

## God'S Sea Of Glass (Part 2)

Mingled With Fire

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In my last sermon, I described to you how the sea of glass represents and reflects God's holiness, purity, peace, calmness, cleanness, and clarity. God is a God of righteousness who demands righteous living from His people. In this second and final sermon on the sea of glass, we will continue with that and add more about what is required of us, if we want to be worthy to stand on that sea. Also, what is the meaning of the fire mingled with the sea of glass?

Let us look at the scene of Moses' vision of the throne of God.

**Exodus 24:1-8** Now He said to Moses, "Come up to the LOORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. And Moses alone shall come near the LOORD, but they shall not come near; nor shall the people go up with him." So Moses came and told the people all the words of the LOORD and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the LOORD has said we will do." And Moses wrote all the words of the LOORD. And he rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LOORD. And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LOORD has said we will do, and be obedient." And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the LOORD has made with you according to all these words."

It is interesting that, four times in this context, "all these words" is mentioned. We see there the importance of the Word of God and how it impacts us. We have here a description of the marriage covenant of Israel to God. The people agree to live according to "all these words." They promised to live by the word of God.

When the church is resurrected, there will be the marriage of Christ and the church, and there will be a new covenant at that time. It will be a marriage covenant for all eternity. The ratification of this covenant with Moses, the Israelites with God, was a type of that

future marriage covenant between the church and Jesus Christ.

The covenant that we are under now we renew every year with the bread and wine and foot-washing during Passover services. Christ does not have to renew it because He gave His life. That is why He said that He would not eat of the bread or drink of the wine. He referred to the bread of Passover. He may have eaten bread later, but that was not in the covenant ceremony of the Passover. He is described as eating bread and fish for breakfast with His disciples, but that is in the way of physical sustenance. He is not going to drink of the fruit of the vine until in the Kingdom. He will drink the wine of the marriage ceremony when the church is married to Christ.

Moses, Aaron and his sons, and seventy of the elders partake in what the peace offering (mentioned in verse 5) signifies: fellowship and spiritual union in the presence of God.

Let us look at what is called "the sea of glass." On Mount Sinai, the elders of Israel saw a vision of the God of Israel, and there was something interesting under his feet: a clear pavement.

**Exodus 24:9-10** Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity.

The description focuses on the fact that the men saw the God of Israel and remained unharmed.

Why is this so important? Because according to Exodus 33:20, "no man shall see Me and live."

**Exodus 33:20-23** But He said, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live." And the LORD said, "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen."

The "seeing" in Exodus 24:10 was something different from that of Exodus 33:20 and

23, which may denote a partial, as opposed to a full and complete, vision of God. The description of the clear surface that they saw under his feet, in Exodus 24:10, may indicate that this is all they saw of God. It may be that all they saw was a reflection of the image of God, or it may be that this was just a vision in their minds only and not literal.

When Exodus 24:10 says that the four leaders and the seventy elders "saw God," this does not mean that they beheld God in His essential being or the way that He is in His fullest, because this is not possible for humans. John 1:18 says, "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." The knowledge of God that we have in Jesus Christ is real just as sight is real. It is not complete, but it is genuine and true knowledge. Therefore, in one sense, we see the Father by observing the way and teachings of Jesus Christ who represents and is one with the Father.

The seventy-four men saw some of God's glory, and they probably saw the throne of God on the sapphire pavement, but the true glory of God was hidden from them. You may remember, from my last sermon, that we read a similar description in Ezekiel 1:26: "And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it."

**Exodus 24:10** And they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity.

*Clarity* is translated from the Hebrew word *tohar* (to'-har) which signifies, literally, "brightness or purity." Thus, there is a sea of glass or a pavement of a blue color that has the appearance of glass. Moses probably saw God's reflection in the sea of glass. He would certainly have been in a position of bowing.

God came down to the mountain so that they could see a muted likeness, or reflection, of His glory but not look directly at Him. They saw the outline of Him, but they could not see Him clearly. Verse 17 tells us that the glory of the Lord seemed like a consuming fire in a cloud that covered the mountain. Then, they had a special ceremony and a meal, there commemorating the marriage of Israel to God.

This covenant between God and ancient Israel was only a shadow of what was to come. It was only an inferior covenant that Israel was unable to keep, because of her human

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nature and the enmity that exists between man and God. However, under the New Covenant, we have been given the means, through the indwelling of God's Spirit, to keep this covenant on a spiritual level. If we are faithful to this spiritual marriage covenant, we will be taken by the angels to the sea of glass before the throne of God. I am pretty certain that this will happen soon after our resurrection. Where else would we go but to God's throne to worship Him as soon as we are made into spirit beings? That will probably be one of the first things that we do after being resurrected as spirit beings.

**Matthew 24:31** And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

What is going to happen to us when the trumpet sounds?

**I Corinthians 15:51-52** Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

This will be an exciting and overwhelming moment for every one of us. I Thessalonians 4 and I Corinthians 15 talk about the first resurrection. We will be caught up in the air to meet Christ. We will be raised and brought to the sea of glass in front of God. Revelation 19 describes what is most important about our attire at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

**Revelation 19:6-9** And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."

What is required of each Christian before he is allowed to stand on the sea of glass before God's throne? Righteousness! Right living! It will be the righteousness of Jesus Christ. We are given the Holy Spirit so that we can do our part in developing that

righteous life.

Matthew 19:16-22, has been called the story of the "rich young ruler." He may have been a religious lay leader, quite possibly a Pharisee (because of the diligence he displays in following the law).

**Matthew 19:16-17** Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."

We could add to that, if you want to stand on the sea of glass, keep all of God's commandments. It is not that we earn that right or that opportunity to stand on the sea of glass; it is a complete gift. We do have to do our part, and that is to keep all of God's commandments.

**Matthew 19:20** He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?"

Most likely he was only keeping the letter of the law, because you need God's Holy Spirit to keep the spirit of the law.

**Matthew 19:21** Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

Jesus is basically telling him, "Get rid of all your idols, all of those things that are distracting your worship of Me."

**Matthew 19:22** But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

There was nothing wrong with the possessions themselves, but apparently he had

accumulated more than he should have.

After addressing Jesus as Teacher, a title of respect, he asks what good deed he must do to have eternal life. *Eternal life* is virtually synonymous with the expression *entering the kingdom of heaven*, and this is the first occurrence of this expression in Matthew.

Obedience to the law is an expression of belief in the truly good God, who is the source of all good, including eternal life. Salvation is a gift of God's grace, not something earned. There are minimum requirements in fulfilling God's law that we must do if we want to meet the criteria for God's kingdom. As human beings, we all have our moments of sin, and we are forgiven through genuine repentance. It is the habitual sins, the ones that we keep doing over and over again, that we should be worried about and work to overcome.

We have to love God first and foremost, and then we have to love our family, friends, acquaintances, and even our enemies by keeping God's commands, statutes and ordinances. This requirement must be known and should be understood by all members of God's church. As members of God's church, we spend a lifetime learning what we should be doing and trying to overcome what we should not be doing.

The rich young ruler implies that he has kept not only the commandments mentioned but also the entire law, which they represent. He views his obedience to the law as complete, but he still senses that something is lacking, and that is why he asks Christ, "What else is there that I need to do?"

Jesus knows that the man's wealth has become his means to personal identity, power, and a sense of meaning in his life. This has become the idolatrous god of his life. Jesus' approach is to turn this man from focusing on external conformity to the law to examining his heart, revealing what truly is the ruling god in his life.

The man had no doubt given some money to the poor, since the giving of alms was considered a moral duty, especially among the Pharisees. However, Jesus calls him to give everything away, exchanging the god of wealth for the eternal treasure found in following Christ. Even though he wants "eternal life," the young man cannot bring himself to stop worshiping the ruling force in his life, his great possessions. Wealth is both deceptive and intoxicating: it fools a person into thinking that he or she is self-sufficient apart from God, and the rich person wants desperately to hold on to that supposed self-sufficiency.

We are in very tough economic times and certainly we want to do our part preparing for

what is coming, but we cannot put our reliance on the things that we put aside to protect or feed our family. We have to understand that we can do our part, but God is the one who is going to ultimately protect and provide for us. For the wealthy to shift their primary allegiance to God is humanly impossible, but with God all things are possible, as evidenced by the conversions of rich men like Joseph of Arimathea and Zacchaeus.

Matthew 19:18 commands, "You shall not steal," if you want eternal life. Let us take some time to look at this requirement of God's law regarding "not stealing." In his temple sermon, the prophet Jeremiah warned Jerusalem against using the temple "which is called by my name," while practicing theft, murder, adultery. For God's chosen people to steal would be a violation of His covenant with them. By keeping the eighth commandment, "You shall not steal," Israel witnessed to its faith in and loyalty to God.

**Jeremiah 7:8-11** "Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations'? Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," says the LOORD.

Here is Jeremiah's warning to Israel, directly from God . Apparently, they were stealing in various ways.

Ultimately, God will judge all sinners who have rebelled against His law, but He will start with Israel because she was given God's Law first. It is a divine principle that judgment begins with God's people.

Zechariah writes to give a warning and encouragement of God's offer and promise to Jerusalem (which as we know is a code word for the church). The Lord tells Zechariah to tell the church that, if she returns to Him, He will return to her. This is by extension, because he is speaking directly to Israel in his writing. God invites His people to renew their commitment to Him. I am not saying that the church is awfully sinful or anything like that, but I am saying that sin always separates people from God. Any time we do sin, even if it is inadvertently or we do not mean to, and then we repent, there is still a sense of separation from God. We certainly want to overcome sin, and get rid of that separation.

The Lord promised that God's people would be full of the abundance of the gifts of God

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and His grace. God would restore, expand, and secure them under His protection. There is a reverse side to all of this in that, if they did not take God up on His offer, His judgments would be on those who reject all His mercies.

**Zechariah 5:1-2** Then I turned and raised my eyes, and saw there a flying scroll. And he said to me, "What do you see?" So I answered, "I see a flying scroll. Its length is twenty cubits and its width ten cubits."

This sixth vision is of a gigantic scroll, 30 feet by 15 feet, flying in mid-air. It could not be missed. The dimensions are those of a large billboard, suggesting that the scroll is unrolled so that its fearful contents may be easily read. Its flight signifies the very swift coming of punishment, and its flying from heaven signifies that the sentence came from the judgment-seat above.

**Zechariah 5:3** Then he said to me, "This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole earth: 'Every thief shall be expelled,' according to this side of the scroll; and, 'Every perjurer [or liar] shall be expelled,' according to that side of it."

The scroll is a covenant document, written on both sides, like the tablets Moses received from the Lord. Those tablets given to Moses were the Ten Commandments, of course.

**Exodus 32:15-16** And Moses turned and went down from the mountain, and the two tablets of the Testimony were in his hand. The tablets were written on both sides; on the one side and on the other they were written. Now the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets.

The purpose of this scroll is to bring the covenant curses to bear on covenant-breakers, using as representative examples everyone who steals and everyone who swears falsely.

**Zechariah 5:4** "I will send out the curse," says the LORD of hosts; "It shall enter the house of the thief and the house of the one who swears falsely by My name. It shall remain in the midst of his house and consume it, with its timber and stones."

Theft is a sin that carries a severe curse with it. It is the breaking of the eighth commandment: "You shall not steal." All covenant breakers will be cleaned out from God's church according to His covenant. The curse will enter the house of the covenant-breaker and consume it, no matter what spiritual building materials have been used in leading and training the family. Apparently, the curse is that if someone is a thief, then that will bring destruction upon his home.

I am pretty sure it would also be that a person who was a thief would always struggle with employment. I am not implying at all that someone who has struggled his whole life with unemployment or is struggling now is a thief. I am just saying that apparently this seems to be a curse that comes along with it. God tests us in various ways. Sometimes we are just out of work, and God wants us to learn lessons.

This scroll represented the law of God, which brings a curse on all who disobey it. That includes all of us; nobody can fully obey God's law without God's Holy Spirit. We are so thankful that we have the blood of Christ by which we are able to be forgiven. For that matter, the law was never given to save people but to reveal that people need to be saved, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Here in Zechariah, out of Ten Commandments, God selected the two that forbid stealing and swearing falsely. These sins were especially prevalent among the Jewish remnant at that time. Many of the Jewish people were not faithful in their giving to God; they were robbing Him of tithes and offerings and then lying about it. Also, in their business dealings, they cheated one another. Ultimately, God will judge all sinners who have rebelled against His law; but He will start with Israel, the people who had God's law. Judgment begins with God's people.

The Lord announced that the scroll of His law would visit the individual homes in the land and judge those who were deliberately disobeying God. *Expelled*, in verse 3, means "cutoff or removed from the covenant community." Thieves were to be expelled from Israel, cut off from the church, and refused entry into the kingdom of God. Ironically, the curse for stealing enters the houses like a thief itself, or a plague unannounced, and brings destruction.

Hosea pointed out that while there is no faithfulness, kindness, and knowledge of God in the land, swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and adultery existed in abundance. This sounds like this society today! The prophet Haggai rebuked them for putting their own interests ahead of the Lord's work (Haggai 1:1-11). Malachi tells us that as an evidence of wholehearted repentance, God promises that if His people become faithful in

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presenting the full tithe, God's full tenth, then the desperately-needed rain will come, pestilence and crop failure will cease, and the promise to Abraham that "all nations will call you blessed" will be fulfilled. That promise goes to the physical nation, but it is fulfilled, in the spiritual sense, in our lives as members of God's church.

The tithes were given to support the priests and Levites, whose ministry was essential if Israel was to be faithful to its calling. Also, the second tithe was kept for the attendance of the Feast, and a tithe was to be given every three years on a seven-year cycle for the poor and the needy.

**Malachi 3:8-10** "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it."

We see in this nation the curse that is coming financially, because there is a lack of tithing fully.

Because the Israelites did not render God's tithes and offerings, they were cursed in famine and poverty. *Famine* generally means "severe shortages." Because they did not give tithes and offerings to the Levites, the Lord said that He Himself suffered fraud when His ministers, constrained by hunger and poverty, deserted the temple. In ancient Israel, the people were not tithing; therefore, there was no way of supporting the priesthood, and the priesthood ended up just going off and getting other jobs and leaving the people with no one to teach God's ways to them. The nation declined very rapidly into chaos and was eventually overtaken and conquered. This sinful negligence of withholding God's tithes and offerings may have seemed justified because of crop failure, drought, pestilence and famine, and shortage of work; but God reveals that these natural disasters were not the cause of the nation's disobedience but the cursed result.

**Matthew 6:24** "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

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Nevertheless, God is merciful! He promises abundance to those who obey Him by giving Him back his tithes and offerings.

**Malachi 3:10** "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this," says the LOORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it."

These blessings come in both physical/material and spiritual/understanding forms.

By saying, "try me now," or "put me to the test," God is challenging the people to give the tithe that they owe Him and then watch to see if He would be faithful to His promise. God promises to meet all our needs—but not necessarily all our "greeds"—and to pour down on us blessings until there is no more need.

On the spiritual level, God's church will be judged first. This judgment will occur before Christ establishes God's kingdom on earth. This judgment is happening now. These bad economic times are tests on God's people as to our faithfulness in tithing and dedication to God's way of life.

All the commandments, including "You shall not steal," are summed up and fulfilled in the words, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Peter included the admonition that, while Christians can expect to suffer for the name of Christ, they should not suffer as murderers, thieves, wrongdoers, or mischief-makers.

**I Peter 4:12-17** Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

Simply put, no thief or robber will inherit God's kingdom.

**I Corinthians 6:9-10** Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

In verse 9, we see Paul's third reminder, "Do you not know..." meaning it is inconceivable that a member of God's church would not know better.

**I Corinthians 6:2-3** Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?

This illustrates the gap that existed between the Corinthians' future spiritual position and their present fleshly practice of breaking the commandments. The unrighteous would not have any share in God's future kingdom because they were not Christ-like. One day, the unrighteous will be judged by the saints on the basis of their works, which will condemn them. The problem Paul saw in the Corinthian brethren is that the saints are acting no differently than those they are to judge in the future. Will a saint rob God in tithes and offerings? Not if he wants to be able to stand on the sea of glass before God's throne and receive a new righteous name. No habitual thief can call himself a saint.

**Revelation 22:14** Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life [and the Kingdom of God], and may enter through the gates into the city [Jerusalem].

Those who have given up the god of their lives to obey God the Father and follow Christ's example will receive abundant reward and will inherit eternal life. Eternal life (which is a gift) is an inheritance, not an earned reward. This devotion and submission and obedience to God that we call "conversion" is a long process that requires patient endurance.

**Revelation 14:12-15** Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them." Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on

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the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe."

The Harvester takes a sickle and cuts the grain, and then He gathers it. The angels gather it and take the firstfruits to the sea of glass before God. The rest of the chapter talks about the harvest of the wicked. You do not want to be in that harvest.

In the vision of heaven in Revelation 4:6 and 15:2, the likeness of a "glassy sea" is seen in front of the throne of God. The pure translucency of the sea is indicated in the words *like crystal*. Its fiery appearance is suggested in Revelation 15:2, by the words *mingled with fire*. On the sea stood the victorious martyrs with harps in their hands, singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb.

**Revelation 15:1-2** Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete. And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.

That is what it looked like. It was created out of spirit and shone very brightly. We see here that those of us who have spiritual victory over the beast and all it represents will stand on the sea of glass. Also, of course, God's throne and His temple are also there with the sea of glass.

The cycle of bowls containing the seven last plagues, in which God's wrath on rebels is completed, is preceded by a scene of celebratory worship that is offered by the saints who share the Lamb's victory. The harps of God and the song of the Lamb seem to indicate that this choir is the same as the 144,000 saints who appeared with the Lamb before God's throne in Revelation 7:1-8 and Revelation 14:1-5.

**Revelation 14:1-4** Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard

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the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins.

Remember this has a spiritual application as well, these are those who are not defiled by other churches, or nations, or systems that are on earth.

**Revelation 14:5** These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.

As human beings, we cannot become totally sinless, but it will be God who wipes away both our sins and our tears. Here are the 144,000, with the Father's name on their foreheads identifying them as His Family, standing on the Mount of Olives after they had been standing on the sea of glass in front of God's throne.

In contrast to a picture of peace on the sea of glass, in the front of God's throne, the sea is said to be "mingled with fire." What is that all about? God's throne is a spectacularly dynamic throne, described in various scriptures as flaming with fire; flashing and crashing with lightning and thunder; and dazzlingly white, with brightness everywhere.

**Revelation 15:1** Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete.

Like the woman and the dragon of Revelation 12:1-3, these angels signify another turning point in the war between Christ and Satan: the completion of God's triumph and the destruction of His enemies.

**Revelation 15:2** And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.

The portion of the sea that seemed to be crystal-glass stands for justice and holiness in biblical imagery, while in this case, intermingled with that image, is the image of just anger or righteous indignation, represented by the portion that was fiery. There is far more to it than that, though. Fire in Scripture represents the impending judgment of God, and it also signifies cleansing and refining and even protection for God's people.

Let us look at how the imagery of fire is used in Scripture. Notice how God often reveals Himself. In Exodus 3:2, God makes Himself known to Moses "in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush." Later, in Exodus 19:18, God descends upon Mount Sinai "in fire." There is thunder, and it encourages us to think of the lightning that comes with it. In Ezekiel, the prophet sees "a storm wind" come "out of the north, and a great cloud," with "brightness round about it," and fire flashing forth continually.

**Ezekiel 1:4** Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself; and brightness was all around it and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire.

Ezekiel tries to describe the indescribable form on the divine throne:

**Ezekiel 1:26-28** And above the firmament over their heads was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it. Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around. Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. So when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of One speaking.

If the glory of God Himself appears as fire, so do the things around Him; they reflect His glory. Described in scripture, His throne appears like "fiery flames," its wheels "burning fire." His angelic servants are "flames of fire." Between the cherubim are fire and coals of fire. A lot of fire is used in this type of imagery.

In front of God's throne is a "sea of glass mingled with fire." Symbolically, as a physical type, the cast metal sea in Solomon's temple was made of polished bronze; and when

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the light shone on it from the torches in the temple, there was a flickering effect reflecting from the polished bronze sea. I think it was 15 feet in diameter and 7.5 feet tall.

In heaven, the "seven spirits of God" are "torches of fire." Heavenly chariots are made of fire. Even the eyes of the glorified Jesus Christ and other heavenly beings are like flames of fire. In Acts 2:3-4, the Holy Spirit is also associated with fire.

The *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* describes fire compared to God this way:

Just as fire lights up the blackness of night, so does God overcome the dark powers of evil. Just as fire is mysterious and immaterial, so too, is God enigmatic and incorporeal. And just as fire is always flickering and changing its shape and cannot be held for examination, so is God always the indefinable in human terms.

Basically, His glory is beyond our comprehension with our human minds.

Notice how God uses fire for His own purposes. Fire represents God's desire to destroy sin and to purify his people.

**Isaiah 6:6-7** Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged."

Being tested by God is like being purified by fire

God appears as fire for many reasons. Similar to the way all physical life depends on the fire that is the sun, so does all spiritual life depend on God.

**Revelation 16:8-9** Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory.

God's word is fire in that it destroys.

**Jeremiah 5:14** Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts: "Because you speak this word, behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them."

Just as fire both purifies and destroys, so does God purify the righteous and destroy the wicked—"for our God is a consuming fire." Prophecies of destruction by fire are often simply figurative ways of saying that God's judgment is sure or thorough. The association of fire with wrath and the fact that God sometimes destroys the wicked by raining fire down on them make it natural for judgment to be depicted as fire. II Thessalonians says that the Lord Jesus will be revealed "from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire."

**II Thessalonians 1:6-8** Since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is something else that appears to be like fire and lightning. This may help explain the fire mingled with the sea of glass. The movement of the angels often resembles flashes of fire and lightning.

**Ezekiel 1:13-14** As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches going back and forth among the living creatures. The fire was bright, and out of the fire went lightning. And the living creatures ran back and forth, in appearance like a flash of lightning.

This may be what is seen mingled with the sea of glass. As we stand on the sea of glass will the angels appear as torches of fire and flashes of lightning? It appears so!

**Revelation 15:2** And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.

This happens just before the bowl judgments of the seven last plagues of God's wrath are poured out on the earth. The sea of glass mingled with fire appears to have the seven angels who are about to pour out the seven last plagues actively preparing to carry out the Lord God Almighty's true and righteous judgments against the wicked inhabitants of the earth.

When God's Kingdom is established on earth, fire is not destructive. Isaiah prophesies that there will be over Mount Zion "a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night."

**Isaiah 4:2-5** In that day the Branch of the LOORD shall be beautiful and glorious; and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing for those of Israel who have escaped. And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem. When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning, then the LOORD will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering.

This prophecy bears in mind the pillar of fire of the Exodus. Also, an example of God's fiery protection is seen in the miracle to protect Elisha in II Kings 6:17, "And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." Also, in Zechariah 2:5, God promises, "For I,' says the Lord, 'will be a wall of fire all around her [Jerusalem, the Church], and I will be the glory in her midst." God protects His people with fire. This may be a reference to the "place of safety"—the place of final training.

**Revelation 15:2** And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God.

The calm, glass-like sea before God's throne is never stormy; nevertheless, it is interfused with flames at this time. The sea is reflecting the counsels of God, His purposes of righteousness and love which are often fathomless, but never obscure, always the same though sometimes glowing with holy anger—this too is represented by the flames.

**Revelation 15:3-4** They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested."

The "song of Moses" (Exodus 15:1-18) points to the song of victory sung by Moses and the Israelites after their passage through the Red Sea. This song may be the one sung on the sea of glass. It is referring to the Red Sea crossing that spiritually symbolizes the process of salvation from God's calling to our baptism, overcoming, leaving sin behind, and entering God's kingdom.

The ancient "song of Moses" is fulfilled in the future "song of the Lamb," which tells of a greater redemption of a new kingdom of priests: the bride of Christ. Essentially, this song pictures the majesty, holiness, and purity of God. A later song of Moses praised the Lord whose ways are just. That song of Moses is found in Deuteronomy 32:1-43 (note especially verse 4).

**Revelation 15:5-6** After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands.

There we are on the sea of glass. The throne of God is there, and we see the seven angels come out and get the seven bowls for the seven last plagues. God gives us the blessing of His promise that He said that we would see His vengeance. It appears here that we will be standing on that sea of glass when those angels head out to give those seven last plagues. This is how it appears to me, but it is speculation. Keep that in mind.

Christ revealed to the apostle John that there will be no more sea. What is that all about? After the Great White Throne Judgment, there is no longer an earthly sea, which seems to indicate in symbol that there will be no more threatening attempts against the creation and sovereignty of God.

**Revelation 21:1** Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more

[earthly] sea.

Today, the seas and oceans occupy about three-fourths of the surface of the globe and, of course, to that extent prevent the world from being totally occupied by people, except by the comparatively small number that are mariners. In the present physical state of things, these vast oceans are necessary to make the world a fit habitat for human beings, as well as to give life to the innumerable species of animals that find their homes in salt water. As you know, the movement of the moon causes the tides of the sea to increase and decrease.

The earthly sea is a symbol of the seething nations of the world and of the troubled lives of the unrighteous. This is why the apostle John spoke of the glorious new heaven and new earth as a place in which "there was no more sea." The phrase *no more sea* does not mean "no more water." It simply indicates that the new earth will have a different arrangement or consistency as far as water is concerned. Keep in mind that the new heaven and the new earth are spiritual. No doubt, we as saints and kings and priests in the family of God will be assisting if not creating, because God is a creating God . He is not going to stop with the creation that we know of here, but, with us, He will continue to create things in the universe.

In the future state, the present physical ecosystem will be unnecessary; spirit beings do not have physical restrictions for inhabiting the new earth. Also, immense bodies of water will be unnecessary. Whatever the details of God's creation of the new heavens and new earth, in general, these descriptive images point out great changes in the universe. It is a change from physical to spiritual.

This new creation is described as a totally new heaven and a new earth and not the present heaven and earth renovated. This is made clear by the additional statement, "for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away." This earth on which we live now will be renovated, in a sense, during the Millennium, but this is after the Great White Throne Judgment.

Very little information is given about the new heaven and the new earth, but one major additional fact is stated in this verse: Not only had the first heaven and earth been wiped away, there was no longer any earthly sea. When we look out over a churning sea or ocean, it is very easy to see its power and relentless pushing at its boundaries, all the time eroding away whatever it pushes and pulls against. In this, we see in symbol the effects of sin on our own lives. Sin hits every bit as hard, as shockingly, and as destructively as a rogue wave. A rogue wave gives no warning, but it is devastating

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when it comes, as is Satan's influence and sin.

As beautiful as the earthly seas and oceans are, they are deceptively destructive. As useful as they appear, they carry with them terrifying danger (people drown, ships sink, tidal waves wipe out coastal communities, and hurricanes gain their power from them). As enticing as the many entertainment and sporting activities offered by them are, they are potentially watery graves.

God's forgiveness and salvation are portrayed as casting sin into the depths of the sea.

**Micah 7:18-19** Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

This has a positive cleansing effect, destroying the poison of sin permanently. Not only is sin conquered and destroyed but also, apparently, the place it is cast also ceases to exist. In this we see the totality and finality of God's judgment, His mercy, and His love, from which eternal peace will come.

In contrast to the perpetual unrest and chaos seen in the earthly sea, the sea of glass at God's throne reflects and symbolizes God's holiness and purity, peace and calmness, and His purposes of righteousness and love.

**Revelation 22:1-5** And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

The message of the biblical image of the sea of glass is that the Eternal is the God of holiness Who demands righteous living from His people. To righteous people, He will abundantly give eternal life and peace. It may very well be that this will begin when we

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stand on that sea of glass before His glorious throne with God sitting there in all His majesty!

May God help us to live our lives in a way that pleases Him, in obedience, submission, and righteousness, so that we may come and stand on the sea of glass before His throne, to share in His glory! What an exciting, breathtaking, and awesome time that will be. I do not know about you, but I do not think that I will be able to stand at that point.

MGC/pp-sl/klg