

Redemption and Plagues

Revelation 15

Chapter 15 is a prelude to the seven last plagues presented in chapter 16. As we have noted previously, the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation often retrace the same periods of time from different perspectives. In addition, there is not a strict chronological progression from chapter to chapter in Revelation. For example, chapter 14 ends with the final harvest of earth when the saved and the lost meet their eternal destiny at the end of time. But chapter 15 goes back to introduce the seven last plagues that will be poured out on the earth just prior to the return of Jesus. The individual plagues are the subject of chapter 16.

But even in the middle of introducing the seven last plagues, John breaks in with a description of the saved in heaven—those who made up the harvest of the saved.

Standing On the Sea of Glass

I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb (Revelation 15:2, 3).

John had seen this sea of glass earlier (Revelation 4:6) when he looked through the open door into the throne room of God in heaven. He described it as being clear “like crystal.” Now he sees the redeemed standing on it—those who have been victorious over the beast and his image and his mark—and the glassy sea looks like it is “mingled with fire.” This may be symbolic imagery referring to the fiery trials through which the redeemed have come or perhaps it is a description of the glory surrounding them in heaven. Whatever John saw in vision must have been impressive—a vast “sea” looking like crystal mixed with fire!

The Song of Moses and the Lamb

The redeemed sing “the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.” Some commentators have understood this to mean two different songs, while others see it as a single song with two titles. The reference clearly looks back to the song Moses and the Israelites sang praising God following their miraculous deliverance from the Egyptians at the Red Sea (Exodus 15). One of the verses of that song says, “You in Your mercy have led forth the people whom You have redeemed; You have guided them in Your strength to Your holy habitation” (Exodus 15:13). This was sung originally in reference to the Exodus from Egypt and what happened at the Red Sea, but it aptly describes the experience of the redeemed who stand on the sea of glass in heaven. The song of Moses commemorated the greatest act of God’s deliverance in Israel’s history, and those whom God has delivered from the persecutions of the beast have every right to appropriate Moses’ song as their own.

If we see the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb as a single song, it illustrates the perfect harmony between God’s plan of redeeming sinners both before the cross and afterwards. Deliverance from sin in Old Testament times came through faith in the Lamb who *would* die on the cross, and deliverance from sin in New Testament times comes from the Lamb who *has* died on the cross.

The Song of the Redeemed

The redeemed add their own verses to the song.

Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy, for all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested (Revelation 15:3, 4).

The second angel’s message in the previous chapter calls on men and women to “fear God and give glory to Him” (Revelation 14:7). And the song of the redeemed in chapter

15 says, “Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?” Those who stand on the sea of glass are the ones who have heeded the second angel’s counsel.

We should note one more thing about the song of the redeemed. It contains not one word about what they have done to overcome the beast and his mark; it is all about what God has done. No one who stands on the sea of glass will be looking to self; all the attention and praise is focused on the One who has delivered them. They have come through a trying, dangerous time. They have successfully resisted the beast and its demand for worship. They have overcome. But they know that none of this has happened in their own strength, but only by the grace of God and in His power.

Seven Angels, Seven Plagues

John writes,

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete. . . . Out of the temple came the seven angels, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. Then 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. The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed (Revelation 15:1, 5-8).

The transition is abrupt. From the redeemed standing on the sea of glass praising God in song, the scene swings completely around to focus on seven plagues about to be poured out upon the earth. These plagues complete God’s wrath against sin.

These plagues remind us of the plagues God poured out on Egypt when Pharaoh refused to obey God and let the Israelites go free. At least four of the ten plagues inflicted on Egypt have counterparts in the seven last plagues that fall on earth at the end of time—water turning to blood, painful sores, darkness, and hail.

John says that “the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed” (verse 8). The presence and glory of God filled the Old Testament sanctuary on occasion like a cloud so that no one could enter (Exodus 40:34, 35; 1 Kings 8:10; 2 Chronicles 5:13, 14; Ezekiel 10:4). Some have seen in the smoke that filled the temple preventing anyone from entering during the time of the plagues as indicating that the decisions of the judgment are fixed and irrevocable at this point.

The appealing description of the seven angels’ clothing and appearance forms a distinct contrast to the loathsome plagues they pour out upon the earth. John describes them as “clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands” (verse 7). Some have seen in this the fact that God’s judgments against sin, although severe, are just. The psalmist wrote: “The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether” (Psalm 19:9). “Righteous are You, O LORD, and upright are Your judgments” (Psalm 119:137). God must punish sin and sinners, but He does so only as a last resort. “‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live’ ” (Ezekiel 33:11).

Revelation 15 merely introduces the seven angels and their seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues. The description of what happens when each angel pours out his bowl upon the earth is reserved for chapter 16.