

“Reversed Thunder”*Revelation 15***Introduction – SLIDE1 - Lightning**

Growing up in the prairies, I could often watch from a safe distance as dark thunderclouds formed, signaling an approaching storm. Then out of the towering black clouds I would see a bright flash and I would start counting the seconds between that flash and the thunderous boom that I knew would follow. But one year an incredible storm descended upon us moving ever closer until the bright flash and thunderous boom were directly overhead. I had always had a sense of the great power of the lightning from the magnitude of the thunder, but on this occasion a tree near our home was struck and exploded, its shattered remains were visible testimony to a power greater than anything I had ever known. I later learned that within those milliseconds, 15 million volts of electricity had ripped through that tree reaching a temperature of 28,000 °C—five times hotter than the surface temperature of the sun.

17th-century pastor and poet George Herbert wrote a poem in which he described prayer as “reversed thunder”, a force that travels **upward**, from earth to heaven (followed by a response of God from heaven to earth). In Revelation 15 John is given yet another glimpse into heaven, into the bridge or control room of the universe where the true captain of starship earth is at work. As the Spirit draws back the curtain John is given the ability to see a fuller deeper version of reality than what is seen with merely human eyes. Things are not at they seem. From a merely human perspective “the Empire” convinces people that it is all-powerful—13⁴ “Who is like the beast?” “Who can make war against it?” (e.g. Star Trek “We are Borg, you will be assimilate...”; explain the state propaganda in John’s day)

- Victory marches with male choirs singing the empire and emperor’s praises¹

¹ “For generations, male choirs had lauded gods such as Apollo or Zeus, but now they praised the emperor. The choirs at first were voluntary, but in the course of the first century AD, they became professional, and municipal or provincial funds covered expenses. A second-century altar at Pergamum bears an inscription about the choir for emperor worship in that city....The inscription gives directions for celebrating birthdays of emperors, living and dead. Crowns, incense, lamps, and sermon (*encomia*) were part of the ceremonies.” J.N. Kraybill, p. 60.

- Highlighted military exploits & replayed their military victories in the arenas to fan the flames of patriotism. (cf. North Korea military parade **VIDEO**²)

But friends, things are not as they seem for there is an All-Power that is over all earthly powers to whom we should pray and who alone is worthy of all praise. **Read Rev.15** (shortest ch. but stunning, “a lyric outburst on the greatness of God”^{Barclay})

Biblical Contact

As the story in the Revelation unfolds and builds to its climax, it becomes clear that John has two ultimate concerns in mind: God’s judgment of Satan and his followers (chs. 19–20), and the final salvation of God’s people (chs. 21–22). But in typical fashion, the final round of judgments against the Empire^{ch.16} are first introduced with a vision of heaven^{ch.15}. Here the last seven plagues are introduced using material in previous chapters (e.g. “a sea of glass”^{4:6}, “the four living creatures”^{4:6}) and stock images and stories from the OT (e.g. exodus plagues).³

Structural Contact (Observe, Interpret, Apply)

- What John saw^{Observe}, how he understood it^{Interpret}, and the implications^{Apply}

1st Observation & Interpretation

- “I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign” (radiant woman^{12:1}; red dragon^{12:3}; angelic wrap up) – “great and marvelous” = outstanding, uniquely God-like in size & scope, “awe-inspiring”^{Mounce,285}
- “last plagues—last because with them God’s wrath is completed” = the final completion (*etelesthe* = reaches its *telos*, its end aim... The *telos* of an oak is an oak tree, so what is the end aim of God’s wrath (his settled unwavering opposition to sin and evil)? Putting sin and evil back where they belong contained and defeated once and for all. Extinct, eradicated.
- E.g. the elimination and final eradication of small pox... To date, only one infectious disease that affects humans has been eradicated.* In 1980, after decades of efforts by the World Health Organization, the World Health Assembly endorsed a statement declaring smallpox eradicated. Coordinated efforts rid the world of a disease that had once killed up to 35% of its victims and left others scarred or blind.⁴

² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2017/apr/15/north-korea-military-parade-shows-off-new-weapons-video>

³ Gordon Fee, *Revelation*, p.207

⁴ <https://www.historyofvaccines.org/content/articles/disease-eradication>

God is at work eradicating sin and evil.

- Show and briefly explain “Complete Salvation: in Three Tenses” **SLIDE**

1st Implications

- Get in sync with God’s program, live the life of the future already
- “Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow”

2nd Observation & Interpretation

- “*I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire*” = a mixed metaphor.
- “*standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious...*” – Why beside the sea? Probably because they had come through it...Just like a famous OT story^{Ex.15}. The beast thought that by killing them he had conquered them; but their death only meant they moved from earth into God’s presence.
- “*victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name*” = resisted the temptations and coercions and intimidations & death threats. Resistance is not futile for the “sea” (the place of monstrous evil^{Ps.74:13-14}) has been crossed by the martyrs and is about to submerge their foes.^{Morris, 182}
- “*They held harps...and sang the song*” – Harps^{Gen.4:21} are instruments of praise and worship.^{5:8} They have been saved for true worship.⁵
 - “*the song of God’s servant Moses and of the Lamb*” – Two songs or one? If two they have the same unified theme...notice the unity of the OT & NT (“The New is in the Old contained; the Old is in the New explained.”) Ex.15 & Rev.15
 - “*servant of the Lord*” = the greatest epitaph (Ex. 14³¹; Jos. 1¹; 14⁷; Mt.25²¹)
 - The great deliverance under Moses⁶ forms the pattern for the greater and complete deliverance by the Lamb over the beast. (typology...)

2nd Interpretation: Nothing evil can triumph over God’s people.

- In the early church the day of a person’s martyrdom was often called the day of his victory.^{Morris,182}

⁵ See this repeated theme in the first Exodus (4²³; 5^{1,3}; 7¹⁶; 8^{1,20}; 9^{1,13}; etc.).

⁶ See Ex. 15. “This song commemorating Israel’s greatest deliverance was sung on Sabbath evenings in the synagogue service. Its imagery was stamped on the consciousness of every pious Jew.” (Mounce, p. 287)

- “The real victory is not to live in safety, to evade trouble, cautiously and prudently to preserve life; the real victory is to face the worst that evil can do, and if need be to be faithful unto death.”

3rd Observation: the Song (observe the Hebrew parallelism)

- “*Great^{megas} and marvelous^{thaumastos} are your deeds^{ergon}*” (cf. Ps. 92⁵; 112³⁻⁴)
 - “great” = great in appearance, in number, in intensity, in rank, in scale
 - “marvelous” = extraordinary, glorious, miraculous, awe inspiring (TDNT, 316)
 - “Lord God Almighty” = title for the All-Power (ultimate supreme reality...)
- “*Just and true are your ways, King of the nations*”
 - “just & true” = complete honesty & integrity, truth-FULL
 - “King of the nations” = universal sovereignty; “...ages” = across all times
- “*Who will not fear you, Lord, and bring glory to your name?*” (e.g. Mufasa Clip)
 - Contrast 13⁴ “*Who is like the beast? Who can make war against it?*”
- “*For you alone are holy.*” = God’s perfect character
 - “Hosios” (holy) = “the holiness of God, whose justice does not conform to human standards but rather lays out for the first time the standards of eternal justice”. EDNT, 536
 - “fulfills covenant obligations by vindicating persecuted believers & judging malefactors” TDNT, 734
- “*All nations will come and worship before you,*” (Ps. 86⁹; Jer. 16¹⁹; Micah 4¹⁻⁵ // Is. 2¹⁻⁴)
- “*for your righteous acts have been revealed.*” = right judicial decisions & actions either in terms of mercy or condemnation^{Morris, 184}
 - *Those who triumph in Christ fix all their attention on him. “Heaven is heaven because in it all at last all self, and self-importance, are lost in the presence of the greatness and glory of God.” Barclay*

Applications = praise and adoration to God for his works & his ways

4th Observation (vv.5-8)

- “*I look, and I saw in heaven the temple...and it was opened*”
 - “*the tabernacle of the covenant law*” = the original “tent of meeting”⁷...

⁷ As Morris notes, this is the LXX translation of the OT phrase “the tent of meeting”. Revelation, p. 184.

Our attention is being drawn to the fact that the judgments flow from God's presence and character, his abiding moral law summarized in the covenant law. The bowls judgments are "the outworking of the natural consequences of violating God's moral law....When we violate God's [moral] law we...we go against reality. We end up ruining ourselves and creation around us."⁸

- *"Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues."* = divine source and sanction, right from the top.
- *"They were dressed..."* = spotless and pure (like Christ in 1³)
- *"...seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever"*
 - "The modern vogue for dispensing with hell has no counterpart in Revelation."^{Morris, 176}
 - "wrath" = God's settled unflinching unwavering opposition to sin and evil, his full commitment to deal with them completely once and for all.
- *"The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God...no one could enter..."*
 - = A powerful audio-visual presentation and representation of God's awesome power and glory. (cf. Ex. 40³⁶; 1 Kgs. 8¹⁰; Is. 6⁴; Ezek. 44⁴)

Implication(s)

We serve a God who gives his people songs to sing in the night. (Job 35⁹⁻¹⁰)

- "People cry out under a load of oppression;
they plead for relief from the arm of the powerful.
¹⁰But no one says, 'Where is God my Maker,
who gives songs in the night...'
- "It is Well With My Soul"
- "Day By Day"
- "Christ is Surely Coming"
- Michael Card "Unveiled Hope" album ("The Song of the Lamb")

⁸ Darrell Johnson, Discipleship On The Edge, p. 286.