

THE SEVEN PLAGUES FULFILLED

A SERMON

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“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.” Revelation 15:8

IT cannot perhaps be too often repeated that the word “heaven” in this Book of the Revelation generally means simply the gospel dispensation. Circumstances are recorded as taking place in the heaven here spoken of that could not be true of the heaven of glory, such as there being war in heaven, which of course could not be true if we were to take the heaven to mean the heaven of glory. But if we take the heaven here to mean the gospel dispensation, then all will come in in accordance; at the same time stretching forward, of course, into the heaven of everlasting glory to which John beautifully, in the latter part of this book, refers. Then the temple, you will at once perceive, must mean the church of the blessed God; not only the church of God, but it has another meaning as well as that, that will come before us this morning as we go through our subject. Now it is said that this temple was opened in heaven, that is, the true spiritual church. When the gospel dispensation was founded, then the true spiritual church was opened. You will observe that false prophets had closed the true church and had set up another church in its place. This has been the object of the adversary in all ages, to take away the key of knowledge, that is, the truth; to take that away and put something else into the place of it. So, the Pharisees, said the Savior, shut up the kingdom of heaven. But Christ opened, reopened, the true church of the blessed God, and one was brought in, and another was brought in, till by-and-bye, on the day of Pentecost, thousands rushed in. Now was the temple opened in heaven, and people were brought in, according to the Lord's own prediction of the same. I shall therefore, in the first place this morning, notice *the temple*; secondly, *the angels*; and thirdly, *the fulness of the temple*.

First, then, I notice *the temple*, as being the church of the blessed God. I am authorized to do this, first, because the temple literally was a type of the church; secondly, because the church itself is called the temple of God, growing into a holy temple of the Lord. Now this true church, this true temple of the Lord, is distinguished by two things especially; perhaps I might say three things.

¹ In the volume of 1866 sermons this sermon is labeled as number 1 (as it is the first for that year).

First, that of holiness; hence it is that there was no more holiness in the materials of which the literal temple was made than there was in those stones in the quarry that were left behind and there was no more holiness in that wood of Lebanon that was taken to form part of the temple than there was in the cedars that were left behind; and there was no more holiness in the gold that was taken to adorn the temple than there was in the gold that was not taken, all was alike by nature. But then those materials were taken from their common position and put into an uncommon, peculiar, and special position and use. There, therefore, the materials were reckoned holy by the use to which they were put; they were to form the residence of the most high God; and it was the presence of the Lord in that temple, that temple being for his residence and for his glory, it was on that account called the holy temple. Just so with us. Of course, similes are defective, and we must be careful, of course, that we do not carry them too far. I am not going to infer, from what I have said, that there is no holiness in the Christian; that would not be true. Not that there is any more holiness in us by nature than in others; we were taken out of the common quarry, we were taken out of the common forest, as it were, of the world, and if there be any difference, as those materials did not make the difference, living power made the difference, just so now; if we differ from our former position of unbelief and ignorance, it is the Lord that has made us to differ, being born now of an incorruptible seed, that lives and abides forever. So that the Christian has a principle of imperishable holiness, because there is the incorruptible seed that lives and abides forever; so that the Christian thus becomes, by faith in Christ, by the blood of Christ, by the mercy and the presence of God, consecrated to God; as said the apostle Peter, "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." But one of the chief things to which I wish to refer this, morning by which the true temple, the true church, is distinguished from all others, is that which it contains. Hence, in the last verse of the 11th chapter of this book, you have these words, "And the temple of God was opened in heaven," I take that to mean the true church of God, "and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament." Now, then, this ark of the testament is sure to be found in the true temple of God; and wherever this ark of the testament is not found, then the Lord is not there, and it is not the true church. And what is this ark of the testament? Does it not represent, we all know it does represent God's everlasting covenant; that this old covenant literal ark is a type of the new and everlasting covenant that is in Christ Jesus the Lord. And now let me come for one moment to individual experience. Wherever the Holy Spirit is the teacher, he is sure to lead that soul along from one degree of knowledge of its own condition to another, and from one degree of knowledge of its need, of God's mercy to another, and from one degree of acquaintance with Jesus Christ to another, until such an one becomes acquainted with the covenant of which Christ is the Mediator, that, he is the Mediator of a covenant established upon yea and amen promises, for "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant," and such an one will be led to see that there is an everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David; and such an one will say now, I see that Jesus Christ is to be my life, I see now that Jesus Christ is to be my light, that he is to be my sanctification, and my eternal salvation, according to this covenant that is ordered in all things and sure; not according to the doctrines of men, but according to this covenant, which David called all his salvation and all his desire. Now there was seen in his temple, in his church, this ark of his testament. We will avoid egotism all we can, still we may, without blamable egotism, refer, for the sake of honoring the Lord, a little to ourselves; I think in this one respect we have been favored. I think the Lord has lived among us, and appeared among us in that covenant, and that we love God our Father in that sworn covenant, that we love Jesus Christ as the Mediator of that better covenant, and that we love

the Holy and Eternal Spirit of God as the revealer of this wonderful and everlasting covenant. Now “the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament.” Where I a hearer tomorrow, and to wander about from place to place, and if I met with a church and congregation where this covenant was not the substance, where it was not the life, where it was not the order, I should not stop there. I should say, There is no covenant here, consequently no mercy-seat; for remember, the mercy-seat rests upon the covenant; there is no covenant here, not the true covenant; there is no mercy-seat, and if there be no mercy-seat there is no high priest; for the high priest once a year was to enter into the holy of holies; a comprehensive and beautiful type of the dear Savior entering into heaven by his own blood; and therefore, if there is no ark there is no mercy-seat, there is no high priest, there is no blood of the covenant; there is no presence of God, for God’s presence was there at the mercy-seat, and he said, “There I will commune with you, and there I will bless you, and there I will talk with you.” And does not the Lord talk to us in this way? There is no other way in which we can talk with God as our friend, there is no other way in which we can have peace with God, but by this everlasting covenant. Now, then, it is not much to be wondered at that this temple should be “filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power,” seeing that this is his own order of things. Now, then, John saw this temple; it is called a little farther back in this chapter the temple of his tabernacle, tabernacle meaning dwelling; so that in one case it is called the ark of the testament, here it is called the temple of his tabernacle, because it is the place of his abode. Now this was opened, and there was seen therein the ark of his testament; this then is the true church of God. But to come down to individual experience; I know my experience pushed me into this everlasting covenant. Oh, I look back at that four or five months in which I struggled in the miry clay in which I was, in the low dungeon in which I was, tempted to suicide in order to go into hell at once, for I thought the longer I lived the worse my hell would be. I shall never forget the wormwood and the gall; I shall never forget the despairing, the agony; I shall never forget when I looked in the glass and saw what a miserable skeleton I was then reduced to wretchedness, and it looked to me, my sight of myself made me feel as though I must soon die. And I heard Wesleyans, I heard low Calvinists, I heard one minister and another, but none of them came to where I was. There was a wonderful deal for me to do; I had tried it all, but could do nothing, till the Lord appeared to me by the 54th of Isaiah, and lifted me out of it all, sealed home pardoning mercy, brought me into the liberty of the gospel, and a sweet assurance of interest in a covenant that never fails, and promises that are yea and amen; and then I was filled, as it were, with holy smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and keep it to myself I could not. Now every Christian must have this same experience in kind, but not the same in degree; it is not every one that is pressed so hard or delivered so conspicuously. One thing I do say that this dear covenant, over which I have ranged now for thirty-eight years, yes, for forty years, it is now exactly forty years ago since the Lord brought my soul into liberty, I have ranged over it, and I love it more than ever. Here I find all the mercy I need, all the sympathy, all the soothing, all the friendship, all the kindness. I have watched lately this matter very much. I have met, as you are aware, and so have you as well as myself, with plenty of unkindness lately; and I have thought within myself: How am I in private? With the same access to God, or more than I ever had. How am I in reading his holy word? Does it open to me as much as ever? Yes, if not more. Is Jesus Christ as precious as ever? I think more. Do you love the people as much as ever? I think more because they have shown more love to me. And do you feel interested in the welfare of immortal souls as much as ever? Yes, if not more. I take these to be good signs. So “there was seen in his temple,” in his dwelling-place, in his church, “the ark of his testament,” the ark of the everlasting covenant. Oh, may these walls never, never resound with anything contrary

to a covenant ordered in all things and sure, contrary to this dear Mediator, Why, I make no hesitation in saying, that it is a literal and an utter impossibility to know him and not love him. Now these are two of the features of the true church. First, they are formed, brought into harmony with Christ, consecrated to God, and therefore his holy temple; and, secondly, they see in this holy temple the ark of his testament; that, you will observe, as we have said, includes the mercy-seat, and the high priest, and the presence of God, and all the blessings that can be needed; there is no blessing, eternal or temporal, which is not included in this gospel of the blessed God.

Now when John saw this he saw the accompaniments too; when this temple was opened there were voices, and lightnings, and thundering's, and an earthquake, and great hail. Now this is very sublime imagery, and we are apt to think that it is something not to be understood; but there is a blessing upon him that reads and them that hear the words of the prophecy of this book and keep the things that are written therein; showing that if read in the right light they shall be understood. What are the voices?

Here are three thousand souls, no voice of prayer, no voice of confession, no voice of praise, no voice for God, dead. They are pricked in the heart; they begin to pray, they begin to inquire, and then, when mercy rolls into their souls, they begin to praise the Lord. Here are the voices, "I heard voices;" no voice before this. There was a time when you had no voice for God; but now you love to speak to the honor of his dear name; there was a time when you had no voice of prayer, no voice of praise, no voice of testimony; but now there are voices; and these mighty voices, for mighty voices they shall be, shall roll forth as many waters, and as mighty thundering's. But there were "thundering's" too, certainly. The Lord makes some of his ministers' sons of thunder. When God's word first sounded into my soul it sounded like thunder, I was brought into the secret place of thunder, and there God set my sins in the light of his countenance. There is the thunder, sons of thunder. And lightnings. Does it not say in the 9th of Zechariah that "his arrow shall go forth as the lightning"? So, it is now. Sometimes in the conviction of a sinner, the arrow, the lightning of truth, shall enter into his conscience, and all at once show him what a sinner he is, as in the case of Saul of Tarsus. Sometimes a soul in bondage to a false religion, and counterfeit coin is generally so polished off that it looks very superior to the real coin; so, a false religion, Satan himself transformed into an angel of light; by-and-bye a luminous ray, like lightning, shall dart into the mind, and show the young inquirer the truth. Why, he shall say, election is true after all; perfection in Christ is true after all; these people that are everywhere spoken against are right after all; it must be all of grace after all. Here are the voices, here are the thundering's, and here is the lightning. But there was "an earthquake." An earthquake, that is a figure made use of sometimes to denote national convulsions and revolutions, but here I must bring it down to Christian experience. Now I had a great deal, until I knew better, of false confidence and of self-righteousness. I am sure I had some self-righteousness, for one day a Wesleyan and I met, we were both Wesleyans, at least I tried to be, and he was one, and he said, "Well, brother, how do you feel today? I have not seen you for four days." "Well," I said, "I think I am better I think I am more holy than, I was, and I think if I go on, I shall soon be righteous." "That's right," he said, "brother, go on." But before the day was over, I got provoked dreadfully. I did not show any outward temper, but I felt a deal of it within, and down went the whole of it. And when he saw me again, and said, "Well, brother, how do you get on?" "Well," I said, "not at all. I was getting on very well, but now it is all gone; I so feel to be that sinful, hard-hearted, poor creature, I wonder the Lord does not cut me down." "Ah," he said, "you must try again." And so I did try again, and the more I tried to get rid of the spots of

the leopard the more numerous they appeared, and the more I tried to change the Ethiopian's skin, the more I rubbed it with fuller's soap, why, the more black it appeared; and by-and-by there came a kind of an earthquake, swallowed up all this, and I thank God that I was not swallowed up; my prayer then was, "Let not the pit shut her mouth upon me." And so very often he will, by external circumstances, so try you as to swallow up all your false confidences and your self-righteousness's, and everything is gone, and then you will fly to Christ, to the rock for shelter, and bless God that you know something of this earthquake that thus swallowed up all your false hopes. Well, now, when you are thus brought to the temple, know something of the ark of the testament, and have a voice for God, and know something of the thunder, and something of the lightning, and something of this earthquake, so that now all confidence in the flesh is renounced, and now Christ has become your all in all, you must expect something else. John said there was a "great hail." He saw these same people in storms of tribulation; the hail I there take to mean tribulations. And I have had a pretty goodly number of storms in my time, and so have some of you; but they have been nothing in comparison of what our brethren experienced in apostolic, in pagan, and in papal ages, when that awful wild beast was rampant, treading down the saints. Ah, what storms of hail the people of God underwent then. These are they, said John, that have come out of this great storm of hail, that have come out of this great tribulation, "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." I have often remarked, and just repeat it, that while it thus speaks in the last verse of the 11th of Revelation of this great hail of tribulation, the very next words represent the church as a woman, as clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. So that this storm of hail seems to have driven her into the sunshine. And many of us have had to say,

"Blest be the storm that drives us nearer home."

We pity the ancients, that held the idea of a plurality of gods; well, if we don't hold the idea of a plurality of gods, we are certainly very apt to hold the idea of a plurality of heavens. Yes, I will have a heaven of a home, and I will have a heaven of circumstances, a heaven here, and a heaven there. The Lord sends a storm of hail here, and blasts our crops there, our gourds there; and what does it do? Drives us to God; and just in proportion as it drives us to him it drives us into the sunshine. Clothed with the sun, the moon of the gospel was shining on her path, and she was crowned with twelve stars, crowned with the fulfilment of the exceeding great and precious promises of the everlasting gospel. Thus, then, this temple is the church of God, consecrated to him, having in it the ark of the everlasting covenant, the mercy-seat, the high priest, the presence of the Lord, and all the blessings of the everlasting covenant; and these are the accompaniments. And I appeal to you that know the truth, is it not exactly so? Was there not a time when you had no voice for God, and now you have? and has not the word of the Lord been more terrific to you than ever literal thunder was? and has not the word of the Lord been to you like lightning? convictions have flashed into your mind, and illumination, too, very suddenly; has it not been so? And as to the earthquake, your false confidences, and human comforts, have they not been swallowed up? is it not exactly so? And as to the great hail, have you not had your troubles? have not storms of sorrow fallen upon you, and yet through the mercy of the Lord, having obtained help of him, you continue to the present day unmoved; as said one, who knew well what those storms of hail were, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

Second, this temple represents not only the church of God, but represents God himself as the dwelling-place of the people of God. Now, mind, I am not saying the temple represents God in his abstract character as God, but in his relative character by Christ Jesus as our dwelling-place; the temple represents him as our dwelling-place. Hence in the 11th of Ezekiel the people of God were much despised, and they shared in great tribulation; but the Lord says, "Though I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come." Another scripture says, "O Lord, you have been our dwelling-place in all generations;" and in the 21st chapter of this book you have these beautiful words, "I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." So, then, apply the words here, "I saw the temple opened;" So God, as a dwelling-place, is revealed to us; a way in which he can be a dwelling-place is opened unto us. Sin shut us out from the approving presence of God; what lets us into the approving presence of God, and what makes him our habitation? Hear you the word of the Lord; "We have boldness by the blood of Jesus to enter into the holy of holies;" this is the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; here the Lord dwells in his choice, dwells in his power, dwells in his love, and dwells in his salvation; yes, is it not written that "as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people henceforth and forever"? These two things, then, I think, the temple fairly represents; first, the church of God as the dwelling-place of the blessed God, that church distinguished by the three things I have named, consecration to God, possession of the everlasting covenant, and accompanied by those experiences indicated by the voices, the lightnings, the thundering's, the earthquake, and the great hail; and then this temple represents the Lord himself as our dwelling; "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb", not God without the Lamb, nor the Lamb without God, but "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." Then if this be our dwelling-place, we shall never want a dwelling, no. If you should be turned out of your dwelling on earth, you will not be turned out of your dwelling in heaven; if you should not be able to maintain your standing in your dwelling on earth, God will always maintain your standing in your dwelling in heaven. And we cannot maintain our standing on earth much longer, we shall soon be called to pass the Jordan; but we shall put off an earthly for a heavenly, a corruptible, for an incorruptible, a perishable for an imperishable; clothed upon with our house which is from heaven. I am persuaded the more you are enabled thus to look to the Lord the happier you will be. You may look down at your sins till they frighten you out of all your faith in God; and you may look down at your troubles till you lose all your confidence in God; and you may look at your enemies till you are tempted to take the sword and go to war with them; whereas the wisest course is God giving you grace to do so, to look unto him, and leave matters with him, and rest with him, rest in him. "Commit your way unto the Lord, and he shall bring it to pass; delight yourself in the Lord, and he shall give you the desires of your heart."

I secondly just glance hastily at *the angels*, just a word or two. These seven angels I take to represent the holy prophets and apostles, too, if you like, and all ministers, too, if you like, good men. Now these angels are said to come out of the temple, they came out of the temple. They would not be good ministers if they did not come out of the temple. The true messengers come out of the temple; that is, out of the church of the living God, "Their nobles shall be of themselves that is, these messengers must first be real Christians; and so, they are of themselves, being in themselves made acquainted with, these eternal truths. They are of the people; they weep with them, rejoice with them, and there is not an experience a Christian can have that the true man of

God will pass over. I do not dwell perhaps so much upon downward experience at times as some of the friends may wish. Well, then, you must pray that the Lord will guide me right. It is not because I am not the subject of them; but I do hope there are not many experiences you have that I do not sometimes come to you in. I hope sometimes, when you are cast down, I come to you, and that sometimes when you are up I come to you; and that sometimes when you are standing still I come to you; that is to say, I hope we are not preaching from time to time in that way that there is no connection between the testimony of the minister and the feeling and experience of the real Christian. These angels, then, came out of the temple, the church, of the blessed God; they ministered to the true church of God. And whenever the Lord intends to make a minister, he first makes him a Christian; and then he is eager to:

“Tell to sinners’ round,
What a dear Savior he has found.”

Now they are clothed in fine linen; that is, in the garments of salvation. Ah, say some, that is your interpretation, that is the way you explain it. Well, I know how it is explained generally, or rather obscured. It is explained in this way, that the minister is such a dear, holy, sinless creature, denoted by the fine linen. I should like to know where you would find him. The apostle Paul would not hold that; he declared that in his flesh dwelt no good thing; and of that great man of God, Elijah, it is written that he was subjected to like passions with us. Therefore, the fine linen I take to be the garments of salvation. 132nd Psalm: “I will clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints shall shout aloud for joy.” And so, when the minister’s soul is arrayed in salvation, he does, in proclaiming the same and savoring of the same, often cause the saints to shout for joy. Hence said one of old, “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, I will rejoice in the Lord my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness.” This, then, is the white robe that every minister and every Christian is to wear, the righteousness of saints, imputed to them by the grace, mercy, and good pleasure of God. And “girded with golden girdles;” the apostle calls it the girdle of truth; called golden because of its purity. Truth is pure, all free grace; the girdle is all one kind, you see, it is all gold; and so, the truth is all gracious truth, all enriching truth, all precious truth. Now then, no man could enter the temple till the seven plagues of these seven angels were fulfilled. Does not there seem a difficulty here? Very great; but it is only in appearance, and we shall get over it as easily as possible in our usual way. Now mark, these plagues are said to be the seven last plagues; they are said to be the last. And who took these seven plagues? Christ Jesus. Who was it that was made sin for us? Christ Jesus. Who was it that was made a curse for us? Christ Jesus. Who is it that has taken away the last judgment that was due to us? Who is it that has atoned for our first and for our last sins? Who is it that has borne our first and our last sorrows? Who is it that has endured our first and last agonies? Who is it that has gone to the end of our hell? Who is it that is the end of the law for righteousness? Who is it that swallowed up death in victory, brought life and immortality to light? These plagues, as the chapter I read this morning shows, will fall upon the wicked; but Christ took these plagues as they pertained to his people. Well, say you, I can’t see the meaning then, that no man could enter until these plagues were fulfilled. The meaning is you cannot come truly into the true church of God only on the ground of what Christ has done. Only imagine one of you coming before our church, and saying, “I wish to join the church.” “Yes. Do you believe Jesus Christ is the end of the law?” “Not exactly.” “Do you believe Jesus Christ has ended the curse, that there shall be no more curse?” “Not exactly.” “Do you believe he has endured the last plague?” “Not exactly.” “Do you believe

that we are eternally and unalterably complete in him, and that the eternal salvation of the real Christian is as sure as the throne of God?" "Not exactly." We would not have you; you could not come in, no. You do not admit Jesus Christ is the law-fulfiller; you do not admit he has gone to the end of the curse, the end of sin; and if you do not admit that, then you must bring in something else to be the end of sin; but the word of God shows that Christ, and Christ only, is the end of sin. Now you can come into the true church in no other way, you can come into the presence of God in no other way, and you can enter heaven in no other way. No man comes unto the Father truly while here but by what the Savior has done, and no man comes to eternal glory but by what he has done. Thus, then, no man can enter the temple only by the completeness of the Savior's work; he has endured for all his people what the wicked must endure for themselves; that is, living and dying in that state.

But the church of God was "filled with smoke," alluding to the smoke of the incense, "from the glory of God." What is the meaning of this? In entire accordance with what we have said. Now I will compare it in conclusion with what I have said that none can enter truly the church of God, nor into the presence of God, nor into the heaven of God, only by these plagues having been fulfilled in what the Savior suffered. Now the temple being filled with smoke from the glory of God shows that in this temple God is all and in all. When the tabernacle was finished, Moses might work outside, but not inside. You must not go in, Moses; nothing for you to do, nothing for the law to do. When Solomon's temple was finished, the priests must not go in; there is nothing for the Levitical priest to do. So, in this ultimate, true temple God is all and in all. So, you must go in by the finished work of Jesus, and there God is all and in all. "The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God;" the fragrance of his presence, the fragrance of his glory. Christ is represented thus, "All your garments smell of aloes and cassia," and so on. The presence of God by Christ Jesus fills the soul, fills the church with fragrance. But it is also added, and with that one idea I must close, though I have not said one half I might have said upon these beautiful words, it is added, "and from his power." Yes, says Satan, that's the worst of it. If he did not dwell there in his power, I should try to turn him out, but I can't. God can cast the devil out, but the devil cannot cast God out; Christ could cast Satan out, but Satan could not cast Christ out. When Christ came to you, if he did not come so conspicuously, he came as truly and savingly as he did to Saul of Tarsus. He cast Satan out of Saul of Tarsus; Christ took possession of the soul of Saul of Tarsus; was Christ ever afterwards cast out of Saul's heart, out of Saul's mind? No; he dwelt there in his power. Oh, my hearer, little, weak, tottering, trembling, nervous one, God dwells in you in his power; he lives with you in the eternity of his power. Will he plead against me with his great power? No, but he would put strength in me, "Trust you in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." How then can the temple fall? How can the glory depart? How then can anything fail? Now, he dwelt in the old temples, the first and the second, conditionally, by a wavering, uncertain priesthood; but he dwells in this temple by a perfect and an eternal priesthood; is there any danger or possibility of failure there? Bless the Lord, then, if he is pleased to dwell with us, who can hinder him? The Lord help us more and more to rejoice in his great and almighty power.