

Revelation 15: A Preface to the Bowl Judgments

Scripture: Revelation 15

Introduction:

We have been introduced to two of the dragon's fierce allies, namely the beast from the sea and the beast from the land, both of whom work to deceive the world and destroy Christ's church. Recognizing the great difficulties and challenges brought about by these beasts, chapter fourteen has provided us with great motivation to stand firm in the faith, and to persevere to the end. There, we have considered the end of the righteous (those who refuse to serve and worship the beast) and the end of the wicked (those who compromise and worship the beast). We have been called to see the "big picture," so that we stand firm, even at the expense of our very lives, in the face of great opposition and temptation.

Now, we are preparing to move into the final bowl judgments, which God will pour out upon the earth, at the end of the age. We have considered the general judgments that come upon the world, revealed in the first five seals, culminating in the sixth and seventh seal, which brings us to the final destruction of the world. And we have considered the more intense judgments that come upon the wicked, in the trumpet judgments, culminating in the seventh trumpet judgment, which again brings us to the end of the age and the final destruction of the world. Remember, the trumpet judgments, though more intense in their scope of devastation than the seal judgments, were still very limited, and they were meant to warn those who were not directly affected/killed by them, of a coming great and final, worldwide devastation. Well, now we come to that great and final worldwide devastation, in the bowl judgments. In fact, you might say that the bowl judgments contain the very descriptive details that make-up the final seal and final trumpet judgments. And unlike the seals and the trumpets, which are activated all throughout the history of the church age, the bowls are poured out immediately, one right after the other, at the end of the church age.

I. Prelude to the Bowl Judgments

Chapter fifteen gives us a prelude to the bowl judgments, which will be poured out in Chapter 16 (similar to there being a prelude to the trumpets--Chapter 8).

Read verse 1. John sees another sign in heaven. This is the third and final sign that John sees. Remember, back in Chapter 12, at that great division in the Book of Revelation, carrying us behind the scenes of all that has happened in the previous 11 Chapters, John spoke of seeing two signs. And those signs were meant to grab hold of our attention in a very significant way, as they presented to us the dragon (representing satan) and the woman (the church), showing the great conflict that has existed since the fall of man, which continues to the end of time. The dragon, who could not devour the woman's child (the Christ child), now spends his remaining days contending with the church, the very apple of God's eye, as a means of expressing his rage against the child/Christ, who has defeated him. And all of history, from the time of Christ's resurrection and ascension to the end of the church age (the end of history) centers upon this great conflict. Hence, the importance of those signs.

Well, here again, we are given a sign, the third and last, recorded in the Book of Revelation; a sign described as "great and marvelous"...why? Because it brings us to the very end of that great and universal conflict that has existed since the beginning. Judgment is now arriving; the church is complete, and Christ will return. John sees "seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete." The former temporal judgments, which cast forth warnings and were limited in their scope, now spill over into the final plagues, where God brings His final judgments upon this world. The time for warning is over; the time for repentance is through, the end is here...these bowl judgments will bring everything to that final Day of God's wrath, where He will judge the world at the return of Christ. Indeed, this sign is very significant. It ushers in the close of history as we know it, and the consummation of the Kingdom of God.

Read verses 2-4. John sees that sea of glass that he saw back in chapter 4:6, which rested before the throne of God. Only now, it is mingled with fire, indicating that judgment is taking place beneath it. For, only those who have overcome and not worshiped the beast; the same group of redeemed who were rejoicing on Mount Zion in chapter 14:1ff, are standing on

top of it, because they are not the objects of God's wrath (consider the example of the "Red Sea," and those who were buried beneath it). All who wear the mark of the beast and the number of his name, being condemned, are beneath the glass; beneath the protective care of God, marked out for the judgment and the completed wrath of God, which is to be poured out in the seven bowls. The people of God are protected, and in fact, they worship God with harp and song, in light of His just judgment upon the world.

They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb. Moses and the Israelites sang, when their physical redemption from Egypt was sealed by the closing of the Red Sea, upon the heads of the Egyptian army. The threat was forever gone, and the Israelites prevailed under the leadership of Moses....all to the glory of God. And the people of God sing of the redemption brought about by Christ (pictured in the Exodus redemption), which is ultimately completed, when His enemies are completely put under His feet. Salvation and redemption meet their absolute fulfillment, when the enemies of God are destroyed...all to the glory of God.

And this song, given here in the text, tells us that the righteous will praise God in the destruction of the wicked for at least a few significant reasons:

1) Because God will display the glory of His greatness when He ends all wickedness and injustice upon the earth. The God who has been so overlooked, ignored and considered dormant at best, will step in and bring about the final judgment, revealing His sovereign power and control over all things. He has been running the show, the whole time. The wicked have not prevailed on His watch. God's greatness will be seen in the destruction of all; the mighty and the great, and every living person outside of Christ.

2) Because God will display the glory of His justice when He destroys the wicked. God will indeed show Himself just. The wicked and unredeemed will not go unpunished. The people of God, and all who are righteous will say "Amen, God is good!" Brethren, the properness, the righteous reality of God's wrath, which may be somewhat hard to swallow in the present, will be acknowledged in full in that day. None of us will say, "Well that is just unfair." The reality of the wrath of God toward sin, which may be difficult to wholly grasp in the present, will be seen and confirmed as an absolute necessity, when we see God through pure eyes on that Day.

3) The confirmation that God is indeed a God to be feared; to be treated as holy, pure and unique in the most perfect and infinite sense, will be acknowledged on that Day. We will praise God for His justice, and how it properly magnifies the holiness of His nature.

4) Every nation will be brought into subjection to God; every knee will ultimately bow before Christ and confess that Jesus is Lord, when He is revealed and His judgments are made known. God will be seen as God; as the God who really cared, who never slept, and who moved all things unto the perfect completion of His holy will!

All of this prefaces the description and revelation of the bowl judgments, in which the wrath of God is complete.

Read verses 5-8. Hence, the seven angels come out of the inner sanctuary of the heavenly temple, radiant and decked with holiness. And they receive the seven bowls of the wrath of God "who lives forever and ever" from one of the four living creatures; one of those glorious beings (the Seraphim) who stand closest to the throne of God. And they prepare to pour the bowls out, one right after the other.

But first, we are told that "the temple is filled with smoke from the glory of God and His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed." What is meant by this? There are no more warnings; there is no more need for the martyrs to pray for their deaths to be avenged, and there is no more intercession to be received on behalf of the lost. Grace and mercy are shut up until the completed wrath of God is poured out on the world. The hope of repentance is finished. God's patience is complete. Judgment has come. [Example of Solomon, when temple was built...etc]

II. Conclusive Thoughts on Chapter 15

1) God's greatness and justice will be vindicated in the end ("The God who lives forever and ever!"). The people of God will rejoice, even over God's judgment upon the wicked in the end. This is not to make us self-righteous, but our then clear understanding of the holiness of

God will compel us to recognize, acknowledge and praise the justice of God, deeming it as wholly proper and necessary (in accordance with His holy, divine nature).

The world denies the wrath of God (or limits it to the OT) because it fails to understand these things. We must embrace, by faith, what we cannot now understand by pure reason (use verses 3&4).

2) The time for repentance is now, while we witness other temporal, limited judgments. The present judgments are forewarnings of the final destruction to come upon the world. There is a time when the warnings will be over. It will be too late to repent then.

Amen!!!