

R. C. Sproul tells this story of when he was a college professor. At the start of the semester, the class of about 150 students had three papers which would be due – let’s say, by noon on October 1st, on November 1st, and on December 1st, and the penalty for a late paper was a zero grade.

At noon on October 1st, 140 students strolled in and put their papers on his desk. Sproul asked the 10 students whose papers were late, “Where are your papers?” “Oh, Professor Sproul,” they pleaded, “we have had so much work, and we are having such a hard time adjusting to college. Please give us an extension.” “Okay,” said Dr. Sproul, “but the next time your papers are late, you will receive a zero grade. Agreed?” “Yes,” they all replied.

At noon on November 1st, 125 students strolled in and put their papers on his desk. Sproul asked the 25 students whose papers were late, “Where are your papers?” “Oh, Professor Sproul, we had mid-terms, and we just did not get time to write the papers. Please give us an extension.” “Okay,” said Dr. Sproul, “but this is your final warning. The next time your papers are late, you will receive a zero grade. Understand?” “Yes,” they all replied.

At noon on December 1st, 100 students strolled in and put their papers on his desk. Sproul asked the 50 students whose papers were late, “Where are your papers?” “Oh, Professor Sproul, don’t sweat it! Don’t worry about it! We’ll get the papers to you in a day or two!” “Each of you will get a one letter grade reduction!” said Dr. Sproul. Enraged, the students shouted, “That’s not fair!” “Oh, you want me to be fair!” said Sproul, “I will be fair. I said that if your papers were not on my desk by noon today, you would receive a zero grade. Since they are not here, I will be fair, and you will receive a zero grade.”

What Dr. Sproul was illustrating is that as the professor who sets the rules, he had the freedom to extend mercy to whom he wanted to extend mercy. He did so the first two times when the papers were late, and he even extended mercy the third time by initially only reducing their papers by one letter grade, but when the students took Sproul’s mercy for granted and cried out for fairness – they got what they asked for – they received what was due to them for their failure to do what they were supposed to do. They asked for fairness and that’s what they got. They got what they deserved.

This matter of fairness – God’s fairness will be something we explore this morning as we continue in our study through the Book of Revelation.

We have made it to **Revelation 15**, the shortest chapter in the Book of Revelation, and in order to move forward into this chapter, we will first have to backtrack a bit so it will make sense. So, if you have your Bible, let's go back a few chapters to **Revelation 11**, and we will begin with **verse 15**. It's here we are told by the Apostle John,

¹⁵ Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; He will reign forever and ever." ¹⁶ And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, ¹⁷ saying, "We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. ¹⁸ And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth." ¹⁹ And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

If you remember, the seven-year Tribulation period follows a pattern of three sets of seven judgments, presented to us like a pirate's telescope. First, there were the seven seal judgments – those were the seals that Jesus removed one at a time from the scroll. Then, out of the seventh seal, comes the seven trumpet judgments, and out of the seventh trumpet, comes the last set of judgments – these are seven bowl judgments.

In this passage, the angel blew this seventh trumpet, and an announcement was made of Christ's ultimate victory and the establishment of His kingdom – the kingdom of the world has become Christ's kingdom – and that's the good news, but there is bad news as well. With the blowing of the seventh trumpet comes a response in the form of the seven bowl judgments, seven bowls of wrath, which are about to be poured out upon the Earth – no doubt, the worst of the judgments, and that's where we pick up with **Chapter 15**.

So, from a chronological perspective, we go from the end of **Chapter 11** where the seventh trumpet is sounded and we jump to the beginning of **Chapter 15** where the action starts with the introduction of the seven bowls, and that may cause you to ask, *"Then how do Chapters 12 thru 14 fit in all of this?"*

Well, **Chapters 12, 13, and 14**, were special chapters that were taken out of chronological sequence. If you recall, **Chapter 12** was an introduction to the characters in this timeless drama of good versus evil that has been playing out since the beginning of time. These characters were Israel (*the woman*), Satan (*the dragon*), and Jesus (*the child*), and it was in **Chapter 12** that we saw this common thread of Satan trying to destroy both Israel and Jesus throughout history.

Then we came to **Chapter 13**, where two more characters were introduced into this drama – they were two beasts in league with Satan – the Antichrist and his False Prophet, and they appeared to have control over the Earth during the Tribulation period. **Chapter 13** was dark and depressing and maybe the readers were wondering if the enemies of God had the upper hand, but then we came to **Chapter 14**, where we were given an encouraging sneak-peek of the end, a preview of the future, where Jesus returns to Mount Zion in victory, surrounded by the 144,000, and the final reaping takes place.

So, **Chapters 12 thru 14** are special chapters, and this morning, we find ourselves back into chronological sequence where the final judgments are introduced. With that said, let's begin **Chapter 15** with **verse 1**, where we are told,

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished.

The opening line “**Then I saw another sign in heaven**” marks the beginning of a new vision by John, which serves as a prelude to the seven bowl judgments detailed in our chapter for next week – **Chapter 16**.

Now, from this verse we discover several important truths. First, these last set of judgments are referred to as **seven plagues** which may be a little misleading to us. This is nothing like the flu or the Coronavirus, instead that word “plague” literally means a “*blow*” or a “*strike*” – essentially, describing these judgments as having a sudden impact – they are swift, and destructive, and fierce. They will be the severest and the deadliest of all the judgments that we will see in this book.

We are told this last set of judgments contains the **wrath of God**, and we have seen God's wrath already, but this time the Greek word for “wrath” is a different kind of word. It is the word “*thymos*” which describes a hot and glowing anger – like a white-hot fire. True, we are told that Jesus is *slow* to anger – but slow to anger does not mean *never* to anger, and here we might say that Jesus is steaming and

He's preparing to clean house at the end of the seven-year Tribulation period. This will be the last expression of God's wrath toward the unrepentant inhabitants of the Earth – climaxing at the Battle of Armageddon and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Now before this white-hot wrath is poured out, God reveals His grace, and once more He reassures His people, for in the next few verses, there is a pause for praise and thanksgiving. Let's continue beginning with **verse 2**.

² And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God. ³ And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations! ⁴ "Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For all the nations will come and worship before You, For Your righteous acts have been revealed."

In the first verse, John saw seven angels with their plagues lining up to take action, but now he also sees an untold number of people **standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God**.

If you recall back in **Chapter 4 verse 6**, the sea of glass was described to us like a heavenly crystal sea proceeding from God's throne. It was calm and peaceful like a sea of glass – but this time it is different – this time it is **mixed with fire**, suggesting that a terrible storm is coming.

We are told that standing on or beside this crystal sea are the faithful Tribulation saints who were martyred by the Antichrist for their faith in Jesus, and we are told they are singing the **song of Moses** and the **song of the Lamb**, and apparently, they have learned to play **harps**.

Now, I'm not sure if there are two different songs or just one song with two different titles, but whatever the case, they are similar. For example, according to John Phillips, in both cases, God's people are beside a sea after a difficult and trying journey. The song of Moses was sung at the Red Sea, while the song of the Lamb is sung at the crystal sea. The song of Moses was a song of triumph over Egypt. The song of the Lamb is a song of triumph over the Antichrist and his worldly system. The song of Moses told how God brought His people out. The song of the Lamb tells how God brings His people in. The song of Moses was the

first song in Scripture. The song of the Lamb is the last. The song of Moses told the story of the deliverance from their enemy, God's faithfulness, and it's an offering of praise. The song of the Lamb is no different.

In their song, these Tribulation saints praise God for who He is and what He has done. He is praised for His **works** as well as His **ways**, which brings up a very important observation. Notice, there is no complaint by these martyrs about the way God permitted these people to suffer. They had lost every earthly treasure due to the cruelty of others. The enemy came and stole and destroyed what they had. They were persecuted and killed, and **what did they sing about God? Great and marvelous are Your works. Righteous and true are Your ways.**

What the martyrs were singing really resonated with me, but their words also caused me to pause because their response to God hasn't always been the response of God's people towards God. Sometimes God's people question and reject God's works and His ways, and suggest that His works and His ways are not right and are not true. As I was studying this passage in **Revelation 15**, I was led to **Ezekiel 18**, which makes my point.

In **Ezekiel**, God's people were in trouble – as usual, and they were placing the blame for their problems on their circumstances. They were blaming the influences around them. They were blaming everyone else for their problems – even blaming God, accusing Him of being unrighteous, unjust, and unfair towards them.

In essence they were saying, *“If God is in control, then He has to own the problems in my life. It's not my fault, I'm just a victim of the sovereign God.”*

So, Ezekiel replies to them and says beginning in **verse 25**,

²⁵*“Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not right.’ Hear now, O house of Israel! Is My way not right? Is it not your ways that are not right?”* ²⁶*“When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and dies because of it, for his iniquity which he has committed he will die.”* ²⁷*“Again, when a wicked man turns away from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life.”* ²⁸*“Because he considered and turned away from all his transgressions which he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die.”* ²⁹*“But the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not right.’ Are My ways not right, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are not right?”* ³⁰*“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his*

*conduct,” declares the Lord GOD. “Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. ³¹“Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! **For why will you die, O house of Israel?** ³²“For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,” declares the Lord GOD. “Therefore, repent and live.”*

What did God tell them? Essentially, God told them through Ezekiel, you are living in sin and expect to be treated as if you were living in righteousness. Each of you have to accept the truth of your own sinfulness. If you want to see where the problem lies in your problem, each of you should just look in the mirror. Don't blame your problems on others, don't blame them on your circumstances, and don't blame God – it's you. You are the problem!

You have turned from God, you have sinned against God, you have followed other gods to do your own thing – and now you want God to look other way and bless you. And if you are crying out for fairness – I wouldn't do that. Please don't tell God to give you what you really deserve. Please don't tell God to be fair with you – because you really don't want that. Fairness is getting exactly what you deserve from God, and remember, you don't get to judge God – He judges you.

The Israelites were blaming God for their problems, and their troubles, and their suffering and it's the complete opposite of what the martyrs were singing about. These martyrs who suffered terribly during the Tribulation period are singing – **Great and marvelous are God's works. Righteous and true are God's ways.**

In the here and now, we don't fully understand God's works and His ways, in fact, God says **“My ways are not your ways.”** We don't have the big picture, we don't see how His purposes and His plans all perfectly fit together – our pea brains are limited at best, but there will come a time when we leave this world and go into the next, and it's all revealed – it all becomes clear and sure enough we will see God was **right** and **true** all along. We question God now – we even doubt Him, but there will come a time when we are praising Him and singing our songs.

I think it is also worth mentioning that last verse again. God says, **“For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,” declares the Lord GOD. “Therefore, repent and live.”**

This is consistent with God's activities during the Tribulation period to cause people to repent. God has sent two prophets. He has sent 144,000 Jewish

evangelists to share the gospel throughout the world. He sent angels to share and give warnings. God, has even given people a small taste of Hell to experience what their future holds if they do not come to Him. He has given every opportunity for people to repent.

God is pleading with the lost not to reject His forgiveness and mercy and grace, and He takes no pleasure in punishing them. God wants people to repent and turn to Him; otherwise, He will be totally fair and they will get exactly what they deserve for rejecting Him. Again, they don't get to judge God – God will judge them.

Okay, let's move on to the last three verses beginning with **verse 5**.

⁵ After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened, ⁶ and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean and bright, and girded around their chests with golden sashes. ⁷ Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. ⁸ And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

This marks another change in the vision John sees. After looking at the crystal sea, seeing the martyrs, and hearing them sing God's praises – then the atmosphere dramatically changes. It's like one of those old western movies where Clint Eastwood walks into a rowdy saloon and the place gets really quiet and tense.

This scene in heaven goes from praise and worship to something that is ominous and terrifying. We are told the seven angels move from the holy of holies in heaven, each wearing priestly garments, and each are given a golden bowl filled to the brim with **the wrath of God**. That word for "bowl" actually refers to a shallow cooking saucer, so when its poured, its contents are emptied instantly rather than being poured out slowly.

So, the time for mercy is over. After all that has occurred, after the gospel presentations, after the pleas to repent, after the warnings, after the opportunities, even after a taste of Hell – the time has come for the kingdom of the Antichrist and for those who have rejected salvation to get what they fairly deserve.

The hymn “Rock of Ages” was written by Augustus Toplady after he had been trapped outdoors in a fierce storm. Knowing of a large rock with a cleft in it – he ran there for shelter. As he entered that fissure in the rock, the storm broke upon it with all its fury. Lightning flashed, thunder boomed and the rains fell in a torrential downpour. Toplady, in his shelter, was totally untouched. The storm poured out its fury upon the rock, but he was safe because he was in the rock.

When Jesus went to the cross, the storm of God’s wrath rained upon Him. Jesus willingly took God’s judgment upon Himself, and He became our Rock – our shelter in the storm. He took what we rightly deserved – and that’s mercy. Unfortunately, there are those who reject the sacrifice Jesus made on their behalf. They refuse to enter into the shelter provided by God, and as a consequence, the storm of God’s wrath will rain upon them, and it will be fair. They will get what they deserve.

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At the beginning of our study of **Revelation**, I mentioned we would learn things about Jesus that we wouldn’t know if it weren’t for this book. Things would be revealed to us about Him that we wouldn’t see elsewhere, and what we have seen this morning is an example. Often times we only picture the Lord as some gentle and kind grandmotherly figure, but that’s a distorted picture of our God. Yes, the Lord is gentle and kind, full of grace and mercy, but He is also holy and just and will severely judge those who reject Him.