

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Revelation 15

Introduction:

Chapter 15 is the shortest chapter in the book of Revelation. However, it is certainly not without significance. It is not a chapter to pass over quickly. I have entitled this message, *“The Beginning of the End”* for very good reason. All of the events that have happened up to this point are just the preliminaries to the final judgment of God that is waiting to be poured out on the earth. This final judgment will bring to a close God’s dealing with the rebellion of people and will prepare the way for the transition into the next stage of history—the millennium, or a 1000 year reign of righteousness by Christ himself.

Over the past weeks and months, as we have gone through this book of the Revelation, we have seen one disastrous calamity after another as it seems that all hell breaks loose after the Rapture of the Church. When the Church is removed and the Holy Spirit is taken out of the world, the Man of sin and lawlessness is revealed. The Antichrist, indwelt by Satan, sets himself up as a Messiah, the one who will save the world from destruction. But, in fact, just the opposite begins to occur. As people are taken in by this imposter, and devote themselves to his deception, the earth and those who dwell in it are faced with catastrophes which bring devastation on both the people and the earth itself.

Last week, in chapter 14, we saw a bit of a preview of what was yet to come. In a series of messages from a number of angels, John was shown an overview of the events which were still coming during the last part of this 7-year Tribulation period. This final period of the Tribulation is referred to by many as simply, *“The Wrath of God”*. It is a time when God will pour out his wrath on the Antichrist and all those who have bought his lie and refused to obey the truth of God.

Rev. 14 verses 6 and 7 introduce and summarize it well – *read them*. There is one final proclamation of the gospel by an angel, and then the warning that the hour has come for God’s final judgment on the earth.

Now we come to chapter 15. There are two key sections in this chapter. Verse 1 introduces the chapter and the final wrath of God. The theme of verse 1 is picked up and explained further beginning in verse 5. In between, in vv. 2-4 John shares another vision which he saw around the throne of God in heaven. Let’s begin by *reading this chapter*.

The Introduction to God’s Wrath – v. 1

In v. 1 we have the introduction to the final outpouring of God’s wrath. John says, *“I saw another sign in heaven...”* The term another makes it clear this sign was preceded by other signs. Two times prior to this John refers to a sign in heaven, both times in chapter 12. The first sign was a woman, who represented the nation of Israel. She was the one who would bring forth a male child – the Messiah who was to come forth out of Israel. The second sign in heaven was a great red dragon, who represented Satan, whose goal it was to destroy the child, to prevent the fulfilment of God’s plan of redemption. When he failed in that attempt, he turned his attention and his hatred toward the woman. From the time of the Roman emperors of the first century to the present, Satan has done everything possible to try to destroy the woman, the nation of Israel, but has always been unsuccessful.

Those two signs in heaven are now followed by another sign, great and amazing (NIV – marvelous). What John saw was *“...seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.”* These final seven plagues would bring to completion the wrath and the judgment of God. This is truly the beginning of the end.

But before he completes his description of this description of the angels and the plagues, John is given another vision...

The Songs of the Tribulation Saints – vv. 2-4

In v. 2 John’s vision expands to include what appears to be a sea of glass, mingled with fire. If this sea of glass sounds familiar, it should. Back in chapter 4, when John was first caught up to heaven to view the scene of worship around the throne of God, we read, *“...and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal...”* (v. 6). Surrounding the throne, on and beside that “sea of glass” were the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders worshiping the One on the throne.

But in John's current vision, there is something new added to this scene. He sees "...those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands." These are the Tribulation saints, believers who had stood up against the Antichrist and his evil system. They had refused the mark of the beast and suffered martyrdom for it. They are now gathered around the throne and they are singing. They sing two songs. The first is the song of Moses, which is not given to us, as we already have it in the Old Testament.

There are two songs composed by Moses which are recorded in the Old Testament. The first is in Ex. 15, the second is in Deut. 32. The evidence would suggest that the song referred to here is the one in Exodus 15. That song speaks of Israel's victorious deliverance and triumph over Pharaoh's army, all of whom were destroyed in the Red Sea. It is a song of victory and deliverance and certainly is fitting for these saints who have been victorious in the battle against the evil of the Antichrist.

The second song is called the song of the Lamb. As this is a new song, we are given the words. It is a song of praise and adoration to the Lord. The two songs are clearly different, but they both express a similar theme, that of deliverance. *Go through the song briefly...*

The Coming Wrath of God – vv. 5-8

In verse 5 the scene changes again. However there is something you need to see as it relates to the timeline of events. Turn back for a moment to chapter 11. This chapter ends with the sounding of the seventh trumpet. Review: Seven seals → seven trumpets → now seven bowls. The seventh seal ushered in the seven trumpets. Now at the end of the chapter 11, we have the seventh angel blowing his trumpet, and this ushers in the seven bowls or vials of God's wrath.

In between, in chapters 12-14, we have a number of other events and people described which help to fill in the details, but do not add to the timeline. With the sounding of the seventh trumpet we have a scene of worship around the throne. It ends in verse 19 with these words – *read it*. God's temple was opened... Now turn back to chapter 15. Look at verse 5 – *read it*.

Chapter 15 picks up right where chapter 1 left off. The temple or tabernacle—God's dwelling place—is opened up and the ark of the covenant is seen (11:19). Kind of reminds me of the earthly temple when Jesus died on the cross. The Holy of Holies was opened up to reveal the ark of the covenant, when the veil was torn in two.

Now as God prepares to pour out his final judgment against sin we are reminded of how Jesus Christ took the judgment for our sin on himself if only we will believe and receive his free gift.

Anyway, in John's vision, he sees seven angels coming out of the sanctuary with the seven plagues. *Read vv. 6-7.*

They are given bowls or vials by one of the four living creatures. David Levy suggests that these bowls would have been shallow, much like the shape of a saucer. But what is important is not the vessel, but what is contained in it. They are filled with the wrath of God.

That word *wrath* is important. There are two Greek words that are commonly translated as *wrath*. The most common word used is *orge*, meaning the natural disposition of anger or wrath. It is often used to refer to judgment or punishment. But the word used here is *thumos*, a word which refers to passion, anger, heat. It has the connotation of anger that boils up and soon subsides again. Levy says that in the OT, "...this anger is pictured as a cup of hot, bitter wine, boiling to the point of overflowing, depicting violent wrath from God against sin."

These seven angels are commissioned with the task of pouring out these bowls filled with the wrath of God against sin and sinners. This is the final judgment before God puts an end to unrighteousness. But before the final judgment begins John sees one more thing that is significant.

Read v. 8 – a couple of things. First – the smoke that filled the sanctuary. God's presence and His glory and power are often associated with a cloud or fire and smoke. When Moses went up on Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments, as the people stood at the foot of the mountain, we read, "*Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.*" (Ex 19:18)

When the tabernacle was assembled in the wilderness for the first time, and they placed the ark in the Holy of Holies, we read, *“Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.” (Ex 40:34-35).*

Again, when the temple was built in Jerusalem, and the Ark of the Covenant was placed in the Holy of Holies, we read in 1 Kings 8:10-11, *“And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a 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.” (1Ki 8:10-11 ESV)*

What an incredible reminder of God’s awesome holiness. No one can enter into the holy presence of God without having first been cleansed of sin and unrighteousness.

But there is a second thing to note here. Just as in the past, when God filled the tabernacle and the temple with his holiness, it made it impossible for the priests or anyone else to enter, so it is here. *Read v. 8 again.*

It appears to me that we are now at the point of no return. The separation has been made between the righteous and the unrighteous. God is about to pour out his wrath upon those who have refused to worship him and have chosen to follow the beast. The entrance to the presence of God has now been closed. There will be no more opportunity for repentance. The destiny of those who remain on the earth has been eternally settled. What a terrifying thought, but what a reminder of the importance of choosing Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

So, how do we wrap this up? What can we say to apply this to us today? I would like to take you back to the Scripture we read earlier today in 2 Peter. Turn to 2 Peter 2:1-13. Application:

- Are you ready for when the day of wrath comes?
- How are you living – what sort of people ought you to be?