

Revelation

*Part Forty-Four
Great and Marvelous
(Revelation 15:1-8)*

With Study Questions

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Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete.

² And I saw *something* like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark *and* over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. ³ They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvelous *are* Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true *are* Your ways, O King of the saints!

⁴ Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For *You* alone *are* holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested." ⁵ After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. ⁶ And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. ⁷ Then 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. ⁸ The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed (Revelation 15:1-8).

Introduction

We live in an era of mass information. That being the case, we are exposed (almost on a moment-by-moment basis) of the monstrous behaviors of the luminaries of our society-whether political or other celebrities. Yet it would appear that the famous, especially political, personalities are never held accountable for their actions. It can become disheartening to hear of behaviors by our leaders that would land almost anybody else in jail. Will there never be a reckoning? If so, will that reckoning only be in eternity?

Most certainly, the greatest reckoning will be on the final day of Judgment! But, as we learn in passages such as the one above, God interacts with His history as to bring kings and kingdoms to an end. And it would appear by the context of chapters thirteen and fourteen, His patience is pushed to its border when His body, the body of Christ becomes the target of persecution. Such is the context of chapter fifteen of Revelation.

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete (Revelation 15:1).

Great and Marvelous Wrath?

We now turn for home in terms of God's quenching of those who would seek to promote evil and stem the tide of the truth and redemption found in Christ. We may balk at the notion of "**the wrath of God**" being "**great and marvelous**," (*mega* meaning large and *thaumaston* and something at which we marvel or are astonished) but only because most of us have never had to experience the depth of darkness these first century saints were exposed to. For the enslaved Israelites, it was great and marvelous to be delivered from Egypt.

And, although John writes of a specific historic event (one that is soon to be "**complete**" in this judgment of Rome), we can be assured that those saints even in the world today, who have refused to bow the knee to man at great expense in their faithfulness to Christ can be assured that God will suffer evil for only so long.

And I saw *something* like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark *and* over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God (Revelation 15:2).

An Eye Toward Heaven

Some view the "**sea of glass**" as the brittle nature of this world; others as a reference to the Red Sea (especially in light of the song of Moses); still others as the brazen sea in the temple-the font which the

priests were to wash themselves. From Revelation 4:6 (which speaks of the sea of glass) it appears we are presented with a heavenly scene. As we often observe in Revelation, our minds are ever to be swept heavenward.

We see so much more here than a mere guide to holy living. We see the basis of holy living. We are not merely brought to the truth, we are brought to the One who Himself is **“the Truth.”** Apart from this, the Scriptures are mere ink on paper. Writing of those who could only see that singular dimension, Paul writes of what can and should happen to those exposed to the redemptive message.

Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. ¹⁶ But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:15-18).

May we ever read the Scriptures as those who have **“turned to the Lord”** that we may ever be **“transformed.”**

Throughout the chapter, our minds are beckoned to the tabernacle and the exodus. When we study the exodus, we generally focus on the deliverance of Israel, but there is also a judgment of Egypt. This sea of glass is **“mingled with fire”** indicating an impending judgment.

The scene is ominous. Those who have **“victory over the beast...his image...his mark and the number of his name”** (that is, those who have turned to the Lord and remained faithful-likely focusing here on the martyred saints) are **“standing on the sea of glass, having harps.”** It has been said that they are playing, as it were, the soundtrack for judgment. We tend to think of harps as mellow instruments (**“harp”** *katharas* is where we get the word guitar). It is difficult to say with certainty what these harps sounded like-probably more like Wagner’s *Ride of the Valkyries* from *Apocalypse Now* than Enya.

Either way, the most powerful, oppressive, bloodthirsty, Christian-burning, soul-killing nation on earth, with their string of would-be gods on their thrones would find that their days are numbered. And in the same way the Israelites would praise God for His deliverance from Egypt after

hundreds of years of slavery (“the song of Moses” in Exodus 15:1-18), these glorified saints would lift up their voices in the “song of the Lamb.”

**They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: “Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty!¹ Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!
⁴Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested” (Revelation 15:3, 4).**

King of Saints

It has been said that we read here of Christ replacing Rome with His own empire. The “stone” that was “cut out by no human hand” (Daniel 2:34) would strike the image, which typified Rome) and begin to fill “the whole earth” (Daniel 2:35).

Instead of a world governed by human folly, warped deceit, and falsehoods (which could easily describe the entire earth during the time of Christ), justice and truth would begin to weave its way into the world through Christ. The “King of the saints”² is also the “King of kings” (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 19:16).

As we’ve seen, the throne of God and the kingship of Christ is a predominant theme in Revelation. The Westminster Larger Catechism describes this office and the order and priority of it.

Q. 45. How doth Christ execute the office of a king?

A. Christ executeth the office of a king, in calling out of the world a people to himself, and giving them officers, laws, and censures, by which he visibly governs them; in bestowing saving grace upon his elect, rewarding their obedience, and correcting them for their sins, preserving and supporting them under all their temptations and sufferings, restraining and overcoming all their enemies, and powerfully ordering

¹ God is called Almighty only one other time in the New Testament outside of Revelation but nine times in Revelation.

² Some translations this verse reads, “King of nations.”

all things for his own glory, and their good; and also in taking vengeance on the rest, who know not God, and obey not the gospel.

We should find comfort in our current (or any) political climate with these words. How much more the saints of the first century and other brothers and sisters throughout the world today in nations hostile to Christ.

It is also worth noting that the current, more popular notions of eschatology (study of end times) have jettisoned the notion that Jesus is the current reigning King. Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, in his book, *Major Bible Themes*, explains that Jesus...

“...is now serving as Priest and not as King.”³

Late president of Dallas Seminary, John Walvoord, comments:

His (Jesus’) fulfillment of the role of ‘ruler of the kings of the earth’ is future, to be achieved after his victory over the beast and the false prophet (Rev. 19),...Jesus has the right to rule, though He is not exercising this right over the kings of the earth now...”⁴

Hopefully we can see how this view not only infringes upon orthodoxy, but robs Christians of both their comfort and their task.

The song somewhat rhetorically asks, **“Who will not fear You, O Lord?”** The implied answer is that it would be the height of folly to reject Him who is **“just and true”**. In a world where we struggle with who to believe and who is truly equitable, these words become a fountain of peace.

Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me,¹⁰ Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, And I

³ Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, (Dunham Publishing Company, 1926), p. 52.

⁴ John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, (Moody Press, 1966), p. 38.

will do all My pleasure,' ¹¹ Calling a bird of prey⁵ from the east, The man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken *it*; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed *it*; I will also do it (Isaiah 46:9-11).

When, it might be asked, will all the nations come and worship God? For the sake of being informed, the futurist (those who believe the Revelation is primarily about events just prior to the end of the world) believes this worship happens in the future millennial kingdom.

The idealist/amillennialist (those who believe these promises should be restricted, more or less, to that which is immaterial or spiritual) say this is the worship at the consummation of history.

The partial preterist (those who understand most of Revelation speaking of the end of the Old Covenant and beginning of the New Covenant) take this to mean the increasing growth of Christ's church in the fulfillment of the Great Commission and its profound affect upon all areas of life.

This final view seems most consistent with the overall promise of the universal impact of the gospel throughout history. It is true that **"the kings of the earth (shall) bring their glory and honor into (the new Jerusalem)"** (Revelation 21:24-parenthesis mine). But that can only be true because they bowed to the Son while still on the earth.

After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. ⁶ And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. ⁷ Then 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. ⁸ The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed (Revelation 15:5-8).

The Temple Closed for Business

⁵ This is a reference to the Persian King Cyrus and how God would use him in His judgments.

We now see the opening of the **“temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven.”** Here is an allusion to the holy of holies with its mercy seat and ark of the testimony. It is here where the high priest would make intercession. The description of the angels with **“bright linen”** and **“chests girded with golden bands”** were the garb of the high priest in their enquiries of God (Exodus 28).

In a culture where, as (I think) R.C. Sproul once quipped, that we have sought to de-fang God, we might lose the irony that this holy place, which contained the mercy seat, would also be the place from which His **“bowls full of the wrath”** would proceed.

We will take up the meaning of those bowls in the next chapter, for now let us recognize (as we often see in Scripture), that that which is a blessing to those in faith can, at the same time, be a curse to those in opposition to that faith. Think of the curse of the splitting of the Red Sea when it came to the Egyptians (Exodus 14:28) or the unworthy taking of the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:30).

The Christian faith is often viewed as some sort of product, designed to serve, enrich and upgrade our lives. And it certainly can be said that apart from Christ, there is no true life at all. So, it is all that and more! But it is a deadly error to tinker or engage in a selective, buffet type approach to the faith-to alter it in such a way as to serve me better. I decided long ago that I would not work on my own brakes in my car or gas or electricity in my house (nor would I perform surgery on myself). To tinker with these things can be life-threatening. How much more dangerous to tinker with the great and marvelous things of God!

The **“living creature”** gives us the impression that the commission of this judgment comes from the very presence of God (Isaiah 6:2; Revelation 4:6; 5:14; 6:1). The **“smoke from the glory of God and from His power”** directs our thoughts to the giving of the law (Exodus 19:18) and the unapproachable holiness of God (Isaiah 6:4, 5).

In all of this, perhaps the most disquieting words are the final words in the chapter, that **“no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.”** The bowls of God’s wrath are full against Rome, and He will no longer even entertain intercession for that nation. None can enter the temple. God won’t even hear a prayer. We see this point of no return in the rebellion of individuals (Romans 1:21-25; Hebrews 6:4-6). We see it also in terms of nations. Similar words are given in God’s judgment on Judea.

The Lord said to me: “Do not pray for the welfare of this people. ¹² Though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence” (Jeremiah 14:11, 12).

Years ago, a former college teammate of mine asked me to do his wedding. He was an atheist. As we discussed the wedding he asked when I would pray. I told him I would pray for him privately, but we would not pray in the wedding. It would be hypocritical to pray. “You don’t believe in God. He is not invited to your wedding.” He found such a thought very disturbing (which was my goal).

One of the worst things God can do to an individual, a church or a nation is to allow them to follow their own inclinations-their own heart-to live in the full consequences of rebellion. The great division we spoke of earlier is now climaxing. It would be the full force of grace or the full force of justice.

May we ever be a people who enjoy the full force of God’s grace-a grace found in Christ and Christ alone.

Questions for Study

1. Is God involved in human history? Explain why evil persists and how it is eventually stemmed (pages 2, 3)?
2. How can the wrath of God be great and marvelous (page 3)?
3. Why do you suppose the “sea of glass” is mentioned (pages 3, 4)?
4. What should the reading of the Scriptures produce in us (page 4)?
5. Is Christ currently King? Discuss the various perspectives of the critical doctrine (pages 5-7).
6. In what respect was the temple closed for Rome? What do we learn from this (pages 7-9)?