

Revelation 15 & 16a – Chapter Study

INTRO

As we've seen over the last weeks, chs 10-14 are **background visions** John's had of what was going on in heaven during the Tribulation on Earth.

Bible students call these chs "**parenthetical**" because they pause the narrative of the judgments that come before & after.

They are a kind of behind the scenes look at what's going on in the Spiritual realm while all hell is breaking loose, literally, on Earth.

Last week in ch14, John described his vision of the **last judgments** & took us all the way up through the end of the Tribulation & the battle of Armageddon.

Now he's given **further visions** describing God's judgment **in more detail**.

¹ Then I saw another sign in heaven, great & marvelous:

In ch12, John told of **2 great signs he'd seen in heaven**

1st: A woman representing Israel &

2nd: A dragon repping satan.

John uses the same terms here & **adds** to them.

This sign isn't just mega-great; it's "**marvelous**."

The word means something that creates **wonder**; it causes the viewer to **marvel!**

This is a "WOW DUDE!" moment for John.

In light of all he's seen so far, it's hard to imagine anything *more* stupendous.

Yet that's precisely what he says.

This vision filled him w/an **even more intense** feeling of awe & wonder.

He saw

7 angels having the 7 last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete.

Before they set about their task of unleashing God's wrath, John has **another** vision.

² & I saw something like a sea of glass mingled w/fire, & those who have the victory over the beast, over his image & over his mark & over the # of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. ³ They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, & the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great & marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just & true are Your ways, O King of the saints! ⁴ Who shall not fear You, O Lord, & glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come & worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested."

Those martyred for their faith during the Trib stand round God's throne.

We were **first introduced** to these martyrs in ch7.

But now that we've read about the career of the antichrist & false prophet in ch 13 we understand better **why** they were put to death.

They refused to take the mark of the beast or worship him. For this they've been executed.

But the antichrist hasn't **really** overcome them. V2 says **they've overcome him**.

Remember, what the antichrist lusts for is total control.

He wants desperately to decide the fate of people.

& as the servant of satan, he wants to damn their souls to hell.

So in killing them he doesn't really win; **he loses**, because all he does is send them to heaven.

Now, **they're out of his reach**.

The early church celebrated the anniversary of martyr's deaths, calling it their "**Victory Day**."

The sea of glass these martyrs stand on was first mentioned in ch4.

It's the platform God's throne sits on.

It's what those who approach Him **stand on**.

John calls it a *sea* rather than a *floor* for a reason.

For one thing, it's **clear**; like **water**. But it's **solid**, so he refers to it as **glass**.

All this points back to the temple.

Before the priest could enter the holy place, which represented God's throne room in heaven, he went to a huge bronze bowl called the **laver**; sometimes referred to as the **sea**.

It was a massive basin filled w/water they washed in before entering God's presence.

[Pic of temple]

The bronze laver was a **symbol of God's Word** which cleanses us.

Psalms 119:9 • How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.

John 15:3 • [Jesus said] "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you."

In Eph 5:25-26 • [Paul talks about our being cleansed by the washing of the water of the Word.]

Here John sees the saints in heaven standing on the glass sea; they are **standing on** the Word of God.

It's their **foundation** & what allows them to come before God at all.

What John didn't mention when he first spoke of the glass sea in ch4 is that **now it's lit w/fire**.

Because God's Word which saved them by The Gospel has become a message of Judgment.

But they've **overcome** that judgment, so they stand **ON** it; while the E-D's **under it** are about to be **consumed** by it.

These martyrs play harps & sing the *song of Moses & the Lamb*.

God sent Moses to deliver Israel from bondage in Egypt, & lead them into a new life in the Promised Land.

Not long after their departure, they seemed trapped btwn the Red Sea & Pharaoh's army.

God opened the Sea & they all passed safely thru.

The Egyptians followed, but God returned the sea & drowned them, leaving Israel safe on the other side.

So, standing on the farther shore & seeing the Egyptians washing up on the shore as a testimony to the victory of God in delivering them not only from bondage, but from the **fear** of bondage, Moses led them in a glorious song of deliverance.

Exodus 15:1-18 • Then Moses & the children of Israel sang this song to the Lord, & spoke, saying: "I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse & its rider He has thrown into the sea! ² The Lord *is* my strength & song, & He has become my salvation; He *is* my God, & I will praise Him; My father's God, & I will exalt Him. ³ The Lord *is* a man of war; The Lord *is* His name. ...

¹⁸ "The Lord shall reign forever & ever."

John uses an unusual phrase here in v2 when he says of these martyrs –

² & I saw something like a sea of glass mingled w/fire, & those who have the victory **OVER** the beast, **OVER** his image & **OVER** his mark & **OVER** the number of his name,

John's repeated use of that word "OVER" is purposeful.

In Greek, to repeat a word like that means to draw attention to it.

& it really ought **not** be translated "over."

It's the word "ek" as in 'exit'. = It means to go out of, depart, go away from.

That's **grammatically awkward** in English so translators changed it to "over."

But John purposely bent language here to convey an important truth.

These martyrs had their victory **out of** the beast, **away from** his image.

They've **departed from** the mark & number of his name.

Like ancient Israel was in Egypt during the plagues, but then ultimately left their bondage for the Land of Promise, these Trib saints have been delivered from the reach of the devil.

John wants us to make a connection between the Tribulation saints & the Exodus.

There are **many** parallels between the Exodus & Revelation.

Israel stood walked over the Red Sea to safety.

These saints stand safely on the Glass Sea.

The waters of the Red Sea saved the Jews & judged their enemies.

The Word of God saves the martyrs & judges the wicked.

Moses & the children of Israel sang.

These saints also sing, repeating Moses' song, but they add a new chorus, because it's not only the Song of Moses, it's the song of the Lamb, of Jesus **too**.

& note: Their worship **is all about God**.

Some of the modern praise & worship choruses written today are really good.

Musically, it's superior to what was written back in the late 60's & the beginning of the Jesus People movement.

But **lyrically**, we have a long way to go before we match the quality of the hymns previous generations sang.

So many choruses today are **me**-oriented.

They're about **me** worshipping, **me** praising, **me** loving God.

Don't get me wrong; I'm not saying that's always wrong.

Plenty of the **Psalms** are the Psalmist's pouring his heart out to God in this fashion.

But the problem w/some modern choruses is their preoccupation w/what "I'm" doing in worship & how "I" love to praise the Lord.

We need more songs like this: lauding the greatness of God.

Count how many times the martyrs sing about "themselves" & how many times about "God."

"Great & marvelous & Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just & true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, & glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come & worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested."

God = 10 // Martyrs = 0

One more thing before we move on. These martyr-saints have **harps**.

The only other musical instruments we find in heaven are **trumpets**.

This is going to make for an interesting praise band in heaven = horns & harps!

⁵ After these things I looked, & behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened.

This seems an unusual way to refer to the heavenly temple but John is being precise in describing what he saw.

In Exo 25 & Heb 8, God told Moses to build the earthly tabernacle of meeting **exactly** as he'd received instructions because it was a **copy**, a model of the **real thing** in heaven.

When John says "*the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven*" he's referring **to the throne room of God** he's already seen several times in his visions.

But now his perspective is from the **outside**.

The **temple** is the **central house** or building of the **temple complex**, here referred to as the **tabernacle**.

The testimony refers to the **Ten Commandments** kept in the Ark of the Covenant inside the central temple; the ark representing the throne of God. [Picture of the tabernacle, inside tent of meeting]

John sees the heavenly temple the earthly one was a model of.

Its doors open, & out step the 7 angels who'll be the agents of the final plagues.

These plagues, as v1 says, are the consummation of God's wrath poured out in judgment on Earth.

Heaven's doors open, like the gate of a castle, to allow the coming forth of the army, led by the King as He goes forth to conquer.

For centuries, God's people of every brand, flavor, stripe, & sect have prayed & longed for the day when evil is defeated & righteousness prevails on Earth as it is in Heaven.

John sees the beginning of the earnest answer to ALL those prayers as the doors to the throne room of heaven swing wide. **This is it!**

He knows Heaven is going to invade Earth & the ancient rebellion of satan will be brought to an end.

In previous visions, he's witnessed that rebellion reach its graphic & evil climax.

Earth has been pummeled again & again by wickedness.

It doesn't seem that it could get any worse.

Then, in the darkest hour, a light dawns; the doors of heaven swing wide.

The title of this Book is The Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Not the revelation of the devil, the antichrist, the false prophet.

It's not the revelation of wild things to take place in the end times.

It's the Revelation of Jesus Christ!!!!

⁶ & out of the temple came the 7 angels having the 7 plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, & having their chests girded w/golden bands.

These angels come from the temple; that is - the presence of God.

They're **agents of His throne**; executing His judgments under His authority.

They aren't **spiritual vigilantes**; they're only carrying out the will of God.

They wear **pure bright linen**.

Linen was the cloth of the high priest's uniform.

God had the priests wear linen for 2 reasons.

1) Of all the fabrics available to the ancient world, linen could be made the whitest.

2) Linen resists perspiration.

a) It's weave is open so it breathes.

b) But also, it wicks moisture & dries quickly.

The high priest wore linen because his service of God wasn't to be about *self-effort*.

He stood before God on the basis of God's grace, His favor.

His *holiness* wasn't something he generated by his own good works.

It's bestowed on him by God, just as he'd don that pure, white linen tunic.

There's a lesson in all that for us, for Peter says in Christ, we're all a kingdom of priests.

In our worship & service of God, the focus is to be on Him, not what *we're* doing.

Jesus said that we were to let our light shine before others in such a way that they gave glory to God, rather than us.

These angels wear linen because they're *agents* of God; doing His bidding & empowered by Him.

Gold speaks of royalty.

The golden band around their chests means they're *royal emissaries*.

⁷ Then 1 of the 4 living creatures [cherubim] gave to the 7 angels 7 golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever & ever.

This word *bowls* is a broad, shallow saucer; think salad bowl.

They were used in the temple for pouring out drink offerings.

Their design meant they were to be poured out rapidly.

You didn't pour one of these slowly; you couldn't!

They were so wide, when you tipped them a *sheet* of liquid came out, not a trickle.

The idea here is that these last plagues are dumped out on Earth in an overwhelming flood.

⁸ The temple was filled w/smoke from the glory of God & from His power, & no 1 was able to enter the temple till the 7 plagues of the 7 angels were completed.

When the angels leave the temple, the glory of God is re-doubled there.

When God's glory first invested the ancient tabernacle & temple, it was so thick, no one is able to stand, let alone enter.

It's fitting the glory of God is renewed at the point His definitive wrath is revealed.

Many people have a hard time attributing wrath to God.

They think of wrath as petty & unworthy of Him.

They do so because they think of God's wrath like the anger *people* exhibit; a selfish dislike of something.

We criticize the guy who rages; the woman throws a hissy-fit.

We think of an immature child having a tantrum because he didn't get his selfish little way.

That is NOT what God's wrath is about.

God's wrath is a righteous, & may I say, long-brewing, *abhorrence* of all the evil that's been done throughout history.

This is no tantrum, no fit of anger.

This has been brewing for thousands of years.

& it *catalogs* all the horrible things that have been done to the poor, weak, & innocent.

It's God's response to injustice, slavery, brutality, abuse, molestation, perversion, debauchery, abomination, & grotesquerie.

Extortion, blackmail, kidnapping, torture, defilement, & pride.

This is when God finally answers the oft spoken challenge voiced by a billion lips, "God! How long will You let evil prosper? When are you going to do something about it?"

God says, "**NOW!**"

The glory in the temple reminds us these 7 angels & their bowls are the righteous expression of a holy God.

Even His wrath is perfect!

There's a scene in *Braveheart* that capture this.

Scotland under the leadership of William Wallace face England across a large, green field.

Wallace rallies the Scots & they plunge across the field in attack.

The bloodshed is horrific, & you get something of the horror of medieval warfare; when battle was face to face w/a sword, dagger, mace, & club.

As the battle winds down, it's clear the Scots have won, & Wallace, in triumph, heaves his big sword skyward to come sailing down, point first into the bloodied soil of a now **free** Scotland.

That scene conveys the sense of the **righteousness** of the Scottish campaign for freedom; for liberty from the brutal & unjust tyranny of the English.

It was a violent scene, & many who saw the movie were disturbed, thinking it contained a needless amount of gore.

Maybe so. I won't disagree; though it was a realistic depiction of medieval warfare.

But even more, & this is my point, the **cost of liberty**, the dear price paid to secure it was made abundantly clear.

Victory was **both** violent & righteous.

God moves to liberate Earth & humanity from the tyranny of a brutal despot.

It won't be a pretty campaign, for the despot won't just roll over & play dead; he will resist God to the bitter end.

So God comes across the field of battle to engage him, as we'll see in Rev. 19, **in a sword fight**.

CHAPTER 16

¹ Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the 7 angels, "Go & pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth."

Since v8 of ch15 says only God was in the temple, this loud voice is none other than His.

He tells the angels to commence pouring out their bowls.

We're going to read these last 7 plagues quickly w/o a lot of comment because for the most part they're pretty straightforward.

But before we do, I wanted to recap something.

We read here of **7 bowls**.

Prior to this we had 7 trumpets & before that 7 seals.

The 7th seal was the 7 trumpets; & the 7th trumpet becomes the 7 bowls.

W/the seals & trumpets, the 1st 6 are acted, then there's a pause before the 7th.

W/the 7 bowls, there's no pause; they all come in rapid succession.

In fact, they may all be poured out **simultaneously**.

The NKJV begins each bowl w/the word "**Then**."

That makes it appear their sequential; 1 after the other.

But the Grk word is **kai** & ought to be translated as "&."

So it may be that all these bowls are poured out at the same time.

Another thing we'll note is that some of the bowl-judgments are repeats of the trumpet-judgments.

The difference is that the trumpets were **limited** in scope. The bowls are **global**.

Oh, & 1 more thing.

I've mentioned of the view of prophecy that's grown quite over the last couple decades called **Preterism**.

It's the view most of Bible Prophecy regarding the end times was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD.

Preterists believe all but last couple chapters of Rev. **have already been fulfilled**.

You'll see that apart from some highly imaginative & ultra-obscure interpretation, there's no way you can squeeze ch16 into the destruction of Jerusalem.

² So the 1st went & poured out his bowl upon the earth, & a foul & loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast & those who worshiped his image.

The 1st bowl is a grievous sore on those who've taken the hated mark.

They've been marked by the beast; so now God marks them as well, w/a sore.

The adjectives to describe it mean a horrible affliction.

It's not something those who have it get used to; it's not something they learn to live with.

It's an annoying bother that needs constant attention, like a wound that won't stop oozing puss.

A fitting affliction; for they thought the mark would initiate them into a grand new day for humanity.

They saw it as their pass into ease & comfort.

So they're saddled w/a gross burden that dominates their lives.

³ Then [&] the 2nd angel poured out his bowl on the sea, & it became blood as of a dead *man*; & every living creature in the sea died.

This has to be close to the **end** of the Tribulation.

How long could the world last without any sea life?

We're not talking here just about fish, but seaweed & plankton as well.

Plankton is responsible for the production of 90% of the oxygen in the atmosphere.

Kill the plankton & the air becomes thin real quick.

John likens the water to that of the blood of a dead man.

He's not saying it **actually** turns to blood, but that it becomes **like** it.

The life is in the blood, but the blood of a dead man lacks life, & that's what John mean.

All life in the sea is killed off.

The seas are the circulatory system for the Planet.

Pollute the seas & it won't be long till the whole world is sick.

Some commentators point out the similarity to what John says here & **red tides**.

Under the right conditions, plankton known as dinoflagellates experience a massive population explosions, known as a **bloom**.

Dinoflagellates have a red pigment & when their concentration are high enough they turn seawater red, forming red tides.

These plankton blooms can be quite destructive.

During the night when photosynthesis halts, such a high concentration of plankton can deplete the oxygen in the water, suffocating fish.

Some dinoflagellates also release toxins in blooms of this kind which kill sea life.

Turning water to blood points us back to the plagues of Egypt.

There are several similarities between the bowls & the plagues.

This 2nd bowl resembles the **1st plague** • Exo 7:20-25

The 1st bowl was similar to the **boil** that afflicted the Egyptians in the 6th plague • Exo 9:9-11

As we move on to the 3rd bowl, we see that it's an extension of the 2nd bowl -

⁴ Then the 3rd angel poured out his bowl on the rivers & springs of water, & they became blood. ⁵ & I heard the angel of the waters saying: "You are righteous, O Lord, The One who is & who was & who is to be, because You have judged these things. ⁶ For they have shed the blood of saints & prophets, & You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due."

Not only is **saltwater** contaminated, so is **all fresh water**.

V5 refers to an "**angel of the waters**."

I'm sure you've noticed the large number of angels & their different assignments in our study in Rev.

Here we find an angel whose jurisdiction is freshwater.

It may be that God has established His angels at strategic places to protect parts of creation from the polluting, corrupting, & destructive plans of the devil.

In Heb. 1:14 we read that the angels are serving spirits sent forth to serve God's people.

In Dan 10 we read that Michael the archangel did battle w/the forces of darkness in a strategic spiritual conflict.

This angel, with jurisdiction over the waters, declares God's righteousness in turning the water to blood; after all, the E-Ds have conducted a Last Day's Holocaust that will surpass that of the Nazis.

Hitler's Final Solution saw 6 million Jews put to death.

Stalin wiped out 10 million Ukrainians & others he perceived a threat to his reign.

As horrifying as these atrocities are, they point up the fact people can be convinced to massacre those deemed a threat.

The A/C will convince those loyal to him it's their solemn duty to root out & execute all who won't go along w/his program. & **millions** will die.

Blood will flow in great abundance. So God returns blood on them by turning water to blood.

⁷ And I heard another from the altar saying, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true & righteous *are* Your

judgments.”

In ch6 we saw the souls of the Trib martyrs under the altar asking when their tormentors would be punished.

This voice is probably theirs.

⁸Then the 4th angel poured out his bowl on the sun, & power was given to him to scorch men w/fire. ⁹ & men were scorched w/great heat, & they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; & they did not repent & give Him glory.

Something happens to the sun that it doesn't just give a sun-burn; exposure to its rays **burns** flesh.

This may be intense solar flares, or something's happened to the atmosphere, allowing harmful radiation in.

W/no fresh water to drink, it gets REAL HOT as a foretaste of the eternal flames they're headed for.

The E-Ds are spiritual so far gone instead of repenting, they curse God.

¹⁰ Then the 5th angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, & his kingdom became full of darkness; & they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. ¹¹ They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains & their sores, & did not repent of their deeds.

This is a judgment by darkness; reminiscent of the 9th plague on Egypt • Exo. 10:21-23.

This judgment is focused on the **capital** of the A/C's power.

He's claimed to be the way & light for humanity.

God smites his power-center not just with darkness, this is **blackness**; the **absence** of light.

They can do nothing but stumble around & run in to things.

All they can do is moan & curse.

Listen – if there was ever a time when the people of earth have abundant evidence for the existence, power & holiness of God, this is it right here.

& what do they do w/that knowledge? **They blaspheme!**

CONCLUSION

We'll end our study there because the 6th & 7th bowls are the Battle of Armageddon.

We have to slow down & go into a lot more depth in those so we'll save it for next Wednesday.