

GOD'S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

Lesson 10

Revelation 15–16



WELCOME

What is one of your favorite worship songs or hymns and why?

INTRODUCTION

Revelation 15 introduces the final series of seven judgments—the bowl judgments—by reminding listeners that God’s judgment is His righteous response to evil and injustice. God’s people have endured great suffering because of the pervasive and insistent evil in the world, but God has seen His people’s suffering and heard their cries for His justice to prevail. Thus it is with great reverence that they welcome His righteous judgment, which we will see in chapter 16.¹

Tips for meaningful engagement with the Word:

- The seven bowls are the third series of seven judgments; each series increases in intensity. In the seal judgments John used the fraction one-fourth (**Revelation 6:8**), in the trumpet judgments he used the fraction one-third (**Revelation 8:7, 12**), but in this final series of judgments there are no fractions—the devastation is total.²
- The bowl judgments have many similarities with the trumpet judgments and both have connections with the Egyptian plagues in Exodus.³
- Revelation 15–16 begins and ends with God’s wrath (**15:1; 16:19**). When referring to God’s wrath, “John is not referring to that intense, emotional flare-up of anger which we humans are known for” or the “irrational passion [of] the gods of ancient mythology.” Rather, God’s wrath is His “strong and settled opposition to all that is evil.”⁴ Only in dealing rightly with sin and evil can God remain true to His character.

¹ Duvall, 219

² Johnson, 288

³ **Exodus 7:14–11:10**; Duvall, 225-226

⁴ Johnson, 283-284

- Each of these chapters will be looked at separately with questions in between. The verse numbers have been removed from the Scripture passages and footnotes have been inserted. These footnotes are intended to help clarify the passage and provide better understanding.



WORD

As you come to the Word, pause and ask God to make it come alive for you. Ask Him to make it understandable and transformational.

Revelation 15:1–8

I saw in heaven another marvelous event of great significance. Seven angels were holding the seven last plagues, which would bring God’s wrath to completion.⁵ I saw before me what seemed to be a glass sea mixed with fire. And on it stood all the people who had been victorious over the beast and his statue and the number representing his name.⁶ They were all holding harps that God had given them. And they were singing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb:⁷

“Great and marvelous are your works,⁸

O Lord God, the Almighty.⁹

Just and true are your ways,¹⁰

O King of the nations.¹¹

Who will not fear you, Lord,

and glorify your name?¹²

⁵ These judgments pour out God’s wrath on those who remain opposed to God; they end God’s warnings to an unrepentant world. Like the Egyptian plagues, these plagues serve as a final warning... (Duvall, 220)

⁶ Those who are standing on the sea of fiery glass are the overcomers—the recipients of the promises “of eating of the tree of life (**Revelation 2:7**), protection from the second death (**2:11**), hidden manna (**2:17**), authority over the nations (**2:26**), white garments (**3:5**), the honor of becoming a pillar in the temple of God (**3:12**), and the privilege of sitting with Christ on his throne (**3:21**).” (Mounce, 286)

⁷ The “song of Moses” celebrates the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt (Exodus 15) just as the “song of the Lamb” celebrates the “great and marvelous” work of God in delivering and redeeming all His people. (Mounce, 286-287)

⁸ Every phrase of this song “comes from a phrase in the Old Testament psalms or prophets.” The first line can be found in **Exodus 15:11** as well as **Psalms 86:10** and **139:14**. (Barton, 180)

⁹ **Amos 4:13**

¹⁰ **Deuteronomy 32:4**

¹¹ **Jeremiah 10:7**

¹² **Jeremiah 10:7; Psalm 86:9**

*For you alone are holy.¹³
All nations will come and worship before you,¹⁴
for your righteous deeds have been revealed.”¹⁵*

Then I looked and saw that the Temple in heaven, God’s Tabernacle, was thrown wide open. The seven angels who were holding the seven plagues came out of the Temple.¹⁶ They were clothed in spotless white linen with gold sashes across their chests.¹⁷ Then one of the four living beings handed each of the seven angels a gold bowl¹⁸ filled with the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. The Temple was filled with smoke from God’s glory and power. No one could enter the Temple until the seven angels had completed pouring out the seven plagues.¹⁹

¹³ **Psalm 99:9**

¹⁴ **Psalm 86:9; Malachi 1:11.** “...Whether in grateful worship or defeated submission, eventually all nations will give the honor to Christ that is his due” (**Philippians 2:10–11**). (Barton, 181)

¹⁵ **Psalm 98:2**

¹⁶ In the Old Testament, the Temple, and the Tabernacle that preceded it, was the place of God’s presence. The Tabernacle was also called a “tent of testimony” (**Numbers 17:7; 18:2**) because it contained the two tablets of stone brought down from Mt. Sinai by Moses (**Exodus 32:15; Deuteronomy 10:5**). These tablets testified to the moral law of God. (Mounce, 289) The angels with the plagues are coming out of this heavenly Temple, showing that these judgments are coming from the presence of God and are His response to the violation of His moral law. (Johnson, 286)

¹⁷ “Linen, a symbol of purity, was also worn by the priests when performing their duties” (**Leviticus 16:4; Ezekiel 9:2–3**). It “represents the purity and justice of God’s judgments.” (*Illustrated Study Bible*, 2363) “The gold sashes across their chests probably symbolize [the angels’] divine mission as ministers of justice on God’s behalf.” (*Illustrated Study Bible*, 2363)

¹⁸ Bowls like these were used in Temple worship for various purposes, such as collecting the blood in sacrificial worship (**Exodus 27:3; 1 Kings 7:50; 2 Kings 25:15**). The only other place in Revelation where these bowls are said to be “golden” is in 5:8, where the bowl contains the prayers of the saints. This “suggests a strong connection between God’s justice and the prayers of his people.” (Duvall, 222)

¹⁹ That no one can enter the Temple until these judgments have been carried out indicates that the time for intercession is over; it is now time for sovereign judgment. (Mounce, 290)

1. What does John's description say or imply to you about the people in heaven (**Revelation 15:2–4**) as the final plagues are about to be unleashed on the world?

2. John saw God's overcomers joined together in a song of worship (**Revelation 15:3–4**). What lines from their song stand out to you or bless you the most, and why?

This song of worship suggests that God's plan to bring together people from every tribe, language, people and nation will be accomplished. What excites or stirs you about the possibility of being part of this type of worship?

Revelation 16:1–21

Then I heard a mighty voice from the Temple²⁰ say to the seven angels, "Go your ways and pour out on the earth the seven

²⁰ It is not clear whose voice this is. It could be God's voice since, "no one could enter the Temple until the seven angels had completed pouring out the seven plagues" (**Revelation 15:8**). Isaiah heard a similar voice, saying "What is that terrible noise from the Temple? It is the voice of the LORD taking vengeance against his enemies" (**Isaiah 66:6**). (Barton, 183-184)

*bowls containing God's wrath."*²¹ *So the first angel left the Temple and poured out his bowl on the earth, and horrible, malignant sores broke out on everyone who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his statue.*²²

*Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse. And everything in the sea died.*²³

*Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs, and they became blood.*²⁴ *And I heard the angel who had authority over all water saying,*

"You are just, O Holy One, who is and who always was, because you have sent these judgments.

Since they shed the blood

of your holy people and your prophets, you have given them blood to drink.

*It is their just reward."*²⁵

*And I heard a voice from the altar saying,*²⁶

*"Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, your judgments are true and just."*²⁷

Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, causing it to scorch everyone with its fire. Everyone was burned by this blast of

²¹ Remember that these seven judgments are the third series of seven judgments in the book of Revelation. The judgments in this series follow one another in rapid succession, with no interlude between the 6th and 7th judgments like there were in the seal and trumpet judgments. (Mounce, 292) "Some view these three sets of judgments as one set of events with three different descriptions; some see them as occurring consecutively; others see repetition with increasing intensity." (Barton, 183).

²² These painful sores are reminiscent of the plague of boils on the Egyptians (**Exodus 9:10–11**), but the effects of these sores linger, still being felt when the 5th bowl is being poured out (**Revelation 16:11**). The sores are only poured out on those who are aligned with and marked by the beast.

²³ This plague parallels the Egyptian plague where the waters were turned to blood (**Exodus 7:20–21**) as well as the second trumpet, which turned one-third of the sea into blood (**Revelation 8:8–9**). (Mounce, 294) The magnitude of this plague would not have been lost on the original hearers who were heavily dependent on food from the Mediterranean Sea. (Barton, 185)

²⁴ The plague on all the inland waters, rendering them undrinkable, removes a basic necessity for life. (Barton, 185)

²⁵ The principle of the law of retribution was the basis of Roman and Jewish law. The angel declares that because these people have shed the blood of God's people it is just retribution for them to be given blood to drink. (*Illustrated Study Bible*, 2363)

²⁶ The voice from the altar represents the corporate testimony of the martyrs (**Revelation 6:9**) and the prayers of the saints (**8:3–5**). (Mounce, 296)

²⁷ The statement of the angel closely resembles the song of Moses and the Lamb (**Revelation 15:3–4**), recognizing God's just and righteous nature. (Mounce, 295)

heat, and they cursed the name of God, who had control over all these plagues. They did not repent of their sins and turn to God and give him glory.

Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness.²⁸ His subjects ground their teeth in anguish, and they cursed the God of heaven for their pains and sores. But they did not repent of their evil deeds and turn to God.

Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great Euphrates River, and it dried up so that the kings from the east could march their armies toward the west without hindrance.²⁹ And I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs leap from the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet.³⁰ They are demonic spirits who work miracles and go out to all the rulers of the world to gather them for battle against the Lord on that great judgment day of God the Almighty.³¹ “Look, I will come as unexpectedly as a thief! Blessed are all who are watching for me, who keep their clothing ready so they will not have to walk around naked and ashamed.”³²

²⁸ This plague is like the darkness that fell upon Egypt, with darkness so complete people could not even see each other move (**Exodus 10:23**). Some interpret the darkness of this plague as symbolic of total depravity; others see it as a scientific phenomenon where the sun burns itself out in the aftermath of its flare in the previous plague. Whether the darkness is physical or spiritual, the anguish and abject fear are very real. (Barton, 188)

²⁹ The Euphrates was the location of Babylon, the great anti-God throne of ancient times, and was also the place from which an enormous army was released in the 6th trumpet judgment (**Revelation 9:14–19**). (Gaebelein, 550) “The Euphrates River was a natural protective boundary against the empires to the east ... If it dried up, nothing could hold back invading armies. The armies from the east symbolize unhindered judgment.” (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2193)

³⁰ Frogs were considered unclean animals in Jewish kosher law (**Leviticus 11:10–11**) and were also associated with Egyptian idolatry. That these demonic spirits come from the mouths of the dragon, beast, and false prophet indicates that their verbal enticements, lies, deception and propaganda were intended to draw people to take up their evil cause. (Barton, 189; Gaebelein, 551)

³¹ The “great judgment day of God the Almighty” is also called “the day of the Lord” in the Old Testament, and will include both punishment and blessing—God will triumph and Christ will judge sin and set up His eternal kingdom (**Joel 2:11, 28–32; 3:2; Zephaniah 1:14–18**). (Barton, 190) These things will be looked at more closely in the remainder of the book of Revelation.

³² John interrupts the description of the bowl judgments to give a statement from Jesus. This is the third of seven beatitudes, or blessings, in Revelation. The accompanying warning is to keep oneself ready, like a soldier who is prepared rather than being caught without his clothes on, therefore, unprepared to fight. (Mounce, 301)

And the demonic spirits gathered all the rulers and their armies to a place with the Hebrew name Armageddon.³³

Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air. And a mighty shout came from the throne in the Temple, saying, “It is finished!”³⁴ Then the thunder crashed and rolled, and lightning flashed. And a great earthquake struck—the worst since people were placed on the earth. The great city of Babylon split into three sections, and the cities of many nations fell into heaps of rubble.³⁵ So God remembered all of Babylon’s sins, and he made her drink the cup that was filled with the wine of his fierce wrath. And every island disappeared, and all the mountains were leveled. There was a terrible hailstorm, and hailstones weighing as much as seventy-five pounds fell from the sky onto the people below. They cursed God because of the terrible plague of the hailstorm.

3. John’s vision of God’s righteous judgment and wrath being poured out is an awful scene. “John means for us to feel the horror of God’s wrath.”³⁶ The vision conveys the reality of these truths that must be held together:³⁷

God’s judgment is horrible.

God’s judgment is justified.

God’s judgment comes only after opportunities have been offered for repentance.³⁸

God’s judgment is perfectly just because God has provided a way out through Jesus.³⁹

³³ There is little consensus on whether Armageddon is a literal place or a symbolic name. Those who believe it’s a literal place suggest, “The battlefield called Armageddon is near the city of Megiddo, which guarded a large plain in northern Israel.” (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2194)

³⁴ Just as Jesus declared “It is finished” at the cross (**John 19:30**), signifying that God’s wrath against sin had been satisfied by His sinless sacrifice, the voice from the throne now declares that God’s purposes of salvation and judgment have been accomplished and His righteous wrath is satisfied. (Duvall, 228-229)

³⁵ “The great city’s division into three parts symbolizes its complete destruction” along with the destruction of cities all around the world, which represent all worldly systems that rejected God. (Barton, 193)

³⁶ Johnson, 290

³⁷ Johnson, 290-291

³⁸ **2 Peter 3:9**

³⁹ **John 5:24**

As you consider the statements on the previous page, describe the reaction in your mind and spirit. What things do you find reassuring, unsettling, unbelievable, etc.?

4. The posture of those under God's judgment in this chapter is striking:

They were hard-hearted and unrepentant; they refused to turn to God or give Him glory; and they continued to blame God and curse Him all the way through to the end. These were people who had already chosen a path of opposition to God and were under His wrath. We who are Christ-followers are not under the wrath of God. However, reading about the responses of those who are unrepentant can lead us to examine the condition of our own hearts. Take a moment to ask yourself these questions:

- a. How do I tend to respond when confronted with my sin?

- b. Could my heart more often be characterized as soft or hard?

- c. Have I been ignoring any of God's warnings in my life? If so, why?

5. **Revelation 16:15** announces a blessing for those who have their clothes ready so they will not be left naked and ashamed when Christ returns. Read these verses about being clothed. Note how they speak to you about being ready for Christ's return.

a. **Isaiah 61:10**

*I am overwhelmed with joy in the Lord my God!
For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation
and draped me in a robe of righteousness.
I am like a bridegroom dressed for his wedding
or a bride with her jewels.*

b. **Colossians 3:10, 12**

Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. ... Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

c. **Luke 24:49 (NIV)**

I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high [Holy Spirit].

d. **Romans 13:12**

The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here. So remove your dark deeds like dirty clothes, and put on the shining armor of right living.

e. As you consider the verses on the previous page, “In what ways does your life show either your readiness or your lack of preparation for Christ’s return?”⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Barton, 191



WORSHIP

Take a moment to enter into a time of worship—both on your own and with your community—to show praise, adoration and love for God.

Throughout Revelation 16 we see God’s wrath poured out over the earth. It is God’s righteous judgment leveled against all those who sided with the beast and unrepentantly shook their fists at God and refused His mercy. Having considered the terrible and sobering picture of God’s wrath, now consider this picture:

Jesus Christ is in the garden. He knows what is about to come. He knows the ugliness and destructive nature of sin. He knows that He is about to take upon Himself all of the sickness, horror, and utter filth of the sins of all people who would ever exist. And when that sin is on Him, He will suffer the unbearable fullness of God’s righteous wrath. So He prays the agonizing words, “If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me.”⁴¹

What extreme love would carry Him forward? What incredible mercy would compel Him to meet that terror with a surrendered will? What beauty and goodness within Him would enable Him to yield to this terrible and perfect plan—to take upon Himself the righteous wrath of God so that no one else would ever have to.

So He spoke possibly the most beautiful words ever spoken—“not My will, but Yours be done.”⁴²

As you consider the magnitude of what Jesus endured to secure God’s blessing for you rather than His wrath, join in the song of the Lamb as you read these words:

*“Great and marvelous are your works,
O Lord God, the Almighty.
Just and true are your ways,
O King of the nations.
Who will not fear you, Lord,
And glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come and worship before you,
For your righteous deeds have been revealed.”*

Revelation 15:3–4

⁴¹ **Matthew 26:39**

⁴² **Luke 22:42** (NIV)



WITNESS

Believers are called to reflect Christ in the world. This section will help you engage with how to be a witness—reflecting Christ—this week.

Revelation 15 and 16 reveal that there will come a time when judgment is imminent; peoples' hearts will be set towards the path they have chosen and the time for repentance will be over. When that time comes, the opportunity for intercession will also have passed. As you consider this sobering reality, here are some ways you could intercede for people around the world—from every tribe, language and nation—in the coming weeks:

- Pray that their eyes will be opened to the truth. (**2 Corinthians 4:3–4**)
- Pray that God would knock down strongholds of human reasoning, destroy false arguments, and tear down rebellious thoughts—destroying every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. (**2 Corinthians 10:4–5**)

