

CHAPTER 15

INTRODUCTION:

This short chapter will serve as the staging area for our third and final trip through time found in chapter 16. As we reflect on our first two voyages and prepare for the third and final one, let's keep in mind that the war between God and Satan has been going on since before the establishment of the church and will continue until the Lord returns. Even though the visions John records were penned almost 2,000 years ago, the events occurring in them refer to the world of the 21st century as much as the 1st. Everyone on this earth from John's days until the day the trumpets sound... is living in the times described in these chapters.

Even though all three journeys actually take us on the same trip, we are afforded a different perspective with each trip to help us better understand the complete picture God wants us to see. The first journey (*chapters 6-7 and the opening of the seals*) focused our attention on the persecution suffered by the faithful, and the reward promised them. The second (*chapter 8 and the sounding of the trumpets*) presented warnings to the unrighteous, but with hope for their repentance.

In the third and final voyage of chapter 16 we will read of the pouring out of the seven bowls of wrath onto the earth. This time the focus will be on the punishment to be inflicted on those who worship the dragon (Satan), with the fervent desire that a glimpse of the consequences of allegiance to him might bring about repentance.

Let the short scene form in your mind before we discuss it:

“And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God. And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, ‘Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For thou

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Ron Roberts

Lesson Seventeen

only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.’ And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened: And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles. And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.”

This chapter begins with the words, *“And I saw another sign in heaven.”* The last time we read similar words was in chapter 12:3: *“And there appeared another wonder in heaven”* when John described the seven-headed dragon hovering over the woman in labor, ready to devour her child. This – Satan’s effort to kill Jesus at birth to prevent Him from ever establishing his church – marks the beginning of the “War of Armageddon.” In chapter 16 we will see the name “Armageddon” again, referring to the ongoing battle between God and His followers and the great dragon and his. I suspect this “Armageddon” might be the only subject in the Bible that has gained the attention of both Christians and non-Christians alike. The very mention of the word conjures up end-of-the-world images. The movies and books dedicated to this subject lead us to picture a great battle taking place in the last days before a new heaven and a new earth are formed. Many envision the “antichrist” gathering up the kings of the earth in this place called Armageddon, their combined armies waging war against the people of God – a war to end all wars. That is a discussion for chapter 16, but let me assure you in advance that it is not what most people have conjured up in their minds.

John tells us that this sign was *“great and marvelous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.”* The “sign” is, of course, an event taking place, and the term *“in heaven,”* as it is used here, does not mean this sign was seen in the realm where God lives. The Greek word translated “heaven” in this instance is “Ouranos” and according to Henry Thayer is *“the vaulted expanse of the sky with all things visible in it.”* In other words, this event was taking place in a conspicuous area where all could see it.

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Ron Roberts

Lesson Seventeen

The words “*great and marvelous*” do not imply something of enormous beauty either. Instead, we should understand that it is a two-fold revealing of the final judgment: For the unrighteous, a terrible consequence of having followed the dragon; but for the righteous eternal bliss with the saints in glory! When John says he sees seven angels with the seven last plagues, remember the symbolism attached to that number. These seven plagues contain the full and complete wrath of God. They are said to be the last plagues because this wrath of God being poured out onto the earth will lead us to the ultimate fall of the devil and the final judgment of God.

However, as is customary in this book, before punishment is doled out to the unrighteous, we are reminded of the victory awaiting the virtuous. In the end, just before the ax falls on the dragon’s followers, Jesus will collect all the faithful living on earth to meet Him in the clouds so they are not harmed when the earth is destroyed.

Before we discuss this part of his vision, let’s remember that what John witnessed was a complete picture of this “great and marvelous” event as it happened all at once – in one precise moment. But in order for our time-related minds to grasp what he saw, we need to read about it in a “chain of events” style, with one event described after another, even though in truth it happened in the blink of an eye.

John sees a sea of glass mingled with fire. Do you remember the first throne scene in chapter 4? Before the throne of God there was a sea of glass like crystal: clear, pure, and perfectly transparent. The one John sees here, though, is “*mingled with fire.*” This fire represents a combination of purity and judgment. The idea of purity comes from the “smelting” process where a mass of ore is held in the fire until all the impurities have burned up or melted off, leaving only the pure base metal like gold or silver. But fire also represents judgment, and that is easily understood if you imagine the burning off of the impurities to represent the discarding of the unrighteous. Here standing on the sea of glass are those who have overcome the beasts and been made pure. Their names are written in the Lamb’s book of life and they have

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Ron Roberts

Lesson Seventeen

been separated from the unrighteous – removed from the earth – so that the final judgment on the unrighteous and those who worship the dragon can be carried out.

They stand on the sea of glass holding harps of gold, singing the songs of Moses and the Lamb – songs of victory and deliverance – representing both the old and new covenants. Victory is theirs. They are delivered to their promised reward. And once God’s plan is complete and this world is no more, all the righteous will be singing that “New Song” that only the redeemed will learn!

And then, opening before John’s eyes is the ***“temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven”***. This would be the Holy of Holies of both the tabernacle and the temple – again consolidating both the Old and New Testaments, bringing to our minds the place where God abides. As it opens we know this means He is about to execute His judgment on the world. Seven angels come out from it, clothed in pure white linen, wearing golden belts. These are the same angels mentioned in verse 1, and have been with God in that holy place until this moment.

[Note: Some bible versions say they are wearing pure and bright precious stones rather than pure white linen. The Greek words for linen and stone are very similar and the discrepancy comes from the fact that some of the early manuscripts are blurred.]

John sees one of the four beasts representing life on earth (first viewed around the throne in the original throne scene) giving each of the seven angels a vial full of the “wrath of God.” They will be poured out one by one, representing the complete, full wrath of God! And the temple is immediately filled with smoke – God is present there! We are reminded of God’s appearance on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19: ***“And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.”*** No one is allowed to approach His dwelling place while He is handing out His judgments!

And so we have seen the beginning of the end...