

Prelude To Armageddon

Revelation 15:1-8

Introduction

1. Revelation 6-19 records the events of the 7 year Tribulation which brings history, as we know it, to a close. In these chapters is revealed the future salvation of Israel as well as the salvation of an untold multitude of Gentiles (Ch. 7). We receive a detailed description of the activity of the Antichrist (13:1-10) and the False Prophet (13:11-18). We are shown the deception and ultimate destruction of an evil, spiritual, political and economic system known as Babylon (Chapters 17-18). We are provided a birdseye view of the glorious return of Jesus (19:11-21).
2. Tying all of this together are 3 series of judgements that God brings against the earth. The 1st is the seal judgements of chapter 6; the 2nd is the trumpet judgements of chapters 8-9; the 3rd is the bowl judgements introduced in chapter 15 and poured out in chapter 16. Chapter 15, the shortest chapter in Revelation, serves as a prelude then to the final series of judgements. It serves as a prelude to Armageddon. This is where we have come.
3. Throughout Scripture we are warned about this terrible time of judgement, the Day of the Lord.
 - *Joel 1:15 – “Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as destruction from the Almighty.”
 - *Zephaniah 1:14-18 – “The great day of the Lord is near; It is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; There the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, A day of trouble and distress, A day of devastation and desolation, A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers. I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord’s wrath; But the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy, for He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land.”
 - *Malachi 4:1 – “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” says the Lord of hosts, “that will leave them neither root nor branch.”
4. Now that Day has arrived, it is upon us. Chapter 15 serves as its prelude. The 7 bowls of judgement constitute the 3rd great woe of 11:14. They are the blowing of the 7th trumpet. We are at the end of the end.

Transition

We have come to the conclusion of a lengthy interlude in chapters 10-14. Divine judgement is on the horizon; it is just around the corner. What do we discover? What is it that God wants us to learn?

I. God’s sovereignty is revealed as Armageddon approaches. 15:1

- *Chapter 15 is structured around the phrase “I saw” (*kai eidon*), in verses 1, 2, 5.
- *Another sign in heaven looks back to chapter 12 and the “woman” (12:1-2) who is Israel and the “great, fiery red dragon (12:3) who is Satan.

1. There is wonder in what God does.

*Great (*mega*) and wonderful (marvelous, amazing). John is astonished at what he sees. Its magnitude and significance is difficult to comprehend. What is about to happen will change all of history. Indeed the world will never be the same. John looks on in amazement. He is stunned by the vision.

2. There is wrath in what God does.

*7 angels and 7 plagues communicate completeness.

*7 last (*eschatas*) plagues (*plegas*) denotes finality.

*That they are called the “last plagues” sets them apart from the seals and trumpets in spite of some similarities. They are different chronologically and in intensity. Why? “For in them the wrath (*thumos*) of God is complete,” brought to its appropriate and climactic conclusion. These are the last and these are the worst.

*They are the 3rd woe (11:14), the time of destruction (11:18), the wrath of God poured out in full strength (14:10), the final reaping of the earth (14:14-20).

II. God’s servants rejoice as Armageddon approaches. 15:2-4

*John receives his 2nd vision in this chapter. These verses constitute an interlude of victory.

*Significant similarities with the Exodus will accompany us from this point all the way through chapter 16.

*We learn 4 great activities which should characterize every servant of God in every age.

1. We should praise His judgement and justice. 15:2

*Sea of glass (cf. 4:6) mixed with fire – denotes judgement.

(v. 2). The “sea of glass” was first revealed in 4:6 and functioned as a mirror, reflecting God’s glory and majesty. This is symbolic of God’s purity, holiness, and separation from creation. Here it is “mingled with fire,” symbolizing the divine judgement that is about to be manifested from a holy God.

*John sees martyred saints (cf. 13:7) redeemed during the Tribulation. They are described as victorious (*nikontas*), lit. “overcomers” or “conquerors.”

*Because of their faith in Christ, even unto death (cf. 14:13), they defeated Antichrist (the beast), his image, his mark, and the number of his name. They had no standing on earth, but they do in heaven! They stand on the majestic sea of glass, harps (joy, celebration) of God in hand. God is just in honoring his faithful servants. What they lost on earth they more than gain back in heaven.

Transition

God should be praised for His judgement and justice.

2. **We should praise His works and ways. 15:3**

* Song of Moses is a song of deliverance found in Exodus 15:1-8. A 2nd song of Moses is found in Deuteronomy 32:1-43, but it is the Exodus song that is in view here.

* Notice His title, the servant (*doulos*) of God. What a great tribute.

* Read the song and note, like the song of the Lamb (5:8-14), it resounds with the themes of God's salvation, victory and deliverance. It celebrates the righteousness of His redemptive acts.

* What we find in Revelation 15:3-4 is not an exact reproduction of Exodus 15 or Revelation 5. Here the common themes of Exodus 15 and Revelation 5:8-14 are summarized and highlighted.

* Verse 3 with its 4 lines forms a synonymous parallelism.

* Great and marvelous are Your works (repeated from v. 1, cf. Psalm 139:14) parallels just and true are Your ways.

* Lord God Almighty (cf. Amos 4:13) parallels O King of the Saints ("ages", *NIV*), or better "nations." It recalls Jeremiah 10:7 which reads, "Who would not fear you, O King of the nations?"

* God's works are great, marvelous, just and true. Our Savior is the Lord God Almighty, the King of the nations.

Transition

God should be praised for His works and ways.

3. **We should praise His name and nature. 15:4**

* Verse 4 begins with a rhetorical question.

* Fear (*phobos*) and glorify (*doxa*) are proper responses in light of who God is and what He has done (vs. 3 & 4). This is the only logical and spiritual response to the God who alone is holy.

* Name connotes all that God is in His person, character and activity. God is to be feared and glorified because He is great, marvelous, just, true, holy, the Lord, the Almighty, the King! His name and His nature are truly worthy to be praised. There truly is none like Him.

4. **We should praise His worth and wisdom. 15:4**

* All (not some) of the nations (*ethne*) shall come and worship (ascribe worth, value, honor) before you. No other is worthy of such reverence and homage, worship and adoration. He alone is Lord, Almighty, King and holy.

* His judgements (righteous acts) have been manifested (revealed, made known). *The day will come when all people will acknowledge that God's wrath, which is about to be poured out, is deserved, righteous, and perfectly designed to achieve His holy purposes. It should be noted that the saints in heaven do not sing about their own victory over the beast but about God's glory, sovereignty, and justice.* Note that some form of the pronoun "you" or "your" occurs 7 times! It truly is all about Him!

III. **God's sanctuary is ready as Armageddon approaches. 15:5-8**

*These verses reveal the 3rd and final scene of this chapter; the final act before the bowl judgements are poured out.

*John's attention is drawn away from the praises of the redeemed before the Lord.

*2 important lessons bring this chapter to a close.

1. **We should be prepared to serve His purpose. 15:5-7**

*After these things – the vision of the victors singing praises to God.

*The temple (naos), the Holy of Holies, of the tabernacle of the testimony – this takes us back to the tabernacle in the wilderness (Exodus 40:34-35) where in was the 2 tables of testimony, the 10 commandments brought down by Moses from Mt. Sinai (Exodus 32:15) and the ark of the covenant. This is the place where God dwells, where His holy presence was made known.

**John saw the veil of the Holy of Holies part, and out of the inner sanctuary of the Temple appeared "seven angels" (v. 6) who had been selected to administer God's bowl judgements. They are holding "the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles" (v. 6).*

White linen is symbolic of the purity of the angels, their righteous character, and the righteous act of God in pouring out His wrath on the earth. The golden girdle held the linen garment in place when the priest ministered in the Temple. Gold is symbolic of God's riches, beauty, greatness, and majesty. Christ wore the same apparel when He appeared to John (cp. 1:13).

*4 living creatures (ch. 4), angelic beings of worship. One gave to the 7 angels 7 golden bowls full of the wrath (thumou) of God. These guardians of the heavenly throne appear 7 times in Revelation (4:6; 5:6; 6:1; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; 19:4). Their assignment on this occasion is ominous and foreboding. God's anger, His wrath, His last judgements on the earth are carefully and reverently passed to the 7 messengers of destruction. There is no doubt that what they are assigned will come to pass. It comes from the God who lives forever and ever. The Lord is everlasting. He will send His divine judgement on His time, and that time has come.

2. **We may be prevented from seeing His power. 15:8**

*Following the angels out of the temple comes smoke, symbolizing God's majesty and glory, His awesomeness and His wrath.

When God made a covenant with Abraham, He passed through the divided pieces of the sacrifice in the smoking furnace and burning lamp (Genesis 15:17). When Moses received God's law on Mount Sinai, God revealed His holiness with fire and smoke (Exodus 19:18). After Israel placed the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle, God's presence was symbolized with smoke and fire (Exodus 40:34-35). In Solomon's Temple the glory of the Lord filled the holy place in the form of a cloud (1 Kings 8:10-11). This is an ongoing reminder of God's holiness. God's glory is always manifested during the time of

His judgement. Smoke from God's glory made entering the Temple impossible until His seething indignation was poured out. What a sign to the ungodly people on the earth, who chose to shun the worship of a holy God to follow the beast. The seven angels stand ready, awaiting the final signal to pour out God's wrath.

That signal will soon be given. Indeed, it is only 1 verse away.

Conclusion

One day God's wrath was poured out on Jesus because of what He did for sinners. One day God's wrath will be poured out on sinners because of what they did with Jesus. When that day comes no one or no thing will be able to stay the hand of God's judgement. He will no longer stand knocking on the door of human hearts. He will rather knock down the door separating heaven from earth as he floods the world with His final judgements. It will truly be "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).