

**The Facebook Commentary on Revelation**  
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**Revelation Chapter 15**

**Rev 15-18 (Introduction)**—Revelation 15 serves as a major transition in the book of Revelation. It is preceded by chapter 14, which elaborates the remnant's role in the final conflict of the end-time (Rev 14). It precedes chapter 16, which describes the seven last plagues after the close of probation (Rev 16). In the outline of Revelation I have developed, Revelation 15 contains a sanctuary introduction to the seven last bowl-plagues and the fall of Babylon (Rev 15-18), which forms the unit of Revelation that comes after the central unit, the great conflict of chapter 12-14. Revelation 15-18, especially chapter 16, has major parallels to the seven trumpets of chapters 8-11. If Revelation 12-14 portrays the anger of the dragon against God's remnant (building on Rev 11:18 and 12:17), Revelation 15-18 represents the wrath of God, holding the dragon (Satan) in check and bringing history to a close before the second coming of Jesus (based on Rev 11:18 and 15:1).

**Rev 15-18 (The Wrath of God)**--This is probably a good place to reflect briefly on the concept of God's wrath in the Bible generally and the book of Revelation in particular. When Revelation speaks of the wrath of the nations (Rev 11:18) and the wrath of the dragon (Rev 12:12, 17), it is not a compliment. It represents irrational fury grounded in hatred and diabolical desire to destroy both lives and the environment. To then turn around and apply the same term to God can be unsettling (14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19; 19:15). Can God be irrationally destructive too? Does God have a dark side? Why is the book of Revelation so full of divine wrath? How can we reconcile God's wrath with the idea that God is love? There are a number of things to know about God and about God's wrath before we get into the seven last plagues.

Regarding the wrath of God, I can think of at least six circumstances in which God's wrath is invoked in the Bible, some of them actively and others passively. First, God sometimes speaks of destructive things Satan or the nations do as if He Himself had done them. In other words, He takes responsibility for actions that He simply allows to happen. A good example of this is the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchanezzar. God speaks of it as an active judgment, but then makes clear that He is simply allowing Nebuchanezzar to do what he wants to do. God withholds His protection from His people because of their rebellion against Him (Jer 20:4-5; 21:2-10; 25:1-11). Second, the "wrath of God" in the Bible is often His sadly turning away from people who don't want Him, allowing them to reap the consequences of their own decisions

and actions. This is illustrated in Romans 1:18-28 where the wrath of God against human rebellion (Rom 1:18) is explained as God “giving them up” to the consequences of their rebellion. Third, wrath is sometimes used to describe God’s aggressive action to deliver His people, as in the Exodus from Egypt (Exod 15:7). Fourth, God sometimes acts aggressively to restrain evil when it is in danger of getting out of control, as in the Flood story. Fifth, God sometimes acts aggressively in order to get people’s attention. Sixth, God sometimes acts or doesn’t act in order to reveal the characters of Satan or of Satan’s followers. The big question here is, which of these motivations lies behind the wrath of a loving God in Revelation 16? How do you reconcile the seven last plagues with the love of the God who is most clearly revealed in the gracious, forgiving and self-sacrificing actions of Jesus Christ?

The seven last bowl-plagues at first glance seem to be direct actions of judgment on God’s part. Each of the plagues results from an action that originates in the heavenly sanctuary. The Exodus background of the bowl-plagues reminds the reader of God’s direct intervention in Egypt. The purpose of that intervention was to deliver God’s people from slavery. Read in this way, the seven bowl-plagues would be interventions of God to deliver His people from end-time Babylon. Allusions to the ancient fall of Babylon in the sixth and seventh bowls would support the same theme. A loving God acts to deliver His faithful ones from their oppressors.

The bowl-plagues fall on the earth after the close of human probation (the empty temple in heaven—Rev 15:7-8). If they are, as the text seems on the surface to suggest, active interventions of God, what is the point of such plagues if human beings are no longer willing to repent? It would be to expose the reality of their characters. In spite of the final proclamation of the gospel (Rev 14:6-7), in spite of desperate threats (Rev 14:8-11), in spite of everything in their lives going wrong (the bowl-plagues), the wicked ones’ defiance toward God and stubborn refusal to repent only increases (Rev 16:9, 11, 21). The bowl-plagues demonstrate that the character of those who oppose God and His people has become hardened in unrepentance. No amount of time or effort will win them back. A loving God does not force people into relationship with Him. If they stubbornly refuse to repent, He eventually lets them go to reap the consequences of their choices.

Sigve Tonstad offers another way to read Revelation 16. He sees it as an end-time revelation of Satan’s character. Tonstad admits that at first glance Revelation 15:7 – 16:1 implies that God is about to do something terrible. But rather than simply accept a surface reading of the text, he suggests that in the seven bowls God is permitting Satan to take nearly total control of this earth and to thereby demonstrate what his government of the universe would be like if he achieved his goal to “be like the Most High” (Isa 14:14, KJV). He points to Revelation 16:13-14 as direct evidence that demonic activity lies behind the fearsome plagues of the chapter. The surface current of Revelation reads as if the seven bowls-plagues were active, punitive judgments of God on the unrighteous after the close of human probation. But the demonic undercurrent of the book may be more important in this chapter than most commentators have allowed in the past.

Tonstad points to the clear parallels between the seven bowls and the seven trumpets. The seven trumpets also read, at first glance, as active judgments of God. But there is abundant evidence in the seven trumpets that it is the operation of Satan that is the cause of the

destruction, not God (Rev 8:10-11; 9:1-5, 11, 14-15). God releases His tight control over Satan to allow him to reveal his destructive character. Tonstad reasons, from the strong parallels between the trumpets and the bowls, that they also should be read in terms of divine permission for the “Destroyer” (Rev 9:11) to reveal his destructive character. Both the trumpets and the bowls are completing a process that begins with the crisis in the heavenly council over the character and government of God (Rev 15:2, 7, cf. 5:1-5). The deceptive and destructive character of the one who slanders the character of God must be exposed (Rev 16:14) that the true character of God may be revealed (Rev 15:3-4). In the larger scheme of things (the cosmic conflict), God loosens His restraint of Satan in the trumpets and bowls so that the character of Satan can be fully revealed. A loving God wants His creatures to know the character of their adversary, so they will not place their trust in his leadership or in the words that he speaks against God. The images of Revelation can be disturbing at times, but from the perspective of the cosmic conflict, they are consistent with the actions of a loving, other-centered God.

In conclusion, the love of God is essential to His character. It has been there from eternity past. Wrath is not essential to God’s character, it is a reactive force grounded in God’s love. As one who cares deeply about the welfare of His creatures, God is distressed when His creatures hurt each other and hurt themselves by their behavior. But He does not force constructive behavior, instead he persuades; sometimes by intervention and sometimes by allowing sin to take its course. But even his aggressive interventions are grounded in His other-centered character that desires what is best for His creatures, but does not force them to adopt His ways of thinking and acting. As we approach the close of earth’s history, the book of Revelation seeks to arrest the attention of the world by demonstrating the consequences of rebellion and self-centeredness. Whether one sees the seven last plagues as active or passive judgments, a loving purpose lies behind.

**Rev 15 (Introduction)**—The chapter falls naturally into two parts, verses 1-4 and 5-8. Verses 1-4 take place on the sea of glass and offer a view of the righteous celebrating victory over the beast and his image. Verses 5-8, on the other hand, take place in the heavenly temple, which is filled with the smoke of the glory of God and emptied of officiants as a result. Verse 1 introduces the whole chapter with strong reference also to the seven last plagues of Revelation 16. Verse 5 begins with “after these things I saw” (Greek: *meta tauta eidon*). That phrase occurs numerous times in Revelation at the beginning of a new section. This, combined with the change of scene from the sea of glass to the heavenly temple, leads naturally to a division of the chapter into two parts, verses 1-4 and 5-8.

The question is whether the natural division in the middle of Revelation 15 is significant for the structure of the book of Revelation. Some, like Stefanovic, see all of chapter 15 as an introduction to the bowl-plagues of Rev 16 (based on the mention of the seven last plagues in the first verse). Others, like Strand, see the first four verses of chapter 15 as the conclusion of Rev 12-14 and the last four verses as the sanctuary introduction to Rev 16, since there is no explicit sanctuary language in Revelation 15:1-4 (unless the sea of glass is a cryptic reference to the laver). In a way, I agree with both, seeing the chapter as a whole to be duodirectional, as we will see below. As a unit, it completes what went before and introduces what will come after.

For the sake of a structure, however, I have included verses 1-4 with the previous section (Rev 11:19 – 15:4) and verses 5-8 with what follows (Rev 15:5 – 18:24). See *The Deep Things of God*, page 123.

As mentioned above, I see all of chapter 15 as duodirectional (see comments on Revelation 3:21). Verses 1-4, in particular, are the climax to the central section of Revelation, going all the way back to Revelation 11:19. The remnant of God's people have been under attack by the dragon (Rev 12:17). The dragon's side of the war is elaborated in Revelation 13. The remnant's side of the conflict is elaborated in Revelation 14:1-13. The climax of the final battle is seen in Revelation 14:14-20, where the opponents of God and his people are finally defeated. The celebration of Revelation 15:2-4 is the fitting conclusion to the end-time war, celebrating the way God brought the war to an end. On the other hand, Revelation 15:1 clearly introduces the seven bowl-plagues, as do verses 5-8. So the entire chapter looks both ways. It is the fitting climax of the great final battle of chapters 12-14 (summarized by "the nations were angry" in Rev 11:18) and it is the introduction to the second elaboration of that war in Revelation 16-18 (summarized by "your wrath has come" in Rev 11:18—see comments on Rev 11:18). This is the consistent literary pattern in Revelation that I call duodirectionality. The seams between sections often point both ways, concluding what comes before and introducing what comes after at the same time.

**Rev 15:1—“And I saw another great and astonishing sign in heaven, seven angels having the seven last plagues, because in them the wrath of God has been brought to completion.”** This verse is the first explicitly heavenly scene since great heavenly signs of the woman and the dragon in chapter twelve (Rev 12:1, 3, 7-12). While the 144,000 are before the throne in Revelation 14:3, the location is an earthly one, Mount Zion (Rev 14:1). With this heavenly sign, things are brought to a full circle, the material which began in the vision of Revelation 11:19 is drawn to completion in Revelation 15:1-8. But this duodirectional verse also makes reference to the seven angels having the seven last plagues. God's wrath is brought to its full completion in these plagues. So Revelation 15:1 itself points both ways, back to the early verses of chapter twelve and forward to the seven last plagues of chapter sixteen. It is a summary in advance of the more detailed scene in verses 5-8.

The wrath of God, expressed in the seven last bowl-plagues, is the next major move in the outline presented in Revelation 11:18. The final events of earth's history begin there with "the nations were angry." This phrase pointed forward to the anger of the dragon in Revelation 12:17. Revelation 12:17 is a duodirectional text, offering the climax of the story in chapter twelve and pointing forward to the actions of the dragon and the remnant in chapters thirteen and fourteen. So the anger of the nations (Rev 11:18) is an excellent summary in advance of the main themes of Revelation 12-14. The next move announced in Revelation 11:18 is "your wrath has come." This is taken up in 15:1 and points to the seven last bowl-plagues (Revelation 16) and the fall of Babylon chapters that follow them (Rev 17-18). At the time when the nations are angry, God's wrath will come (Revelation 11:18). See comments on the wrath of God above.

“And I saw another **great and astonishing sign in heaven.**” In Revelation 12:1 there was a “great” (Greek: *mega*) sign in heaven. In Revelation 12:3 there was “another” (Greek: *allo*)

sign in heaven. So the reference here not only refers back to the two earlier signs in heaven, it takes them to another level. The sign here is “great and astonishing” (Greek: *mega kai thaumaston*), expressing that what is about to take place, the final outpouring of the wrath of God, is worthy of complete and careful attention. The word astonishing (Greek: *thaumaston*) represents an action designed to evoke surprise or admiration. All three of these heavenly signs are singular (Greek: *sêmeion*). But the signs performed by the beast powers are always in the plural (Greek: *sêmeia*—Rev 13:13, 14; 16:14; 19:20). When performed by the beast powers, the signs refer to miracles worked to deceive those on the earth to believe that the true God is at work in them. In Revelation signs in the singular are God’s revelations, signs in the plural are counter-revelations of the beast powers.

**“seven angels having the seven last plagues . . .”** It says here that the seven angels are “having” (Greek: *echontas*) the seven last plagues. This is parallel to verse 6, where the seven angels are “having” (Greek: *echontes*) the seven plagues. The word “last” (Greek: *eschatas*) is not repeated in verse six, because it is understood from the reference in verse one. There is no mention yet in either verse of the bowls, which are not given to the seven angels until verse 7. The word for “plagues” (Greek: *plêgas*) means to wound, either by a whip stroke or a blunt instrument. It is usually translated “wound” in Revelation 13:3. In this case the stripe or blow is portrayed as being inflicted by God (see **Rev 15-18 [The Wrath of God]**). These plagues come in accordance with the plan and purpose of God.

**“. . . because in them the wrath of God has been brought to completion.”** On the concept of wrath see preceding section: **Rev 15-18 (The Wrath of God)**. This final clause explains the word “last” in the preceding clause. Up until this point in history, the wrath of God has been restrained. But now it bursts forth in fullness all the way to completion, the end (Greek: *etelesthê*) of all wrath. From Tonstad’s perspective, the wrath of God is complete when Satan is fully unrestrained to fully demonstrate what the universe would be like if he were in charge. The wrath of God, ultimately, is not active destruction, but God’s sad turning away from those who do not want Him, allowing them to reap the full consequences of their choices. In Satan’s case, getting free of restraint is what he wants but it will end in his exposure before the universe and his ultimate demise. For the human race, freedom from God means to become slaves of Satan and in the end to suffer his cruelty. These plagues are not the end of history, the Second Coming and the Millennium are to follow. But there are no other plagues after these. They are the completion of the mission, of which the seals and trumpets were a part, to fully reveal the characters of both God and Satan. They are also last in the sense that the earlier plagues were intended to lead to repentance. These come after the time for repentance has closed. They affect those who are deliberately hostile to God.

**Rev 15:2—“And I saw, as it were, a sea of glass mingled with fire, and the ones who had overcome the beast and his image and the number of his name stood upon the sea of glass having the harps of God.”** In Revelation, the sea of glass is mentioned twice. It was seen in front of the throne of God clear as crystal (Rev 4:6) and here it is mixed with fire in an unspecified location (Rev 15:2). The oddity here is that, as a second reference, one would expect it to have a Greek article. John saw “as it were” (Greek: *hôs*) “a” sea of glass, not “the”

sea of glass. This is probably done to indicate that this is not an actual sea of glass, but something that looked like a sea of glass. In both cases, the sea of glass probably represents the laver in the Hebrew tabernacle and temple. Just as the laver was placed in front of the ark of the covenant, so the sea of glass in Revelation 4, and presumably here, is before the throne. This scene also recalls the great multitude of Revelation 7:9-17, who stand before the throne of God in the heavenly temple.

In the Old Testament, the background seems to be when the Israelites watched the destruction of the Egyptians while standing on the shore of the Red Sea. The song of Moses recalls the song that the Israelites sang there (Exodus 15). The great deliverance at the Red Sea becomes a model for the end-time deliverance of God's faithful. Allusions to the Exodus are frequent in Revelation 16, as will be noted there. But unlike the Exodus, here the song occurs before the plagues are described. The seven last plagues do not lead to the deliverance of God's people, they are delivered in the midst of the plagues.

The mingling of fire with the glass is puzzling. There is no convincing interpretation of the fire's meaning. Perhaps it represents the morning sun rising over the calm Aegean Sea, a scene John would have experienced many times on Patmos. Some suggest it refers to the blood of the wicked who have just perished (Revelation 14). Another possibility is this scene recalls the fire of God's glory, which is before the throne in Revelation 4:5, reflecting on the sea of glass in Revelation 4:6. That connection would place this scene in the same heavenly location as the throne room in Revelation 4, 5, and 7. Reference back to the early throne scene places the plagues in the context of two revelations; the revelation of God's character in the way that He has handled the crisis in the universe, and the revelation of Satan's character when he is completely unrestrained in the final moments of human history.

As the world enters into a time when the power of Satan is unrestrained, God's faithful ones are sheltered in the "storm", there would be no purpose in allowing Satan to hurt them any longer. The world at this time is divided into two groups of people, those who had overcome the beast and its image (Rev 15:2) and those who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image (Rev 16:2). The former group is sheltered from the seven last plagues and the latter group experiences their full force. The word for "overcome" (Greek: *nikôntas*) recalls the letter to the churches (Rev 2:7, 1, 17, etc.) and many other references to the people of God in the book (Rev 12:11; 17:14; 21:7). That the overcoming is a present active participle (Greek: *tas nikôntas*) underlines that the overcoming is ongoing in John's day and will be completed in the context of the final events. God's people are depicted before the throne in this verse, even though they are still in the midst of the conflict on earth. In Revelation, those who "live in heaven" include the saints of God on earth, while "those who live on the earth" refers consistently to the unrighteous in Revelation.

**“. . . the ones who had overcome . . . stood upon the sea of glass.”** It is not immediately clear exactly where the overcomers were standing. The key lies in the Greek preposition *epi*. The overcomers stood *epi* the sea of glass. The most common meaning of *epi* is "upon", as in Jesus "walking on (Greek: *epi*) the sea" of Galilee (Matt 14:26). But Revelation 15:2, *epi* is combined with the sea in the accusative case (Greek: *epi tēn thalassan*). In Matthew, on the other hand, *epi* is combined with a genitive form of the sea (Greek: *tēs*

*thalassês*). But while this is the most likely reading of Matthew 14:26, the majority of manuscripts of Matthew have the accusative there instead (Greek: *epi tēn thalassan*), the same form as Revelation 15:2. So *epi* can mean “upon” with either the genitive or the accusative.

In at least one instance (John 21:1), however, *epi* with the accusative can mean “at” or “nearby”. The parallel with the Exodus story would support the overcomers standing “by” the sea of glass, just as the Israelites stood at the shore as they watched the Egyptians drown (Exod 14:30). But if we take the most natural meaning of *epi*, the scene depicts the overcomers standing “upon” the sea of glass. This would be deeply meaningful to John. In Revelation 13 the beast arose out of the sea. The sea is the place from which evil arises. It is also the place that separated John from those he loved (Rev 21:2). But in Revelation 15 the sea is no longer treacherous. It is no longer a threat. It is solid as glass under the saints’ feet. They now not only stand with the Israelites on the shore of the sea, they stand on the sea itself, representing a permanent conquest of all that had troubled them in the past.

“. . . **having the harps of God.**” The mention of harps recalls two earlier heavenly scenes, the first in Revelation 5:8 and the second in Revelation 14:2. In the first case the four living creatures and the elders are about to break out into a song praising the Lamb for His death on the cross, which redeems those who live on the earth (Rev 5:9-10). The harps of Revelation 14:2 also preceded a song, but the words of that song are not given. Here the words of the song are given in verses 3 and 4. According to Revelation 14:3, only the redeemed are able to sing these songs.

**Rev 15:3-4—“And they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and they sang the song of the lamb, ‘Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God Almighty, righteous and trustworthy are your ways, O King of the nations. Who will not fear You, O Lord, and glorify your name, for You alone are holy. All the nations will come and worship before You, because Your righteous acts have been brought into the open.’”**

Songs break out frequently in the book of Revelation. They are essential to the overall story that is being told. They speak primarily to the kind of person God is (see Rev 4:8, 11; 5:9-12; 7:10-12, etc.). It is in the songs of Revelation that the crisis in the heavenly government is resolved. The songs are about God and what He has done. They result in words and actions of worship. In the end, the purpose of the book is not a revelation of horrific end-time events. It is a revelation of Jesus Christ, who is the clearest revelation of what God is like. It is that revelation which resolves the crisis in the throne room of God.

In some ways, the song in these two verses, though somewhat distant from the end of the book of Revelation, is the climax of the songs in the whole book. It is a final paean of praise directly to God for who He is and what He has done. It is a fitting climax to the mighty acts of God from Genesis to Revelation, from the original creation to the new creation.

As Stefanovic notes, the song in these verses is almost entirely composed of phrases from the Old Testament. Yet the song is so seamlessly put together, that it reads like an independent composition. We will take up the Old Testament background texts one by one as the allusions appear in the passage. The first of these allusions lies in the phrase “the song of Moses” (Exod 15:1) combined with the phrase “the servant of God” (Exod 14:31). The

combination of four major words with the setting by the Red Sea makes an allusion to Exodus 15 probable, as many commentators support. But a description of Moses singing is also found in Deuteronomy 31:30. This combined with several verbal parallels to Deuteronomy 32:3-4 in the song itself (see below) makes an allusion to the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 a probable allusion as well. We will explore the latter allusion more deeply below.

**Rev 15:3-- “And they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and they sang the song of the Lamb. . . .”** The song in this passage is a blending of two songs, the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. God’s deliverance of Israel in the Exodus is the model for the greater deliverance at the end of time in Revelation. The combining of these two titles is a testimony to the essential unity of the two revelations of God; one from a mountain in the desert of Sinai, and the other on a hill called Golgotha. The one revelation was good, the other revelation was even better (John 1:17-18). There is an essential unity between Old Testament Israel and the church of the New Testament.

It is possible that this song is the “new song” of Revelation 14:3, which only the redeemed can sing. They are named by many names in the book of Revelation, they are the 144,000 (Rev 7:4; 14:1), the great multitude (Rev 7:9), the remnant (Rev 12:17), and the saints (Rev 14:12). Here they are called those who overcome the beast, his image, and his name that get to sing this song, no one else. They have experienced a deliverance like none other in human history, and so they get to sing a song that none other in human history have ever sung.

There are three songs of Moses in the Old Testament. The first and best known is in Exodus 15:1-18. The song was sung on the other shore of the Red Sea, as the Israelites observed the tragic destruction of the Egyptians, who were attempted to drag them back into slavery (Exod 14:30-31). The second is the song Moses sang as his ministry was coming to an end (Deuteronomy 32:1-43). In this song Moses recounted the faithfulness of God and the unfaithfulness of Israel. It is a song grounded in his personal experience as Israel’s leader for forty years. The third song is Psalm 90, titled “The Prayer of Moses, the man of God” (Psa 90:1). This prayer is a plea for God’s favor, in spite Israel’s many shortcomings. It contains two famous concepts, a thousand years with the Lord is like yesterday when it is past (Psa 90:4), and the concept that the human lifespan is normally 70 years and occasionally 80 (Psa 90:10). What all three have in common is praise to God for both His greatness and His goodness.

While there are many songs in the book of Revelation, this is the only song that mirrors to some degree the rhythm and parallelism of Hebrew poetry. For example, “Great and marvelous are your works” parallels “just and true are your ways.” “Lord, God Almighty” parallels “O King of the nations.” And even in English, there is quite a bit of rhythm in the cadence of the words.

The setting of Revelation 15:2-4 is reminiscent of Exodus 15, where the Israelites sang beside the Red Sea. But the words of the song in Revelation 15:3-4 are more reminiscent of Deuteronomy 32. There Moses sings, “For I will proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he” (Deut 32:3-4, ESV). Tonstad points out that Deuteronomy 32 is sung in painful awareness of Moses’ failure to rightly represent God’s

character before the Israelites in Numbers 20:7-11. He spoke angrily to Israel on God's behalf when God was not angry with them. On that occasion God leveled against Moses the charge of rebellion, the same charge Moses had wrongly leveled against the people (Num 20:10; cf. 20:24 and 27:14). But what Moses got wrong about God in Numbers 20, he got right about God in Deuteronomy 32. So the language of Revelation 15 reflects Deuteronomy 32 more than the other two Old Testament songs of Moses.

While grounded in the original song of Moses, the song of Revelation 15 finds its completion in Jesus. This is the song of the Lamb as much as it is the song of Moses. The result is not two songs, but one. Both Moses and Lamb are Greek genitives (Greek: *Mouseos, tou arniou*). That means they can be subjective or objective. Subjective would mean that the song is sung by the person or belongs to that person. Objective would mean the song is about the person. "Song of Moses" is clearly subjective, it is like the song that Moses sang in Deuteronomy 32. But in Revelation 5, the Lamb does not sing. Instead, the three songs of Revelation 5 are **about** the Lamb (Rev 5:9-10, 12, 13), which would suggest an objective genitive in Revelation 15. It is the content of the song more than the one who sings that matters with the song of the Lamb. It is the Lamb who clarifies the true character of God at the cross (Rev 5:6). It is the Lamb who overcomes the crisis in the universe (Rev 5:1-4). So this song is one of many indications that the crisis of the universe in chapters 5 and 12 is very much in view here in Revelation 15. The song of Revelation 15 is about how the actions of the Lamb clarify the conflict in the universe over the character and government of God.

**'Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God Almighty, righteous and trustworthy are your ways, O King of the nations. . . .'** Most commentators point to Psalm 111:2-3 as a background text to "great and marvelous are your works" . . . (Greek: *megala kai thaumasta ta erga sou*). Psalm 111:2 reads "great are the works (Psa 110:2 in the LXX: *megala ta erga*) of the Lord." Adding to the likelihood of this allusion is the fact that a variation of "marvelous" (Greek: *thaumasta*) is found in Psalm 111:4: "wondrous works" (Psa 110:4 in the LXX: *thausasiôn*). So the entire opening phrase of the Song of Moses and the Lamb can be found in Psalm 111:2-4 (Psalm 110:2-4 in the LXX). The theme of the psalm is that God's mighty acts are designed to be remembered. The rightful response to God's acts is to rehearse and retell them over and over, thereby reactivating God's might action in the lives of the worshipers. The phrase "marvelous are your works" (Greek: *ta erga sou*-- deeds, actions, accomplishments) echos Psalm 139:14 (138:14 in the LXX: *thausasia ta erga sou*). There the reference is in relation to the intricate construction of the human body. In Revelation 15 it is in relation to God's actions to heal the universe.

The word "marvelous" (Greek: *thaumasta*) is worth some extra attention. As noted by Tonstad, the Greek word can mean amazing, marvelous, surprising. In the throne room of the universe, God springs a surprise in answer to the crisis (Rev 5:1-4). Anticipating a triumphal warrior, the lion of the tribe of Judah, John instead sees a Lamb as if it was slain. The solution to the crisis in the universe is not the exercise of greater power, but the exercise of a different kind of power, the power of self-sacrificing non-violence. It is the revelation that God is not worthy to rule because He is more powerful than all rivals, He is worthy to rule because His character is safe to be on a throne. The way God rules the universe is a surprise and thus His

actions are both great and marvelous. His leadership proves different in kind than human beings would expect. Hence the song begins with an exclamation of surprise and amazement.

“. . . **righteous and trustworthy are your ways.** . . .” God’s great and marvelous works (Greek: *ta erga*) are here paralleled to His righteous (Greek: *dikaiai*) and trustworthy (Greek: *alêthinai*) ways (Greek: *hai hodoi*). The core meaning of *hodoi* has to do with paths, roads, and highways in the physical world. But in relation to character, *hodoi* has to do with a way of life or conduct. God’s actions are great and marvelous, but God’s ways of doing those actions are just and they can be trusted. The singers marvel not only over **what** God has done, but the **way** in which He has done these things. God has not only met the standards to righteousness they are familiar with, the way he has met those standards exceeds all expectations.

The language here recalls Deuteronomy 32:4 (NIV): “He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.” The parallels between the two passages are closer in the LXX than in the English. “Perfect” in the NIV translates “true” or “trustworthy” (LXX: *alêthinos*). Since Satan is the deceiver (Rev 13:14), this assertion is a vindication of God’s character over against Satan’s lies. I have chosen to translated *alêthinos* as “trustworthy,” not only because of the form of the Greek word for “true” but because it is describing God’s ways as much as His words. Tonstad adds “sincere” and “authentic” to the range of meanings for *alêthinos*. God can be trusted because He speaks the truth and His ways are consistent with His words. This meaning of *alêthinos* is combined with God’s “ways” (LXX: *ai hodoi*), which are “just” (Greek: *diakios*). Combined with the title “song of Moses” we have a nearly certain allusion to Deuteronomy 32:4 in this phrase. Less certain is an allusion to Psalm 145:17. This verse combines the justice (LXX: *dikaios*) of Yahweh’s ways (LXX: *tais hodois*) with a reference to His works (LXX: *tois ergois*). This allusion is possible, but does not add anything substantive to our understanding of Revelation 15:3.

“. . . **O King of the nations.** . . .” The phrase “O King of the nations” is another title for God in parallel with “Lord God Almighty”. The phrase is only found twice in the Bible, here and in Jeremiah 10:6-7. It is not found in the Septuagint Greek translation of Jeremiah 10:6-7, it is only in the Hebrew and the translation by Theodotion. The phrase anticipates verse 4, where it says: “All the nations will come and worship before You, because Your righteous acts have been brought into the open.” In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he quotes Isaiah to the effect that the day will come when “every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil 2:10-11, cf. Isa 45:23). In Isaiah this is spoken of Yahweh, in Philippians the worship is directed to Jesus Christ. This is one of numerous passages in the New Testament where an Old Testament text referring to Yahweh is applied to Jesus Christ, one of the strongest affirmations of His divinity.

“King of the nations” implies just such an event, that the day will come when everyone, even including Satan, will bow before God and confess that His ways are just and true. Ellen White places that moment at the end of the Millennium and just before the annihilation of the unrighteous along with Satan and his angels (GC 669-671). In the concluding events of the conflict, God’s actions are seen by all to be just, true, and in full harmony with His covenant. That is the point in time when the song of this verse is truly appropriate, “Just and true are your ways”. In the world today, the concept of a true and just God is called into question. At the End,

the world will see that God's ways are entirely fair, just, and true.

**Rev 15:4— “Who will not fear You, O Lord, and glorify your name. . . .”** “Who will not fear you” continues the allusion to the Hebrew of Jeremiah 10:6-7 mentioned above. The word “You” in the opening clause is actually missing in the original (unlike Jeremiah 10:7). John has slightly modified the wording of Jeremiah 10:7 to create a double object for this sentence. A literal translation would be: “Who will not fear, Lord, and glorify your name” (Greek: *tis ou mê phobêthê, kurie, kai doxasei to onoma sou*). The verbs “fear” and “glorify” have a single object, “your name” (*to onoma sou*). To glorify someone means to speak well of them. This steers the meaning of “fear” (Greek: *phobêthê*) away from terror or being afraid to the meanings of fear that parallel “glorify”, such as “honor” or “reverence”. The two categories are closely connected, as they are in Revelation 14:7. The first angel there invites the world to “fear God and give him glory.” The same language appears here on the lips of the redeemed. In the words of Stefanovic, “The redeemed saints have accepted the eternal gospel message of the three angels.” The three angels’ messages have borne fruit in the many nations who heard the message. Since names in the Hebrew background are related to character, honoring God and glorifying His name means to speak well regarding His character, the way that He rules the universe, and the way He treats the creatures He has made. It means to adore someone that you worship and admire. This meaning is likely an intentional contrast with the terror experienced by Israel’s enemies in the Exodus from Egypt (Exod 15:14-16).

**. . . because You alone are holy, because all the nations will come and worship before You, because Your righteous acts have been brought into the open.** The triple use of “because” (Greek: *hoti*) indicates that the rest of verse 4 gives the reasons that the redeemed fear God and give Him glory. They worship and adore Him because He is holy, because He has drawn all nations to His side, and because of the way that He has accomplished that, without the use of force or deception, the tools by which Satan seeks to ground his authority. The works and ways of God have been fully revealed at the end of the conflict, and the universe is satisfied that He is worthy to rule (anticipated in Rev 5:12-13).

The Greek word for “holy” here (*hosios*) is different from the more common word *hagios*. In the Greco-Roman world, *hosios* is that which helps maintain the balance between the interests of human society and the expectations of the gods. As such, it is rarely used of deities outside the Bible. Like *hagios*, in the spiritual realm *hosios* means “holy” or “set apart”, but it can also mean “faultless”. This extended meaning is seen in Hebrews 7:26, ESV: “For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy (Greek: *hosios*), innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens” (in Ephesians 1:4 *hagios* also has this extended meaning). God has been vindicated against all charges of Satan that He is arbitrary, untrustworthy, vengeful, selfish, judgmental and severe. The song in these verses reflects a time when the whole universe realizes He is innocent of all the charges. As noted by Stefanovic, “You alone are holy” may reflect 1 Samuel 2:2 (“there is none holy like the Lord”), but the Greek word in the LXX of 1 Samuel is *hagios* rather than *hosios*.

All nations coming and worshiping before God elaborates on the “King of the nations” in the previous verse. See comments on Rev 15:3. Multiple verbal and thematic parallels indicate

a clear allusion to Psalm 86:9 (85:9 in the LXX): “All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.” There is an interesting difference. In the Psalm it is the nations that glorify God’s name. In Revelation 15, the redeemed glorify God’s name because the nations will come and do the same. This is the time in the history of the universe when “every knee bows and every tongue confesses” (Phil 2:9-11) that Christ and God are rightly on the throne (cf. Rev 5:13). The universe is in good hands.

The Greek word translated “righteous acts” here is *dikaiômata* (see also Rev 19:8). It is from the root word for “righteous” or “righteousness” but the long “o” implies actions of righteousness. These are acts in harmony with what is right and just. In biblical terms *dikaiômata* are actions in harmony with the covenant. The rightness of God’s actions has been brought out into the open, publically exposed (Greek: *ephanerôthêsan*). It is right, not might, that is found to be at the foundation of the government of the universe. This phrase anticipates the conclusion of the cosmic conflict, when Satan’s lies have been forever laid to rest. Combining this concept with the reference to the nations is a thematic parallel to Isaiah 26:9, ESV: “For when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness” (see also Psalm 22:27-31; Isa 66:23; Jer 16:19). It is the way God wins the conflict that excites the admiration of the nations. This conclusion was clearly anticipated in the Old Testament but it is not fully achieved during the seven last plagues (Rev 16:9), it comes afterward.

**Rev 15:1-4 (Spiritual lessons)**— Motivation can come in both positive and negative forms. It would be nice if we human beings always responded to positive motivations, but sometimes negative motivations are necessary, if nothing else, just to get our attention. In part, the descriptions of fire and brimstone and the destruction of the unrighteous are negative motivations that can help us. How? Sin is so attractive and deceptive in the short run that God has to lay out its consequences graphically to get us to take it seriously. These concepts are not popular or attractive to us today, but they are placed in Revelation as a warning. While the plagues of Revelation 16 are after the close of probation, they are described ahead of time for the benefit of readers who still have a chance to repent. Warnings are appropriate when the opportunity is still there to repent.

The warnings of the third angel (Rev 14:9-11) are probably the most fearsome in all the Bible. How do you reconcile that with a God of love? Think of it this way. A loving parent is about to lose many of His children. But they could all be saved if He could only get their attention and let them know how much He cares and that the way back is simple and free. So He raises his voice one last time before the human race plunges off the cliff. Love is always willing to confront when the consequences of not doing so are even greater than the consequences of being misunderstood as angry and vengeful.

In the end-time, Christian life calls for patient endurance. Have you noticed how the pace of life seems to be accelerating and everyone seems to be worn to a frazzle? That is how it will be as we approach the end of earth's history. Only patient endurance will allow one to survive. In Revelation that patient endurance is fueled by the faith of Jesus.

The bottom line of the whole conflict (Revelation 12:9-12) is the question, "Are God's ways fair and just? Is He telling the truth when He warns us about sin?" The conflict will draw to a close with the statement, "Just and true are Your ways." When every person who has ever lived can make that statement without feeling coerced, God can draw the whole conflict to a close. Wounds will be healed, there will be no suspicions, and it will be the best of all possible worlds.

**Rev 15:5-8 (Introduction)**—According to my structure of the book of Revelation, this section begins an entirely new vision which corresponds to the phrase "your wrath has come" in Revelation 11:18. In Revelation 11:19 – 15:4, we saw the "anger of the nations" elaborated in the dragon's war against the woman first (Rev 12:1-16) and then against the remnant (Rev 12:17 – 15:4). From here on we see God's response to the anger of the nations with some "anger" of His own (Revelation 15:5-18:24). See Rev 15-18 (Introduction). While I make the line of division between Revelation 15:4 and 15:5, the principle of duodirectionality should not be forgotten. The seams between sections in Revelation are not hard and fast, there are connections that move across the seam both ways. See Rev 15 (Introduction).

As with the churches, the seals, and the trumpets, the vision of Revelation 16-18 begins with a sanctuary introduction. It continues with the seven bowls, a message strikingly parallel to the seven trumpets. The main difference is that the trumpets affect thirds of the earth and the bowls fall on the whole earth. The plagues of Revelation 16 are elaborated in Revelation 17-18, which flesh out some of the themes addressed in the bowl plagues.

This passage serves as the sanctuary introduction scene for Revelation 16-18 (like the sanctuary introductions in Revelation 1:9-20; 4-5; 8:2-6; 11:19). The passage as a whole is grounded in Exodus 34:28-29. Notice the phrase "the tabernacle of the testimony" (Rev 15:5). In Exodus 34 "the tables of the testimony" (Exod 34:29) are a reference to the ten commandments which were written on tables of stone (Exod 34:28, see also Exod 31:18). The ten commandments are also alluded to in Revelation 11:19 with its reference to the ark of the covenant. The tables of the testimony were placed inside the ark before its installation in the tabernacle (Exod 25:16, 21; 40:20). So both the ark of the covenant (Rev 11:19) and the "tabernacle of the testimony" (Rev 15:5) are references to the ten commandments. This connection forms an envelope around Revelation 12-14 with its two references to "the commandments of God" (Rev 12:17; 14:12). Since both verse one and verse five point back to Revelation 11:19 – 12:3 and the whole of chapter 15 points forward to the seven last plagues, I would conclude that chapter 15 as a whole is a duodirectional chapter, completing what went before and preparing the way for what follows.

**Rev 15:5-- After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened.** A major break in the text of Revelation is usually signaled with language like "after this I looked" (Greek: *meta tauta eidon*-- Revelation 4:1; 7:1 and 9; 18:1, etc.). That is a strong indication that verse 5 does not continue the scene by the sea of glass (Revelation 15:1-4), but introduces something new in Revelation).

In the new scene, we see the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony (Greek: *Ho naos*

*tês skênês tou marturiou*). Stephen referred to the “tabernacle of the testimony” (Greek: *Hê skênê tou marturiou*) in Acts 7:44 (see also Exodus 38:21; Numbers 1:50, 53; 9:15; 10:11). The word “testimony” refers the Ten Commandments, which were a clear witness to the character of God within the tabernacle. The use of temple (Greek: *naos*) and tabernacle (Greek: *skênê*) together combines the images of the Mosaic tabernacle and Solomon's temple. In the wilderness, the sanctuary was simply a tent but in Solomon's time it became a permanent building. In the New Testament, the Greek word used for “temple” here (*naos*) refers usually to the Most Holy Place where God's throne appears in the form of the Ark of the Covenant. The ten commandments were housed within the ark (Exod 25:21; 40:20) in the Most Holy Place. The word *naos* is not used in the two earlier sanctuary introductions where only the Holy Place seems to be in view (Revelation 4-5 and 8:2-6). The fact that the temple was opened means the interior could be viewed from outside, it was open to John's view in the vision. The heavenly sanctuary was opened previously in Revelation 4:1 and 11:19. This verse is not the only time that the heavenly temple is associated with plagues on the earth (Revelation 14:15-17; 16:1 and 17).

A number of years ago I had the privilege of visiting Aswan, Egypt, location of the famous Aswan High Dam on the Nile River. One of the ancient treasures due to be flooded after the completion of the dam was the Temple of Philae. It was built by the Greeks in the Egyptian style starting with Ptolemy II Philadelphus, who died in 246 BC. What is special about this particular temple is that it was buried in sand for centuries and when uncovered was in virtually new condition, including colorful frescoes. It was rescued stone by stone in the 1960s and rebuilt on an island above the waters of Lake Nasser. When my daughter and I visited, the guide took us through the pylons at the entrance, the courtyard, and on into the interior of the temple itself. I was thinking the whole time about the Hebrew sanctuary and temple, with many similarities and some differences. Eventually we came to a small room at the very heart of the temple. In a hushed tone the guide said, “We have now entered the *naos* of the temple”, the most holy place. That is the same word used in this verse. It usually in Greek represents the innermost, holiest part of a temple.

There is an interesting and rather startling statement in the book *Patriarchs and Prophets* (page 364), by Ellen G. White. She is describing in a nutshell the mission and purpose of the sanctuary in God's plan. She states the following: “If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a sign, they would never have been seduced into idolatry, nor would it have been necessary for them to suffer a life of bondage in Egypt; they would have kept God's law in mind, and there would have been no necessity for it to be proclaimed from Sinai or engraved upon the tables of stone. And had the people practiced the principles of the Ten Commandments, there would have been no need of the additional directions given to Moses.” The “additional directions given to Moses” is a reference to the Hebrew tabernacle, which makes up a major portion of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. The tabernacle/temple was an important teaching device for Israel, but its importance needs to be kept in perspective. God's attempts to reveal Himself went through four stages, according to

this paragraph. The tabernacle was actually Plan D in this list. So while it is an important teaching device, its importance should not be overplayed (Jer 7:21-23; Hos 6:6; Mic 6:6-8). It is one of many such attempts by God. We should never forget that the greatest teaching device of all was the incarnation of Jesus. He was and is the greatest revelation of God the world has ever seen.

In the New Testament, temple imagery centers on the person of Jesus Christ (Matt 12:6; John 2:19-21). He Himself is the complete fulfillment of all that the Old Testament sanctuaries represented. But Matthew 18:20 indicates that temple imagery is not limited to Jesus, it is extended to wherever Jesus is. So where two or three gather in His name, He is in the midst (a reference to the Shekinah glory in the Most Holy Place (see 1 Cor 3:17). Temple language is used in reference to the church in the New Testament. But since Jesus dwells in the hearts of believers through the Holy Spirit, their bodies are also temples of the Holy Spirit (see also 1 Peter 2:4-10). And in the book of Hebrews, there is a sanctuary in heaven. Of the three options, it is the latter picture that is in view in Revelation 15. The temple of this passage is the heavenly sanctuary. And that raises the question, why is the heavenly temple opened at this point? See comments on Rev 15:6.

**Rev 15:6-- And the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple dressed in clean and bright linen, wearing golden sashes around their chests.** This text follows a pattern that is seen throughout the book of Revelation. The plagues, the trumpets, and the seals are all connected to the heavenly temple, as are the judgments toward the end of Revelation 14 (14:15-18). The first view of that temple is in Revelation 4 and 5, and it is the place where the crisis in the universe is addressed (Rev 5:1-5). So however one interprets the bowl-plagues of Revelation 16, they are part of a pattern through the whole book. Coming out of the opened temple in heaven means that these angels are coming from the immediate presence of God, they are carrying out a commission from the highest authority in the universe.

As noted in the comments on the wrath of God at the beginning of this chapter, the surface impression is that the fierce plagues of Revelation 16 are the direct results of God's actions. In this view, the plagues reflect His ultimate will and are done to rescue His people from those who would hurt them (Rev 13:15). They are the ultimate answer to the prayers of those under the altar in Revelation 6:9-11. But there is also evidence in the context that the actions of these angels represent the permissive will of God in allowing Satan a full demonstration of his character before the close of the cosmic conflict (see Rev 15-18 [The Wrath of God]). Either way, God's mercy and His judgments arise from a heart of other-centered love that is looking to the long-range outcomes of events, not just the short-term consequences. God is intimately involved in the plagues, but not necessarily in the active way that the linkage to the temple seems to suggest.

**“. . . dressed in clean and bright linen.”** There is an interesting manuscript variant in this verse. Some important manuscripts have stone (Greek: *lithon*) instead of linen (Greek: *linon*), which is a very rare word in the New Testament (the only other occurrence of *linon* is in Matthew 12:20, where it represents a burning wick made of flax—the normal word for linen in the NT is *bussinos*—see Rev 18:12, 16; 19:8, 14). Normally the harder reading is preferred in

such a variant. It is easy to imagine a scribe helpfully changing “dressed in a stone” to “dressed in linen”, especially when there is only one letter difference. It is hard to imagine the opposite. If this reading were original, it would be an allusion to Ezekiel 28:13, where Lucifer is said to have every precious stone (LXX: *lithon*) as a covering. His garment had, as it were, sequins or jewels all over it. But the singular “dressed in a stone” seems to be too hard a reading for the text critics, as they consider this an unintentional slip of the pen rather than a genuinely difficult reading that most scribes tried to fix. So I have gone with “linen” as the likely original text.

“. . . wearing golden sashes around their chests.” The angels in this verse wear golden sashes around their chests like the son of man tenderly caring for churches (Rev 1:13-16). But in this case, the angels act in a way that has horrific consequences for those who live on the earth in Revelation 16. In John’s vision, the two actions are not a contradiction because the same uniform is worn in each case. Both mercy and judgment are qualities of the same God and have the endorsement of Jesus. The temptation to see the plagues as the work of God the Father, but not that of Jesus, is hereby excluded. However you view God’s activity in the plagues, it has the full endorsement of Jesus (see Rev 14:10-11) and needs to be seen in the light of the footwashing (John 13) and the declaration of Jesus: “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father” (John 14:9). The angels are here serving the united purpose of the Godhead. See Rev 15-18 (The Wrath of God).

One other possible connection with the dress of the angels in this verse is Ephesians 6:14. There believers are encouraged to be “dressed” (Greek: *endusamenoï*) in the breastplate of righteousness. Here the angels are “dressed” (Greek: *endedumenoï*) in clean and bright linen.

**Rev 15:7—And one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden bowls, full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever.** Here is introduced the image that will play throughout the plague vision that follows, the seven angels receive seven bowls full of the wrath of God. As noted earlier (Rev 15-18 [The Wrath of God]) the wrath of God in Revelation 15-16 can be seen in terms of active judgments of God to deliver His people or reveal the workings of sin and Satan. It can also be seen in terms of God removing His restraint (see Rev 7:1) on the workings of Satan, allowing Satan to reveal what the universe would be like if he were in charge. It is important to remember that what happens here not only concerns this earth, but also a crisis of confidence in God that affects the whole universe (Rev 12:7-10). God’s actions during the seven last plagues need to be understood in a larger context.

. . . **seven golden bowls, full of the wrath of God.** The bowls referred to here are relatively shallow. They are more like frying pans than salad bowls, so they are similar to censers or fire pans. It is not clear if liquid or burning incense is being poured out onto the earth in Revelation 16. Cups of wrath would contain wine, but the bowls here are better fitted to incense. In fact, in Revelation 5:8 the twenty-four elders actually carry incense (Greek: *thumiamatôn*) in golden bowls (Greek: *phialas*). In Revelation 8:3-5, on the other hand, the incense (Greek: *thumiamatôn*) carriers are not called bowls (Greek: *phialas*) but rather censers (Greek: *libanôtôn*). And in Revelation 15:7-8 there is no indication of smoke rising from the bowls, as was the case in Revelation 8:4, but the smoke does fill the temple. The text of

Revelation 16 does not tell us what was poured out of the bowls. It could be temple wine being poured out, the wine of the wrath of God (Rev 14:10). Or it could be temple incense, like that burning coals poured out on Jerusalem in Ezekiel 10:2. In that case the incense of intercession (Rev 8:3-4) has become the incense of judgment (Rev 8:5). That there are seven of these bowls is consistent with the idea at the beginning of the chapter that in them the wrath of God is complete (Rev 15:1—Greek: *etelesthê*).

. . . **one of the four living creatures.** The seven angels receive the bowls of wrath from one of the four living creatures, which were the agents closest to the throne in the vision of Revelation 4-5 (Rev 4:6, 8, 10: 5:6, 8, 14). It is not stated which of the four living creatures is in view here. Including a living creature at this point ties the seven bowls to the crisis in the heavenly throne room back in Revelation 4 and 5. The seven bowls, therefore, play a part in the resolution of the cosmic conflict over the character and government of God. This should not be forgotten as we move into Revelation 16. The four living creatures were also involved with the four horsemen (Revelation 6). All humanity was subject to the actions of the four horsemen, but only the unrighteous are the objects of the bowl plagues.

. . . **seven golden bowls, full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever.** In the Greek Old Testament, bowls (LXX: *phialas*) are used in both the tabernacle and temple for incense and offerings to God (Exodus 27:3; Numbers 4:14; 1 Kings 7:40, 45, and 50; and 2 Kings 12:13 and 25:15). So the association of seven golden bowls with the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony builds on Old Testament antecedents. It also likely builds on the use of wrath in connection with a cup (Greek: *potêriô*) in Revelation 14:10, which builds on Isaiah 51:17. Since in the Aramaic of Isaiah the same word is used for both cup and bowl, cup of wrath and bowls of wrath are related concepts. Pouring out these bowls of wrath show that the time of mercy is past. One additional

The mention of the one “who lives forever and ever” clarifies that none other than the eternal God is in view here.

**Rev 15:8— And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter into the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.** This verse as a whole immediately reminds someone familiar with the Old Testament of the tabernacle and temple inaugurations there. The inauguration of the wilderness tabernacle was described in Exodus 40. First, the fabrications of the various parts of the tabernacle was described in Exodus 35-39. Then God gave instructions for the assembly of the tabernacle and the consecration of the tabernacle and of Aaron and his sons (Exod 40:1-16). Then Exodus 40:16-33 describes how Moses carried out God’s instructions. The climax of the construction and dedication ceremony was described in verses 34-35: "Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Exod 40:34-35). The cloud here represents the Shekinah glory of God (Exod 16:10; 24:16). When Moses and the Israelites followed God’s instructions completely, God’s very presence filled the tabernacle and not even Moses could enter in because of the glory of God.

A similar sequence of events occurred in relation to the construction and dedication of Solomon's temple, as described in 1 Kings, chapters 5-8. The details of the design and construction of the temple are laid out in 1 Kings 5-7. The inauguration of the temple is described in chapter eight. Solomon called for representatives of every tribe and clan in Israel to come (1 Kings 8:1-2). A procession then brought the ark, the tabernacle, and all the furnishings of the tabernacle to the temple (1 Kings 8:3-5). When the ark was installed in the Most Holy Place of the temple (1 Kings 8:6-9), the glory of the Lord in the form of a cloud filled the temple: "When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple" (1 Kings 8:10-11). In Exodus 40 it says that Moses could not enter the tabernacle because of God's glory. In 1 Kings 8 it says the priests could not carry out their priestly service because of the glory of the Lord in the temple.

. . . **smoke from the glory of God and from His power.** In both the tabernacle and the temple inaugurations, there was such glory inside the tabernacle and the temple that the services came to a halt (Exod 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-11, see also 2 Chr 7:1-3). These were positive scenes, showing God's approval of the people's work in preparation and building the tabernacle and temple. But there is one significant difference here. The glory of God is not described as a cloud, it is described as smoke. This is possibly a reference to Isaiah 6:4 (see also Exod 19:18), where the glory of the Lord is described as smoke, which terrified Isaiah the prophet (Isa 6:5). This was in the context of a message of judgment against Israel (Isa 6:9-13). In Isaiah's day the sins of the people had reached a climax. From that time on, the words of the prophets would only harden them against God rather than awaken repentance. The glory of God is life-giving to the righteous, but its revelation is deadly to the unrighteous (Isa 6:6-8; Eze 10:2-4).

The imagery of smoke and glory seems to have a darker purpose in Revelation 15 than in the Old Testament inaugurations. The days of warning (Rev 14:10-11) are over, the unrepentant are fully handed over to the consequences of their decisions and actions. While the glory of God's character has been revealed in Revelation 15:3-4, the revelation of the seven bowl-plagues will reveal the character of Satan and what the whole universe would be like if he were in charge. The contrast between the truth about God and the lies of Satan must be made clear to the entire audience of the cosmic conflict. The people of God need to be delivered, which involves God's active intervention at times (see the association of smoke with God's rescuing wrath in Psalm 18:6-8). The God of grace is also a God of justice and faithfulness. While in mercy He has sustained the lives of Satan and the unrighteous, a day of final reckoning is approaching, and that day is signaled here. At this point in history, there is no intercession in heaven that can turn away the wrath of God in every sense of that phrase.

Since the heavenly temple is the place from which the benefits of Jesus' intercession flow out to the world, the use of inauguration imagery in Revelation 15:8 seems to reflect a time in history when that heavenly intercession will cease. Since this scene is the sanctuary backdrop to the vision that follows, all of the seven bowl plagues occur at a time when the sanctuary ministry in heaven is closed. As noted in Revelation 22:11, NIV: "Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right

continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy." This close of probation also parallels Revelation 10:7. When the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God is finished (Rev 10:7), which describes the closing up of gospel ministry on earth, the close of human probation. See comments on Rev 10:7. What this means is that followers of the beast have reached a point where the mercy of God and promptings of the Holy Spirit no longer make any impression. Probation is over during the bowl-plagues and the consequences of disobedience are seen in all of their horror. This is the fulfillment of Revelation 11:18, which anticipates the time of God's wrath in response to the wrath of the nations.

**Rev 15 (Summary)**—With the verse by verse commentary behind us, I can now summarize my argument for seeing all of chapter 15 as duodirectional. Verse one alludes back to the earlier great signs in heaven (Rev 12:1-3). Verse 5 serves with Revelation 11:19 as an envelope for chapters 12-14. Both 11:19 and 15:5 allude to the ten commandments, which are central to chapters 12-14 (Rev 12:17; 14:12). On the other hand, verse one introduces the seven last plagues and verses seven and eight clearly set the stage for what follows. So I would conclude that there is no airtight division between verses 1-4 and 5-8. Both sections of chapter 15 point both ways, backward and forward. So the entire chapter is duodirectional. But for the sake of outlining a structure, I have chosen to include Revelation 15:1-4 with what precedes and Revelation 15:5-8 with what follows. See *The Deep Things of God*, page 123.

Revelation 15, particularly verses 5-8 is the sanctuary backdrop for the following vision in Revelation 16:1-21. It pictures the world falling apart as the mercy of God is withdrawn from the earth.