

CHAPTER 8, VERSES 2 – 13

The seals have been opened, their visions revealed. The saints have been bolstered by the messages contained within, assured that they would not be forgotten and that their perseverance would be rewarded by a crown of victory. The vision of the seventh seal gave them a glimpse of what that victory would mean: an eternity of peace and tranquility in Heaven.

There is however, a flip side to the reward and victory scenario: Punishment for all those who stand against the righteous. In the picture of judgment contained within the sixth seal lies a warning for the unfaithful, and it is this warning we witness with the sounding of the trumpets.

Some commentators take the position that the sounding of these seven trumpets is the answer to the question we saw in chapter 6 where those under the altar were crying ***“How long, O Lord... dost thou not judge and avenge our blood...”*** While these visions certainly do promise judgment (with a warning inherent in this promise), there also seems to be an undercurrent of hope running through them. Perhaps the wicked might be stirred enough by what is described in these visions to turn their lives around. There is, after all, still time to accept Jesus, be obedient to Him and yet be saved.

Some would say death itself is punishment enough for the wicked, but God does not hold that view. Unless we’re still alive when Jesus returns all of us will suffer physical death, faithful servant or not. So, there is obviously more to the reward/punishment scenario. The Creator of everything that exists has always – even before that first sin in the Garden of Eden – made it plain that just as there is a reward for the faithful, there is punishment for the unfaithful.

God told Adam, whom He created to live eternally, ***“Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”*** (Genesis 2:16-17 KJV) Until that point – when Adam and Eve disobeyed – death did not exist in the world. Stop and think about that for a moment: nothing and no one was meant to die! The day they sinned, though, death

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Ron Roberts

Lesson Ten

became their eventual punishment. Eventual! For Adam, that death sentence was still 930 years in the future. Apparently, God felt they needed a more immediate “consequences of sin” to promote repentance and help them see the error of their ways. So, right then and there, a two-fold punishment for sin was established: immediate consequences and ultimate death. While we can certainly be forgiven of our sins if we repent, God typically does not remove the consequences. We must endure those.

For Adam and Eve those consequences were strong. First, they were immediately put out of the Garden of Eden. No longer would they enjoy walking with God. Adam, who represented “mankind,” would have to work to provide for his family and livelihood from that point on. No longer would God freely provide their daily needs. Eve, who represented woman and all female offspring, would have the pain of childbearing multiplied, yet her husband would rule over her, and her desire would be to her husband.

After witnessing the events that follow the sounding of these seven trumpets, we may better understand this concept of punishment and reward; all the while keeping in mind that while both exist in our physical lives, the reward and punishment that are associated with our spiritual lives are much, much more profound.

In terms of chapter and verse, the vision of the trumpets comes after the visions of the seals. But do not misunderstand the chronology. We have not progressed forward in time. The events we see as each trumpet sounds are synchronous with the opening of the first six seals and the time period referenced still spans from about 34 AD to the end of the world. That being said, though it refers to the same time period, the sounding of the trumpets will offer us a second perspective of that period.

There are certainly similarities between the visions of the seals and the trumpets. Both are grouped into two parts: The first four, and the last three. The first group deals with the natural, physical world while the second connects more with spiritual life.

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Ron Roberts

Lesson Ten

There is one marked difference. While the visions revealed by opening the seals provided comfort to the faithful, those accompanying the sounding of the trumpets will provide warnings to those who still cling to the world. These visions will demonstrate God's judgments against the wicked. They are independent of the seals, but the incidents depicted are synchronous with those of the seals. *Revelation 8:2 reads: "And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets."*

The trumpet was the instrument used for signaling the assembling of the Israelites whether it be a call to battle or for some peaceful purpose. God instructed the Israelites to carry trumpets and to blow them at designated times, like when marching around Jericho, for example. The end result of that episode was the destruction of the wall, the city, and its people. That same result is paralleled here in the visions of the trumpets... but in this case the destruction is of the whole world, and all the worldly people.

But before the trumpets blow, let's consider four introductory verses which connect the visions we saw as the seals were opened to the revelations that follow as each trumpet sounds. The text is Revelation 8:2-5. Read carefully and let the scene form in your mind:

"And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets. And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake."

John says he saw seven angels standing in the presence of God. In the vision of the seals he saw four angels located at the four corners of the earth holding back the destruction until a fifth angel sealed the righteous. Here, each angel was given a trumpet. There is much discussion

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Ron Roberts

Lesson Ten

concerning who these angels were: archangels, seven spirits of God or holy angels presenting prayers of the saints. The most popular view among trusted commentators is that they are simply seven of the heavenly angels selected to sound the trumpets.

I also believe the number “seven” in this vision is both quantitative as well as symbolic. Quantitative, because I believe there actually were seven angels and seven trumpets. Symbolic, because like all the other “sevens” we have seen thus far, it represents perfection of purpose and completeness of plan. Each angel has been given a trumpet, and God’s plan will be signified by the events following the sounding of each one.

Prior to the sounding of the trumpets, (similar to what happened in the vision of the seals) another angel comes into the scene and stands by the altar. Notice that no particular angel is identified. There are those who believe this angel is Jesus because it appears that the prayers of the saints are presented to God through him. However, Romans 8:26 teaches us that it is the Holy Spirit that presents our prayers to God with “*groanings that can’t be uttered.*”, so I cannot accept that theory. Actually, I don’t believe this angel represents any entity of the Godhead at all. Just as the seven angels are not identified, I believe we should accept this angel in the same way.

It is often believed the altar mentioned here is the same one we saw when the fifth seal was opened – with the souls of the slain under it. When we discussed that seal, I suggested that we should not visualize an actual altar. There is no need for one in Heaven where no sacrifices will be offered. It was, instead, a symbol of sacrifice. While I still stand behind that statement, perhaps I should qualify it, because there are other kinds of altars. In the tabernacle as well as in the temple there was an “Altar of Incense”. No sacrifices were made on it; it was to present a sweet odor before God.

The Altar of Incense was centered straight ahead of the veil that separated the “Holy Place” from the “Most Holy Places (where God dwelt while in the wilderness). It was on this piece of furniture in the Holy Place where the holy incense was burned. The Altar of Incense was

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Ron Roberts

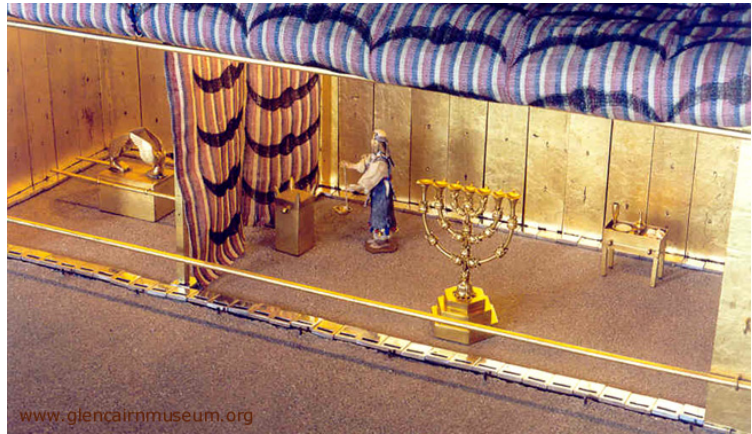
Lesson Ten

made from acacia wood overlaid with pure gold. The image at left provides us with an idea of what the Altar of Incense might have looked like. It was the tallest piece of furniture in the holy



place, measuring 2 cubits (3 feet) tall. It was one cubit square and around the top had a crown of gold. Just below the crown, on each side, were golden rings to insert the poles for carrying. It also had four golden horns just as the bronze altar in the courtyard.

As you can see in the image to the right, there were three pieces of furniture in the Holy Place: the table of showbread on the north wall, the candlestick on the south wall, and the altar of incense on the west wall. (I doubt the candlestick was as large as pictured in this image.)



This “other angel” is holding a golden censer, perhaps similar to the image to the left, a small golden bowl with a lid that could



be lowered and raised, in which a piece of glowing coal was placed. Then incense was sprinkled onto the coal, the lid would be lowered a bit, and the censer waved about as it was carried around the room. A sweet odor would fill the whole area even as more incense was being prepared for burning on the Altar of Incense. This “other angel”, being given “much” incense to mix with the prayers of all saints, leads me to believe John refers to the Altar of Incense in verse 3. Also, John says this altar “*was before the throne*” which would correspond to “before the veil” in the Tabernacle.

So, when John records in verse 3 that this angel “*should offer it (the incense) with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne,*” the offering consists of both the incense and the prayers of all saints. What were the saints asking in those prayers?

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Ron Roberts

Lesson Ten

Revelation 8:3 says that the angel should offer the incense with *“the prayers of all saints ...”* so, even though we don’t know what these prayers might include, it does appear that this angel is offering up the prayers all of us have prayed and will continue to pray to God. The smoke from the incense mingled with the prayers of the saints ascended up before God out of the angel’s hand. Visualize prayers of the saints, mixed with incense (*which may symbolize the prayers being purified by the “groaning” of the Holy Spirit*) being offered to the God who is sitting on the Throne. The result of those prayers being heard is the judgment that takes place below, symbolized by the angel filling the censer with the fire of the altar and casting it down to the earth. When that is done, John hears voices, sees thunder and lightning and an earthquake introduces the sounding of the seven trumpets. With the trumpets come judgment.

It is unwise to interpret the results of the trumpets’ call literally. Some try to pinpoint a time in history and apply the events described here to it, but that is a waste of time. I don’t believe God intended for us to think that all of these things were literally going to happen. It is best to view them as a warning of the supernatural judgment that is to come. So with this being said, let’s look at the text of the first trumpet. Read it slowly and let a scene form in your mind:

The First Trumpet text – (Verse 7)

“And the first sounded, and there followed hail and fire, mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of the earth was burnt up, and the third part of the trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.”

In our English translations it is difficult to get the right picture of what is happening when this first trumpet sounds. Did a mixture of hail, fire and blood all mingled together pour out on the earth? The Greek/English interlinear bible words verse 7 thusly: *“And the before-most messenger trumpets and there came to be hail and fire having been mixed, and blood was cast into the land and the third of the trees was burned down and every green fodder was burned up.”*

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Ron Roberts

Lesson Ten

As Spence remarks, “It is made clear, therefore, that it is the fire and hail that is mingled together, and both are sent to the earth with blood.” This seems to corroborate the idea that the trumpets declare God’s judgment on the world. In Genesis 9:6 – right after the flood – God demanded “blood for blood.” In Numbers 35:33 it is said blood is the symbol of life. And God says, “...*that the life of a person can only be paid for by the life of the one who took it!*” It appears that what this trumpet is indicating is that the blood (lives) of the wicked are upon their own head. That is to say... it is their own fault that they're not among the “sealed.”

A cursory reading of the verse might lead us to conclude that the “third part of the earth” indicates that only a part of the earth will be damaged, leaving the rest untouched. But again I must point out that this is a book of symbols. So, if “three” = completeness in the sense of enough, and the use of a fraction = “less than perfect,” then the image we should see from this verse is that this judgment is upon ALL those who are less than perfect. While that might seem harsh to many readers, I can only reply by stating that God requires “perfect-ness” in His church. Does that mean we must all live a perfect life? No, that is impossible for our mortal bodies. It does, however, mean that we should be “sinless”, and that is achieved by washing away our sins, and then living a Christian life for the remainder of our days. Of course we will misstep, but if we repent and ask forgiveness, it will be granted. We shall then be “*white as snow,*” able to inherit life eternal in Heaven. Those who are not “white as snow” will not only suffer the consequences of their sins while here on earth, but they will also NOT inherit that peace promised at the opening of the seventh seal. This should serve as “wake-up-call” to those who reject Christianity.

The Second Trumpet text – (Verses 8 & 9)

“And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; and there died the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, even they that had life; and the third part of the ships was destroyed.”

Spence and other commentators view the term “mountain” as it is used here as a volcano that spews out burning lava to run down the sides and into the sea. We find that mountains are often used in Old Testament imagery to refer to a *“seat of government.”* Babylon is so represented in Isaiah 41. When viewed that way, a mountain being “cast down” indicates that a “seat of government” is taken away. This thinking leads several other commentators to interpret this trumpet as a symbol of the fall of some great government such as Rome.

I believe the scene is more far reaching than that. Remember, these visions focus on the *unrighteous*. It is no stretch to suggest that the unrighteous place more emphasis on the material things of life than they do on the spiritual things. We know that those earthly things are only temporary, so I believe this trumpet shows us the worldly society of the unrighteous in which the “mountain” of earthly possessions they so cherish is destroyed.

The Third Trumpet – (Verses 10 & 11)

“And the third angel sounded, and there fell from heaven a great star, burning as a torch, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of the waters; and the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.”

In apocalyptic writing even outside the book of Revelation, falling stars are often used to represent a time when God will either save or judge His people as well as others. Since a star can also be a symbol for someone in an exalted position or a “figurehead”, this trumpet has caused some commentators to speculate on which “great man” this star must be referring to. But since this star came from Heaven, I believe we must rely on a different interpretation...

Throughout the Old Testament, trouble is foretold with the symbol of a “darkened star,” such as in Ezek. 32:7, where it is said, *“...I will cover the heaven, and make the stars thereof dark...”* In Matthew 24, Jesus uses the symbol of a *“falling star”* to represent the trouble

coming from the destruction of Jerusalem. For these reasons I believe this third trumpet is taking that idea one step further and describing God's vengeance on the wicked. With the first trumpet the grass and trees were burned, with the second the sea life was destroyed. Now, we see the rivers, springs, and fresh water sources affected. Because the name of this star is "Wormwood" and "*many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter*" some commentators suggest the drinking waters became contaminated with a strong concentrate of wormwood – the name given to a particular plant common in the area around Jerusalem that had a very bitter and nauseating taste. It was widely distributed and most folks knew that when you ate it, you got sick. Later, in the 5th century, the Saxons believed it could be used to protect people from madness. Perhaps there was some medicinal use for the plant in the first century as well.

It bears mentioning again that we are not talking about only one third of the wicked (*use of a fraction to indicate "less than perfect*). So in this trumpet we are shown that this judgment is upon ALL those who are less than perfect, that is to say any who have not been sealed or "set apart" from the unrighteous.

The Fourth Trumpet – (Verse 12)

"And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; that the third part of them should be darkened, and the day should not shine for the third part of it, and the night in like manner."

When the fourth angel sounded his trumpet it is said the third part of the sun "*was smitten.*" It doesn't say how, just that it was. Our focus should be on the result, not the cause. The entire solar system – the Sun, Moon, stars and planets – are all looked upon by men as symbols of stability. We reckon time by them, count seasons and years by them, and navigate by them because they have proven to be faithful markers. But God is in control of them! He can destroy even these things we count on as "unshakeable!" And of course, some people actually

worship these entities. I find it interesting that God illustrates the fulfillment of judgment with the very things that some people treat as divine.

When it is said that one-third of these things should be darkened, our knowledge of the symbolic meaning of fractions leads us to conclude that this means the sun, moon, and stars only shine “imperfectly”, perhaps with one-third of their normal brightness. But when it is read from the Greek/English interlinear version, “...*a blow that eclipsed the third of the Sun and the third of the Moon, and the third of the Gleamers (stars) that may be appearing for the third of her day and the night likewise.*” it appears as though it could mean that for one-third of the time, both day and night, there was total blackness. We simply don’t know for sure.

This brings us to verse 13 where John says, “*I saw, and I heard an eagle, flying in mid heaven, saying with a great voice, ‘Woe, woe, woe, for them that dwell on the earth, by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, who are yet to sound.’*” Some translations have “angel” in place of “eagle”, but the original Greek says “one eagle” and that is certainly appropriate in this scene since an eagle is swift and unerring when swooping down on its prey. This eagle was flying in “*mid heaven*” where all could see it and hear it. “*Woe, woe, woe...*” it was saying, which I paraphrase as: “If you think that what has just passed is bad — wait till you see what’s coming next!”