

Handout Lesson 18: Chapter 15

Moses' warning to the Israelites just before the conquest of Canaan: *"For not having joyfully and with happy heart served Yahweh your God, despite the abundance of everything, you will have to serve the enemy whom Yahweh will send against you, in hunger, thirst, lack of clothing and total privation. He will put an iron yoke on your neck, until he has destroyed you. Against you Yahweh will raise a distant nation from the ends of the earth like an eagle taking wing; a nation whose language you do not understand, a nation grim of face, with neither respect for the old, or pity for the young ... He will besiege you inside all the towns throughout your country, given you by Yahweh your God. During the siege and in the distress to which your enemy will reduce you, you will eat the offspring of your own body, the flesh of the sons and daughters given you by Yahweh your God."*

Deuteronomy 28:47-53

Flavius Josephus recorded that some of the besieged Jews of Jerusalem did indeed kill and eat their children to the horror of the Roman soldiers who discovered what they had done (*The Jewish Wars*, 6.3.4).

Historical events that impacted the events in the Book of Revelation:

- Nero became the emperor of the Roman Empire when he was seventeen years old in AD 54.
- In AD 64, after a fire destroyed three-fourths of Rome, Nero blamed the Christians for the disaster, and the Roman Empire's persecution of Christians began.
- The Romans imprison St. John on the Island of Patmos sometime between AD 64-68, when he began to receive divine visions.
- The abuses of the brutal Roman governor, Florus Gallus, drove the citizens of the Roman province of Judea to revolt in AD 66.
- In AD 66, the Jews overwhelmed a Roman punitive force lead by Gallus, the imperial legate in Syria.
- In November of AD 67, Roman general Vespasian mustered an army of 60,000, four legions plus Syrian slingers, Arab archers, and the cavalry of Jewish King Herod Agrippa II, and began to methodically and brutally reconquer the Galilee, Samaria, and the rest of Judea for three and a half years (as the ancients counted).
- In AD 68, Nero committed suicide and was succeeded by four other men within the year AD 69, three of whom met a violent end.
- On April 14, AD 70, just before the Passover, Vespasian's army besieged Jerusalem. The people of Jerusalem held out for three and a half months (as the ancients counted) before the Romans took the city, destroying Jerusalem and the Temple by fire.

In contrast to the evil forces of Satan and his followers who worship the beast of the sea in Chapter 13, Chapter 14 reveals the hierarchy of heaven in the Father, the Son (Lamb), the angel/messengers, and the 144,000 sealed followers of the Lamb in whom no fault is found. Compare the visions in Chapter 13 with those in Chapter 14:

Revelation Chapter 13	Revelation Chapter 14
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The Dragon (Satan)	God the Father
The sea beast (The Roman Empire)	The Lamb-King, Jesus Christ
The false prophet land beast (Israel) who serves the sea beast and Satan	Angel/messengers (true prophets who serve the Lamb)
Apostate followers of the land beast marked by the number of the sea beast	Righteous followers of Christ sealed with the names of the Father and the Son

Chapter 15 begins and ends using the Greek word *teleo*, meaning completed or accomplished, and indicating that God's divine judgment is about to make a complete [*teleo*] end of apostate Judea.

- *1 And I saw in heaven another sign, great and wonderful: seven angels were bringing the seven plagues that are the last of all, because they exhaust [teleo] the anger of God.*
- *8 The smoke from the glory and the power of God filled the Temple so that no one could go into it until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed [teleo].*

In Chapter 15, we reach the final section of Revelation's covenant treaty format, the Succession Arrangements. In this fifth section of Revelation, the symbol of judgment is seven angels pouring out God's wrath from their seven chalices. This vision would remind Jewish Christians of the blood of the sacrifices poured out against the altar in the Jerusalem Temple during the worship services.

1. The cherub with a face like a Bull	Taurus	Rev Chapter 1 and the letters to the seven churches in Chapters 2-3
2. The cherub with a face like a Lion	Leo	Rev Chapters 4-7
3. The cherub with a face like an Eagle	Scorpio (ancient symbol was an eagle)	Rev Chapters 8-14
4. The cherub with a face like a man	Aquarius the Water Pourer	Rev Chapters 15-22

Deuteronomy Chapters 31-34 are Moses' last instructions from Yahweh and his last homily to the children of Israel before they took possession of the Promised Land. He charged three groups with the responsibility for faithfulness and obedience, for maintenance and justice, and the instruction concerning sacrifice and the liturgy of the covenant people with the duties to the present and future generations.

The Three Groups of Covenant People:

1. The people: Deuteronomy 31:1-6 (obligation of faithfulness and obedience)
2. The civil leadership (Joshua, Moses' successor): Deuteronomy 31:7-8 (duty to maintain the covenant and provide justice)
3. The priesthood: Deuteronomy 31:9-13 (instruction in the Law and rites of worship)

15:1 *And I saw in heaven another sign, great and wonderful: seven angels were bringing the seven plagues that are the last of all, because they exhaust [teleo] the anger of God.* From the sea beast of Revelation 13:1 to the vision of the seven angels and the crystal sea in 15:2, John

received seven separate visions. However, John only describes one vision as a “sign” that is both “great and wonderful” (the sixth sign of the seven, and the third sign in heaven).

1. 13:1	<i>Then I saw a beast emerge from the sea</i>
2. 13:11	<i>Then I saw a second beast emerge from the ground</i>
3. 14:1	<i>Next in my vision I saw Mt. Zion and standing on it the Lamb</i>
4. 14:6	<i>Then I saw another angel flying overhead, sent to announce the Gospel</i>
5. 14:14	<i>Now in my vision I saw a white cloud ... one like a son of man</i>
6. 15:1	<i>And I saw in heaven another sign ... seven angels were bringing seven plagues</i>
7. 15:2	<i>I seemed to be looking at a sea of crystal ... those who had fought against the beast and won</i>

The Seven Signs

1. The Woman clothed with the sun	Revelation 12:1 “a great sign”
2. The great red Dragon (Satan)	Revelation 12:3 “second sign”
3. The signs performed by the land beast with horns like a lamb	Revelation 13:13 “it worked great miracles (signs)”
4. The land beast whose power comes from the sea beast	Revelation 13:14 “through the miracles (signs) which it was allowed to do..”
5. The seven angels with seven chalices full of plagues	Revelation 15:1 “I saw in heaven another sign, great and wonderful”
6. The demon spirits sign	Revelation 16:14 “demon spirits, able to work miracles (signs)”
7. The false prophet’s signs	Revelation 19:20 “the false prophet who had worked miracles (signs)”

The Hymn of Moses and the Lamb in 15:3-4 recalls the Song of Witness and the passages that follow it in Deuteronomy Chapter 32-34 that are Yahweh’s warning of a future Covenant Lawsuit against unfaithful Israel. It was structured according to the standard form of an ancient Mesopotamian five-part Covenant Treaty:

I. Preamble	Deuteronomy 32:1-4	The identity of the King
II. Historical Prologue	Deuteronomy 32: 5-14	History of the relationship
III. Covenant Stipulations	Deuteronomy 32: 15-18	The record of rebellion
IV. Sanctions	A. Deuteronomy 32: 19-25 B. Deuteronomy 32:26-43	A. Curses against covenant-breakers B. Blessings on the Holy Remnant through redemptive judgment
V. Succession Arrangements	Deuteronomy 32:44-34:12	Future of the Covenant for the next generations

(this chart is adapted from scholar David Chilton’s outline)

In the last four verses of Chapter 15, we come to the last seven of the four-part judgments in the Book of Revelation. It is an ominous vision of seven angels carrying seven golden chalices filled with the wrath of God. The Chalice Judgments are repeats, with variation, of the Trumpet Judgments. Since the Trumpet Judgments were mainly warnings, they took only a third of the land of Judah; however, with the Chalices, the destruction is total. The similarities between the Chalice

and Trumpet Judgments and the Plagues of Egypt cannot be a coincidence and should make us ask, “Why is the vision (or the plague) repeated, and what is the connection?”

PLAGUES ON EGYPT in Exodus	TRUMPET JUDGMENTS in Revelation	CHALICE JUDGMENTS in Revelation
6 th Plague: boils (Ex 9:8-12)	1 st Trumpet: On the Land; 1/3 earth, trees, grass burned (Rev 8:7)	1 st Chalice: On the land; people disfigured with sores (Rev 16:1-2)
1 st Plague: waters become blood (Ex 7:17-21)	2 nd Trumpet: On the sea; 1/3 of the sea becomes blood, 1/3 of sea creatures die, 1/3 ships destroyed (Rev 8:8-9)	2 nd Chalice: On the sea, becoming blood (Rev 16:3)
1 st Plague: waters become blood; impossible to drink: (Ex 7:17-21)	3 rd Trumpet: On rivers and springs; 1/3 of the waters become wormwood (Rev 8:10-11)	3 rd Chalice: On rivers and springs, becoming blood (Rev 16:8-9)
9 th Plague: darkness: (Ex 10:21-23)	4 th Trumpet: 1/3 of sun, moon, and stars are darkened (8:12)	4 th Chalice: On the sun, causing it to scorch = darkness (Rev 16:8-9)
8 th Plague: locusts: (Ex 10: 4-20)	5 th Trumpet: Demonic locusts tormenting the people (Rev 9:13-21)	5 th Chalice: On the throne of the beast, causing darkness, pain, and sores on people (Rev 16:10-11)
2 nd Plague: invasion of frogs from the river [Nile] (Ex 8:2- 4)	6 th Trumpet: Invasion of an army from the river [Euphrates] kills 1/3 of the population (Rev 9:13-21)	6 th Chalice: On the river [Euphrates], drying it up to make way for the kings of the east; invasion of frog-demons (Rev 16:12-16)
7 th Plague: hailstorm (Ex 9:18-26)	7 th Trumpet: Voices, storm, earthquake, and hail (11:15- 19)	7 th Chalice: On the air, causing storms, earthquake, and hail; the Great City splits into three parts (16:17-21)

From the time of the Chalice Judgment forward, John will no longer use the imagery of warning but will concentrate on the message of Jerusalem’s destruction. In Revelation 16:19, he will once again mention the “Great City” that he identified in Revelation 11:8 as the city where Jesus was crucified. In that passage, he symbolically connected that sinful city with Sodom and Egypt. Jerusalem is symbolically imaged with Sodom because, like Sodom, Jerusalem will be condemned to destruction as a whole burnt sacrifice on the altar of divine judgment (Gen 19:24-25; Dt 13:12-18).

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