

THE LAST SEVEN
Revelation 15:1-8
By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In the book of Revelation there are three series of seven judgments: the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls. Understanding the relationship of these three sevens is a key to interpreting Revelation. Are the three sevens repetitive, describing the same events but in a different way? Or are they sequential and chronological, describing different events?
2. In Revelation 15 we will be introduced to the third series of sevens, the seven bowls of wrath. In this sermon I will explain Revelation 15 to you, and then we will talk about the Relationship of the three sevens, as well as answer a few other important questions.

II. RECAP OF REVELATION

1. Before we get into Revelation 15, let's remind ourselves of the context.
2. The first thing to say about Revelation is that it is not about the end times.
 - i. It was written in first century.
 - ii. The first chapter says that it is written about things that must soon take place because the time is near (Rev 1:1, 3).
 - iii. Now, some people have questioned me about the words "soon" and "near." Two questions have arisen.
 1. Can't the word "soon" mean quickly?
 - a. In other words, can't it mean that when these things do take place, they will happen quickly? In other words, could it mean that there might be a long delay, but then when these things start happening, they will happen fast?
 - b. No. That's not a possible translation.
 - c. The Greek word for "soon" is *tachos*. It is used all throughout the New Testament, and it never means that something will happen quickly after a long delay. It always means close in distance, or close in time.
 - d. **2 Timothy 4:9** "Make every effort to come to me soon."
 - i. Paul didn't mean, "If and when you decide to come visit me, travel fast." Instead, he meant for him to come as soon as possible. Don't delay any more than necessary.
 - e. **3 John 14** "I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face."
 - i. Do you think John meant to say, "When we see each other, I hope it will be a fast visit"? Or perhaps, "When

I find time to visit you, I'll travel as fast as possible"?

No. He meant that he wanted to visit them in person as soon as possible; with as little delay as possible.

- f. The word "soon" in Revelation 1:1 means that the events in Revelation were close, at hand, impending, right around the corner.
 - g. Let me give you an illustration. If your child says, "I'll clean my room soon," but waits a few weeks, they haven't cleaned it soon. So you ask, "You said you would do it soon. Why hasn't it been done?" Imagine if your child said, "Soon means that I when I decide to do it, I'll do it quickly, or speedily." Obviously, that's not what soon means.
 - h. In Revelation 1:1, "soon" can be translated "quickly" or "swiftly," but it doesn't mean after a long delay. It means close in time.
 - i. And in case we aren't sure what he means by "close" in verse 1, in verse three John uses the word "near." The time is near. The Greek word for near is *engus*, and it always means close in distance, or close in time. In other words, without delay.
2. A second question about the words "close" and "near" have to do with 2 Peter 3:8.
- a. **2 Peter 3:8** "Dear friends, don't overlook this one fact: With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day."
 - b. Some people say since God is outside of time, then "soon" and "near" might mean thousands of years.
 - c. That's not the point of this verse, which is to say that God is timeless. Time means nothing to God.
 - d. But people are not outside of time. And the words in Revelation 1:1-3 are given to people. It is a promise to the first century readers of Revelation that the events in the book will happen soon and near. "Soon" and "near" apply to the people in the first century, not to God. They obviously don't apply to God, because "soon" and "near" have no meaning to God who is outside of time.
- iv. All that to say that the book of Revelation is not about the end times.
3. If it is not about the end times, then what is it about?
- i. It is about Christ's judgment on the Jews, which was fulfilled just a few years after it was written when Rome destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.
 - ii. Revelation was written between 65-66 AD, and Rome destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD.

- iii. Revelation is a prophecy about the events leading up to and including the destruction of 70 AD.
- 4. The theme verse of Revelation is Revelation 1:7. Let's take a look.
 - i. **Revelation 1:7** "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn over him. So it is to be. Amen."
 - ii. Most people assume this verse is talk about the second coming of Christ sometime in the future.
 - iii. I believe that it is referring to Christ's coming in judgment on the Jews in 70 AD, just a few years after this was written.
 - iv. "He is coming"
 - 1. Not every "coming" of Christ refers to His second coming. There are three types of "comings" of Christ:
 - a. His spiritual comings:
 - i. He promised His disciples that when a believer dies, He will come again to take you to be with Him in heaven (Jn 14:3).
 - ii. He promised that He would not leave His disciples as orphans, but that He was going to come to them through the presence of the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:18).
 - b. His metaphorical coming:
 - i. In Matthew 24 Jesus said He was coming to destroy the Jewish nation.
 - 1. **Matthew 24:1-2** As Jesus left and was going out of the temple, his disciples came up and called his attention to its buildings. 2 He replied to them, "Do you see all these things? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here on another that will not be thrown down."
 - ii. He described this judgment as His coming.
 - 1. **Matthew 24:30** "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the peoples of the earth will mourn; and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."
 - iii. In case you misunderstand this as a reference to His second coming at the end of time, He says when this would happen just a few verses later.
 - 1. **Matthew 24:34** "Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place."

- c. His second coming at the end of history.
 - i. **Acts 1:11** They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven.”
 - 2. So, the word “coming” doesn’t have to refer to the end times. It can refer to Christ’s coming in judgment on Israel in the first century.
 - 3. And since the language of Revelation 1:7 is almost an exact repeat of Mt 24:30, we can conclude that it is talking about Christ’s coming in judgment on Israel in the first century.
 - v. “With the clouds”
 - 1. This phrase was commonly used by OT prophets to describe God’s coming in judgment upon different nations.
 - 2. **Isaiah 19:1** “An oracle concerning Egypt. Behold, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt; and the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them.”
 - 3. Note the similarities between Is 19:1 and Revelation 1:7:
 - i. Both speak of the Lord being on clouds. One says “riding” on clouds, and the other says “coming” on clouds.”
 - ii. Both speak of the Lord coming.
 - iii. Both speak of the response by those under judgment:
 - 1. Revelation 1:7 “all the tribes of the earth will mourn over him”
 - 2. Is 19:1 “the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them”
 - 4. If 19:1 wasn’t talking about the end times, then is it possible that Revelation 1:7 isn’t talking about the end times.
 - vi. “every eye will see him”
 - 1. This sounds like it is saying that every person in the whole world will be an eyewitness to this coming.
 - 2. The word “every” isn’t always used in a comprehensive way in Scripture.
 - 3. Jer 2:20 says that Israel sinned against God “on every hill” and “under every tree.” But surely it doesn’t literally mean every hill, any every single tree.
 - 4. “Every eye will see him” doesn’t have to literally mean every single person in the whole world. It can simply mean that this will be a public, and not a private event.
 - 5. It can also simply mean that the whole nation of Israel will witness this event.

6. The next phrase in the verse explains “every eye will see him”.
- vii. “even those who pierced him”
 1. “Even” in Greek is explicative, which means it can be translated “that is.”
 2. So, another way to translate this verse is, “every eye will see him, that is, those who pierced him.”
 3. Who pierced Christ? First century Jews. This verse is saying that the first century Jews will witness this coming of Christ.
- viii. “and all the tribes of the earth”
 1. “Tribes” brings to mind the nation of Israel, which was comprised of twelve tribes.
 2. “Earth” in Greek is the word *ge*, which can be translated “land.”
 3. This can be translated “all the tribes of the land.” That sounds like the land of Israel.
- ix. “will mourn over him”
 1. This is a warning of impending judgment. When Christ comes, all the tribes of the land, those who pierced Christ, will mourn, as Christ destroys their land.
 2. This is the theme verse of Revelation, and it is was a warning that Christ was coming to judge first century Israel. That’s the theme of Revelation. It’s not about the end of the world.
5. So, we are interpreting Revelation from a preterist understanding, rather than futurist perspective.
 - i. There are two kinds of preterism. Full and Partial. I am a partial preterism.
 1. Partial Preterism:
 - a. Believes that many of the prophecies in the NT were fulfilled with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, but still believes in a future, final coming of Christ; in the physical resurrection of the dead; the final judgment of all people; and the establishment of a new heavens and earth.
 2. Full Preterism (a.k.a. Hyper-preterism):
 - a. Full preterism denies the future second coming of Christ.
 - b. They believe that Christ’s coming in judgment in 70 AD was the second coming.
6. So far, in Revelation, we have seen seven seal judgments and seven trumpet judgments. I believe all of these are pointing to the Jewish war against Rome that culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70.
7. In Revelation 15 we are going to be introduced to the seven bowl judgments.

III. TEXT: Revelation 15:1-8

1 Then I saw another great and awe-inspiring sign in heaven: seven angels with the seven last plagues; for with them God’s wrath will be completed.

- “God’s wrath will be completed.”
 - The seven bowls will get to the final destruction of Jerusalem. There won’t be any more seven’s against Jerusalem after this.

2 I also saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had won the victory over the beast, its image, and the number of its name, were standing on the sea of glass with harps from God.

- “sea of glass mixed with fire”
 - This is a vision of Christians in heaven because they were victorious over the beast. They did not worship the beast. They stood firm in Christ.
 - The sea of glass described the open space before God’s throne in heaven in Revelation 4:6.
 - Here it is “mixed with fire.” This is possibly tied to the song of Moses that they sing in the next verse. The song of Moses was sung by Moses and the Israelites in Exodus 15 right after they crossed the Red Sea, escaping the Egyptians. They stood on the shore of the Red Sea, as the Egyptians were being destroyed, and praised the Lord. In the same way, the Christians are standing in heaven in the throne room of God, praising God for delivering them from the beast – Nero Ceasar.

3 They sang the song of God’s servant Moses and the song of the Lamb:

*Great and awe-inspiring are your works,
Lord God, the Almighty;
just and true are your ways,
King of the nations.,*

*4 Lord, who will not fear
and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.*

*All the nations will come
and worship before you
because your righteous acts
have been revealed.*

5 After this I looked, and the heavenly temple—the tabernacle of testimony—was opened.

6 Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues, dressed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes wrapped around their chests. 7 One of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God who lives forever and ever. 8 Then the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

- John sees a vision of heaven. Seven angels come out of the temple with seven plagues. Then they are given seven bowls filled with the wrath of God. These seven bowl judgments will be described in detail in the next chapter.

- Smoke filled the temple, and no one could enter the temple until the plagues were completed.
 - When both the tabernacle in the wilderness and Solomon’s temple were dedicated, smoke filled the temple. In the case of the tabernacle, Moses was unable to enter the tent because of the cloud (Ex 40:34-35). In the case of the temple, the priests were not able to carry out their duties because of the cloud.
 - Douglas Wilson says that this is a “symbolic way of saying that intercession for Jerusalem is no longer a possibility.” In other words, God will no longer hear any prayers for mercy for the Jews, because their time of judgment has come.

IV. THE THREE SEVENS

1. Let’s return now to my opening question. What is the relationship between the three sevens – the seven seal judgments, the seven trumpet judgments, and the seven bowl judgments? Is the book of Revelation chronological, so that the three sevens are describing different events? Or is the book of Revelation cyclical, repeating the same events, but in a different way?
2. Most scholars agree that Revelation is not chronological.
3. **Robert Mounce** (who is not a preterist) “The continuous chronological approach is not accepted by the majority of contemporary writers” (Robert Mounce, *Revelation*, 31).”
4. Most scholars from all viewpoints agree that the book of Revelation follows some form of recapitulation scheme. The word recapitulation means to summarize and restate the main points of something. In other words, the book of Revelation is not simply describing the events of a story from A to Z. Rather, it describes the events of story, say A-G, in several ways.
5. That’s the best way to understand the three series of seven judgments. They are not describing three different judgments, but the same judgment against Israel. There is more development and intensification with each series, but they are all describing the Jewish War in 66-70 AD.
6. **David Chilton** “Although there is a progressive development toward a climax in the second half of Revelation, we will also see both a repetition of familiar concepts and a diversity in portraying them, a device often used by the Biblical prophets.”
7. One of the reasons for this view is the repetitive nature of the sevens. For example, there is a striking similarity between the trumpets and the bowls.
 - i. The first trumpet and bowl plagues affect the earth.
 - ii. The second, the sea.
 - iii. The third, rivers and springs.
 - iv. The fourth, the sun.
 - v. The fifth, the bottomless pit causes darkness, or the throne of the beast becomes darkened.

- vi. The seventh, completion. “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever” (Rev 11:15). Then there was lightning, thunder, and an earthquake. With the seventh bowl “It is done” (Rev 16:17), and there was lightning, thunder, and an earthquake.
8. **Robert Mounce** (*Revelation*, 168–69) puts it well when he notes: “While there is a rather clearly discernible literary development [between the seals, trumpets, and bowls], it is not to represent a corresponding chronological development. The three series cover the same period of travail” (though he sees this occurring toward the end of history).”
9. To put it another way, the three sevens are a “a series of parallel yet ever-progressing sections. These bring [matters] before the reader, over and over again, but in climacteric form.” Bruce Metzger (*Revelation*, 18)
10. So there is repetition, but there is development. The visions are heading somewhere, but there is some repetition along the way.

V. CONCLUSION

1. Next week we’ll take a look at the seven bowl judgments.