

Revelation
A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #36
5/09/2007

The Judgment of God, The Great Tribulation, The Great Day of God's Wrath
Chapter Fifteen - An Explanatory Prelude to The Bowl Judgments
The Last Series of Judgments, The End of The Tribulation Period

Before we proceed with Chapter fifteen, the shortest Chapter in the book and which serves as an introductory prelude to the last series of judgments, the **Bowl Judgments**, let us consider what we have seen and what we are about to see.

The chronological structure of the seven-year Tribulation Period, which begins in Chapter six, is built around **the three series of judgments: (1) The Seal Judgments in Chapter six; (2) The Trumpet Judgments in Chapters eight and nine; and (3) The Bowl Judgments in Chapter sixteen.** When the “**seventh seal**” judgment was opened, it produced the seven Trumpet Judgments (8:1). The blowing of the seventh trumpet (11:15) results in the seven bowl judgments which are before us. The seventh trumpet judgment is also the same as the “third woe judgment” (12:12). The Seal Judgments and the Trumpet Judgments essentially cover the first three and one half years of the seven-year Tribulation Period.

As He has presented these series of judgments God has also included some passages, “explanatory interludes.” These interludes give us more information about significant events and themes which either happen during this seven-year period, after it is over or, in the case with Chapter twelve, the eternal conflict between God and Satan.

Chapter seven tells us about God choosing and sealing His 144,000 witnesses who serve Him during the seven-year period. Then, looking forward to a scene which follows the Tribulation Period, we see those who were saved during the Tribulation Period, the tribulation saints, worshipping the Lamb before the throne of God in heaven.

Chapters ten through fourteen are explanatory chapters. Chapter ten tells us about the “**little book**” that John was to eat which was both sweet and bitter. **Chapter eleven** tells us about the “**two prophets of God**” who had prophesied from the beginning of the **Tribulation Period** and were killed by Anti-Christ when their assignment was finished at the midpoint of the **Tribulation Period**. **Chapter eleven** also presents the first two of the “**three Woe Judgments**” and concludes by showing us the “**temple of God being opened in heaven**” displaying a picture of God’s coming wrath.

Chapter twelve presents the eternal conflict between Satan and God and introduces the first five of the seven personages who play vital roles in this conflict.

Chapter thirteen introduces the sixth and seventh personages, the beast and the false prophet, or composite anti-Christ and describes the horror which they bring upon the world.

Chapter fourteen presents two visions which John received. First, he sees the 144,000 worshipping the Lamb in the millennial kingdom. Second, he sees, first the angel preaching the everlasting gospel to the whole world and then a preview of God’s wrath being poured out upon those who chose to serve Satan and to receive the mark of the beast.

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As we come to Chapter fifteen, the first words that greet us, **“And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous,”** remind us of the opening of Chapter twelve. The words, **“another sign,”** indicate that what we are reading has a relationship to what was introduced in Chapter twelve which began with the words, **“there appeared a great wonder (sign) in heaven.”** Thus, what John is about to see and describe is a continuation of and related to the events introduced in Chapter twelve. This includes the matters related in Chapters thirteen and fourteen. All of these have to do with the last three and one half years of the Tribulation Period which culminates in the victorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ (Chapter 19) as He asserts His authority and annihilates His enemies. Chapters fifteen and sixteen are as one with Chapter fifteen serving as an introduction to Chapter sixteen.

John, in heaven, sees **“seven angels having the seven last plagues filled up with the wrath of God.”** The expression, **“filled up,”** means the completion, the finish. When this judgment is finished, God will have poured out all of His wrath upon the Christ-rejecting world. Knowing this, if we think what we have already read has been horrific, the judgments which these **“seven angels”** will administer will make all the previous judgments seem small by comparison. The long-suffering patience of God is now to be ended (2 Peter 3:9). It's time now for judgment.

John describes what he sees as **“great and marvelous,”** two words which were likely inadequate to properly describe the sight before him. The **“great and marvelous”** adjectives relate to more than just the **“seven angels.”** It includes the totality of what he sees. What is before his eyes must have reminded him of what he saw when he was first raptured up into heaven and was told **“Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the Spirit: and behold a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And before the throne was a sea of glass like unto crystal”** (Rev. 4:1-2,6). After that first experience of seeing the throne of God John had seen it once again (7:9-17) prior to this vision, but this is only the second time he mentions the **“sea of glass.”** John makes sure that we understand that what he saw was difficult to describe. This **“sea of glass”** was unlike anything known in this temporal world or describable with human words. Besides telling us that it is **“great and marvelous,”** John uses a Greek particle, **ὡς** (5613), translated **“as it were,”** to indicate he is using symbolic language to describe something which is otherwise indescribable.

The first time he saw it the **“sea of glass was like unto crystal.”** This time, the **“sea of glass is mingled with fire.”** Why the difference in the appearance of **“the sea?”** The first time John saw the **“sea of glass like unto crystal”** before the throne of God the purity and holiness of God was emphasized. The use of the word **“sea”** usually emphasizes the idea of separation. For instance, in the

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“new heaven and the new earth there is no more sea” because there is no separation from God. While in the first vision of the throne John saw twenty four elders and four creatures arranged about the throne, we are not told that he saw anyone standing on the **“sea of glass.”** However, in this vision, John not only sees the **“sea of glass mingled with fire,”** he also sees some people **“standing on the sea of glass.”**

The explanation of the difference can be found in the **“fire”** which John saw **“mingled with the sea of glass.”** **“Fire”** almost always meant at least one of two things. Here, both meanings are implied and appropriate.

First, “fire” referred to purification. In a passage in the Gospel of Mark that has been called difficult to understand and thereby often passed over, Jesus made an enigmatic statement that probably relates to what John sees here. In referring to escaping the fires of hell, Jesus had said, **“For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt”** (Mark 9:49). With this statement Jesus had tied together two symbols of purification, i.e., salt and fire. Salt both penetrates and purifies and is commonly used in the Old Testament for this symbolism. In order for anyone to stand before the throne of God he must first be purified. These, seen by John, are believers who have been purified by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and have had their **“dross burned away”** in the fires of persecution during the terrible persecution of the Tribulation Period.

We are acutely aware that the Tribulation Period has a unique relationship to the Old Testament and to the Jews. Thus, what John sees is a fulfillment of what we find in Malachi 3:2-3: **“But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.”**

John sees some believers, some **“sons of Levi,”** who **“had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass.”** They have been purified and cleansed and therefore now can stand before the throne of God as sacrifices unto Him.

Second, “fire” referred to destruction and judgment — the burning away of the **“tares,”** the **“dross,”** the evil and the wicked. Thus, the **“fire mingled with the sea of glass”** presents a dual picture — the purifying of those who belong to God and the destruction of those who belong to Satan.

The reference to the **“harps of God”** reminds us once again of the special relationship existing between the Old Testament Jew and the **Tribulation Period.** **“Harps”** were far more commonly used in the worship of God in the Old Testament than in the New.

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3 And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.

Once again we have a reminder of the special relationship existing between the Old Testament and the Tribulation Period in the reference to the **“song of Moses.”** The **“song of Moses”** would likely be the one he sang upon God's deliverance of the people from Egypt and Pharaoh found in Exodus 15:1-24. It could also refer to Moses' song sung unto the people when they had finished their wanderings in the dessert and were about to enter the promised land (Deuteronomy 32:1-43) or both songs. The song found in Exodus would be especially appropriate at this time, with its references to Pharaoh and Egypt, as we shall see when we read of the seven bowls of wrath which certainly have a unique resemblance to the plagues God imposed upon Pharaoh at that time of deliverance and judgment.

In addition to the relevance of the theme of deliverance from Egypt in Moses's song, the very mention of Moses often reminds us that he represented the law of God and the judgment which flows from violating God's law. As such, when we see a reference to Moses associated with the Lamb we should be reminded of Jesus Christ, as **“the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world”** (John 1:29). As **“the Lamb,”** Jesus, **“by His own blood entered in once into the holy place having obtained eternal redemption for us”** (Hebrews 9:11). As John has this vision of God's throne in heaven and tells us of **“the victorious saints singing the song of Moses”** we should not forget that things related to Moses involved **“patterns of things in heaven”** (Hebrews 9:23). The deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt was most certainly an earthly pattern of what is being described here. God has made that clear by a number of similarities between the two.

In Exodus, the Israelites were delivered physically by God from their bondage to Pharaoh and Moses celebrated with a song which is sung here. In this passage we see the saints who were not only delivered from the physical bondage and persecution of Satan, but were also set free from their spiritual bondage to Satan and sin by the Lamb. That is made crystal clear by “the song of the Lamb” first sung in Revelation 5:9-10: And they sang a new song, saying,

“Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”

In addition to the praises sung in Chapter five, these saints add some verses to the **“song of the Lamb:”**

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“Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.”

By their additional words, these saints extend the focus and praise for the Lord Jesus beyond His role as Savior to His role as King of Kings. It is a fitting prelude to the culmination of this expanded view of our Lord Jesus Christ, the purpose of this entire book, which reaches its climax in Chapter nineteen when Jesus is seen as **KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS** (19:16).

Though this view of Jesus has not been seen by many, it certainly has been clearly and emphatically presented previously in the Word of God such as in Psalms 2:1-6:

“Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.”

God used Paul to give us a more complete picture of the Lord Jesus Christ when He told Paul to write what we find in Philippians 2:9-11 and 1 Timothy 6:15-16:

“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”
“Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.”

The sober truth of the matter is that we, today, have as much for which to praise the Lord Jesus Christ as the victorious saints pictured here in Revelation fifteen. It is long past time that we emphasize the throne of Jesus as much as we emphasize His cradle and His cross.