tabernacle of the Testimony, to transport and attend to it (Num. 1:50). God's presence dwelt between the cherubim over the mercy seat of the ark within the tabernacle. The earthly tabernacle was patterned after the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven. See [A Heavenly Pattern](#). See [The Abiding Presence of God](#). See [Tabernacle in the Wilderness](#). When the heavenly temple was last opened, the ark of His covenant (the "testimony") was seen together with manifestations of judgment (Rev. 11:19⁺). The same idea is present here. Whatever is about to come forth from the temple is a manifestation of God's judgment for those who fall short of the testimony (witness) of the law and who have not sought Christ for refuge from God's wrath. The righteous requirement of the law judges those who are guilty and under judgment of God's wrath (Rom. 2:12; 3:19-20). For "the law brings about wrath" (Rom. 4:15). Believers will not be subject to the written requirements which were taken away in Christ (Rom. 7:6; Col. 2:14). See commentary on [Revelation 11:19](#).

Revelation 15:6

out of the temple

[Temple](#) is [ναός](#) [naos], generally used of the innermost portion of the temple, the holy of holies. These angels come forth directly from God's presence. Whatever attends their mission has the utmost authority behind it. Like the two angels who come out of the temple and initiate the two harvests of the previous chapter (Rev. 14:15⁺, 17⁺), their work has divine mandate. This is also seen in God's response from within the Temple when the last of these angels pours forth his golden bowl: "It is done!" (Rev. 16:17⁺).

seven angels having the seven plagues

These are the final judgments in the series of seals, trumpets, and bowls. See [Sequential Events](#). See [Seven: Perfection, Completeness](#).

clothed in pure white linen

Pure white is [καθαρόν καὶ λαμπρόν](#) [katharon kai lampron], *clean and shining*. [Λαμπρόν](#) [Lampron], from which we get our English word *lamp*, is used to describe heavenly bodies, the sun, and the morning star (Rev. 22:16⁺). Here, it means "a brightly shining garment."²⁷ These wear similar garments to the angels seen at the empty tomb (Luke 24:4) and the angel which visited Cornelius (Acts 10:30). The garments of the wife of the Lamb at the marriage of the Lamb are also "clean and bright," [λαμπρόν καθαρόν](#) [lampron katharon] (Rev. 19:7-8⁺). "The righteous character of their mission is signified by the pure and bright linen in which they are clothed."²⁸ A few manuscripts have "stone," [λίθον](#) [lithon], in place of "linen," [λίνον](#) [linon]. Some have noted a similarity between this textual variant and the passage which describes the covering of Satan in the garden of God: "Every precious stone was your covering" (Eze. 28:13). If this textual variant were legitimate, it could conceivably relate to the difficult promise of Jesus concerning the white stone given to the overcomer. See commentary on [Revelation 2:17](#). However, this variant is probably best explained as a transcriptional error.²⁹

girded with golden bands

Bands is [ζώνας](#) [zōnas], elsewhere translated as *belt* (Mat. 3:4). The same girding which John saw Jesus wear (Rev. 1:13⁺).

Revelation 15:7

four living creatures

These are four cherubim which attend the throne. See commentary on [Revelation 4:6](#).

seven golden bowls

Bowls is [φιάλας](#) [phialas]: "A bowl used in offerings."³⁰ Considered the equivalent of a [זִרְזִין](#) [mizraq], the bowl used for sprinkling the altar (*basins*, Ex. 27:3; 38:3) or a bowl used for drinking wine (Amos 6:6). Here, we are to understand a parallel between these golden bowls of wrath and the "golden bowls of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (Rev. 5:8⁺). The wrath contained in these bowls represents God's response to the mountains of prayers over the ages by the saints of God to avenge the blood of the martyrs (Rev. 6:10⁺) and to bring His kingdom to earth (Mat. 6:10; Luke 18:7-8). These seven most severe plagues are reminiscent of God's promise to Israel if she refused to heed his prior judgments designed to turn her back to Him. "And after all this, if you do not obey Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you **seven times** for your sins" [emphasis added] (Lev. 26:27-28). See [Seven: Perfection, Completeness](#). The seven bowls are poured forth in the next chapter (Rev. 16:2⁺, 3⁺, 4⁺, 8⁺, 10⁺, 12⁺, 17⁺). In the pouring forth of these bowls, God will administer His *wine of wrath* upon those who worship the [Beast](#). See commentary on [Revelation 14:10](#).

of the wrath of God

These represent the culmination of God's wrath poured out during the Tribulation. His wrath is associated with the entire Tribulation. See commentary on [Revelation 6:17](#) and [Revelation 15:1](#).

who lives forever and ever

[Τὸ ζῶντος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων](#) [Tou zōntos eis tous aiōnas tōn aiōnōn], *the living one into the ages of the ages* Jesus described Himself with an almost identical phrase, see commentary on [Revelation 1:18](#).

Revelation 15:8

the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God

Although God has been within the [Temple](#), His [shekinah glory](#) now manifests itself. Such manifestations of His presence typically attend moments of great import and significance. His glory filled the [Tabernacle in the Wilderness](#) indicating His approval and presence among the children of Israel:

Then the cloud covered the [tabernacle](#) of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. (Ex. 40:34-35)

His presence also filled [Solomon's Temple](#) at its dedication:

And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy *place*, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD. (1K. 8:10-11)

The same glory was seen by Isaiah in the heavenly Temple:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His *robe* filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy *is* the LORD of hosts; the whole earth *is* full of His glory!" And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. (Isa. 6:1-4)

See [The Abiding Presence of God](#)

no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed

Here we have perhaps one of the most mysterious and wondrous verses in all of Scripture. It surely must indicate a period of great privacy and intensity in the mind of God attending the final outpouring of His wrath. It probably indicates an unwillingness to allow for even the possibility of distraction until what has been initiated finds its completion and likely signifies the holiness of the moment, as when Moses could not enter the tabernacle when the glory fell upon it (Ex. 40:35) and the priests could not minister in Solomon's Temple (1K. 8:11). Perhaps the idea is that of the finality of the action: "*Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My mind would not be favorable toward this people. Cast them out of My sight . . . Such as are for death, to death*" (Jer. 15:1-2).

It may suggest that God will, at this point in history, seal the doors of Heaven, making it impossible for any who have not hitherto accepted Jesus as Savior to do so. In other words, from this time forth until God has executed the human race, no additional souls will be saved. This is reminiscent of the previous great judgment, for, in the age before the flood, God said, "My Spirit will not strive with man forever" (Gen. 6:3). What a fearsome prospect: God closeted in His sanctuary until His wrath is satisfied, and no one able to approach Him. Sin will cause this; sin is never a light matter.³¹

Perhaps there is also great sadness in knowing that nothing further can be done, no more will turn (2Pe. 3:9). All that remains is the hand of judgment. Perhaps there is anguish on the part of the Father like that of the Son on the cross (Mat. 27:46; Mark 15:34)?

What insight we should have here of the holiness of God, and may we not be allowed to think that behind this hiding smoke the heart of God is weeping, even as the Lord Jesus wept over Jerusalem, as He acknowledged that all the efforts of His mercy has been in vain, and that the city refused all of His offers of pardon and love? And as we shall be in Heaven at that moment, yet outside of the presence of God, shall we not know that he suffers alone for the horror of the sin that separates men forever from Himself and forces Him to send them away to outer darkness forever?³²

To speculate further is to go where angels fear to tread. God has covered Himself with a cloud of darkness and we do well to respect His privacy in this matter (Lam. 3:44; Rom. 11:33). Such intense judgment to come! Such grief on the part of the Creator for the creature which refuses to acknowledge Him. Yet He *must* judge for His very holiness and justice require it! Every person born will drink from one or the other of two cups. Either they will drink the cup of salvation:

Then He [Jesus] took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide *it* among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And He took bread, gave thanks and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." Likewise He also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you." (Luke 22:17-20)

Or they will drink the cup of the wrath of God (Rev. 14:10⁺):

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. (John 3:36)

Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your heart (Heb. 3:15), for *now* is the day of salvation (2Cor. 6:2).

Notes

- ¹J. A. Seiss, [*The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966), 367.
- ²Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, [*Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 195.
- ³Henry Morris, [*The Revelation Record*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1983), Rev. 15:1.
- ⁴Robert L. Thomas, [*Revelation 8-22*](#) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995), Rev. 15:1.
- ⁵Walter Scott, [*Exposition of The Revelation*](#) (London, England: Pickering & Inglis, n.d.), Rev. 15:1.
- ⁶David Chilton, [*The Days of Vengeance*](#) (Tyler, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), Rev. 15:1.
- ⁷Seiss, [*The Apocalypse: Lectures on the Book of Revelation*](#), 370-371.
- ⁸Morris, [*The Revelation Record*](#), Rev. 15:3.
- ⁹Friberg, [*Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*](#), 253.
- ¹⁰Donald Grey Barnhouse, [*Revelation*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 284.
- ¹¹Scott, [*Exposition of The Revelation*](#), Rev. 15:2.
- ¹²A. R. Fausset, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," in Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, [*A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*](#) (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, 1877), Rev. 15:2.
- ¹³"The crystal sea, speaking of a past watery judgment and deliverance, is also 'mingled with fire,' speaking of the impending fiery judgment and deliverance."—Morris, [*The Revelation Record*](#), Rev. 15:3.
- ¹⁴*Ibid.*, Rev. 15:2.
- ¹⁵M. R. Vincent, [*Vincent's Word Studies*](#) (Escondido, CA: Ephesians Four Group, 2002), Rev. 15:2.
- ¹⁶"They are the harpers which we saw harping and singing in Rev. 14:2-3+. They are the martyred company worshipping in glory."—Arno C. Gaebelin, [*The Revelation*](#) (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1961), Rev. 15:2.
- ¹⁷Thomas, [*Revelation 8-22*](#), Rev. 15:3.
- ¹⁸This is one reason that [preterist interpreters](#) tend to see everything in the book of Revelation in light of God judging *Israel*. They fail to see the distinctions between the time of the end and the overthrow of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the extension of God's principles relating to Israel's rebellion being applied wholesale to a rebellious world.
- ¹⁹Morris, [*The Revelation Record*](#), Rev. 15:3.
- ²⁰John MacArthur, [*Revelation 12-22 : The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*](#) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2000), Rev. 15:3-4.
- ²¹Morris, [*The Revelation Record*](#), Rev. 15:3.
- ²²"The reading of the Textus Receptus ([ϣιωβ](#) [*hagiōn*]), which has only the slenderest support in Greek witnesses (296 2049, neither of which was available when the Textus Receptus was formed), appears to have arisen from confusion of the Latin compendia for *sanctorum* (*sctorum*) and *saeculorum* (*sclorum* [[=α ἰωνων](#) [*aiōnōn*]]); 'saint' is also read by several Latin writers, including Victorinus-Pettau, Tyconius, Apringius, and Cassiodorus."—Bruce M. Metzger, [*A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*](#) (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), Rev. 15:3.
- ²³P⁴⁷, [ϣ](#)^{*}, and C have *King of the ages*.
- ²⁴"Emphatic negation is indicated by [ο μὴ](#) [*ou mē*] plus the *aorist subjunctive* or, less frequently, [ο μὴ](#) [*ou mē*] plus the future indicative (e.g., Mat. 26:35; Mark 13:31; John 4:14; 6:35). This is the strongest way to negate something in Greek."—Daniel B. Wallace, [*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics - Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House and Galaxie Software, 1999, 2002), 466.
- ²⁵Friberg, [*Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*](#), 286.

²⁶Fausset, [*The Revelation of St. John the Divine*](#), Rev. 15:4.

²⁷Frederick William Danker and Walter Bauer, [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 465.

²⁸Scott, [*Exposition of The Revelation*](#), Rev. 15:6.

²⁹“Although the reading [λιθον](#) [lithon] is strongly attested (A C 2053 vg. *al*) and was widely circulated at an early date, in the opinion of the Committee it is a transcriptional error that, despite a superficial parallel with Eze. 28:13, makes no sense; it is particularly inapposite with the adjective [καθαρὸν](#) [katharon], which, on the contrary, is altogether appropriate with [λινον](#) [linon].”—Metzger, [*A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*](#), Rev. 15:6.

³⁰Danker, [*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*](#) 858.

³¹Monty S. Mills, [*Revelations: An Exegetical Study of the Revelation to John*](#) (Dallas, TX: 3E Ministries, 1987), Rev. 15:5.

³²Barnhouse, [*Revelation*](#), 287.

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contact@SpiritAndTruth.org