



THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Bible Study 38

Text: Rev. 15:1-8

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1 Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀγέλου καὶ τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἁπὸς τὰς ἐσχάτας, ὅτι ἐν αὐταῖς ἐτελέσθη ὁ θυμὸς τοῦ θεοῦ. 2 Καὶ εἶδον ὡς θάλασσαν ὑαλίνην μεμιγμένην πυρὶ καὶ τοὺς νικῶντας ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνος αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν τὴν ὑαλίνην ἔχοντας κιθάρας τοῦ θεοῦ. 3 καὶ ᾄδουσιν τὴν ᾠδὴν Μωϋσέως τοῦ δούλου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν ᾠδὴν τοῦ ἀρνίου λέγοντες·

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2. What the text means.

The Seven Bowls

Greek NT

15.1 Καὶ εἶδον ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν, ἀγγέλους ἑπτὰ ἔχοντας πληγὰς ἑπτὰ τὰς ἐσχάτας, ὅτι ἐν αὐταῖς ἐτελέσθη ὁ θυμὸς τοῦ θεοῦ.

2 Καὶ εἶδον ὡς θάλασσαν ὑαλίνην μεμιγμένην πυρὶ καὶ τοὺς νικῶντας ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνος αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν τὴν ὑαλίνην ἔχοντας κιθάρας τοῦ θεοῦ. 3 καὶ ᾄδουσιν τὴν ᾠδὴν Μωϋσέως τοῦ δούλου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν ᾠδὴν τοῦ ἀρνίου λέγοντες·

μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά τὰ ἔργα σου, κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ· δίκαια καὶ ἀληθινὰ αἱ ὁδοί σου, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν· 4 τίς οὐ μὴ φοβηθῆ, κύριε, καὶ δοξάσει τὸ ὄνομά σου; ὅτι μόνος ὁσῖος, ὅτι πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιόν σου, ὅτι τὰ δικαιώματά σου ἐφανερώθησαν.

5 Καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, καὶ ἠνοίγη ὁ ναὸς τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, 6 καὶ ἐξῆλθον οἱ ἑπτὰ ἄγγελοι [οἱ] ἔχοντες τὰς ἑπτὰ πληγὰς ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ ἐνδεδυμένοι

Gute Nachricht Bibel

15.1 Dann sah ich eine weitere große und Staunen erregende Erscheinung am Himmel: sieben Engel, die sieben Katastrophen bringen. Dies sind die letzten Katastrophen, denn mit ihnen geht Gottes Zorn zu Ende.

2 Ich sah etwas wie ein gläsernes Meer, das mit Feuer vermischt war. Auf diesem Meer sah ich alle die stehen, die den Sieg über das Tier erlangt hatten und über sein Standbild und die Zahl seines Namens. Sie hielten himmlische Harfen in den Händen. 3 Sie sangen ein Lied, das das Siegeslied Moses, des Bevollmächtigten Gottes, noch weit überbietet, das Siegeslied des Lammes:

»Herr, unser Gott, du Herrscher der ganzen Welt, wie groß und wunderbar sind deine Taten! In allem, was du planst und ausführst, bist du vollkommen und gerecht, du König über alle Völker! 4 Wer wollte dich, Herr, nicht fürchten und deinem Namen keine Ehre erweisen? Du allein bist heilig. Alle Völker werden kommen und sich vor dir niederwerfen; denn deine gerechten Taten sind nun für alle offenbar geworden.«

5 Danach sah ich, wie

NRSV

15.1 Then I saw another portent in heaven, great and amazing: seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is ended.

2 And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mixed with fire, and 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. 3 And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb:

“Great and amazing are your deeds, 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 nations will come and worship before you, for your judgments have been revealed.”

5 After this I looked, and the temple of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, 6 and out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues, robed in pure bright linen, with golden sashes across their chests. 7 Then one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven

NLT

15.1 Then I saw in heaven another significant event, and it was great and marvelous. Seven angels were holding the seven last plagues, which would bring God’s wrath to completion.

2 I saw before me what seemed to be a crystal sea mixed with fire. And on it stood all the people who had been victorious over the beast and his statue and the number representing his name. They were all holding harps that God had given them. 3 And they were singing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb:

“Great and marvelous are your actions, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations. 4 Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous deeds have been revealed.”

5 Then I looked and saw that the Temple in heaven, God’s Tabernacle, was thrown wide open! 6 The seven angels who were

λίον καθαρὸν λαμπρὸν καὶ περιεζωσμένοι περὶ τὰ στήθη ζώνας χρυσαῖς. 7 καὶ ἔν ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων ἔδωκεν τοῖς ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλοις ἑπτὰ φιάλας χρυσαῖς γεμούσας τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. 8 καὶ ἐγεμίσθη ὁ ναὸς καπνοῦ ἐκ τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὸν ναὸν ἄχρι τελεσθῶσιν αἱ ἑπτὰ πληγαὶ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλων.

im Himmel der Tempel, das Heilige Zelt, geöffnet wurde. 6 Die sieben Engel mit den sieben Katastrophen kamen aus dem Tempel. Sie waren in reines, weißes Leinen gekleidet und trugen ein breites goldenes Band um die Brust. 7 Eine von den vier mächtigen Gestalten gab den sieben Engeln sieben goldene Schalen. Sie waren bis an den Rand gefüllt mit dem Zorn des Gottes, der in alle Ewigkeit lebt. 8 Der Tempel füllte sich mit Rauch, der von der Herrlichkeit und Macht Gottes ausging. Keiner konnte den Tempel betreten, solange nicht die sieben Katastrophen zu Ende waren, die von den sieben Engeln gebracht wurden.

golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever; 8 and 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 ended.

holding the bowls of the seven plagues came from the Temple, clothed in spotless white linen with gold belts across their chests. 7 And one of the four living beings handed each of the seven angels a gold bowl filled with the terrible wrath of God, who lives forever and forever. 8 The Temple was filled with smoke from God's glory and power. No one could enter the Temple until the seven angels had completed pouring out the seven plagues.

INTRODUCTION

Finally! The seventh trumpet blew in 11:15 to announce the seven bowls of wrath: 15 Καὶ ὁ ἕβδομος ἄγγελος ἔσάλπισεν, [And the seventh trumpet blew](#). But no bowls of wrath. At least not until now.

Chapter fifteen stands as an extended introduction to the seven bowls of wrath. The pouring out of the seven bowls comes then in chapter sixteen in rapid fire succession. These are introduced as τὰς ἐσχάτας, [the last ones](#), which signals first that this is the final series of sevens that began with the seven seals (6:1-17; 8:1), moved to the seven trumpets (8:2-9:21; 11:14-19), and concludes now with the seven bowls (15:1-16:21). Interludes or pauses are inserted at 7:1-17; 10:1-11:13; 12:1-14:20. They offer a moment of 'catching one's breath' with the presentation of a steady intensification of the outpouring of God's wrath upon a wicked world. Now the seven bowls are not only τὰς ἐσχάτας [the last ones](#) in the series, but they are presented as ἐν αὐταῖς ἐτελέσθη ὁ θυμὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, [with them the wrath of God is brought to completion](#). That is, the temporal judgments of God upon the earth as expressions of His wrath are finished.

In chapter seventeen, one of these seven angels gives John a preview of the destruction of Rome as Babylon the great whore, which was anticipated in the message of the second angel in 14:8. This depiction is then expanded in chapter eighteen when this second angel of 14:8 announces again her complete destruction in very graphic detail. Ancient Rome stands as the very epitome of evil by human leaders and authorities on the earth.

The judgment that awaits humanity now is the final one that determines the eternal destiny of people on

the earth both the dead and the living, which occupies chapters nineteen and twenty. Then in chapters twenty-one and twenty-two the blessed state of the saints of God in eternity is presented with a wonderfully rich variety of images drawing upon the lavish gardens of ancient Babylon to the new Jerusalem as the eternal city of God.

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

As always, background issues that impact the interpretation of the text will be considered first. They provide invaluable insight into the everyday world of John that provided him with the materials to craft his apocalyptic vision to his readers in understandable language.

Historical Aspects:

First comes the historical aspects of the text that begins with the composition and transmission history, and then moves to the internal history marked off by temporal and spatial markers inside the passage. The social dimensions of people interaction are also included in this Internal History.

External History. In the history of the hand copying of this passage during the first six or seven centuries, variations of wording natural surface. We know of most of these simply because of the present existence of several thousand of these ancient copies in our world. They are scattered across the western world mostly in university librar-



ies in Europe and North America.

In the primary printed Greek text of the New Testament used in the English speaking world today, *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev. ed.), the Text Apparatus lists two places where variations surface that have the potential to impact the translation of the passage into various languages in our modern world. These are found in verses three and six.

15.3, ἔθνῶν, nations.¹ The expression ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν, *King of the nations*, in reference to Christ prompted a switch primarily to either ὁ βασιλεὺς πάντων τῶν ἐθνῶν, *King of all the nations*, or ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν αἰώνων, *King of the ages*. The manuscript evidence is rather divided between King of the nations or King of the ages.² The adopted reading, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν, seems to be more in line with the contextual emphasis.

15.6, λίνον, linen garment.³ The alternatives here are basically between the adopted reading, ἐνδεδυμένοι λίνον καθαρὸν λαμπρὸν, *clothed with a pure bright linen (robe)*, or ἐνδεδυμένοι λίθον καθαρὸν λαμπρὸν, *clothed with a pure bright rock*. Contextually only the first reading makes any real sense.⁴

¹{B} ἐθνῶν κ1 A 051 205 209 1854 2053 2062 2329 Byz [P 046] it^{sig} syr^{hmg} cop^{bo} Andrew; Ambrose Beatus // πάντων τῶν ἐθνῶν it^h arm eth Primasius // αἰώνων (see 1 Tm 1.17) P⁴⁷ κ^{*.2} C 1006 1611 1841 it^{ar} vg syr^{ph, h} cop^{samss}, (sa^{mss}) // ἁγίων 2049

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

²“The manuscript support is nearly evenly divided between ἐθνῶν and αἰώνων (ages). The noun ἐθνῶν is preferred on the grounds that (a) αἰώνων was introduced by copyists who remembered 1 Tim 1:17 (see also Enoch 9:4 and Tobit 13:4), and (b) the reading ἐθνῶν is more in agreement with the context (v. 4). In order to enhance the meaning, a few witnesses add πάντων (all). The reading ‘saints’ (ἁγίων) of the Textus Receptus, which has very little support in Greek witnesses, appears to have arisen from confusion of the Latin abbreviations for *sanctorum* (*sctorum*) and *saculorum* (*sclorum* [= αἰώνων]). ‘Saint’ is also read by several Latin writers. The reading in the text, followed by most translations, may be translated ‘You who rule over all the people of the world.’ RSV (also NIV and REB) follows the variant: ‘O King of the ages.’ The meaning of this variant reading is ‘You who are King forever and ever.’” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 542.]

³{B} λίνον 051 205 209 1006 1611 2329 Byz [P] vg^{cl} syr^{ph, h} Andrew; Beatus // λινούν P⁴⁷ 046 it^{ar, sig, (h)} vg^{ms} Origen^{vid, h}; (Primasius) // λινους [sic] after καθαρούς and before λαμπρούς κ arm (Cassiodorus) // λίθον (see Eze 28.13) A C 2053 2062 vg^{ww, st} syr^{hmg} // omit eth

[Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

⁴“The reading λίθον (stone) has strong manuscript support and was widely circulated at an early date, but despite a superficial par-

Of course, this does not cover all of the variations in the numerous manuscripts now existing from the ancient world. The Text Apparatus in the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (N-A 27th rev. ed.) lists the majority of these and this passage contains some twenty-five places where variations surface in the different manuscripts.⁵



allel with Ezek 28:13, it makes no sense and must be the result of an error in copying. It does not fit well with the adjective καθαρὸν (pure), which, on the contrary, does fit well with λίνον. The reading λινούν (made of linen) is a secondary improvement for a rare use of λίνον, and indirectly strengthens the manuscript support for λίνον as opposed to λίθον. (For a more detailed discussion, see Aune, Revelation 6–16, p. 854, n. 6.c; and for the view that λίθον is the original reading, see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 804–5.)” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 542.]

Offenbarung 15,1

* 3 1 2 P⁴⁷ (alternative sequence for ἐν αὐταῖς ἐτελέσθη, with possible replacement of ἐν αὐταῖς)

| εν ταυταις ετ. 051 M^A

Offenbarung 15,2

* 5 6 3 4 1 2 1006. 1841 M^K (alternative sequences for τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνας)

| 1-3 5 6 P⁴⁷ κ 2062. 2329

* εκ του χαραγματος αυτου και 051 M^A (after καὶ and before ἐκ a major insertion is found in isolated mss)

* τας M^K (the article τὰς is inserted before κιθάρας)

*1 κυρίου κ (κυριου is inserted before τοῦ θεοῦ)

Offenbarung 15,3

* αδοντας κ 2062 pc ar h vg^{ww}; Prim Bea (alternative spelling for ἄδουσιν)

° 1006. 1841. 1854 M^K (the article τοῦ before δούλου is omitted)

* βασιλευ κ* 1854 pc (alternative spelling for ὁ βασιλεὺς)

* (1T 1,17) αωνων P⁴⁷ κ^{*.2} C 1006. 1611. 1841 pc vg sy sa^{mss} (ἐθνῶν· is replaced)

| txt κ^l A 051 M gīg (h) syh^{ms} bo; Prim

Offenbarung 15,4

* σε P⁴⁷ κ 1006. 1841. 1854. 2329 pc (°p. φοβ. 051 M^A sy) ar vg^{ww} (τίς is inserted σε)

° κ 1006. 1841 pc (μὴ is omitted)

* -ση κ 1006. 1611. 1841. 2062 M^K (alternative spelling for δοξάσει, or replacement)

| θαυμαση 1854

| txt (P⁴⁷: -ξησει) A C P 046. 051. 2053. 2329 al

* εἶ P⁴⁷ (ὄσιος, is replaced)

| αγιος (+ εἶ 1006. 1841) 051v.l. M^K syh^{ms}

| οσ. και δικαιος 2329 pc (sy^{h**})

| txt κ A C 051*. 1611. 1854. 2053. 2062 M^A sy^{ph}

* παντες M^K (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη is replaced)

| παντα 1006. 1841

* ενωπιον κ (ἐνώπιον is inserted before σου)

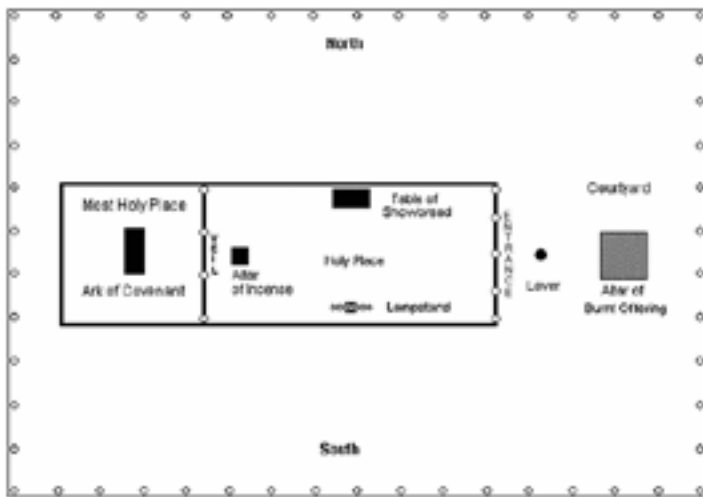
Offenbarung 15,5

* ιδου 2344? lat; Prim (ιδου is inserted before ἡνοίγη)

Offenbarung 15,6

Careful analysis of these variations reveals a considerable amount of carelessness in the copying process, but also some efforts at stylistic improvement of the language to conform to standards in the region and time period of the copyist.

Internal History. The only spatial reference in this passage that merits background treatment is the reference to the ἑπτὰ φιάλας χρυσᾶς, *the seven golden bowls*. The background here is the presence and the use of their earthly counterpart in the Jerusalem temple. The φιάλη in Greek translated either *ἡρα*, *qe 'arah*, or *ἡροθ*, *qe 'aroth* in the Hebrew.⁶ By general definition a φιάλη was a “round and shallow bowl, saucer, or pan.” Interestingly, φιάλη is used twelve times in Revelation and eleven of them are connected to the seven angels primarily described in chapter sixteen.



The background of this usage is signaled in Rev. 5:8 where the 24 elders hold φιάλας χρυσᾶς γεμούσας

° P47 κ P 046. 051. 1006. 1854. 2053. 2062 pm ([oi] is omitted)

| txt A C 1611. 1841. 2329 pm

* οι ησαν M^K (ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ is replaced)

* (Ez 28,13) λιθον A C 2053. 2062 pc vgst sy^{hmg} (λίθον is replaced)

| λινουν P⁴⁷ (κ) 046 pc ar gig (h)

Offenbarung 15,7

° P⁴⁷ κ* M^A (ἐν is omitted)

°1 P⁴⁷ (ζῶων is omitted)

°2 κ (ἑπτὰ before ἀγγέλοις is omitted)

* αμην κ pc sy^{ph} bo (after αἰῶνων is ἀμὴν inserted)

Offenbarung 15,8

* εκ του P⁴⁷ M^K (before καπνοῦ is inserted εκ τοῦ)

° 051 M^A gig (ἑπτὰ before ἀγγέλων is omitted)

[Eberhard Nestle et al., Universität Münster. Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 662–663.]

“Several Hebrew and Greek terms are used for such VESSELS made of POTTERY, wood, or stone, depending upon their religious or household context. Archaeology and biblical texts indicate that bowls were used extensively for a variety of purposes in the biblical period.” [Channa Cohen Stuart, “Bowl,” ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 496.]

θυμιαμάτων, αἱ εἰσιν αἱ προσευχαὶ τῶν ἁγίων, *golden bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of the saints*. These bowls are connected to the altar of incense in the Jerusalem temple. Located just outside the holy of holies in the inner court of the temple, it functioned as a affirmation that the prayers of God’s people were heard by Him and that He would respond to the prayers. The divine presence of God was deeply linked to the smoke of the incense.

This altar was located just outside the holy of holies and thus stood between the priests and God. Only once during the year could the high priest cross that barrier on the Day of Atonement by entering the inner sanctuary for sacrifice.⁷ But otherwise the priests were under threat of death if they crossed this barrier.

Legitimate worship of God in ancient Judaism could only be conducted in the temple and required the use of incense smoke from this altar. Exod. 30:7-8 prescribes the morning and evening burning of incense done on a daily



basis as an offering presented to God. Exod. 30:34-35 prescribes the formula for creating the incense for these rituals. This formula for incense could never be used in the home or anywhere else among the Jews. It was exclusively for use in the temple as a part of Israelite worship of God. It was used at all the major festival worship experiences in addition to the twice daily ritual.

The φιάλη referred to the pans used for handling the hot coals of fire burning on top of the altar. With them containing hot coals on fire, they could easily symbolize a wide variety of religious ideas. Thus here in reference to



⁷“To understand this regular incense offering on the incense altar, it may be profitable to glance at the ritual which belongs to the Day of Atonement described in Leviticus 16. At this occasion (Lev 16:12–13), the high priest takes in one hand a shovel with charcoal and in the other hand some of the ritually correct incense. He enters the holy of holies, where he puts the incense onto the charcoal in the shovel to produce an incense cloud which prevents him from being killed while performing certain rites of expiation. This incense cloud provides the high priest with cover against the divine wrath or the divine ‘radiation.’ The incense smoke gives protection. In Lev 16:2, however, it seems that the incense being burnt produces a cloud, in which the deity appears; the incense cloud in v 2 is a symbol of the call upon the deity, a call which the deity answers favorably.” [Kjeld Nielsen, “Incense,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 406.]

the seven angels they are equated with τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, *the wrath of God* (e.g., 15:7). But they are also equated with τὰς ἑπτὰ πληγὰς, *the seven plagues* (e.g., 15:6).

The connection to the altar of incense then becomes easy to understand. The pouring out of the contents of these bowls by the seven angels becomes God's answer to the prayers of the saints, especially those martyred, as depicted in 6:10 in the opening of the fifth seal: ἕως πότε, ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός, οὐ κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν ἐκ τῶν κατοικούντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς; *“Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?”* In the divine response in 6:11, they were told to be patient a while longer but that God would take action soon upon the evil people of the earth. In chaps. 15 and 16, that time has arrived.

The burning coals contained in the bowls becomes the symbolic expression of God's wrath as they are poured out in rapid fire succession upon the earth, as per the depiction in chapter sixteen: ὑπάγετε καὶ ἐκχέετε τὰς ἑπτὰ φιάλας τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς τὴν γῆν, *“Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God”* (16:1). The judgments then described in each of the seven bowls as they are ‘poured out’ on the earth are intense expressions of just how much God despises evil and those promoting it.

Literary Aspects:

As is always the case, these literary aspects play a critical role in interpreting the content of the scripture passage. Failure to take note of them will inevitably lead to false interpretation of the text.

Genre: Of course, the broad genre continues to be that of apocalyptic vision. The standard signal of such comes three times in these eight verses:

v. 1, Καὶ εἶδον, *And I saw*

v. 2, Καὶ εἶδον, *And I saw*

v. 5, Καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, *And after these things I saw*

Each of these signals a scene shift in the units of the vision being described here by John.

The first unit in verse one contains some distinctives with Καὶ εἶδον ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν, *And I saw another sign in heaven great and amazing*. Although σημεῖον, *sign*, is used seven times from chapter twelve to the end of Revelation, the distinctive phrase ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, *another sign in heaven*, is only used three times: 12:1, 3, 15:1. In chapter twelve the two ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ introduced the figures of the woman and the dragon which began the lengthy interlude of chapters twelve through fourteen. The third use here, at a literary level, signals the formal end of this interlude. It also marks the beginning of another significant section of

John's vision in Revelation. Whereas the first sign was a σημεῖον μέγα, *great sign* (12:1), this third sign is an ἄλλο σημεῖον...μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν, *another great and wonderful sign*.

In vv. 3b-4, a hymnic unit is introduced as τὴν ᾠδὴν Μωϋσέως τοῦ δούλου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν ᾠδὴν τοῦ ἀρνίου, *the song of Moses, God's servant, and the son of the Lamb*. The challenge is that the content of this unit bears no resemblance to the song of Moses celebrating the victory of the Exodus in Exod. 15:1-18 or the song of Moses in Deut. 31:30-32:43. Neither is it linked by content to a later reworking of the Exod. 15:1-18 song in Isaiah 12:1-6 which was to be sung when the exiles returned from Babylon. Perhaps just the genre of Moses' song of victory was the intention for this introductory titles here in 15:3a.

The introductory phrase Καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, *and after these things I saw* in 15:5 raises some genre issues. It is found only four times in Revelation -- 4:1; 7:1; 15:5; 18:1 -- and in each instance introduces a major unit of text. In combination with εἶδον ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν, *I saw another sign in heaven great and amazing*, in 15:1, a strong transition is marked out by John. The initial marker signals the end of the interlude and the beginning of a new section to focus on the seven angels. This one in 15:5, reinforces this new beginning by signaling the introduction to the seven bowls of wrath with vv. 5-8 setting up the seven bowls in chapter sixteen.

Literary Setting: By this point, the literary context of 15:1-8 should be relatively clear. First, it marks the close of the long interlude of chapters twelve through fourteen. Don't forget that the original composition did not contain chapter or verse divisions. Shifts of theme etc. had to be marked out for the reader and listeners with repetitive literary forms such as those discussed above under Genre.

Second, these verses set up the next major division of the seven angels with the bowls of wrath. These are described in chapter sixteen. But chapters seventeen especially along with chapter eighteen come as appendages to chapter sixteen with the graphic depiction of the destruction of Rome as symbolized by the name Babylon.

Literary Structure: The block diagram below illustrates the internal through flow and structure by visually presenting the connections between primary and secondary units of text ideas. The English language diagram below is excessively literal in order to preserve the syntactical relationships of the original Greek text. Side note: when the Revelation study is completed, both the complete English and Greek diagrams of the entire document will be posted.

15.6 And
460 out came the seven angels,
 | who have seven plagues
 of the temple
 clothed in a bright white robe
 and
 dressed with golden sashes across their chests.

15.7 And
461 one...gave to the seven angels seven bowls
 out of the four living creatures |
 golden
 filled with the wrath of God
 the living
 /-----|
 forever and ever.

15.8 And
462 was filled the temple
 with smoke
 out of the glory of God
 and
 out of His power
 and
463 no one was able to enter
 into the temple
 until the seven plagues were finished
 of the seven angels.

Summary of Rhetorical Structure

The core structure of this pericope is easily determined by the three expressions of εἶδον in statements 455, 456, and 458. Thus the passage naturally divides into three subunits of # 455, #s 456-457, and #s 458-463.

The first unit of #455 stands as a header providing both a closing to chapters twelve through fourteen, and an introduction to what follows through chapter sixteen.

The second unit of #s 456-457 presents a picture of celebration in heaven of the victory of martyred saints who have found victory over the evil beast on earth. Statement 456 describes the scene and statement 457 outlines their chat of victory in heaven.

The longer third unit of #s 458-463 comes back to the topic of the seven angels with the bowls of wrath. In #s 458-461 these angels are presented in description of the heavenly scene.

In #s 462-463 the divine response to their presentation is described.

Exegesis of the Text:

In light of the nature units of material as described above, the most nature exegetical division of the text is a three fold

structure.

A. A third sign in heaven, v. 1

1 Καὶ εἶδον ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν, ἀγγέλους ἑπτὰ ἔχοντας πληγὰς ἑπτὰ τὰς ἐσχάτας, ὅτι ἐν αὐταῖς ἐτελέσθη ὁ θυμὸς τοῦ θεοῦ.

Then I saw another portent in heaven, great and amazing: seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is ended.

With verse one, John brings to a formal end the lengthy interlude in chapters twelve through fourteen. He also signals the beginning of another new major section of his vision which will concentrate on the events of the very end of human history. This understanding comes from several signals in this single sentence of verse one. Note the diagram of the Greek text:

15.1 Καὶ
 εἶδον ἄλλο σημεῖον
 | ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ
 | μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν,
 ἀγγέλους
 ἑπτὰ
 ἔχοντας πληγὰς
 | ἑπτὰ
 | τὰς ἐσχάτας,
 ὅτι ἐν αὐταῖς ἐτελέσθη ὁ θυμὸς τοῦ θεοῦ.

First is the core statement, εἶδον ἄλλο σημεῖον, I saw another sign. This comes as the third signal of another sign. Note 12:1, Καὶ σημεῖον μέγα ὥφθη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, **and a great sign was seen in heaven**. This statement defines the appearance of the pregnant woman, γυνὴ περιβεβλημένη τὸν ἥλιον, καὶ ἡ σελήνη ὑποκάτω τῶν ποδῶν αὐτῆς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς στέφανος ἀστέρων δώδεκα, **clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet and upon her head a crown of twelve stars**. Then in 12:3 comes καὶ ὥφθη ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, **And was seen another sign in heaven**. This second sign is then defined as καὶ ἰδοὺ δράκων μέγας πυρρὸς ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτοῦ ἑπτὰ διαδήματα, **and indeed a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns and upon his heads were ten crowns**. The first two signs signal the beginning of the lengthy interlude of chapters twelve through fourteen. Now this third sign, ἄλλο σημεῖον, in 15:1 indicates the formal ending of this interlude, along with a shift to a new topic significantly different from the content of the interlude.

This sign is described three ways: ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν, **in heaven, great and wonderful**. Interestingly, John uses the word σημεῖον, **sign**, only seven times in all of Revelation. The three instances in 12:1, 3, and 15:1 are in the singular form and thus take on a meaning distinct from the others.⁸ The other

⁸“The term σημεῖον, ‘sign, portent,’ referring to a significant heavenly sight, occurs just three times in the singular in Revelation (12:1, 3; 15:1); each of these is connected, for 12:3 and 15:1 refer to ἄλλο σημεῖον, ‘another sign,’ referring respectively to 12:1 and 12:3. σημεῖον, regularly used to translate τὸ σημεῖον in the LXX, means ‘sign’ in a number of specific ways: (1) a characteristic mark by which something is known or recognized (Gen 1:14; Exod 12:13; Josh 2:12; Matt 16:3; 26:48); (2) a monument that is a reminder of a past event (Gen 9:12, 17; 17:11; Exod 13:9; Deut 6:8; 11:18); (3) an omen or indication of something to come (2 Kgs 19:29; Isa 7:14; Ezek 4:3; Matt 24:3; Luke 21:11, 25; Acts 2:19); (4) a miracle, which may be either genuine (Exod 7:3; Josh 24:17; Ps 77:13; Mark 16:20; John 2:11; 4:48; 6:30; 1 Cor 14:22) or a lie (Mark 13:22 = Matt 24:24; 2 Thess 2:9–10; Rev 13:13–14; 16:14); or (5) a constellation, for in Greco-Roman astrological lore the Greek term σημεῖον could mean ‘constellation’ (Euripides *Rhesus* 528–33; Ion 1157 [in context of 1146–58]; Aratus *Phaen.* 10; LSJ, 1593). The corresponding Latin term *signum*, a translation equivalent of σημεῖον, was also used in the sense of ‘constellation’ or ‘sign of the zodiac’ (Manilius *Astron.* 1.34, 109, 215, 255, 295, 506; Cicero *De nat. deor.* 1.22; see OLD, 1760).

“Mentioned in the eschatological scenario in Did. 16 are three heavenly τὰ σημεῖα τῆς ἀληθείας, ‘signs of truth,’ which include (1) ‘the sign spread out in heaven,’ (2) ‘the sign of the trumpet,’ and (3) ‘the resurrection of the dead.’ Similarly, Matt 24:30 refers enigmatically to ‘the sign of the Son of man in heaven’ (RSV). The plural term σημεῖα occurs four times in Revelation, always of false miracles performed by the beast from the earth (13:13–14), by the three froglike demonic spirits (16:14), or by the false prophet (19:20). A celestial phenomenon can be referred to as a σημεῖον (Gen 1:14; 19:12–17; Matt 16:1; 24:23; Mark 8:11). The term can refer to an exceptional occurrence that serves as a

four instances -- 13:13, 14; 16:14; 19:20 -- are all in the plural σημεῖα and refer to spectacular actions done by the second beast (13:13, 14; 19:20) or demonic spirits (πνεύματα δαιμονίων, 16:14). Only in the singular σημεῖον is a positive action designated.

This sign takes place ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ which is the same location as the first two in 12:1 and 12:3. This indicates the location in the sky just below the dwelling place of God. Also this sign is μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν, **great and amazing**. This is the only pairing of these two adjectives in all of Revelation, and perhaps reflects the influence of πιρρηκὶ τὸν τῆς μακκὸτ γέδολὸτ νένε ἐμάνοτ, **plagues great and lasting**, found in Deut. 28:59, which is translated by the LXX as πληγὰς μεγάλας καὶ θαυμαστάς, **plagues great and amazing**.⁹ The point of these descriptors of σημεῖον is to depict an event in the direction of heaven visible to all and of such magnitude that it astounds all of see it.

Now just what is this σημεῖον? As illustrated in the above diagram, ἀγγέλους ἑπτὰ, seven angels, stands in apposition to σημεῖον thus defining the specific content of this sign. Therefore what John saw that was huge and amazing was seven angels gathered together.¹⁰ What John alludes to here is explained in detail in

forewarning of something that will happen in the future and can therefore be translated ‘portent’ (see Luke 21:11, which speaks of ἀπ’ οὐρανοῦ σημεῖα μεγάλα, ‘great signs from heaven’), or it can refer to a miracle that is a demonstration of supernatural power (John 20:30–31). The term σημεῖον is used of heavenly phenomena that presage impending events upon the earth (Sib. Or. 2.34–38; 3.796–803, 804–8; Luke 21:11; Did. 16:6, ‘a sign spread out in heaven’; see Josephus J. W. 6.289). The term σημεῖον also occurs in LXX Isa 7:14 (a passage with some connections to Isa 66:6–7), ‘Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign [σημεῖον]. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.’ σημεῖον in Rev 12:1, 3 seems to have a different meaning, however, for here it means a symbol that has deeper significance. Although it is clear that John has incorporated an originally Greek myth (perhaps as mediated by Hellenistic Judaism) into his narrative in 12:4b–6, 13–18, he uses this earlier, older material allegorically, perhaps as an *interpretatio Iudaica* or *interpretatio Christiana*. John, however, is not concerned to interpret explicitly any of the figures or actions in the drama (unlike, for example, his procedure in Rev 17), with the single exception that he wants the reader to know who the dragon is and therefore lists his many aliases, which include Satan and Devil (v 9; cf. v 12). While it is not a close parallel to Rev 12:1–4a, there are some important similarities in the Star Hymn quoted by Ignatius *Eph.* 19:1–3 with its sidereal imagery; an incomparably bright star (= Christ) astonishes the other stars along with the sun and the moon (see the astral imagery in the Joseph story in Gen 37:9–11).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 679–680.]

⁹David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 869.

¹⁰“The masculine plural accusative noun ἀγγέλους, ‘angels,’ is in apposition to ἄλλο σημεῖον, ‘another sign’ (v 1a), which more closely defines it (cf. 12:1, 3, where a similar grammatical phe-

verses five through eight. To find a contradictory tension between verse one and verses five through eight is to reflect failure to understand what John is seeking to accomplish in these units of material.¹¹ The overarching heading of verse one sets up the more detailed expansion of verses five through eight, along with the celebration of verses two through four.

The seven angels, ἀγγέλους ἑπτὰ, are depicted as ἔχοντας πληγὰς ἑπτὰ τὰς ἔσχάτας, *having the last seven plagues*. Πληγαί, *plagues*, come in different bundles in the sixteen uses of πληγή inside Revelation. In chapter nine (vv. 18, 20), they come in a package of three. Here with the blowing of the fourth trumpet four angels were released to destroy a third of mankind with three plagues: fire, smoke, and sulfur. In chapters fifteen and sixteen (vv. 1, 67, 8; 16:9, 21; cf. 21:9), seven angels have seven plagues that will be inflicted upon the wicked on earth. In 11:6, the two witnesses of God on earth have the power to πατάξαι τὴν γῆν ἐν πάσῃ πληγῇ ὡσάκις ἐὰν θελήσωσιν, *to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they desire*. In chapter thirteen, the first beast had one of its heads ὡς ἐσφαγμένην εἰς θάνατον, *as plagued (=wounded) unto death* (v. 3), but

nomenon occurs).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 869.]

¹¹“This scene might initially appear anachronistic or unconnected with vv 5–8 since the seer could not see the seven angels with the seven last plagues before they had emerged from the heavenly temple, described in v 6, and before they had received the libation bowls, described in v 7 (Wellhausen, *Analyse*, 25). Some have therefore judged 15:1 to be an interpolation into the text (Charles, 2:29–32). However, it appears likely that this verse is rather a summary of the vision reported in 15:2–16:21 and therefore functions as a title or superscription (Bousset [1906] 394–95; Lohse, 86; Beasley-Murray, 233–34), analogous to 17:1–2 (see Comments there). This superscription introduces two separate scenes, the first in vv 2–4, introduced with καὶ εἶδον, ‘then I saw,’ and the second in vv 5–8, introduced with καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, ‘after this I saw.’ The first scene in vv 2–4 appears to be a later insertion, for in content it exhibits no connections with v 1 or with vv 5–8. Yet the reference to the glassy sea in v 2 (see 4:6) indicates that this is a throne-room scene and is placed here by design as part of vv 2–8, which constitute a throne-room scene similar to those that introduce each heptad (see 4:1–5:14, which introduces the seven seals, and 8:1–5, which introduces the seven trumpets). The phrase ‘seven plagues’ is used of the bowl plagues (15:1, 6, 8; 21:9), while the phrase ‘the seven last plagues’ occurs only in 15:1 and 21:9. The description of the plagues as the seven last plagues connects them with the earlier series of plagues connected with the seven seals (6:1–17; 8:1) and the seven trumpets (8:1–9:21; 11:15–18), though neither of these series is called ‘plagues’ (with the possible, but unlikely, exception of 9:20). The divine punishments narrated in Revelation are referred to collectively as ‘plagues’ in 22:18, and the fire, smoke, and sulfur associated with the sixth trumpet are called “these three plagues” (9:18).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 869–870.]

managed to get it healed (οὐ ἔθεραπεύθη ἡ πληγὴ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ, *whose wound [plague] unto death was healed*, v. 12). In verse fourteen, indication is given that this near fatal plague had come from a sword (τὴν πληγὴν τῆς μαχαίρης). In 22:18 all of the plagues are bundled together in a warning to the reader: ἐὰν τις ἐπιθῆ ἑπ’ αὐτά, ἐπιθήσει ὁ θεὸς ἑπ’ αὐτὸν τὰς πληγὰς τὰς γεγραμμένας ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ, *If anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book*.

Thus a πληγή, inside the New Testament, is a sudden blow or strike that causes a wound or some kind of calamity.¹² “Cognate words: ἐκπλήσσω, ἐπιπλήσσω, πλήκτης, πλήσσω. Heb. equiv. fr. LXX: הָרַג (35×), הָרַגְתִּי (8×); + 9 more.”¹³ The specific content of each of these seven plagues will be spelled out in chapter sixteen.

One modifier, τὰς ἔσχάτας, *the last ones*, is located in an unusual position after the number ἑπτὰ. This reference first of all connects this series of sevens with the seals in 6:1–17 and 8:1, along with the trumpets in 8:2–9:21 and 11:14–19. The seven angels stand as the last of these three series of sevens.

But τὰς ἔσχάτας is also positioned at the end of the phrase to be close to the causal clause that follows: ὅτι ἐν αὐταῖς ἐτελέσθη ὁ θυμὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, *because with them the wrath of God has been completed*. Against the clear backdrop of key elements here the sense is that the final expression of divine wrath upon evil has now arrived and will be poured out.¹⁴ The last series

¹²“(1) literally blow (LU 10.30); as laid on by a whip like instrument stroke, stripe, plural beating (LU 12.48); (2) as the result of blows or stripes wound, bruise (AC 16.33); (3) as a blow or stroke of judgment sent by God plague, calamity (RV 9.18).” [Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker’s Greek New Testament Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 316.]

¹³*The Lexham Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Logos Bible Software, 2011).

¹⁴“The aorist passive verb ἐτελέσθη (see 10:7, καὶ ἐτελέσθη τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ, ‘and the mystery of God was accomplished’) is a passive of divine activity indicating that it is God who concludes history. The term τελεῖν is used of the fulfillment of OT prophecy or of the word of God (Rev 10:7; 17:17; Luke 18:31; 22:37; Acts 13:29). The phrase “the wrath of God” occurs six times in Revelation (14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1; cf. 19:15). In the OT the phrase יהוה נאפ ‘ap *YHWH*, ‘anger of the Lord,’ occurs about forty times and can be translated (ὁ) θυμὸς (τοῦ) κυρίου or (ἡ) ὀργὴ (τοῦ) κυρίου (Num 16:22; 32:14; 2 Kgs 22:13; 2 Chr 34:21; 36:16; Isa 30:33; 34:2; 51:20), while the term יְהוָה נאפ ‘ap *’ēlohîm*, ‘anger of God,’ occurs just twice (Num 22:22; Ps 78:31). In the Dead Sea Scrolls the phrase לַאֲלֹהִים ‘ap *’ēl*, ‘anger of God,’ occurs more frequently (1QM 4:1; 6:3; CD 1:21; 3:8; 10:9; 20:16; see DCH 1:354). In the OT the anger of the Lord is brought about by Israel’s rebellion against the kingship and rule of God and is therefore primarily an inner-Israel phenomenon in which the anger of the Lord is expressed against Israel as both punishment and correction (TDOT 1:357; G. A. Herion in ABD 6:994). In later writers the

of temporal judgments in anticipation of final judgment are now ready to be inflicted upon the earth.

This is the introductory header for vv. 2-8 in the chapter. The first event of this vision will be a heavenly celebration by those already in heaven with God. They will celebrate the pouring out of God's wrath. Then the depiction of this happening on earth will follow with vv. 5-8 introducing 16:1-21 describing how it will happen.

B. A heavenly celebration of victory, vv. 2-4

2 Καὶ εἶδον ὡς θάλασσαν ὑαλίνην μεμιγμένην πυρὶ καὶ τοὺς νικῶντας ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνης αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν τὴν ὑαλίνην ἔχοντας κιθάρας τοῦ θεοῦ. 3 καὶ ᾄδουσιν τὴν ᾠδὴν Μωϋσέως τοῦ δούλου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν ᾠδὴν τοῦ ἀρνίου λέγοντες·

μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά τὰ ἔργα σου,
κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ·
δίκαιαι καὶ ἀληθιναὶ αἱ ὁδοὶ σου,
ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν·

4 τίς οὐ μὴ φοβηθῆ,
κύριε,

καὶ δοξάσει τὸ ὄνομά σου;
ὅτι μόνος ὁσιος,
ὅτι πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἤξουσιν
καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιόν σου,
ὅτι τὰ δικαιώματά σου ἐφανερώθησαν.

2 And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mixed with fire, and 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. 3 And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb:

“Great and amazing are your deeds,
Lord God the Almighty!

wrath of the Lord is transformed into an eschatological event (Isa 26:20; Ezek 7:19; 22:24; Zeph 1:15, 18; 2:2–3; 1 Enoch 62:12; IQM 3:9; IQH 15:17; IQS 4:12). During the postexilic period the anger of the Lord was at times thought to be directed against other nations, primarily because of their interference with Israel (Isa 13:1–22; Obad 1–14; Nah 1:2; Jub. 24:30), but there are other texts in which the wrath of God directed toward the nations appears to be unrelated to their relationship with Israel (Jer 10:25–26; Zeph 3:8). The eschatological wrath of God expressed against the inhabitants of the earth in Revelation presupposes a universal divine law or standard, repeated violations of which are now thought to have caused a final eschatological manifestation of the wrath of God (A. T. Hanson, *Wrath*, 85, 110; Dunn, *Romans* 1:54). In the NT the wrath or anger of God is primarily used in an eschatological sense of the final judgment of God (Luke 3:7 = Matt 3:7; Rom 1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5; 5:9; Col 3:6; Eph 5:6), which can be escaped through faith in Christ (John 3:36; Rom 5:9; 1 Thess 1:10; 5:9). While the wrath or anger of God is obviously an anthropomorphism, the focus of this metaphor is the anticipation that those who violate the laws of God will be punished.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 870.]

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 nations will come
and worship before you,
for your judgments have been revealed.”

With this vision and the next one in vv. 5-8 John switches to a heavenly court scene. This scene in vv. 2-4 functions the same way as do the similar ones in 4:1-5:14 and 8:2-5, that is, to introduce divine judgment action upon the earth that comes out of heaven.



The standard signal of apocalyptic vision comes with Καὶ εἶδον, *And I saw*, at the beginning. In the first Καὶ εἶδον in v. 1, what John saw was ἄλλο σημεῖον, another sign, which he then defined as ἀγγέλους ἑπτὰ, seven angels. But now what he sees are two items: ὡς θάλασσαν ὑαλίνην μεμιγμένην πυρὶ καὶ τοὺς νικῶντας, a glass sea mixed with fire and the victorious ones.

First, the ὡς θάλασσαν ὑαλίνην μεμιγμένην πυρὶ. In a typical apocalyptic manner of expression, this is presented not as θάλασσαν ὑαλίνην, a glass sea, with a clearly defined direct object in following the pattern of τοὺς νικῶντας. Instead the sea is presented indirectly as ὡς θάλασσαν ὑαλίνην, something like a glass sea. The use of the Greek comparative particle ὡς reflects a standard visionary pattern of description to emphasize the mysterious tone of what John sees that has no direct earthly counterpart.¹⁵ This kind of expression is common in Revelation: 4:6; 5:6; 6:6; 8:8; 9:7; 13:2; 14:2; 15:2; 19:6. This glass sea image carries the read-

¹⁵“The comparative particle ὡς is used in a distinctive way typical of apocalyptic visions to emphasize the mysterious and enigmatic character of what is seen (Dan 7:4, 7, 13; 4 Ezra 11:37; 14:39; Volz, *Eschatologie*, 11–12). ὡς is used similarly in Rev 4:6; 5:6; 6:6; 8:8; 9:7; 13:2; 14:2; 19:6. The anarthrous comparative phrase ὡς θάλασσα ὑαλίνη, ‘like a sea of glass,’ was mentioned in 4:6 as part of a throne scene (see Comment on 4:6). This second use of the same phrase is unaccountably anarthrous, though it is, as one would expect, repeated with the definite article in v 2c.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 870.]

er back to 4:1-6 where in the initial throne vision there was ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου ὡς θάλασσα ὑαλίνη ὁμοία κρυστάλλῳ, *before the throne something like a glass sea comparable to crystal* (v. 6). This image heightens the distance between God's throne and those dwelling in heaven due to the greatness and power of God. The modifier μεμιγμένην πυρὶ, *mixed with fire*, evidently comes from Daniel 7:10 with ἐξεπορεύετο κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ποταμὸς πυρός, *there flowed out from His presence a river of fire*. But John reworks the image to suit his purposes here. This is how the image in Daniel is often used in the Jewish apocalyptic literature in the different depictions of heaven.¹⁶ The fire image underscores divine judgment and its inclusion in the image at 15:2 helps to highlight the impending wrath of God to be inflicted upon the wicked on earth.

The second item that John saw in this experience is defined as a participle direct object: τοὺς νικῶντας, *the ones victorious*. The present tense of the participle stresses ongoing victory in process, rather than a completed victory. These believers are in heaven rather than on earth, probably through martyrdom.

The verb νικάω first surfaced in the Victory Promise in each of the seven messages of chapters two and three. There it functioned as an Entrance Saying defining the requirements for entering heaven at death. This stands as Jesus' promise to each of the seven churches. Numerous times the one who conquers is either Christ as the Lamb (5:5; 17:14) or an angel commissioned by God (6:2). Also Satan and one of his beasts are allowed to conquer God's people on occasion (11:7). But God's people conquer Satan and his cohorts (12:11; 13:7; 21:7). The sense of νικάω in 15:2 is this latter meaning. The sense of successful defeat of an opposing enemy or force is at the heart of the term. The most complete expression is 21:7, ὁ νικῶν κληρονομήσει ταῦτα καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ θεὸς καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι υἱός, *the one overcoming will inherit these things and I will be to him God and he will be to me a son*.

The challenge here is the way the 'object' of the verb is set up. Where the verb is used with a direct object elsewhere in Revelation it is either αὐτοῦς, *them* (3x) or αὐτόν, *him* (1x). In the other uses the verb is used without a stated object, including the seven in-

16 "1 Enoch 14:19; 71:2; 3 Enoch 18:19 [four fiery rivers]; 19:4 [the mention of four fiery rivers that flow from God's throne is an allusion to Gen 2:10-14]; 33:4 [seven rivers of fire]; 36:1-2; 37:1; Sepher ha-Razim 7 [tr. Morgan, 81]; for rabbinic references, see P. Alexander in Charlesworth, OTP 1:273 n. a2). The phrase 'mingled with fire,' absent from 4:6, is probably included here to symbolize impending judgment (Lohmeyer, 130). Though this is, of course, a heavenly reality, the corresponding cosmic counterpart is the lake of fire (19:20; 20:10, 14[2x], 15; 21:8), which is the place of eternal punishment for unbelievers." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 870-871.]

stances in the seven messages. But here in 15:2, the preposition ἐκ is used to specify what seems to be a direct object.¹⁷ Nowhere else either in Revelation, the

¹⁷"The meaning of the verb νικᾶν, 'to be victorious,' is restricted by the unexpected prepositional phrase ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου, 'over the beast,' where the simple accusative τὸ θηρίον, 'the beast,' would be appropriate. This is a very difficult form of expression; the verb νικᾶν + ἐκ does not occur in any other Greek texts. Yet similar expressions are found using the noun νίκη, 'victory.' Pindar used νίκη this way in Isthmian Ode 7.21-22, φέρει γὰρ Ἴσθμοῖ νίκαν πανκρατίου, 'At the Isthmus he brought victory in the pancratium' (here πανκρατίου is an objective genitive; cf. the use of νίκη with the objective genitive in Aristophanes Equites 521 and Plato Leges 840C, τῆς τῶν ἡδονῶν νίκης, 'victory over pleasures'). In another passage in Pindar, νίκη + ἀπό with the genitive is used in Isthmian Ode 6.60-61, ἄρα νότο γὰρ νίκας ἀπὸ πανκρατίου τρεῖς ἀπ' Ἴσθμοῦ, 'For they carried off three victories in the pancratium from the Isthmus.'

"The expression νικᾶν + ἐκ in this verse has been construed in three very different ways, (1) as a *constructio praegnans*, (2) as an Aramaism, and (3) as a Latinism (Aune, JBL 110 [1991] 691-92). Beckwith's suggestion (674) that the preposition ἐκ is used with the idea of 'coming off victorious from' (Thayer, Lexicon, 426) is semantically unlikely since he cites no parallels. (1) As a *constructio praegnans*. In understanding the phrase as a *constructio praegnans*, i.e., an elliptical or brachylogical expression, Stuart (2:305) suggests that the idea of σωζόμενοι, 'being saved,' is implied, a term that would naturally be used with the preposition ἐκ. Turner (Style, 260) proposes that a phrase meaning 'by separating themselves from' or 'and delivered themselves from' be supplied. BDR § 212.3 (accepted by Prigent, 239 n. 4) suggests that τοὺς νικῶντας ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου means τηρήσαντας ἑαυτοὺς ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου, 'guarding themselves from the beast.' (2) As an Aramaism. Torrey (Apocalypse, 108-9) argued that the translator of Revelation used νικᾶν here as the standard translation of the Aramaic verb נזי zēkā, which means 'pure, clean, innocent,' for in the courts of law the 'innocent' man is 'victorious.' The Hebrew verb נזי zākā is used with מן min (= ἐκ) with the meaning 'innocent of,' and Torrey cites a number of passages exhibiting this construction (Num 5:31; Josh 2:17, 20; 2 Sam 3:28; Ps 19:14). The problem, however, is that all these passages have the Hebrew verb ניקקא niqqā, not נזי zākā, thus considerably weakening his case. Since (according to Torrey) νικᾶν is used to translate נזי zēkā in Rev 15:2, the meaning is 'those who are innocent of the beast, and of his image, and of the number of his name.' According to Torrey, the notion of conquering is completely missing. The chief difficulty with Torrey's imaginative solution to the problem of νικᾶν ἐκ in Rev 15:2 is that it does not make sense to say that someone is 'innocent of the beast,' unless it is taken to mean 'undefiled by the beast,' a meaning for which there is no clear parallel. (3) As a Latinism. Despite the demurrer of Charles (2:33), this expression is probably best construed as a Latinism, in which the noun *uictoria*, 'victory,' sometimes used as the predicate with the verb *ferre*, 'bear, carry, bring,' and the prepositions *de*, 'from,' or *ex*, 'from,' with the ablative of the person or thing conquered (OLD, 2057), e.g., *uictoriam de Hannibale*, 'victory over Hannibal' (Livy 21.46.8); *iuuenis ... ex centurione Latino uictoriam tulit*, 'the youth won the victory over the Latin centurion' (cf. Livy 4.6.5; 5.15.11; 25.39.17; 29.9.5; 38.37.2); Velleius Paterculus 2.10.2, *Eodem tractu temporum et Domitii ex Arvernis et Fabii ex Allobrogibus uictoria fuit nobilis*, 'At the same time the noteworthy victory of Domitius over

New Testament, or ancient Greek literature is such a construction found. What does surface, however, is the use of a somewhat similar construction both with the nouns *νίκη* and *νίκος* in the Greek outside the NT, e.g., *φέρει γὰρ Ἴσθμοί νίκαν πανκρατίου*, for at the Isthmus he brought victory over the pancratium (*Isthmian Ode* 7:21-22). Additionally, in ancient Latin the noun *uictoria* is occasionally used with the prepositions *de* or *ek*, as in *uictoriam de Hannibale*, victory over Hannibal (Livy, *Annals* 21.46.8). Something along these lines seems to be the direction that John is moving with *νικῶντας ἐκ....*, with the sense of ‘being victorious over...’.

The threefold specification of victory over is *ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνης αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ*, over the beast and over his image and over the number of his name. This reaches back to 13:11-18 and summarizes it with the threefold depiction found in this earlier text. These believers have successfully avoided compromising their Christian faith by refusing to worship the beast and his image and by avoiding the branding with the name of the beast.

They are now *ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν τὴν ὑαλίνην*, standing upon the glass sea. This reaches back to the numberless multitude standing before the throne of God in 7:9-10, where are described *ἐστῶτες ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου*, standing before the throne and before the Lamb (7:9). The prepositional phrase *ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν τὴν ὑαλίνην* doesn’t particularly imply that the glass sea was the floor of heaven since *ἐπὶ* with the accusative case can equally imply ‘by the side of’ as well as ‘upon.’

Additionally the overcomers are *ἔχοντας κιθάρας τοῦ θεοῦ*, holding harps from God. This image reaches back to 14:2 with the reference of *κιθαρῶδων κιθαριζόντων ἐν ταῖς κιθάραις αὐτῶν*, harpists playing on their harps. The image here in 14:1-5 was built off the same image in 7:9-10, and pictures the same group of God’s people in heaven. Remember that *κιθάρα* in a first century Jewish setting would more precisely be labeled a lyre or a kithara than a harp.¹⁸ Whatever the precise nature



the Averni and Fabius over the Allobroges took place.’ Despite the rarity of Latinisms in Revelation, it is possible that the author was familiar with Greek sources that had been translated woodenly from Latin but are now unknown. Had the author omitted the preposition *ἐκ*, the following articular genitive *τοῦ θηρίου* could be construed as an objective genitive.”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 871–872.]

¹⁸The translation problem is that the Greek *κιθάρα* covers via the LXX *קנָה*, lyre, *קנָה*, stringed instrument, and several other

of this *κιθάρα*, the most important aspect is that it was provided to these overcomers by God.

After describing these who are getting ready to celebrate, John proceeds to depict their celebration using ancient Jewish chants in vv. 3-4.

Their hymns are introduced in 3a: *καὶ ᾄδουσιν τὴν ᾠδὴν Μωϋσέως τοῦ δούλου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν ᾠδὴν τοῦ ἀρνίου λέγοντες*, and they sing the hymn of Moses, God’s servant, and the hymn of the Lamb saying: Two *ᾠδαί* are mentioned but only one is presented.

What was an *ᾠδή* in the ancient world?¹⁹ Inside the NT, five of the seven uses of this term are in Revelation in three passages: 5:9; 14:3; 15:3. The other two are in Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16 where *ψαλμοὶς καὶ ὕμνοις καὶ ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς / ψαλμοῖς ὕμνοις ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς* are distinguished from one another by Paul. The OT in the LXX uses it in several places for different Hebrew words.²⁰

Hebrew words. Plus the stringed instrument *κιθάρα* could have either four or twelve strings, thus further complicating the translation process. Thus all the modern translations are calculated guesses at the precise designation of the musical instrument.

¹⁹*ᾠδή, ἦς, ἡ* (ᾄδω; Hom. Hymns, Soph., Pla., X. et al.; of a rooster Aesop Fab. 110 H.; ins, LXX; ParJer 7:33) song, in our lit. only of sacred song, a song of praise to God (εις [τὸν] θεόν: Philo, Somn. 2, 34, Virt. 95; Jos., Ant. 7, 305) or to Christ **Rv 5:9; 14:3ab** (on ᾠ. καινή cp. Ps 143:9; on worship in heaven gener. EPeter-son, *Liturgisches Leben* ’34, 297–306.—Lucian, Zeux. 2 ἡ νέα ᾠ.). ᾄδουσιν τὴν ᾠδὴν Μωϋσέως καὶ τὴν ᾠδὴν τοῦ ἀρνίου **15:3** (cp. Ex 15:1 and on Ex 15 as a song in the liturgy of Judaism s. Elbogen 2 23; 86; 113; 117; 136.—ᾄδ. ᾠδὴν as Achilles Tat. 3, 15, 3 ὁ ἱερεὺς ἦδεν ᾠδὴν); ᾠδὴν ἁγίαν holy song GJs 6:3. ἐν ψαλμοῖς καὶ ὕμνοις καὶ ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς **Eph 5:19**; cp. **Col 3:16** (on the hymn as a means of private edification cp. Hierocles 19, where the examination of one’s conscience at the close of day [Hierocles 27 the golden verses of the Pythagoreans are to be read aloud morning and evening] is designated as ἐπικοίτιον ἕσμα θεῶ=an evening hymn in the presence of God); AcPl Ha 7, 11 (s. ψαλμός).—Lit. s.v. ὕμνος. DELG s.v. ἀείδω. M-M. TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1101.]

²⁰*ᾠδή* G6046 (ōdē), song, ode (of mourning, complaint or joy); ᾄδω G106 (adō), sing.

CL *adō* is the contracted form of Att. Gk. *aeidō*. *ōdē* is a contracted form of *aoidē*. *ōdos*, a contraction of *aoidos* (singer), also occurs occasionally.

1. The vb. *adō* is used from Homer onwards with the following meanings: (a) to sing; (b) to produce all kinds of vocal sounds, e.g. the hoot of the owl or the croaking of a frog; (c) to produce the sound of a plucked string, or any other similar sound, such as the whistling of the wind in the trees; (d) (later) simply, to call; and also (e) to celebrate, praise or honour in the cult.

2. The noun *ōdē* occurs in Gk. tragedy with these meanings: (a) a song of mourning or lamentation; (b) a song of joy or praise; (c) poetry in general; and (d) singing in general, whether of men or birds. These words do not appear to have an intrinsically religious significance in non-biblical Gk.

OT In the LXX the vb. occurs 66 times rendering chiefly the Heb. *šîrh*, sing (Exod. 15:1 twice, 21; Num. 21:17; Jdg. 5:1, 3; 2 Sam. 19:35; 1 Chr. 15:27; 16:9, 23; 2 Chr. 23:13; 29:28; 2 Esd. 2:41, 65, 70; 7:7; 10:24; Neh. 7:1, 44, 67, 73; 10:28, 39; 11:22; 12:28f., 42, 45ff.; 13:5, 10; Jdt. 16:2; Pss. 7 title; 13:6 [12:6]; 21:13 [20:13]; 27:6 [26:6]; 33:3 [32:3]; 57:7 [56:7]; 59:16 [58:16]; 68:4, 32 [67:4, 32]; 89:1 [88:1]; 96:1 [95:1]; 98:1 [97:1]; 101:1 [100:1]; 104:33 [103:33]; 105:2 [104:2]; 106:12 [105:12]; 108:1 [107:1]; 137:3f. [136:3f.]; 138:5 [137:5]; 144:9 [143:9]; 149:1; Eccl. 2:8 twice; Isa. 5:1; 26:1; Jer. 20:13). It also stands for the noun *šîrh* (1 Chr. 6:31; 25:7; 2 Chr. 29:27; Isa. 23:16), *šārath*, → serve (2 Esd. 8:17), *zamar*, sing (2 Esd. 7:24), *tôdâh*, song of thanksgiving (Jer. 30:19 [37:19]), and *pāšah*, be serene, (Ps. 98:4 [97:4]). It has no equivalent at Hos. 7:2.

The noun *ōdē* occurs 87 times mainly for *šîrh* and *šîrâhh* (Exod. 15:1; Deut. 31:19 twice, 21 f., 30; 32:34; Jdg. 5:12; 2 Sam. 22:1; 1 Ki. 5:12 [4:32]; 1 Chr. 15:26; 16:42; 2 Chr. 5:13; 7:6; 23:18; 34:12; Neh. 12:27, 36; Pss. 137:3 twice, 4 [136:3]; 144:9 [143:9]; Amos 5:23; 8:10. It occurs 36 times in the titles of Psalms from Ps. 18 to Ps. 134. Other Heb. terms are *higgāyôn* (Pss. 9:16; 92:3 [91:3]), *mizmôr* (in the titles of Pss. 4; Pss. 39 [Pss. 38]; Pss. 48 [Pss. 47]), *maššā'* (1 Chr. 15:22, 27), *neḡînôt* (Hab. 3:19), and *šîgyônôth*, (Hab. 3:1). Apart from various Ps. titles, *ōdē* occurs without Heb. equivalent in Jdg. 5:1 v. l.; 2 Sam. 6:5; 22:2; 1 Ki. 8:53; Jon. 2:3 v. l.; Isa. 5:1; 25:1; 26:1, 9; 38:9 (all v. l.); 1 Macc. 4:54; 13:51; 2 Macc. 7:6; 3 Macc. 6:32; 4 Macc. 18:18.

With the one exception of Deut. 31:30, where *ōdē* is spoken, singing is always indicated. Sometimes musical accompaniment is mentioned (e.g. 1 Chr. 16:42), and on occasion both music and dancing. → David and the Israelites sang and danced before the ark (2 Sam. 6:5). Sometimes the vb. has a cognate acc. ("Moses sang [*ēse*] this song [*tēn ōdēn tautēn*]" (Exod. 15:1; cf. Num. 21:17 where *asma* is used). *asma*, song, does not occur in the NT, but is found in the LXX for *šîrh* and *šîrâhh* (Num. 21:17; Pss. 33:3 [32:3]; 40:3 [39:3]; 96:1 [95:1]; 98:1 [97:1]; 149:1; Eccl. 7:5 [6]; 12:4; in the title of the Song of Songs and Cant. 1:1; Sir. 39:14; Isa. 5:1; 23:15; 26:1). *adō* is sometimes used in parallel with other words, such as *hymneō* (1 Chr. 16:9), *agalliaō*, rejoice, and *psallō* (Ps. 98:4 [97:4]).

Sometimes the joyous nature of *ōdē* is stressed. But Amos 8:10 gives a dire warning to those who self-confidently await the day of Yahweh: "I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation..." The new song was a song for festive occasions. The references in Chr. indicates something of the role of the temple singers and music in the cult.

Music is mentioned in various connexions in the OT: at a family gathering (Gen. 31:27); the acclamation of heroes (Jdg. 11:34; 1 Sam. 18:6); and the king's enthronement and martial occasions (Jdg. 7:18ff.; 1 Ki. 1:39f.; 2 Ki. 11:14; 2 Chr. 13:14; 2 Chr. 20:28); harem and court music (2 Sam. 19:35; Eccl. 2:8); feasts (Isa. 5:12; 24:8f.); dirges and laments (2 Sam. 1:17f.; 2 Chr. 35:25); incantations and cultic occasions (Exod. 28:35; Jos. 6:4–20; 1 Sam. 16:6ff.; 2 Ki. 3:15); and occupational songs (Num. 21:17; Jdg. 9:27; Isa. 16:10; Jer. 31:4f., 7; 48:33).

NT 1. In the NT *ōdē* and *adō* occur only 4 times in the Pauline writings and 6 times in Rev., with both noun and vb. together in Rev. (cf. Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Rev. 5:9; 14:3; 15:3). Rev. 5:9 indicates that the reference is always to a song that is sung: "And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.'" The verse is also an example of the so-called "Axios-ac-

The *ἄδουσιν τὴν ᾠδὴν* expression followed by an outline of the chant in vv. 3b-4 affirm the idea of a chant expression in the manner heard in the temple from the Levitical singers.²¹ The distinction in Revela-

climation" (from the Gk. *axios*, "worthy"), known in liturgical and juridical contexts from the time of the ancient Gk. world to the Byzantine emperors (cf. E. Peterson, *Heis Theos*, 1926, 176 ff.). In Rev. the whole creation—in heaven, on earth, and below the earth—acknowledges, as of right, the lordship of the → Lamb in their eschatological paean of praise. The "song of Moses" in Rev. 15:3 transposes the song of Moses in Exod. 15:1 and also includes words from Ps. 145:7, giving them a christological significance: "And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, 'Great and wonderful are thy deeds, Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, O King of the ages!'" "As Moses once sang God's praises after crossing the Red Sea, so the singers who have won their freedom through the Lamb celebrate God's deeds which have been revealed in his work as judge" (E. Lohse, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, NTD 11, 1966⁹, ad loc.).

[K. H. Bartels, "Ὁδὴ," ed. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 672–674.]

²¹The term Levite is a developing idea over the period of the OT and thus changes meanings at different periods. The term moves from designating the priesthood inclusively (e.g., Exod. 4:14–16) to finally specifying only the non-priests in connection to the Jerusalem temple (e.g., 2 Chron. 29:34). The latest era of the exile and post-exilic era is described in 1–2 Chronicles which gives a somewhat detailed picture. This provides something of a foundation for understanding the perimeters of the term at the beginning of the Christian era.

The Israelite musician guilds have many parallels throughout the ANE. They in essence represent the movement of music into a formal liturgical setting with a set religious calendar of performances. Sarna (EncJud 13: 1317) suggests that the levitical singers, said to have been appointed by David to the task of performing the music in the Jerusalem temple (1 Chronicles 6; 15; 16; 25; 29; 2 Chr 35:15), were actually in place within the cultic community not long after this traditional date. Whenever they were appointed, it would have been their responsibility to make constant praise to Yahweh, and "prophecy with lyres, with harps, and with cymbals" (1 Chr 25:1). Among the themes of their music was the call for Yahweh to have mercy and to care for the people (Psalms 23; 46) and curse the wicked (Psalm 58). They also recited the epic history of Yahweh's past victories at the major festivals and the coronation of kings (Psalms 78; 81; 105).

These levitical singers, whose original leaders are said to be Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman (1 Chr 25:1) were probably even more prominent in temple worship during the Second Temple period following the Exile. They were joined in the organization and performance of all liturgical music by several other groups, including those associated with Chenaniah, "leader of the music of the singers" (1 Chr 5:27), and Matithiah and five other men, who were "to lead with lyres" (1 Chr 15:21). Still another group, the Korahites (1 Chr 6:7), were also apparently members of the musical community, since their name appears in the superscription of a number of psalms (42; 44–49; 84–85; 87–88).

Each guild would have ultimately created and become

tion from the practices in Second Temple Judaism was that everyone in heaven possessed the necessary musical skills to be able to join in the praise lifted to God. Across Revelation therefore at different times the four living creatures praise God musically, as well as the 24 elders and angels, in addition to the believers.

The first ᾠδή (ōdē) is τὴν ᾠδὴν Μωϋσέως τοῦ δούλου τοῦ θεοῦ. What is not clear is whether this is the song Moses' sang or a song about Moses.²² Probably the former is more likely since the three songs linked to Moses in the OT in Exod. 15; Deut. 31-32; and Psalm 90 more naturally fit the first category. But it would be entirely mistaken to equate Rev. 15:3b-4 with any of these songs since no literary connection exists with them. This song in Revelation is related only in broad conceptualizations of victory over enemies and the greatness of God.

The second ᾠδή (ōdē) is καὶ τὴν ᾠδὴν τοῦ ἀρνίου, **and the song of the Lamb.** Grammatically this phrase can also be saying either the song sung by the Lamb or the song about the Lamb. But since no where in Revelation does Christ sing a song, the larger context would favor here the latter understanding of an objective genitive case function for τοῦ ἀρνίου meaning **'about the Lamb.'**

associated with a particular repertoire of songs — thereby aiding in the transmission and survival of this sacred music (Sarna EncJud 13: 1317). Their survival during the Babylonian Exile and their importance to the establishment of the Second Temple community can be seen in the list of the exiles who returned with Zerubbabel to Jerusalem. Here it states that 200 male and female singers (Ezra 2:65) as well as 128 "sons of Asaph" (2:41) were a part of the company of returnees.

[Victor H. Matthews, "Music and Musical Instruments: Music in the Bible," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 933.]

22 "Does this refer to the Song about Moses (objective genitive) or the Song by Moses (subjective genitive)? The OT contains three songs by Moses, Exod 15:1–18, Deut 31:30–32:43 (cf. Philo Virt. 11.72–75), and Ps 90 (the only psalm linked to the name Moses and entitled 'A prayer [תפילה *tēpillā*] of Moses, the man of God,' though לְמֹשֶׁה *lēmōšeh* can mean 'to/by/for/about Moses' [Craigie, Psalms 1–50, 33–35], translated in LXX Ps 89:1 as Προσευχή τοῦ Μωϋσῆ ἀνθρώπου τοῦ θεοῦ). Josephus refers to the songs in Exod 15:1–18 and Deut 31:30–32:42 as compositions in hexameter (Ant. 2.346; 4.303), which may suggest that he was familiar with hymnic compositions based on these biblical texts (see Thackeray, Josephus, 90–91). Since the song sung in Rev 15:3b–4 is obviously not that found in Exod 15, some commentators argue that the hymn referred to here is Deut 31:30–32:43 (Beckwith, 677; Ford, 247). However, Exod 15:1–18 is certainly the more appropriate (this was the view of ancient commentators such as Oecumenius *Comm. in Apoc.* 15:3), for it is a song of victory sung after the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, and the motifs of sea and victory are explicitly emphasized in v 2. Yet it must be admitted that there is no literary relationship between the song in Rev 15:3b–4 and either Exod 15 or Deut 30–32 (Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation, 135)."

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 872.]

One such song is in [Rev. 5:9-12](#), and is identified as ἄδουσιν ᾠδὴν καινὴν, **they sang a new song.**

Another interesting possibility emerges from the seemingly contradictory structure of the grammar in v. 3a introducing the songs. The two songs are presented in parallel structure while the participle of manner λέγοντες modifies the core verb ἄδουσιν with the basic idea ἄδουσιν τὴν ᾠδὴν.... καὶ τὴν ᾠδὴν... λέγοντες, **they were singing the song..., and the song...saying.** Perhaps John was simply summarizing the doxology ending (v. 18) of Moses' victory song in [Exod. 15:1b-18](#), and by that implying the general themes of the entire song. Did John then set up the intro to these songs including Moses because of the Jewish rabbinic tradition that in the world to come Moses will sing a new song of praise?²³ Maybe, but it is not certain.

The ᾠδή (ōdē) is presented in vv. 3b-4 in hexameter format:

μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά τὰ ἔργα σου,
 κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ·
 δίκαιαι καὶ ἀληθιναὶ αἱ ὁδοὶ σου,
 ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν·
 τίς οὐ μὴ φοβηθῆ, κύριε,
 καὶ δοξάσει τὸ ὄνομά σου;
 ὅτι μόνος ὄσιος,
 ὅτι πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἤξουσιν
 καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιόν σου,

²³“Rabbinic tradition enumerates ten biblical songs (Goldin, Song, 68–72). There is a rabbinic tradition that just as Moses sang a song at the Sea of Reeds, so in the world to come he will sing a ‘new song’ of praise to God (Qoh. Rab. 1.9; Mek. Exod 15:1). This tradition is also reflected in Tanhuma Exod. 30b (S. Buber, ed., Midrash Tanhuma, 2 vols. [Jerusalem: Eshkol, 1990]): “It is not said, ‘Then šar,’ [i.e., a perfect or past tense, ‘he sang’] but, ‘Then yāšir,’ [i.e., an imperfect or future tense, ‘he will sing’] in the Age to Come — in the Age to Come Israel will recite Shirah to the Lord.” De Moor and van Staaldune-Sulman (JST 24 [1993] 261–79) claim to have identified an Aramaic acrostic ‘Song of the Lamb,’ discovered in fragmentary form in some fragments of the Tosepta-Targum to 1 Sam 17:43, which describes David as a messianic lamb conquering Goliath, depicted as an anti-messianic giant bear (= beast), and which may be part of a larger poetic composition. The fragments exploit the ambiguity of the term אֲלַיָּא *alāyā*, which can mean either ‘boy’ or ‘lamb,’ though David is also called an אֲמֵרָא *immērā*, ‘lamb.’ The waw strophe reads as follows (De Moor and Staaldune-Sulman, JST 24 [1993] 269):

Woe to you lamb [ymr],
 you who want to wage battle with a bear!
 But there is no lamb
 which can stand up against a bear.

“Despite the late date of these targumic texts, De Moor and Staaldune-Sulman argue that the composition was written between 100 B.C. and A.D. 100. This proposal is interesting, but the early date of the text is highly questionable, and the parallels to Revelation proposed (JST 24 [1993] 272–79) are simply too speculative and far-fetched.”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 873.]

ὅτι τὰ δικαιώματά σου ἐφανερώθησαν

Literary wise, this constitutes a ‘descriptive hymn of praise’ with parallels especially in the secular non-biblical literature. It is made up of a “pastiche of stereotypical hymnic phrases gathered primarily from the Psalms.”²⁴ That it is missing the typical introduction of a call to worship to such a hymn may suggest that what John has preserved is only the conclusion of the hymn rather than the complete hymn. The contrast between a ‘descriptive’ hymn of praise and a ‘celebrative’ hymn of praise can be seen between the hymn to the Lamb in 5:9b-10 (celebrative of divine actions) and this descriptive hymn in 15:3b-4 (descriptive of divine majesty):

Rev. 5:9b-10	Rev. 15:3b-4
<p>ἄξιός εἰ λαβεῖν τὸ βιβλίον καὶ ἀνοῖξει τὰς σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἐσφάγης καὶ ἠγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματί σου ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς καὶ γλώσσης καὶ λαοῦ καὶ ἔθνους καὶ ἐποίησας αὐτούς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς, καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.</p> <p>You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have made them to be a kingdom and priest serving our God, and they will reign on earth.</p>	<p>μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά τὰ ἔργα σου, κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ· δίκαια καὶ ἀληθινὰ αἱ ὁδοὶ σου, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν· τίς οὐ μὴ φοβηθῆ, κύριε, καὶ δοξάσει τὸ ὄνομά σου; ὅτι μόνος ὄσιος, ὅτι πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιόν σου, ὅτι τὰ δικαιώματά σου ἐφανερώθησαν</p> <p>Great and amazing are your deeds, Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, King of the nations! Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your judgments have been revealed.</p>

²⁴“Vv 3–4 constitute a hymn to God in the form of a descriptive hymn of praise (Westermann, Praise, 116–51; Deichgräber, Gotteshymnus, 55), composed of a pastiche of stereotypical hymnic phrases gathered primarily from the Psalms. Westermann describes this hymn type as speech directed toward God that does not rehearse specific instances of deliverance but rather focuses on God’s majesty in a summarizing or descriptive manner (Westermann, Praise, 118). The particular importance of this hymn is emphasized by the extensive introduction in v 2a and by the explicit mention of the title or titles of the song (which occurs only here in Revelation). However, since the typical introduction to a descriptive hymn of praise is lacking, namely, the call to praise in the imperative, it is appropriate to recognize this as a partial hymn (K. Berger, Formgeschichte, 242).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 873–874.]

The different emphases are clearly obvious between these two songs focusing on Christ and God.

The first stich of μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά τὰ ἔργα σου, κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ affirms the greatness and awe inspiring character of God through what He does.²⁵ It has a somewhat similar pattern in Tobit 12:22 with the phrase τὰ ἔργα τὰ μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά τοῦ θεοῦ. It opens the song with the general principle of God being known through His deeds. And these deeds reveal clearly who He is in character and being. The vocative of direct address κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ define the heart of what God’s deeds reveal: His awesome power and authority.

The second stich of δίκαια καὶ ἀληθινὰ αἱ ὁδοὶ σου, ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν raise the character issue of justice as an integral part of God’s being.²⁶ That

²⁵“The song that follows is a pastiche of lyrical fragments. In Tob 12:22, which introduces a hymn of praise, there occurs the phrase τὰ ἔργα τὰ μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά τοῦ θεοῦ, ‘the great and wonderful works of God’ (LXX see Job 42:3). These epithets are applied to God himself in Theod Dan 9:4, Κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ μέγας καὶ θαυμαστός, ‘Lord, great and wonderful God.’ The phrase μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά, ‘great and wonderful,’ occurs as ‘Baruch’s’ description of what the angel has shown him in 3 Apoc. Bar. (Gk. text) 4:1, while in Ep. Arist. 155, the phrase is used of the ‘great and wonderful’ things God has done in a combined quotation from Deut 7:18 and 10:21 (though in the latter passage the phrase is τὰ μεγάλα καὶ ἔνδοξα ταῦτα, ‘great and glorious things,’ an essentially synonymous phrase; see LXX 2 Chr 2:8; LXX Dan 6:4; Jdt 16:13, κύριε, μέγας εἶ καὶ ἔνδοξος, ‘Lord, you are great and glorious’). The phrase ἡ καλλονὴ αὐτῆ ἡ μεγάλη καὶ θαυμαστή, ‘her great and wonderful beauty,’ occurs in Jos. As. 18:11, where the adjectives describe Aseneth’s pulchritude. In the Apostolic Fathers, μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν is used of various special things but never of God himself (Barn. 6:4 [altered quotation of Ps 117:22, 24]; 1 Clem. 26:1; 50:1; 53:3 [altered quotation of LXX Deut 9:14]; 2 Clem. 5:5). One can conclude that this was a formulaic phrase in Greek (reflecting various Hebrew words) used in contexts of praise and thanksgiving in which a person (primarily God), action, or thing is extolled. See also Ps 111:2(LXX 110:2), ‘Great are the works of the Lord,’ and 139:14(LXX 138:14), ‘Wonderful are your works.’ The meaning of ἔργα, ‘works, deeds,’ overlaps with that of ἀρεταί, ‘virtues,’ i.e., actions through which the deity manifests his power (Engelmann, Aretalogy, 26, line 31). The phrase κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ‘Lord God Almighty,’ occurs in 4:8; 11:17; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22; see Comment on 4:8.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 874.]

²⁶“The phrase ‘king of the nations,’ which occurs in Jer 10:7 (missing from the LXX), is significant here since Jer 10:7 is also alluded to in 15:4a. It is significant that this is an allusion to Deut 32:4 (a song of Moses), ἀληθινὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ καὶ πάντα αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτοῦ κρίσεις, ‘His words are true and all his ways are judgments [just?],’ perhaps combined with Ps 145:17(LXX 144:17), δίκαιος κύριος ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτοῦ, ‘the Lord is righteous in all his ways.’ The Res Gestae Divi Augusti 34.2 makes particular mention of four imperial virtues: *virtus, clementia, iustitia, and pietas* (courage, clemency, justice, and piety); see the commentary by P. A. Brunt and J. M. Moore, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: The*

God is just above all rulers is stressed in the vocative ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν. That God is the very epitome of ἀλήθεια for αἱ ὁδοί, His ways, are always in accordance to who God is as holy and righteous. Thus the first instance of God's great works can be seen in His role as Ruler of all nations and how He treats all the people on earth. They are dealt with solely on the basis of His righteousness and holiness. Therefore His dealings are δίκαιαι καὶ ἀληθιναί.

The people singing this praise are His saints in heaven who have passed through death to eternal life. Although the mistreatment from human rulers brought them untold misery and injury, from God's hands they have found pure justice. He has not mistreated or injured them whatsoever.

The third stich οὐ μὴ φοβηθῆ, κύριε, καὶ δοξάσει τὸ ὄνομά σου; raises the question of who would dare not fear and praise God's name as Lord. The double negative οὐ μὴ combined with the interrogative pronoun τίς carries with it the implication that no one with an ounce of understanding of God would not reverence and praise Him. As elaborated in the second ὅτι clause it clearly suggests that at some future point everyone down to the last person to ever live will be compelled to reverence and praise God simply by being totally overwhelmed by Him. Their action may not be sincere, and clearly will be too late to help them spiritually but this they will do without fail.

The two verbs, φοβηθῆ and δοξάσει, form a synonymous parallelism.²⁷ That is, they are two ways of saying the same thing with the 'thing' defined by the first verb. Thus, all the world will come to fear God at some point and will acknowledge this fear in words of praise to God.

The fourth stich is a set of three ὅτι clauses with

Achievements of the Divine Augustus (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1967) 78. The Greek equivalents of these four cardinal virtues are ἀρετή, ἐπιείκεια, δικαιοσύνη, and εὐσέβεια (Danker, Benefactor, 279). *Iustitia*, or justice, an important virtue in a ruler, is frequently mentioned in inscriptions but rarely on coins. A statue representing the 'Justice of Augustus' was erected in A.D. 13, and thereafter dedications to 'the most just of princes' become relatively common. After the overthrow of Domitian, Nerva minted coins announcing his 'Justice' and the 'Freedom of the Roman People' (Charlesworth, PBA 23 [1937] 113). [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 874–875.]

²⁷These two cola exhibit synonymous parallelism (Jörns, *Evangelium*, 130). Rhetorical questions are characteristic in hymns (Exod 15:11; Pss 2:1; 6:3; 8:4; 10:13; 11:3; 13:2; 14:4; 15:1; 22:1; 35:10; 89:6, 8; 113:5; 1 Sam 26:15; Isa 40:25; 46:5; Mic 7:18; IQH 1:25; 3:23–24; 7:28–29; 10:5–6); see Comment on 13:4b. This rhetorical question is an allusion to Jer 10:7 (RSV; missing from LXX), 'Who would not fear you, / O King of the nations?' [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 875.]

the first one affirming God's holy character, and out of that will come worship from the nations and also the disclosure of God's righteous judgments (τὰ δικαιώματά σου) which reflect His ὁσιος, With the subordinate conjunction ὅτι defining all of these they are presented as the causal foundation for the twin rhetorical question at the beginning of verse four.

First the character of God: ὅτι μόνος ὁσιος, because You alone are holy. The adjective μόνος reflects a clear tendency of later OT writings to attribute unique qualities to God alone.²⁸ What is uniquely attributed to God is the character trait of ὁσιος, which is found in Revelation only here and in 16:5–6:

δίκαιος εἶ, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν, ὁ ὁσιος,
ὅτι ταῦτα ἔκρινας,
ὅτι αἷμα ἁγίων καὶ προφητῶν ἐξέχεαν
καὶ αἷμα αὐτοῖς [δ]έδωκας πιεῖν,
ἄξιοι εἰσιν.

You are just, **O Holy One**, who are and were,
for you have judged these things;
because they shed the blood of saints and prophets,
you have given them blood to drink.
It is what they deserve!

The sense of holiness suggested by ὁσιος and related words²⁹ is underscored perhaps by Psalm 86:8 (LXX 85:8):

οὐκ ἔστιν ὁμοίός σοι ἐν θεοῖς, κύριε,
καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν κατὰ τὰ ἔργα σου.†
There is none like you among the gods, O Lord,
nor are there any works like yours.

Although not used in the OT often in reference to God -- only in Psalm 145:17; Deut. 32:4, the primary sense is of an inner quality of purity that is reflected consistently in outward actions. This dual thrust of the adjective distinguishes it from more commonly used adjective regarding being holy.³⁰ The natural focus then is upon people

²⁸The adjective μόνος is used in divine predications in later OT writings, early Judaism, and early Christianity to underscore aspects of the uniqueness of God (2 Kgs 19:15, 19; Neh 9:6; Pss 72:18; 83:18; 86:10; 136:4; Isa 2:11, 17; 26:13; 37:16, 20; 1 Esdr 8:25; 4 Ezra 8:7; 2 Macc 1:24–25; 7:37; Mark 2:7; Rom 16:27; 1 Tim 1:17; 6:15–16; Jude 25). Only in Rev 15:4, however, is the predication 'you alone are holy' found, and it must therefore be considered a formulation by the author." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 875.]

²⁹The word group includes ὁσιος, ὁσίως, ἀνόσις, ὁσιότης.

³⁰In the LXX ὁσιος is used predominantly for ἁγιος, which for its part is used only of persons (24 times in Ps., Dt. 33:8; 2 Bas. 22:26).¹⁶ ὁσιος is never used in the LXX for ἁγιος (→ ἁγιος, I, 91 f.) or ἁγιος (→ δίκαιος, esp. II, 186, 185), and it is plainly distinct from καθάρος (→ III, 417), θρησκός (→ III, 158) and → εὐσεβής. ἁγιος, an intr. construct, denotes the one who exercises ἁγιος (→ II, 479). The latter term is correlative to ἁγιος and means conduct acc. to right and duty, as where there is a bond (relatives, allies, guests etc.). In this respect it differs from voluntary favour.¹⁷

whose outward actions reflect a genuine commitment to God. In this sense we find an emphasis upon both individuals (1 Tim. 2:8 and Tit. 1:8) and especially upon God or Christ (Acts 2:27; 13:34; 13:35; Heb. 7:26; Rev. 15:4; 16:5) in the eight uses of the adjective inside the NT. Given the emphasis upon the actions of God in this song in chapter fifteen, the use of ὁσιος is entirely appropriate.

Second is the expected human response to God as μόνος ὁσιος, uniquely holy: ὅτι πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἤξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιόν σου, *for all the nations will be present and will bow their knees before You*. Very likely the use here in chapter fifteen is an allusion back to an LXX phrase in Psalm 86:9-10 (LXX 85:9-10):

πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, ὅσα ἐποίησας, ἤξουσιν
καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιόν σου, κύριε,
καὶ δοξάσουσιν τὸ ὄνομά σου,
*All the nations you have made shall come
and bow down before you, O Lord,
and shall glorify your name.*

In this pilgrim psalm what is celebrated is the annual pilgrimage by God's people to the temple in Jerusalem to worship God in His holiness. It idealizes the image to include all people. In Revelation at final judgment, all the nations³¹ of the world will join God's people in the

רִשְׁיָהּ is the one who observes such obligations. It can thus be used of God (Ps. 145:17; in Dt. 32:4 ὁσιος is used for רִשְׁיָהּ), but it is much more frequently used of men. In the cultus the righteous are pledged to obedience to God (Ps. 50:5). Since רִשְׁיָהּ as used in religion expresses the relation of faithfulness to Yahweh, it is used predominantly with gen. or suffix. The יהוה רִשְׁיָהּ or οἱ ὅσιοι αὐτοῦ¹⁸ are originally the whole cultic community of Israel, Ps. 149:1 f.; 79:1 f.; 132:9, 16 = 2 Ch. 6:41. Nevertheless, in the course of a development which showed that the community also included some who were ungodly, the concept narrowed itself to a smaller circle of those who for their part were willing to fulfil the obligations of the covenant. The word becomes a self-designation of the righteous who call themselves οἱ ὅσιοι in the abs., Ps. 12:1; 18:26; 32:6.¹⁹ רִשְׁיָהּ is an ideal, and thus acquires an ethico-religious content. It is par. to תְּמִים (Ps. 18:26)²⁰ and close to צְדִיק. But if in the latter the main pt. is uprightness in fulfilment of God's demands, what counts in רִשְׁיָהּ - ὁσιος is rather what follows from dutiful acceptance of relationship to others (men or God).²¹ Toward the end of OT development the יהוה רִשְׁיָהּ are the core of the people which remains loyal to Yahweh.²² They are the quiet ones in the land who are faithful to the Law and who oppose the Philhellenic party, esp. in the Syrian period. In the Maccabean age they are an organised group, 1 Macc. 2:42: συναγωγὴ Ἀσιδαίων, cf. Ps. 149:1: רִשְׁיָהּ קָהָל. For the sake of their faith they are prepared to give up their quiet love of peace and enter the struggle for freedom, the Hasideans in 1 Macc. 7:13; 2 Macc. 14:6. But they withdraw again from the political struggle when this begins to serve other than religious ends. Their spiritual descendants in NT days are the Pharisees.²³

[Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:490–491.]

³¹“The phrase πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, ‘all the nations,’ is a fixed phrase

heavenly temple for worship of Him without alternative option. Their ‘worship’ will center on the bowing of the knee before God (προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιόν σου) in acknowledgment of His overwhelming power as they fearfully await final sentencing to eternal damnation. The hymn here in chapter fifteen celebrates this as an expression of the unique holiness of God who makes this happen.

Third comes the divine revelation that ὅτι τὰ δικαιώματά σου ἐφανερώθησαν, *Your just judgments will be disclosed*. This becomes the logical outcome of the sequence of three reasons for the rhetorical question. God is uniquely holy, the whole world will be compelled to acknowledge that, and it will be demonstrated in the judgments rendered by God on the day of judgment.

The noun τὰ δικαιώματά σου, *your just judgments*, is only used here in Revelation of God.³² And in the other usage inside Rev. in 19:8, the white linen robes of the saints at the great banquet are τὰ δικαιώματα τῶν ἁγίων, *the righteous deeds of the saints*. In reference to God's actions in a moment of disclosure in final judgment (ἐφανερώθησαν), the sense is the sentencing of the wicked to eternal punishment is affirmed as completely just and correct.³³ Thus God is true to His holy

that occurs five times in Revelation (12:5; 14:8; 15:4; 18:3, 23); see Comment on 12:5. The theme of the coming of the nations to worship God in Jerusalem occurs frequently in the OT (Isa 2:2–4; 14:1–2; 45:14; 60:1–3; 66:18; Jer 16:19; Zech 8:20–23); see Comment on Rev 21:24.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 876.]

³²The word group here is δίκη, δίκαιος, δικαιοσύνη, δικαίω, δικαίωμα, δικαίωσις, δικαιοκρασία [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 5:174.]

For a wider exploration of the idea of just and justice with all of the connected Greek words inside the NT, see Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1996, topics 88:12–88.23. And for those connected to holy and pure see topics 88.24–88.35. For the very extensive terminology treating judge / judgment see topic 30.75–30.85. Quate a large number of words and phrases could have been used by John, had he only wanted to stress divine judgment.

³³“The phrase τὰ δικαιώματά σου can mean ‘your righteous ordinances’ or ‘your righteous judgments’ (Rom 1:32; 2:26; 8:4), perhaps in the sense of the punishment of the ungodly (1 Kgs 3:28; 2 Chr 6:35; Plato Leg. 9.864e; CIJ, 361) since δικαίωμα can refer to a just decree or sentence of condemnation (Rom 5:16; Thayer, *Lexicon*, 151; Charles, 2:36–37; BAGD, 198; Prigent, 240; the evidence in Spicq, TLNT 1:344 n. 96). The phrase can also mean “your righteous deeds” (Rev 19:8; Bar 2:17 [GELS, 115]), referring to the striking manifestations of the sovereignty of God. Since the previous line refers to the pilgrimage of all nations to worship before God, a positive rather than a negative construal of τὰ δικαιώματά σου is appropriate, favoring the translation ‘righteous actions’ (NIV; NEB, ‘just dealings’; Swete, 196; Bousset [1906] 394; Bratcher-Hatton, *Revelation*, 226) rather than ‘righteous

character in His judgment actions and will be so on the day of final judgment.

Thus what is being celebrated is the day of judgment when God discloses in His condemnation of the wicked to eternal punishment His holy and pure character. Unlike the pagan deities worshiped in the seven cities who were as corrupt and evil as their human worshipers, the God of Christians is uniquely holy and in such a way that it guides all of His decisions and actions. Believers already know this; the pagan world will discover this on judgment day. But it is this *μόνος ὄσιος* that His saints in heaven are preparing to celebrate with this song of praise. It indeed is the victory song of both Moses and the Lamb, but it focuses upon God and who He is.

C. The seven angels with bowls, vv. 5-8

5 Καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, καὶ ἡνοίγη ὁ ναὸς τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, 6 καὶ ἐξῆλθον οἱ ἑπτὰ ἄγγελοι [οἱ] ἔχοντες τὰς ἑπτὰ πληγὰς ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ ἐνδεδυμένοι λίνον καθαρὸν λαμπρὸν καὶ περιεζωσμένοι περὶ τὰ στήθη ζώνας χρυσαῖς. 7 καὶ ἔν ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων ἔδωκεν τοῖς ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλοις ἑπτὰ φιάλας χρυσαῖς γεμούσας τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζώντος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. 8 καὶ ἐγεμίσθη ὁ ναὸς καπνοῦ ἐκ τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὸν ναὸν ἄχρι τελεσθῶσιν αἱ ἑπτὰ πληγαὶ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλων.

5 After this I looked, and the temple of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, 6 and out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues, robed in pure bright linen, with golden sashes across their chests. 7 Then one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever; 8 and 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 ended.

This third segment of the vision is introduced in a similar manner as the first two segments in chapter fifteen, with Καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, and after these things I saw. The distinct part is the prepositional phrase μετὰ ταῦτα. This phrase of μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον shows up in several places in Revelation: 4:1; 7:1, 9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1 *teous judgments*' (REB, 'just decrees'). This contextual argument is strengthened by the likelihood that this verse alludes to Ps 86:9–10 (LXX 85:9–10), where it is said that God is great and does wonderful things. Some prefer the more ambiguous translation 'judgments' (RSV; NRSV; Kraft, 200 [Gerichte]). Lohmeyer (131–32) blends these two aspects of δικαίωμα when he claims that the term designates 'juridical judgment' as well as 'righteous action' and concludes that both are relevant since the judgment of God is an action of God." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 876.]

(Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον). Additionally the prepositional phrase μετὰ ταῦτα shows up four more times: 1:19; 4:1b; 9:12; 20:3. The preposition μετὰ with an object in the accusative case normally expresses the next item in a sequence, either temporal or logical. The latter is the point here, and consistently with μετὰ ταῦτα throughout Revelation. John uses the expression to signal the next item in his continuing apocalyptic vision.

The next thing that John saw came subsequent to ἄλλο σημεῖον, another sign, which were ἀγγέλους ἑπτὰ, seven angels (v. 1) and then ὡς θάλασσαν ὑαλίνην, something like a glassy sea, and τοὺς νικῶντας, the victorious ones, (v. 2).

Now the next items he sees are ἡνοίγη ὁ ναὸς,³⁴ the temple was opened, and ἐξῆλθον οἱ ἑπτὰ ἄγγελοι, out comes seven angels (vv. 5-6). This signals the final action prior to the inflicting of divine punishment by these seven angels (16:1-21). A parallel phrase -- ἡνοίγη ὁ ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ -- occurs in 11:19 just after the celebration chant of the 24 elders (11:16-18). This

³⁴The term ναός, usually translated 'temple,' requires some discussion at this point. In the LXX and later Jewish and Christian Greek literature, four different terms were used for the temple in Jerusalem: τὸ ἅγιον (Exod 26:33; Num 3:38; Ezek 45:18; 1 Macc 10:42), τὸ ἱερόν (2 Macc 3:2), ὁ οἶκος (3 Kgdms 7:31; Jos. J. W. 4.281; Mark 2:26; Matt 12:4), and τὸ ναός (3 Kgdms 6:5, 17; Jos. J. W. 5.207, 209, 211; Ant. 15.391; Matt 23:16, 17, 21). These terms can be used interchangeably (TDNT 9:882), and there are no discernible ideological reasons for preferring some of these terms over others in particular contexts (Barr, Semantics, 282–87). ναός is used in the LXX ca. 120 times, almost always as a translation of *הֶכְלָל* *hēkāl*, which can mean 'palace,' 'temple,' or the holy place that occupied the middle area of the Solomonic temple (references in DCH 2:541–42). When *הֶכְלָל* *hēkāl* is used of the temple, it normally refers to the sacred building itself, which consisted of three rooms: (1) an innermost shrine called the holy of holies (*דְּבִיר* *dēbîr* or *מִשְׁכַּן קֹדֶשׁ* *qōdeš haqqādāšîm*), a nave called the holy place (*מִשְׁכַּן קֹדֶשׁ* *qōdeš*), and a porch or vestibule called an *אֹיָלָם* *ʾūlām*. The porch was separated from the holy place by doors (1 Kgs 6:33–35; Ezek 41:21–25; Jos. Ag. Ap. 2.119; J. W. 5.202; 6.293). Occasionally the translators of Chronicles used ναός to translate the term *אֹיָלָם* *ʾūlām* (1 Chr 28:11; 2 Chr 8:12; 15:8; 29:7, 17), referring to the 'porch' or 'vestibule' of the temple of Solomon (references in DCH 1:152–53), but ναός is never used as a term for the *dēbîr* or most holy place (and therefore the comments of Bratcher-Hatton, Revelation, 227, are quite wrong). This is in contrast to classical and Hellenistic Greek usage in which ναός was used for the sanctuary within a temple in which the cult statue of the god was placed (Herodotus 1.183; 6.16), while τὸ ἱερόν was the term used for the temple as a whole.

"In Revelation, the term ναός is used to mean four different things: (1) the temple in Jerusalem, consisting of a three-room building, which the author may have used secondarily to refer to the heavenly temple (11:1–2); (2) the temple as a metaphor for the people of God (3:12); (3) the heavenly temple (7:15; 11:19[2x]; 15:5, 6, 8[2x]; 16:1, 17); and (4) the presence of God as a temple in the New Jerusalem (21:22[2x])."

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 877.]

scene comes at the end of the blowing of the seventh trumpet (11:15-19) in anticipation of the seven angels with the bowls of wrath in 16:1-21.

From a literary perspective John signals in 15:5-8 that he is picking up where he left off in 11:19. Finally now the actions of the seven angels with the bowls of wrath is about to happen.

The second item in both instances are linked to one another. In 11:19 what ὠφθη ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ ναῷ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐγένοντο ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη, *was seen the ark of His covenant in His temple, and there happened flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and earthquake, and heavy hail.* In 15: 6 καὶ ἐξῆλθον οἱ ἑπτὰ ἄγγελοι, *and comes out seven angels.* The ark of the covenant stands as God's pledge to treat His people in ways consistent to His own holy character. Now the seven angels emerge from the temple in order to carry out the sentencing of the wicked to punishment for having harmed the people of God -- actions entirely consistent with and derived from His commitments in the covenant. The taking of these actions comes after the customary celebration of God by various groups located in heaven.

In looking closer at the details of the sentence in vv. 5-6, one of the first unusual items is the insertion of the phrase τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου, *the tent of witness.*³⁵ In 11:19, the phrase is simply ἡνοίγη ὁ ναὸς τοῦ

³⁵“Though Bousset ([1906] 394) and Lohmeyer (129) are among those who suggest that the OT Hebrew phrase מִשְׁכַּן אֱהֵל מוֹעֵד *miškan .əhel mō.ēd*, literally, ‘the tabernacle of the tent of meeting’ (Exod 40:2, 6, 29; n.b. that the LXX does not translate מִשְׁכַּן *miškan*), lies behind ὁ ναὸς τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου, this is simply not plausible, for מִשְׁכַּן *miškan* is never translated ναὸς in the LXX, and מוֹעֵד *mō.ēd* means ‘meeting,’ not ‘testimony.’ However, the Hebrew phrases אֱהֵל הָאֵדוּת *.əhel ha.ēdut*, ‘tent of testimony,’ and אֱהֵל מוֹעֵד *.əhel mō.ēd*, ‘tent of meeting,’ are frequently translated in the LXX as ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ μαρτυρίου, ‘tent of testimony.’ The corresponding Hebrew phrase should rather be מִקְדָּשׁ אֱהֵל הָאֵדוּת *.əhel hā.ēdūt*, ‘sanctuary of the tent of testimony,’ which occurs in the OT only in the form אֶת-הַמִּשְׁכָּן לְאֵהֵל הָאֵדוּת *.et-hammiškan lē.əhel hā.ēdut*, ‘[the cloud covered] the tabernacle, the tent of testimony’ (Num 9:15). The LXX version of Num 9:15 reflects this difficult concatenation: τὴν σκηνήν, τὸν οἶκον τοῦ μαρτυρίου, ‘the tent, the house of testimony,’ though Tg. Neof. Num 9:15 and Tg. Ps.-J. Num 9:15 read simply ‘the tent of testimony.’ In the phrase ὁ ναὸς τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου, ‘the temple, namely, the tent of witness,’ the first genitive, τῆς σκηνῆς, ‘the tent,’ is probably an appositive genitive (Bousset [1906] 394; Beckwith, 678; NIV), while the second, τοῦ μαρτυρίου, ‘of witness,’ is a descriptive genitive. Charles thought the phrase so difficult that he considered τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου to be a later addition to the text (2:38). Eichhorn (2:170) tried to solve the problem by translating the entire clause *aperiebatur templum illud coeleste, in quo arca foederis* [should not Eichhorn have used *testimonii*?] *reposita erat*, ‘the heavenly temple was opened in which the ark of covenant was located.’ The same solution appears in TEV: ‘After this I saw the

θεοῦ ὁ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, *opened was the temple of God in heaven.* But in 15:5 the phrase becomes ἡνοίγη ὁ ναὸς τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, *opened was the temple, the tent of witness, in heaven.* At first the insertion of τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου doesn't make sense. But in realizing that it was ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης, the ark of the covenant (11:19) that was first seen with the opening of the doors of the heavenly temple, the insertion here in 15:5 becomes clear as a pointer back to the 11:19 image. The ark was first stored on earth in the tabernacle during the Exodus. The use of the label 5 Καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, καὶ ἡνοίγη ὁ ναὸς τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου for the tabernacle further confirms this purpose for the insertion as a pointer. It was this ark that stood as a visible symbol of God's commitments to His people.

Quite interesting is that in both cases of 11:19 and 15:5 the doors of the heavenly temple were opened automatically and not by someone as the aorist passive voice verb ἡνοίγη, *was opened*, affirms. According to Josephus, the double doors at the entrance to the temple proper in Jerusalem were extremely large and heavy and required several individuals in order to open them.³⁶ Among the Jewish people, the feeling was that if they opened themselves something highly unusual

temple in heaven open, with the Covenant Tent in it.’ The unusual juxtaposition of ‘temple’ and ‘tent of meeting’ is also found in the reconstructed text of 4QMMT 32–35 (tr. García Martínez, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 77), ‘And we think that the temple [is the place of the tent of meeting, and Jerusalem is the camp.’ In the OT the term tabernacle (Hebrew מִשְׁכַּן *miškan*) is used for the temple (Pss 26:8; 46:4[MT 5]; 74:7 [it is interesting that in this passage מִשְׁכַּן *miškan*, ‘tabernacle,’ and מִקְדָּשׁ *miqdāš*, ‘sanctuary, temple,’ are used as synonyms]; 84:2; 132:5, 7). The heavenly tabernacle (ἡ σκηνή) is mentioned twice in Hebrews (8:2; 9:11), and also in 4Q403 1 ii 10 and 4Q405 20–21–22 ii 7. In the OT the pattern of the tabernacle is revealed by God to Moses, suggesting its heavenly preexistence (Exod 25:9, 40; 26:30; 27:8). The opening of the heavenly temple (see 11:19) functions as an introduction to the judgments of the seven bowls. Similarly, the opening of heavenly gates precedes judgment in 3 Macc 6:18–19 (tr. M. Hadas, *Maccabees*):

Then the greatly glorious, almighty, and true God, making His countenance manifest, opened the gates of heaven, from which two glorified angels of terrible aspect descended ... [T]hey confronted the forces of their [the Jews'] adversaries, and filled them with confusion and terror, and bound them with immovable fetters.

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 877–878.]

³⁶“The doors that connected the porch or vestibule to the holy place or sanctuary in the temple in Jerusalem were large and heavy (Josephus gives two conflicting reports about their size and how many men it took to open them in Ag. Ap. 2.119 and J. W. 5.202; 6.293) and were reported to have opened by themselves (αὐτομάτως ἡνοιγμένη), interpreted to symbolize either the coming of divine blessings or the impending desolation (J. W. 6.293–96).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 876.]

was about to happen either in the way of blessing or curse from God. Thus for the doors of heaven to open without someone visibly opening them signaled an even greater event about to take place.

The emergence of the seven angels here represents the second appearance of a group of seven angels. In 8:2 and 8:6. When the seventh seal on the scroll was opened by the Lamb seven angels appeared standing before God -- οἱ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἑστήκασιν, 8:2 -- and they were given seven trumpets -- καὶ ἐδόθησαν αὐτοῖς ἑπτὰ σάλπιγγες, 8:2. Perhaps these are the same seven angels, but John doesn't explicitly say this.

What he does say defines them sufficiently for their assignment from God:

1) [οἱ] ἔχοντες τὰς ἑπτὰ πληγὰς, **who possess the seven plagues**. Interestingly the angels already have the divine punishments here labeled as τὰς ἑπτὰ πληγὰς before they are subsequently given the ἑπτὰ φιάλας χρυσᾶς, **seven golden bowls** by one of the four living creatures (v. 7). A πληγή was literally a blow or hit with some kind of instrument causing a serious if not fatal wound. As 11:6 specifies with πάση πληγῇ, it could come in a wide variety of ways. Thus the phrase here takes on the sense of a prior divine authorization to inflict punishments, but subsequent to their appearance there would be the formal authorization for this by one of the four living creatures.

2) ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ, **out of the temple**. This prepositional phrase, although somewhat separated from the verb, non the less modifies the core verb ἐξήλθον, **came out**, as illustrated by the above diagram.

15.6
 And
 460 out came the seven angels,
 | who have...
 of the temple

When the temple doors were opened the seven angels are the first to emerge from their meeting with God.

3) ἐνδεδυμένοι λίνον καθαρὸν λαμπρὸν, **clothed with pure bright linen**. Their dress is described in terms of the clothing used by the priests in the Jerusalem temple.³⁷ Thus the angels were dressed for a priestly

³⁷“The term λίνον, ‘linen,’ occurs only here in Revelation, where it is used of a sacral garment. Elsewhere in Revelation the adjective βύσσινος, ‘made of fine linen’ (from βύσσιος, a loanword from the Semitic languages; see בִּישׁ *bûš* in 2 Chr 2:14[LXX 2:13]; 3:14), occurs five times (18:12, 16; 19:8[2x], 14). Linen garments are worn by priests (Lev 16:4, 23; 1 Sam 2:8). The term בַּד *bad* or בִּדִּים *baddîm* is used of ‘linen garments’ worn by angels (Ezek 9:2, 3, 11; 10:2, 6, 7; Dan 10:5; 12:6, 7). Josephus, in rewriting the section of the Pentateuch dealing with the priests’ garments, mentions the ‘girdle’ (ζώνη) of the high priest (Ant. 3.153–54, 185). According to the Priestly writer, the basic priestly wardrobe consisted of a coat, breeches, girdle, and turban, all of linen (Lev 16:4, 10). In Jos. As. 3:6, the garments of Aseneth are described as a linen robe interwoven with violet and gold and a golden girdle (along

assigned given to them by God.

4) καὶ περιεζωσμένοι περι τὰ στήθη ζώνας χρυσᾶς, **and covered across by golden sashes across their chest**. Interestingly only here are angels wearing a golden sash but in 1:13 Christ is described as ἐνδεδυμένον ποδήρη καὶ περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσᾶν, **clothed with a long robe and wearing across his chest a golden sash**. Gold color is frequently a symbol of divine or heavenly realities. The noun ζώνη can be translated either girdle or sash. In the 8 NT uses the two in Revelation are translated as ‘sash’ while the remaining 6 elsewhere in the NT are rendered as ‘belt’ or ‘girdle.’³⁸

The next scene after the appearance of the angels through the opened doors of the temple comes in verse seven: καὶ ἐν ἓκ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων ἔδωκεν τοῖς ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλοις ἑπτὰ φιάλας χρυσᾶς γεμούσας τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, **Then one of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever**. This scene comes something as an insertion in the opening of heaven sequence in 11:19 where the doors open to reveal the ark of the covenant, and then the presence of ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμὸς καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη, **flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail** take place (ἐγένοντο). This is on par with verse eight when καὶ ἐγεμίσθη ὁ ναὸς καπνοῦ ἐκ τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, **and the temple was filled with smoke out of the glory of God and out of His power**.

The action of one of the living creatures giving the seven angels ἑπτὰ φιάλας χρυσᾶς, **seven golden bowls**, constitutes an open divine commissioning which they had already received inside the temple with the doors closed.³⁹ This ritual reflects such an action as

with golden shoes, jewelry, a tiara, and a veil). The priest of Isis in the Hellenistic period wore linen robes (Plutarch De Iside 352C).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 878.]

38 “*Their breasts girded with golden girdles*: as in 1:13. The Greek word for ‘breasts (or, chests)’ in 1:13 is different from the one used here, but the meaning is the same. NRSV is much better than RSV: ‘golden sashes across their chests’; note NIV and RN-AB ‘gold sashes around their chests.’

“An alternative translation model for verse 6 is:

“The seven angels (or, heavenly messengers) who had the seven punishments came out of the Witness Tent. Each one was wearing a white shining robe, and had a gold colored band (or, sash) across his chest.”

[Robert G. Bratcher and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 227.]

³⁹“This action (ἔδωκεν) constitutes, at least in part, the commissioning and empowerment of the angels; a similar motif precedes the seven seals (6:6–14) and the seven trumpets (8:2, ἐδόθησαν). The author frequently uses individual figures from groups of heavy-

dedication to God and a seeking of divine confirmation.

What was in the bowls is of significant interest: γεμούσας τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, *full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever*. The aorist participle γεμούσας from the verb -- only used here in Revelation -- denotes that some container has been filled to capacity. What that is is specified as τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, *the wrath of God*.

enly courtiers as influential actors in the continuing eschatological saga (5:5; 7:13; 17:1; 21:9). The word φιάλη, usually translated ‘bowl’ (Louw-Nida, § 6.124), must be understood as a cultic utensil and should therefore be translated ‘bowl used in offerings’ (BAGD, 858) or Opferschale (Bauer-Aland, 1711). These libation bowls are mentioned twelve times in Revelation (5:8; 15:7; 16:1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 17; 17:1; 21:9). The cultic use of φιάλαι is attested for Greek religion (Diodorus 4.49.8), where it was used primarily to pour libations of wine. The term is also used in connection with revelatory magic ceremonies, where visions are reflected on the surface of the liquid contained in the bowl (PGM IV.224, 3210; LXII.44, 48). The equivalent Latin term is *patera*, meaning a shallow, broad dish used in libation offerings (OLD, 1308; see Varro *De lingua Latina* 5.122 [LCL tr.]: ‘it is this kind of cup that the magistrate uses in sacrificing to the gods, when he gives wine to the god’). Vergil *Georgics* 2.192 mentions offering wine from golden *pateras* (*qualem pateris libamus et auro*). The Pentateuch mentions ‘libation vessels’ (מִזְרָקֹת *mizraqôt*; מִזְרָק *mizraq* is always translated φιάλη in the LXX; since מִזְרָק *mizraq* is from the verb זָרַק *zaraq*, meaning ‘to toss, splash,’ it means a container from which something is thrown or splashed) in Exod 27:3; 38:3; Num 4:14. Aramaic letters from Jewish officials concerned with the temple at Elephantine reported that their temple was destroyed and the ‘libation vessels of gold and silver’ (מִזְרָקֵי זָהָב וְזֵי כֶסֶפֶא) *wmzraqy. zy zhb. wzy ksp.*) were stolen (Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri*, no. 30, line 12; no. 31, line 11). These were used as containers for flour mixed with oil (Num 7:13, 19, 25, 31), wine (Zech 9:15), and perhaps blood. In Exod 24:6, 8; 29:16, 20; 2 Kgs 16:13, 15, the verb זָרַק *zaraq* is used, though no vessel is specified (see Haran, *Temples*, 216 n. 13). It is probable that animal sacrifices were generally accompanied by libations of wine (Hos 9:4; see Gen 35:14; 2 Kgs 16:13; T. Levi 18:30 [MS e only, printed in de Jonge, *Testaments*, 46–48]; see T. H. Gaster, *IDB* 4:156). *Adam and Eve* 2:2 refers to angels gathered before the Father, ‘some with censers in their hands, and others with harps and bowls and trumpets’ (τινὲς ἔχοντες θυμιατήρια ἐν χειρσὶν αὐτῶν ἄλλοι δὲ κιθάρας καὶ φιάλας καὶ σάλπιγγας). Again in *Adam and Eve* 33:4, ‘I saw golden censers [θυμιατήρια χρυσᾶ] and three bowls [τρεις φιάλας], and behold all the angels with frankincense [λίβανον] and censers [θυμιατήρια] came with haste to the altar of incense [θυσιαστήριον] and blew on it.’ These references indicate that the angels are thought of as heavenly priests possessing cultic instruments and utensils such as harps, libation bowls, censers, and trumpets. Ep. Arist. 33 (see Ant. 12.40) mentions Ptolemy’s gift of fifty talents of gold and seventy talents of silver for the fabrication of ‘mixing bowls, bowls, a table, and libation bowls of gold’ (κρατήρων τε καὶ φιαλῶν καὶ τραπέζης καὶ σπονδειῶν χρυσοῦ). Ep. Arist. 42 reports that twenty gold and thirty silver bowls were constructed, while a description of the ‘golden bowls’ (χρυσᾶς φιάλας) is found in Ep. Arist. 79 (see Ant. 12.82).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 879–880.]

This phrase is found in Revelation at 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1. A more intense expression surfaces at 16:19 and 19:15.

16:19. καὶ Βαβυλῶν ἡ μεγάλη ἐμνήσθη ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ δοῦναι αὐτῇ τὸ ποτήριον τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτοῦ. *God remembered great Babylon and gave her the wine-cup of the fury of his wrath.*

19:15. αὐτὸς πατεῖ τὴν ληνὸν τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ παντοκράτορος, *he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.*

A similar expression to τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, *of the God who lives forever and ever*, shows up in 4:9, τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, *to the One sitting on the throne who lives forever and ever*. The affirmation acknowledges the eternal existence of God. It is this eternal God who has filled the bowls to the limit with His wrath and ordered that it be poured out upon the nations.

The climax of this heavenly commissioning service is described in verse eight: καὶ ἐγεμίσθη ὁ ναὸς καπνοῦ ἐκ τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὸν ναὸν ἄχρι τελεσθῶσιν αἱ ἑπτὰ πληγαὶ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλων, *and 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 ended.*

First upon completion of the commissioning of the seven angels, the temple was filled with smoke.⁴⁰ In

40 “Here ‘smoke’ is a theophanic image based on the combination of the metaphorical significance of smoke in the Sinai tradition with the meaning of the cloud of incense smoke that filled the holy place during the time when incense was burned on the altar of incense in front of the *dēbîr* (holy of holies), as in Lev 16:2 (the Priestly writer): ‘I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat’ (see Lev 16:12–13; m. Yoma 5). The motif of the cloud or smoke as a theophany of Yahweh, or as a reaction to such a theophany, sometimes accompanied by the quaking of the earth, is found in Exod 19:18; Pss 18:7–9; 104:32; Isa 6:4. In Isa 6:4, in the theophany that was part of the narrative of Isaiah’s prophetic call, ‘the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke [LXX ὁ οἶκος ἐπλήσθη καπνοῦ],’ though the suggestion that more of Isa 6 is present thematically both in this context and in that of Rev 4:8 is overdrawn (see Fekkes, *Isaiah*, 146–47). There is a close association between the glory of Yahweh (יהוה כבוד *kēbôd YHWH*) and the cloud of smoke in Isa 6:1–4 (clearly a cultic context). According to Exod 24:16 (part of the Sinai pericope), ‘The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days.’ Clouds and thick darkness surround Yahweh, according to Ps 97:2, and Ps 97:8 suggests that this is not at Sinai but at Mount Zion. According to 1 Kgs 8:10–12 (RSV),

And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord. Then Solomon said, “The Lord has set

the background here lies first the smoke coming up from the altar of incense in front of the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem temple. The smoke drifted into this inner sanctuary where God was present and completely filled it so that no one could enter. With John's language here stands also the smoke that surrounded the top of Mt. Sinai when Moses received the Law from God in the Exodus (Lev. 16:12-13). The theophanic language here matches that in 11:19b and links even further 11:19 and 15:5-8.

The second part of this climatic scene underscores the extent of God's presence and blessing upon this commissioning ritual: *καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὸν ναὸν ἄχρι τελεσθῶσιν αἱ ἑπτὰ πληγαὶ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλων*, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were ended. God becomes unapproachable during the time of the infliction of punishment of the wicked with the seven bowls of wrath.⁴¹

the sun in the heavens, but has said that he would dwell in thick darkness.”

“All of these passages (see Nielsen, *Incense*, 81–84) suggest a close connection between the theophanic cloud of smoke and the temple in Jerusalem. In Rev 8:4 the smoke of the incense burned by the angel goes up before God. Here in 15:8 (following the logic of the narrative), the smoke that fills the heavenly temple would be that produced by the incense burned by the angels on the golden altar of incense. The revelation at Sinai was accompanied by the theophanic phenomena of thunder, lightning, the sound of the shofar or ram's horn trumpet, and a heavy cloud covering the mountain (Exod 19:16). In Exod 19:18, the emphasis is on the heavy smoke, ‘because the Lord descended upon it in fire,’ and upon the quaking of the mountain. According to Exod 34:5, ‘the Lord descended in the cloud.’ The Sinai pericope appears to have been shaped by projecting the incense cloud of the temple back into the period of the wilderness wandering (Nielsen, *Incense*, 85). This notion is related to the tradition that Yahweh was thought present in the pillar of cloud; see Exod 40:34–35, a passage that was undoubtedly shaped by the later burning of incense in the temple in Jerusalem:

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting [τὴν σκηνὴν τοῦ μαρτυρίου], and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle [καὶ δόξης κυρίου ἐπλήσθη ἡ σκηνή]. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting [καὶ οὐκ ἠδυνάσθη Μωυσῆς εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν σκηνὴν τοῦ μαρτυρίου], because the cloud abode upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. (RSV)

“It is clear that Rev 15:5–8 alludes to both Exod 40:34–35 and 1 Kgs 8:10–12.”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 880–881.]

⁴¹“The aorist passive of *τελεῖν*, ‘complete,’ which occurs both here and in v 1b, forms an inclusio for vv 1–8, a unit that constitutes an introductory heavenly court scene of the kind used in Revelation as a prelude to God's action on earth (4:1–5:14; 8:2–5). This is an allusion to the common features of an anecdote, narrated in three versions in the OT, that relates that the glory of God so filled the house of God that Moses or the priests were unable to enter. The first narrative pertains to the erection and furnishing of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting in Exod 40:16–38. When these tasks were completed, it is said that a cloud covered the tent of meeting (Exod 40:34–35).

Why this is so John does not say. Instead, in his vision he realized that during this period one should keep his distance from the all powerful God inflicting punishments upon the wicked of the earth.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

What can we learn from this passage? As John

“A very similar account is narrated in two versions in connection with the much more elaborate story of the dedication of the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 8:1–66 = 2 Chr 5:1–7:10). The dedication of Solomon's temple focused on the procession that brought the ark into the holy of holies. When this task was completed, an anecdote very similar to the one in Exod 40:34–35 is narrated in 1 Kgs 8:10–11 (quoted in Comment on v 8a). The parallel account in 2 Chr 5:11–14 is very similar, though greatly expanded by additional material in vv 12–13. However, when the Chronicler concludes the great dedicatory prayer of king Solomon (2 Chr 6:12–42), he inserts a variant of the account in 2 Chr 5:11–14:

When Solomon had ended his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house. (2 Chr 7:1–2, RSV)

“These brief narratives of the inability of certain people to enter the house of God because the cloud and the glory of God (Exod 40:34–35; 1 Kgs 8:10–11), or the glory of God alone (2 Chr 7:1–2), filled the sanctuary occurs in just four OT passages, and in each passage the event has a very positive connotation. The allusion to these passages in Rev 15:8, however, is primarily negative since it deals with the infliction of plagues on the people of the world. In part this negative use of anecdotes in the OT with positive connotations is signaled by the substitution of ‘smoke’ for ‘cloud’ in v 8a, for unlike ‘cloud,’ ‘smoke’ is used as a metaphor for divine judgment (Deut 29:20; 2 Sam 22:9 = Ps 18:8; Isa 9:18–21; 34:10; 65:5–6; see Comment on 15:8a). But why does the author insist that no one can enter the heavenly temple until the seven bowl plagues have been dispensed? The most widely held view among commentators is that God is temporarily unapproachable because his presence has become a presence of wrath and judgment (Bousset [1906] 395; Behm, 89; Lohmeyer, 132; Lohse, 90; Roloff [ET] 185). A second view, which emphasizes the OT parallels discussed above (Exod 40:34–35; 1 Kgs 8:10–11 = 2 Chr 5:11–14; 2 Chr 7:1–2), argues that God is temporarily unapproachable because of the full manifestation of his majesty and power (Beckwith, 679; Beasley-Murray, 238). A third view is that, since the time of final judgment has now arrived, it is too late for an angelic mediator (as in 5:8 and 8:3) to present prayers of intercession to God to save the world (Charles, 2:40; Mounce, 290). The weakness of this view is that the prayers presented to God by the angel in 8:3 are probably intended to be understood as prayers asking for divine vengeance as in 6:10–11.

“The motif of the impossibility or even the danger of approaching God when he manifests his presence in a particularly powerful manner is also integral to the story of Israel at Sinai. According to Exod 19:9, 16, God's presence was manifest in a thick cloud, and no one could touch the mountain under penalty of death (19:12–13). The theophanic function of the cloud in a cultic context is found in Lev 16:2, where Aaron is forbidden to enter the holy of holies when God appears in a cloud upon the mercy seat.”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 881–882.]

links through the blowing of the seventh trumpet the work of the seven angels pouring out God's wrath upon the wicked in the final round of temporal judgments, we catch a glimpse of the developing intensity of these punishments across the span of human history to the very climatic end. The developing evil among humanity triggers greater wrath poured out upon it at the very end.

The wicked live in perpetual rebellion against God and feel that the longer they rebel the less likely God will punish them. But just the opposite is the reality. More rebellion generates more divine wrath. It is a fatal mistake to think that one can sin and 'get away with it.' Such never ever happens with God. The pagan world of John's day was convinced of this and discovered it to be completely wrong.

And this doesn't take into consideration at all the final day of judgment that John previewed for his readers in the harvest day image of 14:14-20. His subsequent depictions under different images in chapters nineteen and twenty underscore the eternal nature of this punishment in Hell for everyone connected to evil and Satan.

God's people in heaven typically celebrate just prior to the unleashing of God's wrath on evil and evil people. This is the consistent pattern for all the recordings of the songs from chapter four to the end of the book. But they are not celebrating gaining revenge upon those who did evil to them on earth. To the contrary, heaven has taught them a different perspective. They celebrate the holiness of God as described in vv. 5-8 and that a holy God will not tolerate evil and evil actions. All humanity are held intensely accountable and will suffer the wrath of God both in this world and especially in the world to come. Only in this way is God truly holy and just. To do otherwise would be to compromise the essence of His being.

This we must never forget!

**ὅτι ὁ μόνος ὁσῖος,
ὅτι πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἤξουσιν
καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιόν σου,
ὅτι τὰ δικαιώματά σου ἐφανερώθησαν.**

**for You alone are holy,
for all nations will come
and worship before You,
for Your righteous judgments will be revealed.**