

CHAPTER 15

INTRODUCTION TO REVELATION 15

This chapter is a preparation to the pouring out of the seven vials, and contains a vision of the seven angels in heaven that should do this work, of a chorus of harpers on this occasion, and of the same seven angels coming out of the temple, and receiving the vials, in order to execute their commission. The vision of the seven angels, having the seven last plagues, so called because filled up with the wrath of God, is said to be a sign, great and marvellous, ([Revelation 15:1](#)) a sea of glass, mingled with fire, is seen, with persons standing on it, described by the victory they had got over the beast, his image, mark, and number of his name; by having the harps of God in their hands, and by the song they sung, called the song of Moses, and of the Lamb; in which they ascribe to Christ deity, dominion over the saints, omnipotence, justice, truth, and holiness; give him glory, celebrate his works, commend his ways, and suggest that he ought to be the object of the fear and worship of all, ([Revelation 15:2-4](#)). Next the temple in heaven is seen opened, out of which come the seven angels, described by the place they came from, the temple; by what they had, the seven plagues; by their habit, clothed in pure white linen; and by their golden girdles about their breasts, ([Revelation 15:5,6](#)) to whom one of the four living creatures, made mention of in ([Revelation 4:6](#)) delivers to them seven golden vials full of divine wrath, upon which the temple is filled with smoke from the Lord; so that it was not possible for anyone to enter into it, until these seven plagues were ended, ([Revelation 15:7,8](#)).

Ver. 1. *And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous,* etc.] This chapter is a preparation to the pouring out of the seven vials, as ([Revelation 16:1-21](#)) is to the sending of the seven epistles, and ([Revelation 2:1-3:22](#)) to the seven seals and seven trumpets: the vision is called a “sign”, because what was seen was significative of future events; a sign of the coming of Christ, of his kingdom, and of the destruction of antichrist; and it is said to be a sign “in heaven”, where John was called up, and where he had his visions; and it was “another”, a different one from that in ([Revelation 12:1](#)) which represented the downfall of Paganism,

but this the downfall of Popery; and it is a very “great” one, it is expressive of great things, as the fall of Babylon the great, or the judgment of the great whore, and the great glory of the church and kingdom of Christ; and it is “marvellous”, for the two grand events it respects are very wonderful; as that antichrist, who was once in such power, should be destroyed, and that by such weak means, in the esteem of men, as the preaching of the Gospel, which is no less marvellous than the fall of Jericho by the sound of rams' horns; and that the church, which was in so low an estate in the wilderness, for the space of 1260 days or years, should become so glorious. The vision follows,

seven angels, having the seven last plagues; these are not the same angels that blew the seven trumpets, for they are not contemporary with them, but are more likely the same with those in the preceding chapter; though they seem rather to be different from them: if these were angels literally understood, their having plagues is no objection to their being good angels, since such are often the executioners of God's wrath; and that these good ones, appears from one of them talking with John, and showing him the judgment of antichrist, and another the bride, the Lamb's wife, and her glory, (~~617~~ Revelation 17:1 21:9) though they seem rather to be the ministers of the Gospel, since they are said to come out of the temple, (~~615~~ Revelation 15:6) and since the destruction of antichrist will be by the breath of Christ's mouth, or by the preaching of the Gospel; unless it should be thought that members of churches are designed, since these angels receive their vials from one of the four living creatures, (~~617~~ Revelation 15:7) or preachers of the word; and may denote some very principal men, as kings, who will now be come to Zion, and be members of Gospel churches, and will be the nursing fathers and protectors of them; and these will hate the whore, and burn her flesh with fire; but of these angels, see more on (~~615~~ Revelation 15:6). They are said to have “the seven last plagues”; that is, in their vials; for these seven plagues are the same with the seven vials of the wrath of God, to be poured out upon antichrist; and are no other than so many steps, ways, and means, by which God will bring on and finish his destruction: these are called the last plagues, because they will be in the last days: there have been plagues before, as at the destruction of the old world, and of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the plagues of Egypt, and the downfall of several monarchies and kingdoms, and of Paganism in the Roman empire; but these will fall upon antichrist, and will be the last upon him, for they will issue in his utter ruin; they will

be the last plagues upon the earth, there will be no other after them, but the conflagration of the world, and the general destruction of the wicked in hell. These plagues are the same with the third woe, and are an explanation of it, and belong to the sounding of the seventh trumpet, which brings in the kingdoms of this world to become the kingdoms of Christ, and the time of God's wrath upon the nations, or Gentiles, the Papists, and of judging the dead, and destroying them that destroyed the earth, (⁶¹¹⁵Revelation 11:15,18) for these plagues do not follow upon the harvest and vintage, nor has this vision any respect to them, nor to be connected with the preceding chapter, but with (⁶¹⁰¹Revelation 11:1-19) and gives an enlarged view, both of the glory of Christ's kingdom, and of the ruin of antichrist, by these plagues, called the last:

for in them is filled up the wrath of God; upon the beast, and his followers.

Ver. 2. *And I saw, as it were, a sea of glass mingled with fire*, etc.] Not baptism, but rather the blood of Christ, which may be compared to a sea, for its abundant virtue and efficacy in cleansing from all sin; and to a sea “of glass”, since in it are clearly seen free justification, full pardon, peace and reconciliation; and may be said to be “mingled with fire”, being attended in the application of it with the Spirit of God, whose gifts and graces are sometimes signified by fire: and so, according to others, this sea may represent the pure church of God, as washed in the blood of the Lamb; compared to a sea for the multitude of which it consists, and to a sea of glass, because of the transparency and clearness of its principles and practices, and may be said to be mingled with the fire of love and zeal: most interpreters understand it of the world, which is like a sea for the multitude of its inhabitants; and sometimes to a troubled one, because of the restlessness and disquietude of the wicked in it; but here it is like a sea of glass, for the quiet, and peace, and rest it shall be in at this time; though it is commonly said to be like such a sea, partly because all things are manifest, and open to an omniscient God; and partly because of its outward splendour, and the brittleness, frailty, and transitoriness of it; and to be mixed with fire, either because of the light of the Gospel, and the operation of the Spirit in the hearts of some that are in it, or because of the afflictions and persecutions the saints in it; though it seems best of all to understand it of the Gospel, as in (see Gill on “⁶¹⁰⁶Revelation 4:6”); and which may be said to be mingled with fire, either because of the powerful and clear demonstration of the Spirit that attends it to the minds of many, or that heat of persecution which is raised by it; (see ⁶¹²⁹Luke 12:49) or rather it

denotes the purity of the Gospel in those times, its general spread, and the great zeal and fervour of the professors of it, since persecution will now be at an end.

And them that had gotten the victory over the beast; over antichrist, signified the beast, that rose up out of the sea, and out of the earth, (⁶¹³¹Revelation 13:1,11) and which are the same, and were but one, though in different forms, as from hence appears: the beast first overcame the saints, by slaying of them; and they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, by preaching and professing the Gospel, by their close and constant adherence to it, and by dying for it:

and over his image; caused by him to be made to the first beast; and is no other than the Popish religion, which bears a resemblance to Paganism; and which the saints may be said to get the victory over, by standing out against it, opposing and refuting it, not giving into it, but bearing their testimony against it:

and over his mark; refusing to receive it either in their forehead, or in their right hand; that is, either to swear allegiance to him, or profess his religion. This clause is wanting in the Alexandrian copy, Vulgate Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions:

and over the number his name; that is, they would not own his supremacy and authority, nor embrace his doctrines, nor obey his orders, nor be reckoned his followers in any form or shape; (see ⁶¹³⁵Revelation 13:15-18). These conquerors John saw

stand on the sea of glass; which, if applied to the blood of Christ, shows that these confessors were purified by it, and were more than conquerors through it; that they were come out of great tribulation, and had washed their garments, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; and were just come up from the washing, and stood upon, or rather by, or “near the sea”, as the Arabic version renders it, in allusion to the priests at the molten sea, in the temple: but if the world is meant by the sea, their standing upon it designs their victory and triumph over it by faith, their having it under their feet, and their contempt of it; but rather, since the Gospel is intended, it may denote their solid standing upon the doctrines of it, the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and their steadfast continuance in them, and faithful abiding by them, whereby they got the victory over antichrist:

having the harps of God: their hearts in an excellent frame, tuned and disposed by God, to sing his praise, and set forth his glory; having them filled with spiritual joy and gladness, and with great thankfulness, on account of their victory, the happy state of Christ's church, and the destruction of its enemies: the allusion is to the people of Israel, Moses and the men, and Miriam and the women with timbrels and dances standing on the sea shore, when the Egyptians were destroyed, singing the praises of God; as is still more manifest from the following verse.

Ver. 3. *And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God,* etc.] Not that in (^(481B)Deuteronomy 32:1) but that in (^(481B)Exodus 15:1) and the sense is, either that they observed the law of Moses, which he as a servant in the Lord's house faithfully delivered, and kept it distinct from the Gospel, and did not blend them together, as in the times before; or rather, that they sung a song like that of Moses, and on a like occasion. Pharaoh was the very picture of the pope of Rome; his oppression and cruel usage of the Israelites represent the tyranny and cruelty of the Romish antichrist; and the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, and the destruction of the Egyptians at the Red sea, which occasioned the song of Moses, were an emblem of God's bringing his people out of antichristian bondage, and of the ruin of antichrist, upon which this song is sung; and Rome, in this book, is called Egypt, (^(611B)Revelation 11:8). The Jews have a notion, that the very song of Moses itself will be sung in the world to come, in the days of the Messiah; for they say, there are in it the times of the Messiah, and of Gog and Magog, and of the resurrection of the dead, and the world to come ^{f372}. And this song was sung by the Levites in the daily service ^{f373}.

And the song of the Lamb; the Lamb of God, who was slain for the sins of men; the same song of which mention is made, (^(611B)Revelation 5:9 14:3) the song of redeeming love, a song of praise for the blessings of grace which come through him, and of deliverance by him:

saying, great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; Christ is in this song addressed as a divine person, as Lord of all, God over all, blessed for ever, the Almighty God, as his works declare him to be; his works of creation, providence, and redemption, which are all great and marvellous, particularly the accomplishment of the glorious things spoken of his church, and the destruction of his enemies, which are here designed:

just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints: made so by his Father, and acknowledged by all his people, and especially at this time, when his

kingdom will more visibly and gloriously appear: the Alexandrian copy, one of Stephens's, the Complutensian edition, and Arabic version, read, King of nations, as in (²⁴⁰⁰Jeremiah 10:7) from whence this, and the beginning of the next verse, seem to be taken; the Vulgate Latin and Syriac versions read, "King of ages", an everlasting King, as in (²⁴⁰⁰Jeremiah 10:10) but the generality of copies read as we have it: and the ways of this King are just and true; his purposes, decrees, and counsels of old, are faithfulness and truth; all his proceedings towards his own people, his subjects, are mercy and truth; his precepts and ordinances, his worship and service, are just and true, in opposition to every false way; and all his judgments upon his enemies, which are intended, are just, being what their sins deserved, and are true, being agreeably to his word and threatenings.

Ver. 4. *Who shall not fear thee, O Lord*, etc.] At this time the people of the Jews shall seek after Christ, and fear him and his goodness; the forces of the Gentiles shall be brought into Zion, whose heart shall then fear, and be enlarged; the fear of the Lord will be in all places, and in all men, both Jews and Gentiles, (³⁸⁰⁵Hosea 3:5 ³⁹⁰⁵Isaiah 60:5)

and glorify thy name? by ascribing all divine perfections to him, giving him divine worship and adoration, and attributing the whole of salvation to him, and the glory of all that is done for his church, and against its enemies:

for thou only art holy; not only perfectly holy, as man, but infinitely and essentially holy, as God, and the fountain of holiness to his people, as Mediator: this character seems to be given in opposition to antichrist, who arrogantly assumes the title of holiness to himself, when it only belongs to Christ.

For all nations shall come and worship before thee; the Gospel shall now be preached to all nations, and the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of it; the kingdoms of this world will become Christ's, and his kingdom shall be to the ends of the earth, and all people shall obey him: the words seem to be taken, with some other phrases before used, out of (³⁸⁰⁸Psalms 86:8-10)

for thy judgments are made manifest; or "thy justifications", or "righteousnesses"; the perfect righteousness of Christ, and the doctrine of justification by it, will now be most clearly revealed, and generally received, in opposition to the Popish doctrine of merits, works of supererogation, etc. or the judgments of the King of saints upon antichrist,

who will now avenge their blood, which he has shed; (see ⁽⁶⁷⁰⁾Revelation 17:1 19:2) and the justice and righteousness of his proceedings against the man of sin will be notorious and manifest to all, and be acknowledged, as in (⁽⁶⁶⁵⁾Revelation 16:5,6 19:1,2).

Ver. 5. *And after that I looked*, etc.] That is, after John had seen the above vision, he looked again, and saw what follows:

and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened; this does not refer to heaven itself, the antitype of the holy of holies, which is opened by the blood of Christ, by which he himself has entered, and his people have boldness to enter now by faith, and where their souls always enter upon their departure from their bodies; for of this temple cannot be said what is in (⁽⁶⁵⁸⁾Revelation 15:8) nor to the Jerusalem state, or the most glorious state of the church on earth, during the thousand years' reign; for in that there will be no temple, (⁽⁶¹²⁾Revelation 21:22) much less to any material temple on earth; the temple at Jerusalem was destroyed before this vision was, and is never to be rebuilt; nor will there be any third temple, as the Jews vainly expect: but to the church of God in the spiritual reign of Christ, under the blowing of the seventh trumpet; and designs the same thing as in (⁽⁶¹⁹⁾Revelation 11:19) and this is to be understood as what will be, not before, but after the seven angels have poured out their vials; for till they have fulfilled the seven plagues, there is no entering into the temple for smoke, (⁽⁶⁵⁸⁾Revelation 15:8) and besides, it was after these things; after John had seen the seven angels, with the seven last plagues, (⁽⁶⁵¹⁾Revelation 15:1) that he beheld the temple opened. The church is called “the temple”, in allusion to Solomon's temple, because of its builder, materials, situation, magnificence, strength, holiness, and use; (see Gill on “⁽⁶¹⁶⁾2 Corinthians 6:16”) and the tabernacle, in allusion to the tabernacle of Moses, which was before the temple, because God dwells in it, as he did in that; and because like that it is movable, and but for a while; and points at this church state, which will not always be so, but change and sink into the Laodicean state: and it is called “the tabernacle of the testimony”, as that was; the testimony was the law, or the two tables of stone, so called, because they testified what was the good, and perfect, and acceptable will of God; and these being put into the ark, were a testimony of the covenant between God and the people of Israel, and were a witness against them, when they transgressed them, (⁽⁶²⁵⁾Deuteronomy 31:26,27) and over these were the mercy seat, and cherubim, as a testimony of the divine Presence; and the law being put into

the ark, hence the ark was called the ark of the testimony, and that being placed in the tabernacle, that was called the tabernacle of the testimony, or of witness, (~~4050~~Numbers 1:50 ~~4074~~Acts 7:44) and all these were types of, and came to signify Christ, and the covenant of grace, the Gospel, and the mysteries of it: so that by the opening of the temple, etc. is meant a free exercise of the true religion, a setting up of Gospel churches according to the original plan, a keeping of the ordinances, as they were first delivered, and a more clear discovery of Gospel truths: it is the same with the open door in the Philadelphian church state, (~~6688~~Revelation 3:8) as well as that at this time there will be a full manifestation of the judgments of God upon antichrist: the Alexandrian copy leaves out the word “behold”.

Ver. 6. *And the seven angels came out of the temple*, etc.] By which it appears, that they are such who are of, or belong to the church of Christ; and are either ministers, or members of churches, who will be the executioners of God's wrath upon the beast, and his followers; some copies, and the Complutensian edition, read, “out of heaven”:

having the seven plagues; that is, they were appointed to inflict them, and were preparing and furnishing for it, and quickly had orders to do it:

clothed in pure and white linen; in which habit angels have been used to appear, as at our Lord's resurrection and ascension, and is by some thought to be expressive of the purity and holiness of angels; but rather saints are meant, who appear in the habit of priests, being all made kings and priests; and denotes their being clothed with the pure and spotless robe of Christ's righteousness, which is fine linen, clean and white, and the righteousness of the saints, (~~6688~~Revelation 19:8) and also their spiritual joy in their present situation, and in the view of the destruction of antichrist, their sackcloth being put off, in which they, the witnesses, before appeared. So the linen garment of the high priest was, as Philo the Jew says ^{f374}, made of “fine linen”, *καψαρωτατος*, “most pure”. The Alexandrian copy, and some copies of the Vulgate Latin version, and some exemplars mentioned by Andreas Caesariensis, an ancient commentator on this book, read, “clothed with a stone, pure and white”; as if they were arrayed in garments of stone, which is not likely; unless reference is had to the stone asbestos, of an iron colour, found, as Pliny says ^{f375}, in the mountains of Arcadia, of which linen was made, called “asbestinum”, and of that garments; which were so far from being consumed by fire, that they became clean and brighter by it; or

to the Carystian stone, which the inhabitants of Carystus used to comb, spin, and weave, and make carpets of ^{f376}.

And having their breasts girded with golden girdles; such an one as Christ himself was girded with, (⁶¹¹³Revelation 1:13) and this some understand of the love, which the breasts of angels are filled with towards the saints, and their readiness to perform all good offices to them, and to execute the judgments of God upon their enemies, whenever they have orders: but since these angels come out of the temple, and members of Gospel churches seem designed, rather this is to be understood either of the grace of faith, which is much more precious than of gold that perisheth, which receives the righteousness of Christ, puts it on, and girds it about the believer; or of love, the love of God and Christ, which encompass the saints about, and constrain them, and engage them in fervent love to them, and one another: or of the girdle of truth, (⁶¹⁶⁴Ephesians 6:14) which is near and close to them, and which keeps them close to Christ; nor can they depart totally and finally from him, or that; or in general, this may denote their strength and readiness for what service they shall be called to; (see ²¹²⁵Luke 12:35,36 ⁶¹¹³1 Peter 1:13).

Ver. 7. *And one of the four beasts*, etc.] Or living creatures: now we hear of them, as of the four and twenty elders, under the blowing of the seventh trumpet, (⁶¹¹⁶Revelation 11:16) with which this vision is contemporary; these living creatures are the ministers of the Gospel; (see Gill on ⁶¹¹⁶Revelation 4:6”) and this was one, or the first of them, who was like a lion, for fortitude and courage, and whose voice was as the noise of thunder, (⁶¹⁰⁷Revelation 4:7 6:1) and so fitly represents those ministers who shall give out the vials of God's wrath: not any particular person is designed, who shall be at this time; and much less Luke the evangelist, as Lord Napier thinks; nor Peter, who prophesied of the last time, (⁶¹⁸⁰2 Peter 3:10,11) as Grotius; but a set of Gospel ministers, comparable to one of the living creatures John had before seen; of whom it is said, that they

gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever: these seven vials are for the seven last plagues to be put into, and out of which they are to be taken, or poured, and inflicted; (see ⁶¹⁰⁹Revelation 21:9) hence it appears, that the seven plagues, and the wrath of God, are the same thing, and both design God's judgments upon antichrist; and these being expressed by “vials”, which are measures, and large ones, show the large abundance and plenteous effusion

of God's wrath, and the secret, sudden, and irresistible power of it; and yet that it will be poured out in measure, according to righteous judgment, and therefore it is put into vials; and these golden ones, expressive of the purity, holiness, and justice of the divine proceedings: and it will be very terrible; it will be, not the wrath of men, but of God, and a cup of the fierceness of his wrath; it will be the wrath of the living God, of him that lives for ever, and as he is, such will his wrath be; it will continue for ever, for this wrath will issue in the everlasting destruction of antichrist: so the wrath of God is signified by a wine cup of fury, (^{<2515>}Jeremiah 25:15) and that destruction, and those plagues which God designed to bring upon Pharaoh, are by Jonathan ben Uzziel, in his Targum on (^{<0412>}Genesis 40:12) called **azgwr d al yyp**, “a vial of wrath”, which he should drink of: and in the pouring out of there seven vials, there is in some of them a manifest allusion to the plagues of Egypt. So the cup of trembling, in (^{<2517>}Isaiah 51:17) is by the Targumists called **yl yp**, “a vial”, and also “the cup of fury”, (^{<2512>}Isaiah 51:22) and that these vials were not small narrow mouthed vessels, but large broad mouthed ones, and more properly basins or bowls, is manifest from the use of the word with Jewish writers. The dishes on which the loaves of the shewbread were set, each of which loaves was ten hands breadth long, and five broad ^{f377}, are by the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem on (^{<0259>}Exodus 25:29 ^{<0417>}Numbers 4:7) called **tl yyp**, “vials”; and so the chargers offered at the dedication of the tabernacle, (^{<0473>}Numbers 7:13,84,85) are, by the same, rendered vials, which weighed 130 shekels; and so the silver bowl they offered, is, by Josephus ^{f378}, called a vial: the bowls in (^{<3086>}Amos 6:6) are, by the Targum there, said to be “silver vials”. The lordly dish brought by Jael to Sisera, (^{<0425>}Judges 5:25) the Targum calls the vial of the mighty ones; and the earthen vessels used at the trial of the suspected wife, and at the cleansing of the leper, are both by Jewish writers said to be “vials” ^{f379}. Now these vials were given to the seven angels by one of the living creatures, the ministers of the word; from whence it seems that these angels design members of churches, as distinct from ministers; and may intend civil magistrates, and very principal ones, as kings of the earth, who, in this state of things, and times, will belong to the churches, and will be the instruments of destroying antichrist: and these vials may be said to be given to them by the ministers, since they will execute this vengeance in consequence of their prayers, and the churches', called vials full of odours, (^{<0418>}Revelation 5:8) and because these great men will be stirred up by the

ministers of the Gospel, and by their ministrations, to do this work; (see ^{<6684>}Revelation 18:4-6).

Ver. 8. *And the temple was filled with smoke*, etc.] Not with the smoke of false doctrine and superstition; that comes out of the bottomless pit, this from God, (^{<6682>}Revelation 9:2) and besides, Gospel churches will grow purer and purer, while the seven angels are pouring out the vials: but rather this may be understood of judicial blindness and hardness of heart, upon the antichristian party, which will come upon them from God in righteous judgment; so that they will not be reformed by the plagues, and vials of wrath, nor repent of their sins; but blaspheme God, who has power over the plagues, and so shall not be able to enter into the temple: or else this may design God's powerful and gracious presence in his church, in allusion to the cloud which filled the tabernacle, so that Moses could not enter; and which filled the temple, so that the priests could not minister, (^{<1018>}Exodus 40:34,35 ^{<1080>}1 Kings 8:10,11) since this is said to be

from the glory of God, and from his power; whose presence is the glory in the midst of his church, and a covert, a protection and defence, to the saints, so that none can come into the temple to hurt them: (see ^{<2045>}Isaiah 4:5,6) or rather this intends “the smoke of the anger of God”, as the Ethiopic version renders it, and which is intolerable; and it may have respect not only to the wrath of God, which is insupportable, but to that great affliction which will befall the saints in those times, through the last struggle of the beast; called the earthquake, and the hour of temptation, and a time of trouble, as never the like was, and which will be shortened for the elect's sake:

and no man was able to enter into the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled. None of the anti-Christian party will attempt to enter in, because of their blindness and obduracy; nor can they get in to do any mischief, because the glorious and powerful presence of God is a defence against them: and this may also have some respect to the darkness of God's judgments, which will not be clearly manifest until these seven plagues are accomplished; till that time God's judgments on antichrist will remain a great deep, and be unsearchable; there will be no entering into the temple, so as fully to understand them, which is meant by going into the sanctuary of God, (^{<4931>}Psalms 73:17) and this makes the interpretation of the pouring out of these vials, in the next chapter, very difficult.