

CHAPTER 15

"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. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever. The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed" (15:6-8).

Chapter 15 is a short chapter of only eight verses. In verses 2-4 John is given another, but different, look into the Millennial glory and reign of Christ with His saints.¹ Verse 1 is an introduction to what is more fully described in verses 5-8, the seven last plagues.

To better understand the chronology, let us turn to Seiss:

The fate of the infernal Trinity--the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet--and of what pertains to them, is to be more fully described before we come to the Millennium, the descent of the New Jerusalem, and the planting of God's Tabernacle with men. Hence the same ground covered by the visions of the Harvest and Vintage [chapter 14] is traversed again and again with reference to particular objects and administrations. As we have four distinct Gospels to give us a full and accurate portraiture of the one glorious Savior, so we have these several presentations with reference to one and the same momentous period of the end. Each vision, however, has its own particular office, scope, and features, giving some special aspect or phase in the general sum of events. It is not mere repetition of the same thing, but the separate presentation of particular administrations or occurrences of which the whole is made up. Chapters 15 and 16 belong together. They form one whole, touching one important subject, to wit: the third or last *woe*.²

In the words of Milligan, "To introduce chap. xvi. is the object of chap. xv."³

Beginning, then, with verse 1, we read: *"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."* In chapter 12 John related two signs--the sign of the sun-clad woman and the sign of the red dragon. This is now the third sign of which he writes. However, before he gives the particulars of this sign, he describes a scene in heaven. Standing on a "sea of glass" are the tribulation saints, those martyred for their faithfulness to Christ. They are singing the song of Moses 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 nations. 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.

1 Refer back to chapters 4 and 5 for other heavenly scenes.

2 Seiss, *Lectures*, vol. III, pp. 60-61.

3 Milligan, *The Book of Revelation*, pg. 260.

The song of Moses is recorded in Exodus chapter 15, and there we read, "*I will sing to Yahweh, for he has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!*" Just as Yahweh delivered the children of Israel from Pharaoh, so too will he deliver his saints at the end of the tribulation. They overcame the greatest test of all, Satan's wrath, and now they are secure from the great wrath of God, which is to come.

John then sees that "*the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened.*" Walvoord states that this is the Holy of Holies in the heavenly Tabernacle. "*The angels coming out of the sanctuary indicate that the judgments to be poured out stem from the holiness of God and are properly required of God who must do all things right.*"⁴

Concerning these seven bowls of wrath and the temple filled with smoke, Kelly comments:

The word means bowls or cups, and is taken from the vessels used for pouring out drink-offerings, &c., before the Lord. It is not drink-offerings now, but wrath coming down from from God . . . Thus, neither present worship of God nor intercession was any longer possible. It was vain for any one to attempt entering there: the smoke of the fire of God's righteous anger filled the temple . . . There was nothing He looked upon here below that called for mercy on their behalf. The time was past for intercession. Accordingly the judgments rolled forth, and the wrath of God is finished (verses 6-8).⁵

"It is clear that in these final judgments only the unbelieving world is involved; therefore, they are punitive plagues (16:2)," writes Johnson.⁶

4 Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 229.

5 Kelly, *Lectures*, pg. 345.

6 Johnson, *Revelation*, pg. 544.