Revealing the Character and Nature of God

Revelation 15:1–8

Revelation 15 is the shortest chapter in the book of Revelation, but that does not make it any less meaningful; in fact, it gives us great insights into the character and nature of God; it also signals the final judgments of God upon the earth before the Tribulation ends and Christ returns to the earth for a second time; furthermore, it will give us additional insights into what heaven will be like.

This chapter is like a lull before the storm, for the bowls of wrath judgments to come as described in chapter 16 are unprecedented in world history, though we will see some similarities between them and the plagues of Egypt as well as some of the trumpet judgments; however, they are more severe and worldwide; so let’s move into this chapter and see what we can learn about the character and nature of God.

The Preparation for God’s Vengeance (15:1)

*The completion of God’s wrath... “Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete” (15:1).*

The seventh angel already sounded his trumpet but we have yet to see its effects (11:15); it will produce seven angels with seven bowls of wrath to be emptied on the earth; here they are referred to as seven plagues; once the seventh bowl has been emptied, the wrath of God is complete.

We will never fully understand the nature of God until we understand Him as a God of wrath; Job writes: “The wicked is reserved for the day of destruction. They shall be brought forth to the day of wrath” (Job 21:30).

*The causes for God’s wrath... The wrath of God is based on three things:*
1. **By refusing God’s love**... The book of Nahum says: “God is jealous, and the LORD avenges. The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies” (Nahum 1:2); jealousy comes from a wounded love; when you love someone and they reject your love for another, this will make you jealous; God was jealous because the children of Israel were rejecting Him for dumb idols; you may have heard how Oprah Winfrey left the Christian faith; she was regularly attending a Baptist Church in Chicago; one Sunday her pastor preached on the jealousy of God; Oprah could not believe that God would ever be jealous; she did not understand that jealousy is wounded love; she left the church never to return and today is involved in the New Age movement believing there are many ways to God; she has rejected God’s love and has made Him jealous; if she never repents and comes back to her childhood faith, she will one day face the wrath of God.

2. **By rejecting God’s laws**... Paul wrote, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18); God demonstrates His wrath in His displeasure of sin; Jonathan Edwards in His famous sermon *Sinners In the Hands of An Angry God* on July 8, 1741, began the Great Awakening in America when he said:

“Your wickedness makes you as it were, heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell; and if God would let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf, and your healthy constitution, and your own care and prudence, and best contrivance, and all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, than a spider’s web would have to stop a falling rock.... There are now the black clouds of God’s wrath now hanging directly over your heads, full of the dreadful storm, and big with thunder; and were it not for the restrained hand of God, it would immediately burst forth upon you. The sovereign pleasure of God, for the present, stays His rough wind; otherwise it would come like a fury, and your destruction would come like a whirlwind, and you would be like the chaff of the summer threshing floor.”

Hundreds of people in the audience screamed, others passed out at thought of hanging on a spider web over the fires of hell; of course, many got saved and revival began; this kind of preaching today has become a lost art, but what people need to hear alongside the love, grace, and mercy
of God is the wrath of God, for it will fall on all sinners who disrespect God’s laws and ignore His call to repent and come to Christ and be saved.

The psalmist said of God, “You love righteousness and hate wickedness” (Psalm 45:7).

3. **By ridiculing God’s goodness...** Again Paul wrote: “Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God, on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off” (Romans 11:22); the word “severity” means “to be cut off”; the goodness of God not only contains His kindness (the good things He does in His willingness to forgive our sins), but it also contains His severity—His negative reaction and consequences toward evil.

In his book *Our God is Awesome* Tony Evans wrote: “When God’s patience against sin expires, God cuts people off from His kindness. He no longer makes available to them His love, His patience, and His support.... God’s kindness is perfectly balanced with His severity. Both are part of who He is.”

An announcement has been made as a sign in heaven; seven angels having the seven last plagues, which are seven bowls of wrath, are ready to dump them on the earth; when that seventh bowl is emptied, the wrath of God is complete.

**The Praising of God’s Character (15:2–4)**

“And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark, and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. They sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: ‘Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy, for all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested’ (15:2–4).

*The clarifying of those on “a sea of glass”...* The sea of glass, mingled with fire, was like crystal and was before the throne of God (Revelation 4:6); it was a means of separating those in heaven from the throne where God the Father sat; standing on that sea of glass were those who came out of the great Tribulation; they were martyred for refusing to worship the Antichrist or to bow to his image; their
number is unknown, but each have harps of God; they are going to sing praises to God and in so doing they are going to reveal His character.

_The composers of the songs they sang..._ They sing two songs: the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb; the song of Moses is recorded in Exodus 15:1–18; the children of Israel had made it safely across the parted waters of the Red Sea and once on the other side, the sea closed in on Pharaoh and his men and they all drowned in the sea; it was then the delivered children of Israel burst forth in song to God; we won’t take time to read that song but it is the first song recorded in Scripture that offers praise to God; it is a song that reminds us of who God is and what He has done for His people; in breaking the song down it could be put into four stanzas: The children of Israel are grateful to God because He saves His people (vss. 1–10); He guides them to their inheritance (vss. 11–13); He glorifies His name among His enemies (vss. 14–17); and He reigns forever (v.18).

There is a second song of Moses recorded in Deuteronomy 32:1–43; it speaks of God’s faithfulness to Israel; the purpose of this song was to teach the children of Israel of God’s greatness and to encourage them to live for Him; the key image in this song is that God is “the Rock”; it speaks of His stability in a changing world and His dependability in a demanding world (v.4); the “Rock” is our Savior (v.15); our Father (v. 18) and our Deliverer (vss. 30–31); Israel is compared to young eagles that must leave the nest and learn how to fly (vss. 11–12); but Israel is also God’s treasure, and He will protect His people (vss. 34–35); the song also is to remind them not to forget their beginning, that it was God who Fathered them (v.18), nor should they forget “their latter end” when God will judge them (v.29).

While both of these songs are considered the songs of Moses, yet the one most likely referred to in Revelation 15 and sung by the martyrs standing on the sea of glass is the Exodus song when God delivered Israel from the pursuing Pharaoh and his Egyptian army; they met their fate in the waters of the Red Sea.

They also sang the song of the Lord recorded in Revelation 5:9–10: The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders sang this song to the Lamb, Jesus: “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.”

Then again we hear the voices of many angels, ten thousand times ten thousand, thousands of thousands singing to the Lamb: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing” (Revelation 5:11–12).

Then every creature in heaven began to sing: “Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!” (Revelation 5:13); then all of heaven “fell down and worshipped Him who lives forever and ever” (Revelation 5:14).

When you read the songs of Moses and the song of the Lamb you will notice they are not an exact quote as to the song in the Revelation text; however, the themes are the same as they speak of the greatness, the holiness, the sovereignty, the glory, the majesty of God and so forth.

It is interesting to compare the similarities; the song of Moses was sung at the Red Sea; the song of the Lamb is sung on the crystal sea of glass; the song of Moses was sung in triumph over Egypt; the song of the Lamb is sung over defeated Babylon; the song of Moses was how God brought His people out; the song of the Lamb was how He brought His people in; the song of Moses was the first song sung in Scripture; the song of the Lamb is the last song sung; the song of Moses commemorated the execution of the enemy, God’s faithfulness to His people in delivering them from the ungodly enemy; the song of the Lamb speaks of the same message.

The content of the song they sang...

1. They praise because of the works of God... “Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty!” (15:3b); this speaks of God’s power—He is the omnipotent One; our God has creating power for He has made heaven and earth” (Jeremiah 32:17); He is the cause of all life (Genesis 2:7); He has cohering power, for He holds the universe together (Colossians 1:16–17); He has controlling power over the laws of nature so that even the wind and the sea obey Him (Mark 4:39–41); He has conquering power over His enemies including demons (Matthew 8:28–34); He has circumstantial power as He can cause all things to work together for good to those who love Him (Romans 8:28); we are to praise Him for He is God Almighty.

2. They praise because of the ways of God... “Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!” (15:3c); this speaks of God’s plan—to do what is right and just; all truth is found in God (1 John 5:20); He speaks His truth to us through His creation as the heavens declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1–
4); and through His inspired Word for Jesus said: “Your Word is truth” (John 17:17); and through His Son Jesus who is God’s final revelation to mankind (Hebrews 1: 1–2a).

3. They praise because of the worthiness of God... “Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy” (15:4a); this speaks of God’s perfection—He is beyond temptation and cannot sin (James 1:13); He is unique for there is no one like God; Samuel said: “No one is holy like the Lord, for there is none besides You…” (1 Samuel 2:2); the virgin Mary said of God, “holy is His name” (Luke 1:49); God’s holiness describes His majesty (Exodus 15:11), and it describes His moral goodness (Romans 7:12).

4. They praise because of the worship of God... “For all the nations shall come and worship before You...” (15:4b); This speaks of God’s purpose—that all creation is designed to worship Him; we have been created to worship; the prophet Isaiah wrote: “Everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him” (Isaiah 43:7); only when we give glory, and honor, and praise to our God for who He is and for what He has done do we find true meaning and purpose in life!

5. They praise because of the wrath of God... “For Your judgments have been manifested” (15:4c); this speaks of God’s punishment—He is a just God and He will not let sin go unpunished; either one lays their sin on Christ and His atoning death where there is total and complete forgiveness, or one pays the price for their sins by suffering in hell (Matthew 25:46; Revelation 20:10–15).

There is going to be a lot of singing in heaven as attested by all those who have come out of the great Tribulation as they stand on the sea of glass having the harps of God.

The Plan of God’s Wrath (15:5–8)

“After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever. The temple
was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed” (15:5–8).

*The Ark of the Covenant in view to John*... “...I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened...” (15:5); John beheld the temple in heaven and he saw “the tabernacle of the testimony”; this is another name for the Ark of the Covenant (Numbers 10:11); why is the Ark called “the testimony”? Within the Ark is the testimony of God’s revelation as seen in the two tablets which contained the Ten Commandments written by the hand of God.

Along with the law of God was Aaron’s rod that budded, which confirmed him as the high priest at a time when his priesthood was questioned by some Jewish rebels who wanted to overthrow his leadership; it also contained manna which represented God's provision for the Israelites as they were wandering in the wilderness; however, the primary function of the Ark was to contain the testimony of God, which is His law known as the Ten Commandments.

John is looking into what the writer of Hebrews calls the “heavenly temple,” the true temple of which the earthly temple was but a copy; he looks into the place where God dwells, the Holy of Holies, forbidden to men, but now open to him.

*The appearance of seven angels...* “...out of the temple came seven angels...” (15:6); these angels had the seven plagues that will be poured out on the earth; they are clothed in pure white linen, which speaks of their purity before God, and they are girded with golden bands around their chests, suggesting their royalty and untarnished glory; they come as executors of God’s wrath.

*The assignment of the seven angels...* “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” (15:7). Remember, we met the four living creatures back in chapter 4; they were moving in and around the throne of God giving praise to Him who sits on the throne; they are described as full of eyes front and behind; the first was like a lion, the second like an ox, the third had the face of a man, and the fourth like a flying eagle; they had six wings, and day and night they did not cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come”; they are giving glory and thanks to Him who sits on the throne and who lives forever!
One of these living creatures gives the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God which they will pour out in rapid succession upon the earth, one after the other; those who have refused to drink from the cup of salvation will now drink from the cup of God’s wrath; the psalmist wrote, “I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD” (Psalms 116:13); there is the cup of salvation and there is the cup of God’s wrath; everyone will drink from one cup or the other; people will either call on the name of the Lord and be saved, or they will drink from the bitter cup of His wrath and be condemned; that is the choice facing every person on earth.

The attribute of God... “…who lives forever and ever” (15:7b); the atheist will ask, “Where did God come from? If everything must have a cause, then who caused God?” It is true that everything in the physical universe must have a cause; science recognizes this to be so and refers to it as “the law of cause and effect”; our God does not need a cause—He is the Cause!

God is Spirit and He exists outside of space and time and matter and is not limited by it (John 4:24; 2 Peter 3:8; Psalm 90:4); He existed before time (Genesis 1:1); He exists in all time at the same time for He “inhabits eternity” (Isaiah 57:15); His name is eternal (Psalm 135:13); His Word is eternal (Isaiah 40:8); His mercy is eternal (Psalm 103:17); His covenant is eternal (Psalm 105:8); His love is eternal (Jeremiah 31:3); His kingdom is eternal (Psalm 145:13); His ways are eternal (Habakkuk 3:6); His salvation is eternal (Isaiah 45:17). What a God we serve.

Amen and amen!

This eternal God is now commissioning one of the four living creatures to hand seven angels who have come from the Holy of Holies of the heavenly temple, seven bowls of His wrath—called seven plagues—that will be poured out on the earth as God’s final judgment upon a world that has rejected Him.

The atmosphere in the temple... “The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed” (15:8).

The writer of Hebrews tells us, “Our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29); out of that temple comes seven angels with the golden bowls as well as the living creature who gives to them the judgments to pour out upon the earth; also from that temple comes the smoke from the glory of God; it’s holy smoke! It is like the billowing clouds that engulfed Mount Sinai when God came down to give the law; it is like the holy smoke that filled the temple when Isaiah in a vision saw God
seated on His throne; it is like the holy smoke that filled the tabernacle when it was dedicated by Moses and later the temple when it was dedicated by Solomon; holy smoke, glory smoke, for God’s shining glory, known as “Shekinah,” fills the temple giving His approval to all that is about to come!

On the Day of Atonement when Aaron, the high priest, went behind the veil and stood before the Ark of the Covenant, he had to carry a censor of live coals that created a cloud of incense that would cover the mercy seat, and if he did not he would die (Leviticus 16:12,13).

So it is that John sees smoke rising from the Holy of Holies of the heavenly temple; this glory cloud will not dissipate until the earth is purged and prepared for the King and His kingdom. Chapter 16 of Revelation begins with these words, “Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, ‘Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth’” (16:1).

At Calvary, God’s wrath was poured out on His Son Jesus when He died for our sins; now His wrath is being poured out on the unbelievers who have rejected His Son Jesus Christ; God is not willing that any should perish, but for all to come to a knowledge of the truth; He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked; though He is a God of mercy, He is also a God of justice!

This pouring out of God’s wrath does not come without warning; He warned and warned and warned; God demonstrated amazing patience; these unbelievers have seen earthquakes, the sun darken, the moon turn a blood red and the stars fall from the sky; they have been subjected to the rule of the Antichrist; they have seen vegetation burn up, sea life die, rivers polluted, the lights of the heavens grow dim, and demonic locusts come from the bottomless pit and sting them; they have heard about 200 million horsemen who will come from east of the Euphrates River that will kill a third of mankind.

He has sent Moses and Elijah back as prophets to warn the people; He raised up 144,000 Jewish evangelists to spread the gospel worldwide; He has sent three angels who announce with loud voices the everlasting gospel as well as warn of impending judgment; what else could He have done?

This has been a lesson to reveal the character and nature of God; and what have we learned about Him? He is an all-powerful God as His works are marvelous; His ways are just and true; He is holy and perfect in all His ways and worthy of worship; He is jealous and full of wrath toward those who reject His love; and
finally, He is eternal, for He is from everlasting to everlasting and every quality about Him is likewise eternal. What a God we serve! Aren’t you glad you know Him as Savior and not as one who has refused His mercy? Amen!