**VICTORIOUS LIFE CHURCH BIBLE STUDY SERIES:**

**THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

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**CHAPTER EIGHT- THE SEVENTH SEAL**

**And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. 2 And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets. 3 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. 4 And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. 5 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. 6 And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound. 7 The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up. 8 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; 9 And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed. 10 And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; 11 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. 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; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise. 13 And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabiters of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!**

As we come to chapter eight it is necessary to remind us of a couple of highlights about the sequence of the seal and trumpet judgments.

**Firstly**, notice that the 6th seal is the first one that is clearly supernatural in nature. For the first 5, the the judgments are brought about by Gods use of human activity. God is behind the scenes and is working things out according to His plan. At the same time an unbeliever could easily attempt to explain away these things as “coincidence” or man-made occurrences.

**Secondly**, the sixth seal is different and marks a transition because the events that come forth at the opening of the seal are cosmic in scale. There is a great earthquake. The sun was blackened and the moon looked like blood. Mountains and islands are leveled. It is clearly a supernatural event. So mankind can no longer explain away what they are seeing as coincidence. They must come to the clear conclusion that God is the author of these things. They clearly recognize it is God’s wrath, but yet they don’t repent.This then leads into the seventh seal. Humankind’s unrepentance in the face of divine judgment means that more judgment is on the way as the seventh seal is about to be opened. The best way to describe the opening of the seventh seal is imagining the Russian Doll that is called Matryoshka or Nesting Dolls. They are actually Dolls within Dolls that get smaller as you open them up. When the seventh seal is opened it actually contains within it seven trumpets but instead of the judgments getting smaller they actually grow and become bigger.

**The Seventh Seal (8:1-5)**

**And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.**

**The Lamb opens the seventh seal** – Firstly, we see that Jesus is once again the one opening the seal. He is identified as a Lamb. It reminds us that although He is now executing judgment, He is also gentle. Salvation is still possible through His sacrifice. So those who face judgment are doing so by their own choice.

**Silence in Heaven for about half an hour** – When this seal is opened there is about half an hour of silence. Such silence is striking, since the heavens have virtually been teeming with the sounds of praise from all creation! The replacement of such thunderous sounds of praise by silence would have a stunning effect.This does not mean that time passes in heaven the same as it does on earth. Many believe that this is metaphor with silence being put here for the deep and solemn expectation that something incredible is about to take place as this seal being opened about to produce.This silence is the calm before the storm. It also increases the anticipation and focuses everyone’s attention on what will unfold. It may also be that the silence showed the solemnity and seriousness of what was going to happen. “This silence might also call to mind the words of **Zephaniah (1:7**)

**“Be silent before the Lord GOD, for the Day of the LORD is near.”**

**2 And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.**

The silence and the seven angels with seven trumpets seem to stand in opposition to one another, with silence being the absence of sound, while the seven trumpets represent one of the loudest human-made sounds. On this view, the silence morphs into the seven angels and indicates rather explicitly that, when the seventh seal is opened by the Lamb, the half-hour silence and the seven angels with the seven trumpets are the result. Their number implies perfection, indicating that what they do is complete and full. The angels are in very close proximity to God — standing before him, indicating their willingness to serve him and their direct access to him. These seven angels are given seven trumpets. The passive voice verb “were given” is used to describe the gift of the seven trumpets reveals their origin: they are divine gifts, coming from God himself. Whatever use is made of the trumpets by the angels is in accordance with God’s own will and desires. Twice to this point the word “trumpet” has been used with reference to the voice of Jesus (1:10; 4:1). It is also seen as more of a signal instrument than a musical one, being capable of only a few notes. Its various OT uses reveal the trumpet to be the instrument that signals the grand moments of Israelite history and life.Their mention here would indicate that John and his hearers are on the verge of witnessing additional significant acts of God. When chapter seven closed it ended in such a comforting manner that it gave the impression that the judgment stage had perhaps come to an end. The beginning of the eighth chapter with the silences also gives hope to that idea but now the silence and the seven angels frustrate that expectation of the imminence of the end and now lets us know that the judgment to come has practically just begun.

**3 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. 4 And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand.**

**Golden censer / Prayers of the saints** – Revelation contains many images that are foreshadowed in the Old Testament tabernacle and temple. And this is one of them. There is an angel with a golden censor and he offers incense together with the prayers of the saints on the golden altar before the throne. A censer is the small container used to hold coals. Incense is then put onto the coals. As they burn a cloud of incense rises up. We see this description in Leviticus 16.

**Leviticus 16:12-13 – And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil and put the incense on the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die.**

What we see here is that the incense comes before the Lord together with our prayers. Our prayers are like incense to Him.

**Psalm 141:2 – Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!**

So why is prayer described as incense? Incense is fragrant, much like a perfume. So our prayers are pleasing to the Lord, like the passing of a pleasing aroma. What are your favorite smells? What flavor do you love to smell from things like baked goods. It’s pleasant. In a similar way, God delights in the prayers of His children. In chapter 6:10 it is the cries of those who had been slaughtered that are heard; here it is the prayers of all the saints. The broadening of the scope of the prayers offered has increased to include not only those who have been martyred but also those who are alive. Such a move would indicate that their prayers are not perfunctory but actually make their way to the very presence of God and are even now before him. That the incense appears to be offered along with the prayers of the saints underscores the pleasing, fragrant nature of the prayers that can be seen to rise visibly before the Lord. Being placed upon the golden altar before the throne not only reveals that these prayers will be heard by God but also suggests that there is something sacrificial about them. This imagery further suggests that the incense and prayers kindle and sustain the fire of the altar. And during this time period on earth, His children are suffering. They are being intensely persecuted and martyred. But God is not distant. He is there. He cares. He is listening to our prayers. I believe that one purpose when God’s people face tribulation is to teach us to pray. There is nothing like total desperation to drive a person to pray. What is interesting here, is that we see a direct response from heaven to the prayers. The same censer which presented the incense with the prayers is now filled with burning coals, which are cast upon the earth. From earth’s perspective, these appear as thunder, lightning, and another earthquake. The lesson is simple. God listens. He responds. The prayers go up to heaven and and answer is returned.

**Application**: Let us be people of prayer. When things around us get worse, it is not the time to complain or give up. It is time to go to our knees and redouble our prayers. No matter how imperfect or incomplete our prayers are, they are pleasant to Him, because they mean that His children know that they need Him. As the ungodly suffered the increasingly heavy judgments of the first six seals, they turned against the Christians with greater persecution. This had caused believers to ask God how long it would be before he dealt with those who were killing them (see 6:9-10). God is now going to answer that prayer. He has postponed judgment as long as possible, but now the time has come. All heaven waits silently. But when the seventh seal is broken, it reveals judgments so terrible that a new set of visions will be needed to explain them. The new visions will be announced by the blowing of trumpets (8:1-2).

**5 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 saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake. Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.

 **6 And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.**

Here the seventh seal judgment links to the seven trumpet judgments. Opening the seventh seal reveals the 7 trumpets which are within. If you remember, the seals sealed shut a scroll. As Jesus broke the seal, the contents of the scroll were then opened, revealing the judgments within. Thus, the 7th seal opens the portion of the scroll containing the 7 trumpets. As stated at the beginning of the study, we can envision this as something like Russian dolls. And you can imagine when the seventh one is opened that there are seven more inside.

**Four Trumpets (6-13)**

**Question: Are these Events Literal or not?**

As we start looking at the individual trumpets, we need to ask an important question. Are these literal or not? How you answer that question is probably defined by the overall view you take toward the whole book of Revelation. “Is this literal or not?” is a question many ask throughout the book. And different takes on that question is largely responsible for the different views of Revelation. In the following trumpets we see, hail, fire, blood, a third of trees burnt, all grass burnt, a third of the sea becoming blood, a third of living sea creatures dead, a third of fresh water becoming bitter, and more. Are these things symbolic, or real? I believe we should interpret these things in a literal way. We should consider firstly if the Bible uses language like this elsewhere, and if it was literal or symbolic then. And when we look at that, we will see that it makes a strong case this should be taken literally.

A. Egypt –

**Exodus 7:17-18 Thus says the Lord, “By this you shall know that I am the Lord: behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood. The fish in the Nile shall die, and the Nile will stink, and the Egyptians will grow weary of drinking water from the Nile.”**

Here God said He was going to turn the water to blood and that the animals in it would die. What happened? He turned it to blood and the animals in it died. It was literal.

**Exodus 8:2 – I will plague all your country with frogs.**

God said He was going to bring frogs. And frogs came. Not symbolic ones. Noisy, ugly, annoying ones..

**Exodus 8:21 – And the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand.**

Then God said He would send flies and He sent flies. We won’t look at all of them, but will highlight two of the last ones.

**Exodus 9:18 – Behold, about this time tomorrow I will cause very heavy hail to fall, such as never has been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now.**

God promised to send hail. Then He sent hail. Bricks of ice from the sky, which devastated the land. If He said hail then and it was hail and He says hail here, then why should the hail be symbolic of something else?

**Exodus 10:21 – Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.”**

God said there was going to be darkness. Then there was an actual darkness. Not a symbolic one. But this is not only the case with Egypt. We saw God intervening in the world with supernatural judgment many times.

* Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed with real fire.
* In the time of Joshua, hail was rained down on their enemies and the sun stopped. Real cosmic events.
* The sons of Korah were swallowed up by the ground in judgment.
* Aaron’s first two sons were devoured by fire in judgment.

All of these things have something in common. They are literal descriptions of real events. I believe that here in Revelation when God is pronouncing these judgments, these are also real, literal judgments. In a Bible interpretation course, I heard a phrase, I will never forget, “When the common sense makes sense, seek no other sense.” That means that the Bible should be read in a straightforward way. Unless it is clearly symbolic, then it should be understood in a real sense. That is not to say that there are no symbols in Revelation. There are. But the simplest and most common understanding of hail, blood, and fire, is that it is hail, blood, and fire. And examining all of Scripture, we see God has acted that way again in judgment. It is reasonable that in the final supernatural, cosmic judgments seen in Revelation that He will do so again, and in even more spectacular fashion. I believe that God tells ahead of time clearly what will happen so that when it happens, there will be no denying it. People will know that God has spoken. And people will know that He fulfilled it. They will know that God is God. And that fits with how God works.

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

**The First Trumpet** – The first angel blew his trumpet and… Each trumpet blast is followed by a specific judgment. The trumpet is a warning of what is to come. The first trumpet judgment brings hail and fire and blood thrown upon the earth. One third of the earth is burned up, one third of trees, and all green grass. The judgments now are worse than the seals. Huge numbers of people are affected. We don’t know if this is a contiguous land area or if it takes place throughout the globe. But at least some of the effects are felt around the globe.

**8 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; 9 And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.**

**Second Trumpet** – John describes the next trumpet judgment as something like a mountain being thrown into the sea. Here we see divine judgment on the oceans. One third of them are turned to blood and one third of the sea creatures die. It reminds us of the judgment on the Nile in Egypt. Because John uses imprecise language, “something like a mountain,” it actually suggests this is to be taken literally. He was trying to describe something he was seeing, which he had never experienced before. A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. Some people try to speculate on what this will be or compare it to things we know of like meteors, nuclear bombs, etc. It is not necessary. The point is not exactly what this thing is. The point is that it is coming and it is coming specifically as an act of judgment. Note that even ships are effected. Blood is a different density than water. So ships would float higher. That would cause many to capsize. Can you imaging the horror of flying in an airplane over a stretch of ocean and only seeing blood as far as the eye can see? This is completely frightening if you are not on good terms with the Judge. All of these things make the fear induced by Covid pale in comparison.

**10 And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; 11 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.**

**Third Trumpet** – The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter. This judgment is on the fresh water. Every part of the earth’s ecosystem is being targeted. One third of fresh water in the world turns bitter. Its poison kills those who drink it. Such a change to the earth’s water supply would complete devastate many countries, business, the world’s economy, and lives.

**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; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.**

**Fourth Trumpet** – The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night. This judgment is on the celestial lights. We see the continued pattern of thirds. A third of the oceans and fresh waters have been destroyed. And now we see that a third of sun, moon, and stars were each struck that “third of the day might be kept from shining.” Very possibly that means that the time of day is cut short by one third so that the sun shines for eight hours instead of twelve. That would cause temperatures to plummet around the world, causing something like a nuclear winter. Many would die from the frigid temperatures. Others would be forced to spend all of their time just trying to keep warm and survive. All would know, the time of God’s wrath has come. He is not happy and it shows.

**13. And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabiters of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!**

Here we see the world becoming more inhospitable and barren. And it reminds us of how far people’s sin has taken them from God. In Eden, people lived in a paradise made just for them. As sin runs its full course, the very world He gave us is being taken away. It’s turning from a paradise into a wasteland as judgment against mankind’s willful and repeated rebellion. That is where sin and rebellion lead. Satan makes big promises. Enjoy yourself. Follow your own desires. You can create a wonderful world for yourself where you are king. It is a lie. An illusion. We cannot have a wonderful world outside of God’s will. This is where sin fully pursued finally leads, divine judgment.

**What Does This Teach Us About God?**

The world is being laid waste. How could God do this? What does this teach us about God?

**God is Just** – Firstly, we see God’s justice. The unbeliever might look at this and say, “God is cruel.” That is certainly what Satan wants you to think. But it is not the case. God’s original creation was “very good.” That was the paradise which He gave people. But people rebelled and messed it up. And the rebellion that began with Adam and Eve continues, and is getting worse. It is that rebellion in the face of all of God’s goodness that brings the world to this point. People often ask, “If God is good then why does He allow suffering? Why doesn’t He just end sin?” Well, he will. That is what is happening in the book of Revelation. God is going to end sin once and for all. But you cannot end sin without judging the sinner. So first the sinners are judged. And then sin will be finally ended. God is the “I AM WHO I AM,” not who people expect or want Him to be. And who He is, is just. The destruction in Revelation is not the result of a God who has changed or is moody. It is instead an example of the Biblical principle, “you reap what you sow.” Mankind is responsible. Note again, when the sixth seal judgment occurred it was the first seal with many clear, cosmic signs. When people were confronted so clearly with the truth that God is real and that God is unhappy with them, what did they do? Did they repent? No, they hid from Him. And they wanted to kill themselves rather than turn to the Lord.