

REVELATION 15:1-8

Revelation Chapters 12, 13, and 14 mark a major section of their own, and they form an interlude between the trumpet judgments (Rev. 11) and the bowl judgments (Rev. 16 ff).

Chapters 15 and 16 form a unit, with Chapter 15 introducing Chapter 16. Chapter 15 begins by mentioning seven angels with the seven last plagues, and in Revelation 16:1-21 describes the angels each pouring one of the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth.

The bowl judgments are the final cycle of three series of seven judgments that God will bring upon the earth. The seal judgments end with the devastation of the fourth part of the earth (6:8). The trumpet judgments end with the destruction of one-third of the earth (8:7). The final bowl judgments will end in complete and total destruction. When the seventh angel has poured out his bowl, a loud voice from God's throne says: "It is done" (16:17).

In Revelation 15, the scene shifts back to the judgments, specifically the preparations for the final set of seven judgments to be poured out upon the earth and the kingdom of the Beast. The scene is set in heaven, from where God would initiate the final seven bowls of God's wrath, which will be poured forth in the next chapter (Rev. 16).

The event which led to Chapter 15 is the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11:15). The sounding of the seventh trumpet was met with the announcement that the Lord's kingdom would be underway as a result of the judgments under that trumpet.

The bowl judgments introduced here are the final set of judgments from God which bring about the establishment of His kingdom on earth.

REVELATION 15:1-4

¹ And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.

² And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that 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, having the harps of God.

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.

⁴ 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. (Revelation 15:1-4)

- A. **And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God. (Revelation 15:1)**

1. And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous...

Verse 1 provides the backdrop of verses 5-8. Verses 2-4 form an interlude that describes the saints who have triumphed over evil and are now singing a song to worship and bring glory to God.

The phrase "I saw..." appears three times in Revelation 15 (15:1, 2, 5).

- 15:1 – a preliminary statement on the seven angels with the seven plagues
- 15:2 – an introduction to the song of Moses and the Lamb that the victorious saints sing.
- 15:5 – an introduction to the temple in heaven and the glory of God.

The word "marvellous" [*thaumastos*] is used to describe God or works associated with God, and never of human beings. It describes not only the nature of God (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 15:3). The word is also used to describe God's works (Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:11; John 9:30).

2. Seven angels having the seven last plagues...

Some view the number "seven" – seven angels and seven plagues – as a symbol denoting totality. The number seven depicts completeness so that these bowls of wrath represent the final and complete outpouring of God's anger on the world.

We take the literal view because there are indeed seven judgments. And if seven is taken to denote completeness, how does one account for the earlier two series of seven judgments (seal and trumpet)

3. For in them is filled up the wrath of God.

These seven angels are the agents through which God will pour out His wrath. God's wrath is poured out by means of immense suffering, death, rivers of blood, fire, darkness, drought, and utter destruction (see Rev. 16:2-21).

The word "filled" means "finished" or "completed," indicating that the end has come and so has the judgment. After these seven plagues, there will be no more plagues. In them is the wrath of God completed. At the pouring forth of the last of these seven bowls, a voice from the Temple announces, "It is done!" (16:17).

B. And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that 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, having the harps of God. (Revelation 15:2)

1. And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire...

The glass sea is a symbol of perspicuity and transparency so that everyone is able to observe God's purity, righteousness and integrity.

Note that this sea of glass is mingled with fire. The word “mingled” means “to be mixed with.” This means that the sea of glass sparkles or radiates brilliant light.

There are many views as to what the fire represents.

- Some say the fire [pyri], which is derived from the colour fiery red, is a picture of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Others say that the fire is the blood of the martyrs, shed as part of their testimony.
- A third view is that the fire – like the sea of glass – is a symbol of purity. Fire can be taken to mean God’s presence; the pillar of fire led the Israelites across the Red Sea (Exod. 13:20-14:31).

In light of what the saints are doing in verse 3 – singing the song of Moses – John could be alluding to the deliverance of the Israelites from the Red Sea. Just as the Egyptians drowned in the sea through which the Israelites had come safely to the shore on the other side, the sea mixed with fire destroys the Antichrist and his armies, and the saints standing next to the sea of glass. Therefore, the sea mixed with fire is a symbol of God’s wrath directed against His enemies, as well as the deliverance of His people.

2. Them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name...

In verse 2, John speaks of the victory of the saints over the beast and his image. The phrase “gotten the victory” literally means “to overcome.” The meaning here is that those who have gotten the victory are the overcomers.

These are the ones who remained faithful until death (2:10). They obtained their victory “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death” (12:11).

These believers also overcame the beast. The beast was given the permission to kill the saints (Rev. 6:2; 11:7; 13:7).

John says that the saints overcame the beast, the image, the mark, and the name.

- The beast here refers to the Antichrist which comes from the sea (Rev. 13:3-4).
- The image is that of the beast which the False Prophet caused the people to make (Rev. 13:14-15)
- The saints also overcame the mark in the sense that they refused to take the mark of the Beast (Rev. 13:16-17).
- The name is related to the mark. The mark relates to “the name of the beast, or the number of his name” (Rev. 13:17).

B Stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.

These believers stood. Not only did they stand, but they also had harps of God. Like the twenty-four elders, they use their harps in the worship of God (Rev. 4:8-9).

C. 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. (Revelation 15:3)

1. And they sing the song of Moses...the song of the Lamb...

The saints who overcame are singing the song of Moses. There are two questions concerning this son.

▪ Is this the song of Moses?

First, is this the song of Moses, the same as the one sung by the Israelites after God had delivered from across the Red Sea (Exod. 15; see also Deut. 32)?

First, the words in this song have little in common with the songs of Moses (Exod. 15; Deut. 32). Instead, in this song, there are allusions to the Pentateuch (Exod. 34:10; Deut. 32:4); the Psalter (Ps. 86:9; 98:2; 111:2; 139:14; 145:17); and the Prophets (Isa. 2:2; Jer. 10:7; Amos 3:13; Mal. 1:11). But there are no references to the Song of Moses (Exod. 15). There is only one indirect reference to the other song of Moses (Deut. 32:4).

▪ Are there two songs?

The other question: Are there two different songs, one of Moses and the other of the Lamb?

There are some who regard the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb are not two different hymns but one and the same song (15:3-4). It is the Lamb who is working through Moses the servant of God (Exod. 14:31; Heb. 3:5).

There are others who believe that there are two songs – a song of Moses and a song of the Lamb. The only problem is that in the New Testament, there is no record of a song of the Lamb. In Revelation, there are hymns dedicated to the Lamb (Rev. 5:9-10, 12, 13; 7:10).

There are two songs of Moses recorded in the Old Testament.

- First, the song of Moses is written and sung to commemorate the victory which God gave Israel at the crossing of the Red Sea when Pharaoh's troops were destroyed in the sea (Exod. 15:1-18). The motivation for the song was the miraculous intervention of God on the singers' behalf.

The song of Moses also recognizes the uniqueness of God (Exod. 15:11).

- There is a second “song of Moses.” This second song is sometimes known as the “Great Song” (Deut. 32:1). It was written by Moses when he was about to leave the earthly scene (Deut. 31:19)

Although that song was given to the children of Israel, it contains elements that transcends time and space. It is universal. There is also a reference to the uniqueness of God (Deut. 32:39)

There are some parallels between this song of Moses (Deut. 32) and the song of Moses in Revelation 15.

	Revelation 15	Deuteronomy 32
The greatness of God	15:3a	32:3b
God’s works are just and true	15:3b	32:4b
The power of God’s Name	15:4a	32:3
God’s judgment and subjugation of the world	15:4	32:5ff

The first of Moses (Exod. 15:1-18) celebrates God’s deliverance of the children of Israel. The second song of Moses (Deut. 32:1-43) celebrates God’s judgment. One commentator makes the following observation:

The song of Moses was sung at the Red Sea, the song of the Lamb is sung at the crystal sea; the song of Moses was a song of triumph over Egypt, the song of the Lamb is a song of triumph over Babylon; the song of Moses told how God brought His people out, the song of the Lamb tells how God brings His people in; the song of Moses was the first song in Scripture, the song of the Lamb is the last. The song of Moses commemorated the execution of the foe, the expectation of the saints, and the exaltation of the Lord; the song of the Lamb deals with the same three themes.” (John Phillips, *Exploring Revelation*, p. 187)

2. The servant of God...

Although Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land, at his death he was recorded to be “the servant of the LORD” (Deut. 34:5; 1Chron. 6:49; 2Chron. 24:6).

3. Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.

The second half of verse 3 and verse 4 are taken from the hymns in the Old Testament.

Revelation 15:3b-4	Old Testament
Great and marvellous <i>are</i> thy works	The works of the LORD <i>are</i> great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. (Ps. 111:2) I will praise thee; for I am fearfully <i>and</i> wonderfully made: marvellous <i>are</i> thy works; and <i>that</i> my soul knoweth right well. (Ps. 139:14)
Lord God Almighty	Hear ye, and testify in the house of Jacob, saith the Lord GOD, the God of hosts, (Amos 3:13) For, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what <i>is</i> his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, The LORD, The God of hosts, <i>is</i> his name. (Amos 4:13)
Just and true <i>are</i> thy ways, thou King of saints.	The LORD <i>is</i> righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works. (Ps. 145:17) <i>He is</i> the Rock, his work <i>is</i> perfect: for all his ways <i>are</i> judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right <i>is</i> he. (Deut. 32:4)

- Great and marvellous *are* thy works (Job 5:9; 37:5; Ps. 139:14-15)
- Almighty [*pantokratōr*], which means the one who rules over all.
- Just and true *are* Thy ways. These attributes are fundamental to God. We see that in the Song of Moses (Deut. 32:3-4; Exod. 34:6).
- King of saints. This is the title that is ascribed to God. He is the ruler of the saints (Jer. 10:7, 10; 1Tim. 1:17)

D. **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. (Revelation 15:4)**

1. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for *thou only art* holy...
Verse 4 is a rhetorical question. In light of who God is and what is done, John asks, “Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name?”

Note the word “only” [*monos*]. It means “alone,” “solitary.” It has the connotation of “uniqueness” (1Tim. 1:17; Ps. 86:10)

The word “holy” [*hosios*] is not the same word that means “set apart.” In verse 3, we read that our Lord Jesus is “King of saints” meaning “King of holy ones.” He is the King of those who have been set apart.

Here is the word “holy” [*hosios*] means “pious.” The word appears eight times in the NT (Acts 2:27; 13:34-35; 1Tim. 2:8; Tit. 1:8; Heb. 7:26; Rev. 15:4; 16:5). Of the eight times, only once is used in reference to man (1Tim. 2:8; Tit. 1:8).

The two references to *hosios* are found in the Pastoral Epistles and are applied to Christians. Paul desired that men everywhere pray, lifting up “holy” hands (1Tim. 2:8). These represent freedom from sinful thoughts and deeds and illustrate how a believer is to approach God’s throne. Titus 1:8 lists *hosios* as one of the qualifications for the office of overseer, placing it beside “just.”

Hosios appears three times in the Book of Acts, and each one is an Old Testament quotation applied to Christ. Both Peter (Acts 2:27) and Paul (Acts 13:35) quoted Psalm 16:10 to support Christ’s resurrection from the dead. Jesus is the “Holy One” who would not “see corruption,” because God raised Him up the third day.

Hebrews 7:26 applies *hosios* to Christ as the believers’ High Priest.

2. For all nations shall come and worship before thee...

There is a sense that this is true even now. God is worshipped all across the world. But this is also a prophetic statement that is to be fulfilled. The complete fulfillment awaits Christ’s physical return.

3. Thy judgments are made manifest.

The universal worship of God will make clear those who are His and those who are not. These judgments have two results. First, those who refuse to turn to God in faith will be removed from the earth. Second, those who see His power and glory manifested in the judgments will respond in faith and be saved.

REVELATION 15:5-8

⁵ And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened:

⁶ And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles.

⁷ And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever.

⁸ And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled. (Revelation 15:5–8)

A. **And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened: (Revelation 15:5)**

The opening clause (see also in 4:1; 7:1, 9; 18:1) indicates a shift in John's attention from the vision of the saints at the sea of glass to a vision of what is about to take place in heaven.

In verse 5, John resumes the message which he started in verse 1 regarding the seven angels with the seven plagues. The scene is in heaven where John gets a view of the "temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven" (Rev. 15:5).

The term "temple" [*naos*] in the phrase "the temple of the tent of testimony" signifies the inner sanctuary of the tabernacle itself. The "temple" here is the "holy place."

The "tabernacle" denotes God's dwelling place. The "tabernacle of the Testimony" is found in Exodus 38:21.

John further describes this structure "the tabernacle of testimony." The word "testimony" refers to the ark of the covenant that was placed in the Holy of Holies; the ark contained the two tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed (Rev. 11:19).

This testimony set forth God's law, which stands as a witness against the immoral actions of the nations in their rejection of God.

In short, this expression – the tabernacle of the testimony – alludes to the Ten Commandments, which were the basic condition of the covenant God made with his people at Mount Sinai (Exod. 25:16; 40:20). These two slabs of stone were called "the two tables of the testimony" (Exod. 31:18).

The Ten Commandments are a witness to the people's transgressions that would call forth God's judgment and condemnation. Hence from the very presence of God and from the testimony of these laws divine judgment flows forth.

In Revelation 11:19, the temple in heaven was opened. When it was opened, the ark of His testament was seen together with manifestations of judgment (Rev. 11:19).

B. And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles. (Revelation 15:6)

1. The seven angels came out of the temple...

First, the angels come forth from the presence of God, which means that their mission has God's authority behind it.

2. The seven angels...having the seven plagues...

The angels are given authority to discharge the seven plagues on the people who had rejected God.

3. Clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles.

The apparel of the angels is made out of brightly shining linen that symbolizes holiness, and the golden sashes around their chests symbolize dignity, authority, and prominence.

C. And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever. (Revelation 15:7)

The four beasts are given special roles in the progressive unfolding of *Revelation* (Rev. 4:6). They were instrumental in the opening of the first four seals (6:1-8) and in holding golden bowls of incense, which are the prayers of the saints (5:8; and see 8:3-5).

Golden bowls were used in the service of the tabernacle and the temple of Solomon (Exod. 25:29; 37:16; 2 Chron. 4:22). Now these bowls are filled with the wrath of God from whose anger no one is able to escape (Rev. 6:17; 14:10). The seven bowls are poured forth in the next chapter (Rev. 16:2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 17). In the pouring forth of these bowls, God will administer His wine of wrath upon those who worship the Beast

D. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled. (Revelation 15:8)

1. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God...

The smoke is the manifestation of the glory of God. The scene is reminiscent of God filling the Tabernacle with the cloud of his glory (Exod. 40:34), as it also took place at the dedication of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chron. 5:13b-14).

At the time of King Uzziah's death, Isaiah saw the Lord sitting on his throne in heaven, and "the temple was filled with smoke" (Isa. 6:1-4).

2. No man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.

“No man was able to enter into the temple.” This speaks of the holiness of God. It speaks of a period of great privacy and intensity in the mind of God, when He is attending the final outpouring of His wrath.

It probably signifies the holiness of the moment. We see this when God’s glory visited the Tabernacle (Exod. 40:35), and when the glory of God descended upon the Temple (1 King 8:11), and the priests could not minister in the temple.

No one may enter the inner sanctuary until the bowls of wrath have been poured out and the destruction of the wicked has been completed. It also means that from this time forth, no additional souls will be saved (see Gen. 7:16)