

“When Mercy Turns to Wrath”

Rev. 15

- INTRO. - (Give title) Now, we have been in the Revelation for quite awhile, so let's go back and get a brief overview of what we have covered so far:
 - * Chapter 1 Jesus Christ as He really is
 - * Chapters 2-3 The letters to the 7 churches
 - * Chapter 4 The Rapture of the Church (and we spent a number of weeks on this issue...)
 - * Chapters 5-6 The opening of the 7 seals
 - * Chapter 7 144,000 sealed & a countless multitude
 - * Chapters 8-9 Blowing of the 7 Trumpets
 - * Chapters 10-11 Little Book eaten and the 2 Witnesses
 - * Chapter 12 The Woman (Israel), the Dragon, and the Male Child (Christ); Satan cast from heaven
 - * Chapter 13 Beast from the Sea (Antichrist) and Beast from the Earth (False Prophet)
 - * Chapter 14 Great and Terrible Day of the Lord
- *Now* (in chapters 15-16) we have the final wave of judgments, the seven bowls of wrath. Remember, we've seen three waves of judgment (and possibly a fourth).
 - But this final wave of judgment is more severe than any before. In fact, it is hard to really imagine just how terrible these awful judgments are going to be.
 - And you may remember, the seven last plagues are all contained in the seventh trumpet of 8:1. The wrath is expressed by the effects of the seventh trumpet (according to 11:15), which are seen in the seven bowls judgments in ch. 16.
 - This bring us right to the end of human history and the ultimate triumph of Christ. This brings us chronologically to the time just before the glorious appearing of Christ at His Second Coming.
 - Now, some Christians may respond by asking, “Why do we even need to study these awful things like this? We are *not* even going to be here...”
 - Well, that's true. I don't believe we will be here for this, but if God did *not* want us to know about it, He would *not* have put it in His Word. And remember, we are promised a blessing for studying this book. 1:3 says, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it...”
 - I believe, that one result of studying something like this, is that it should make us more zealous in our witness and more diligent in our praying. It should make us more urgent in our service for Christ and in our boldness to proclaim the gospel.

- So with that in mind, let's read this entire chapter again (which is the shortest of all the chapters in the Revelation): "And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, *which are* the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished. ²And I saw, as it were, a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had come off victorious from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God. ³And they sang the song of Moses the bond-servant of God and the song of the Lamb, saying, 'Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nations. ⁴Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou alone art holy; for all the nations will come and worship before Thee, for Thy righteous acts have been revealed.' ⁵After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened, ⁶and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean *and* bright, and girded around their breasts with golden girdles. ⁷And 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. ⁸And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished."
- At this point, seven angels appear, who are prepared to launch "seven last plagues" upon rebellious men. In

v. 7 they are given seven bowls of wrath to pour upon the earth, but they are mentioned in 15:1 by way of anticipation. So the first point in our outline tonight is:

I. THE PREVIEW (v. 1)

- Now, chp. 15 *introduces* the 7 bowls of wrath (which are poured out in ch. 16), and I want you to notice a couple of important things here at the beginning. First of all, this is another scene in heaven. That was the setting for both the seal judgments and the trumpet judgments. This simply points to the fact that God is doing all this.
- The heavenly "sign" that John sees (here) is comprised of seven angels who have seven "plagues." And I think the use of the word "plagues" is significant (here) because it ties this in with the plagues of Egypt.
- The Greek word that is used for "plague" literally means "a blow" or "a wound." And so the idea (here) is *not* really that of a disease or an epidemic of some kind; it is rather that of a powerful deadly blow or mortal wound inflicted upon the men of the world.
- Notice also that v. 1 tells us that "in them the wrath of God is finished." It tells us that these are the "last" plagues.
- You know, God has inflicted His wrath upon men at various points in history. He judged men by

confusing their languages at the Tower of Babel. He sent judgment upon the world by sending the universal flood. He rained down fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah. He judged Israel by sending them into captivity in Babylon.

- But this will be the final judgment of God. After this, His wrath will be finished. And it is interesting that the word for “finished” (there) is the same word that Jesus cried out on the cross concerning the atoning work of God (at least it is from the same derivative).
- And it’s as if the declaration is being made, that in the same way God “finished” our salvation, He will also “finish” the judgment of those who refuse to repent.
- And, by the way, the reference to these being the last plagues is significant in another way as well. MacArthur explains, “It is important to note that the fact that they are called the ‘last’ implies that the preceding trumpet and seal judgments were *also* plagues expressing ‘the wrath of God.’”
- In other words, “God’s wrath extends throughout the Tribulation and is *not* confined to a brief period at the very end, as some argue.” (expound > Pre-Wrath view)
- Now, the fact that these are the “last” plagues also indicates a chronological order (here) as well. Some have held that the trumpets and bowls happen

simultaneously, but this phrase seems to indicate that the bowls come last (chronologically).

- The final outpouring of God’s wrath was anticipated earlier in Revelation. In 6:17 we read, “for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?” This is also referred to as the “third woe” in 11:14; the time of destruction (11:18); the unmixed wine of God’s wrath (14:10); the final reaping of the earth (14:14-16); and the final trampling of the grapes of God’s wrath (14:17-20).
- Now, we know that God is very slow to anger; He is longsuffering and merciful. But *here* all that comes to an end. It is true, as Peter wrote, “The Lord...is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Yet those who refuse God’s mercy in salvation will inevitably experience His wrath. Well, the second thing we see in this passage of Scripture is:

II. THE PRAISE (vv. 2-4)

- In v. 2 we see the description of the sea of glass again. The mention of the “sea of glass” makes it clear that this scene is in heaven because we have seen it before in front of the throne of God.
- Back in 4:6 John had seen this same sea of glass platform. There it says, “and before the throne *there was*, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal.”

- Moses had seen a vision of it when he and the elders of Israel “saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself.” (Ex. 24:10)
- Ezekiel the prophet had also seen it. He described it as “something like an expanse, like an awesome gleam of crystal.” (Ezek. 1:22) But in Rev. 15 it is no longer tranquil. This time it is mixed “with fire.”
- This time the judgment of God (in its full fury) has been mixed with the tranquility before the throne. Walvoord writes, “Here the sea mingled with fire speaks of divine judgment proceeding from God’s holiness.” (We’ll see this from the fact that this judgment comes from the Holy of Holies in the Temple in heaven...)
- We’ve already seen that “fire” is a sign of judgment, and I believe this judgment fire is called forth by the believers in heaven on behalf of the martyrs who have come through the agonies of the Tribulation.
- We have already seen these Tribulation saints several times. Remember, in ch. 6, the prayer of the martyrs (under the altar) was, “When will our blood be avenged?” And then in ch. 8, the judgment of the 7 trumpets were in response to the prayers of the saints.
- There is coming a day when all the suffering of the Tribulation saints will be avenged. We’re getting ready to see that day in these verses before us.
- And notice that they are described as “...those who had come off victorious from the beast...” Now, how can this be? These people will have died the most brutal death at the hand of the Antichrist, and yet, they are called “victorious.” In 20:4-6 we will read about their resurrection and reward.
- Perhaps nothing is more difficult for the natural mind to understand than how death can really mean victory for a believer in Christ.
- All believers who died during the Tribulation will have died a horrible death, and no doubt will have suffered unbearably before the release of death.
- But listen, no one standing in this crowd before the throne of God bears any semblance of defeat or bitterness. There’s nothing but victory and praise and worship!
- For those living during the Tribulation, it will appear as if the Antichrist has conquered the saints, but God turns the tables. And we must understand: Death is never defeat for a child of God. It is victory!
- Remember what the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 15:55-57? He said, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- Paul declared, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Death, for a Christian of any age, is the end of suffering and the beginning of eternal joy. Ps. 30:5 says, “Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy *comes* in the morning.”
- This passage is the shout of joy! There is no defeat at all for these martyred saints; only a great song of joy. The fact that they are “holding harps of God” indicates that they are rejoicing and preparing to sing praise to God.
- MacArthur writes, “The believers pictured here will have undergone the terrors of the Tribulation and suffered painful, violent deaths as martyrs. Yet despite having endured the most intense persecution the world will ever know, their faith, which is a gift from God, will endure. Eventually, they will stand triumphantly before the throne of God, watching as God takes vengeance on their persecutors.”
- Now, notice in vv. 3-4 the song they sing. Actually, this is two different songs. Walvoord says, “The fact that ‘song’...is repeated with a definite article in both cases would lead to the conclusion that two songs are in view, rather than one, both being sung by the martyred throng.”
- He says, “The former recounts the faithfulness of God to Israel as a nation in recognition that a large number of Israelites are among these martyred dead. The song

of the Lamb speaks of redemption from sin made possible by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, and would include all saints.”

- But let’s look at these two songs more carefully. First of all, “the song of Moses.” And to understand the song of Moses, we need to remember that after Pharaoh released the children of Israel from Egypt, he changed his mind and pursued them furiously with a host of Egyptian troops... (expound)
- And they sang a song of praise to God for delivering them from what seemed like a hopeless situation. The people of Israel were naturally overwhelmed by this, because what looked like a complete disaster at the hands of a cruel, satanically inspired king (a brief likeness to Antichrist) was suddenly turned into an incredible victory, as God destroyed the Egyptian armies... (expound)
- So they sang a great song of praise to God for this victory, and this song was stamped upon the memory of the Jews. It was sung at every Sabbath evening service in their synagogues (kind of like the doxology is in many Evangelical churches today).
- But, now, why do the Tribulation saints sing it? Well, just as the Israelites looked back toward Egypt and realized that they were forever delivered from slavery and the taskmaster’s whip, so these people will look back to their experiences of horror on earth and realize

that they are forever delivered from the grasp of suffering and death.

- But, since they are *not* OT saints, they are *not* content *just* to sing the song of deliverance, (as the children of Israel were, who were merely delivered *physically*), but they also sing a song of eternal redemption by the blood of the Lamb.
- Gaebelien explains, “The song of Moses (in Exod. 15) is the song of an *earthly* deliverance and the song of the Lamb concerns a *spiritual* deliverance.”
- The song of the Lamb was first heard back in 5:8-14. It expresses the same themes of deliverance, God’s faithfulness, and His judgment upon their enemies. And even though neither of these two songs are word for word from Exodus 15 or Revelation 5, the essence is the same, and all of the phrases of these two songs come from the OT.
- Commentator John Phillips compares and contrasts the two songs: “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.”

- And the song of the Lamb brings us back to the central focus of the Revelation. J. Vernon McGee writes, “Again, let me call your attention to the fact that the Book of Revelation is Christocentric, that is, Christ-centered. Don’t let the four horsemen carry you away, or don’t be distracted by the blowing of the trumpets... And don’t let your interest center on these bowls of wrath. Let’s keep our eyes centered on Christ. He is in charge; He is the Lord. In this book we have the unveiling of Jesus Christ in His holiness, in His power, and in His glory.”
- They sing the song of Lamb, and there is something else that is very important about this song they sing – there is *not* one single word in it about man or the achievements of any man. From beginning to end, it is all about the greatness of God.
- APPL. - Listen, when we stand before God some day, we won’t be thinking about any of our own achievements. We won’t be thinking about which team won the Super Bowl. We will be focused on the greatness and the glory of God. Heaven is a place where men forget themselves and remember only God.
- The song of these redeemed saints extols God’s character as the omnipotent, immutable, sovereign, perfect, and righteous Creator and Judge. It closes with the joyful anticipation of the millennial kingdom,

when “all the nations will come and worship before” God.

- The prophet Zechariah wrote, that in the millennial kingdom, “it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths.” (Zech. 14:16)
- Isaiah wrote, ““And it shall be from new moon to new moon and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all mankind will come to bow down before Me,” says the LORD.” (Is. 66:23) And then thirdly we have:

III. THE PRESENTATION (vv. 5-8)

- Look at v. 5, “After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened, and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean *and* bright, and girded around their breasts with golden girdles.”
- As we have already seen several times, the phrase “after these things I looked” introduces a new vision. *Here* something takes John’s attention away from the Tribulation saints. It happens to be the angels, who are coming forth from the temple.

- The reason the “temple” was “opened” was to reveal the seven angels who would be given the seven bowls of wrath to be poured out upon the earth.
- The word for “temple” (there) is the word that refers to the Holy of Holies, the very dwelling place of God. This emphasizes that the wrath comes from God, and is entirely consistent with His holiness.
- The “tabernacle” was often referred to in the OT as “the tabernacle of testimony” because it contained the tablets of stone, the Ten Commandments. I believe this is to indicate that God’s judgment is based on His holy law.
- Ironside writes, “The mention of the tabernacle of the testimony brings Israel again before us, and reminds us that these judgments are in order to the carrying out of God’s covenant with His ancient people Israel, when the nations that have oppressed them must be punished.”
- Well, look with me at v. 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.”
- Here we see seven bowls full of the wrath of God. Notice, they are *not* filled with the *love* of God but with God’s *wrath*.
- Some people say, “My concept of God does *not* include wrath and judgment.” People who say

something like that simply do *not* have a biblical concept of God. (expound)

- And Mounce reminds us that in 5:8 “the golden bowls were full of incense representing the prayers of the saints...” In other words, God is calling our attention to the connection between the prayers of the saints and the wrath of God.
- Steve Gregg says, “Though the King James Version referred to the containers from which these plagues are poured as ‘vials,’ it is now generally agreed that the Greek word refers to a vessel that is more broad than tall, like a bowl.”
- MacArthur says, “*Phialas* (bowls) refers to shallow saucers.” He says, “The imagery is *not* that of a stream being poured out gradually out of a pitcher, but of the whole contents of the shallow saucers being hurled down in an instant flood of judgment.”
- Some (like David Chilton) have pictured these as “chalices” and the idea of a “negative sacrament.” They point to the fact that 14:10 said, “he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger...” And in 16:6 we read, “for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and Thou hast given them blood to drink.” Verse 19 refers to “the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.”

- So I think this is also a possibility, but the idea is that this is judgment that will be poured out quickly. In other words, “Those who refuse to drink the cup of salvation (Ps. 116:13) will be drowned in the judgments poured from the bowls of wrath.”
- Verse 8 says, “And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.”
- The first part of this verse recalls the times in the OT when the tabernacle (and then later the Temple) were filled with the smoke of the shikénah glory of God. And you may remember that on those occasions when that happened, no one was able to enter the temple and to minister.
- The meaning (here) seems to be, that no one would be permitted to enter to make intercession—to turn away his wrath—to divert him from his purpose.
- One Bible scholar explains this verse this way: “Here it is said, no man was able to enter this temple in heaven till the seven plagues were fulfilled. This was no doubt to show that no intercession would now avail for the doomed sinners. Their day of grace was past.”
- Now, as we move into ch. 16, the bowl judgments will come in very rapid-fire succession, and will only cover days or weeks at the most. You will notice a similarity between the 7 bowls and the 7 trumpets, and

you should also note a similarity between these judgments and the plagues of Egypt. (We'll see that next time)

- PRAYER