

“SEVEN ANGELS WITH SEVEN PLAGUES.”

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Scripture Texts: Revelation 15:1-8

Introduction.

Are you beginning to sense the pattern of cycles in Revelation? We keep starting over with sevens. We keep hearing about the end of time but with different images or analogies. The seven seals ended with the final judgment, and the seven trumpets ended the same way.

You can't outline Revelation on a straight line chart, it is more of a series of overlapping circles, sort of like one of those roller coasters that takes you in a series of loops, each one a little scarier than the last.

Now we come to the cycle called the seven bowls and it will conclude with a great judgment at the end of chapter 16. The seven bowls of the seven plagues form this next major section of Revelation

But before we get to the seven bowls themselves we are given a prelude of things to come that describes a scene in heaven.

Another Sign in Heaven, vs. 1.

It seems a bit strange for John to tell us about the seven plagues in verse one and then change subjects until verse 5. But we saw this before in chapter 8 when he mentioned the seven trumpets in verse one and then talked about something else until verse 6.

This sign is the *third sign* John has mentioned, the first was the pregnant woman (12:1) and the second was the red dragon (12:3). The first two signs were about the conflict, this third sign is of the outcome of the conflict.

We are told that with these seven plagues the wrath of God is completed, these are the last, the end of the end. The word “last” in our text is the Greek word *eschatos* or *eschoton*, from which we get our word *eschatology*, meaning last things.

This is the last of the cycles of visions, this is the last in the sequence of judgments that started with the seals. This is last also in the sense that while before repentance was possible, now there is only judgment, God's wrath has reached its completion. What we will encounter here will be more intense than anything we have seen before. When the bowls are done the judgment will be done.

After this the head of the serpent will be crushed, the seed of woman will triumph, what God promised way back in Genesis 3:15 will be accomplished, God's justice will be vindicated and fulfilled.

Genesis 3:15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

The Song of Moses, vss. 2-4.

What happens next takes place by a sea of glass mingled with fire. We saw the sea of glass in Revelation 4:6:

Revelation 4:5-6 ... before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, 6 and before the throne there was as it were *a sea of glass, like crystal*.

So we are in the throne room of God, we are in the presence of God and His holy angels and the saints.

Once again we hear singing. There is a lot of singing and rejoicing in heaven. Music breaks out again and again. What do you think about this singing in the midst of wrath and judgment? Hold that thought and we will come back to it.

Revelation 15:2-3 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. 3 And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

Who is singing? Those who conquered the beast. How is the beast conquered?

Revelation 12:11-12 They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. 12 Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them!

By the blood of the Lamb and by the word of the testimony. They trusted Jesus and they bore witness to Him. Even if not having the mark of the beast meant no food, starving to death was better than bearing the wrath of God.

What are they singing? The song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. We are reminded of another song of Moses in Exodus 15, a scene with some parallels to this one.

1,500 years before John, 2,500 years ago from us the people of Israel were standing on the far side of another sea, the Red Sea that had closed up on the Egyptian army. They just witnessed the most incredible display of God's power and deliverance.

God saved Israel by visiting His judgment on Egypt and in Exodus 15 Moses and the people broke out into song:

Exodus 15:1-2 Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying, “I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.

2 The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.

This new song of victory Revelation 15 picks up from that old song of victory. God saves His people when He visits His wrath on the world. Here the plagues follow the song of victory, in Exodus the song followed the plagues. They are singing about the defeat of the beast, like the singing of defeat of the beast of Egypt.

Moses is a type, a picture of deliverance. Through Moses God delivered His people from Egypt. The Passover was an annual reminder for the Jews of God's deliverance and triumph.

And now one greater than Moses is here. Through Christ God delivers His people from Satan and from all their sins. Christ is the greater Passover Lamb sacrificed for us.

Notice the words they are singing. They start praising God for His greatness and amazing power, as many of our hymns do. But it also praises God for His justice and righteousness. God's justice is one of His attributes, it flows out of who He is. God's wrath and fury are not a bad thing or a negative side of God's character. They completely consistent with His character because they are part of His character and nature. We will worship God for His justice as much as for His love and grace.

What is great and amazing and just and true are God's judgments.

Revelation 16:7 And I heard the altar saying, “Yes, Lord God the Almighty, *true and just are your judgments!*”

Revelation 19:1-2 After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, 2 for *his judgments are true and just.*

This is a great song of praise that ends with three reasons for their praise and worship.

God alone is holy. That's the first and greatest reason.

All nations will come and worship Him. No other god can make that claim.

His righteous acts have been revealed. This is cause to fear the Lord and fall down in worship.

Seven Angels with Seven Bowls, vss. 5-8.

The vision shifts to the tabernacle, the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven. In the OT the tabernacle and the temple represented God's presence with His people.

This is where God let His presence be seen through the pillar of cloud and fire. This is where God met with His people.

Exodus 40:34-35 Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 35 And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

And that presence breathed holiness. The glory cloud of God's presence communicated His holiness to everyone who saw it. Everything about the tabernacle/temple shouted holiness, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, the ritual cleansing, the careful observance of all the law. There were careful laws about what you could touch and not touch, what you could do and not do, when you could do something. Remember when Uzzah reached out to steady the Ark of the Covenant. Remember the cry of the seraphim, "Holy, holy, holy."

All through John's visions on the Island of Patmos he has been hearing things and seeing things. After hearing the Song of Moses he sees seven angels in dazzling robes each carrying a bowl made of pure gold. Their clothing reminds us of the OT priestly garments. They were meant to reflect the holiness of God and the holiness of their calling.

These angels look like God because they have been with Him and because they represent Him. Their task is a most holy task. They have a commission from God.

Judgment is always in the context of holiness, in the context of a pure and righteous God, in whom there is no sin or evil and in whose presence there can be no sin and evil.

When God disciplines us why does He do it? What does Hebrews 12 say, "To yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (12:11). To root out what is unholy, for without holiness no one will see God" (Hebrews 12:14).

Why do we confess our sin every week? Because God is holy.

Why do churches exercise discipline? In part because God is holy and the Church of Jesus Christ is kept holy when sin is dealt with honestly and repentance is sought.

The seven plagues take us back to God's promise in Leviticus of a *sevenfold* judgment:

Leviticus 26:18, 21 And if in spite of this you will not listen to me, then I will discipline you again sevenfold for your sins.

21 Then if you walk contrary to me and will not listen to me, I will continue striking you, sevenfold for your sins.

These seven bowls are full of the wine of God's wrath from the great winepress of the wrath of God (Rev 14:10, 19-20).

The bowls are full which indicates that God's patience and mercy have come to an end and now His righteous wrath and fury are about to be poured out. These seven bowls contain the seven last plagues of God's justice and judgment.

Judgment begins with the Judge, with God. God is the creator of all mankind and He created them for Himself. God will be the judge of all mankind.

Hebrews 10:29-31 How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Implications and Applications.

Does the Gospel seem like more good news to you now than ever before. When you see what you have been saved from does it change your view of God or your view of what Jesus accomplished on the cross?

Does this change what we think about what Jesus endured for us, so great a wrath?

The forest fires that have been burning in Washington and California are huge and horrible. We see glimpses of how dangers they can be when fueled by wind and dry timber. We see how fast they can jump and move and catch people by surprise and destroy houses in minutes.

It is an incredible thing to think about the fire of God's all-consuming wrath bearing down on us only to be quenched by the righteous blood of Jesus.

What a great plan of redemption, a baby born of woman who would crush the head of the serpent for us and for our salvation and deliver us from what we deserve.

"Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!
4 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."