

## **A Celestial Prelude to the Last Plagues**

Revelation 15:1-8

Would you take your Bibles this morning and turn to Revelation chapter 15? This is the shortest chapter in the book of Revelation. It is the introduction to the final plagues that will be poured out upon the world one day. And this morning I have entitled my discourse to you, “A Celestial Prelude to the Last Plagues.”

Let me read these eight verses to you as we prepare to examine them more closely. Revelation 15.

And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished. And I saw, as it were, a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had come off victorious from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God. And they sang the song of Moses the bond-servant of God and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nations. Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou alone art holy; For ALL THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE THEE, For Thy righteous acts have been revealed."

After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened, and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean and bright, and girded around their breasts with golden girdles. And 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. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.<sup>1</sup>

In a recent conversation I had with some fellow believers I was reminded, afresh, of how indifferent most people are to Bible prophecy and to the Second Coming of Christ. Not only indifferent—but I might add—ignorant. Most people who claim to be born again, those who claim to love the Lord Jesus Christ live as though he will never return. It is amazing. Pulpits are largely silent when it comes to preaching on eschatology, the study of the things of the end. Seldom do you hear sermons on the wrath of God, on divine vengeance, on coming judgment. Yet we are told in Acts 20 through the ministry of the apostle Paul that we are not, as ministers of the gospel, we are not to shrink from declaring the whole purpose of God. And in order to do that you must preach on Bible prophecy which is at least a third of the Bible.

Some will say, “Well, Bible prophecy is too controversial.”

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 15:1-8.

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I was talking with a few pastors not too long ago and that was their argument. And I teased them and I said, “Brothers, that is your excuse. Of course it is controversial. The gospel is controversial.”

Of course, many will add, “Well, it is also too confusing.” Preterists, amillennialists, post millennialists, premillennialists and most people want to say, “I am just a pan millennialist. It is all going to pan out in the end anyway, so who cares?” And, unfortunately many times that betrays a heart that is much more concerned about their favorite sports team and their next vacation than the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You would expect this with the unsaved, but not with the saved. Speaking of the terrifying judgments of God that will come about upon the world and ultimately result in a complete recreation of the heavens and the earth Peter admonishes us, saying in 2 Peter 3:12, “Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness.”<sup>2</sup> And I love this next phrase, “Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God.”<sup>3</sup> Hastening means to eagerly desire it. Beloved, I hope that is your heart.

John has encouraged us earlier in 1 John chapter three and verse two. He said, “We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”<sup>4</sup> And he goes on to say, “And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”<sup>5</sup> You see, as believers we are to live in the light of the Lord’s glorious return knowing that when he comes for us he will conform us completely into his image, to his nature. We are going to be like him, unbelievable. This is why the apostle Paul said in Philippians three and verse 14, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”<sup>6</sup>

Dear friends, we should live with our eyes fixed on heaven, so to speak, knowing that at any moment the Lord could come and snatch us away into his presence either in the glorious rapture of the Church or even in death. And he has given us the prophetic Word to keep us awake, to remind us, to help us stay on the alert, to help us realize that a day of judgment is coming upon the world that will ultimately give way to the glorious second coming of the one that we love and serve.

And this is why the Lord said in Revelation 1:3, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near,”<sup>7</sup> referring not to chronological time but the next epoch, the next season, the next era of redemptive history is imminent. That is, the next thing to come.

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<sup>2</sup> 2 Peter 3:11.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Peter 3:12.

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 3:2.

<sup>5</sup> 1 John 3:3.

<sup>6</sup> Philippians 3:14.

<sup>7</sup> Revelation 1:3.

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So, beloved, because I am commanded to preach the Word of God even when it is not popular and because I am commanded to preach the whole counsel of God and certainly because the Word of God is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work, we return again to our verse by verse study of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. And what a marvellous privilege it is to have the prophetic Word.

I was talking with someone the other day and we were thinking how terrible would it be to not have the end of the story, to kind of wonder how it was all going to turn out. But we have the prophet Word, unlike any other religious document in the world that claims to be from God—all of which are counterfeits—but the Bible has prophecy because only the God of the Bible knows the end from the beginning and has ordained all things according to his purposes. So what a privilege it is to study the prophetic Word and to allow the Holy Spirit to move upon our hearts, to stir the coals of our spiritual affections and fan them into full flame so that we can give him praise and glory and to be excited about his return and also be vigilant about spreading the gospel of Christ.

Down through redemptive history and all through the Bible we see examples of the wrath of God. We can go all the way back to Adam in the garden. Because of his sin God cursed Adam and Eve and therefore all of mankind, he plunged the earth and all men into sin, because of Adam's sin and the curse that resulted from that. And even by the time of Noah the wickedness was so great that God drowned the whole world except for Noah's family. And repeatedly throughout the Old Testament the prophets warned of the coming "day of the Lord," an impending, imminent judgment. Sometimes those things were going to happen in the near future, but they were also harbingers of a greater judgment to come, an eschatological "day of the Lord."

And over and over and over the Lord warns us of this coming judgment. Yet he patiently waits for men to repent that he might save them from his wrath, the just sentence for those who have violated his holy law.

But the world remains oblivious for the most part, although fear is mounting. Yesterday an article on the internet grabbed my attention by Bill O'Reilly. Most of you know of him. And the title of his article was, "The Wide World of Chaos." Here is just a little smattering of what he said, and I quote, "It may be time to start channeling Noah and begin building an ark." That was the first phrase that caught my attention.

"The world is a huge mess," he went on to say. "And it is getting worse every day. Iran is on track to develop nuclear weapons, but global warming may incinerate us first. The Israeli Palestinian hate fest rolls on and Afghanistan is falling apart. Drug criminals have overrun Mexico and third world poverty is as horrific as ever."

Then he went on to say, "This week President Obama implored the United Nations to do something, anything, to combat terrorism and global warming. The president was blunt." And then he quotes what the President said. "Consider the course that we are on if we fail to confront the status quo. Extremists sowing terror in pockets of the world,

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protracted conflicts that grind on and on, genocide and mass atrocities, more and more nations with nuclear weapons, melting ice caps and ravaged populations, persistent poverty and pandemic disease. I say this not to sow fear, but to state a fact. The magnitude of our challenges has yet to be met by the measure of our action,” end quote, so says President Obama.

O’Reilly then closed his little article a little later and said this, quote, “It will be a miracle if tough sanctions are applied against Iran. And even if they are, there is no guarantee the crazy mullahs will end their nuke program. Therefore, Israel will most likely attack them and a huge war will break out. Of course, the Muslim world will blame America,” end quote.

Well, he is right. The world is in a huge mess and it is getting worse every day. And as we come to Revelation 15 and 16 we see the prelude to the great harvest of divine judgment that is going to take place when the Son of man according to chapter 14 verse 15 puts in his sickle and reaps, “Because the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.”<sup>8</sup>

Now for a moment I would like to briefly review the chronology of what we have learned thus far in our studies, certainly the convictions that I have with respect to eschatology.

When the Church age has been completed the Church will be translated into heaven. This is sometimes called the rapture. And then the focus of God’s redemptive purposes will turn, once again, to his beloved enemy, his covenant people Israel. We know, according to the apostle Paul in Romans 11 verse 25, “A partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in.”

And certainly, as we look at them today we see the hardening. He goes on to say:

And thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB. AND THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."<sup>9</sup>

But before the Lord reconciles Israel unto himself I believe the Church will be snatched away. The sudden disappearance of millions of Christians around the world will bring incredible chaos and confusion upon the world, especially upon the United States which is already in a moral and economic free fall. This will be the opportune time for the Russian-Arab alliance to sweep down upon Israel as we read in Ezekiel chapter 38 and 39, the battle of Gog and Magog. And we know that God will utterly defeat them on the mountains of Israel. It will take seven months to bury the dead, seven years to burn the weaponry. And this miraculous defeat will be a witness to all of the nations that the God of Israel is nothing to be trifled with, that he, indeed, is the one true God.

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<sup>8</sup> Revelation 14:15.

<sup>9</sup> Romans 11:26-27.

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Like never before in the history of the world, given the rhetoric of religious fanaticism, of Iran's Ahmadinejad, combined with the staggering bias of the United Nations and even our own president against Israel, like never before in the world this scenario is not only likely, it is inevitable. An Israeli preemptive strike against Iran would immediately galvanize the Islamic nations with their ally Russia. And there you have Ezekiel 38 and 39.

This may well be what God has in mind when he said in Ezekiel 39 verse three:

And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD," Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal; and I shall turn you around, drive you on.'<sup>10</sup>

And some will ask, "Well, what will happen to this massive Russian, Arab, Islamic force?"

Verse 18 goes on to answer that.

And it will come about on that day, when Gog comes against the land of Israel," declares the Lord GOD, "that My fury will mount up in My anger. And in My zeal and in My blazing wrath I declare that on that day there will surely be a great earthquake in the land of Israel."<sup>11</sup>

He goes on to say in verse 22:

And with pestilence and with blood I shall enter into judgment with him; and I shall rain on him, and on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, a torrential rain, with hailstones, fire, and brimstone. And I shall magnify Myself, sanctify Myself, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations; and they will know that I am the LORD."<sup>12</sup>

With the chaos that will be the result of the rapture of the Church and the carnage produced by the defeat of the Russian Arab alliance, the Islamic world will be in utter disarray. And Israel will have unprecedented clout amongst the nations. This will provide the perfect storm for the most diabolical leader in the history of the world to emerge.

In Daniel chapter nine and verse 27 he is called "the prince to come." He is the antichrist. He will make a covenant with Israel which actually will be the trigger of the tribulation, also known as Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week. Daniel prophesied this in Daniel nine. It is the final week or the final seven years. Sixty-nine weeks of judgment have already occurred. There is one seven year period left.

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<sup>10</sup> Ezekiel 39:1-2.

<sup>11</sup> Ezekiel 38:18-19.

<sup>12</sup> Ezekiel 38:22-23.

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And in Daniel 9:27 we read of this judgment. He says that it is, quote, “decreed for your people and your holy city,”<sup>13</sup> referring to Israel, “to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place,”<sup>14</sup> which will be the millennial temple.

At that time the Jews will finally be able to rebuild their temple, that is when the antichrist emerges with a false sense of peace that he will promote across the world. The Jews are already preparing to build that temple. And that will be the same temple that the antichrist will later desecrate in the middle of the week. This will set into motion the seal and the trumpet judgments that we have studied thus far, judgments that will render the world almost uninhabitable. Over half of the population will die. In fact, the catastrophic consequences of even the first four seals are inconceivable. The Word of God tells us that it will kill a fourth of the population. And yet Jesus tells us that this is only the beginning of birth pains. By the end most of the human race will be exterminated.

And even as labor pains increase in severity and frequency for a mother who is about to give birth, so, too, the seal and trumpet and bowl judgments will increase in severity and frequency until finally the glorious kingdom is born when the Messiah returns in all of his glory.

Now the chronology of Revelation 15 and 16 is the middle of the seven year tribulation. It is in the middle of Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week. Just after the antichrist has desecrated the Jewish temple and demanded that the world worship him, and now the affects of the seventh trumpet which we read about in Daniel or in Revelation 11:15 are ready to occur. The seven bowl judgments that will be poured out upon the world very rapidly. These will be judgments that recall five of the 10 plagues of God upon the Egyptians in Israel’s first deliverance.

We read about that in Exodus seven through 10. And these bowl judgments that we will begin to study next week in chapter 16 will consist of loathsome and malignant sores on the beast worshippers, those who worship the antichrist. The seas will be turned to blood. Everything in the seas will die. The same fate will befall the fresh waters and rivers and springs. The sun will scorch men with fierce heat. Darkness will encompass the earth. The prophecy tells us that men will gnaw their tongues because of pain. The River Euphrates will dry up allowing the kings of the east to be assembled. According to chapter 16 verse 14, “For the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.”<sup>15</sup> And verse 16 he says that he gathers them together to the place which in the Hebrew is called Har-Magedon.

And then the final bowl judgment will be the greatest earthquake in the history of the world. Huge hail stones, about 100 pounds will come down from heaven upon men.

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<sup>13</sup> Daniel 9:24.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Revelation 16:14.

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Now, beloved, before these final plagues are unleashed upon the world the Lord reveals to us a celestial prelude that we have before us this morning in chapter 15. He did the same thing just before the seal judgments in chapters four and five. And even the trumpet judgments in chapter eight verses two through six.

So what was warned and anticipated in chapter 14 regarding the fall of Babylon, which will be the empire of the antichrist, and the judgment upon the beast worshippers who will be made to drink of the wine of the wrath of God, all of that now is about to occur. But before it does the Lord reveals this amazing vision to John in the first... or in these eight verses of chapter 15.

So, again, I have titled my discourse to you, “A Celestial Prelude to the Last Plagues.”

And there are four themes that I believe emerge from the text before us that I wish to examine for a few minutes this morning. First, we will see *a sign great and marvelous*. Secondly, *a sea of consuming fire*. Thirdly, *a song of triumphant deliverance*. And, finally, *a sanctuary of holy vengeance*.

First notice *a sign great and marvelous* in verse one. “And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished.”<sup>16</sup>

Now, John has previously seen two other signs in heaven. In chapter 12 verses one and three there was the woman clothed in the sun. And we also saw the sign of the great fiery red dragon. But this sign, we read, is great and marvelous.

What that means is that it is utterly amazing. It is that which causes absolute awe and wonder. Why? Because it points to the goal of these seven angels, namely to finish the wrath of God. Wrath, indeed, refers to his burning anger. It refers to his fury. It is a term in the original language that is used to describe the explosion of divine rage. Dear friends, this is the final phase of his wrath that began in the seal and the trumpet judgments. And now he is about to glorify himself by avenging his name through these seven plagues “which are the last.”

It is very important, “which are the last.” They are last in chronological sequence. I might add that this refutes those who argue that God’s wrath is reserved solely for the final stage of the tribulation rather than that which has existed throughout the entirety of the seven years even in the seal and the trumpet judgments. These plagues are the climax of all of the rest. In fact, they comprise the “third woe” that was predicted to come just after “the second woe is past” in chapter 11 verse 14.

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<sup>16</sup> Revelation 15:1.

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Beloved, what is about to happen is great and marvelous because the unholy trinity of the dragon and of the beast and the false prophet, along with all who worship them are about to be judged.

As I think about it, John sees this and now he is witnessing some of what he had heard about and read about in the Old Testament prophecies. Remember, Isaiah warned in chapter two verse 12, “For the LORD of hosts will have a day of reckoning Against everyone who is proud and lofty, And against everyone who is lifted up, That he may be abased.”<sup>17</sup>

And in chapter 13 verse six we read:

Wail, for the day of the LORD is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will fall limp, And every man’s heart will melt. And they will be terrified, Pains and anguish will take hold of them.<sup>18</sup>

In Jeremiah chapter 30 and verse seven we read, “Alas! for that day is great, There is none like it; And it is the time of Jacob’s distress, But he will be saved from it.”<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, God has promised to restore Israel unto himself.

And in Ezekiel chapter 30 and verse two we read, “Wail, Alas for the day! For the day is near, Even the day of the LORD is near; It will be a day of clouds, A time of doom for the nations.”<sup>20</sup>

Oh, how I wish Bill O’Reilly could hear this and understand it, announce it.

The prophet Zephaniah warned in chapter one verse 14:

Near is the great day of the LORD, Near and coming very quickly; Listen, the day of the LORD! In it the warrior cries out bitterly. A day of wrath is that day, A day of trouble and distress, A day of destruction and desolation, A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of trumpet and battle cry, Against the fortified cities And the high corner towers. And I will bring distress on men, So that they will walk like the blind, Because they have sinned against the LORD; And their blood will be poured out like dust, And their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold Will be able to deliver them On the day of the LORD’S wrath; And all the earth will be devoured In the fire of His jealousy, For He will make a complete end, Indeed a terrifying one, Of all the inhabitants of the earth.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Isaiah 2:12.

<sup>18</sup> Isaiah 13:6-8.

<sup>19</sup> Jeremiah 30:7.

<sup>20</sup> Ezekiel 30:2-3.

<sup>21</sup> Zephaniah 1:14-18.

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So, indeed, this sign that John sees is great and marvelous.

But, secondly, we see *a sea of consuming fire* in verse two. “And I saw, as it were, a sea of glass mixed with fire.”<sup>22</sup> My, what a stunning scene. Once again, John is allowed to see with his own eyes the sea of glass, chapter four verse six. Robert Thomas described this as, quote, “An emblem of the splendor and majesty of God on his throne that set him apart from all his creation, a separation stemming from his purity and absolute holiness which he shares with no one else,” end quote.

This recalls what Moses and the elders of Israel also saw when they saw the throne of God in Exodus 24:10 where we read, “And they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire,”<sup>23</sup> that is, something that is fiery red, “as clear as the sky itself.”<sup>24</sup>

Likewise, the prophet Ezekiel said in Ezekiel one that he sees this platform, that it is over the heads of the living creatures, the cherubim that he witnesses. And he sees this dazzling crystal like sea.

In verse 22 he says, “Now over the heads of the living beings there was something like an expanse, like the awesome gleam of crystal, extended over their heads.”<sup>25</sup>

And in verse 26 he goes on and he says, “Something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance.”<sup>26</sup> Lapis lazuli is an opaque blue.

And on that which resembled a throne, high up, was a figure with the appearance of a man. Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and there was a radiance around Him.<sup>27</sup>

So, beloved, here John witnesses the same thing. And here the tranquility of this sea of glass is mixed with fire and for good reason. You see, judgment is about to proceed from the one who is a consuming fire. Here we learn of the vast reservoir of righteous judgments that are about to be poured out upon the earth.

Dear friends, even as the waters of the Red Sea engulfed the enemies of Israel so, too, will the fires of divine judgment one day consume their enemies once again who are also the enemies of God.

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<sup>22</sup> Revelation 15:2.

<sup>23</sup> Exodus 24:10.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ezekiel 1:22.

<sup>26</sup> Ezekiel 1:26.

<sup>27</sup> Ezekiel 1:26-27.

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Now will you notice also the text says, “Those who had come off victorious from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God.”<sup>28</sup> Now this is a picture of the saints who have been saved during the tribulation and are martyred for their faith, yet those who have triumph over the beast, over the antichrist. This is a picture of those who refused to bow to his image nor would they wear the number of his name. And here they are pictured as this massive choir with full orchestral accompaniment singing praises to the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ before the throne of God.

Now earlier in chapter six these saints were pictured under the heavenly altar of incense. You will recall that there they were crying out with a loud voice, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”<sup>29</sup> Now, friends, here in this scene their prayers are being answered. The judge of all the earth is ready to act upon their behalf and to avenge himself.

So we have seen *a sign great and marvelous* and *a sea of consuming fire* and, thirdly, we see and hear *a song of triumphant deliverance* in verse three. “And they sang the song of Moses the bond-servant of God and the song of the Lamb.”<sup>30</sup>

This was the great anthem of praise that the Israelites sang immediately after God miraculously delivered them from the Egyptian charioteers at the Red Sea, remember, in Exodus 15. You will recall that as they watched the thousands of horses and the bodies of those troops and all manner of weaponry surface from the depths of the sea, they sang in Exodus 15 verse one, this song.

I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted;  
The horse and its rider  
He has hurled into the sea. The LORD is my strength and song,  
And He has become my salvation;  
This is my God, and I will praise Him;  
My father’s God, and I will extol Him. The LORD is a warrior;  
The LORD is His name.<sup>31</sup>

And then later on in verse 17 they sing something that is prophetic, something that here in Revelation we are beginning to see unfold. They sing:

Thou wilt bring them and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance,  
The place, O LORD, which Thou hast made for Thy dwelling,  
The sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established. The LORD shall reign forever and ever.<sup>32</sup>

And, of course, this was precisely the promise that God had made to Abraham some 700 years earlier in Genesis chapter 12 and 15 and 17.

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<sup>28</sup> Revelation 15:3.

<sup>29</sup> Revelation 6:10.

<sup>30</sup> Revelation 15:3.

<sup>31</sup> Exodus 15:1-3.

<sup>32</sup> Exodus 15:17-18.

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And now in Revelation 15 there is a new version of this great psalm of praise, the one that was once sung with respect to God's deliverance now sung again regarding the covenant promises of God that are being fulfilled on behalf of his people.

But will you notice they also sing "the song of the Lamb?"

Now, this adds some additional lyrics to the new song that we will sing that was recorded in Revelation five. Here I might pause for a moment. Those of you who have been with our expositions of the Psalter on Wednesday nights will be reminded of this, but "a new song" in the Old Testament was not one that had never been sung before, but rather it referred to a song that captured afresh the majesty and glory of God that he had demonstrated with his merciful and loving deliverance over some great calamity, a song that would fully summarize some magnificent truth, some magnificent work of God that gripped the hearts of the people, a new song that would celebrate some new act of God, that would speak of his redemption and his deliverance. For example in Psalm 40 verse three David said, "He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God."<sup>33</sup> That was with respect to some great deliverance that had occurred in his life and in the life of the nation.

But notice now the additional stanzas of the song of the Lamb in verse three:

Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty;  
Righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nations. Who will not  
fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou alone art holy; For ALL  
THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE THEE.<sup>34</sup>

That is a quote from Psalm 86:9. "For thy righteous acts have been revealed."<sup>35</sup> That is a reference to the righteous acts of judgment upon the wicked that will be meted out during the tribulation.

Oh, child of God, this is our hope. This is our song. In fact, it is a song that we can sing in advance, isn't it? It is an amazing thing. And aren't you glad that with each deliverance in our life, with every time where the Lord God proves himself powerful on our behalf, every time we experience something like that, we have yet a new song to sing, one more song to give him glory. Not only a song for what God has done, but also we can praise him because in the midst of some great difficulty he gives us confidence for the song that we *will* sing knowing that he will deliver us.

Beloved, when the storms of life encompass us we need to sing the songs of mercies in the past. But also we need to anticipate songs of mercy in the future. Our God is an awesome God. He is a holy, redeeming, faithful, merciful God who will do all that he has promised including the judgment of sin.

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<sup>33</sup> Psalm 40:3.

<sup>34</sup> Revelation 15:3-4.

<sup>35</sup> Revelation 15:4.

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So this is always a confident hope that we can have when suffering comes our way. Again, when we look beyond the suffering through the eyes of faith we can see the coming of the Lord, the great victory celebration. We need to have the same mindset as Jesus did, remember, when he endured the cross. And the text says that he despised the shame. Why? For the joy, for the joy that was set before him.

So we have seen *a great and marvelous sign, a sea of consuming fire, a song of triumphant deliverance* and, finally, John's eyes are drawn to the climactic scene and that is *a sanctuary of holy vengeance*, verse five. "After these things I looked."<sup>36</sup>

Now, let me pause here. That is a phrase that is used throughout the book of Revelation to underscore something amazing, something that is just startling. "After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened."<sup>37</sup>

Now the temple here refers to the innermost sanctuary where God abides. This is the holy of holies where God dwells. And I might remind you that the Old Testament tabernacle and later on the temple were—those that were on earth—were merely a faint copy of the heavenly reality. And so here he is seeing the heavenly reality opened up. And the phrase, "the tabernacle of testimony," is another name for the ark of the covenant because within this tabernacle was housed the most sacred of all objects and that was the ark of the covenant which is also called in Scripture the "ark of the testimony" because it housed the tablets of stone upon which God had written his law that he gave to Moses on Mount Sinai that we have all violated, the righteous, holy, moral standards that we are to obey.

So for this reason they are called the testimony, the testimony because what was written on the tablets of stone testify against our sin.

Now recall in chapter 11 verse 19 the temple of God was open to reveal the "ark of the covenant." But here the "temple of the tabernacle of testimony" is opened where God is now going to dispatch from his very presence these seven angels who are to pour out these last seven plagues.

Any of you that saw, a number of years ago, that Indiana Jones film where the Germans got the ark of the covenant supposedly and opened it up and they were all incinerated. This is the text from which that was drawn, albeit, a bit out of context.

But notice the attire of the angels, verse six. They were, "clothed in linen, clean and bright, and girded around their breasts with golden girdles."<sup>38</sup> Certainly this is attire that is fitting for these celestial creatures who will now emerge from the presence of a holy God. This also underscores the transcendent glory of what is about to happen. And here I find it interesting that the position of the girdles are the same as those that Christ wore in

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<sup>36</sup> Revelation 15:5.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Revelation 15:6.

## A Celestial Prelude to the Last Plagues

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chapter one verse 13, remember, where he was adorned with the attire of the high priest of the Old Testament picturing Christ as our great high priest. For certainly Christ alone is the one who could offer up sacrifice and make atonement for sin. And in that scene Jesus is pictured in the fierceness of his wrath preparing to judge his enemies. And now, likewise, the attire of these angels is befitting of their punitive mission.

Then in verse seven the drama intensifies. “And 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.”<sup>39</sup> These bowls are merely shallow saucers like those used in the context of the sacrifices offered in the temple. And now these bowls are full to the brim with wrath of God and are about to be dumped upon the wicked of the earth.

And then in verse eight he says, “And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power.”<sup>40</sup> This scene is so vivid, isn’t it? Can’t you see the smoke? Can’t you smell it, so to speak? This was always emblematic of the glory of God in the Old Testament, the cloud of his presence, like the thick cloud upon Mount Sinai in Exodus 19, like Exodus 40 and verse 34, “Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”<sup>41</sup>

Remember the same thing at the dedication of Solomon’s temple in 1 Kings 8:10. We read, “When the priests came from the holy place,”<sup>42</sup> it goes on to say:

The cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

Then Solomon said, "The LORD has said that He would dwell in the thick cloud. I have surely built Thee a lofty house, A place for Thy dwelling forever."<sup>43</sup>

Now, dear friends, here in Revelation 15 we see the heavenly counterpart of that earthly temple. And it is filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power. And at the end of verse eight it says, “And no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.”<sup>44</sup> Here we get a sense of the unapproachable fury of God. Like a volcano erupting with unimaginable power, the wrath of almighty God is about to erupt as the seven angels take the seven bowls and pour them out upon the earth.

Dear sinner, may I say to you, “Repent before it is too late”? Acknowledge your guilt before a holy God. You know that it is true. He will be merciful to you and he will save

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<sup>39</sup> Revelation 15:7.

<sup>40</sup> Revelation 15:8.

<sup>41</sup> Exodus 40:34.

<sup>42</sup> 1 Kings 8:10.

<sup>43</sup> 1 Kings 8:10-13.

<sup>44</sup> Revelation 15:8.

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you. Put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He died in your place. He is your substitute. He is your only hope of salvation.

And, dear Christian, be thankful that God and his grace has saved us and delivered us from the wrath to come because, indeed, “our God is a consuming fire.”

Let’s pray together.

*Lord, we praise you for your Word and for the glory of your name. And how we long to see you face to face and yet, Lord, our hearts are heavy for those that we love that do not know you. I am sure there are those in this room who do not know you. And, worse yet, they may be of those that think they know you but in reality they will be the ones that you will say, “Depart from me, you worker of iniquity. I never knew you.”*

*Lord, how I pray that you will bring conviction of sin to everyone who does not know you as Savior. And, Lord, cause us, those of us who know and do love you, to worship you in Spirit and in truth and to be busy about the great gospel enterprise.*

*Even so Lord Jesus come quickly. I pray in your name. Amen.*

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