

“Eschatology”
(Part 21: Prelude to the Seven Bowls)

III. The Book of Revelation.

O. Prelude to the Seven Bowls: “15:1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, *which are* the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished. 2 And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God. 3 And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, ‘Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations! 4 Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; for all the nations will come and worship before You, for Your righteous acts have been revealed.’ 5 After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened, 6 and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean *and* bright, and girded around their chests with golden sashes. 7 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. 8 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.”

1. First, we have a picture of what is going on in heaven with the saints just prior to the commissioning of the angels to pour out the seven final plagues (vv. 2-4).
 - a. Each series of judgments has a prelude:
 - (i) Before the seal judgments, we had a picture of the throne of God in heaven, who, in His holiness, was about to execute judgment; we have the worship of the four living creatures, the 24 elders (implying the presence of the church), and the angels; the concern John had that no one would be able to prosecute that judgment, and then the introduction of the One who would because of His personal worthiness: the Lamb of God (Rev. 4-5).
 - (ii) Before the trumpet judgments, we had another picture of heaven: how the judgments would be executed by the angels in answer to the prayers of the saints (Rev. 7:9 - 8:6).
 - (iii) Now we have a final picture of heaven where the seven angels prepare to execute the final seven judgments, while the church stands to worship the Lord for His redemption (Rev. 15).
 - b. Here we see the faithful martyrs worshiping God.
 - (i) These are likely the 144,000, the first fruits from among men, who have been protected by the Lord from the Beast.
 - (ii) These “had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name” (15:2).
 - (a) They had not submitted to emperor worship, nor worshiped his image, nor received his number.

- (b) The Beast (Nero) believed himself to be divine and required worship.
- (c) The second beast (the false prophet) enforced that worship in the land.
- (d) But the faithful refused to submit to it.

- (iii) They are seen standing on a sea of glass (cf. Rev. 4:6); but this time it is mixed with fire, perhaps representing the judgment the Lord is about to unleash on their behalf.
- (iv) The fact that they are holding instruments of praise (harps; v. 2; cf. 5:8; 14:2), shows us that they are worshiping the Lord.
 - (a) Our obligation to worship our Creator won't end when we reach heaven, but in a real sense will begin there.
 - (b) The fact these saints are represented as using instruments may be instructive in the controversy regarding instruments in worship.
- (v) As they stand before the throne, they sing two songs: the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb.
 - (i) Moses is the Old Covenant redeemer who brought God's people out of bondage to Egypt – a picture of the New Covenant redemption in Christ.
 - (ii) Perhaps the fact that both songs are sung is indicative of the meeting of the Old and New Covenant people of God in Christ.
 - (a) The 24 elders may represent the faithful of the Old and New Covenants (12 patriarchs and 12 apostles).
 - (b) The 144,000 is 12 x 12,000; they are further defined as the twelve tribes of Israel, but then the church is the true Israel of God (Gal. 6:16).
 - (c) Here they are represented as singing both the Old Covenant and New Covenant songs of redemption.
 - (iii) In both cases, their redemption spells judgment to their enemies.
 - (a) God destroyed Egypt through ten plagues and drowning their army in the Red Sea, when He delivered His people.
 - (b) He is now about to destroy ethnic Israel on behalf of His faithful martyrs – the Lord refers to Jerusalem (the center of ethnic Israel) as Egypt because of their sinfulness (Rev. 11:8), and inflicts them with the plagues of Egypt (Cf. the trumpet and bowl judgments).
 - (c) Jesus said He would charge all the righteous blood shed on earth to this generation. This would include the vindication of both Old and New Covenant saints (Matt. 23:35).
 - (iv) We should understand the song that's quoted as primarily that of the Lamb, though containing the essence of Moses' song of redemption (vv. 3-4).
 - (a) They worship God for His power in judgment: "Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty."
 - (b) They worship Him for His justice: "Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations!" There is nothing anyone does on any level that will not be brought into judgment by God.

- (c) They confess that He is a God to be feared and honored for His judgments: “Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name?” This is what Jesus tells us we should pray regarding all the nations (“Hallowed by Your name”: Matt. 6:9).
- (d) They confess that this judgment flows from His holiness – He is a holy God who cannot overlook sin: “For You alone are holy.”
- (e) And they worship Him for His sovereignty: “For all the nations will come and worship before You, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”
 - (1) God’s judgment on Egypt resulted in His glory being proclaimed throughout the nations (Ex. 15:14-16).
 - (2) This judgment would have the same effect.

2. Next, we are introduced to the seven angels with the seven last plagues that finish God’s wrath on Israel (vv. 1, 5-8).

a. Why do these judgments come in sevens?

- (i) There are seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowls.
- (ii) This likely is another reference to Israel’s having broken her covenant with God.
- (iii) God threatened vengeance against His people would be seven-fold if they broke the covenant: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt so that *you* would not be their slaves, and I broke the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect. 14 But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments, 15 if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, *and* so break My covenant, 16 I, in turn, will do this to you: I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that will waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away; also, you will sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies will eat it up. 17 I will set My face against you so that you will be struck down before your enemies; and those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee when no one is pursuing you. 18 If also after these things you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. 19 I will also break down your pride of power; I will also make your sky like iron and your earth like bronze. 20 Your strength will be spent uselessly, for your land will not yield its produce and the trees of the land will not yield their fruit. 21 If then, you act with hostility against Me and are unwilling to obey Me, I will increase the plague on you seven times according to your sins. 22 I will let loose among you the beasts of the field, which will bereave you of your children and destroy your cattle and reduce your number so that your roads lie deserted. 23 And if by these things you are not turned to Me, but act with hostility against Me, 24 then I will act with hostility against you; and I, even I, will strike you seven times for your sins. 25 I will also bring upon you a sword which will execute vengeance for the covenant; and when you gather together into your cities, I will send pestilence among you, so that you shall be delivered into enemy hands. 26 When I break your staff of bread, ten women will bake your bread in one oven, and they will bring back your bread in

rationed amounts, so that you will eat and not be satisfied. 27 Yet if in spite of this you do not obey Me, but act with hostility against Me, 28 then I will act with wrathful hostility against you, and I, even I, will punish you seven times for your sins” (Lev. 26:13-28).

- (iv) The Jews would have seen the correlation because of their familiarity with the Scriptures.
 - (v) Note the increasing intensity of God’s judgment implied in this text, if they do not repent.
 - (a) The same thing happens in the book of Revelation, showing us that they will not repent.
 - (b) Their heart has hardened to the point where they appear to have committed the unpardonable sin (Matt. 12:32).
- b. God’s final judgment comes in the form of these seven last angels.
- (i) With them “the wrath of God is finished” (v. 1).
 - (ii) The bowl judgments appear to be largely a repetition of the trumpet judgments, only more intense.
 - (a) The Lord often repeated His warnings – He gave Pharaoh two dreams regarding the coming famine – to confirm that they would take place. He does this so often that sometimes we think if the Lord doesn’t repeat what He says at least twice, He really doesn’t mean it.
 - (b) These are the most severe of His judgments because they are the last.
 - (iii) Again, this judgment arises from their breaking the covenant.
 - (a) The angels emerge from “the temple of the tabernacle of testimony,” which is what the OT tabernacle was called because it housed the testimony or “commandments” of God (Ex. 38:21; 40:5; Num. 1:50, 53; 9:15; 10:1; Acts 7:44).
 - (b) The commandments are still the standard by which men are judged, especially Israel, as this was their treasured possession and so their greater responsibility to keep (Deu. 4:8).
 - (c) The angels are clothed with clean linen and golden sashes, representing the holiness of God, and subsequently, their holiness, in executing this judgment: Israel is guilty, and God is just.
 - (iv) One of the four living creatures – attendants of God, guardians of His holiness (Rev. 4:6) – gives the seven angels the seven bowls full of God’s wrath. These creatures appear both to open and close the judgments of God in this book.
 - (v) The Temple itself was filled with the Shekinah glory of God.
 - (a) Like the Tabernacle dedicated by Moses (Ex. 40:34-35) and the Temple dedicated by Solomon (2 Chr. 5:14) was filled with the Lord’s glory so that no one could stand, so this temple is filled with His glory, as the seven angels prepare to execute His judgment against His unfaithful bride.
 - (b) God is glorified not only by showing mercy, but also by dealing out justice.