

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
6-13-18

Revelation 8

The Seventh Seal and the Golden Censer - Verses 1-5

¹ When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. ² And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. ³ Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God's people, on the golden altar in front of the throne. ⁴ The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God's people, went up before God from the angel's hand. ⁵ Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

8:1 There was silence in heaven for about half an hour. With all the activity, this dramatic pause must have seemed to last for an eternity. During this time, the only activity was the prayers of the saints (8:3-4). We must seek God in times of silence. How proper for us to be quiet and honor God for his power and might. Take time each day to be silent and exalt God. Silence also conveys trust and confidence in God (see Isaiah 30:15). We can trust God that he will give us strength and provide the justice against oppressors that we seek.

8:1-2 When the seventh seal is opened, the seven trumpet judgments are revealed. In the same way, the seventh trumpet will announce the seven bowl judgments in 11:15 and 16:1-21. The trumpet judgments, like the seal judgments, are only partial. God's final and complete judgment has not yet come.

8:3-5 A censer filled with live coals was used in temple worship. Incense was poured on the coals, and the sweet-smelling smoke drifted upward, symbolizing believers' prayers ascending to God (see Exodus 30:7-9).

The angel then threw the censer down upon the earth. This symbolizes the judgment of God released on earth in answer to the prayers of the saints for justice for those who had oppressed and killed them. This shows that judgment, vindication, and revenge are in God's hands, not ours (see Matthew 5:38; Romans 12:9; 1 Peter 3:9). No matter how strong the desire to exact revenge and retaliate at our enemies, our work is to pray to God for his justice.

The Trumpets - Verses 6-13

⁶ Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them. ⁷ The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down on the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. ⁸ The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, ⁹ a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. ¹⁰ The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water— ¹¹ the name of the star is Wormwood.^[a] A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter. ¹² The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night. ¹³ As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!"

8:6 The trumpet blasts have three purposes: (1) to warn that judgment is certain, (2) to call the forces of good and evil to battle, and (3) to announce the return of the King, the Messiah. These warnings urge us to make sure our faith is firmly fixed on Christ.

The First Trumpet - Scorching of the Earth

The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. (Revelation 8:7)

The events of the previous Seven Seals, were events caused by human activity and natural, earthly disasters. This next series brings what might be called supernatural judgments. The first three appear to be the result of asteroids, meteors or comets. These are also natural, but in the sense that they are divinely directed judgments on the earth, they have a supernatural element. There seems to be a progression of disasters from space: first hail and fire mixed with blood, then what seemed like a large mountain, and later, a "star."

The Second Trumpet - Slaughter in the Sea

The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. (Revelation 8:8-9)

This judgment could be caused by an asteroid plunging into the sea. Even a small asteroid crashing into one of our oceans would cause utter devastation. The fiery impact would burn and crush all life in a large portion of the ocean, and the resulting tidal waves would be beyond comprehension. These waves could capsize ships in every direction for hundreds of miles.

The Third Trumpet - Souring of the Water

The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water--the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter. (Revelation 8:10-11)

The word "wormwood" is mentioned only here in the New Testament, but it appears eight times in the Old Testament, each time associated with bitterness, poison and death. Wormwood was a well-known bitter herb in the Bible times, so by naming the star Wormwood, we are told that its effect will be to embitter the waters of the earth, so much so that the water is undrinkable. It won't be a matter of simply a bitter taste to the water; it will literally be poisonous. If drinking water is unavailable to one third of the earth's population, it's easy to see how chaos and terror will result. Humans can only survive a couple of days without water, and the inhabitants of the affected areas will be so desperate as to actually drink the poisoned water, causing the death of thousands, if not millions of people.

The Fourth Trumpet - Smiting of the Planets

The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night. As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!" (Revelation 8:12-13)

This judgment affects the entrance of light from space. The amount of light from the sun, moon and stars is diminished by one third. This could be a description of what, in our generation, has been called "nuclear winter." One of the most serious side-effects of a nuclear war would be the wide-spread burning of cities and forests and the resulting soot and smoke reaching the stratosphere. This diminishing of the Sun's radiation could cause the average temperature of the Earth to cool between 18 and 36 degrees, resulting in crop failures and great ecological damage.

Alternatively, we cannot rule out that the actual light and heat output from the sun might be diminished by God during this judgment of mankind.

The eagle flying through the heavens with a message of woe is most likely a symbolic image of an angelic being. The three-fold repetition of "woe" is a Biblical way of intensifying the terrible nature of the impending doom soon to follow.

In Revelation 4:7 one of the faces of the Four Living Creatures was the face of an eagle. The message is a warning of the dreadful nature of the next three trumpet judgments.

Differences between The Rapture and The 2nd Coming

We believe that much of the confusion about the Rapture is caused by a lack of understanding that Christ comes first for believers, and then comes later in what is properly called the Second Coming, or His Glorious Return as King of Kings. Here are some of the differences between these two events.

The Rapture	The 2nd Coming
Christ comes for His own 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18	Christ return with His own Revelation 19:14
Believers taken to Father's House John 14:3	Believers come to Earth Matthew 24:30
Seen only by believers 1 Corinthians 15:52, 19:11-16;	Every eye will see Him Revelation 1:7 Matthew 24:30
No reference to Satan	Satan bound Revelation 20:1-3
Earth not judged	Earth judged Revelation 20:4-5
A Mystery 1 Corinthians 15:51	Foretold in Old Testament Dan. 12:1-3; Zech. 12:10; 14:4

One way to better understand the clear distinction between The Rapture and the Second Coming in glory can be seen by carefully considering the different Greek words used for these two events.

Absence of the Church

Finally, and probably most significant of all, is this fact:

The Church is Missing From The Tribulation - Revelation 4-19

In the first three chapters of Revelation, there are constant references to the church and to the Seven Churches. However, starting at chapter 4, verse 1, where John is told to "come up here," the church is obviously absent throughout the Tribulation period. The expression "come up here" does mean leaving the earth in Revelation 11:12 where the translation of the Two Witnesses takes place. (We are not suggesting that the Rapture takes place in chapter 11, only that the same expression, used there, does mean virtually the same thing for the Two Witnesses that the Rapture does to the church.)

There are numerous references to believers in these chapters, but they are not called the church. What might be called the church on the earth during this time is the apostate shell of nominal Christianity, which has lost its true believers, and has joined with other religions of the world to become a "United Religion," which, in turn will give its power to Antichrist. This apostate church is pictured as a prostitute riding the beast in Revelation 18.

Finally, the absence of the church will undoubtedly account for the lawlessness spoken of in 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

The 144,000 Called

Revelation Chapter Seven describes the calling out of 144,000 select Jewish evangelists from the nation Israel at the beginning of the Tribulation period, probably soon after the Rapture of the church.

12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel

As you can see from the following passage, the 144,000 are specifically God's chosen people, 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes *of Israel*.

"Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God."

Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.

From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000,

from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000,

from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000,

from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000. (Revelation 7:3-8)

Sealed - for what?

Immediately after the verses about the calling of the 144,000, this information is added. It depicts the result of the sealing of these people: the evangelization of multitudes of people.

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9-10)

The 144,000 will vigorously evangelize Israel, completing the task begun by the disciples of Jesus, within Israel but also extending their field to all the nations. The result of their bold and fearless evangelism program will be hundreds of thousands of converts to Jesus Christ.