

# Revelation

## Escape the Coming Wrath!

Lesson 15

Chapter 15

The Temple of Doom!

1. Read verses 1-4.

When they think about the future, people worry about many things. The destruction of the environment, global warming, political unrest and instability, terrorism, crime, economic and financial collapse, and the continual decline in moral values that destroy all relationships are all causes for concern. A further cause for anxiety is the sense of forlorn emptiness fostered by the anti-God philosophy of humanism. For those who believe there is no personal God, there is no one home in the universe, so they have nowhere to turn for ultimate answers, help, or meaning.

But what is truly frightening about the future is not any of those things; what should stop the heart of sinners is what God will do. God's judgmental anger and fury is a terrifying reality that looms just over the horizon of human history (cf. Pss. 96:13; 98:9; 110:6; Joel 3:2, 12; Acts 17:31; II Tim. 4:1). Because they willfully ignore that reality, people do not fear what they should fear. Jesus exhorted people to "fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28), because "God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day" (Ps. 7:11 NKJV). The writer of Hebrews adds, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31).

Throughout human history God has poured out His wrath in judgment on sinners. Adam's sin in Eden brought the entire human race under judgment (Rom. 5:12). By Noah's day, people had become so wicked that God sent the cataclysmic judgment of the Flood to destroy the world (cf. Gen. 6:5-8). Only Noah and those with him on the ark were spared. Centuries of disobedience by the Jewish people ultimately led to their judgment, as first the northern kingdom of Israel and then the southern kingdom went into captivity.

God's wrath and judgment were the constant themes of the Old Testament prophets. They frequently warned of the coming Day of the Lord, whether an imminent historical judgment, or the final eschatological Day of the Lord. All the historical Day of the Lord judgments were previews of the last and most terrible Day of the Lord.<sup>30</sup>

- (a) Read Isaiah 13:6-9 and Zephaniah 1:14-18. The day of the Lord refers to the day of God's judgment upon the world. It can refer to a day that has already past and to the coming Day of the Lord when God will bring final judgment upon this world. Describe this coming Day of the Lord in your own words.

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Ibid. 120.

(b) Read Romans 1:18-20. Against what is God's wrath directed? Why are we without excuse?

The historical outpourings of God's wrath fall into several categories. First is what might be called "sowing and reaping" wrath. People sin and suffer the logical consequences of that sin; "Those who plow iniquity and those who sow trouble harvest it" (Job 4:8; cf. Gal. 6:7-8). A second kind of wrath is cataclysmic wrath, when God sends massive, destructive judgment. That judgment may engulf the entire world, as it did with the Flood (Gen. 6-8), or a smaller region, as when God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:1-29). Romans chapter 1 reveals God's wrath of abandonment when Paul three times used the phrase "God gave them over" to demonstrate God's judicial abandonment of sinners, removing restraint to the deadly consequences of their sinful choice (vv. 24, 26, 28). Hosea 4:17 declares, "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone." As previously noted, God's temporal judgment is poured out in historical Day of the Lord judgments. Finally, there is eternal wrath, God's eschatological wrath that will in the future be poured out on the whole world (I Thess. 1:10; 5:9). The ultimate result of eternal wrath will be the sentencing of all unrepentant sinners to hell forever.

But through out the entire historical outpouring of God's wrath, from Eden to the final explosion of His eschatological wrath, a strange paradox exists: God is busily working to save sinners from His own wrath. God's nature encompasses not only righteousness and holiness, but also grace and mercy. Even during the devastating judgments of the Tribulation, God will call sinners to salvation. He will do so using the 144,000 Jewish evangelists (7:2-8; 14:1-5), the two witnesses (11:3-13), a host of redeemed Gentiles and Jews (7:9-17), even an angel flying in the sky (14:6-7). As the outpouring of divine wrath escalates, God's evangelistic efforts will escalate as well. The result will be the greatest harvest of souls in human history (cf. 7:9). A redeemed Israel and souls from all the nations will be saved, many to survive the Tribulation and enter the millennial kingdom.

Chapter 15 and 16 present the specific phenomena of the final outpouring of God's wrath before Christ's return. That wrath is expressed by the effects of the seventh trumpet (11:15), which are the seven bowl judgments described in chapter 16. Chapter 15, the shortest in Revelation, forms an introduction to those rapid-fire judgments...<sup>31</sup>

(c) What marvelous sign does John see in verse 1? Why does John call this a marvelous sign?

This tremendous outpouring of God's final judgmental fury was actually anticipated earlier in Revelation. It is the culmination of the "great day of [God the Father's and Jesus Christ's] wrath" (6:17). It is the "third woe" predicted in 11:14; the time of destruction (11:18); the unmixed wine of God's wrath (14:10); the final reaping of the earth (14:14-16); the final trampling of the grapes of God's wrath (14:17-20).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 122.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 123.

- (d) Read Zephaniah 3:8 along with II Peter 3:9. From these two passages, what do you learn about God's patience?
- (e) Who does John see in verse 2 standing before the sea? How did these Tribulation saints overcome the beast (Revelation 12:11)? How can we overcome Satan in this life (Ephesians 6:10-18)?
- (f) These Tribulation saints were given harps in order to sing the song of Moses (Exodus 15) and the song of the Lamb (Revelation 5:8-14). What do you learn about God's character from this song?
- (g) From what you now know about God's character, why must God judge sinners (Psalm 11:7; 19:9; 77:13; Job 8:3; Habakkuk 1:13)?

Like the song of Moses, the song of the Lamb expresses the themes of God's faithfulness, deliverance of His people, and judgment of His enemies. Commentator John Phillips compares and contrasts the two songs:

The song of Moses was sung at the Red Sea, 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 Babylon; 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 commemorated the execution of the foe, the expectation of the saints, and the exaltation of the Lord; the song of the Lamb deals with the same three themes. (*Exploring Revelation*, rev. ed. [Chicago: Moody, 1987; reprint, Neptune, N.J.:Loizeaux, 1991], 187).<sup>33</sup>

2. Read verses 5-8.

Each of the angelic players in this unfolding drama will fulfill his assigned duty according to God's plan. It has always been God's purpose to judge sinners and destroy sin. The "eternal fire...has [already] been prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41) and awaits those whom God will one day sentence to eternal punishment there. God's holy angels await the time when they will play their role in God's judgment of

<sup>33</sup>

Ibid. 130.

sinner (cf. Matt. 13:41-42, 49-50). Here, in a new vision, they are given the instruments of execution.<sup>34</sup>

(a) In verses 5 and 6, what does John see in this new vision?

*Naos* (temple) refers to the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctuary where God's presence dwells, emphasizing that God is the source of the plagues. The tabernacle was sometimes referred to as the tabernacle of testimony (Ex. 38:21; Num. 1:50, 53; 10:11; Acts 7:44) because the most important item in it was the ark of the covenant, sometimes called the ark of the testimony (Ex. 25:22; 26:33-34; 30:6; Lev. 16:13; Num. 4:5; 7:89; Josh. 4:16). It was so named because it contained the testimony, the two stones tablets on which God had written the Ten Commandments (Ex. 25:16, 21; 40:20; cf. Ps. 78:5).<sup>35</sup>

(b) What do the bowls that are given to the seven angels contain?

(c) What do you think the smoke that fills the temple represents?

The scene described in this chapter establishes the background for the final, definitive judgments, poured out in chapter 16. Once the wrath of God was poured out on Jesus Christ because of what He did for sinners; in the future, wrath will be poured out on sinners because of what they did to Jesus Christ. It is true that "The Lord is . . . patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9), and that even in His wrath, He will remember mercy (cf. Hab. 3:2). Yet mercy refused brings judgment. By the time God pours out the seven bowls of His final wrath on earth, sinners will have been warned repeatedly to repent. They will have experienced numerous terrifying judgments, which they will acknowledge came from God (6:16-17). They will have heard the saving message of the gospel preached by the 144,000 Jewish evangelists, the two witnesses, other redeemed Gentiles and Jews, even from an angel flying in midheaven. Yet, tragically, they will harden their hearts and fall into calamity.<sup>36</sup>

(d) Read Proverbs 28:14; Ephesians 4:18-19; and, Hebrews 3:15; 4:7. What happens to someone who continually hardens his heart towards God?

(e) Read Ezekiel 36:26-7. What does one need who has a hard heart? Who is the only One who can solve the problem of a hard heart? What is the condition of your heart?

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 131-132.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 132.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 133.