

## Revelation Bible Study #38

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

### Revelation 15:1-8

**1** Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.

**2** 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,

“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.”

**5** After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, **6** and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. **7** And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, **8** and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

### **Introduction**

St. John has completed a cycle of prophecy which began in the twelfth chapter and ended at the end of the fourteenth. Now begins the final “cycle of seven” with the seven plagues unleashed by seven angels. Unlike the seals or trumpets or “beast” arcs though, here St. John is more explicit with the connections between his vision and the book of Exodus. As always, the Apostle expects his reader to be familiar with, even steeped in, the Old Testament in order to understand the full context of the vision.

### **Vs.1**

**1** Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.

St. John introduces the vision by giving the reader the same hermeneutic rule as the previous vision.<sup>1</sup> Whoever would understand the arc which starts here and continues into the nineteenth chapter must recognize that the language is *symbolic*. The seven plagues are full of metaphor, allegory and alluding to previous passages. For this reason, the seven angels are brought up *before* they arrive in the vision; St. John is summarizing the matter for us before going into detail on what he saw. The seven

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 12:1

plagues are the representation of God's actions before the final judgment is enacted.

We might ask why Revelation has these signs to begin with. The reader may ask, “why doesn't God simply tell us directly what shall happen?” This is a legitimate question. In the Old Testament, God often gives direct, concrete prophecies to His people, whether it be predicting the rise of the Babylonians to make Judah answer for their sins,<sup>2</sup> or even informing Abraham that his descendants will be afflicted for four hundred years but be granted a prosperous exit.<sup>3</sup> Why then does St. John's vision include such obtuse language, symbolism and references? The answer is simple, but must be repeated: “Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.”<sup>4</sup> The Apostle has been given only one single event with which we may rely on clear words for interpreting: the return of Christ. Everything else that he writes about concerns that which *has* happened, *is* happening, and *will* happen again. In other words, he writes a forward-looking typology for world history before Christ's Return.

David and Joseph and Adam and Joshua and Israel's judges and many others are presented as *types* of Christ. Certain events in their lives are meant to parallel (and thus prophesy) the Messiah's Incarnation (e.g., Samson and Isaac's miraculous births),<sup>5</sup> life (e.g., David's prophetic and kingly ministry), death (Joseph suffering that many may live),<sup>6</sup> and even Resurrection and ascent to Heaven (Elijah's ascent).<sup>7</sup> This also applies to the Levitical Law in many ways. Each *type* is a foreshadowing of the *antitype*, Christ, who fulfilled all of the types' foreshadowing. There are too many to number from Scripture in this document. What Revelation is doing is providing the antitypes *first*, in the form of the vision, which are then fulfilled multiple times throughout history – albeit, like the types of Christ, nor fulfilling the antitype completely. Adam was a type of Christ, but he did not rise again from the dead on the third day; David was a type, but he did not forgive anyone's sins; the list goes on. The final battles of the first Jewish war from 70 A.D. is a *type* of the battle of Armageddon; so too was Antietam, as was Kursk. Various famines are expected from the black horse rider, and dozens of plagues fulfill the pale horse rider's mission.<sup>8</sup> but none of those types which after-shadow the antitypes of the riders necessarily take out all of the food or destroy a quarter of all humanity.

Yet while St. John tells us how things will go in history through these antitypes, it is nonetheless still a prophecy which has a *terminating point*, namely the Return of our Lord Jesus. The Apostle notes “with them the wrath of God is finished.” When the seventh seal is opened, the seventh trumpet blown, the seventh bowl poured out, the text points to the End of all things<sup>9</sup> as the cycles and types are finished. Judgment Day will be upon the world, and all things are made right as Christ takes His rightful place as Ruler over all things.

## Vs.2-4

2 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,

“Great and amazing are your deeds,  
O Lord God the Almighty!  
Just and true are your ways,

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2 Habakkuk 1:5-11

3 Genesis 15:13-14

4 Revelation 1:19

5 Genesis 17:15-19, 21:1, Judges 13

6 Genesis 50:19-20

7 2 Kings 2:1-12

8 Revelation 6:5-8

9 Revelation 8:1-5, 11:15, 16:17

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.”

The vision begins by the sea of glass, which comprises the floor of the Throne Room,<sup>10</sup> changing its color to reflect the carnelian appearance of the One who is seated on the Throne.<sup>11</sup> This is likely a representation of God being “on the move” so to speak; the same way that noise symbolizes Him taking action, the Throne Room being saturated with a red hue tells the reader that He is about to exercise His authority with the seven angels and their plagues. The saints, “those who had conquered the beast,” are shown separate from this sea to demonstrate that though they stood firm in proclaiming the Word,<sup>12</sup> the ultimate judgment and defeat against the beast and those who worship it is accomplished by God alone.

The sea of glass is also turned red, or “mingled with fire,” because that makes it a *red sea*. It was at the Red Sea that God overthrew the Egyptian army by separating and then crashing the waters upon them.<sup>13</sup> The saints being on the side of the sea of glass paints a mental picture which parallels the Israelites having freshly been delivered from Pharaoh and his chariots. Thus they sing what St. John calls the “Song of Moses,” though it is also called the song of the Lamb, suggesting that the specific words are Christ's modification of Moses' original poetry.<sup>14</sup> The saints sing of God's deliverance as Moses did, but instead of Moses's proclamation of fear seizing Philistia and the Canaanites,<sup>15</sup> now *all* nations worship God and sing the same song. Nonetheless the parallel is still striking; just as the Israelites stood by the Red Sea and celebrated deliverance from Pharaoh, so too do all the saints stand by the Red Sea (of glass, made red by fire) and celebrate their deliverance from sin, death and the devil.

## Vs.5-8

5 After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, 6 and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. 7 And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, 8 and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

St. John has spoken of a Temple in Heaven.<sup>16</sup> Here we witness that a tent – or more properly Tabernacle – is also present. The author of Hebrews wrote about such a Tabernacle as well,<sup>17</sup> one in which Christ our High Priest ministers to His saints. While the ark of the covenant resides in the *Temple*,<sup>18</sup> Christ Himself goes to the heavenly Tabernacle to *be* our New Covenant. He has spoken of His blood as the New Covenant;<sup>19</sup> it is from this place that He ministers, likely also the place from which we receive His Body and Blood when taking the Sacrament.

The seven angels are dressed in the same kind of clothing that Christ was seen wearing when

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10 Revelation 4:6

11 Revelation 4:3

12 Revelation 12:11

13 Exodus 14

14 Exodus 15:1-18

15 Exodus 15:14-16

16 Revelation 11:19, 14:15

17 Hebrews 8:1-7

18 Revelation 11:19

19 Luke 22:20

He met St. John at Patmos.<sup>20</sup> They come out of the heavenly Tabernacle, through which Christ fulfills His priestly office, wearing this as a sign of a priestly service. The bowls given are most likely then the heavenly bowls, the copies of which were used for drink offerings – wine to be poured upon the altar during sacrifice.<sup>21</sup> Since martyrdom and the shedding of the blood of saints had already been compared to the drink offering, with St. Paul saying “I am already being poured out as a drink offering,”<sup>22</sup> what is presented here is a *reversal*. The world engages in drink offerings of blood:<sup>23</sup> now it is time for the pain inflicted on the saints to be brought upon them, with exponential increase. It is for this reason that the angels are shown pouring a drink offerings, for in the Old Testament the children of Israel did so with *wine*, which St. John has already told us represents God's wrath against sin and sinner. This means the entirety of the seven bowl will be spent discussing God's direct action of wrath against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

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20 Revelation 1:13

21 Exodus 25:29, Numbers 15:4-5

22 Philippians 2:17, 2 Timothy 4:6

23 Psalm 16:4