

THE PRELUDE TO THE BOWL JUDGMENTS IN REVELATION 15

INTRODUCTION

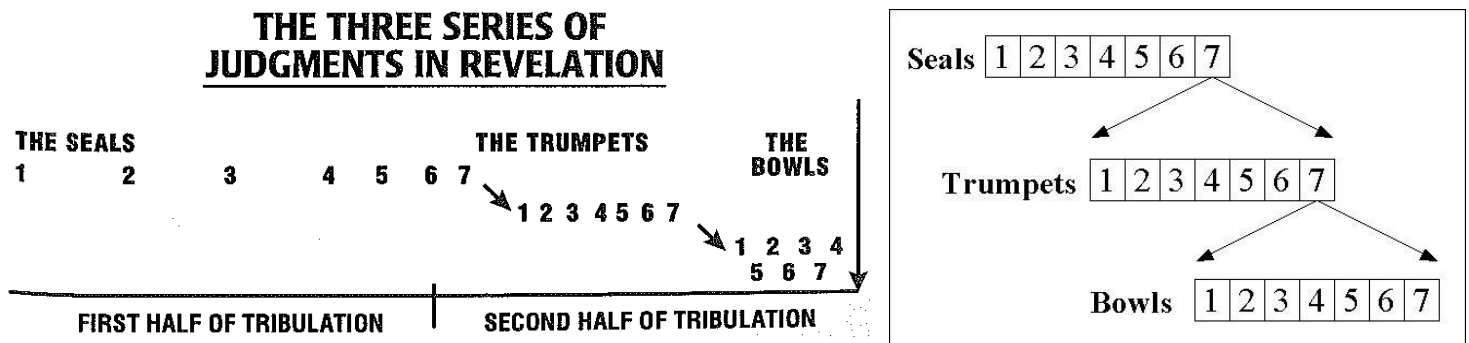
- God’s wrath and judgment were themes repeated frequently throughout the OT prophets, who often warned about the coming Day of the Lord
- All of the Day of the Lord judgments that actually occurred to Israel in the OT were merely previews of the coming terrible and final Day of the Lord

Isaiah 13:6-9 ~ Wail, for the day of the LORD is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. 7 Therefore all hands will fall limp, And every man’s heart will melt. 8 They will be terrified, Pains and anguish will take hold of them; They will writhe like a woman in labor, They will look at one another in astonishment, Their faces aflame. 9 Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger, To make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its sinners from it.

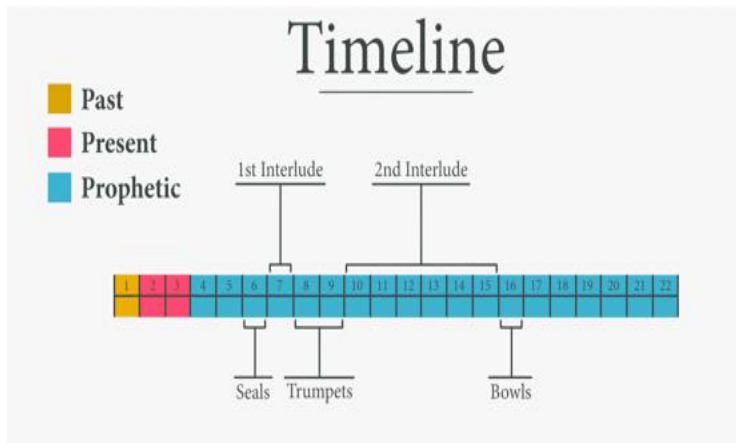
Joel 1:15 ~ Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, And it will come as destruction from the Almighty.

Zephaniah 1:14-18 ~ 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. 15 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, 16 A day of trumpet and battle cry Against the fortified cities And the high corner towers. 17 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. 18 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.

- God’s wrath is described in a variety of categories in Scripture:
 1. Sowing and reaping wrath – people suffer the logical consequences of their sin (Gal 6:7-8)
 2. Cataclysmic wrath – when God brings great destruction on the world (flood, Sodom and Gomorrah)
 3. Abandonment wrath – when God give sinners over to the full effects of their sinful choices (Rom 1:18ff)
 4. Eternal/eschatological wrath – when God pours out His wrath on the whole world and sentences them to hell forever
- The judgment of God in the Tribulation will reach its crescendo in the bowl judgments, which occur immediately prior to the return of Christ
- These bowl judgments are introduced in this chapter as the “seven last plagues”



- Chapter 15 is the last of the 2nd interlude chapters; it does not advance the narrative chronologically



THE AWESOME PRESENCE OF THE LORD

Revelation 15:1-2 ~ Then 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. 2 And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God.

- This final “sign” which John saw relates to the preceding great signs of the woman in Rev 12:1 and the red dragon in Rev 12:3
- “The three signs taken together represent important elements in the prophetic scene: (1) Israel, that is, the woman; (2) the final world empire under the control of Satan and the beast, that is, the great red dragon; and (3) the seven angels having the seven last plagues, that is, the divine judgment upon the satanic system and political power of the beast.”¹
- As with the trumpet judgments, angels are once again used in the execution of the last seven plagues
- Angels will be involved in the seal judgments (Rev 6:1, 3, 5-7), the trumpet judgments (Rev 8-9), and the bowl judgments (Rev 16:2-4, 8, 10, 12, 17)
- This indicates that angels will play an important part in executing God’s eschatological judgment (Matt 13:39-42, 49-50; 25:31; 2 Thess 1:7-8)
- Paradoxically, the same beings who care for and minister to God’s people (Heb 1:14) also will bring God’s wrath to bear on sinful people
- The judgments these angels unleash will be “last, because in them the wrath of God is finished”
- The word “is finished” (*etelesthe*) refers to that which is brought to a conclusion, or the ultimate goal
- These bowl judgments contain the final outpouring of God’s wrath during the Tribulation, the final judgments preceding the Second Coming of Christ
- What John saw as “something like a sea of glass mixed with fire” is similar to what he described in Rev 4:6 (cf. Ex 24:10; Ezek 1:22)

Revelation 4:6 ~ and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.

¹ John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 226.

- The “sea of glass” likely points to the glory of God and the “fire” likely speaks of divine judgment proceeding from God’s holiness
- “those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name” represent the martyrs during the Tribulation (cf. Rev 7:9-17)
- Although the beast thought he was victorious over them, the martyrs will ultimately be “victorious over” him because of their faith in Christ
- “Their triumph consists in the fact that they remained faithful to death instead of yielding to the blasphemous demand of the beast.”²
- “The believers pictured here will have undergone the terrors of the Tribulation and suffered painful, violent deaths as martyrs. Yet despite having endured the most intense persecution the world will ever know, their faith, which is a gift from God, will endure. Eventually, they will stand triumphantly before the throne of God, watching as God takes vengeance on their persecutors.”³

THE ANTICIPATED VICTORY OF THE LORD

Revelation 15:3-4 ~ And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations! 4 Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For ALL THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE YOU, FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUS ACTS HAVE BEEN REVEALED.”

- The martyrs in heaven sing two songs: the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb
- The fact that the word “song” occurs with the article (“the”) in both cases points to the conclusion that that two separate and distinct songs are in view
- The substance of both songs is the mighty works of God...specifically:
 - The song of Moses celebrates God faithfully and powerfully delivering Israel from Egypt
 - The song of the Lamb celebrates God faithfully and powerfully delivering sinners from sin through Christ
- The song of Moses is likely the one recorded in Exodus 15:1-21
- The song of the Lamb is likely the one recorded in Revelation 5:5:8-14
- They specifically worship God for a number of things in anticipation of His impending victory over Satan and his Antichrist and establishment of His earthly kingdom:
 - His great works
 - That He is Almighty
 - That He is Righteous
 - That He is true
 - That He is King of the nations
 - That He should be feared and glorified
 - That He is holy
 - That all the nations will worship Him
- “The righteous judgment from God proceeds from what He is as described in this song: the God who is almighty, righteous, true, holy, just, and worthy of worship.”⁴

² Ibid., 227.

³ John MacArthur, *Revelation 13-22*, 127.

⁴ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 229.

- The redeemed martyrs from the Tribulation will sing both of these songs in celebration of their victory over and deliverance from Antichrist and his wicked system
- “This description of praise to God and prediction of universal worship is in keeping with many other Scriptures and relates, of course, to the second coming of Christ and worship of God by the entire world in the millennial kingdom...The awful hour of wickedness and blasphemy against God, which will characterize the period leading up to the Second Coming, will be followed by a full vindication of God’s judgment and holiness in the next period.”⁵
- This worship of the Lord in response to the many OT predictions of His coming kingdom:

Psalms 2:8-9 ~ Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.’ ”

Isaiah 2:2-4 ~ Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. 3 And many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths.” For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. 4 And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war.

Isaiah 9:6-7 ~ For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. 7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

Isaiah 66:23 ~ “And it shall be from new moon to new moon And from sabbath to sabbath, All mankind will come to bow down before Me,” says the LORD.

Daniel 7:14 ~ And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed.

Zechariah 14:9 ~ And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one.

THE ACTIVATED WRATH OF THE LORD

Revelation 15:5-6 ~ After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened, 6 and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean and bright, and girded around their chests with golden sashes.

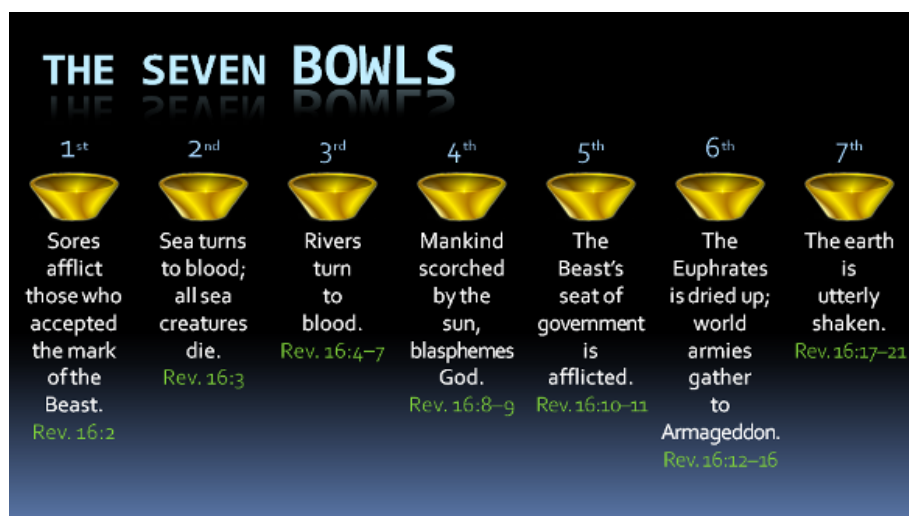
- The phrase “after these things I looked” is used throughout Revelation to introduce a new vision (cf. 4:1; 6:2, 5, 8; 7:9; 14:1, 14)
- John’s attention is drawn away from the redeemed saints singing their praises before God’s throne and to the seven angels who will
- John sees in his heavenly vision the “temple of the tabernacle of testimony” (the whole structure which includes the Holy of Holies and the ark of the covenant; cf. Rev 11:19), likely the heavenly counterpart to the earthly temple (cf. Heb 8:2, 5)

⁵ Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 966). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

- From the heavenly temple, seven angels exited with “seven plagues” which are the bowl judgments to be unleashed in chapter 16, the most severe judgment yet during the Tribulation
- The time has finally arrived for the final, deadly judgments to be poured out on the world
- The fact that the angels come out of the heavenly temple “emphasizes that the judgments of God demonstrate and vindicate His holiness since they come out of the sanctuary itself.”⁶
- “The angels coming out of the sanctuary indicate that the judgments to be poured out stem from the holiness of God and are properly required of God who must do all things right.”⁷
- This is a reminder that it has always been God’s purpose to judge sinners and destroy sin
- That they are “clothed in linen, bright and clean” points to their purity
- That they are “girded around their chests with golden sashes” points to God’s glory

Revelation 15:7-8 ~ 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 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.

- The final phase of God’s wrath during the Tribulation is prepared when one of the living creatures gives to the seven angels “seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God”
- The devastating character of this divine judgment is evident in the fact that these bowls are “full” of God’s righteous wrath and indignation
- Smoke will fill the heavenly temple at this point, a demonstration of God’s wrath and glorious presence (cf. Ex 40:34-35)
- This glory cloud will remain in the heavenly temple until the earth is completely purged of wickedness and prepared for the arrival of Christ and His kingdom
- As a result, no one will be able to enter the heavenly temple until these judgments are fulfilled, an ominous sign of the impending doom for all those who resist God during this period
- “Taken as a whole, Revelation 15:5–8 presents a fearful picture of impending divine judgment on a wicked world. The judgments which are to be poured out (chap. 16) fully justify this ominous introduction.”⁸



⁶ Charles Ryrie, *Revelation*, 129.

⁷ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 229.

⁸ Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 966). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.