

The Twitter Commentary on Revelation
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Revelation Chapter 15

Rev 15-18 (Introduction)—

If Rev 12-14 portrays the anger of the dragon against God's remnant (building on Rev 11:18 and 12:17), Rev 15-18 represents the wrath of God, which brings history to a close before the second coming of Jesus (based on Rev 11:18 and 15:1).

Rev 15-18 (The Wrath of God)--

When Revelation speaks of the wrath of the nations (Rev 11:18) and the wrath of the dragon (Rev 12:12, 17), it is not a compliment. To then apply the same term to God can be unsettling (14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19; 19:15).

The "wrath of God" in the Bible is often His sadly turning away from people who don't want Him, allowing them to reap the consequences of their own decisions and actions (Rom 1:18-28, for example).

Even if the bowl-plagues of Rev are active judgments of God, they are not incompatible with His love. He is acting to rescue His faithful ones and demonstrate the relentless lack of repentance on the part of those who reject Him.

While on the surface, the seven bowls of Rev 16 read like divine punishments, Rev 16:13-14 is direct evidence that demonic activity lies behind at least some of the fearsome plagues of the chapter.

The love of God is essential to His character. It has been there from eternity past. Wrath is not essential to God's character, it is a reactive force grounded in God's love. God is distressed when His creatures hurt themselves and each other.

Rev 15 (Introduction)—

Rev 15:2-4 completes chapters 12-14 and 15:1, 5-8 introduces Rev 16-18. Rev 15 is one of the most important transitions in Rev.

The seams between sections of Revelation often point both ways, concluding what comes before and introducing what comes after at the same time. Rev 15 is one of those seams.

Rev 15:1—

This verse recalls the great heavenly signs in chapter twelve (Rev 12:1, 3, 7-12). Here things are brought to a full circle, the material which began in the vision of Revelation 11:19 is drawn to completion in Revelation 15:1-8.

Rev 11:18 (“your wrath has come”) is taken up in Rev 15:1 and points to the seven last bowl-plagues (Rev 16) and the fall of Babylon chapters that follow them (Rev 17-18).

In Rev a “sign” in singular has to do with heaven (Rev 12:1, 3; 15:1), “signs” in plural are performed by the beast powers (Rev 13:13-14; 16:14; 19:20).

The word for “plagues” means to wound, either by a whip stroke or a blunt instrument. It is usually translated “wound” in Revelation 13:3. These plagues come in accordance with the plan and purpose of God.

Freedom from God's restraint is what Satan wants, but it will end in his exposure before the universe and his ultimate demise. For the human race, freedom from God means to become slaves of Satan and in the end to suffer his cruelty.

Rev 15:2—

The song of Moses and the Lamb recalls the song that the Israelites sang on the shore of the Red Sea (Exodus 15). The great deliverance at the Red Sea becomes a model for the end-time deliverance of God’s faithful.

Reference back to the early throne scene (sea of glass) places the plagues of Rev 16 in the context of two revelations; the revelation of God’s character (Rev 5:6) and the revelation of Satan’s character when he is completely unrestrained.

As the world enters into a time when the power of Satan is unrestrained, God’s faithful ones are sheltered in the “storm”, there would be no purpose in allowing Satan to hurt them any longer.

The Greek *epi* with the accusative can mean “at” or “nearby”. The parallel with the Exodus story would support the overcomers standing “by” the sea of glass, just as the Israelites stood at the shore as they watched the Egyptians drown (Exod 14:30).

But if the scene depicts the overcomers standing “upon” the sea of glass, the sea is the place from which the beast arose (Rev 13:1), and the place that separated John from those he loved (Rev 21:2). But in Rev 15:2 the sea is no longer a threat.

The mention of harps recalls two earlier heavenly scenes, the first in Revelation 5:8 and the second in Revelation 14:2. Rev 15 sums up many things that were featured earlier in Rev.

Rev 15:3-4—

Songs break out frequently in Rev. They speak primarily to the kind of person God is (see Rev 4:8, 11; 5:9-12; 7:10-12, etc.). It is in the songs of Revelation that the crisis in the heavenly government is resolved.

In some ways, the song in these two verses is a fitting climax to the mighty acts of God from Genesis to Revelation, from the original creation to the new creation.

Rev 15:3--

The song in this passage is a blending of two songs, the song of Moses and the song of

the Lamb. God's deliverance of Israel in the Exodus is the model for the greater deliverance at the end of time in Revelation.

There are three songs of Moses in the OT: Exod 15:1-18, Deut 32:1-43, and Psalm 90. Rev 15:3-4 is the only song in Rev that mirrors the rhythm and parallelism of Hebrew poetry.

The language of Revelation 15 reflects Deuteronomy 32 more than the other two Old Testament songs of Moses.

It is the content of the song more than the one who sings that matters with the song of the Lamb. The song of Revelation 15 is about how the actions of the Lamb clarify the conflict in the universe over the character and government of God.

Psalm 111:2-4 is an important background text for "great and marvelous are your works". The theme of the psalm is that God's mighty acts are designed to be remembered.

The solution to the crisis in the universe is not the exercise of greater power, but the exercise of a different kind of power, the power of self-sacrificing non-violence. God's leadership is proven different in kind than human beings expected.

The singers here marvel not only over what God has done, but the way in which He has done these things. God has not only met the standards to righteousness, the way he has met those standards exceeds all expectations.

"King of the nations" implies that the day will come when everyone, even including Satan, will bow before God and confess that His ways are just and true. Not because He makes them do it, but because all the truth is out.

Rev 15:4—

Since names in the Hebrew background are related to character, honoring God and glorifying His name means to speak well regarding His character, the way that He rules the universe, and the way He treats the creatures He has made.

The triple use of "because" (Greek: *hoti*) indicates that the rest of verse 4 gives the reasons that the redeemed fear God and give Him glory.

In this song the rightness of God's actions has been brought out into the open. This anticipates the conclusion of the cosmic conflict, when Satan's lies have been forever laid to rest (Isa 26:9).

Rev 15:1-4 (Spiritual lessons)—

Sin is so attractive and deceptive in the short run that God has to lay out its consequences graphically to get us to take it seriously. These concepts are not popular or attractive to us today, but they are placed in Revelation as a warning.

The cosmic conflict will draw to a close with the statement, "Just and true are Your ways." When every person who has ever lived can make that statement without feeling coerced, God can draw the whole conflict to a close.

Have you noticed how the pace of life seems to be accelerating and everyone seems to be worn to a frazzle? That is how it will be as we approach the end of earth's history. Only patient endurance will allow one to survive.

Rev 15:5-8 (Introduction)—

According to my structure of the book of Revelation, this section begins an entirely new vision which corresponds to the phrase "your wrath has come" in Revelation 11:18.

This passage serves as the sanctuary introduction scene for Revelation 16-18 (like the sanctuary introductions in Revelation 1:9-20; 4-5; 8:2-6; 11:19).

Rev 15:5--

A major break in the text of Revelation is usually signaled with language like "after this I looked" (Greek: *meta tauta eidon*-- Revelation 4:1; 7:1 and 9; 18:1, etc.).

It was common usage in the Greek of NT times that the inner shrine (Most Holy Place) of a temple was called the *naos*. That is the Greek word translated "temple" in this verse.

According to Patriarchs and Prophets, 364, the tabernacle/temple was an important teaching device for Israel, but its importance needs to be kept in perspective. It was one of many things God did to reveal Himself to humanity.

In the NT, temple imagery centers on the person of Jesus Christ (Matt 12:6; John 2:19-21). He Himself is the complete fulfillment of all that the Old Testament sanctuaries represented.

Temple imagery in the NT is not limited to Jesus, it is extended to wherever Jesus is, the heart, the church and heaven itself. The latter picture is in view in Rev 15.

Rev 15:6--

The seals, the trumpets, and the bowls of Revelation are all connected to the heavenly temple, as are the judgments toward the end of Revelation 14 (14:15-18). They are commissioned by the highest authority in the universe.

God's mercy and His judgments arise from a heart of other-centered love that is looking to the long-range outcomes of events, not just the short-term consequences.

". . . dressed in clean and bright linen." Some important manuscripts have stone (Greek: *lithon*) instead of linen (Greek: *linon*). Normally the more difficult reading is original, but this seems an unintentional scribal error.

The plague angels in this verse wear golden sashes around their chests like the son of man tenderly caring for churches (Rev 1:13-16). Both mercy and judgment are qualities of the same God and have the endorsement of Jesus (see also Rev 14:10-11).

Rev 15:7—

This verse introduces the image that will play throughout the plague vision that follows, the seven angels receive seven bowls full of the wrath of God.

The bowls referred to here are relatively shallow. They are more like frying pans than salad bowls, so they are similar to censers or fire pans.

The seven angels receive the bowls of wrath from one of the four living creatures, which ties the seven bowls to the crisis in the heavenly throne room back in Rev 4 and 5.

In the Greek Old Testament, bowls (LXX: *phialas*) are used in both the tabernacle and temple for incense and offerings to God (Exodus 27:3; Numbers 4:14; 1 Kings 7:40, 45, and 50;

and 2 Kings 12:13 and 25:15).

Rev 15:8—

This verse offers a highly probable allusion to Exod 40 in general and 40:34-35 in particular, the inauguration ceremony for the wilderness tabernacle. The cloud represented the Shekinah glory of God filling the tabernacle.

The verse also alludes to the dedication of Solomon's temple in 1 Kings 8:10-11. The priests could not carry out their priestly service in the newly dedicated temple because of the glory of the Lord that filled it.

The glory of God is life-giving to the righteous, but its revelation is deadly to the unrighteous (Isa 6:6-8; Eze 10:2-4).

While the glory of God's character has been revealed in Revelation 15:3-4, the revelation of the seven bowl-plagues will reveal the character of Satan and what the whole universe would be like if he were in charge.

Since this scene is the sanctuary backdrop to the vision that follows, it means all of the seven bowl plagues occur at a time when the sanctuary ministry in heaven is not functioning. Probation is closed.

Rev 15 (Summary)—

I divide Rev 15 between verses 4 and 5 for the sake of an outline, but the entire chapter looks both backward and forward. Like Rev 3:21 and 11:18, it is duodirectional, completing what went before and introducing what comes after.