Friend, you will never stumble as long as you are on your knees!
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REVELATION CHAPTER EIGHT
OPENING OF THE SEVENTH SEAL AND THE BLOWING OF THE FIRST FOUR TRUMPETS

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Prayer Study # 413
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We see the pattern that John sets for his writing the vision down. He covers the first six of a series, then has a parenthetical chapter expounding on that particular series, and then he presents the final of the seventh in the series, which introduces the next series of seven, thus connecting the series together in the same time period. Most modern theologians believe that the Church, sealed by the Holy Spirit, has been evacuated or raptured from the earth and is in heaven. They teach that we will not go through the Great Tribulation. This was not a popular teaching in the early history of the Church. In fact, it was popularized in the 1800s by John Darby.

Those teaching this theory say this "the blessed hope" of the Church. And all of us should hope that this is a true theory because most believe it means we will escape the Great Tribulation, a time of terrible judgments.

Early Church teachings taught that what we call the Rapture, and the Second Coming were one and the same experience. So, when "rapture" is used, it is referring to the Second Coming of Christ.

In recent years there has been some push back against the more modern Rapture Theory, i.e.: that the Church will be caught away before the Lord returns to earth at His Second Coming. I must admit that I have no clue whether there will be a rapture or not, based on what I have studied and been taught, but I sure hope there is. We must, however, do a thorough study of this in Scripture and not accept something as fact because some man taught us or that was our denominational stance. The Scriptures say, *Study to show thyself approved* (2nd Timothy 2:15) and also *It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the honor of kings is to search out a matter* (Proverbs 25:2). In a sense, it does not really matter anyway. We should live each day ready to meet the Lord in the air, whether there is a Rapture, or it is His Second Coming. Also, the Scriptures teach emphatically that judgment is coming on this earth, and there is nothing we can do about it, except stay in the Word and in close relationship with Jesus and trust Him to carry us through anything that lies ahead.

The Silence and the Thunder of Prayer

1*When He [the Lamb] broke open the seventh seal, there was silence for about half an hour in heaven.*

2 *Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.*
3 *And another angel came and stood over the altar. He had a golden censer, and he was given very much incense (fragrant spices and gums which exhale perfume when burned), that he might mingle it with the prayers of all the people of God (the saints) upon the golden altar before the throne.*
4 *And the smoke of the incense (the perfume) arose in the presence of God, with the prayers of the people of God (the saints), from the hand of the angel.*
5 *So the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and cast it upon the earth. Then there followed peals of thunder and loud rumblings and blasts and noises, and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.*

Here is Jesus opening the seventh seal in great seriousness and solemnity. I suppose that all of heaven was standing on tiptoe, wondering what these seven seals would mean. They had already seen the six seals of the false Christ, war, famine, death, the martyr remnant, and anarchy on the earth. Seven is the number of completion. What else could come that could be more terrible? I feel like they were stunned as they thought of what this seal might bring. It was not a time of light heartedness, of conversation, of praise and worship, it was a time of total silence. I wonder if heaven ever was totally silent except for maybe when Jesus was crucified and for this passage of scripture.

Barclay gives two possible reasons for the silence. He says that this may have been a kind of breathing space or moment of preparation before another shattering revelation. His second explanation is certainly more comforting. He says that perhaps all of heaven was being silenced so that they could hear the prayers of the saints which were about to be lifted up to heaven. R.H. Charles puts it this way: "The needs of the saints are more to God than all the psalmody of heaven." Barclay concludes, "Even the music of heaven and even the thunder or revelation are stilled so that God's ear may catch the whispered prayer of the humblest of His trusting people." What a beautiful thought that our prayers mean that much to God!

This angel was standing over the altar of incense. (There will be not altar of burnt offering because there is no longer any need for an animal to be sacrificed for sin.) And the smoke from the golden censer had the prayers of the saints was like perfume going up to God.

There is great significance to this passage of scripture. If we have no other sacrifice to give to the Lord, we can always give Him to sacrifice of prayer and the sacrifice of praise. Furthermore, there are always angelic beings ready to take these precious prayers to God.

J. Vernon McGee writes of this scene in heaven: "This silence marks the transition from grace to judgment. God is waiting." Yes, He is patiently waiting for that someone else to come to Him. He does not desire for any to perish. 2nd Peter 3:9-*The Lord is not*

slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness, but is long suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Verse 5 is interesting in that the prayers sent up are hurled down to earth. Thus, the prayers become answers to prayer. This may refer to the tribulation saints who have prayed, "Oh God avenge us." (Revelation 6:9-10-*And when He had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried in a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?)*

John seems to be saying that the prayers of the saints can bring vengeance upon those who have wronged Christians. Yet the Bible says to bless those who curse us (Matthew 5:44 and Luke 6:28), and that vengeance is the Lord (Romans 12:19 and Hebrews 10:30).

The Seven Angels and the Seven Trumpets

6 *Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them*. All seven angels had a trumpet to blow. The trumpet is always a sign of the intervention of God in the affairs of men. The trumpet, which was a shofar, was used for three reasons: to sound an alarm, to announce the arrival of royalty, and to summon to battle.

Some ancient writers, such as Tobin, believe that these seven angels were all archangels: Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Sariel, Gabriel, and Remiel. This is based on non-Biblical writings. The Bible only mentions *the archangel,* and that title is always associated with Michael and none other.

Letting Loose the Elements

7 *The first angel blew [his] trumpet, and there was a storm of hail and fire mingled with blood cast upon the earth. And a third part of the earth was burned up and a third of the trees was burned up and all the green grass was burned up.*
8 *The second angel blew [his] trumpet, and something resembling a great mountain, blazing with fire, was hurled into the sea.*
9 *And a third of the sea was turned to blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea perished, and a third of the ships were destroyed.*
10 *The third angel blew [his] trumpet, and a huge star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it dropped on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water—*
11 *And the name of the star is Wormwood. A third part of the waters was changed into wormwood, and many people died from using the water, because it had become bitter.*
12 *Then the fourth angel blew [his] trumpet, and a third of the sun was smitten, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that [the light of] a third of them was darkened, and a third of the daylight [itself] was withdrawn, and likewise a third [of the*

light] of the night was kept from shining.

God promised to never destroy the earth with water again and gave the beautiful sign of this covenant with man, a rainbow. Here God uses the judgment of fire and hail, something that Scripture tells us He will use at Armageddon. Here He destroys only a third of the earth. Plant life was the first to be created, in Genesis 1:11, after order had been established in the physical earth. This trumpet judgment, as are all of them, is similar to the plagues on Egypt (Exodus 9:13-26). With each trumpet blast will come a judgment on different parts of the world: destruction on the earth, destruction in the sea, destruction on the freshwater rivers and springs; destruction on the visible heavens.

This first judgment talks of hail and fire and blood. According to Barclay, throughout history the Mediterranean countries have seen falling rain which looks like blood. For example, this was reported in Italy and Southeast Europe in 1901. The reason for this phenomenon is that fine red sand from the Sahara Desert is caught up into the upper air. The rain washes the red sand out of the atmosphere. Thus, the rain and sand fall on the earth together looking like blood.

We can speculate on the source of these destructions. Perhaps there was a solar explosion followed by a volcanic eruption and earthquake. Is the source an atomic bomb or some kind of celestial explosion or a great asteroid hitting the earth? The hail and fire and blood remind us of Exodus 9:24 where the Lord tells Moses that He will send hail and fire and blood of unparalleled destruction. That former destruction will pale in comparison to the coming one.

In Exodus again we see Moses lifting his rod and striking the Nile river, turning the waters of the Nile to turn to blood (Exodus 7:20-21). The results of both this trumpet judgment and the judgment on Egypt is the dying of the fish. But again, the coming judgment is so much more severe in the area of its destruction and includes 1/3 of the ships on the earth.

In Zephaniah 1:3, God says, *"I will sweep away humans and animals; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea."* This most likely is an end time prophecy relating to these days of Revelation 8.

Wormwood is actually a common name for a class of plants known as *artisia.* They cause the waters to become very bitter. They are not poisonous as in being fatal, as such, but do cause harm to the human body. This term is used throughout scripture and symbolizes the bitter judgments of God on people because of their disobedience and idolatry. (Deuteronomy 29:17-18, Jeremiah 9:14-15, and Jeremiah 23:15). I wonder if Wormwood is, in reality, Satan who was cast out of heaven. Remember that the waters of Marah were bitter (Exodus 15), but they turned sweet when Moses threw the tree in the water. C.I Scofield writes of this passage, "Israel came to these bitter waters while walking in the very path of the Lord's leading, thus indicating that different experiences for God's people are educative rather than punitive. The tree which healed the waters

should remind the Christian that the cross of Christ can take all the bitterness out of all such experiences and observe that after trial which is accepted as the Father's will, blessing and growth will follow."

Again, with the fourth trumpet judgment, we see John's words bringing to mind the plague in Egypt of the darkness that cover the whole land (Exodus 10:21-23). Jesus Himself spoke of these times in Matthew 24:29: ***Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be shaken."***

These trumpet judgments are just reminders with God using the forces of nature to warn men and women of the final destruction to come. These first four judgments will greatly alter the laws of nature, but there is hope in a verse in Genesis 8:22: *While earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.*

The Flying Eagle

13 *Then I [looked and I] saw a solitary eagle flying in midheaven, and as it flew I heard it crying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the rest of the trumpet blasts which the three angels are about to sound!*

What can be worse than what earth will already have endured in the first four trumpet judgments. Yet this verse tells us of a time of even greater woe and intensity of judgment.

This solitary eagle is in the midheaven or highest point of the sky warning of greater judgments to come. I feel sure that this eagle is symbolic and not literal as some suggest. He certainly is used to emphasize that God uses nature to send His messages to the human race. This possibly points back to Matthew 24:28: ***For wherever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.*** Scofield speaks of this verse, "The meaning of this somewhat puzzling verse is illuminated in the final dialogue between God and Job (Job 39:27-20: *Does the eagle mount up at your command and make its nest on high? On the rock it dwells and resides, on the crag of the rock and the stronghold. From there it spies out the prey; its eyes observe from afar. Its young ones suck up blood; and where the slain are, there it is.*). The spiritual application here is that, where moral corruption exists, divine judgment falls." The eagle, as the king of birds, revels in the victory that has destroyed those who oppose the things of God.