



## **Prayer & the Power of God (Revelation 15 & 16)**

*The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. 24 God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. (Exodus 2:23-24 NIV)*

### **Revelation 15**

In order to understand the graphic images in Revelation 15 & 16, you need to know the most important defining event in Israel's history, the Exodus. God's people, in slavery to Pharaoh, cried out in prayer for their redemption. The Lord answered by sending a deliverer, Moses, who confronted Pharaoh and the pagan Egyptian religious system. When Pharaoh refused to release the Hebrew nation, God through Moses inflicted 10 plagues on the nation; each plague was a direct assault against one of the Egyptian idols. The final, cataclysmic plague took the life of every first born boy who was not protected by the blood of a lamb slathered on the house doorpost. Pharaoh finally freed God's people but then relented, going after them as they were moving in mass toward the Red Sea. Pinned between Pharaoh's chariots and the deep end of the ocean, God's people cried out and the Lord miraculously saved his people by parting the sea, allowing His people to process through dry ground to the other side. When Pharaoh's chariots pursued, nearly catching up with the Hebrew people for the slaughter, God closed the sea and in an instant, the army was gone! *"Not one of them survived!" (Exodus 14:28 NIV)* In Exodus 15, Moses sings a song of deliverance! It is called the "song of Moses."

In Revelation 15 John saw another sign in heaven. He saw God's people standing by the sea. They sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. It is the song of deliverance! The only difference here is that while God's people of old sang their song immediately after their deliverance; the saints in Revelation 15 have yet to be ultimately delivered! The message for John's audience is clear—start acting now as if the victory has already happened! This is what we do in worship, evangelism, serving, prayer and Bible study. When we gather together in Jesus' name to be Jesus and display Jesus in our world, we are declaring that victory has taken place!

This depth of hope will carry you through cancer, divorce, unemployment, and the death of a child. This quality of hope will keep you from keeping grudges. This strength of certainty will make it affordable for you to forgive. In Christ, you do not have to survive this world. Those Revelation 15 didn't. And yet they sing because they reign with the Lamb.

## Revelation 16

*1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth."*

The bowls are "round three" of three sets of judgments. Earlier in Revelation, John saw seven seals (blobs of wax on a scroll); followed by seven trumpets. "The seven seals, the seven trumpets, and seven bowls describe the same reality but with some variation." (Ben Witherington) The difference is that the effects are more severe. The seven seals told about devastation to one-fourth of the earth; the seven trumpets talked about destruction over one-third of the earth; here the catastrophic bowls render total and complete judgment—but only on the enemies of God. And the fact that there are "three sets of seven judgments makes clear that God is in control, even of all the bad things, some of which were happening to John's churches." (Ben Witherington)

These bowls—which had been filled with the prayers of God's people, rising as incense to the throne of God—become something totally different to the enemies of God. Here are some lessons from the bowls.

- When God finally acts to judge this world, it will be in response to the prayers of His people.
- When God finally acts, it will not be without warnings!
- When God finally acts to judge the world that has opposed Him; it will be cataclysmic and irrevocable.
- When God finally acts, the fragility of this world will be seen.
- When God finally acts, those who have opposed him will continue to do so because they are unrepentant; they will not and thus, cannot be changed.
- When God finally acts, it will be with His spoken word—DONE! "It is striking that Revelation 16 never describes an actual *battle* at Armageddon. John only implies what its outcome will be. The final 'battle' occurs as part of a later vision in Revelation 19:21. It is a very one-sided victory." (Davis 2000, 310)
- God has not finally acted; therefore, there is still time to repent and worship Him!
- As God is preparing to act, it appears that the world ("Babylon") dominates. And it is critical for God's people to be vigilant; to not cave to the world's demands; to be faithful and persevere.
- God *has* acted—at the Cross, Jesus drank the bowl of God's wrath so that through faith in Him we may drink from bowl of his blessings. If you refuse the blessings, only one bowl remains. From which bowl will you drink?