

As we continue to unpack that portion of the Book of Revelation, the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter, beginning at verse 5, it says,

*Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake (Revelation 8:5 NKJV).*

Once again, I want to point out that the prayers of the saints were mingled with fire from the altar and incense. I have pointed out, previously, that the fire that was placed upon the altar of incense and upon the censer itself was taken from the bronze altar of sacrifice. So out of a sacrificed life, prayers ascend, and such prayers are pleasing to God. I remind you of the Scripture reference that I cited earlier, Romans 12, where the Romans were cautioned by Paul, “present your bodies living sacrifices,”<sup>1</sup> so prayers that emanate from bodies that have given to sacrifice. Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who dwells within you.<sup>2</sup> Everything that comes out of that, God keeps a record of. And for the purposes of the Book of Revelation, these prayers that are now being answered (and we will note, in a moment, the answer to these prayers) are the prayers of those who had lost their heads,<sup>3</sup> so to speak—the martyrs for the witness of Christ, which meant they had a renewed mind and did not continue to seek after their own interests, but put the interests of Christ ahead of their own interests. Anyone who does that is a martyr.

It is interesting, the term “sacrifice” used there in Romans 12—where it says, “you should present your bodies living sacrifices”—seems a contradiction in terms, because we normally think of a sacrifice as something killed. But a living sacrifice is something quite different. It is something

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All Scripture quotations are taken from the NKJV Bible, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>1</sup> Romans 12:1: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service.”

<sup>2</sup> See 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

<sup>3</sup> See Revelation 20:4b: “Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands.”

that lives for the pleasure and the benefit of another. So, the sacrifice we offer to God is not necessarily the conclusion of our lives by having our heads cut off. That, in fact, is no greater; it is not any greater matter to have your head cut off suddenly in a test of whether or not you believe God, if you are in the presence of an enemy who threatens your life. That form of martyrdom is not more precious to God than the form of martyrdom that requires you to lay down your life every day, and to take up your cross every day, and follow Him.

In fact, the fact that it is said that you “take up your cross”<sup>4</sup> is the indication of martyrdom. What is a cross? What was the cross of Christ? It was where His life expired. But before that, He had learned obedience by the things He suffered.<sup>5</sup> God does not call us to kill the soul. He calls us to bring the soul under the rule of the spirit. And for the purposes of the soul, that is death, in that it is not permitted to have its own way. It is required to submit to the rule of the spirit every day, and in that we die, and in that we are resurrected every day to the newness of life.

I do not believe for a moment that the Scriptures wish to distinguish between those who, historically, had their heads cut off in that form of martyrdom for the witness of Christ—because it says, “who are beheaded for the witness of Christ.” If you want to take a very domesticated view of that, does that mean, for example, those who were pulled apart by wild animals, as happened—stripped limb from limb, dismembered—but their heads remain intact, were they not part of that martyred company? Or those who were devoured by wild beasts? Or drowned? Or otherwise killed? No. It is the entire company of those whose lives have been sacrificed for the purpose of God.

In this world, when we are required to sacrifice that way, to give up our own careers, to give up the directions that we would have pursued otherwise, and to hand our lives to God for His direction... Which is not necessarily that you go be a missionary some place, or that you preach from the pulpit; it is that you honor God centrally in every aspect of your life. Whatever you do on a daily basis—whatever career you may have, whatever sets of relationships you have

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<sup>4</sup> See Luke 9:23: “Then He said to *them* all, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.’ ” See also Matthew 10:38, 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 14:27.

<sup>5</sup> See Hebrews 5:8: “though He was a Son, *yet* He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.”

(husbands, wives, the whole bit)—your life is then presented through the paradigm of suffering and sacrifice to give to God a habitation, a place in which He might dwell in your life, in the confines of your daily lives, so that you may present Him to the world in and through your person. This tells us that that life is not in vain.

There comes a time when this life, like prayers offered before God—prayers being these prayers: the prayers of a broken and a contrite heart, the prayers of a life fully poured out as a drink offering to the Lord, and the rest of it—those prayers mixed with fire from the altar of sacrifices are given such effectiveness, such complete effectiveness, that when they are cast out on the earth, they become the standard by which mankind is judged. The righteousness of the lives of believers leave the unbelievers without an excuse. And whatever was done to you as a righteous believer, by whomever it was done, comes in for judgment. The way you live is the form of judgment to which both men and angels will be subject.

But I want to focus here on these words: “And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake” (Revelation 8:5b). These refer to Hebrews 12, which says, in its relevant part,

*For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: “And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.” And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.”) (Hebrews 12:18-21).*

This is a reference to Mount Sinai, when God came down on the mountain and the mountain shook; there was a trumpet blast, there were thunderings, there were lightnings, and there was an earthquake. The earth was trying to run away from the presence of God. This is that reference. But he said, “You have not come to that. But you have come to Mount Zion” (verse 22)—not Mount Sinai, but the mountain of the Lord.

In a sense, we are watching the opening of heaven to see the events as they transpire in heaven, and the correlated effects of the answering of the prayers of the saints on the earth. Because the earth is now being judged, not by words written in books; the earth is being judged by the Word that has become incarnate in the form of persons whose lives were offered on the altar of sacrifice. And out of that, the fire of their trials, their prayers ascend to the Most High God. Now is the time: it is the seventh seal. It is the finality of what had been waiting to be revealed for long ages past, and it is a standard of judgment. But it ties into this reference, because what happened on Mount Sinai looked forward from that time to this time. That is why there was the reference here to “noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake,” because that was the altar, in a sense, on which God descended to meet with man, the place of mediation.

This angel takes on the role of the mediator, who is Christ Jesus Himself. It is not Christ in His actual person; it is what is called the angel of the Lord, the messenger of the Lord, or the messenger of the covenant. It is a role unique to Christ, but in this configuration, an angel is being sent to portray the activities of Christ relative to these things. We know that, again, from the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter where he said, “This is the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His servants what must soon come to pass.” And Christ, to whom the revelation was given, makes it known by sending His angel to His servant John (cf. Revelation 1:1).

John is writing these things. This is the angel, and he is taking on the mediatory role of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is using the prayers of the saints whose lives have been sacrificed to judge the unrighteousness of the earth. When their prayers, together with the incense from this golden altar, are hurled into the earth, everything that can be shaken is being shaken to bring about conformity to that example of life that they had put on display while they lived, from the time of Christ on up to the present of these occurings. The earth is going to be held accountable to the standards of their righteous life, and everything that can be shaken is in fact being shaken by these, the messengers of the covenant.

He says, from Hebrews 12, verse 25

*See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, “Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.” Now this, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.*

*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably [sacrificially] with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:25-29, comments added in brackets).*

Fire from the altar, fire upon the censer, the prayers of the saints mingled with the incense bringing forth the eschaton, the end of things.

Let us go back now. Again, I remind you, this is the seventh seal. It is the final summation of things. This is when the answers to the prayers of the saints comes to be unequivocal and uncontroverted.

*So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound. [This is in the order of heralds blowing to announce the judgments and the decrees of the King.]*

*The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up (Revelation 8:6-7, comments added in brackets).*

Again, look at the passage when the first angel sounded. Several of what reminds us of the ten plagues of Egypt initially came about. Why? What was God doing when He released the plagues on Egypt? He was about to judge Egypt and release His people from it, where they had been enslaved. This is where the hand of God moves beyond the capabilities of man to bring about things that only God can do:

- So, hail that fell to the ground and burned as fire was one of the plagues of Egypt, as I recall;<sup>6</sup>
- “mingled with blood,” —the waters were turned to blood.<sup>7</sup>
- And the indication of the grass being burned up is a reference to how the locusts devoured all green things in Egypt.<sup>8</sup> “A third of the trees were burned up.”

The indication here may not be that of the physical destruction of the earth, but all relates to how the environments that sustain human life are being affected when God moves to bring judgment on the earth, because these are the things that people put their trust in—their environments, their support system—just like Egypt did in the ancient world. And God is about to remove and to separate that which is His from that which has been compromised. It is clear that this is a reference to how God moved in Egypt to release Israel to bring them into the promised land. This is an indication of separations.

At this time, of course, there are still saints on the earth. In fact, we know that saints will be on the earth until the time when the Lord Himself is revealed from heaven with the shout of the archangel and the trumpet call of God. Then the dead in Christ will arise first. So if we, as believers, by then are dead, we will be resurrected with that first company. If we are alive on the earth and remain on the earth alive, then we will be changed in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye (the shortest measure of time), and our natural bodies will be completely transformed and will be like the bodies

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<sup>6</sup> See Exodus 9:23-26: “And Moses stretched out his rod toward heaven; and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire darted to the ground. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, so very heavy that there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. And the hail struck throughout the whole land of Egypt, all that *was* in the field, both man and beast; and the hail struck every herb of the field and broke every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel *were*, there was no hail.”

<sup>7</sup> See Exodus 7:20c: “And all the waters that *were* in the river were turned to blood.”

<sup>8</sup> See Exodus 10:14:15: “And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt and rested on all the territory of Egypt. *They were* very severe; previously there had been no such locusts as they, nor shall there be such after them. For they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they ate every herb of the land and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left. So there remained nothing green on the trees or on the plants of the field throughout all the land of Egypt.”

of those who are being resurrected out of the dust of the earth, who have slept in the dust of the earth as the Scriptures say.<sup>9</sup> This is the time of the return of the Lord.

But until that is happening, God is beginning the process of separating out. Like He separated Israel out of Egypt before He released them to the promised land, God is beginning to separate out and put a hedge about those who are His in the earth, while He brings the plagues, as it were, of judgment upon an unregenerate world. That is the first trumpet. Again, these are the last things. It is not the absolute end of things, but it is the last of the things. It represents the summation of what had been pending until now.

*Then the second angel sounded: And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed (Revelation 8:8-9).*

You will notice he does not say that it was a burning mountain. Instead, he says, “something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea.” So it is a type; it is a shadow of a thing. Jesus Himself, in His lifetime, had said, “If you have faith as a grain of a mustard seed, you may say to this mountain, ‘Remove yourself hence and be thrown into the sea,’ and it shall be so” (cf. Matthew 17:20). I have known people to test their faith by commanding local mountains to move and be thrown in the sea, and nothing happened. That is what happens when you domesticate Scripture, when you have it become a physical thing that, by definition, describes itself as an allegory.

“Something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea.” What might this mountain be? Well, we know that the woman, the harlot, sat upon seven mountains. And these seven mountains were described as a city upon seven mountains. The city was also defined as a great dragon on which the woman rode. The great dragon itself was viewed as a kingdom, this terrifying beast of seven heads and ten horns.<sup>10</sup> It is my contention that these seven heads are seven

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<sup>9</sup> See Daniel 12:2: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame *and* everlasting contempt.”; see also 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52.

<sup>10</sup> See Revelation, chapter 17

systems of the *kosmos*.<sup>11</sup> What system falling would destroy a third of the ships? It would be the system of commerce. The sounding of this trumpet and this mountain burning with fire means the system cannot sustain itself anymore.

That might well be that the nature of this system... If you go back to the Book of Amos, the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> chapters speak about this. Before God took Israel into Babylonian captivity, He told them how He despised the way that they treated the poor. They would sell the poor for a pair of shoes, is the way the expression goes.<sup>12</sup> Now this great beast requires all, both small and great, rich and poor, to submit loyally to its rule if they are going to engage in commerce.<sup>13</sup> The key, in my understanding, is ships: the purpose of ships, and a third of the ships being destroyed. This is not actual ships moving, but the key of understanding of what this mountain, which, of the indications of the beast has now come under judgment on account of the prayers of the saints. Keep that in mind. These judgments follow what had happened to the saints.

The saints were excluded from doing commerce, just as in the Roman Empire, when their right to hold citizenship in the Roman Empire to engage in commerce was withdrawn from them and used as a basis of oppression. A common basis of oppression of the saints is exclusion from commerce. That is why God has to take care of His own people and establish His own means of the care of people. So, a third of the ships being destroyed means that commerce is falling into the sea, falling into the abyss. Sea, quite often, is a representation of the sea of nations. There were creatures that came up out of the sea, so the indication of this great burning mountain here is that it is one of the seven systems, and other than the religious system, is probably the most important of the systems of the beast. It comes in for judgment right away, as the saints are being vindicated.

Again, keep in mind, all these judgments, these four that you will see, at the first four trumpets sounding, there will be judgments upon humanity as a consequence of having oppressed and

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<sup>11</sup> See *kosmos*, Strong's Greek 2889 - <https://biblehub.com/greek/2889.htm>

<sup>12</sup> See Amos 8:6: "That we may buy the poor for silver, And the needy for a pair of sandals— Even sell the bad wheat?"

<sup>13</sup> See Revelation 13:16-17: "He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name."

opposed the saints. So the very things by which the saints were oppressed, the very things about them that were rejected and for which they were ostracized and marginalized, these are the very things that are coming into judgment.

As we continue, we will look at what happens when the third angel sounds and a great star falls from heaven like a burning torch.

I am Sam Soleyn. We will continue then. Bye-bye.