

# The Seven Angels with the Seven Last Plagues

## 15: 1-8

**DIG:** How does John describe this new sign? Why does he say these are the last plagues? Is ADONAI unjust or unrighteous for sending the seven plagues? What picture does he paint in 15:2? Compare Moses' song of deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 15:1-18) with the song sung by those delivered from the beast. What does the Bible mean when it says: You alone are holy? What praise is given to God? By whom? Why will smoke fill the Temple?

**REFLECT:** The song of Moses draws on the LORD's past deliverance; the song of the Lamb looks forward to His future vengeance. Yet John's vision of joy in heaven and sorrow on the earth should turn our attention to our own situation today. How does this passage make you feel? Why? What does it make you want to do? Why? What great and mighty deeds has God done in your life for which you will praise Him today? How appropriate is the song in this passage to your experience with the Lord? Why?

The fifteenth chapter of Revelation is, by far, the shortest in the book, just eight verses, primarily serving as a prologue to the sixteenth chapter and a somber listing of the seven bowl judgments to be poured out upon the earth. Yet, it is critically important in its own right, providing a glimpse of heaven just before the final judgments fall.

Earlier, John had seen a mighty angel holding a little scroll in his left hand (10:1-11). The content of the little scroll deals with the seventh trumpet, where the mystery of God will be fulfilled and evil will be punished.<sup>345</sup> The seventh trumpet is the third woe. For this reason, it is the worst of all because it contains all the bowl judgments (Revelation 15 and 16). The mighty angel took a solemn oath to show the importance of this mystery and said: **There will be no more delay (10:6)!** Finally nothing will stand in the way of the final dramatic period of human history. From the middle of the Great Tribulation forward ADONAI will not intervene to give man further opportunity to repent. It will be the darkness before the dawn of the Second Coming. The period of delay will be over and the Lord's wrath will be irreversibly set in motion.<sup>346</sup>

This will be the third of three great and marvelous signs in heaven. The first divinely given sign was a woman clothed with the sun (12:1). The second sign was an enormous red dragon (12:3), and the third sign, here, John saw another great and marvelous sign in heaven (15:1a). The sign itself consists of seven angels with the seven last plagues. The word plagues literally means *a blow or a wound* (Luke 12:48; Acts 16:23 and 33; Second Corinthians 6:5 and 11:23). The Greek word for plague, *plege*, describes the beast's fatal wound that seemed to be healed (13:3 and 12). Thus, the seven last plagues are not really diseases or epidemics like AIDS or influenza, but powerful, deadly blows that are the seven bowl judgments.<sup>347</sup> God had said to the Israelites: **If you remain hostile toward Me and refuse to listen to Me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve (Leviticus 26:21).** That time will be upon them, and the world.

These seven last plagues are the greatest because the wrath of ADONAI is completed (15:1b). These seven angels are introduced as the final step in the outpouring of God's wrath on the earth (Zephaniah 3:8). A significant portion of John's revelation describes the coming judgments of the LORD against an increasingly wicked and rebellious inhabitants of the earth. But I need to remind you that if you love the Lord Jesus Christ, you need not fear these cataclysmic judgments. Those who accept Messiah will be rescued from those dreadful days of doom. Those who reject Jesus, however, will be left behind to suffer the coming wrath (First Thessalonians 1:10).

Along with wrath, God reveals His grace. This is an underlying principle of His character. With vengeance, He offers victory; with judgment, He sends joy. So in 15:2-4 He presents the mirror opposite of the somber doom of the seven angels with the seven last plagues of wrath in 15:1. While those seven angels were filling up their bowls of wrath, John saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire (15:2a). Earlier, we had seen this same sea of glass, and it was clear as crystal (4:6a). When Moses, Aaron and the seventy elders of Israel saw ADONAI, under His feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself (Exodus 24:10). Ezekiel saw the same thing (Ezekiel 1:22). But here, the crystal platform before the LORD's throne will be mixed with the fire of God's judgment. Fire is frequently associated with God's judgment in the Scriptures (Numbers 11:1, 16:35; Deut 9:3; Psalm 50:3; Isaiah 66:15; 2 Thess 1:7-9; Second Peter 3:7).

And, standing on the sea of glass, will be those who will be victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name (7:9-17). Some of these will be believing Gentiles and messianic Jews from the Great Tribulation. The first resurrection has three parts: the Rapture of the Church, Tribulation martyrs, and the righteous of the TaNaKh at Christ's Second Coming (Dani'el 12:13). Some will be killed as a result of the seven bowl

judgments that will be poured out upon the earth in the second half of the Great Tribulation, and some will die because **they** refused to take the mark of **the beast and his image**, and, therefore, will be martyred. To quote the famous line of missionary Jim Elliott, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose." Therefore, they will be **victorious over the beast** because of their unyielding faith in **Christ**. But whether Jew or Gentile, when **they** reach heaven **ADONAI** will give **them harps** and they will be seen worshiping **Him** as one (15:2b). **Their** worshiping will never cease, because the more we see **God**, the more reason we'll have to praise **Him**.

The appearance of the righteous of the TaNaKh and Gentile believers reminds us that **Jesus** sends **His wrath** as an act of **revenge** upon those who harm **His** children. **But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea (Matthew 18:6)**. Unbelievers will be condemned to **the lake of burning sulfur (20:10)** for abusing **God's** own people, because their abuse reveals their evil, unrepentant hearts (**Matthew 25:41-46**). Rabbi Sha'ul wrote: **Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for the wrath of ADONAI, for it is written, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord (Romans 12:19)**. Speaking of **the Jews**, **Jesus** said: **Whoever touches you touches the apple of My eye (Zechariah 2:8; also see Psalm 94:1-10 and 21-23)**. So the Jewish and Gentile believers pictured here will have gone through the terrors of the Great Tribulation and suffered horrible deaths. Yet despite having endured the most intense persecution the world has ever known, their **faith**, which is **a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8-9)**, will endure. Eventually, they will stand **victorious on the sea of glass** and watch as **Yeshua** takes **revenge** on their persecutors.

Those standing on the sea of glass will sing two songs, **the song of Moses (the servant of ADONAI) and the song of the Lamb (15:3a)**. **The song of Moses** is found in the TaNaKh (**Exodus 15:1-18; Deuteronomy 31:30 to 32:43; Psalm 92:5, 111:2, and 139:14**), which is included in its entirety in the daily morning synagogue service and liberally quoted twice-daily in the *Shema* (**Deuteronomy 6:4**). It celebrates the victory **God** gave the children of **Isra'el** when **He** brought them out of Egypt. Pharaoh's army sped off to recapture them, but his chariots and the men they carried were drowned in **the Sea of Reeds**.<sup>348</sup> **The song of Moses** was a **song of** victory and deliverance for the righteous, and at the same time of judgment and **wrath** on the enemies of **God**. Thus, in the last days, raptured believers, Tribulation martyrs, and the righteous of the TaNaKh **standing** together before the throne of **the LORD on the sea of glass** will sing the same **song** of deliverance sung long ago by **the people of Isra'el**.

And they will also sing the song of the Lamb, who is their eternal redeemer. That song was first heard in 5:8-14. Like the song of Moses, the song of the Lamb represents God's faithfulness to His children and judgment of His enemies. The song of Moses was sung at the Sea of Reeds, the song of the Lamb will be sung at the crystal sea; the song of Moses was a song of triumph over Egypt, the song of the Lamb will be a song of triumph over Babylon; the song of Moses told how ADONAI brought His children out, the song of the Lamb tells how Jesus will bring 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 an enemy, the expectation of the redeemed and the exaltation of the Lord, the song of the Lamb deals with the same three themes.<sup>349</sup>

The words of the song recorded here in verses 3 and 4 do not exactly match either the song of Moses in Exodus 15, or the song of the Lamb in Revelation 5. **But the seven themes and many of the key terms are similar to those found in the TaNaKh:**

First, **Great and marvelous are Your deeds (15:3b)**, reminds us of Psalm 139:14, where David says: **I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know them well.**

Secondly, when the righteous who stand on the crystal sea sing: **ADONAI, God of heaven's armies (15:3c CJB)**, it reminds us of the name by which God revealed Himself to Abraham (**Genesis 17:1**), Isaac (**Exodus 6:3**), and Jacob (**Genesis 35:11**). Those armies are composed of His angels (**Psalm 68:17; Matthew 26:53**). Jesus is the commander of heaven's armies (**Joshua 5:14**). He can provide for our every need.

Thirdly, when in unison they sing: **Just and true are Your ways, King of the nations (15:3d)**, this reflects the truth in the TaNaKh that affirms all [God's] works are true and His ways just (**Dani'el 4:37; Deuteronomy 32:4; Hosea 14:9**). There is one Ruler over all the nations, and He reigns supreme. His government is incorruptible and without equal. His kingdom includes people from every nation. What a wonderful Kingdom to be a part of.

Fourth, the exclamation: **Who will not fear You, Adonai, and bring glory to Your name (15:4a)?** is taken from the prophets, where Jeremiah says: **Who should not revere You, O King of the nations? This is your due. Among all the wise men of the nations and in all their kingdoms, there is none like You (Jeremiah 10:7)?**

Fifthly, the truth that **God alone is holy (15:4b)**, is often repeated in the TaNaKh (**First Samuel 2:2; Psalm 22:3, 99:5, 111:9; Isaiah 6:3 and 57:15; Habakkuk 1:12**).

Sixthly, the phrase: **All nations will come and worship before You (15:4c)**, quotes Psalm 86:9, when King David says: **All the nations you have made will come and worship before You, O Lord.**

Seventh, when all the redeemed sing: **For Your righteous acts have been revealed (15:4d)**, the TaNaKh echoes with such passages as Judges 5:11; First Samuel 12:7; Psalm 103:6; Dani'el 9:16 and Micah 6:5.

After hearing the song of the righteous standing on the sea of glass in front of the throne of God, John looked and saw the Most Holy Place in heaven opened (15:5). The Greek word *naos* refers to the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle where ADONAI's presence dwells. The Tabernacle on the earth during Moses' day was a mere replica of the true Tabernacle in heaven (Hebrews 8:2). Sometimes the earthly Tabernacle was referred to as the Tabernacle of Testimony (Exodus 38:21; Numbers 1:50; Acts 7:44), because the Testimony, or Ten Commandments, was placed there (Exodus 25:16). **The reason the seven angels will emerge from the Most Holy Place in the heavenly Tabernacle, is to highlight the fact that God Himself is the source of the seven bowl judgments.**

Out of the Tabernacle (see my commentary on Exodus - Fi The Sanctuary of the Tabernacle) came the seven angels with the seven bowls of plagues (15:6a). Bowls refer to shallow saucers that were part of the furniture of the Temple (First Kings 7:50; Second Kings 12:13; First Chron 28:17; Zechariah 14:20); and the sacrifices of the Tabernacle (Exodus 27:3; 38:3). The result will be that the wicked of the earth who refuse to drink the cup of salvation (Psalm 116:13), will be drowned in the seven bowls of plagues.

They were dressed in clean, shinning linen signifying their righteousness, and wore golden sashes around their chests signifying their royal priesthood (15:6b). They move out of the Sanctuary and away from the mercy seat (see my commentary on Exodus Fs - The Mercy Seat in the Most Holy Place). They are about to pour out the wrath of God. Those on the earth will receive judgment without mercy. They had defied the Lord, believed in Satan, worshiped the antichrist, taken his mark and worshiped his image, followed the false prophet, and rejected Christ.

The TaNaKh teaches that once a year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would take a bowl of blood from a goat into the Most Holy Place. He would dip his fingers in the bowl and sprinkle the goat's blood on the mercy seat. This was done to offer atonement for the sins of the people of Isra'el for the previous year. Since the antichrist and his followers will not accept the blood of Yeshua as an atonement for their sins, one of the

four living creatures will give the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God (Jeremiah 25:15), and instead of sprinkling the blood on the mercy seat, they will pour them out upon a sinful and unrepentant world (15:7).<sup>350</sup>

Once the wrath of God was poured out on Messiah because of what He did for sinners; however, in the future His wrath will be poured out on sinners because of what they did to Christ. The lesson here for us today, is that if you do not accept the sacrifice of the Lord, then you become the sacrifice of the Lord.

Then the sanctuary was filled with smoke from God's Shechinah (Exodus 34-35; First Kings 8:10-11; Isaiah 6:1-4), that is, from His power; and no one could enter the Sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels had accomplished their purpose (15:8 CJB). Earlier the antichrist insulted the name of ADONAI, His Shechinah, and those living in heaven. He was given power to make war against God's holy people and to conquer them (13:6-7). Now the tables are turned, with the Lord's people victorious, and His wrath about to be poured out on those who follow the beast.<sup>351</sup> There will be no more mercy, no more delays, and no more opportunities to repent until the seven bowls of judgment have passed.

We've all heard the expression, "I don't get mad; I just get even." Reading about the wrath of God described in Revelation, one might assume that the LORD will get "even" with sinners for their phenomenal offenses throughout the ages. But the truth is that God's final wrath will be a necessary expression of His holy justice. He can't turn a blind eye to sin. In fact, if He doesn't finally carry out justice as described in the Great Tribulation, it would be a denial of His holy character. That's why in the midst of His wrath, the victorious believers will sing His praise: **Who will not fear You, O Lord and bring glory to Your name? For You alone are holy. . . Your righteous acts have been revealed.** Those who know ADONAI best do not judge Him for His wrath. Rather, they worship and affirm His actions.

What should surprise us is not the massive scale of God's wrath, but that He waited so long to display it. **Not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (Second Peter 3:9b), the Lord** is mercifully restraining His wrath and giving maximum space to His marvelous mercy and grace. Now is the time to repent and take advantage of His patient love. And when we do, we'll join the believers in praising Him for all eternity.

*O love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong! It will forevermore endure - believers and angels' song.*<sup>352</sup>