

THE UNVEILING

Session 11

The Song and the Bowls

Revelation 15–16

A Fourteen-Session Inductive Study for Young Adults

Just and true are thy ways, O King of the ages! (Revelation 15:3, RSV2CE)

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group stands beside the sea of glass with the conquerors of the beast and discovers that they are singing the oldest victory song in Scripture: the song of Moses, now the song of Moses and of the Lamb; the study's Exodus thread resolves in full view. Then the seven bowls: Egypt's plagues no longer in warning thirds but full, and a voice from the altar declaring the judgments true and just: the martyrs' how long?, by the book's deliberate echo, answered.

Catholic Touchstone. The Church has always read the Exodus as the map of salvation: the sea crossing prefigures baptism (CCC 1221), the wilderness the Christian life, and the far shore the promised rest. Revelation 15 shows the map completed: God's people standing beyond the sea, harps in hand, singing Moses's song, now titled the song of Moses and of the Lamb.

What You Need to Know

Chapter 15 is the shortest chapter in the book and one of the most beautiful. Before the last plagues, John sees a sea of glass mingled with fire, and standing beside it (the Greek can also suggest upon it) those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name: there is the study's verb again, *nikaō*, worn now by the people who refused the mark. They hold harps of God and sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb. The staging deliberately restages Exodus 15, tonight's central discovery: Israel standing beyond the Red Sea, the pursuing power drowned, Miriam's tambourines out, singing the sea victory. The sea of glass before the throne (4:6) is now shot through with fire (the pillar of fire? the trial passed through? both resonances are old); the beast plays Pharaoh; and the conquerors' crossing, on the vision's suggestion, was martyrdom and fidelity: they conquered by the blood of the Lamb (12:11), and the sea they crossed did not part for them: they went through it. The Church's baptismal reading completes the circle: every Christian's Red Sea is the font (CCC 1221), and the far shore singing has already begun in the liturgy.

Read the song itself (15:3–4) slowly with your group; every line is woven from the Old Testament (echoing Deuteronomy 32:4 on God's just and faithful ways; Psalm 86:9 on all nations coming to worship; Jeremiah 10:7 on fearing the King of the nations). Notice what the song of Moses and the Lamb never mentions: the singers themselves. No verse celebrates their endurance; every line praises God's deeds, justice, holiness, and the nations' homecoming. Victory, sung rightly, is doxology. Note also the title the RSV2CE gives at 15:3: O King of the ages (some manuscripts read King of the nations; older English Bibles printed King of saints on slender textual grounds): worth a leader's footnote if your group compares translations.

Then the tent of witness opens (15:5: the wilderness sanctuary's solemn name; compare Numbers 17:7), seven angels receive seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, and the sanctuary fills with smoke so that no one can enter until the plagues are finished: Sinai's cloud and the dedication glory (Exodus 40:34–35; 1 Kings 8:10–11) in their most solemn key. The bowls themselves (chapter 16) are Egypt's plagues completed: foul sores (the boils of Exodus 9), sea and rivers to blood (Exodus 7), scorching sun, darkness over the beast's kingdom (Exodus 10), the Euphrates dried (a dark inversion of the sea drying for Israel), and demonic frogs (Exodus 8) gathering kings for battle. Where trumpets struck thirds, the bowls read as full and final: the warning phase, by this contrast, is over. Twice the chapter pauses to state the moral logic aloud, and these are its load-bearing verses: the angel of water declares, Just art thou in these thy judgments... For men have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink. It is their due! (16:5–6), and the altar answers, Yea, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are thy judgments! (16:7). The altar: the very altar beneath which the martyrs prayed how long (6:9–10) and from which their prayers rose as incense (8:3–5). The study's longest thread is now

explicitly answered: the bowls are not temper; they are the martyrs' prayers, granted. And still, even now, the refrain of tragedy: they did not repent (16:9, 11): the door stood open to the last.

Two details need honest handling. Armageddon (16:16): the text says the demonic spirits assemble the kings at the place which is called in Hebrew Armageddon (Har-Magedon, mountain of Megiddo). Megiddo was Israel's classic battlefield (Deborah's victory, Judges 5:19; good king Josiah's death, 2 Kings 23:29), yet Megiddo has no mountain: many interpreters read the name as a symbol built from the battlefield of history, the rallying point of every power that gathers against God, rather than a set of coordinates for a future war. Hold it lightly and say the Church has defined nothing about it; the confrontation many interpreters connect with it (chapter 19) is over before it starts. And the thief beatitude (16:15): in the middle of the muster, Christ's own voice interrupts: Lo, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake: the third of the book's seven beatitudes, echoing his own Gospel warning (Matthew 24:43–44). Even the battle chapter is aimed at watchfulness, not calculation.

Pastoral note. It is done (16:17) lands on English ears as a dark twin of the cry from the cross (the Greek differs: *gegonen* here, *tetelestai* at John 19:30); judgment and salvation in this book speak with kindred grammar because they flow from the same throne. Anyone wearied by two chapters of wrath should be told plainly where the study now turns: after Babylon's funeral next session come the wedding feast, the King, and the city where God wipes away tears. The bowls are the storm before that morning, and the singers of chapter 15 are proof the morning is real.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- Exodus 15:1–11 (with 14:29–31): the song at the sea: the LORD has triumphed gloriously; who is like thee, O LORD, among the gods? The staging and spirit of Revelation 15:2–4. Central discovery tonight.
- Deuteronomy 32:4 (his ways are justice, a God of faithfulness); Psalm 86:9 (all the nations shall come and worship); Jeremiah 10:7 (who would not fear thee, King of the nations?): the song's conceptual sources.
- Exodus 7–10: the plagues (boils, blood, darkness, frogs) returning in the bowls, now full. Comparison discovery tonight.
- Exodus 40:34–35 and 1 Kings 8:10–11: the glory-cloud filling tabernacle and temple so that none could enter; Revelation 15:8 speaks that language.
- Judges 5:19 and 2 Kings 23:29: Megiddo, Israel's battlefield of battlefields: the raw material of the name Armageddon.
- Psalm 96:13 (with 98:9): he comes to judge the earth with righteousness: the psalter already sings what the altar declares in 16:7.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Ambrose · *On the Mysteries (summary)*

Teaching the newly baptized, St. Ambrose reads the Red Sea crossing, in substance, as the figure of baptism: the enemy drowned behind you, the people brought through water to freedom and a song. Revelation 15 is the far shore of that reading: those who stand beside the sea of glass singing Moses's song are the baptized who kept faith, arrived. The study's application: every font is a shoreline.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine · *as quoted in CCC 311*

St. Augustine teaches, as the Catechism quotes him, that almighty God, being supremely good, would never allow any evil in his works unless he were so all-powerful and good as to cause good to emerge from evil itself. The bowls are this doctrine's hardest classroom: even the last plagues stand inside a providence that wastes nothing, answers the martyrs' blood, and holds the door of repentance open to the final hour (16:9, 11).

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom · *homily before his exile (summary)*

Facing banishment, St. John Chrysostom preached, in substance, that nothing is truly to be feared except sin: not exile, not confiscation, not death, for none of these can separate us from God, and the only real catastrophe is the one we choose. Read the bowls with his eyes: the terror of these chapters is not the plagues; it is the unrepentant heart that endures them and still will not turn.

Catechism Connection

- CCC 1221: the crossing of the Red Sea, the liberation of Israel from slavery, announces the liberation wrought by baptism: the Church's own key to the sea of glass scene.
- CCC 311: God permits evil only because he is powerful and good enough to draw good from it (quoting St. Augustine): the frame that keeps two chapters of wrath inside providence.
- CCC 268–271: the Almighty: God's power universal, loving, and mysterious: Lord God the Almighty is this book's favorite divine title (15:3; 16:7; compare 16:14), and these paragraphs are its doctrine.
- CCC 1040: the Last Judgment will reveal that God's justice triumphs over all injustice and that his love is stronger than death: what the altar's true and just are thy judgments confesses in advance.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

EXODUS THREAD RESOLVES TONIGHT: plagues (Sessions 7, 11), eagles' wings and wilderness (Session 8), and now the sea crossing and the song of Moses. Name the whole thread aloud when the group finds Exodus 15: the book has been telling a new Exodus from the start, and the Lamb is its Passover (Session 4). Take a moment; this is a summit.

HOW LONG? THREAD RESOLVES TONIGHT as a literary arc: 16:5–7 grounds the judgment in the shed blood of saints and prophets, and the altar's voice answers where the martyrs once prayed (6:9) and the incense rose (8:3). Connect the three scenes aloud as the book's deliberate echo; the text links them by theme rather than by explicit quotation. (Its final echo, 19:2, comes next session.)

Conqueror thread: 15:2, those who had conquered the beast: the promises of chapters 2–3 are being cashed. One sentence suffices.

Cups motif: Babylon's cup (14:8), wrath's cup (14:10), bowls poured out: next session Babylon holds a golden cup (17:4). Still silent tracking.

Armageddon: expect date-setting questions; the answer is in the Build and the steelman. The battle itself is Session 13; do not preview 19:11–21.

No new sealed mechanics; the study runs on momentum from here to the wedding.

Furniture of Heaven, now in the open: tonight's additions are the song of Moses and of the Lamb beside the sea of glass (15:2–4), the canticle the Church sings at the Easter Vigil; the tent of witness opened (15:5); and It is done from the temple (16:17).

Session Goals

1. The group discovers Exodus 15 beneath Revelation 15 and names the study's Exodus thread complete.
2. The group notices what the conquerors' song omits (themselves) and states what victory sounds like.
3. The group maps the bowls to Egypt's plagues and can say why full follows thirds.
4. The group hears 16:5–7 as the explicit answer to the martyrs' how long? from the same altar.
5. The group can give Armageddon its honest size: a symbol of the final gathering, defined by the Church as nothing more.

Timed Plan (75–90 minutes)

- Opening prayer: 5 min
- Win questions: 10 min
- Build (Revelation 15–16, with discovery passages): 45–55 min
- Send questions: 8 min
- Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer, distribute Take-Home 11: 7–10 min

Pre-chosen cuts if time runs short: drop the Dig Deeper box, and cover bowls one through five (Question 4) as a two-minute leader summary, reading only 16:5–7 aloud.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Great and wonderful are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty; just and true are your ways, O King of the ages. Stand us tonight beside your sea of glass with all your conquerors; teach us their song before we need it; and let every judgment we read find us on the shore of your mercy. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

1. What song can you not hear without being taken back to a specific victory, season, or crossing in your life?
2. When something unjust is finally set right (in the news, at work, in a family), what do you feel first: relief, vindication, discomfort, joy? Is it ever okay to celebrate?

Build

Read Revelation 15:1–4 aloud.

3. A sea, a standing people, harps, and a song of Moses. Discovery: open Exodus 14:29–31 and 15:1–11 and read the scene and the song's opening. What is John showing us by restaging this, and who plays each part? What did the conquerors' crossing look like in this book?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

The staging is the Red Sea shore: Israel standing beyond the water, Pharaoh's power drowned behind them, the song rising (who is like thee, O LORD, among the gods?). In John's restaging, the beast plays Pharaoh, the sea of glass mingled with fire is the crossing survived, and the singers are those who conquered the beast: the ones who refused the mark, some of them at the cost of their lives. Their sea, the vision suggests, did not part; they went through it, and they conquered by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony (12:11). The study's Exodus thread now stands complete and visible: plagues (trumpets and bowls), eagles' wings and wilderness (chapter 12), Passover Lamb (chapter 5), and now the sea and the song. Revelation has been telling one story since Egypt: God brings his people out, through, and home. And the Church adds the personal key: your Red Sea was the font (CCC 1221). The baptized are shoreline people learning the far-shore song early.

4. Read the song itself (15:3–4) line by line. What is the song about, and what is entirely missing from it? What do its phrases (just and true; all nations shall come; who shall not fear?) tell us about how heaven talks about victory?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Every line is about God: his deeds great and wonderful, his ways just and true, his holiness, his kingship over the ages, and the nations coming to worship (the lines echo Deuteronomy 32:4, Psalm 86:9, and Jeremiah 10:7: the conquerors sing in Scripture's idiom the way fluent people speak their mother tongue). Entirely missing: themselves. Not one syllable about their endurance, their sufferings, their refusal of the mark. Victory, sung rightly, is doxology; the safest possession of any triumph is to hand it upward immediately. And notice the song's horizon: all nations shall come and worship thee: standing beside the wreckage of the beast's empire, they sing not of enemies destroyed but of nations arriving. Heaven's war aim was always worship.

Leader footnote if translations differ at 15:3: the RSV2CE reads O King of the ages; some manuscripts

read King of the nations, and the old King of saints of some English Bibles rests on slender textual grounds. Nothing doctrinal turns on it.

Read Revelation 15:5–8, then 16:1–4 and 16:8–14 aloud (the leader may summarize bowls three through five if time presses, but read 16:5–7 without fail in the next question).

5. The bowls have a family resemblance you already know. Map them: sores, waters to blood, darkness, frogs. Where have we seen these, and what has changed since the trumpets sounded them? And what happens twice in 16:9 and 16:11 that should grieve us?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Egypt again: the boils of Exodus 9, the blood of Exodus 7, the darkness of Exodus 10, the frogs of Exodus 8, with the Euphrates drying as a dark inversion of the sea drying for Israel. The change from the trumpets: no more thirds; the bowls read as full, the warning phase over, and the tent of witness wrapped in glory-smoke (15:8, Sinai's cloud, the dedication glory of Exodus 40 and 1 Kings 8) tells us heaven itself holds still while justice finishes. And yet, twice, the unbearable refrain: they did not repent and give him glory... they cursed the God of heaven... and did not repent of their deeds. Even under the full bowls, the text still measures tragedy by the unturned heart, a refrain that reads as the door standing open to the last. St. John Chrysostom's rule reads these chapters rightly: the only thing finally to be feared in them is not the plagues; it is the refusal.

6. Now the load-bearing verses. Read 16:5–7 aloud slowly. Who speaks, what is the stated reason for the judgment, and, most important: which altar answers, and what prayer from earlier in our study is being answered out loud?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

The angel of water declares God just: for men have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink. It is their due! And then the altar itself answers: Yea, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are thy judgments! An altar has been in our study twice: the martyrs prayed beneath it, O Sovereign Lord, how long? (6:9–10), and the saints' prayers rose from the golden altar as incense before the censer's fire fell (8:3–5). Tonight a voice from the altar declares the judgments just: the book's altar scenes converge, and the how long? receives its answer in everything but explicit quotation. The study's longest thread closes here: the bowls read, on this convergence, not as divine temper but as the granted petition of the murdered: the moment the blood of every trafficked child, every martyred believer, every silenced innocent receives its reply. If judgment language has troubled anyone all study, bring them here: the question who could want this? was answered in Session 5. The ones under the altar. And the God who made them wait was not ignoring them; he was completing their number and, as St. Peter says of the Lord's patience, giving time for repentance (2 Peter 3:9), a patience that costs the victims most; heaven honors their lament, and sings that even this waiting was just and true.

7. The sixth bowl gathers kings to the place called in Hebrew Armageddon, and right in the middle of the muster, a voice interrupts (16:15). What does the name Armageddon actually mean, what did Megiddo mean to Israel (leader: Judges 5:19; 2 Kings 23:29), and what does the interrupting beatitude do to how we should hold this scene?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Har-Magedon: mountain of Megiddo. Megiddo was Israel's battlefield of battlefields: Deborah's victory over the kings of Canaan, and the valley where good King Josiah fell: the place where the fate of God's people and the nations collided for centuries. The oddity is that Megiddo is a plain and a mound; it has no mountain: which many interpreters take as the text's signal that the name is a

symbol assembled from history's battlefield, the rallying point of every power that gathers against God, rather than coordinates for a bookable future war; the derivation is debated. The Church has defined nothing about Armageddon; and when the confrontation actually arrives in this book, it will be over in a breath, won by a word. But the beatitude is the real key: as the kings muster, Christ's own voice cuts in: Lo, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake (his Gospel warning, Matthew 24:43–44, verbatim in spirit). In the one scene every date-setter loves, the Lord himself changes the subject from calculation to watchfulness. The reader's battle station is a wakeful, clothed, faithful ordinary life.

BUILD, THEN PRESS: IS ARMAGEDDON A BRIEFING ON THE NEXT WAR?

Present this at full strength before answering. A sincere prophecy teacher argues: the sixth bowl names a real, mappable place in Israel; it names the Euphrates, a real river; it describes kings of the whole world massing for battle. Scripture means what it says: a literal last battle at a literal Megiddo, and a faithful reader tracks Middle East armies, alliances, and dried rivers as the stage assembles. (A careful futurist adds: the frog-spirits may be symbolic in form while the river, the place, and the gathering remain literal; symbol and geography are not exclusive.) To spiritualize this is to tell God's people to stop watching exactly where he told them to watch.

8. What is right in that reading's instincts? And what do the text and the Church do with it?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

What is right: the instinct that prophecy touches real history is sound: this book's symbols have first-century referents solid enough to bleed, and the Church confesses a real final confrontation between Christ and evil before the end (CCC 675–677). Watchfulness itself is commanded in this very scene.

But the text resists the map. The place is a symbol wearing history's battlefield as a name (a mountain of Megiddo where Megiddo has none); the armies are gathered by demonic spirits, whose working no observer charts; even the mixed reading must reckon with the name's built-in signal (a mountain where there is none) and the book's pattern of symbolic geography (Babylon, Sodom, Egypt, 11:8); the Euphrates drying reverses an Exodus image, not a hydrology forecast; and when many interpreters' candidate for this battle comes (chapter 19), no combat is narrated: the Rider speaks, and it is over: which is what every gathering against God has amounted to since Psalm 2. Our Lord's own interruption at 16:15 tells the reader what to do while kings muster: not calculate, but stay awake, and he elsewhere flatly denies that the schedule is knowable (Matthew 24:36): the Church firmly rejects date-setting and cautions against speculative mapping of the end. The prophecy teacher's energy is not wrong; it is misaimed: aim it at wakefulness, holiness, and the mission of the Church, which are the watching this scene actually assigns. A Christian glued to troop movements has not out-watched the Church at prayer; every Mass proclaims the Lord's death until he comes, which is the only end-times monitoring the New Testament ever institutionalized.

DIG DEEPER

The Easter Vigil sings this session. At the Vigil, after the Exodus reading of the sea crossing, the Church sings the song of Moses (Exodus 15) over the water in which catechumens are about to be baptized: the Red Sea, the font, and Revelation's sea of glass laid on top of one another in a single liturgy (CCC 1221 is its caption). If anyone in your group was received at a Vigil, they stood in this session's geography without knowing it. Next Easter, listen for it: the Church rehearsing the far shore.

Send

9. The conquerors' song mentions everything except themselves. Where in your life do you most need to convert a victory (or a grievance) into doxology, and what would that sound like?
10. Blessed is he who is awake (16:15): what is the one habit currently most putting your soul to sleep, and what is one wakefulness practice to set against it this week?

Live It This Week

- Learn the far-shore song early: pray Revelation 15:3–4 aloud once each day this week, especially on any day something goes right.
- Choose one wakefulness practice against the sleep-habit you named: a fixed prayer time, a media fast hour, an examen before bed. Do it daily this week.
- Read Revelation 17–18 for next session: Babylon's full file is opened.
- Memorize the memory verse below.

Memory Verse

Great and wonderful are thy deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are thy ways, O King of the ages! (Revelation 15:3, RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Lord God the Almighty, your deeds are great and wonderful, your ways just and true. For every crossing you have brought us through, we hand the victory upward; for every how long still waiting in this room, we trust the altar that answered the martyrs. Keep us awake, keep us singing, and bring all nations to worship you. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Distribute Take-Home 11 as people leave.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 11, in order:

- Revelation 15:1–4 (read aloud)
- Exodus 14:29–31 and 15:1–11 (discovery)
- Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 86:9; Jeremiah 10:7 (leader background, the song's phrases)
- Revelation 15:5–8 (read aloud; Exodus 40:34–35 and 1 Kings 8:10–11 leader background)
- Revelation 16:1–4, 8–14 (read aloud or summarized per timed plan)
- Exodus 7–10 (comparison discovery: boils, blood, darkness, frogs)
- Revelation 16:5–7 (read aloud without fail; connect to 6:9–10 and 8:3–5)
- Revelation 16:15–16 (read aloud)
- Judges 5:19 and 2 Kings 23:29 (leader background, Megiddo)
- Matthew 24:36, 43–44 (steelman answer)
- Memory verse: Revelation 15:3