

# Revelation 15–16 — The Martyred Remnant and the Seven Vials

*Notes on The Revelation with Practical Reflections*

H. H. Snell

---

In these two chapters we have another section of the book, which gives us the account of the outpouring of the seven vials. Terrible judgments as they are, they are followed by the Lord Himself coming in flaming fire. But, as we have previously seen in the Apocalypse, so here, the heart is relieved from the sorrows of the outpoured wrath of God, by a parenthetic announcement of a saved remnant standing in joy and blessing before the throne. The fifteenth chapter opens by telling us, that John 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 {Rev. 15:1}.

It is sad to think that the awful doom which awaits men is so unheeded. God speaks once, yea, twice, but man perceiveth it not. We have traced the opening of the seven seals, and the sounding of the seven trumpets in all their various characters of judgment, and now the last actings of Divine wrath, prior to the Lord taking everything into His own hands, are brought before us. It is the wrath of God in these chapters; the wrath of the Lamb will follow. But before the prophet witnesses in the vision the longdeserved writhings of the profane, his eye is drawn to the sea of glass before the throne of God. In the fourth chapter, we noticed a sea of glass like unto crystal {Rev. 4:6},

and unpeopled; but here it is mingled with fire, referring, perhaps, to the fiery trial of Antichrist which they had passed through, and occupied by them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name {Rev. 15:2}.

They are seen standing upon the sea of glass, in the attitude of thanksgiving and rejoicing, having harps of God {Rev. 15:2};

all expressive of marvelous deliverance and victory. They had known the deep sorrow and distress of the time of Jacob's trouble, and they got victory over the beast, not by an arm of flesh, but by faith; and though by death they lost the place of blessing on the earth, they found it more than made up by a place of resurrectionjoy and gladness given them before the throne of God. Who are the people here spoken of? Let their own utterances tell us. They do not sing the new song of the fifth chapter, or the song of the seventh chapter; neither are they described as coming out of every nation, as we find there; but they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb. It is a song of redemption, both by power and by blood; but why the song of Moses? Is it not to show us that the singers are on Old Testament

ground -- in other words, pious Jews, faithful to Moses' law, and hoping for the kingdom to be set up on earth? Are not these people a remnant the saints described by Daniel (Dan. 7:21), and which we

saw suffering under the beast in the thirteenth chapter of the Apocalypse? Their song, too, seems in harmony with the spirit of the remnant often brought before us in the psalms, as speaking of the judgment and power of God, which would subdue all nations to Himself. This song is, in principle, much like the song of Moses in the book of Exodus. They say, Great and marvelous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of nations! [Margin.] Who shall not fear Thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name; for Thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before Thee; for Thy judgments are made manifest {Rev. 15:3, 4}.

The difference between this utterance and the new song of the fifth chapter is most striking, so that it is impossible to identify them. The whole company stands before us as another witness of the faithfulness of God to those who, in any dispensation, make God and the Lamb their refuge, and thus find shelter from impending wrath. The 20th chapter shows us that those who thus get the victory over the beast and his image are in the first resurrection (Rev. 4, 5) Before closing our remarks on this portion, it may be well to say that the marginal reading, king of nations,

is preferable to king of saints,

because the Scripture nowhere teaches that Christ stands to us in the relationship of king. It is true that He is Lord of all; but our hope is to share His throne with Him, instead of being reigned over by Him as King of kings, and Lord of lords.

The Seven Vials After this, the seer looked, and, behold the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened {Rev. 15:5},

and the whole scene is expressive of wrath coming out from the sanctuary of God. There is not a cheering ray. The whole temple is filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from His power, and no one was able to enter into the temple; for the seven angels are charged with the seven last plagues, and are sent forth to execute on guilty man the wrath of God. How very solemn! Happy those who now, while the gospel is preached, heed the warning, and flee from the wrath to come, by taking refuge in the precious blood of the Son of God. The time will come when it will

#### Notes on the Revelation

be too late. With many, we fear, the hardening process is going on, and will increase till they deny the only Lord God, both as the Creator of the universe and Redeemer of His people. Praise God that the gospel of His grace is still preached, that the arms of pardoning mercy are still opened wide, and that God is the Savior and everlasting Friend and Father of all who believe on the Lord Jesus. Blessed be God, at this moment we can say -“Great grace there is for sinners great, Rich grace for those who’re poor, Almighty grace to keep the weak; Come ye, and test its power. “Infinite grace for finite worms; O Lord; how good Thou art Unto poor sinners who are vile! Sweet Jesus, take my heart!”

We should notice that one of the four living creatures is here seen again acting apart from the elders, and doing that which seems very unlike the business of sinners saved by grace, namely, giving the angels the vials of wrath to discharge on the men who had the mark of the beast. Our place is

association with Christ in judgment. I am aware that some dear servants of the Lord have considered the living creatures to be the Church, but this does not seem to me capable of being established, for reasons assigned when considering the 4th and 5th chapters. But, as before observed, those who hold that the living creatures are the Church, are bound to admit that the saints are caught up to heaven before the great tribulation, because here we see one of the living creatures in heaven engaged in giving the angels vials of wrath to pour out on men, the worshipers of the beast and his image on earth. One of the four living creatures 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 one was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled (Rev. 15:7, 8; see Rev. 16:2).

**The First Vial** The solemn moment will come when the command will be given, and the vials be poured out. To the seven angels it will be said, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth (Rev. 16:1).

This series of judgments evidently begins after the beast has been fully manifested, and his image set up; for the first vial is poured out on those who are connected with the abomination of desolation. The first went and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image (Rev. 16:2).

**The Second Vial** In the outpouring of the vials, we do not find their effect limited to a third part, or a fourth part, as the trumpets and seals were; and the character of the judgments is not only more extensive, but

more severe. If the apocalyptic judgments have a special bearing on the nations where the light of the gospel and outward privileges have so abounded, now they are given up in a thoroughly apostate state to the wrath of God. The second vial is poured on the sea, bringing death on everything. The second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea (Rev. 16:3).

**The Third Vial** The rivers and fountains now become blood, and the angel of the waters acknowledges the just retribution of God upon men in thus executing judgment. Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because Thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and Thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy. And I heard [not another out of, but] the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments (Rev. 16:5-7).

How little do men think that God will act in retributive justice! How awful is the thought, that men, with all their boastful cries of “improvement” and “progress,” are hurrying on to the time of God’s anger! But so it is. He will yet arise, and require all the righteous blood that has been shed, and avenge His own elect. Again, we are forcibly reminded of the safety of those who are sheltered by the precious blood of Christ.

**The Fourth Vial** Men are burned [margin] with a great heat (Rev. 16:9 see also New Trans., JND),

and blaspheme the name of God. There is a remarkable similarity in the spheres of judgment in the first four trumpets and vials -- the earth, sea, rivers, fountains, and sun being smitten in each; the vials, as before noticed, being more extensive and severe. And as we saw in former judgments, so it is recorded now, that instead of these things leading men to repent, it brings out horrible blasphemy. How bad is the human heart! How oft should the believer's cry to God be -- "Take Thou my heart, and let it be For ever close to all but Thee!"

How strikingly in the apocalyptic judgments we see that terror and judgment harden instead of soften the human heart; so here again, in the midst of their sufferings, they blasphemed the name of God, who hath power over these plagues, and they repented not to give Him glory (Rev. 16:9).

The Fifth Vial This outpouring of God's wrath is directed to the seat of the beast. As in the days of Pharaoh, the people suffered for some time, while the wicked king went free; so now those who worship the beast have the vengeance of God executed upon them, while the

judgment of the beast is postponed till the Lord Himself comes to cast him alive into the lake of fire. This will be a time of terror, suffering, and distress. The kingdom of the beast will be full of darkness, and men will gnaw their tongues for pain. Surely this very earth shall witness many at that time weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth. It would seem as if the darkness and torment of hell had overtaken men on earth, so terrible will be the outpoured wrath of God. But what effect will it have? Will these judgments break men's hearts, and subdue them to the living God? Ah, no! We are told here again, that men blasphemed the God of heaven, because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds (Rev. 16:11).

The Sixth Vial The first point noticed here is, that it is poured upon the great river Euphrates, and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings [not of, but] which come from the east might be prepared {Rev. 15:12};

that is, that the present barrier to the kings of the east mingling with the western powers should be removed, and thus the great gathering of kings and people for their final overthrow might be accomplished. The river Euphrates, which formed the eastern boundary of the land of Canaan, is a deep and wide river, about 1500 miles in length, and in some places nearly a mile in breadth; so that we can easily see what a barrier it must be to persons wishing to cross it. This, however, is to be removed in God's time of wrath, and the spirit of gathering together and centralization, now so rapidly growing, will, with special help from Satan and his allies, speedily bring about the awful crisis. John tells us that he saw three unclean spirits like frogs {Rev. 16:13}

acting upon the kings of the earth, and the whole world -- the whole habitable world -- to gather them together to the great day of God Almighty. This power is Satanic. The unclean spirits come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet; for they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, etc. {Rev. 16:13, 14}

Like frogs silently lurk about in hidden places, unperceived, so are these; and they overcome by the miraculous signs and lying wonders which they accomplish and gather men to the great battle. It is said

that He gathered them together {see Rev. 16:14},

and in the 14th verse, they (the spirits of devils) gather them; that is, that though Satan and his allies be the instruments, it is to carry out God's purpose, so that it may be truly said that He gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon (Rev. 16:16).

Men little think what Satan is doing by the confederacies of the day. Is it possible that the fraternizing of nations, and the various minor associations among men, can be already the beginning of this great and awful gathering together? The question is, What is man's object now? Is it self or Christ? Satan is ever opposed to Christ, and acts on man's selfishness. The world, too, lieth in the wicked one. How solemn it is that the dragon (Satan), the beast,

and the false prophet, give birth to these three unclean spirits like frogs, and that they gather men together.

The Seventh Vial This vial is poured into the air; then a voice out of heaven utters, It is done (Rev. 16:17),

and many terrible things follow. The great city -- Babylon -- (see Rev. 14:8; 18:10) is divided into three parts. The cities of the nations fall. Great Babylon, too, now comes into remembrance before God, to receive the cup of the fierceness of His wrath. God shakes terribly the earth. Every island flees away, and the mountains are not found. A great hail falls upon men out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent; and here again we are told that men blasphemed God because of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great (Rev. 16:18-21). As we saw in connection with the opening of the seventh seal, and sounding of the seventh trumpet, the temple of heaven brought before us, and voices and thunders and an earthquake, so now there came a great voice out of the temple, . . . and there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great {Rev. 17:18}.

This, I believe, takes us to the time of the personal coming of the Lord Jesus in the clouds of heaven with great power and glory -the great day of the wrath of the lamb.

#### Notes on the Revelation

Chapter 16:15: The Parenthesis Between the Sixth and Seventh Vials It is remarkable that, as we noticed between the sixth and seventh seals, and the sixth and seventh trumpets, so between the sixth and seventh vials a parenthesis occurs. In this last, the Lord is announced as coming as a thief in judgment -introducing the day of the Lord -- when we shall come out of heaven with Him. (See Rev. 19:11-14.) He says, Behold, I come as a thief {Rev. 16:15}.

Christ will suddenly come upon this world as a thief. The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night {1 Thess. 5:2}.

But we know that He will not come to us as a thief. Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief (1 Thess. 5:2, 4).

But while judgment is threatened, there seems also to be a gleam of mercy rejoicing against judgment (Rev. 16:15). It intimates that a remnant will be watching for the Messiah (and we gather from other Scriptures that such will be the case), and others are spoken of as having the shame of their nakedness made manifest. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame {Rev. 16:15}.