

Rev. 15
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Overview

1. Ch. 15 seems to be picking up 11:15-19, as external inclusio:
 - a) Both in heaven;
 - b) Both quote a hymn by redeemed people;
 - c) Both hymns deal with God's coming judgment;
 - d) Both end with the sanctuary open for judgment.

2. Then what's ch. 12-14 doing there? Note "another wonder" (or "sign"), 15:1. "Another" forces us to look for the previous one. In fact there are two previous ones, and these three are the only singular occurrences of "wonder/sign" in the entire book. Note how they are ranked.
 - a) 12:3, The Dragon is simply a "sign." The Devil has mounted age-long opposition to the Creator. This is the subject of the balance of ch. 12 and all of ch. 13, to which ch. 14 is the response.
 - b) 12:1, The Woman with child is a "great sign." In spite of the rebellion led by Satan, the creator has chosen a part of his creation for special love and fellowship with himself, and through that nation he has provided a Savior.
 - c) 15:1, The angels marshalled for judgment are a "great and wonderful sign."
 - d) *Application*: Satan would have us focus on himself. He is significant, but not as significant as the "great" significance of the chosen nation and the redeemer. Yet too many people stop there, and do not consider the "great and wonderful" judgments of God.

3. Overall Flow of ch. 4-22
(Recall that the 7th of a series opens the next series.)

	4-7	8-11	11-16	16-22
a) Heavenly setting	ch 4-5	8:1-5	11:15-19, ch 15	16:17-21
b) Thndr, Equake, Hail	4:5 T	8:5 TE	11:19 TEH	16:18-21
c) Earthly Jdgmnts	Seals	Trumpets	Vials	Narrative

4. Ch. 15-16 are summary-amplification; 15:1 is the summary, while 15:2-ch. 16 provide the details. Each successive section introduced by a verb of perception on John's part (either "I saw," or [once] "I heard").

A. 15:1, Summary

1. We have already observed that these bowls of God's judgment constitute the third and greatest of the three signs.
2. These are called "the last" plagues, and then that is explained: "for in them is filled up [fulfilled] the wrath of God." This is one of three statements in Rev. about something of God being fulfilled (10:7; 15:1; 17:17), and two of them reinforce the view that the seventh of a heptad introduces what follows.
 - a) 10:7 says that God's Mystery, as spoken by the prophets, will be fulfilled "in the days of the seventh [trumpet] angel, when he shall ... sound" (no inceptive sense). The 7th angel introduces the vials, and indeed ch. 17-22 are managed by members of that heptad (17:1; 21:9).
 - b) His Wrath (here). Alford struggles to understand how the Wrath of God can be completed in the vials when there yet remains the last judgment. But he does not understand that the seventh vial INCLUDES ch. 17-22, just as each of the previous sevenths includes the following section, In fact, this statement REQUIRES that the sevenths be understood in this way.
3. Compare the only two occurrences of "fulfilled" in John's gospel: 19:28, 30, both referring to the death of Christ. The earthly drama that begins with sin must end with God's judgment--either on the innocent substitute, or on the sinner.

B. 15:2-4, The Redeemed Vindicate the Judgment

1. 2a, The firmament that resembles a sea of glass puts us back in heaven (cf. 4:6). Recall our discussion there: this is a comparison of the platform upon which the throne rests with the images of the sea and glass. A small difference--now the firmament has as well the appearance of fire, as it reflects the wrath of the one who sits on the throne.
2. 2b, As in ch. 4, so here we have believers in heaven. But note the differences in their representation.
 - a) Description:
 - 1) Here, "conquerors from the beast." Note grammar: *nikaw ek*, "come victorious from." Usual syntax is with accusative. Their victory consists not in defeating and destroying the beast, but in remaining pure in the face of his opposition.
 - 2) There, "elders," defined with reference to the people of God. Those whose experience has made them exemplary. Is the experience in view that of ch. 12-14?
 - b) Position:

- 1) Here, standing upon the sea. This is where the living creatures were in 4:6; the standing position indicates preparation for service.
 - 2) There, seated on thrones. Promised to those who overcome, 3:21. Again, perhaps ch. 4 is the result of the service depicted in ch.15.
- c) Implements:
- 1) Here, godly guitars, to accompany their hymns of worship.
 - 2) There, crowns of gold, also implements of worship (4:10).
3. 3-4, The Song of Moses and of the Lamb
- Recall discussion under 14:3. The "new song" (there and 5:9) praises God for his redemption of his people; the Song of Moses (Exod. 15) praises God for his judgment on his enemies. This particular hymn is built on Exod. 15, and in fact reflects a structural interpretation of that passage!
- a) Analysis of Exod. 15
- Chiastic nb: an alternative analysis discerns stanzas marked by repetition in 6, 11, 16, but then at least 17-18 are left over at the end! See Muilenburg.*
- 1) Lord in third person 1-5 18-19
 - 2) Lord in 1st person; specific event

Defeat of Egypt at Red Sea	6-10	
Conquest of Canaan		14-17
 - 3) Praise and Summary

Praise	11
Summary of 6-10 (God's Deeds at Red Sea)	12
Summary of 14-17 (God's Paths through Canaan)	13
 - 4) Conclusions: Moses praises God for his Deeds at the Red Sea (1-10, 12) and the Path he prepared for Israel into Canaan (13, 14-19).
- b) Development in Rev. 15:3-4
- The Redeemed pick the center right out of this song, and build their hymn around Exod. 15:11-13.
- 1) 3a announces that God's deeds are "great and wonderful" (the same expression used for his judgments in 15:1). Echos Exod. 15:12, the judgment of Egypt at the Red Sea. Title of God emphasizes his power.
 - 2) 3b describes his Paths as just and true; not just the paths in which he walks (though this is certainly true), but those in which he leads his people, Psa. 25:4,5. These are "just and true"; he will never lead us into sin. Title emphasizes his relation to his people: "king of saints" (MT "nations"). Echos Exod. 15:13, the highway he opened for

Israel into Canaan.

- 3) 4 echos Exod. 15:11. Note in particular the three attributes of God that lead all to fear and glorify him. The first and last describe his attributes and his actions, respectively; the center describes our response to him.
 - a> Glorious in Holiness: He is completely separate from and other than his creation. "Thou only art holy."
 - b> Fearful in Praises: Our worship of him is in full recognition of his awesome power and the wickedness of our sin. "All nations shall come and prostrate themselves before thee."
 - c> Doing Wonders: He not only Is, but Does, and in such a way as to stimulate our awe. "Thy judgments are made manifest."

C. 15:5-8, The Living Creatures Equip the Angels for Judgment

The various elements of this scene point to a liturgy of judgment, originating in the heavenly tabernacle. ("Temple" throughout is better translated "sanctuary," and refers to the tent of the congregation, not Solomon's temple.)

The tabernacle was designed as a place for God to dwell with his people (Exod 25:8). We are accustomed to think of the functions of this tabernacle that secure the forgiveness of God's people so that they can fellowship with him. This paragraph reminds us that it has other functions as well: the center from which God's vengeance against the persecutors of his people goes forth.

1. Their origin: the sanctuary of the tabernacle of the testimony.
 - a) "testimony" is the law, contained in the Ark.
 - b) "tabernacle" is the place of worship initiated by God; not the man-made temple of Solomon and his successors.
 - c) "sanctuary" refers to the holy place and holy of holies, where the ark and the law were kept; not the outer court.
 - d) Thus they are coming from the place where God's holy law is kept, to bring judgment on those who violate that law.
2. Their uniform: linen garments and a golden girdle.
 - a) These are the elements of priestly garments (with other colors, too): Ex. 28:8; 39:5,20.
 - b) This specific combination of garments is seen only two other times in Scripture, both times on the Lord Jesus: Dan. 10:5; Rev. 1:13. How can these angels wear his garments? Answer: they are doing his work, John 5.

We do not usually think of judgment as a priestly work, but compare:

- 1) Lev. 10:1,2, Nadab and Abihu and their "unholy fire"

- 2) Num. 16:35, fire "from the Lord"
- 3) Num. 25:6-8, Phinehas dealing with Moabite fornication

3. Their implements: golden vials or bowls.

a) *fialas* "bowl" in LXX is used almost exclusively for *mizraq*, an implement of the tabernacle and temple used for sprinkling or tossing a substance on the altar for sacrifice.

b) These were seen before in 5:8, where they contained the prayers of the saints. Compare 6:10, where the martyrs cry out for vengeance from the altar, and 8:1-5, where incense is the martyrs' prayers, leading to the trumpet judgments. Throughout the Revelation, God's judgments come in holy vengeance for the persecution that unbelievers bring to his people.

4. The atmosphere: the sanctuary "filled with smoke," excluding any human occupant.

a) Cf. the presence and effect of the cloud at the dedication of the tabernacle (Exod. 40:34,35) and temple (1 Kings 8:10,11).

b) Here it is "smoke," not "cloud," the sign of God's burning wrath. Specifically recalls Isaiah's chartering (Isa. 6:4), which was to a ministry of condemnation, not of forgiveness.

5. Summary: How unlike this vision is to the image most people have of God. We hear only of his love and grace, and indeed he is a God of forgiveness, toward his people who repent and claim his gift of salvation through the Lord Jesus. But there is another side to his character: pure holiness, wrath against sin, vengeance toward those who touch his chosen ones. The tabernacle is the center of judgment as well as of forgiveness. The Cross of Christ will bring us salvation if we receive it, but terrible judgment if we reject it.

D. Ch. 16, God Dispatches the Angels, and they go forth to judgment.