

Series: 7 Bowls with 7 Plagues (a study in Revelation 15-16)

Sermon Text: 15:1-4 The New Song

(Use **app** to get lessons/slides,

ask questions)

[This clip](#) (“The book of Exodus Part 1) will be shown to set up this passage.

We’ll begin with this question: “Do you think God’s judgments are a reason for worship?”. Our text today answers this affirmatively with callbacks to Exodus and Psalms where God’s people testified to this fact. Last time we also addressed judgment being like a 2-sided coin that upholds righteousness and condemns evil. To process this passage, we must enter the minds of 1st century believers who understood Jewish traditions, specifically their annual Passover Feast which celebrates the Exodus of their enslaved ancestors from Egypt whom God delivered by parting the Red Sea. As the tide settled over their enemies, Israel stood on the shore in awe of a God with power to end what had been over 400 years of oppression! Moses recorded their celebratory song of deliverance in **Exodus 15**, which when read alongside a similar song in **Revelation 15**, we see that both tunes are like Bible bookends that summarize its storyline.

Look with me in **Exodus 15:1-13**: *Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the LORD, saying, I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is his name. Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea, and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea. The floods covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone. Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy. In the greatness of your majesty, you overthrow your adversaries; you send out your fury; it consumes them like stubble. At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up; the floods stood up in a heap; the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them. I will draw my sword; my hand shall destroy them.' You blew with your wind; the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters. Who is like you, O LORD,*

among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them. You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode. One might ask: “Should songs like this be sung in churches today, and if so, why?” Third Day, for example, wrote a good one called, “[Our Deliverer](#) (is Coming).” Perhaps we’ll also be inspired by *Exodus 15* and *Revelation 15* to sing and write songs about this historically heart-turning...

BIG IDEA: Jesus is God’s Deliverer and Judge who is making the world right.

Look with me in *Revelation 15:1* where John *saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.* As you may recall, Revelation contains 3 cycles of redemptive visions: One where Jesus removes *7 seals* from God’s last will and testament, another with *7 angels blasting 7 trumpets*, and one other with *7 angels pouring out 7 bowls full of plagues* which John wrote about *last*. Of course, they aren’t consecutive history, but they do reveal how history repeats itself. Moreover, if you think God is just passively watching creation crumble, each cycle proves that He actively addresses whatever ruins creation (e.g., the judgments came at His directive) AND He allows ample time for people to repent of our ruining (illustrated by interludes depicting the cross; cf. 2 Peter 3:9). This text warns us that [the window for repentance eventually closes!](#)

Strangely, the arrival of these *plagues* is being celebrated in *verse 2* where John *saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire--and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands.* In Scripture, *fire* can be a metaphor for God’s holiness, presence, purification, or judgment. *The sea* was a significant image to both Jews and Romans--it represented chaos and the realm of demonic power, hence the first beast arose from *the sea* in *13:1*. Revelation illustrates God’s power to tame the chaotic with an initial heavenly vision in *4:6* of a subdued *sea of glass*, and a final vision in *21:1* depicting “*A new heaven and a*

new earth, for the first heaven and earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.” So, this **sea** in **15:2** is like a glowing neon sign pointing forward to when God will calm the forces of evil AND pointing back to the Exodus. Depending on your translation, they’re either **standing ON the sea** or **BESIDE the sea**, but either way, believers enslaved in Rome’s Empire were to recall **the song of Moses** being sung on the seashore after Israel was delivered from Egypt’s Empire. Again, the Exodus proved that there’s a God who intervenes in history with power that’s superior to all oppressors. John was just being a good 1st century shepherd by helping battle-weary believers visualize a future where, like their ancestors, they’ll sing about their own deliverance! If you ever wonder, “Why do we sing songs together on Sundays?” One reason is the principle pictured in this passage...Singing about God and His deeds floods our affections with fact-based faith to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil (cf. 1 John 2:15-17).

Reading Revelation is like reading a map--it helps to zoom out. So, let’s think: “Where have we seen singers and harpists before?” Well, besides the Psalms, there was Revelation 5:8: “*When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.*” Most recently we reviewed Revelation 7:10 where 144,000 saints sang, “*Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!*” and their encore in 14:3 where they “*sang a new song before the throne which no one could learn except those who had been redeemed from the earth.*” Most think that John leaked the lyrics to this secret song in **verses 3-4**. Read with me where ***They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."*** This song echoes **the song of Moses** and several Psalms from Israel’s hymnbook like Psalm 2, which we’ve noted John alluding to in this segment which started in **Revelation 11**. Let’s read those lyrics which inform this **new song**: “*Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take*

counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.' He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, 'As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.' I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.' Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him."

This new song of Moses and of the Lamb exemplifies how all 66 books of the Bible are a blueprint of God's plan to redeem, sustain, and deliver people who experience oppression and injustice in a world where Satan (the dragon) uses compelling, beastly empires to seduce people from having hope in God. Until then, our worship must be rooted in God's story to maintain our faith in today's **IDEA: Jesus is God's Deliverer and Judge who is making the world right**. Think about it: If bad actors can turn people away from God, then true worship is surely powerful enough to turn them back! Ponder this with God's people, and remember, next steps need not be taken alone--let Christ's church be your supportive family!

Communion: Earlier, we said that to process Revelation 15, one must enter the minds of 1st century believers who were familiar with Jewish traditions like the annual Passover Feast which celebrated the Exodus when God delivered their enslaved ancestors from Egyptian oppression. The Lord's Supper is a similar celebration which commemorates an even greater, worldwide Exodus achieved on the cross of Jesus Christ. His body and blood were given to sustain us, empower us, and eventually deliver us from evil, injustices, and oppression caused by the world, the flesh, and the devil. Those who believe and appreciate that are invited to join us this morning at God's family table. As you are coming, you're welcome to bring offerings [or utilize one of our other giving options](#).

Sunday to Monday Connection: The new song of Moses and of the Lamb exemplifies how all 66 books of the Bible are a blueprint of God's plan to redeem, sustain, and deliver people through spiritual warfare.

- **Question:** What new song lyrics might you write as you remember God's activity in your life?
- **Next Step:** You are invited to celebrate a part of God's activity in your life and share it with your people this week.
- **Note:** If you are not a Christ follower and would like to investigate further what all this might mean for you, please come talk with any of our leaders, or the person who brought you.

Alternative takeaways to discuss with your people:

1. In this lesson, we asked: *"Do you think God's judgments are a reason for worship?"*, and *"Should songs on that topic be sung in churches today, and if so, why?"* After studying the text, discuss whether you believe it supports an affirmative answer to both questions? If you get stuck on this, the quote below titled **"Why judgment is a cause for celebration"** may help.
2. Professor Craig Keener (p. 390) wrote, *"The text also invites us to praise God for his judgments on the world (15:1, 3; cf. 19:1–6), though we must qualify what we mean by this praise. It is praise not for the suffering of our fellow human beings, for whose well-being we should work and pray (Luke 6:28; 1 Tim. 2:1–2). Rather, we see in these judgments, as in the plagues of the first Exodus, acts of deliverance for God's people; the sufferings of this age are birth pangs for a better one. Nor does God look on such activity merely passively (Zeph. 3:17). That God's heavenly temple is filled with glory (15:8) indicates that he celebrates the triumph with us.)*. What are some helpful and unhelpful ways for us to bring up the subject of judgment, and why does it matter?
3. Psalm 58:10-11 says, *"The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; he will bathe his feet in the blood of the wicked. Mankind will say, 'Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth.'"* Discuss: *"How do songs like this, the one in Exodus 15, and the one in Revelation 15 help the faith of modern believers facing what churches struggled with as described in Revelation 2-3?"*
4. This short Revelation 15 song suggests an unusual reason as to why individuals and nations turn to worship the true God--because *"Your judgments have been revealed."* Discuss: *"What are the judgments of God, how have they been revealed, and why has this been bringing nations to worship?"*
5. Consider these questions: *"What attracts people to the Christian message?"*, and *"What is it that attracted you, or what were you needing God to be at that time?"*. Share and elaborate on your answers with your group.
6. Read the quote below titled, **"Seeing the Cross"** and recall last week's big idea: **The blood that cleanses the redeemed condemns the unrepentant.** Discuss: *"In what ways is the cross of Christ like a better Red Sea?"* Maybe you've never thought of it like that, but that was clearly John's goal here in blending Exodus and Babylon images together into one historical story. Psalm 2 also described raging nations plotting against God who laughed at them because He planned to set King Jesus on a holy hill to rule over all nations

who would take refuge in Him. As Professor NT Wright (p. 139) explained: *“For John, as for all the early Christians, there was one great act of judgment above all others which was already compelling people from many nations to worship Israel’s God...The resurrection proved that the cross itself had been the great, spectacular act of judgment, in which sin and death were themselves being condemned and executed.”*

7. Notice how the singers celebrated how they had been delivered THROUGH judgment, not FROM it. Certain readers of Revelation like to imagine the cross to be like a roadway that bypasses the city of judgment. But while it does exempt us from ever enduring the just wrath of our Holy God, we also become participants in the same kinds of sufferings endured by our crucified Savior who aims to crucify the remaining sin in us. NT Wright also noted how *“This is the further ‘judgment’ which flows from the ‘judgment’ revealed in the lamb.”* Discuss how this sheds light on passages like 1 Corinthians 10:13 *“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”*
8. Read [this article](#) about how Israel struggled to follow God after their deliverance, then read all of 1 Corinthians 10 and discuss what modern believers can learn from their ancient failures.

Considerations for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Single underlined sentences are for discussion, while key points are double underlined.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

- Song: [“Revelation 15 - You Alone Are Holy”](#) by Project of Love
- [An intriguing podcast episode](#) about Apostles who were martyred
- [5 Strategies for Reading Revelation](#) from the Bible Project (the first 17 minutes is GOLD!)
- [Heaven and Earth Theme](#) from the Bible Project
- [Other super helpful Revelation summaries](#) from the Bible Project
- [How Revelation mimics ancient Olympic games](#) by Marty Solomon

Quotes related to this passage:

- **Context:** Professor Mulholland (p. 540) wrote: “The Temple is the overarching image of this larger section of John’s vision (11:19–15:4). It began with the Temple in heaven open (11:19), and it will close with the Temple in heaven thrown wide open (15:5). In the Old Testament, the Temple

is God's dwelling place, from which God's action originates." Pastor Tim Chester (p. 111) also wrote that, "Revelation chapters 4–11 offered hope for those longing for security in an insecure world. Chapters 15–16 offer hope for those longing for justice in an unjust world. And this hope is not a fiction."

- **Singing about truth:** "We can overcome on earth when we have a clear vision of the realities of heaven. This passage reminds us of the power of vision to motivate perseverance (cf. Rev. 3:21). Without vision, endurance fades. When worldly powers seem to be in control, people need faith and hope to endure. These qualities grow stronger when they rest on the truth that God reigns from his throne and holds ultimate power over any and all hostile human authorities. Our faith and hope grow weaker when we neglect the truth of the heavenly vision." (Duvall, 86)
- **One song from two:** "They now celebrate with the song of Moses and the Lamb, one song rather than two, since the Lamb's song fulfills Moses's song inasmuch as the final, eschatological exodus fulfills the original deliverance from Egypt. God's triumph over Pharaoh and his army foreshadows his triumph over the dragon and his army of demons. This song is rooted in the celebration of Exodus 15:1–18 (cf. also Deut. 32:1–43) and repeats the scene of the 144,000 singing a new song in 14:1–3." (Duvall, 209–210)
- **God's judgment:** "In the context, God's deeds relate primarily to the judgment of his enemies (note the 'great and marvelous sign' of the last plagues in 15:1) and the salvation of his people. His actions are miraculous, awe-inspiring, and mighty enough to judge and save, and they are carried out in a way that is righteous and faithful. In contrast, the dragon's deeds are limited, and his ways are deceitful and manipulative. What God does flows from who he is: the sovereign, all-powerful, faithful ruler of the universe (as reflected in the titles)." (Duvall, 210)
- **Why judgment is a cause for celebration:** "Imagine a village in the outlying countryside of Judaea. It's a long way from the city, and even traders don't come there that often, far less government officials. A circuit judge comes to the neighbouring small town once every few months if they're lucky. But that doesn't mean that nothing needs doing. A builder is cheated by a customer, who refuses to admit his fault. A widow has her small purse stolen, and since she has nobody to plead for her she can do nothing. A family is evicted from their home by a landlord who thinks he can get more rent from someone else. And a fraudster with his eye on the main chance has accused a work colleague of cheating him, and though nothing has been done about it the other colleagues seem inclined to believe the charge. And so on. Nobody can do anything about any of these—until the judge comes. When he comes, expectations will be massive. Months of pent-up frustrations will boil over... Now magnify the village concerns up to the global level. The wicked empire, and its local henchmen, have become more and more powerful, taking money, lives and pleasure as and when they please. It's no use appealing to the authorities, because it's the authorities who are doing the wrong. So, the cry goes up to God, as it did to the God of Israel when the Egyptians were making their lives more and more miserable. And God's action on behalf of Israel is

therefore a great act of liberating, healing, sigh-of-relief judgment. Things are put right at last...The nations will look on and say to themselves, 'There really is a God in Israel; there really is a God who puts things right, who judges the earth' (see Psalm 58:11). And, saying that, they will come to worship him." (Wright, 137-138)

- **God's activity in history:** "God is not passively sitting on his throne while his people suffer under the dictatorship of evil powers. Rather, he is actively executing his plan to defeat evil, redeem his people, and transform his creation. The very existence of a scroll reassures us that God has a plan. God is on his throne. There is a scroll in his right hand, and it will be opened! God is not sitting idly by as his people suffer. From our vantage point, he has already acted in Jesus Christ. People who have grown up under the heavy influence of a futurist eschatology may need to be reminded of all that has already been accomplished through the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Yes, he will consummate his victory over evil at his second coming, and yes, there are real battles remaining to be fought. But the war has been won! Grant Osborne says it well, The great victory over Satan has already occurred: the cross is the central point of history, and the final battle of Armageddon (16:16; 17:14; 19:14–21) is the culmination of a victory already won. In actuality, Armageddon is more Satan's final act of defiance than the final victory of Christ. The victory of Christ is at the cross....His worthiness rests in his crucifixion and resurrection. This presents an ideal opportunity to talk about keeping Jesus in his rightful place. Even religious leaders can find themselves on pedestals. They can move from representing God to replacing God if they are not careful. But only Jesus, the crucified and resurrected Lord, has the authority to carry out God's plan for the world. Occasionally, Christian leaders (and the people who follow them) need to admit they are replaceable, but only Jesus is indispensable. Humbling ourselves before our Lord and Redeemer will bring great relief and reassuring peace." (Duvall, 91–92)
- **Seeing the cross:** "For John, as for all the early Christians, there was one great act of judgment above all others which was already compelling people from many nations to worship Israel's God. God had raised Jesus from the dead, after his condemnation as a false Messiah. God had reversed the verdict of the human court! He had done the unthinkable and had demonstrated Jesus to be Messiah after all! What's more, the resurrection proved that the cross itself had been the great, spectacular act of judgment, in which sin and death were themselves being condemned and executed. Now, having done all that in Jesus the Messiah, Israel's God was demonstrating that the followers of Jesus were his true people, not least through their faithful testimony to Jesus, even on peril of their own death. This is the further 'judgment' which flows from the 'judgment' revealed in the lamb." (Wright, 139)
- **A shiny sea of glass, sparkling like crystal.** "This demands attention because in the vision of the new creation, John explicitly says, 'The sea was also gone' (21:1). It is also to be noted that the first of the core of heavenly visions (4:1–5:14) opens with the image of the sea (4:6) and the last of the core heavenly visions (19:11–21:8) closes with the image of the sea (21:1). Furthermore, in

the second heavenly vision (11:19–15:4) the beast that exercises Satan’s power comes from the sea (13:1) and, at the close of the vision, the redeemed (defined as “the people who had been victorious over the beast”) are seen with the sea of glass beneath their feet (15:2). In both the Roman and Jewish pool of images, ‘sea’ represented the abode of demonic and evil powers (Caird 1966:65ff; Beale 1999:327). It would seem John used the image of the sea to represent the realm of evil from which the beast emerges (13:1), over which the saints are victorious (15:2—both introduced with the phrase ‘like a glass sea’), and which has no place in God’s new creation (21:2). The image of such a sea before the throne is a powerful picture of the sovereignty of God over the realm of evil.” (Mulholland, 459)

- **Comparing the 2 songs:** “The song of the Lamb, as given in vv. 3b–4, is not sung to or about the Lamb, but by the Lamb to God—just as the Song of Moses was sung by Moses and not to him. Just as the victorious Jewish people learned and sang the song which Moses sang (Exodus 15:1), so the victorious believers in heaven learn and sing the song which the Lamb sings. Like the Song of Moses the Song of the Lamb exults in the just ways of God, using the language of the Tanakh as found in Jeremiah 10:7; Amos 3:13, 4:13; Malachi 1:11; Psalms 86:9–10, 92:6(5), 98:1, 111:2, 139:14, 145:17; 1 Chronicles 16:9, 12. But unlike the Song of Moses it also brings out that in the final judgment God is revealed as king of the nations, king of the whole world, as prophesied in Zechariah 14:9, so that all nations will come and worship before him—as predicted in the continuation of that passage (Zechariah 14:16–20).” (Stern, Re 15:2)
- **Historic fun fact:** At that time the Israelites sang the song of Moshe (Exodus 15:1–18; see 13:4&N), which is included in its entirety in the daily morning synagogue service and liberally quoted again in the twice-daily blessing after the Shema. The victors over the beast will sing the Song of Moses, signifying that true believers in Yeshua fully identify with the Jewish people. David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Commentary : A Companion Volume to the Jewish New Testament, electronic ed. (Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1996), Re 15:2.
- **Allusion to Psalm 137:** In the psalm, the harps are the accompaniment for singing the Lord’s song, songs of Zion, by the people of God. The psalm is also set within a context of restoration. The implication is that when they are restored to their land as God’s kingdom, then they will once again take up their harps and sing the Lord’s song. This is exactly what John sees in his vision. Mulholland, 540-541. See also Psalm 86:8-10.

Bibliography (Note: Our use of these materials does not imply full agreement with them)

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