

## **Study 17: Revelation 8:1-6**

### **1 When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.**

- We now return to the seventh seal. The first six seals were opened in chapter six. There is now a sense of solemnity as this seventh and final seal is opened. That is why there is silence.
- It is good to worship and sing in a loud voice. It is also good to reflect in silence on what the Lord God is doing. Both silence and loudness have their place in worship.
- You get the impression that this dream or vision was being given to John in “real time.” When you dream at night, your dreams may not last very long, although they can be quite vivid and detailed. This Revelation vision seemed to play out over a long period of time. This would keep with the tradition that John received the Revelation over a period of days. Otherwise, how would he have known that there was silence for half an hour?

### **2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.**

- God always provides the angels with what they need to proclaim on His behalf. The angels did not take their own trumpets; they were given trumpets.
- You have to work **not** to hear the Lord. If an angel is blowing a trumpet, it is hard to miss!
- Consider:

**Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice? In the heights along the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand; beside the gates leading into the city, at the entrances, she cries aloud: "To you, O men, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind. You who are simple, gain prudence; you who are foolish, gain understanding. Listen, for I have worthy things to say; I open my lips to speak what is right. My mouth speaks what is true, for my lips detest wickedness. All the words of my mouth are just; none of them is crooked or perverse. To the discerning all of them are right; they are faultless to those who have knowledge (Proverbs 8:1-9).**

- Wisdom is stationed at a high place “along the way” and cries out! Hearing the voice of God isn’t that hard if you are committed to hear it before you hear it. That’s right, once you have determined to hear God, He will speak, whether through His Word, a still, small internal voice, other people, circumstances. How can we do the will of God unless He tells us what that is?

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- What is God “saying” to you at this point in your walk with Him?

**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 the saints, on the golden altar before the throne.**

- I wonder if this angel is Jesus? Since He is seated at the right hand of the Father and makes intercession, I wonder if this is a picture of the Church’s partnership in prayer with the Great Intercessor Himself! The saints mix their prayers with the incense or prayers of Jesus. Just a thought. There is no way to really know from the text.
- I have always liked the picture described in Acts 10:

**At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!" Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God" Acts 10:1-4).**

- Cornelius’ gifts to the poor and prayers went up as a memorial offering to God. When I pray and give, it is like incense that goes up to God. No one else may “smell” it, but He does. And it is a pleasant aroma to Him. I want the Lord to say about me, “Wow, you smell good!” Do you feel the same?

**4 The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand.**

- The concept of what we do giving off a smell is a popular concept in the Bible. Let’s consider some instances:

**Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:1-2).**

- What Jesus did was a fragrant offering to the Lord. The Old Testament is full of references to the burnt offering (which was totally and completely burned; it was not eaten by the high priest; therefore the entire sacrifice was for God) as a pleasing or fragrant offering to the Lord. Thus, Jesus was the burnt offering, a soothing aroma in God’s nostrils.

**I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They**

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**are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God (Philippians 4:18).**

- Once again, we see that our giving can be a fragrant offering. God must have an excellent sense of smell.
- Can you imagine then what our flesh must smell like to God? Have you ever smelled the dead body of an animal after a few days? It stinks! That is what our flesh smells like to God. You cannot cover that smell with perfume. You cannot cover your fleshly deeds with something like perfume that can cover the stench either.

**For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? (2 Corinthians 2:15-16)**

- You see that you do smell, but even when you smell good to God, you may smell bad to someone else who doesn't know the Lord. It is more important to please God with your aroma than anyone else.

**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.**

- Our prayers affect the events on earth. The censer, fire and angel all play a part in bringing about some cataclysmic events on earth. But remember, this is apocalyptic language, representing earth-shaking events without referring to specific activities.
- This is another reason why I think this angel is Jesus. This angel had power to affect the events on earth and doesn't seem to take his direction from God the Father. He acts independently, so to speak.

**6 Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them.**

- There were seven seals and now there are seven trumpets. They both had a specific order in which they were to be opened or sounded. God's will is done in sequential order. The first had to happen before the second and so forth. God has a plan for human history. It unfolds according to His will. Nothing is a mistake or happens out of order.
- Trumpets usually announce something; they are loud and regal sounding instruments.

**7 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.**

- This is a strange mixture: hail, fire and blood. Again, this cannot be taken literally. It could symbolize something, well, something strange and out of the ordinary that will take place in response to the prayers of the saints.
- Some have felt this storm is a picture of nuclear weapons being launched at some point in the future, for a nuclear bomb could conceivably cause the kind of damage described in this verse. My answer to that is: Nonsense! Revelation is not a book of future events, but a picture of heaven working behind the scenes of human history to bring about God's will.
- If Revelation is a book of symbols so that the uninitiated would read and not understand, thus protecting the saints, then we must think symbolically, without insisting that our interpretations are the exact ones implied by the Bible. Unless the Bible explains itself, we must be careful to impose meaning on what we read.
- Let me tell you what I think of when I read that verse. I think of two other verses that say:

**"I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mortal men, the sons of men, who are but grass?" (Isaiah 51:12)**

**"The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isaiah 40:8).**

- There have been events of human history when there was great loss of human life. While this verse is not pointing to any one event that brought that result, it is nonetheless a fact of human history that this has happened. We are not to fear during those terrible times. God is in control.
- There have been other times when the word of the Lord has been rare and confused by human institutions. Once again, this verse is not pointing to any one time in history, but rather that this phenomenon of a lack of grass to feed on, so to speak, will regularly occur.
- The interesting image of these verses is the role that prayer plays in bringing them about! It is the fire from the prayer altar that starts the trumpets sounding and the awesome events taking place!
- We must be careful not to attribute a specific meaning to any passage unless that is clearly what the passage states or unless another part of the Bible interprets that particular passage. When neither of those things occurs, we must be careful to allow the Bible to speak to us without saying, "The Lord showed me this special meaning in these verses." That puts us on dangerous ground.