

The Furious Longing of God in the Book of Revelation

The Power and Place of Prayer in the Book of Revelation

Jim Hall - June 14, 2016

Introduction

- I. Review: This series has been looking at Revelation 1-5 through the lens of God having a furious longing for relational intimacy and union with us, as His creation formed in His image. His heart is full of overwhelming, indescribable passion and longing for the redemption and reconciliation of broken human beings. God has perfect wisdom and sovereign power and He has a plan to cleanse the earth of evil and bring together the heavenly realm.
- II. In Revelation 1 we are introduced to the glorious person of Jesus Christ as the central focus of the entire book. In Revelation 2-3 we are introduced to the church community and see an incredibly rich description of what Jesus is longing (and planning!) for His redeemed community to look like. Jesus is preparing His Bride to face the many challenging times that they will face in the time ahead. Chapters 4 and 5 go together to show us clearly that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are in sovereign control of all things and have a glorious plan to cleanse the earth of evil and wickedness. In Chapter 6 we see Jesus opening a series of seals that release numerous judgements toward the earth with the purpose of cleansing the earth from sin and turning human beings toward God.

A Moment of Transition (Rev. 8:1-5)

- I. Revelation 8 begins with the opening of the last of the seven seal judgements and gives a truly remarkable transition toward the next set of divine judgements in the seven trumpets.

The 7th Seal (Rev. 8:1)

- I. At first glance, the seventh seal appears seriously underwhelming: “When he opened the seventh seal there was silence in heaven for about half an hour”. After the previous seals had seen 1/3 of the earth killed and the celestial bodies being supernaturally affected, the idea of 30 minutes of silence might seem like a major drop in the action.
- II. While there have been numerous ideas about what the time of silence means, perhaps the best meaning can be found by looking at other Scriptural references that speak of silence:
 - “The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.” -Habakkuk 2:20
 - “Come and see what the Lord has done, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. He says, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” -Psalm 46:8-10
 - “I will stretch out my hand against Judah and destroy all who live in Jerusalem...those who turn back from following the LORD and neither seek the LORD nor inquire of him. Be silent before the Sovereign LORD for the day of the LORD is near.” -Zephaniah 1:4,6-7

Silence often precedes times when God is preparing to act in divine judgement, on a national or world-wide level. The silence of the 7th seal anticipates the major divine judgements that are about to be announced through the seven trumpets.

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The Place and Power of Prayer

- I. Before John is shown the sounding of the second round of divine judgements, the seven trumpets, God reveals some astounding realities about the place and power of the prayers of the saints (God's people).
 - “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. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God's people, went up before God from the angel's hand. 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.” -Revelation 8:3-5
- II. This scene is connected to Revelation 5:8 where the elders around God's throne are holding “golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints”. Here in chapter 8 we see that the prayers are symbolically mixed together with a fragrant mix of incense, and that it ascends toward God. It is an offering being given to God. There is also a clear connection to the sacrificial system, where the aromas of various sacrifices would come before God.
- III. Next, the angel with the golden censer, filled it with fire from the altar and throws it to the earth. First the incense of the prayers *ascends* to God and then God's response to those prayers *descends* to the earth. Fire speaks of God's judgement being released on the earth, which are described more specifically in the seven trumpets. These divine judgements are so intense that in anticipation of them all of heaven fell silent for half an hour!

The Manifestation of Love and Justice

- I. After the fire is thrown to the earth, it says that “**there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.**” While this short phrase can easily be overlooked, it is very significant. The background to this phrase can be found in Exodus 19:16-18.
- II. “On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire.”
- III. In Revelation there are several similar descriptions of God's Presence.
 - “From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder.” -Rev. 4:5
 - “...and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.” - Rev. 8:5
 - “...And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake” -Rev. 11:19
 - “Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake.” - Rev. 16:18
- IV. The first of these descriptions come in the context of worship (4:5); the next three come in the context of divine judgement, at the conclusion of the the seals (8:5), the trumpets (11:19) and the bowls (16:18). There are several points that we should understand:
- V. The connection to Exodus 19 makes clear that these descriptions speak of the manifestation of God's presence upon the earth.

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- I. In Revelation we see that worship and judgement are dynamically connected. God's presence is manifest in the context of worship and prayer (Rev.4-5) and it is also manifest in the context of divine judgement. God's purpose is to cleanse and prepare the earth of all sin and wickedness, in preparation for His ultimate return to the earth (1 Cor. 15:24-28)
- II. "Worship throughout (Revelation) produces judgement as well as joy. This is because God is characterized by both love and justice, and these are not separate but interdependent aspects of his being." -Grant Osborne

Conclusion

- I. **The primary theme of this passage is the role that the prayers of God's people have in the upcoming divine judgements about to be released through the seven trumpets.** While God is raising up a worldwide prayer movement at the end of the age, it is also the prayers of the saints throughout history that have been gathered together; they have not been forgotten; they prayers of God's people will be answered! Every cry for justice, every prayer against the injustices in the world will be heard and answered.
- II. While Scripture makes it clear that our battle is a spiritual battle, not a physical battle against other human beings, there will be a time when God Himself will act on behalf of truth, humility and justice and release divine judgement that will directly impact many on the earth. We must entrust such justice to God alone, but we must also recognize that our prayers have a vital role in the unfolding of God's perfect justice and righteousness.

Psalm 149

Praise the Lord.

Sing to the Lord a new song,
his praise in the assembly of his faithful people.

2 Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;

let the people of Zion be glad in their King.

3 Let them praise his name with dancing
and make music to him with timbrel and harp.

4 For the Lord takes delight in his people;
he crowns the humble with victory.

5 Let his faithful people rejoice in this honor
and sing for joy on their beds.

6 May the praise of God be in their mouths
and a double-edged sword in their hands,

7 to inflict vengeance on the nations
and punishment on the peoples,

8 to bind their kings with fetters,
their nobles with shackles of iron,

9 to carry out the sentence written against them—
this is the glory of all his faithful people.

Praise the Lord.