

“And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on (over, or by) the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.” Rev. 15:2,3.

About fifty years ago I went on a search for an original copy of the old Puritan, Joseph Caryl's (1602-1673), definitive two-huge-volume, work, titled, “Exposition Upon the Book of Job.” We finally found a copy for sale by an old preacher living in Chicago, and we quickly sent him his asking price of \$800 – which was a lot of money in those days. I would have given whatever I had to get those books. They are priceless to a helpful understanding of the many difficult passages in the Book of Job. They were printed about 350 years ago, but the pages and the leather binding are strong and beautiful to my eyes.

Well, Beloved, if all the difficult passages in the Book of Job were multiplied by one hundred – or more – one might approach – FOR PURE DIFFICULTY – TALK ABOUT DIFFICULTY – the Book of *“the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass.”* Rev. 1:1. For some years now I have been hearing about another old Puritan book, entitled, “A Commentary Upon the Book of the Revelation,” by James Durham, (1622-1658), which some say ranks right up there with his contemporary Joseph Caryl, (1602-1673). It was printed about the same time as Caryl on Job.

In his forward to Durham's book on the Revelation, Robert Balie wrote that *“the book of the Revelation, without any question, IS THE HARDEST OF ALL Scriptures.”* Then Balie made a most startling statement – really in the nature of an admission; to wit: *“That wit were more than ordinary weak,”* – i.e., a DIM-WIT – *“which durst promise from the pen of any man a clear and certain Exposition of all THE REVELATION, BEFORE THE DAY OF PERFORMANCE of these very deep and mysterious Prophecies.”*

Followed by an even more startling announcement; to wit: *“It was not for nought, that most judicious John Calvin and most acute Theodore Beza, with many other profound Divines, would never be moved to even ATTEMPT any Explication of that Book: Yet I hope I may make bold to affirm, without hazard of any heavy censure, that there is here laid such a bridge over that very deep river, that who ever goeth over it, shall have cause to bless God for the Author's (James Durham's) labor.”*

Well, Beloved, would you believe, that James Durham (1622-1658), of Glasgow, Scotland, at age 36, died, just three months before his famous Book on Revelation went to the printer in Amsterdam, Holland, September 23, 1658. Durham fought in Cromwell's army of Parliament that defeated Charles I and cut off his head, yet became chaplain to Charles II, his son and heir, upon his Restoration to the Throne. Go figure. And, to me, what is stranger still, is that after giving up searching for a copy of Durham's Book on Revelation years ago, an original copy of the Book showed up, mysteriously, last week, on my library shelves !

It's on the table in front of the church. You may look at it, but please don't break it. It's 350 years old, like our Caryl on Job books. To help with remembering the spelling of his name, there is a Durham, North Carolina, a Durham, New Hampshire, and – get this – a Durham, Kansas. Now let us look again at our text – in its immediate context; to wit:

“And I 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. And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on (over, or by) the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. 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. 15:1-4)

Before undertaking the exposition – or merely the study – of any part of any one of the 22 chapters of the Revelation, it is well to consider what our dear Lord Jesus said at Rev. 1:1 and 3; to wit: *“The Revelation”* – (i.e., the Unveiling, Revealing, Uncovering, Displaying, – a kind of glorious Coming-Out Ceremony, if I may so say, which God has promised to reward His obedient Son with, at the victorious end of the battle) – I say:

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John... Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.” (Rev. 1:1,3)

Right off the bat, some things are crystal clear; to wit: Those preachers and others who say they never study or preach from the Revelation because it is too hard to understand – are insulting the Holy Spirit, the Author of the Book, and Who makes the claim going in that the Book was expressly written *“to SHOW unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass.”* Rev. 1:1. Brother, if it's too hard to understand, and therefore you never read it, study it, or preach from it, it's kind of hard to see how that Book *“SHOWS”* you anything. Furthermore, a kind of wonderful and glorious blessing is promised to those who read, and hear, and obey *“those things which are written therein.”* Rev. 1:3(a).

Further, a kind of urgency is added, in order that we might be encouraged to quicken our steps in spending time with this outstanding and unique and special message to us from our glorious Captain leading the children to glory; to wit: *“For the time is at hand !”* Rev. 1:3(b). Therefore, This matter is URGENT ! Paul delights in writing to the churches about this blessed day of the Unveiling; to wit, e.g.:

“When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe in that day. Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
(2 Thes. 1:10-12)

And likewise, our brother Peter deemed this matter of the Revelation of Jesus Christ to be of utmost urgency; to wit:

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you AT THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST; as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance.” (1 Pet. 1:13,14)

Joseph Augustus Seiss, although a very devoted Lutheran, and hence one to be wary of, nevertheless spent many, many years studying all that any others have written about the Revelation, and reduced his lifelong studies to a book entitled, “The Apocalypse, Lectures on the Book of Revelation.” That Seiss book is valuable for just that reason; to wit: That it digests many thoughts from many scholars on many passages of the Revelation. Over the course of many years I have worn my copy of the Seiss book, of some 536 pages, ragged. Sometimes the Lord fed Elijah by means of unclean birds; to wit:

“And I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.” (1 Kgs. 17:4,6)

(Coincidentally, has not the whole world heard of those other filthy, unclean birds, the Baltimore Ravens?) For all his Lutheranism-taint-of-heresy, Seiss appears to have grasped the proper attitudinal approach – the *sine qua non* – to understanding the mysteries of the **Book of the Revelation**; to wit:

“A tremendous Revelation is therefore brought before men in this Book. And if anyone would fully profit by it, let him bear with him this one vital and all-conditioning thought, that he is here dealing with Christ’s own infallible foreshowings of the style, manner, and succession of events in which the Apocalypse awarded to him by the Father is to take place. He who fails in this, misses the kernel of the Book, and must fail of the blessing of those who read, hear, and observe the things which are written in it.”

Concerning the sea of glass mingled with fire that John saw at **Rev. 15:2**, with a shore filled with myriads of happy, joyous harpers and singers whose hearts are filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory, because they have recently obtained a full and complete and final victory over

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the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name – a figure of speech whereby the same thing is said repeatedly in slightly different verbiage to give a powerful statement of final and thorough triumph. Which Durham interprets as being:

*“A little hint at the flourishing and gladsome condition of the Church, as well as of the hard things which were to come on her enemies; which two ordinarily go together, and usually by anticipation are set down in a Song. It is in allusion to Moses’ and Israel’s way of coming out of Egypt, who, when they passed the Sea, wherein their enemies were destroyed, did sing; so the redeemed, when they shall be delivered out of spiritual Egypt, and be put on the shore beyond their trials, they shall sing, and have no less cause to sing, and shall do it as surely as ever Moses did, **Exod. 15.**”*

Indeed, the victory of Moses, that triggered the great joy and singing on the banks of the Red Sea, was only TYPICAL – (i.e., a small TYPE, however great and glorious it was to Moses and his people at the time) – I say, the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea and the total destruction of Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, was only a small (even a tiny) adumbration of what lies just ahead for us, Beloved. We are dealing with and warring against the Antichristic Beast – AND WE ARE WINNING ! and will soon join all God’s elect on the shore of the Crystal Sea, each of us with a harp and a beautiful singing voice; to wit:

“And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. 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. 15:3-5)

Surely the most beautiful music ever made – or ever heard; – performed by the most stupendous congregation of God’s people ever assembled; no doubt attended by myriads of angels; all arranged in bank after bank, row after row, rank after rank – all in one glorious, exquisite, heavenly production – the whole event of astounding volume, degree, and size, befitting the Lord God Almighty. Words literally fail me, when it comes to describing my feelings as I attempt to expound this passage of Scripture. These are very precious souls to me, these victorious ones standing by the sea of glass, having the harps of God, and singing their happy hearts out. I say, God bless them all !

Beloved. We have shared their sorrows and tears. We shall share their eternal joys unspeakable and full of glory. Let us now consult again what the mysterious book from the long-dead Puritan James Durham has to say about these millions of happy, heavenly harpers and singers; to wit:

“These four things over which they get the victory (i.e., 1) the beast, 2) his image, 3) his mark, and 4) his name) – all four, signify the same corruption of Antichrist, and say by their repetition that in no respect did his deadly poison stick to them. After he hath described these singers by their victory,

*as fully renouncing and abhorring Popery in all the branches of it. They are, secondly, set out in that posture they were in, They were standing on a sea of glass mingled with fire. Three things are to be enquired into here, 1) What this sea of glass is? 2) What it is to stand on it? 3) What it is to be mingled with fire? First, By this Sea, or great vessel of glass, we show (**Chapter 4**) was understood the EFFICACY OF THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST, by which only His people and their sacrifices can be washed and sanctified; and of this we gave the reasons there (**Chapter 4**), and here also it may be confirmed; For, first, this standing upon the sea of glass denoteth the excellency and firmness of the foundation upon which they stand. 2. If we consider parallel places, it is in express terms expounded, **Chap. 7:14**, when this same company and their victory are described, this is given as the ground thereof, they are come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; so (**Chap. 12:11**) it is said, that they overcame by the blood of the Lamb, etc. And this being marked as the ground which secureth these redeemed ones, it must be for this purpose, to show that the way and manner of their getting the victory over the beast, and their security against him, did consist in their fleeing to, and resting upon Christ Jesus, His satisfaction and Righteousness, while the rest of the Antichristian world were blind-folded in ignorance and error, going about to establish their own righteousness, as it were, by the works of the Law. 3. It is confirmed from that, **Chap. 4**, where this sea of glass is described to be BEFORE THE THRONE; which signifieth their abiding near unto God in these TIMES OF DEFECTIONS, when all generally went a whoring from Him, wondering after the beast. This sea of glass, upon which they stand, is said to be mingled with fire. By fire must be somewhat suitable to this sea. Now, **Chap. 4**. where this sea is spoken of v. 6. lamps of fire are spoken of as burning before the Throne, which are the seven spirits of God; hence it will follow, that by fire here is understood a sanctifying efficacy of the spirit of Jesus, which is often compared in Scripture to fire. (“**I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; HE SHALL BAPTIZE YOU WITH THE HOLY GHOST, AND WITH FIRE.**” **Mat. 3:11.**) And so, this is the meaning: I saw the redeemed put beyond the difficulties of Antichrist, and out of the hazard of his curse, by the virtue of Christ’s blood justifying them, and by the virtue of His Spirit sanctifying them; and I saw them publicly appearing, and confidently giving testimony to the truth, as not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; and this is added to distinguish these truly redeemed from carnal and presumptuous hypocrites, who boast of faith and their standing upon the sea of glass, but do evidence that that sea is not mingled with fire and the Spirit of Sanctification, and therefore is not that foundation which will give them ground to tone and tune their harps and sing before God.”*

Thus you see that these happy, heavenly harpers boldly take their public STAND upon the sea of glass mingled with fire (**Chap. 15**), which is also said to be a sea of glass like unto fine crystal which is located permanently BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD (**Chap. 4**). And thus you also see that the text of their bold, public STAND is found in the lyrics of their unspeakably joyous songs, sung to the accompaniment of their golden harps of God.

Durham says Christ *“hath put in our mouth the most cheerful song that ever was.”* It is called, *“the song of the Lamb,”* because Christ has given us the occasion for singing it (His very own Apocalypse, or His Coming Out Ceremony, a kind of angelic Party?). It is His Song, then, first, because He, by furnishing the occasion, putteth it in our mouths, **Psa. 40:3**:

“And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.” (Psa. 40:3)

And, secondly, By His Spirit He helpeth to beautifully, melodiously, and rhapsodically sing it, **Heb. 2:12**:

“Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.” (Heb. 2:12)

And, thirdly, because He, our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, is the subject of it. His precious blood fills the basin of the crystal sea, and none can approach the throne of God but those who have been washed in that blood for salvation and sanctification – washed in the blood of the Lamb, whose Apocalypse – Revealing – Unveiling – Coming Out Ceremony – we are participating in – from **Rev. 1:1** to **21:22** – with heavenly music, mirth and meditation.

Beloved, I would not be surprised if our dear Lord Jesus chose to lead that grand, celestial choir in some form of William Cowper's hymn, “There is a Fountain Filled With Blood,” at the occasion of His Glorious Apocalypse. It certainly fits; to wit:

*There is a Fountain filled with blood, Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood Lose all their guilty stains.
The dying thief rejoiced to see That fountain in his day;
O may I there, though vile as he, Wash all my sins away.
Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed church of God Be saved to sin no more.
Lord, I believe thou hast prepared, Unworthy though I be,
For me a glorious free reward, A golden harp for me.
'Tis strung & tuned for endless years, And formed by pow'r divine,
To sound in God the Father's ears No other name but thine.*

Amen.