

Understanding Revelation Part 24

The Grand Finale

Revelation 15:1-8

I love great fireworks displays.

The highlight is the grand finale. That's when multiple rockets set off one after another the sky is filled with color and the sound of the exploding rockets.

This passage is an introduction to a similar set of events that is going to precede the return of Jesus to this earth to reward the godly and judge the ungodly.

We've seen a lot of action so far in Revelation with the seals and trumpets, but when the bowls are released, it's going to be a grand finale, let's review where we are in our journey.

We are at the end of an interlude that began back in chapter 12 and which will conclude here in chapter 15.

We were introduced to seven major characters who participated in seven sub-scenes.

In the first three sub-scenes in chapters 12 and 13, we saw Satan at work, doing much of his damage through his agents, the Antichrist and the false prophet.

Then in chapters 14 and 15, we have four more sub-scenes in which God is at work, much of that work also being carried out by His agents, like the 144,000 and His angels.

The final sub-scene sets the stage for the events that will result in God's wrath being poured out on His enemies in order to prepare the way for the earthly reign of Jesus at His return.

This passage is bookended with two verses that indicate that the plagues of God's wrath are finished.

And that is exactly what we see occurring in this passage.

God's plan, which was in place even before the creation of this world is going to come to a close with the grand finale.

This is such a fascinating passage, God draws together, or reconciles, a number of themes that we have seen throughout the Book of Revelation - and throughout the entire Scripture for that matter.

IN GOD'S "GRAND FINALE", HE WILL RECONCILE:

1. Wrath and Mercy

Throughout the Scriptures we see pictures of how God's wrath and His mercy are often manifested together in one event.

- The flood poured out God's wrath on a rebellious world while at the same time demonstrating God's mercy to Noah and his family.
- When God poured out His wrath on Sodom and Gomorrah, he showed mercy to Lot and his family.
- In the Exodus from Egypt, the waters of the Red Sea served to bring God's wrath on the Egyptian soldiers while at the same time providing mercy to the Hebrews.

We have seen repeatedly throughout the Old Testament prophets and in our journey through Revelation.

We have seen that the same event serves to both pour out God's wrath on the ungodly while at the same time providing a demonstration of God's mercy for the godly.

For those who have placed their faith in Jesus, we have these comforting words regarding God's wrath: (**1 Thess 5:9**) - *For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ*

Unfortunately, many have taken this verse out of context and used it to claim that all Christ followers are going to be removed from this earth before any of the events that comprise God's wrath are carried out.

However, as we see in a later letter to this same church, that is not the point that Paul was making at all.

(**2 Thess 1:5-8**) - *This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering - since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*

Notice that Paul refers here to the affliction that Christ followers are suffering and it is clear from this passage that one day God is going to remove them from that affliction - but not until the day that Jesus returns to the earth to execute fiery judgment on those who have not committed their lives to Jesus.

2. Heaven and Earth

There is a clear connection here between heaven and earth.

Although the bowls are going to be poured out upon the earth, they originate from the throne of God in heaven.

These are not merely the natural consequences of man's immoral behavior.

Although it is true, as we see in Romans 1, that one aspect of God's wrath is that He gives man over to the natural consequences of his sin, the wrath of God that we see here, the wrath that we saw described as "full strength" in Revelation 14, is clearly a deliberate judgment executed by God upon the ungodly.

It is far beyond anything that has ever been seen on this earth.

The bowls that are described here are shallow pan-like golden bowls similar to the ones used in the Temple to hold the fire when incense was burned.

This is the same word that was used back in Revelation 5:8 to describe the golden bowls filled with incense that held the prayers of the saints.

So here we have a cycle between heaven and earth in which prayers from the earth are lifted up to heaven and then God sends the bowls containing His wrath back to earth.

3. Victory and Defeat

In verse 2 we see those who are victorious because they have overcome the beast and its image and the number of his name.

You'll notice that they are standing, which as we have seen frequently is the posture of victory. They are standing beside the sea of glass, we saw back in Rev 4 surrounding the throne of God. They are victorious, because their works were consistent with their faith.

But just as this group is victorious, there is also a much larger group of people who are about to experience one final defeat at the hands of Jesus.

Those who have never trusted in Him, will be defeated one last time, along with Satan, the Antichrist and the false prophet.

4. Faith and Works

The victorious are able to stand in the presence of God because their faith and their works are consistent.

Not only did they profess their faith in Jesus, they demonstrated that faith through their actions of not submitting to the beast or worshipping him or taking the mark.

(James 1:2-4) - Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

This is the testimony of the victorious.

The testing of their faith produced steadfastness and that produced maturity that allowed them to endure to the end.

Our works to be consistent with our faith. *(James 2:17) - So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

Anyone can say that he or she has committed his or her life to Jesus, but the proof of the pudding, so to speak, is whether what we do is consistent with what we profess.

5. Old Testament and New Testament

The Old and New Testaments are pictured here by the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb.

The O.T. saints and N.T. saints are going to be brought together in the continuous worship of God.

Notice the verb sing is in the present tense, we know that indicates that it is a continuous action.

So there will be perpetual worship of God occurring.

In the Old Testament, there are actually two different songs that are identified as the Song of Moses.

The first, found in Exodus 15, is a song of thanksgiving and praise to God for His deliverance and redemption of His people from bondage in Egypt.

The second, in Deuteronomy 32, is a much longer song that is a more general song of praise and thanksgiving about God's faithfulness to Israel.

Although the song in Exodus is probably the one referred to here in Revelation, both picture the idea of God bringing redemption to His people.

In the New Testament, we have a fuller revelation of God's plan for redeeming His people – a redemption that is made possible by the Lamb, Jesus.

The redemption that He provides is not merely physical, but rather a spiritual redemption that frees us from the slavery to sin

(Eph 1:7) - In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace

This is the plan that God designed from before the beginning of the world – one that is pictured by the Exodus and other Biblical accounts in the Old Testament, but which is brought to completion in the New Testament in the person of Jesus.

And God's redeemed will be praising Him for that redemption forever and ever.

6. Law and Grace

Moses and the Lamb also serve to reconcile the Law, represented by Moses, and grace, pictured by the Lamb.

I really like how Paul describes the relationship between law and grace in Galatians:

(Galatians 3:24-26) - *So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.*

Before Jesus came to the earth, God used the law as a guardian to direct people to faith in Him.

Although they could not fully understand God's plan until the coming of Jesus, there was enough in the Law to point people to God and allow them to develop their faith in Him.

But when Jesus came to the earth and died on the cross and rose from the dead, we were released from the need to live under the Law

(Romans 7:4-6) - *Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.*

The Law still does serve the purpose of allowing us to identify sin in our lives, but since we live under grace and not under the law, we have been released from bondage to sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

7. God's character and God's deeds

In a few moments, we're going to focus a bit more on the song that is sung here in this passage, but for now, what I want us to observe in this song is the relationship between God's character and His deeds.

It is God's character that demands that he pour out His wrath on those who are ungodly.

What we see here in the Book of Revelation is merely God being faithful to carry out what He promised way back in the Book of Leviticus:

(Leviticus 26:21) - *Then if you walk contrary to me and will not listen to me, I will continue striking you, sevenfold for your sins.*

It is certainly interesting that the seals, trumpets and bowls come in series of seven when God promised that He would strike those who refused to listen to Him sevenfold.

In a sense everything we see here in chapter 15, and which will be described in more detail in the following chapters, as God brings his plan to completion, is a vindication of His holiness.

Because God is holy, He must execute judgment upon those who refuse to enter into a relationship with Him through faith in Jesus.

The eternal God will not have sin and sinners destroying His universe forever.

He is going to live forever, but He's not going to allow sin to live forever.

Satan, the two beasts and those who choose to follow them, are permitted only a limited period of time in which they exercise their dominion here on this earth.

But as God brings His plan to its completion, He will destroy sin, He will destroy sinners.

He will remove all that filth from His presence and from the presence of those whom He has redeemed and from the environment of His holy new creation.

What really amazes me about this passage is how God's people respond to the way God reconciles all these things and pours out His wrath on the ungodly.

After all, the ones who are the subject of God's judgment are the very people who have been persecuting them, and even putting them to death during this period of tribulation.

But instead of cheering the fact that these people finally get what they deserve, they focus on God and worship Him.

There is no celebrating the fact that the ungodly have been defeated, only a celebration of who God is and what he has done.

And as the people sing, they do not sing to a God of their own imagining, they sing to the God who has revealed Himself through His Word.