

BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson 33 - Chapters 15 & 16

We got most of the way through Revelation chapter 15 last week, and we'll finish it up today and get started on chapter 16.

Because chapter 15 is so short, we'll re-read it in its entirety to begin our study for today.

RE-READ REVELATION CHAPTER 15 all

Remembering that what we're reading in Revelation is a series of visions that God gave to John while he was in forced exile on the Island of Patmos, then we also need to follow that his visions alternate between what is happening in Heaven and what is happening on Earth. Getting it straight on where the actions are happening is critical to understanding this book. The things that happen in Heaven are in some ways more difficult to think about because since as living physical beings we exist in a world controlled by time and space, everything for us operates in a sequence (first this, then that, then what comes next, and so on). But in Heaven the concept of sequence is more challenging to mentally picture because there is no such thing as time in that mysterious spiritual dimension that all Believers count on eventually winding up in. In other words our standard conceptions of past, present, and future don't exist there. There is no dynamic of what comes first, and then second, and then third, and so on. It is as though everything that has happened or will ever happen in Heaven happen all at once. I have no illusions that this is a great definition of how things occur in Heaven; but it's about the best I can do when using my finite mind to try to understand and explain the in-finite.

Further we must always be careful about how to understand the objects and the beings that the Scripture verses speak about that are in Heaven. By definition the spiritual world does not and can not contain physical things. Heaven is 100% spiritual in nature..... invisible to the human eye.... while Earth and all of its creatures and objects are always physical in nature. So when we read of thrones, and harps, and smoke, and a Temple and more in Heaven, God has given John visions of physical forms that merely represent the invisible spiritual forms that actually exist in Heaven; physical forms that he stands a better chance of comprehending and then communicating to others.

The vision recorded in chapter 15 takes place in Heaven so everything we read about objects and people are to be taken as representative. And what we see is 7 angels that have each been given a bowl that contains a judgment that will, in turn, be poured out upon earth and its inhabitants. Thus Christianity has labeled these the 7 Bowl Judgments. So now we've had the 7 Seal Judgments (each of the 7 representing one of the 7 seals that sealed a scroll that God handed to the Lamb), then the 7 Trumpet Judgments (each judgment announced by a trumpet or shofar blown by an angel), and now the 7 Bowl Judgments. Added together we get a total of 21. There is some scholarly debate about whether the 7 Bowl Judgments are judgments 15

through 21, but I don't see evidence to think it is not especially when verse 1 says that these are the final judgments.

Especially from verse 2 forward we need to picture that everything that is happening is happening in connection with God's Heavenly Temple. Thus the representative figures of people and objects that are spoken of can be better understood by visualizing their physical counterparts in God's earthly Temple in Jerusalem. Going back to the teaching of the Torah, I introduced to you the principle of the Reality of Duality. It is that what happens in Heaven in the spiritual world has a counterpart that happens on earth in the physical world. However, the objects and beings spoken of in Heaven are perfect and complete as compared to their inferior and incomplete counterparts on earth. So what happens on earth can be said to be but a shadow of what happens in Heaven.

Since beginning in verse 2 we are reading about goings on in Heaven, and specifically in relation to the Heavenly Temple or Tabernacle, then we can understand the sea of glass mixed with fire in Heaven as something that must also exist in some form on earth. And indeed, although in John's day the Jerusalem Temple lay in ruins at the hands of the Romans, nonetheless the object that the sea of glass represents is the giant water laver that was present in the Temple grounds of the earthly Temple when it stood intact. And in fact that giant water laver went by the name of "the sea" due to the enormous amount of water that it held. So while the earthly laver held water, the Heavenly laver held what more resembled glass and fire. In both cases the contents of the laver was used to purify.

The mention of people in Heaven holding harps has as its earthly counterpart the Levite musicians who played harps at ritual ceremonies at the Jerusalem Temple. So very likely those departed souls in Heaven playing harps were the souls of Levites who died trusting Yeshua as their Messiah.

Continuing that same theme, there were people in Heaven (again, spiritual souls in actuality) singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. We discussed this last time and I only wish to reiterate that the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb are but one song and it is sung to the Father (called God of Heaven's Armies and King of the Nations in the song). This is not a song being sung **to** Moses or **to** the Lamb (Christ). If anything, we have Moses and Yeshua joining in with the others who are signing these words in praise of the Father. When the Temple stood, Levite singers would sing the Song of Moses as taken from Deuteronomy 32 as part of regular Temple liturgy. But now, since both Moses and Yeshua (the Lamb) were mediators for Israel, then the song is described as the Song of Moses **and** the Lamb. However to be clear, this is NOT the same as the Song of Moses as taken from Deuteronomy; rather, it is a new song.... a victory song.... that we read in verses 3 and 4. That both mediators are mentioned (and if one wishes to get technical about preeminence of persons depending on who is mentioned first, then Moses gets top billing in this song) it indicates their mutual continuing relevance and importance to the redemption plan and process.

Verse 5 can get a little confusing the way we find it translated in most Bibles although the CJB has done a better job of it. Let's take a quick look at a couple of other Bible versions to see how they deal with verse 5.

^{KJV} Revelation 15:5 *And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened:*

^{NAS} Revelation 15:5 *After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened,*

In reality the KJV and NAS translations are more true to the Greek. The CJB is what is called a dynamic translation that attempts to explain what is meant versus merely translating the words. And in our case, the difficult part is trying to understand what the "temple of the tabernacle of the testimony" means. Looking at the Greek helps us right away. The Greek word being translated to "temple" is **naos**. It is speaking NOT of the Temple in general, but rather ONLY of the inner sanctum; that is, the two inner chambers inside the Temple called the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. Taken together, these two inner chambers are usually called the Sanctuary in the Bible (which is how the CJB deals with it).

So this verse is really saying that the sanctuary portion of the Temple complex in Heaven was opened and (in verse 6) out of the sanctuary portion came those 7 angels with their 7 bowls. To clarify: the earthly counterpart of what is described as occurring in Heaven is speaking of the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple. These 7 angels were dressed in clean white linen garments with golden belts around their chests. Obviously spiritual beings like angels don't wear physical garments of white linen. However since the Heavenly Temple is representative of its earthly counterpart, Levitical priests are required to wear clean, white linen garments with a belt around their waist, especially when serving inside the sanctuary. In fact, on the one day per year that the High Priest is allowed inside the Holy of Holies (on earth) he doesn't wear his usual colorful garment but must instead wear a simple white garment. The white color indicates purity and oftentimes humility.

In verse 7 one of the 4 Living Beings who surrounds God's throne and goes with Him wherever He goes as the protectors of His incomparable holiness, gives these bowls full of God's ferocious judgment to the 7 angels. Again we see the connection between the Heavenly and earthly temples as bowls were a normal and customary part of ritual performed by priests in Temple service. I think since these 7 angels emerged from the sanctuary it would be correct to refer to them as angelic priests. We know from other passages that angels have a hierarchy of some sort, and perhaps those who serve God in the Heavenly Temple are a special class, which I shall call priests.

Finally in verse 8, we're told that the Heavenly sanctuary was filled with the smoke of God's glory. I think that the CJB has it better described as the smoke of God's **Sh'khinah**. We have seen a similar phenomenon occur within the earthly Temple. Listen to this passage from 2Chronicles of something that happened back in the days of King Solomon, and it is so very similar to what John is being shown in his vision.

^{CJB} 2 Chr 5:6-6:1 ⁶ *King Shlomo and the whole community of Isra'el who had assembled in his presence were in front of the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen in numbers beyond counting or recording.* ⁷ *The cohanim brought the ark for the covenant of ADONAI in to its place inside the sanctuary of the house, to the Especially Holy Place, under the*

wings of the k'ruvim. ⁸ *For the k'ruvim spread out their wings over the place for the ark, covering the ark and its poles from above.*

⁹ *The poles were so long that their ends could be seen [extending] from the ark into the sanctuary, but they could not be seen from outside; they are there to this day.* ¹⁰ *There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets Moshe put there at Horev, when ADONAI made the covenant with the people of Isra'el at the time of their leaving Egypt.*

¹¹ *When the cohanim came out of the Holy Place (for all the cohanim who were present had consecrated themselves; they didn't keep to their divisions; ¹² also the L'vi'im who were the singers, all of them- Asaf, Heman, Y'dutun and their sons and relatives-dressed in fine linen, with cymbals, lutes and lyres, stood on the east side of the altar; and with them 120 cohanim sounding trumpets), ¹³ then, when the trumpeters and singers were playing in concord, to be heard harmoniously praising and thanking ADONAI, and they lifted their voices together with the trumpets, cymbals and other musical instruments to praise ADONAI: "for he is good, for his grace continues forever"- then, the house, the house of ADONAI, was filled with a cloud; ¹⁴ so that because of the cloud, the cohanim could not stand up to perform their service; for the glory of ADONAI filled the house of God.*

Notice that we have the Levite musicians, the singing, the priests, the heavy involvement of the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies (the sanctuary), and God's presence in the form of a cloud that filled the sanctuary such that the priests couldn't perform their normal Temple service. Although in the description of the Heavenly Temple it was smoke that represented God's glory and filled the Heavenly sanctuary, just remember that smoke is being used as a figurative term. Smoke and a cloud perform the same function; they obscure and/or hide something from the sight of humans.

And just as the priests in Solomon's day couldn't perform their service for God until the cloud of God's presence left the sanctuary, we read in Revelation 15:8 that no one (that is, no departed soul or any angel in Heaven) could enter the Heavenly sanctuary until the 7 angelic priests with their bowls filled with God's wrath had completed their assigned tasks. A major point to notice is that when God decides to act, not even the Heavenly angels can do anything but observe and obey.

Let's move on to Revelation 16. Here is another case in which a manmade chapter break obscures the natural flow of the narrative. There should have been no chapter break at all at this point. To help us, then, to recover the natural flow I'm going to start reading from chapter 15 verse 8 and continue to the end of chapter 16.

READ REVELATION CHAPTER 15:8 - 16 all

So chapter 16 continues with what is going on in the Heavenly Temple, but now it will also begin to incorporate what is going to happen on Earth.

The Heavenly sanctuary is emptied of everyone except God's presence (His glory), with the 7

angelic priests having being sent out of the sanctuary with their bowls of judgment in hand, in preparation to carry out their task of administering God's justice. So verse 1 of chapter 16 says that a loud voice came from inside the emptied sanctuary and ordered the 7 angels to immediately begin pouring out their bowls on the earth. Who was in the sanctuary? Only God. So it had to be His voice, although there is room to allow that it could have been one of the 4 Living Beings that goes wherever God goes. But saying that is only acknowledging a speculative possibility as there is nothing in these verses to hint that this was the case.

In 1st century Jewish thought every form of created life had a guardian angel, and different groups of angels were responsible for different activities and even had specified areas where they were assigned to operate. So I want to throw out something rather fascinating for you take as you see fit. In a pseudepigraphical work from around the 2nd century called the Testament of Solomon (yes, the same Solomon that is King David's son), the author of this book names 7 angels of punishment or wrath that he says exists. The first is **Kushiel**, which means the rigid one of God. The second is **Lahatiel**, the flaming one of God. The third is **Shaftiel**, the judge of God. The fourth is **Makatiel** that translates to plague of God. The fifth angel is **Hutriel**, rod of God. The sixth is **Pusiel** meaning fire of God. And the seventh and final angel of punishment is **Rogziel**, the wrath of God. I cannot account for the veracity of this as far as to whether it is truth or not. The consensus is that it was written by a Believer in Christ, either Jew or gentile. The Testament of Solomon is not a book that is part of the Jewish or Christian canon. However, that does not automatically make it a lie or a fairy tale. You be the judge.

I want to shift focus for a few minutes to make a pertinent point that will likely cause discomfort among some of you, maybe even a little anger, but it is important that it be said. In the Old Testament, when the term "pour out God's wrath" is used, it is meant to include not only those who persecute God's people but also His own people who are rebellious and covenant breakers. Do not ever think that God's own people only mean Hebrews in the physical sense. The Church has long ago decided that gentile Believers are also God's people although from a spiritual, but not physical, sense and when taken in the proper balance, that is certainly correct. So Believers, Jew or gentile, I exhort you to listen carefully to what I'm about to read to you.

^{CJB} Ezekiel 14:21-23 ²¹ For here is what Adonai ELOHIM says: "Even if I inflict my four dreadful judgments on Yerushalayim- sword, famine, wild animals and plagues- to eliminate both its humans and its animals; ²² there will still be left a remnant in it to be brought out, including both sons and daughters. When they come out to you, and you see their way of life and how they act, then you will be consoled over the calamity I have brought upon Yerushalayim, over everything I have done to it.

²³ Yes, they will console you when you see their way of life and how they act; and you will understand that it was not without good reason that I did what I did in [Yerushalayim]," says Adonai ELOHIM.

^{CJB} Jeremiah 10:25 ²⁵ Pour out your anger on the nations that do not acknowledge you, also on the families that do not call on your name. For they have consumed Ya'akov- consumed him and finished him off, and laid waste to his home.

CJB Zephaniah 3:1-9 ¹ *Woe to her who is filthy, defiled; woe to the tyrant city!* ² *She wouldn't listen to the voice, wouldn't receive correction; she didn't trust in ADONAI, didn't draw close to her God.* ³ *Her leaders there with her are roaring lions, her judges desert wolves, who don't leave even a bone for tomorrow.* ⁴ *Her prophets are reckless, treacherous men; her cohanim profane the holy and do violence to Torah.*

⁵ *ADONAI, who is righteous, is there among them; he never does anything wrong. Every morning he renders his judgment, every morning, without fail; yet the wrongdoer knows no shame.* ⁶ *"I have cut off nations, their battlements are ruined; I have made their streets ruins, no one walks in them. Their cities are destroyed, abandoned, unpeopled.*

⁷ *I said, 'Surely now you will fear me, you will receive correction'; so that her place will not be cut off by all the punishments I brought on her. But no, they only grew all the more eager to be corrupt in all that they do.* ⁸ *Therefore, wait for me," says ADONAI, "for the day when I rise to witness against you, when I decide to assemble nations, to gather kingdoms together, to pour on them my indignation, all my furious anger; for all the earth will be consumed in the fire of my passion.*

⁹ *For then I will change the peoples, so that they will have pure lips, to call on the name of ADONAI, all of them, and serve him with one accord.*

And now a well known New Testament passage that sums up exactly what all that we have been reading about portends. In this passage in Matthew Christ is speaking and He says:

CJB Matthew 7:21-23 ²¹ *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, only those who do what my Father in heaven wants.* ²² *On that Day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we expel demons in your name? Didn't we perform many miracles in your name?'* ²³ *Then I will tell them to their faces, 'I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!'*

Who are these workers of lawlessness that Yeshua says He doesn't know? A better term that captures exactly what lawlessness means in this case is Torah-lessness. Think about it. What law are we to suppose Christ is referring to that if we shun it He'll disown us? Roman Law? American Law? European Union Law? Sharia Law? Naturally it is the only law that meant anything to Yeshua and ultimately should mean much of anything to us.... God's laws: the Law of Moses. So "workers of lawlessness" are those who are disobedient to the covenant, and disobedience to the covenant has played a front and center role throughout the last several chapters of Revelation, as well as in the books of Daniel and Ezekiel upon which much of Revelation depends. And what we learn is that when God pours out His wrath upon earth, both the oppressors of God's people and those who consider themselves as God's people but in fact are rebellious and are unrepentant covenant breakers are going to suffer it.

We'll talk about this a little more when we get to chapter 18 and we read of God's plea to His people to "come out of her" so that they (we) too don't suffer from the plagues He is going to inflict upon this planet and its wicked inhabitants.

Since God is a God of patterns, we're going to see a very similar pattern emerge in the carrying out of the Bowl Judgments that we saw earlier in chapter 8 concerning the Trumpet Judgments. That is, whereas each blow of the Trumpet sent forth a judgment upon a particular segment of our planet (the land, the salt water sea, the fresh water sources, and the sky), so we find the same in chapter 16 with the Bowl Judgments.

The first Bowl Judgment, verse 2, was poured out upon the land and upon the land dwelling creatures. Disgusting and painful sores broke out on all who wore the mark of the Beast and those that worshipped his image. God's own people are warned in Revelation 14 not to take on the mark of the Beast merely to survive; so this fits well with what we just discussed.

CJB Revelation 14:11-13 ¹¹ and the smoke from their tormenting goes up forever and ever. They have no rest, day or night, those who worship the beast and its image and those who receive the mark of its name."

¹² This is when perseverance is needed on the part of God's people, those who observe his commands and exercise Yeshua's faithfulness.

¹³ Next I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write: 'How blessed are the dead who die united with the Lord, from now on!' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'now they may rest from their efforts, for the things they have accomplished follow along with them.'"

We learn that covenant breakers and rebellious Believers will suffer just as pagans do for wearing the mark of the Beast. Recall that while on the surface the mark (666) is said to control all ability to buy and sell, in fact such a mark carries a far more ominous meaning to God; it means allegiance to Satan. So God's people will not be able to take on the mark as a means to save theirs' or their family's lives and then say: "**Lord, Lord! Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we expel demons in your name? Didn't we perform many miracles in your name?**"

The time of the reign of the Anti-Christ will be more horrible than any time ever known on earth in all of history. And God will not accept as a legitimate excuse a parent making the choice to take on the mark in the name of providing for his or her children and then saying, "but I only did it as an act of love. In reality, God, my allegiance remains with you."

One of my favorite films is called The Kingdom of Heaven. Despite the name it really isn't a religious movie; rather it is about a young man who lost his young pregnant wife to suicide and then lost his way. He wanted to go to Jerusalem to seek forgiveness from God, and in a strange set of circumstances became a knight for the Crusaders and went on to defend Jerusalem from the Muslims led by the famous Islamic general Saladin. In one scene that has always stuck with me, when it seemed certain that all was lost and in a day Saladin and his hordes would break down the walls of the holy city, enter and massacre every Christian in it, the Catholic Priest of Jerusalem recommended that the people convert to Islam now and repent later. I have little doubt that similar advice will be given the world over from overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and biblically challenged Pastors and Priests to their wholly ignorant congregations. Accept the mark of the Beast now, they will say, for the love of your

families and friends; and then repent later because God will understand because He is a God of love.

Our Lord has taken every opportunity to tell us that such an attitude of His Believers will be rejected as unworthy of salvation, and to attempt such a strategy will result in the same destiny as for those who had never Believed. This tactic of claiming allegiance to God but behaving in the opposite way and ignoring God's commandments is called lawlessness by Christ.

Yeshua has warned us that suffering and death may be the price to be paid in order to follow Him. We in the West have really not experienced such a horrific choice and so we seem immune to the suffering and murder of Christians in Africa and in the Middle East that are but occasional blips in the news. In fact, the prospect doesn't seem like much more than a distant or hypothetical warning, unlikely to happen, that merely means to emphasize how seriously we need to take our relationship with Jesus. But at some point in the not-so-distant future, according to John's Apocalypse, oppression for our trust in Messiah Yeshua will become the law of the Anti-Christ and the world's population will join in carrying it out just as some of the German citizenry helped carry out the Holocaust that murdered 6 million Jews in death camps. So the precedent has already been set.

This 1st Bowl Judgment reminds us of the plague of boils upon the Egyptians that we find in Exodus 9. Again; our Lord is a Lord of patterns and so it should not be surprising to find a similar plague once again striking the oppressors of God's people for their stubborn refusal to submit to the God of Israel. Interesting, isn't it, that since these people will take a mark on their skin in order to buy, sell, and show their allegiance to Satan, that God will respond by filling their bodies with His own marks; the marks of visible sores.....marks of God's judgment.... in retribution for wearing the mark of the Beast. In many ways this affliction of painful sores fulfills the same intent as the law of **Tzara'at**. **Tzara'at**, often misidentified as leprosy by Bible translators, is a skin condition caused by God upon a person who He has deemed as inwardly impure and worthy of shame. It exposes that person for who he or she really is. The idea is that while one might think to look pious on the outside while harboring godlessness on the inside, but God sees the heart. And when He deems the inner spiritual condition as too unacceptable, He will afflict that person with a highly visible and gross skin disease that essentially marks him or her as spiritually unclean.

In verse 3 the second angel of punishment poured out his bowl upon the salt water seas. The water became like the blood of a dead person and so every bit of life in the sea died. The blood of a dead person becomes thick and coagulated. While this is similar to the Exodus plague upon the Egyptians, it is not identical in that it was the fresh water that was affected in Egypt and it was affected because it was more the color of the water that seemed to make it undrinkable. But, there is another aspect to this that Jewish Believers that read John's Apocalypse would have immediately latched upon. It is that blood itself was forbidden to be eaten, and that a dead person represented the height of ritual impurity. So as the salt water became more blood-like, no Jew would continue fishing in it. And this is because they would consider this contaminated condition of the oceans as akin to the uncleanness of a corpse. Thus in the first Bowl Judgment when the sores on the skin of those who took the mark of the Beast became like a person afflicted with **Tzara'at**..... and a person with **Tzara'at** was highly

unclean and could not live among his family or society until it cleared up... now the world's oceans and thus everything that came in contact with that water became impure and unclean at the hand of God. Bottom line: God has declared, and physically marked, all of wicked humanity with His mark of skin sores, and He has also marked all the world's oceans as unclean by making them contaminated as with the blood of a dead person. This is perhaps the harshest, most widespread judgment upon earth since the Great Flood.

This second Bowl Judgment is a much more serious plague than it's Trumpet Judgment counterpart that also afflicted the salt water and it is hard to tell just how much of the world's oceans shall be affected by it. We should notice that while there are indeed striking similarities of the Bowl Judgments to the Trumpet Judgments, the Trumpet Judgments affected limited specified portions of the globe, but not all. The Bowl Judgments seem to be universal in their effects.

We'll continue with the Bowl Judgments, the final judgments of God, next time.