

Revelation 15 — Who Will Not Worship You?

Introduction

There are moments in the Bible when judgment and deliverance happen at the same time. The flood in Noah's day is one example. The waters that destroyed the wicked world also carried Noah and his family safely in the ark. The Exodus is another. The plagues that devastated Egypt prepared the way for Israel's deliverance, and the sea that opened before the Israelites closed over Pharaoh's pursuing army. One event, two very different experiences.

I believe that God used the flood of Noah, which was a global flood, to repurpose the mountains and valleys we see in our days. The world that emerged from that judgment was not the world Noah had known. Whatever questions people might raise about the geological processes involved, my conviction is that the flood was comprehensive and that God's judgment brought extraordinary change.

We encounter that same comprehensiveness in Revelation 15. John sees seven angels carrying seven final plagues, and he tells us that in them the wrath of God is finished. The language is unmistakable. We are approaching a conclusion. God's patience has been extraordinary, His warnings repeated, and His invitations to repentance extended again and again. But patience is not the same as indifference. There comes a point when judgment must be completed.

Yet before John describes the pouring out of the seven bowls in Chapter 16, he hears singing. Isn't that remarkable? At the threshold of judgment, heaven is filled with worship. Those who have remained faithful to the Lamb are standing beside a sea, celebrating the God who has delivered them. If that sounds familiar to Jewish ears, it should. We have been here before.

Revelation 15 invites us to revisit the Exodus, to understand God's purposes for Israel and the nations, and to discover why worship remains the proper response to God's righteous ways, even when those ways include judgment.

1. The Final Sign — Revelation 15:1

John begins, “Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous.” Seven angels appear with seven plagues, which he describes as the last, because in them God's wrath is finished. This is not merely another episode in a long series of calamities. The vision announces the completion of divine judgment.

Throughout Revelation we have encountered seals, trumpets, warnings, and judgments. Some have been partial, affecting a third of the earth or sea or heavenly lights. Those limitations were significant. They reminded us that judgment had not yet reached its final expression. The opportunity to hear, respond, and repent remained before the world. Now John describes

something different. The seven angels carry the last plagues, and their appearance signals finality.

The number seven once again communicates completeness. I don't want us to become obsessed with counting sevens, because John's purpose is not to provide a mathematical puzzle. He is telling us that God will finish what He has begun. Evil will not continue indefinitely, and the suffering of God's people will not remain unanswered.

The prophets often spoke about repeated warnings before judgment. Amos, for example, uses the memorable expression “for three transgressions ... and for four,” announcing that a people's persistent rebellion has reached the point of accountability (Amos 1–2). The precise pattern is different from Revelation, but the principle is familiar. God is patient, and His patience should never be mistaken for permission to continue doing evil.

I believe God can use natural disasters, political upheavals, personal crises, and the warnings of His messengers to get our attention. That does not mean every earthquake, cyclone, flood, or illness is a specific punishment for the people who suffer it. Yeshua rejected that simplistic reasoning when He spoke about the Galileans killed by Pilate and those who died when the tower of Siloam fell (Luke 13:1–5). Rather than identifying the victims as unusually sinful, He called everyone listening to repentance.

That distinction matters. We should never stand beside another person's suffering and confidently announce that we know God's hidden reasons for it. But neither should we imagine that God is silent in a troubled world. He continues to call humanity to Himself, and the repeated warnings of Revelation demonstrate that judgment is never a trivial matter.

In Noah's day, according to the traditional understanding, the 120 years associated with Genesis 6:3 were years of both construction and proclamation. Peter calls Noah a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5). The ark was therefore more than an unusual building project. It was a testimony to the approaching judgment and to the possibility of deliverance. Noah's family entered the ark, and the flood came. The same waters that carried the ark also overwhelmed the world outside.

That is the picture I want us to carry into Revelation 15. God's judgment and His deliverance belong to the same story.

2. Standing Beside the Sea — Revelation 15:2

John sees something like a sea of glass mixed with fire. Standing beside or upon that sea are those who have overcome the beast, his image, and the number of his name. They hold harps given by God, and they are ready to sing.

Earlier, in Revelation 4:6, John described something like a sea of glass before God's throne. Now the sea appears mixed with fire, an image that brings judgment into the scene. But notice where

the redeemed are standing. They are not drowning in the sea, nor are they being consumed by the fire. They are victorious, standing in God's presence.

When people imagine heaven, they sometimes picture everyone sitting on clouds playing harps. I have to tell you, that has never sounded particularly exciting to me. If that's what heaven is like, I'll enjoy it, of course, but I hope there's room for a pickleball court or a golf course somewhere! John's point, however, is not to provide an inventory of heavenly recreational activities. The harps belong to a scene of celebration, and the people holding them have something extraordinary to celebrate. They have overcome the beast.

Think back to Chapters 12 and 13. The dragon wages war against God's people. The beast demands allegiance, controls commerce, and threatens those who refuse to worship his image. From the world's perspective, those who resist the beast appear vulnerable and perhaps defeated. Some lose their livelihoods, some their security, and some even their lives. But heaven describes them as victorious.

Their victory is not measured by whether they escaped every difficulty. It is measured by their continuing allegiance to the Lamb. They refused to give the beast what belongs to God alone. And now they stand beside a sea.

For Jewish readers, that scene immediately recalls Exodus 14 and 15. Israel had escaped Egypt, but Pharaoh's army pursued them. Ahead lay the sea; behind came the Egyptian forces. There seemed to be no way forward and no way back.

The rabbis describe four 'groups' of people by the Red Sea. First are those who are fearful and want to dive into the sea. Second, those who want to return to Egypt and give up this escape plan. Third, a group who wanted to turn and fight the marauding Egyptian army. Fourth, those who wanted to have a prayer meeting. You see those groups rebuked in Exodus 14:13-14.

Yet God opened a way through the waters, and Israel crossed to safety. When the waters returned, the pursuing army was destroyed. Then Moses and the Israelites sang. Miriam took a tambourine and led the women in celebration. The people who had lived under slavery were now standing beside the sea, praising the God who had delivered them. The song was not merely about escaping danger. It was about discovering afresh who God is.

I'm always intrigued that out of all the items and nicknacks, the historical memorabilia that a person could take with them for the flight out of Egypt, that Miriam brought a tambourine. I see a picture of faith and a heart of jubilation in her as a result. Remember, since she was the one who assisted in retrieving her little brother Moses from the river with Pharaoh's daughter, she is likely at least 83 years old, probably nearer to 90. But her heart is a heart of joy. She's an inspiration to me as I age, too.

John deliberately brings that scene at the Red Sea into view. Once again, the redeemed stand beside a sea. Once again, deliverance and judgment belong to the same divine action. Once again, God's people sing.

But something has expanded. At the Red Sea, Israel celebrated deliverance from Egypt. In Revelation 15, the victorious company celebrates the Lamb's deliverance from the power represented by the beast. The Exodus has become a pattern through which John helps us understand God's greater purposes.

No wonder the annual celebration of the Exodus story, repeated in the Passover seder at Jewish homes worldwide, is increasingly being celebrated in Christian homes and churches in our day. They see the two significantly linked in so many ways, and I don't want us to miss those links as well.

3. The Song of Moses and the Lamb — Revelation 15:3–4

John calls their song “the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.” I love that combination. Moses and the Lamb are not competitors. The deliverance accomplished through Moses points toward the greater deliverance accomplished through Yeshua, and the worship of the redeemed embraces both.

The song (the 3rd song labelled the “Song of Moses” in the Scriptures) begins by declaring God's works great and marvelous and His ways righteous and true. He is addressed as the Almighty and as King of the nations. Then comes the question that gives this chapter its title: “Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name?”

This is not the question of someone uncertain whether God deserves worship. It is a declaration that His holiness and righteousness will ultimately be recognized. The nations will come and worship before Him because His righteous acts have been revealed.

Notice that the song celebrates God's character before it celebrates the singers' circumstances. They do not begin by describing how difficult life was under the beast, although their suffering was real. They begin with God. His works are great. His ways are true. His judgments are righteous. Their worship is rooted in who He is.

There is a powerful connection here with the Tanakh. Exodus 15 celebrates God's victory and His incomparable holiness. Deuteronomy 32, the second song associated with Moses and his swan song, calls heaven and earth to witness God's righteousness and faithfulness. Psalm 86:9 anticipates the nations coming to worship before the Lord, while Jeremiah 10:7 addresses Him as King of the nations. John is gathering these familiar biblical themes into a single heavenly song.

And that brings us to something I consider especially important: the nations.

God has never been merely a parochial deity, belonging to one little community or one geographical location. He is the God of Israel, certainly, and His covenant promises to Israel remain important. We saw that in chapter 7. But from the beginning, His purposes have embraced the nations of the world.

When God called Abraham, He promised that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). Israel's election was never intended to mean that the nations were

excluded from God's concern. Rather, Israel was chosen to become an instrument through which His blessing would reach them.

We sometimes want to make God smaller than He is. We imagine that He belongs to our people, our congregation, our denomination, or perhaps even our particular neighborhood. We put Him in a box, assign Him our preferred loyalties, and expect Him to support our side.

Remember what happened when people put Yeshua in a box. He broke right out of it. You simply cannot contain Him. The tomb was empty!

There is a wonderful and informing incident in Joshua 5:13–15. Joshua encounters a mysterious figure with a drawn sword and asks whether he is for Israel or for its enemies. We understand the question. We always want to know whose side someone is on. Are you for Parramatta or Penrith? Swans or Dockers? Dodgers or Yankees? But the commander of the Lord's army does not accept Joshua's categories. The issue is not whether God will fit into Joshua's plans, but whether Joshua will recognize God's authority.

The same lesson applies to us. God is not obligated to endorse every human division or every preference of His people. He is the King of the nations, and we are called to align ourselves with Him.

Paul makes this wonderfully clear in Romans 15:8–12. He writes that Messiah became a servant to the circumcision to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs. That is God's faithfulness to Israel. But Paul does not stop there. He immediately speaks about the Gentiles glorifying God for His mercy, supporting his argument with passages from the Torah, Psalms, and Prophets.

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people,” he quotes from Deuteronomy 32:43. He also draws from Psalm 117 and Isaiah 11:10, where the root of Jesse becomes the hope of the nations.

Do you see what Paul is doing? He is not replacing Israel with the nations, nor is he restricting Messiah's work to Israel. He is showing that God's promises to the patriarchs and His mercy toward the Gentiles belong together. The God who keeps His word to Israel is the God who invites the nations to worship Him.

Consider Jonah. God sent him to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, a nation that represented terror and oppression to Israel. Jonah did not want to go. He was not particularly interested in seeing those people receive mercy. But God cared about Nineveh as well, and He sent His reluctant prophet anyway.

Then consider Peter in Acts 10. Peter, whose father's name was Jonah, travels to the house of Cornelius, a Roman centurion. Rome was the occupying imperial power of Peter's day, just as Assyria had been a dreaded enemy in Israel's earlier history. Yet God sends Peter to proclaim the good news to this Gentile household. While Peter is speaking, the Holy Spirit comes upon those listening.

Once again, God refuses to be limited by the boundaries we might prefer.

There is another Jewish connection that I don't want us to miss. At Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles, God prescribes the offering of seventy bulls over seven days (Numbers 29:12–34). Jewish tradition associates those seventy bulls with the seventy nations believed at that time to represent the world. Sukkot has a distinctive emphasis on the nations, and Zechariah 14:16–19 anticipates the nations going up to Jerusalem to worship the King and celebrate the festival.

Think about that. In Israel's worship, there was already a place for concern about the nations. The Jewish people were not simply praying for themselves. Their sacrifices included the peoples of the world. All the peoples. The wider world was in view.

Solomon expressed a similar desire when he dedicated the Temple. He prayed that the peoples of the earth would know the Lord's name and fear Him (1 Kings 8:41–43), and that all the peoples of the earth would know that the Lord is God (1 Kings 8:60). And when did that dedication of the Temple occur? On Sukkot!

So when John hears that all the nations will come and worship before God, he is not introducing an entirely new idea. He is bringing forward a promise and purpose woven throughout the Scriptures and the history of Israel.

This is why Revelation 15 is not merely a chapter about the approaching judgment. It is also a chapter about the scope of God's mercy, the faithfulness of His covenant promises, and the worship He deserves from every people.

4. The Sanctuary Is Opened — Revelation 15:5–8

After the song, John sees the heavenly sanctuary opened. He calls it the temple of the tabernacle of testimony, language that deliberately recalls Israel's wilderness worship. The tabernacle was the place where God's presence dwelt among His people, and the testimony pointed to the covenant He had given them.

From this sanctuary come seven angels carrying the seven plagues. They are dressed in clean, bright linen and wear golden sashes. Their appearance emphasizes the solemnity and holiness of their commission. They are not independent agents of destruction acting according to their own desires. They come from God's presence to carry out His judgments.

One of the four living creatures gives them seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. The bowls will be poured out in Chapter 16, but their appearance here tells us that the judgment proceeds from God's throne.

Then the sanctuary fills with smoke from God's glory and power, and no one can enter until the seven plagues are completed.

We have seen something like this before. When the wilderness tabernacle was completed, the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled it so fully that Moses could not enter (Exodus 40:34–35). When Solomon dedicated the Temple, the priests could not continue ministering because the glory of the Lord filled the house (1 Kings 8:10–11).

John's vision belongs to that same biblical world. The smoke is not merely an atmospheric effect. It announces the overwhelming presence of the holy God.

Have you ever been in a room filling with smoke? Visibility disappears, familiar surroundings become difficult to recognize, and you realize very quickly that you are no longer in control of the environment. Even that ordinary experience gives us a faint illustration of something far greater in John's vision. The sanctuary is filled with the glory and power of God, and human access is suspended.

There is a solemn finality here. The angels have received their commission, and the judgments must run their course. John does not describe another negotiation or postponement. The vision has reached a decisive point.

Yet we should remember what has immediately preceded this scene. The redeemed have been singing. God's righteousness has been declared. The nations have been named as the intended worshipers of the King. The judgment that follows is not the action of a capricious deity who delights in suffering. It is the righteous response of the holy God to evil that has persisted despite His warnings.

That is difficult for modern readers, and I understand why. We are often comfortable speaking about God's love but less comfortable speaking about His wrath. Yet a God who never confronts evil would not be loving toward its victims. A God who remains forever indifferent to oppression, cruelty, idolatry, and injustice would not be righteous. The redeemed sing because they know that God's ways are just and true, even when His judgments are severe.

5. What Are We Supposed to Do?

First, we should learn to see God's deliverance and judgment together without confusing them. The Exodus was salvation for Israel and judgment for Pharaoh's forces. Noah's ark carried a family safely through the waters that overwhelmed the world. Revelation presents the same fundamental contrast. Those who remain loyal to the beast face judgment, while those who belong to the Lamb stand victorious in God's presence. Our security is not found in avoiding every hardship but in belonging to the One who delivers.

Second, we should refuse to make God smaller than He is. He is not merely the God of our congregation, our theological tradition, our neighborhood, or even our nation. He is the King of the nations. For my fellow Jewish believers in Yeshua, we have every reason to celebrate God's continuing faithfulness to Israel, but that faithfulness should increase rather than diminish our concern for the rest of the world. If God sent Jonah to Nineveh and Peter to Cornelius, who might He be sending us to today? Perhaps someone in a hospital bed nearby, a neighbor we rarely speak to, or a person whose background makes us uncomfortable. God's mercy reaches beyond our preferred boundaries.

Third, we should take God's warnings seriously while remaining careful about how we interpret the suffering of others. I believe God can use the events of this world to awaken people to their need for Him. But we should not presume to explain every disaster as a specific punishment. I heard some of this with Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and it was painful to observe.

Yeshua's response to tragedy was to call His listeners to repentance, not to encourage speculation about the victims or their failures. We can acknowledge God's sovereignty, offer practical compassion, and proclaim His mercy without pretending to possess knowledge He has not given us.

Fourth, we should cultivate worship that is grounded in God's character rather than merely in our circumstances. The redeemed in Revelation 15 have suffered under the beast, yet their song celebrates God's greatness, holiness, righteousness, and truth. They are not pretending that suffering never happened. They are declaring that suffering did not have the final word. When we gather to worship, whether in a synagogue, a congregation, or a small group of believers, we are joining a much larger song. The God who delivered Israel at the sea is the God who has delivered us through the Lamb.

Finally, we should remember that the purpose of hearing Revelation is not simply to know what happens next. John is calling us to faithful living now. We are to reject false worship, remain loyal to Yeshua, extend God's invitation to the nations, and give thanks for His mercy. The question is not merely whether we understand the seven angels or the seven bowls. The deeper question is whether we are among those who can sing, with conviction, that God's ways are righteous and true.

Takeaways

- God's judgment and His deliverance reveal His righteous character.
- The King of Israel calls all nations to worship Him.
- Stand with the Lamb and learn the song of the redeemed. Then sing it!

Memory Verse

Revelation 15:3

“Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations!”

What's Next? — Revelation 16

The seven angels have received their bowls, and the heavenly sanctuary is filled with God's glory. Now the bowls will be poured out.

Chapter 16 brings the judgment announced in Chapter 15 into view. Sores, bloodied waters, scorching heat, darkness, and the drying of the Euphrates recall the plagues of Egypt. But the

response of those who experience these judgments is particularly troubling: instead of repenting, they repeatedly blaspheme God.

We will also encounter the gathering at Armageddon and the declaration from the throne that the judgment is completed. As we examine these visions, we'll need to distinguish John's powerful symbolic language from the speculation that so often surrounds the end of the world.

And through it all, one question will remain: Why do people continue to resist the God who has warned them so persistently and invited them so generously to turn to Him?