

REVELATION – SERMON 60

PRELUDE TO THE PLAGUES

Revelation 15:5-8

INTRODUCTION

- In recent days bushfires have ravaged many parts of drought-stricken Australia
- More and more, the media is using Biblical language to describe the disasters: *diabolical, hell, inferno, apocalyptic* and *Armageddon*
- Yet as bad as things are, such events are nothing new in the history of the world
- According to the Scriptures, the future *will* get much worse (Matthew 24:21)
- This seven-year period known as the tribulation, is the “seventieth week” of Daniel 9:24-27, and the events of this time are recorded in Revelation chapters 6-19
- It is “the great and terrible day of the Lord” (Joel 2:31), in which God will purify and save the nation of Israel, while punishing the ungodly in preparation for Christ’s earthly kingdom
- The successive judgments of God during the tribulation are depicted as seals (which *unveil* God’s wrath); trumpets (which *proclaim* God’s wrath); and vials (which *pour out* God’s wrath)

THE TRIBULATION JUDGMENTS		
SEALS (ch.6)	TRUMPETS (chs.8-9)	VIALS (ch.16)
Antichrist	Hail, Fire, Blood on Earth	Grievous Sores
War	Meteor; $\frac{1}{3}$ Seas to Blood	Seas to Blood
Famine	Bitter Waters	Rivers to Blood
Death ($\frac{1}{4}$ of men)	Darkness	Scorching Heat & Fire
Imprecations	Demonic Locusts	Darkness
Earthquake	Demonic Horsemen Kill $\frac{1}{3}$ Mankind	Armies Gather to Armageddon
Seven Trumpets	Seven Vials	Earthquake & Hail

- The intervening chapters give parenthetical visions which provide additional information surrounding the events and characters during the tribulation.
- Last week we considered the opening 4 verses of chapter 15 and the great chorus of tribulation martyrs singing God's glory in heaven.
- In v.5, while the scene remains in heaven, the focus shifts to the activities in the temple as seven last plagues are about to be poured out on earth.
- The anticipation of the cup of the wine of God's wrath (14:10), the harvest of the earth (14:14-16) and the winepress of the wrath of God (14:14-16) is intensified here as the seven vials appear
- We are reminded again that God remains on his throne, in complete control over the events upon earth

I. THE GRAND SCENE OF THE SANCTUARY IN PREPARATION (5)

A. The heavenly temple

1. This is “the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Hebrews 8:2) – the earthly tabernacle “was a copy and shadow of the heavenly” (Hebrews 8:5; 9:11,23)
2. The word for “temple” (*naos*) here refers to the most holy place where God’s presence dwells
3. The “testimony” (or “witness”) in the Old Testament tabernacle referred to the tablets containing the ten commandments (Numbers 18:2; cf. Revelation 11:19)
 - a. God’s law manifests his holy nature
 - b. God’s law ever has been and always will be the standard of righteousness required to be accepted of him
 - c. God’s law condemns every person as a sinner, under God’s wrath, and in need of Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:22)
 - d. When God pours out his wrath upon the ungodly in the tribulation, it emanates not from an arbitrary whim, but from a judicial imperative concerning unrepentant lawbreakers

B. The temple opened

1. This opening speaks of *revelation*
 - a. The earthly sanctuary was closed and hidden to man, except for the high priest on the day of atonement

- b. At Christ's death, the veil was rent, the way to God was opened, and the formerly hidden mysteries and purposes of God were brought to light
 - c. As the tribulation reaches its final stage, the purposes of God will be made manifest, and "the mystery of God should be finished" (cf. Revelation 10:7)
2. This opening speaks of *retribution*
- a. The previous opening of the temple (11:19) manifested tokens of judgment
 - b. Likewise in this case the temple is opened in order for wrath to be unleashed
3. This opening speaks of *release*
- a. The time has come for the angels holding the plagues to go forth

II. THE GRAVE SPIRITS HOLDING THE SEVEN PLAGUES (6-7)

A. The seven angels

- 1. Throughout history, God has employed angels as his instruments in executing his wrath upon sinners (2 Samuel 24:16; 2 Kings 19:35; Acts 12:23) and will do so again
- 2. To the heirs of salvation, they are ministers of God's grace (Hebrews 1:14), but to the children of wrath, they are executors of God's vengeance

3. They come out of the temple—the very presence of God—obeying his commands, fulfilling his will (14:15,17)
4. Pure and white linen
 - a. This portrays the holiness and righteousness of both their persons, as well as their mission (19:8,14)
 - b. This may also indicate a priestly role—they have access to God; they will make a *sacrifice* of judgment unto God
5. Golden girdles
 - a. This shows their high standing before God
 - b. The girdle is a symbol of strength (Isaiah 22:21)
 - c. It shows their readiness and alacrity for the work they are called to (1 Kings 18:46)
 - d. It indicates their punitive mission, just as Christ is shown with a golden girdle in his Second Coming (1:13)

B. The seven plagues

1. These are the “last” (*eschatas*) plagues
2. The descriptor “plagues” is another parallel with the Exodus story, as is the hard-hearted impenitence of the heathen (16:9,11); the song of Moses at the sea (15:3-4); the smoke of God’s presence (15:8); and the tabernacle of the testimony (15:5)

- a. Both the exodus and the tribulation have dual purposes of *judgment* and *deliverance*
 - b. The Israelites were saved, while the Egyptians perished; likewise in the tribulation, the believers will be finally delivered, while the unbelievers will be destroyed
3. They are seven vials
- a. They are gold, showing they from God himself
 - b. In 5:8, the vials are full of odours which are the prayers of the saints
 - c. Those vials of imprecatory prayers find their answer in these vials of indignant wrath
 - d. They are given by one of the four beasts on behalf of God
 - e. They are full of the wrath of God
 - f. This wrath goes beyond the momentary plagues of the tribulation to the eternal torments of the lake of fire (14:10), as it emanates from him “who liveth for ever and ever” (v.7)

III. THE GLORIOUS SMOKE OF THE SOVEREIGN'S PRESENCE (8)

A. The temple filled with smoke

- 1. This is the *shekinah* glory of God, his visible presence, which filled the tabernacle (Exodus 19:18; 40:34) and

Solomon's temple (1 Kings 8:10-11; 2 Chronicles 5:11-14; 7:1-3)

2. This same smoke in the heavenly temple was witnessed by Isaiah (Isaiah 6:4)
3. As it was on Mount Sinai, the smoke of God's glory and power is associated with his *holiness* and *judgment* (Exodus 40:35)
4. It is a reminder that while on earth all is chaos and calamity, in the temple of heaven, God is upon his throne executing his eternal decrees (Ephesians 1:11)

B. No man was able enter

1. Once the time of final judgment upon earth has commenced, none can stay God's hand (Psalm 76:7)
2. Prayers for mercy will not be heard as the door of grace is closed (Proverbs 1:24-33)
3. "When mercy has been long offered and despised, the Lord at last becomes inexorable, and will suffer none to intercede or plead with him." (William Burkitt)

CONCLUSION

1. For the believer, God's wrath for sin is "finished" (John 19:30)
2. For the unbeliever, God's wrath presently abides on him, and will ultimately devour him
3. There are two cups offered to every sinner – the cup of salvation (Psalm 116:13) or the cup of God's wrath (14:10)

4. Those who refuse the former *must* drink the latter (John 3:36)
5. Under the previous plagues of the tribulation, God gives space for sinners to repent, sending witnesses (including an angel) to preach the gospel to the world, and in his wrath he remembers mercy (Habakkuk 3:2)
6. But when the hour comes for these seven vials to be brought forth, they are found without a single drop of mercy, grace, longsuffering or forgiveness
7. They are filled to the brim with the undiluted wrath of God
8. From that point on, there is no more opportunity for men to repent
9. At any moment, the door of grace may shut upon you, whether by death or the Rapture
10. Countless multitudes will suffer eternally in hell lamenting their folly in leaving their repentance till it was *too late* (see Matthew 25:1-13)
11. Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 3:15)