

## REVELATION 15

### Introduction

- *“Chapters 15 and 16 of Revelation display the third and last vision of events on earth. As in the first two earthly visions (6:1-8:5 and 8:6-11:19), there are seven scenes. In this third vision, each of the scenes is introduced by an angel with a censer. The first five scenes (16:1-11) depict events that take place concurrently: each covers the same time period, from Christ’s ascension up to Armageddon. The sixth scene (16:12-16) describes the last battle, here called Armageddon, which takes place just prior to the end of this present world at Christ’s return. The seventh scene (16:17-21) envisions the End at the second coming of Christ.” (Brighton, Revelation, CPH)*

### Rev. 15:1

- “Another sign in heaven” – This is the third time St. John has seen a “sign in heaven” (12:1 – the Woman; 12:3 – the dragon), but this sign is described as “great and amazing,” emphasizing that there is added significance here of which we are to take note. Indeed, this is a “great and amazing sign,” for this is the final of the three seven-fold visions St. John sees which describe what will take place on earth between Christ’s First and Second Comings. We have heard about the seven seals and seven trumpets and now we will hear about the seven censers (or bowls) of God’s wrath. This final set of judgments is the most severe of the three sevenfold visions St. John sees.
- “Seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished” – *“The specific task of these seven censer-angels is the revelation of the ‘seven plagues, the last ones,’ by which God will have vented and completed his ‘fury’ (15:1). They are on a godly mission. On behalf of God and for the sake of the churches, they herald the last great effort of God to move the human race to repentance before it is too late. The revelation of and the sending out of the plagues of God’s fury are called a ‘great and marvelous’ sign, for it is by these last plagues that God will display his righteous judgment and thus show forth the glory of his name.” (Brighton, Revelation, CPH)*

### Rev. 15:2

- “A sea of glass mingled with fire” – This is a description of the battlefield on which the warfare between the church and the beasts of Satan takes place. The “sea of glass” symbolizes the peace and serenity which the church has even in the midst of the battle – it is reminiscent of the “glassy sea, like crystal” which is before the heavenly throne of God (4:6). The saints on earth are citizens of heaven and are assured of the eternal peace and comfort which belongs to all those who enjoy that citizenship. However, while they remain on earth, the sea of glass (hope and assurance of faith and heaven as their destination) upon which they stand is “mingled with fire,” which symbolizes the horrifying suffering they will endure during their battle with Satan and his beasts.
- “Those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name” – These are they who remain faithful through the persecutions and suffering they experience on earth brought upon them by Satan through his earthly agents (cf. notes on 13:5-7).

### Rev. 15:3-4

- “The song of Moses . . . and the song of the Lamb” – Those who remain faithful on earth are those who are brought to, and kept in the faith, by the Holy Spirit through God’s Holy Word and Sacraments. God’s Holy Word consists of two fundamental doctrines – Law (symbolized by Moses) and Gospel (symbolized by the Lamb, i.e., Christ). These saints, then, are those who are slain by the Law and made alive by the Gospel. The Law shows them their sin of which they repent, and the Gospel shows them their Savior, to whom they cling. These saints join in the

Divine liturgy and sing praises to God who has delivered them and will keep them until the end. The song here echoes the song sung by the Israelites (cf. Exod. 15) in response to God's deliverance of them from the tyranny and suffering they endured in Egypt. God brought them to salvation through the waters of the Red Sea, even as God has brought us to salvation through the waters of Holy Baptism. The words of the song glorify God as the Lord and Judge of all nations in view of the fact that He alone is Holy (just as we sing in the Gloria in Excelsis). The faithful know that there is only One, True God, and that all nations will bow down to Him in the end.

#### Rev. 15:5-8

- “The sanctuary of the tent (or, tabernacle) of witness in heaven” – St. John’s attention is lifted heavenward where he sees the place where God’s presence dwells. It was in the Tabernacle (and later, the Temple) where God’s presence dwelt among His people (cf. Ex. 25:8-9; 40:34-38; et. al.). As the Tabernacle of Moses was the focal point of Israel’s life with God, so now the heavenly Tabernacle is the focus of the New Israel’s life with God. God’s Holy Presence is the center and core of the life of His saints in His heavenly glory. It is in the Divine Service when the heavenly tabernacle descends to earth and God’s children are privileged to enter in and receive the Divine Gifts He bestows upon them to keep them in the faith, i.e., His Holy Word and Sacraments. This vision is given before the seven angels are release with the seven censers (or bowls) to bring God’s judgments upon the earth as a reminder to the saints that they are under God’s Divine protection amidst the plagues to come. As Brighton puts it, *“As the earthly tabernacle embodied God’s presence through his covenant with his people in the wilderness, so now the heavenly tabernacle reminds John that God, through the covenant of his Christ, is with his saints on earth with his ‘righteous actions’ for the protection of his church and for the judgment of her enemies.”*
- “Out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with seven plagues” – These angels come straight from the Holy Presence of God to unleash His righteous judgments upon the earth. They are “clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests,” that is, they are clothed with the holiness and righteousness of God and His Christ, with the sign of royalty (golden sash) indicating that they are acting on behalf of God and in particular on behalf of Christ their Lord and King.
- “One of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels . . .” – These angels do not obtain the censers (or bowls) of God’s wrath, but receive them from one of the holy angels which reside around the throne of God (4:6), which is further indication that these holy angels do not act on their own accord, but do the bidding of their Lord. And, the bidding of their Lord is to dispense His wrath upon the earth, so that people will repent and turn to Him for salvation.
- “The sanctuary was filled with smoke” – Throughout Scripture, smoke is an indication of the Divine Presence and Holiness of God (cf. Ex. 19:18-20; 40:34; Is. 6:1-5). So it is here. Smoke fills the sanctuary for it is the place of God’s Divine Presence and Holiness.
- “No one could enter the sanctuary” – This, again, is reminiscent of the Tabernacle of Moses, when the Cloud of God’s Glory filled it and Moses could not enter it as long as God’s Glory rested upon it (Ex. 40:34-35; cf. 1 Ki. 8:10-11). Brighton, *“So terrifying would be God’s holy judgments in the form of the plagues which John was about to witness that no one could penetrate these inscrutable righteous actions of God until they were completed at the End itself (see Rev. 10:5-7; cf. 16:17-21; 19:1-8).* In other words, no mortal will fully understand the just actions of God in sending forth His judgments upon the earth until the Last Day. Then, all will know and understand the righteousness of God, as all will know and understand that He alone is God and bow down to worship Him. For most, this will be too late, but for the faithful, this will be the Day of their great reward, for which they long.