

THE LAST PLAGUES
AND
INTRODUCTION OF
THE SEVEN
CENSER-ANGELS
(REVELATION 15:1-8)

THE FIRST FIVE
CENSER-ANGELS
(REVELATION 16:1-11)

INTRODUCTION

Revelation Chapters 15 & 16 depicts the third and last vision of events on earth. As in the first two earthly visions (6:1-8:5 and 8:6-11:19), there are seven scenes. In this third vision, each of the scenes is introduced by an angel with a censer (bowl).

The first five scenes (16:1-11) depict events that take place concurrently: each covers the same time period, from Christ's ascension up to His Second Advent. The sixth scene (16:12-16) describes the last battle (Armageddon), which takes place just prior to the end of this present world at our Lord's return. The seventh scene (16:17-21) envisions the End at the Second Advent of Jesus, The Christ.

REVELATION 15:1-8

INTRODUCTION



FIRST VISION

SCENE 1-5 – Seals 1-5 (6:1-11)

SCENE 6 – Sixth Seal (6:12-17)
(End of this World) (NO Battle Scene)

The Interlude: Comfort and
and Protection of the Church (7:1-17)

SCENE 7 – Seventh Seal (8:1-5)
(Introduces the Second Vision)

SECOND VISION

SCENE 1-5 – Trumpets 1-5 (8:6 – 9:12)
Scene 5 (Fifth Trumpet-Angel)

SCENE 6 – Sixth Trumpet (9:13-21)
(The Great Battle)

The Interlude: The Church in Mission and
God's Protection (10:1-11:14)

SCENE 7 – Seventh Trumpet (11:15-19)
(End of this World)

The Interregnum
(Chapters 12-14)

THIRD VISION

SCENE 1-5 – Bowls 1-5 (15:1 – 16:11)

SCENE 6 – Sixth Bowl (16:12-16)
(The Battle of Armageddon)

SCENE 7 – Seventh Bowl (16:17-21)
(End of this World)

REVELATION 15:1 -8

ANOTHER SIGN

+ *“Another sign in heaven”* – This is the third time St. John has seen a “sign in heaven” (12:1 – the Woman; 12:3 – the dragon), but this sign is described as *“great and marvelous,”* emphasizing added significance of which we are to take note. Indeed, this is a *“great and marvelous sign,”* since this is the final of the three seven-fold visions St. John sees which describe what will take place on earth between our Lord’s Ascension and Second Advent. We have heard about the seven seals and seven trumpets; now we will hear about the seven censers (or bowls) of God’s wrath. This final set of judgments is the most severe of the three sevenfold visions.

REVELATION 15:1

ANOTHER SIGN

+ *“Seven angels who have seven plagues, the last ones, because of them the fury of God is brought to an end”* – The specific task of these seven censer-angels is the revelation of the *‘seven plagues, the last ones,’* by which God will vent and complete His ‘fury’ (v.1). The angels are on a godly mission! On behalf of God, and for the sake of the Church, they herald the last great work of God to move the human race to repentance. The revelation of and the sending out of the plagues of God’s fury are called a *‘great and marvelous’* sign, for it is by these last plagues that God will display His righteous judgment and thus show forth the glory of His Name.

REVELATION 15:1

THE BATTLEFIELD

+ “...like a glassy sea mixed with fire” – This is a description of the battlefield on which the warfare between the church and the beasts of Satan takes place. The “glassy sea” symbolizes the peace and serenity which the church has even in the midst of the battle – it is reminiscent of the “glassy sea, like crystal” which is before the heavenly throne of God (4:6).



REVELATION 15:2

THE BATTLEFIELD

Saints on earth are citizens of heaven and are assured of the eternal peace and comfort which belongs to all those who enjoy that citizenship. However, while they remain on earth, the sea of glass (hope/assurance of faith) upon which they stand is *“mixed with fire,”* which symbolizes the horrific suffering they will endure during their battle with Satan, the political beast and the religious beast.

REVELATION 15:2



THE BATTLEFIELD

+ *“Those [who, though being conquered] by the beast and by its image and by the number of its name”* – John uses a very unusual and very uncommon Greek construction here. It’s in the form of a solecism, which is an inappropriate use of language, like *“Curiouser and Curiouser....”* Why such unconventional use of language?



REVELATION 15:2

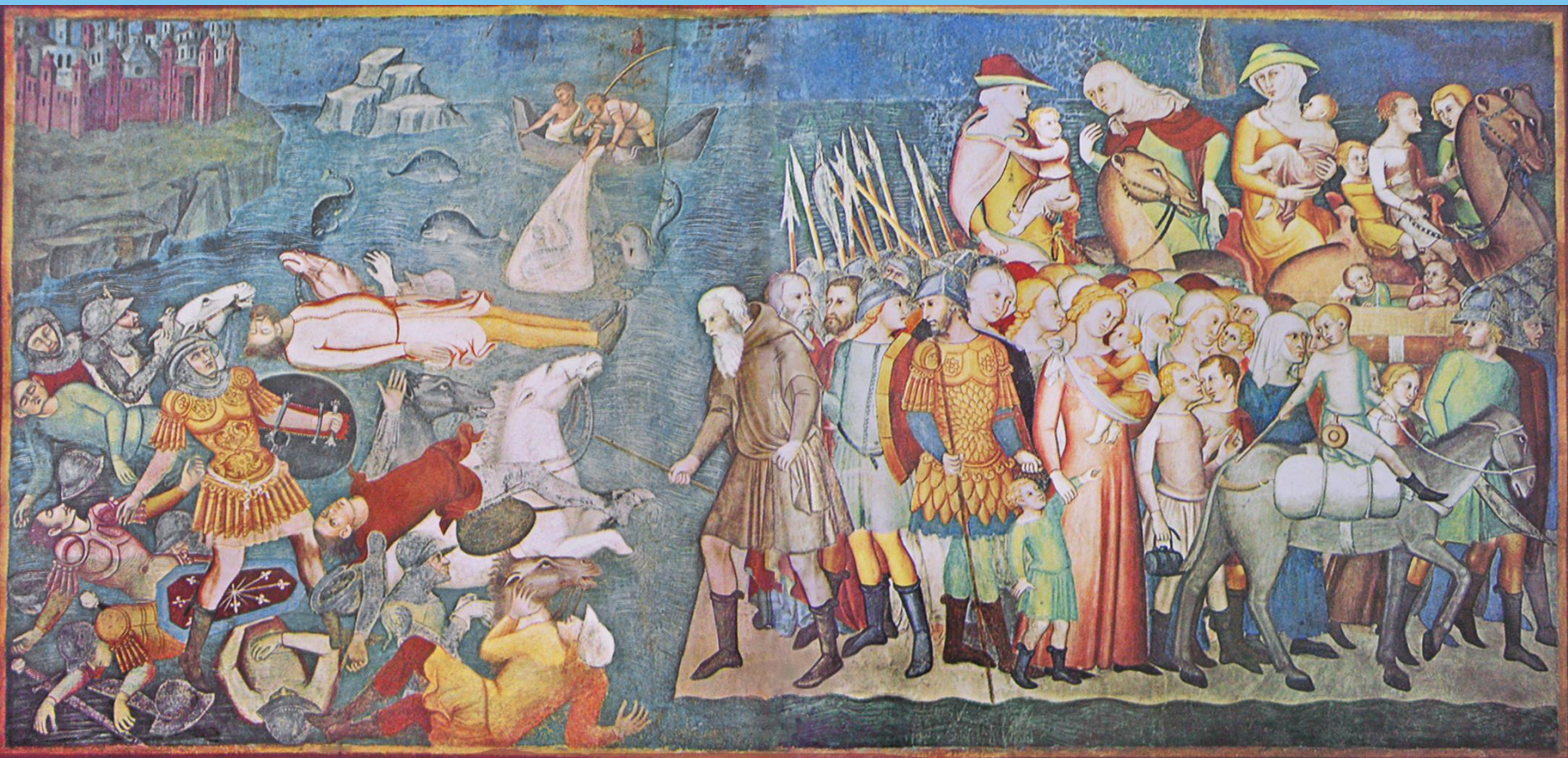
THE BATTLEFIELD

To make a point: Those who are being conquered by the beast in their earthly and human experience, though trampled and slaughtered, nevertheless are victorious by faith.



REVELATION 15:2

THE VICTORY SONG



THE VICTORY SONG

+ “...*the song of Moses . . . and the hymn of the Lamb*” –

Those who remain faithful on earth are those who are brought to, and kept in the faith, by the Holy Spirit through God’s Holy Word and Sacraments. God’s Holy Word consists of two fundamental doctrines – Law (symbolized by Moses) and Gospel (symbolized by the Lamb, i.e., Christ). These saints, then, are those who are slain by the Law and made alive by the Gospel. The Law shows them their sin (second use of the Law) of which they repent, and the Gospel shows them their Savior, to whom they cling.

REVELATION 15:2

THE VICTORY SONG

These saints join in the Divine Liturgy and sing praises to God who has delivered them and will keep them until the end. The song here echoes the song sung by the Israelites (cf. Exodus 15) in response to God's deliverance from the tyranny and suffering they endured in Egypt. God brought them to salvation through the waters of the Red Sea, even as God has brought us to salvation through the waters of Holy Baptism. The words of the song glorify God as the Lord and Judge of all nations in view of the fact that He alone is Holy (just as we sing in the Gloria in Excelsis). The faithful know that there is only One, True God, and that all nations will bow down to Him in the end.

REVELATION 15:3-4

TABERNACLE & CENSERS

+ “...*the sanctuary of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven*” – John’s attention is lifted heavenward where he sees the place where God’s presence dwells. It was in the Tabernacle (and later, the Temple) where God’s presence dwelt among His people (cf. Ex. 25:8-9; 40:34-38; et. al.). As the Tabernacle of Moses was the focal point of Israel’s life with God, so now the heavenly Tabernacle is the focus of the New Israel’s life with God. God’s Holy Presence is the center and core of the life of His saints in His heavenly glory. It is in Divine Service when the heavenly tabernacle descends to earth and you are privileged to enter in and receive the Divine Gifts He bestows upon you to keep you in the faith.

REVELATION 15:5-8

TABERNACLE & CENSERS

This vision is given before the seven angels are release with the seven censers (or bowls) to bring God's judgments upon the earth as a reminder to the saints that they (you) are under God's Divine protection amidst the plagues to come.

Dr. Brighton writes, “...as the earthly tabernacle embodied God's presence through His covenant with His people in the wilderness, so now the heavenly tabernacle reminds John that God, through the covenant of His Christ, is with His saints on earth with His ‘righteous actions’ for the protection of His church and for the judgment of her enemies.” [Concordia Commentary, Revelation, p. 405]

REVELATION 15:5-8

TABERNACLE & CENSERS

+ *“And the seven angels who have the seven plagues came out of the sanctuary”* – These seven angels come straight from the Holy Presence of God to unleash His righteous judgments upon the earth.



They are *“clothed in pure and shining linen and girded around the chest with golden cinctures.”* that is, they are clothed with the holiness and righteousness of God and His Christ, with the sign of royalty (golden sash) indicating that they are acting on behalf of God and in particular on behalf of Christ their Lord and King.

REVELATION 15:5-8

TABERNACLE & CENSERS

+ *“And one of the four winged creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden censers filled with the fury of God, who lives forever and ever.”* –

These angels do not obtain the censers (or bowls) of God’s wrath, but receive them from one of the holy angels which reside around the throne of God (4:6), which is further indication that these holy angels do not act on their own accord, but do the bidding of their Lord. And, the bidding of their Lord is to dispense His wrath upon the earth, so that the unrepentant will repent and turn to Him for salvation.



REVELATION 15:5-8

TABERNACLE & CENSERS

+ *“And the sanctuary was filled with smoke”* – Throughout Scripture, smoke is an indication of the Divine Presence and Holiness of God (cf. Ex. 19:18-20; 40:34; Is. 6:1-5); as it is here! Smoke fills the sanctuary for it is the place of God’s Divine Presence and Holiness.



SUMMARY

No mortal will fully understand the just actions of God in sending forth His judgments upon the earth until the Last Day. Then, all will know and understand the righteousness of God, as all will know and understand that He alone is God and bow down to worship Him. For most, it will be too late, but for the faithful, this will be the Great Day of their deliverance and reward, for which they, and you and me, patiently await!