

Revelation Chapter Fifteen

Celestial Interlude to the Seven Last Plagues

(Rev. 15:1-8)

Sign in Heaven (v.1)

VERSE 1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous (Καὶ εἶδον ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν [conj kai + aor.act.ind.1s. eidon saw + adj.acc.nt.s. allos another + noun acc.nt.s. semeion sign + prep en in + art.w/noun loc.m.s. ouranos heaven + adj.acc.nt.s. megas great + conj kai + adj.acc.nt.s. thaumastos marvelous, amazing], **seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last** [ἀγγέλους ἑπτὰ ἔχοντας πληγὰς ἑπτὰ τὰς ἐσχάτας [noun acc.m.p. angelos angel + adj.acc.m.p. hepta seven + pres.act.part.acc.m.p. echo have + noun acc.f.p. plege plague + adj.acc.f.p. hepta seven], **because in them the wrath of God is finished** [ὅτι ἐν αὐταῖς ἐτελέσθη ὁ θυμὸς τοῦ θεοῦ [conj hoti because (assigns the reason for the “lastness” of the 7 plagues + prep en + pro.loc.f.p. aute “them” + aor.pass.ind.3s. teleo complete, finish + art.w/noun nom.m.s. thumos anger, wrath + art.w/noun gen.m.s. theos God]).

ANALYSIS: VERSE 1

1. A scene in heaven precedes the bowl series as happened with the seals (chap. 4-5) and the trumpets (8:2-6) as well.
2. Chapter 15 constitutes a heavenly interlude introducing the pouring out of the seven bowls of wrath of chapter 16.
3. The nations must experience the full measure of God’s wrath as seen in the cup of 14:10 and the harvest of 14:14-16 and the vintage of 14:17-20.
4. Verse 1 is a superscription for chapters 15 and 16.
5. The mention of the plague angels places this verse squarely with what follows in chapters 15 and 16.
6. What we have in this scene is not sequential with what we saw in chapter 14.
7. This is not the first time the a simple “then I saw” has made such a transition (e.g., 8:2).
8. The appearance of trumpet angels in heaven followed by activity connected with the prayers of the saints (8:3-5) before the angels ready themselves to sound is seen here as well with the appearance of the plague angels followed in heaven with the singing of the great multitude.
9. A note of finality prevails in 15:1 with the words “the last” and “was completed.”
10. Also note the finality in the words of the song which proclaim “all the nations will come” (15:4).
11. The seven angels comprise “another sign in heaven, a great and marvelous one.”
12. The first two signs in heaven noted in the Apocalypse are the woman clothed with the sun and the great red dragon (12:1,3).
13. The vision is in heaven but has to do with things that transpire on earth.

14. The sign of the woman was “great,” but this one is “great and marvelous.”
15. The combination of these two adjectives occurs only here and in 15:3 in Revelation.
16. The awesomeness of the angels stems from the fact of their mission, which completes the wrath of God.
17. The plagues are great in what they bring upon those who remain negative to the POG at the very end of the tribulation.
18. The sign consists of “seven angels having seven plagues, the last ones.”
19. “Having” carries the sense of the “having the duty of inflicting,” as does a participle of the same verb in 15:6.
20. “Plagues” is used 15x in Revelation (Rev. 9:18, 20; 11:6; 13:3,12,14; 15:1,6,8; 16:9, 21; 18:4,8; 21:9; 22:18).
21. This is the first time these seven angels are mentioned in Revelation as seen in the absence of the definite article with the noun “angel.”
22. They appear seven times as a group in the balance of the book (15:1,6,7,8; 16:1; 17:1; 21:9).
23. Nine times individual members of the group involve themselves in various activities (16:2,3,4,8,10,12,17; 17:2; 21:9).
24. Angels are agents of God carrying out His purposes (cf. Ps. 103:20).
25. This verse does not announce the actual appearance of the angels to undertake their task.
26. That comes later in 15:5-6.
27. Their duty is to inflict “seven plagues, the last ones” [*plegas hepta tas exchatas*].
28. Five of the plagues recall five of the ten Egyptian plagues in Exodus 7-10.
29. The first and third bowl-plagues are particularly reminiscent of what God did to punish the Egyptians and to deliver His people Israel.
30. Besides the plagues, other features of this context resemble God’s previous deliverance are the crossing of the sea (16:12), the song of Moses (15:3), the giving of the Law amid the smoke of Sinai (15:8), and the erection of the tent of the testimony (15:5).
31. These similarities hint that the seven bowls have a similar purpose, that of punishing the world and delivering the faithful into the promised bliss.
32. The first six seals and the first six trumpets were also plagues (e.g., 9:20), but these have the distinction of being the last ones.
33. These seven also comprise the third woe announced in 11:14.
34. The conjunction “because” (*hoti*) assigns the reason for the emphatic “lastness” of these plagues.
35. The form “was completed” (aor.pass.ind.3s.) is identical with the one discussed in Rev. 10:7: “but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets.”
36. In other words, in them (e.g. “seven plagues”) the anger of god “will have been completed” or “will have reached its ultimate goal.”
37. It is here and in Rev. 1:7 a proleptic or prophetic aorist.
38. A problem that arises is the fact that there is more wrath coming after the 7th plague has run its course.
39. Immediately after the 7th plague or bowl comes the 2nd Advent and the battle of Armageddon.
40. Following that comes the Judgment of the Nations which sees unbelievers who survive the tribulation being cast into hell.

41. So how is it that the 7th and final plague/bowl consummates the wrath of God against tribulational humanity?
42. The execution of the 7th plague/bowl concludes the wrath associated with the opening of the scroll with the seven seals.
43. It is probably this wrath/anger that is in view here.
44. Other manifestations of divine wrath take place that are not the consequence of the opening of the seven seals.
45. Armageddon, for instance, is not part of the seven seals, but depends on the fulfillment of the seven seals before it can take place.
46. The seven seals constitute the finale before Christ can return and take possession of the kingdom.
47. Near the end of the tribulation seven angels will take center stage.
48. Each angel will be responsible for the carrying out of the seven plagues, which equals the 3rd woe (9:12) and the seven bowls of wrath of chapter 16.
49. The 7th plague opens the door to the coming of Christ and things ahead.
50. These seven plagues as they are called here are the seven keys to the consummation of all things once history arrives at this point.

Vision of the Great Multitude (v.2)

VERSE 2 And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire (Καὶ εἶδον ὡς θάλασσαν ὑαλίνην μεμιγμένην πυρὶ [*conj kai + aor.act.ind.1s. eidon “saw” + conj hos as, like + noun acc.f.s. thalassa sea + adj.acc.f.s. hualinos glass, transparent + pf.pass.part.acc.f.s. mignumi mix + noun instr.nt.s. pur fire*], **and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name** [καὶ τοὺς νικῶντας ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνης αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ [*conj kai + art.w/pres.act.part.acc.m.p. nikao be victorious, win + prep ek “over” + noun abl.nt.s. therion beast + conj kai + prep ek from + art.w/noun abl.f.s. eikon image + pro.gen.m.s. autos “his” + conj kai + prep ek + art.w/noun abl.m.s. arithmos number + art.w/noun gen.nt.s. onoma name + pro.gen.m.s. autos “his”*], **standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God** [ἑστῶτας ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν τὴν ὑαλίνην ἔχοντας κιθάρας τοῦ θεοῦ [*perf.act.part.acc.m.p. histemi stand + prep epi on + art.w/noun acc.f.s. thalassa sea + art.w/adj.acc.f.s. hualinos glass + pres.act.part.acc.m.p. echo have + noun acc.f.p. kithara harp*]).

ANALYSIS: VERSE 2

1. At this point in the vision John’s sees the martyrs of the tribulation in their Ph 3 blessedness.
2. Again, the setting depicted is just before the 2nd Advent on the eve of the seven plagues.
3. John first focuses on “a sea of glass”, the one already encountered in 4:6.
4. As stated earlier the sea of glass is heaven’s pavement.
5. The translucence of this “sea” (suggesting vastness”) symbolizes God’s absolute purity.

6. Unlike the depiction in 4:6, the sea is untroubled, making it look crystal, but here the intermingling of fire suggests the aspect of God's purity that brings punitive actions to materialize shortly in the bowls of wrath.
7. The fire has specific meaning related to the mission of the seven angels.
8. "Those who had been victorious" are the same as the martyrs of 12:11.
9. They did not love their lives all the way to physical death.
10. The beast overcame them during the days of their sojourn (13:7), but now the roles are being reversed.
11. The beast is about to meet his end at Armageddon.
12. The trib martyrs are in heaven enjoying semi-ultimate sanctification (cf. Rev. 20:4).
13. From time to time they are the center of attention (beginning in 6:9ff.; also at 7:9ff.; 12:11; 15:2-4; 20:4-6).
14. One thing they all have in common is that they are victors over the beast.
15. They all have the salvation adjustment in common making them all overcomers (cf. 1Jn.5:4-5).
16. Of course many, if not most, of these saints are Ph2 victors as well (cf. 12:11; also 14:13).
17. Three times the preposition ἐκ ("from") occurs in this verse listing the obstacles overcome by this throng of singers.
18. They are the beast (Antichrist proper), his image (the cyborg), and the number of his name (chip or tattoo; e.g., the mark).
19. They refused to buy into the political and religious propaganda of the beast's deity.
20. They refused to worship the image set up in the midpoint of the tribulation.
21. And finally, they refused to take the beast's name or number into their bodies identifying them with the cult of the Antichrist and marking them as targets for liquidation.
22. They will be marched off to the death camps and slaughtered by the hundreds of thousands.
23. These believers who risked it all are seen standing on the solid pavement of heaven having harps in their hands to celebrate their victory in the Angelic Conflict.
24. The harp and the trumpet are the only musical instruments mentioned in Revelation.
25. They will all stand as a completed group of saints in heaven ready to sing a song in tribute to God for His faithfulness, righteousness and power.

The Singing of the Multitude (vv. 3-4)

VERSE 3 **And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying** (καὶ ᾄδουσιν τὴν ᾠδὴν Μωϋσέως τοῦ δούλου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν ᾠδὴν τοῦ ἀρνίου λέγοντες [*conj kai + pres.act.ind.3p. ado sing + art.w/noun acc.f.s. ode song + noun gen.m.s. Moses, Moses + conj kai + art.w/noun gen.nt.s. arnion lamb + pres.act.part.nom.m.p. lego say*], **"Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty** [*Μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά τὰ ἔργα σου, κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ* [*adj.nom.nt.p. megas great + conj kai + adj.nom.nt.p. thaumastos marvelous, amazing + art.w/noun nom.nt.p. ergon work + pro.gen.s. su "Your" + noun voc.m.s. kurios lord + art.w/noun nom.m.s. theos God + art.w/noun voc.m.s. pantokrator all-powerful, omnipotent*]; **Righteous and true are**

Your ways, King of the nations [δικαίαι καὶ ἀληθινὰ αἱ ὁδοὶ σου, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν [adj.nom.f.p. dikaios righteous, just + conj kai + adj.nom.f.p. alethinos true + art.w/noun nom.f.p. hodos way + pro.gen.m.s. su “Your” + art.w/noun voc.m.s. basileus king + art.w/noun gen.nt.p. ethnos nation]!]

VERSE 4 "Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are

holy (τίς οὐ μὴ φοβηθῆ, κύριε, καὶ δοξάσει τὸ ὄνομά σου; ὅτι μόνος ὁσῖος [pro.nom.m.s. tis who + neg ou + neg me + aor.pass.subj.3s. phobeomai fear + noun voc.m.s. kurios lord + conj kai + fut.act.ind.3s. doxazo glorify + art.w/noun acc.nt.s. onoma name; reputation + pro.gen.s. su “Your” + conj hoti for, since + adj.nom.m.s. monos alone + adj.nom.m.s. hosios holy, pure];

For ALL THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE YOU [ὅτι πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἥξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιόν σου [conj hoti for, since + adj.nom.nt.p. pas all + art.w/noun nom.nt.p. ethnos nation + fut.act.ind.3p. heko be, come, arrive + conj kai + fut.act.ind.3p. proskuneo worship + prep enopion before, in the presence of + pro.gen.s. su you],

FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUS ACTS HAVE BEEN REVEALED [ὅτι τὰ δικαιώματά σου ἐφανερώθησαν [conj hoti for, since + noun nom.nt.p. dikaioma righteous act + pro.gen.m.s. su “Your” + aor.pass.ind.3s. phaneroo make known, manifest, reveal])."

ANALYSIS: VERSES 3-4

1. The tribulation overcomers of the great multitude (chap. 7:9ff.) sing in celebration of the momentous occasion that has arrived, namely the pouring out of the seven bowls of wrath opening the way for the Second Advent.
2. Some interpreters feel “The song of Moses” harks back to Moses’ second song which he personally wrote at the close of his career (Deut. 32).
3. His first song is in celebration of Israel’s deliverance from Pharaoh at the Red Sea (Ex. 15).
4. Support for the Deuteronomy song is related to the last seven plagues, in that the words “just and true” in verse 3 are part of the central theme of the song (Deut. 32:2-4).
5. It also predicts the final subjugation of the nations to God (Deut. 31:1-8; 32:44-33:29), which is the hope of this song as well.
6. Specific points of similarity to the Deuteronomy song include Rev. 15:4a with Deut. 32:3; 15:3b; 15:4b with 32:4b.
7. Deut. 32:42 bears a striking similarity to what will happen at Armageddon according to Rev. 14:20 and 19:18-21.
8. The similarities to the Deut. 32 song are real, but a marked difference separates this song from the present song.
9. That song treated Israel’s unfaithfulness and God’s punishment of her because of this, before God eventually brings her back and grants her victory over her enemies.
10. This “last plague” context has nothing to say about the overcomers’ being disobedient.
11. It rather dwells on their faithfulness.

12. The Exodus 15 background has a better footing because that was a victory just as this is a song of victory over the beast.
13. Another tie-in is in the Passover lamb that commemorated the Egyptian deliverance of God's people.
14. Now the great Lamb has come through with the ultimate deliverance of God's people.
15. John's use of the Exodus typology elsewhere in Revelation lends support to the Exodus song.
16. Lines 1 and 2 of the overcomers' song echo the theme of Ex.15, and Rev. 15:4 is quite similar to Ex. 15:11.
17. The consciousness of victory against a background of "plagues" supports the Ex. 15 tie-in as well.
18. It is true that the verbal recollections of Ex. 15 are not as specific, but the thematic resemblances are definitely there.
19. The trib martyrs do not sing of their own deliverance as the Israelites did perhaps because they are so absorbed with the wonders around them.
20. It is not clear whether the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb constitute one song or two.
21. The one-song option notes the similarity of vv. 3-4 to Moses' song and looks upon it as a renewal of that earlier song.
22. But if this is the meaning, the text would have said "the song of Moses and of the Lamb."
23. There is no clearer way of designating two songs than the twofold occurrence of "the song."
24. The view that these are two songs makes a distinction between the two, but does not separate them.
25. Both celebrate the same theme, namely victory.
26. John only cites the song of the Lamb in these two verses, leaving it to the reader to recall Moses' song from Ex. 15.
27. In this view the two genitives, "of Moses" and "of the Lamb" are taken as subjective genitives rendering the meaning: "the song by Moses and the song for which the Lamb is responsible."
28. It is the song of Moses because its content and language come from Moses.
29. It is the song of the Lamb because He is responsible for it, not in words, but in actions related to the whole revelation of events leading up to this point in the prophecy of last things.
30. The actions of the Lamb have dominated throughout the process of deliverance that reaches a climax at this point (cf. 5:5), so that He is responsible for the overcomers' ability to sing as they do.
31. The first part of the song of the Lamb extols the works (τὰ ἔργα) and "the ways" (αἱ ὁδοί) of God.
32. The works of God are both "great" in terms of their magnitude and "marvelous" in terms of the impact they have on the human psyche.
33. Just as God's works were great and marvelous in judging the Egyptians at the sea so are His signs and wonders in the day of His wrath.
34. The descriptive title "the Almighty" speaks to God's attribute of omnipotence, and is especially appropriate in the context of tribulational phenomena leading up to the final victory.
35. "Righteous and true" comes from Deut. 32:4 Moses' second song.

36. The combination of these two particular qualities comes again at 16:7 and 19:2 in reference to the judgments of God.
37. The singers extol God's ways as absolutely "just" and completely in accord with the divine attribute of veracity.
38. God's moral attributes, specifically +R and J, along with veracity are connected to the praise of His ways.
39. God is true to His perfect moral character in judging in severity an unrepentant world.
40. He is neither too lenient nor too harsh in the meeting out of end-time wrath as seen in the seven seals, seven trumpets, seven last plagues, etc.
41. The ascription "King of the nations" implies the divine attribute of sovereignty.
42. It is an especially apropos title in this book (cf. 1:5; 19:16).
43. The song of the Lamb continues in verse 4 by noticing the logic of fearing and glorifying God: "Who will not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?"
44. These words draws attention to the utter insanity, especially within this context, of not recognizing who and what is behind all the wrath being poured out on the nations.
45. Obviously at this late date there will still be many who stubbornly refuse to fear God and glorify His name by believing in Christ for eternal salvation.
46. Everyone will not fear and glorify God even after the seven last plagues are past or even after the battle of Armageddon as evidenced by the fact of those who appear before Christ at the judgment of the nations (Matt. 25).
47. This question resembles the one in 13:4 where the followers of the beast sing the praises of the beast.
48. In response to the question the singers focus on God's incomparable moral character in the words: "For You alone are holy."
49. God stands alone in the category of absolute holiness.
50. Jesus Christ shares in that holiness both in terms of His deity and His humanity.
51. Here, as in verse 3, God the Father is the one being addressed.
52. God's holiness is on display before the nations demonstrating what He is for and what He is against.
53. A great deal of what the nations went into the tribulation thinking was acceptable will be proven to be anathema to God who judges those institutions and individuals the cosmos previously thought was okay.
54. The upshot of this hard lesson imposed on the human race will be that millennial nations "will come and worship before" Jesus Christ.
55. Those that honor the Son honor the Father as well.
56. The nations that exist in the millennium will have been born in the crucible of the tribulation.
57. These are the ones who in the first generation witnessed the manifestation of God's judgments.
58. These are the ones who pass the test associated with those days.
59. They will come to fear God and glorify His name because they are positive.
60. The misery they go through will not have been in vain.
61. The survivors will go on and populate the earth for the 1000 years.
62. Those who die in the Lord will rule and reign with Christ during the 1000 years (cf. Rev 14:13).
63. During the 1000 years pilgrims will come from the nations and worship God in Jerusalem.

64. Once all the nations have been winnowed and the chaff removed there will be universal acclaim expressed in fear and glorification of all that God is.
65. "God's name" does not refer to some title but refers to all that He represents as seen in the doctrine found in His word.
66. The term "righteous acts" include His judicial sentences of condemnation against the world.
67. The thing that brings universal worship from the nations is God's actions in purging the world of evil.
68. And those who benefit are those who fear God and glorify His name before the Judgment of the Nations seen in Matt. 25.
69. The aorist "have been revealed" is prophetic/proleptic in reference to the last plagues leading up to the 2nd Advent.
70. The basis for the nations and their worship of Messiah in the Millennium age is seen in the last phrase of the song: "FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUS ACTS HAVE BEEN REVEALED."
71. All the "righteous acts" serve to convince men from the nations to worship "the King of the nations."
72. The things that make up the tribulation teach righteousness to the positive within the nations (cf. Isa. 26:9-10).
73. Most will stubbornly cling to evil but a significant minority will "fear" and "glorify" who and what God is.
74. God's holiness is manifest via His deeds.
75. It is through these things men can learn what God approves of and what He disapproves of.
76. All men have to do is observe the objects of God's wrath and the ways He accomplishes His wrath.
77. In addition, men have the Scripture to verify these things.
78. Those who do not fear and worship God illustrate spiritual insanity.
79. Positive volition coupled with intellectual honesty will direct the individual to salvation one and two.
80. The great multitude in heaven is proof of significant positive volition in the tribulation as well as those who survive the Judgment of the nations of Matthew 25.
81. Of course there is the 144,000 who are prepared in the first half and minister to the nations in the second half and end up being translated into the presence of the Lamb as were their teachers the two witnesses.
82. Here the great multitude celebrates their counterparts on earth who will start the millennial civilization.
83. The song anticipates the 1000 years and the nations that will "come and worship" the great King.
84. Verse 4a, based on the Greek, should read, "Who will not come to fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name."
85. The double negative with the aorist subjunctive views a person in the tribulation seeing what is going on and fearing God.
86. The upshot of fearing God is glorification of His name by making the adjustments to God, or put another way coming to a knowledge of who and what God is.
87. God's righteousness will be manifest to those who are unrighteous.
88. Positive volition will turn to God and embrace His ways before it is too late.
89. Only the criminally insane (e.g., obdurate neg. vol.) will refuse to repent.

90. Those who “come and worship” the Lord in the kingdom is the answer to the question posed in v. 4a.
91. At this juncture they will have to ride out the last days of the tribulation with its seven plagues and 2nd Advent.
92. Once they have passed the Judgment of the nations they will be invited by the Lord to inherit the kingdom planned before the foundation of the world (cf. Matt. 25:34 “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”).