



Part 33 – The Glory of God

Revelation 15:1-8

God's glory in the victory of the saints

Vs. 1 – “Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing...” – Here is the formal introduction of the final series of “sevens” depicting the judgment of God. Once again, John calls what he is seeing “a sign,” that is, a symbol.

In his vision, he has been witness to symbols which point beyond their appearance to something deeper. In chapter 12, both the woman and the dragon were called “signs.” That is, “they point beyond themselves and disclose the...meaning of history.”¹ This use of symbolism (characteristic of apocalyptic writing) must be kept in mind to avoid poor interpretations of the text.

“...seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last...” – These seven angels are instruments of God’s wrath described here as plagues which recalls God’s judgment of Egypt.

“...for with them the wrath of God is finished.” – Just as was seen in the seven seals and the seven trumpets, the judgment of God upon the world, which has been mixed with mercy, will finally become the unmixed wine of his wrath. The end of the age will come about as God draws his great patience to an end. The clause “is finished,” is *eschatos* which means “last.” In contrast to the seals and trumpets, there is no interlude included between the sixth and seventh bowls (ch. 16). There is strong Exodus imagery throughout this text, as there is elsewhere in Revelation. The seven plagues correspond to the ten plagues which preceded God’s deliverance of his people from slavery.² The world responds much the way Pharaoh did, refusing to repent and instead cursing God (16:9, 11, 21).

“The bowls cycle in Revelation 16 therefore brings us a deeper and more detailed portrait of the cosmic conflagration that we glimpsed in the sixth seal (6:12-17; destruction of earth and sky) and the seventh trumpet (11:15-18: celebration in heaven). Further perspectives on this completion of God’s wrath at the climax of history will come into view in Revelation 19:19-21 and 20:9-11.”³

Vs. 2 – The sea of glass before the throne of God was mentioned in 4:6 and is symbolic of God’s purity and majesty. John sees that this sea is “mingled with fire,” which probably indicates a connection to God’s judgment. That the saints have “harps in their hands” indicates that they are glorifying God in praise.

“...those who had conquered the beast...” – This company is the same as the 144,000 of 14:1-5 and 7:4-10. It is the entire company of the redeemed who are in heaven. They have conquered the beast, its image, and the number of its name “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death” (Revelation 12:11). They have persevered through the trials and suffering brought about by their wicked opponents. They stood fast in refusing to conform to the wickedness of the world, instead, remaining faithful to Jesus.

God's glory in his acts and attributes

The placement of the song that the saints in heaven sing demonstrates the “connection between the prayers/praises of God’s people and the outpouring of God’s justice (cf. 5:8; 8:3-5; Rom. 12:14-21).”⁴

Vs. 3 – The song they sing is described as a song both of Moses and of the Lamb and is similar to other songs of praise in the Old Testament, especially the two songs of Moses (Exodus 15; Deuteronomy 32). Virtually every phrase of this song is drawn from some Old Testament precedent.⁵ Notice that it is one song, not two, because the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb are the same. It is the song of God’s gracious deliverance from captivity to sin and Satan’s tyranny.

Vs. 4 – Throughout the Bible, the vision of the future includes the nations streaming to the city of God to worship the Lord their Savior. The idea is not universal salvation – Revelation still has much to say about the judgment of the unrepentant – but that God’s salvation will reach every nation and people such that we may speak of the *world’s* salvation.

¹ Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) p. 285

² G. K. Beale, cited in *A Theology of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2025) p. 229

³ Dennis Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001) p. 215

⁴ J. Scott Duvall, p. 229

⁵ G.B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, HNTC (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) p. 198

Drawing heavily from the Old Testament, the song highlights both the character (attributes) and the works of God. His “great and amazing” deeds relate primarily to acts of creation, salvation, and judgment. In all his ways, the Lord is “just and true.” Not only that, God’s righteous acts flow from his righteous character. He is the universal Sovereign, possesses all might, is faithful (“true”), and holy. Of course, this song is not comprehensive in its theological scope (that would be a very long song!), but it provides a model upon which to base our own praise, encompassing God’s acts and attributes.

God’s glory in his judgment of the wicked

The vantage point now shifts from the song back to the amazing sign announced in verse one. John now sees a heavenly tabernacle, which again reminds us of God’s presence with his people during their Exodus.

Vs. 5 – “...the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened” – The sight of the tabernacle rather than the temple seems to be due to the prominence of Exodus imagery in chapters 15 and 16. The entire section recalls the time of the tabernacle (wilderness), rather than the temple (Land of Promise). For Christians, this life is akin to the wilderness rather than the Land of Promise. The sign of the tabernacle emphasizes the blessed reality that God is present with his people in the wilderness and will serve as their Champion in the final judgment.

Vs. 6 – “...and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues...” – The seven angels are depicted in a way that emphasizes their purity and authority. That John sees them coming out from the tabernacle indicates that they are sent by the Lord. The royal / priestly garments worn by the “angels” (*angeloi* – “messengers”) are likely meant to reflect their role as Christ’s agents in the final judgment.

Vs. 7 – The “four living creatures” occupy a place of special authority and glory as they attend the throne of God (Revelation 4:6ff). Here, one of those four living creatures, acting on the Lord’s direction, authorizes the angels to proceed with the judgment. The formality and chain of command depicted here reminds us both of the glory of the Lord’s royal court as well as the meticulous nature of his justice. In other words, the Lord’s judgment will be seen to be truly just, not capricious or arbitrary.

Vs. 8 – When the tabernacle and later the temple were consecrated, the glory of the Lord filled those sanctuaries in such a way that men could not enter. When Isaiah encountered the Lord in the temple (Isaiah 6), the foundations shook and the whole place was filled with the smoke of the Lord’s glory. These were visible demonstrations of the majesty of God, a reminder of the vast distance between the Creator and the creature.

The harvest of the wicked called for in chapter 14 is readied in chapter 15 and will be depicted in chapter 16. Those who have denied the Lord and instead drunk the corrupting wine of Babylon will be held to God’s righteous standard of justice. “God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7). But through it all God will remain faithful to bring his beloved people to himself.

1. We are an Exodus People

There are many connection points to the Exodus in the Book of Revelation and none more prominent than here in chapter 15. Like the people newly freed from Egypt, we are not yet home. We live in the wilderness, a land still under the curse of God. Wickedness runs its course from bad to worse. We do not look for our home here. Even Abraham lived in tents after inheriting the Land of Promise because he was looking for that eternal home (Hebrews 11:8-11). When Pharaoh was unable to do anything to stop the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, he pursued the Lord’s people, seeking to destroy them. Similarly, the devil, having been brought to defeat at the cross of the ultimate Passover Lamb, now wastes his final breaths in a hopeless bid to destroy God’s people.

2. Look for God’s glory in the right place.

Throughout the Exodus, the Lord demonstrated his glory to his people in various ways, most supremely through the Tabernacle. In our era of redemptive history God is pleased to show us his glory in ways that are more ordinary on the surface but deeper in their significance. That is, during the Exodus God sustained his people through types and shadows. The tabernacle, the sacrificial system, and the priesthood all pointed ahead toward what the Christ would accomplish. And now we live in that era of fulfillment. God is glorified among us as we receive his ordinary means of grace, as we love him and one another, and as we give witness to his grace in Christ. This is what God’s glory looks like during his church’s long exodus. It’s important, therefore, that we do not repeat the sins of God’s first exodus people as they complained and bickered and committed spiritual adultery by going after idols. Even with the glorious signs they saw, there were moments when they wanted to return to their captors. So let us look for God’s glory in the right place.