

Our Sovereign God
(The Day God Destroys One-Third of His Creation)
Revelation 8:1-13

Introduction

1. It is well said that, “It is often quietest before the storm.” The stillness and silence can almost take your breath away in anticipation of what may come. “It is often quietest before the storm.” Never are those words more appropriate than when they are applied to the Trumpet Judgements of Revelation 8, the day God destroys 1/3 of His creation. Revelation 8:1 speaks of silence in heaven, but only for a ½ hour, a short time, for a judgement almost too great to imagine will quickly follow and when it is finished, 1/3 of God’s glorious creation will be gone, consumed by the God who made it.
2. Revelation 8 – 9 contains the 2nd great series of judgements in John’s apocalypse: the 7 trumpets. Revelation began with a greeting from the Trinity (1:1-8) and a glorious vision of the exalted Lord Jesus who walks in the midst of His churches (1:9-20). 7 letters to 7 specific historical churches comprise chapters 2 – 3, and then a significant turn in our book takes place for in 4:1 John is told, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.” John is taken in the Spirit both to heaven and into the future as God shows, sign-i-fies to His servant His plan for the consummation of history. Chapters 4 – 5 are a glorious vision of 2 parts: chapter 4 focuses on God the Father, the Lord of Creation. Chapter 5 focuses on God the Son, the Lord of Redemption. Thus by creation and redemption God has the right to do with this earth and its inhabitants as He pleases. Chapter 6 begins the divine account of the Tribulation, the Day of the Lord, Daniel’s 70th week. The 19th chapter will bring it to its rightful conclusion with the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ to the earth to establish His earthly kingdom. Chapter 6 contained the seal judgements and introduced us to the 4 horsemen of the apocalypse. ¼ of humanity is killed. Chapter 7 is an interlude, a break in the action, that teaches us that 1) in the midst of great judgement there is still mercy, 2) God is not through with the Jew, and 3) The Tribulation will also be a time of great revival as “a great multitude which no one could count” (7:9) will “wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14). Now, however, the judgement of God on planet earth resumes with the blowing of the trumpets. What should we learn from this awesome scene? Two truths stand out.

I. We should pray for the will of God. 8:1-6

Prayer is an important theme in Revelation. The “prayers of the saints” are mentioned in 5:8 and twice here (8:3,4). There are various facets of prayer to which we should give attention, and 3 of them are highlighted in this text. In light of the judgement that has gone before (ch. 6) and the judgements which will follow (chapters 8-9, 15-16, 17-18 in particular), these aspects of prayer take on an even greater significance.

1. There are times when we need to be quiet before God. 8:1-2

*The Lamb breaks the 7th seal – all of this is His doing. The 7th seal is the 7 trumpets as they follow immediately from it. There is a greater rapidity and intensity to the judgements as we move toward the end.

Silence in heaven for about ½ an hour – why?

- 1) It is the silence before the great storm of God's judgement;
- 2) To hear the cries for deliverance and vindication and justice of the persecuted servants of Christ.

*While it is silent, John sees the 7 angels receive the 7 trumpets. The Lamb broke the seals. Angels will execute the judgement of the trumpets and the bowls (ch. 16).

The non-biblical Jewish book 1 Enoch 20:2-8 makes reference to 7 angels who stand before God and names them as Uriel, Raphael, Raquel, Michael, Saraquel, Gabriel and Remeil. Trumpets, according to Numbers 10 called the people together, announced war, and proclaimed special times and events. They were sounded at Mt. Sinai when the Law was given (Exodus 19:16-19), when Jericho fell (Joshua 6:13-16), when the king was enthroned (1 Kings 1:34, 39). A trumpet will sound at the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) and when Christ returns (Matthew 24:31).

The scene is suspenseful, awesome and majestic. Heaven is silent before the sovereign God who prepares to execute justice. Before such a God we too should, probably more often than we do, stand, bow or kneel in silence.

Habakkuk 2:20 – “But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.”

Zechariah 2:13 – “Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord, for he is aroused from His holy Habitation!”

2. There are times when we need to speak to God. 8:3-4

To stand before God is to be ready for service. In addition to the 7, another angel comes to stand at the altar, the golden altar of incense (cf. Exodus 30:1-10; 2 Kings 6:22; Hebrews 9:4). He holds a golden censer or pan used to transport fiery coals from the brazen altar to the altar of incense in order to ignite the incense. Here the burning incense with its sweet aromatic scent is added or mingled with the prayers of all the saints on the altar and before the throne. All of this rises before the Lord as a cloud of fragrant smoke and as a symbol of an acceptable offering to God. Mounce is correct when he says, “The scene in heaven suggests that there is something sacrificial about genuine prayer” (p. 182). For centuries the saints of God have prayed, talked to God. They have poured out their hearts, laid bare their souls and sought His face. God is pleased when we pray. God is honored when like Jesus, we pray, “... not my will, but Yours be done” (Luke 22:32). During the Great Tribulation God's will will be done. We should tell Him that is what we want too!

3. **There are times when we need to wait on God. 8:5-6**

The language of these verses is reminiscent of Sinai with its thunders, lightnings, and earthquake (Exodus 19:16-19), and the vision of Ezekiel 10:2-7 where a man clothed in linen fills his hand with coals and scatters them over the city.

Intercession has turned to judgement, not according to man's timetable, but God's! The angel priest casts fire upon the earth followed by harbingers of impending storm and disaster. The cosmos trembles before the presence and power of its Creator. A day of reckoning has arrived. "The 7 angels prepare themselves to sound" (v. 7).

Romans 12:19 reminds us, "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, *"Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,"* says the Lord."(cf. Deut. 32:35; Heb. 10:30). There is coming a day when God will make things right. The trumpet judgements are a portion of that day. We need to wait on Him. He will not be late. Indeed, He will be right on time.

Transition

- 1) We should pray for the will of God.
- 2) We should prepare for the work of God.

II. **We should prepare for the work of God. 8:7-13**

The judgements of the trumpets break forth from the 7th seal. They follow a 4-3 pattern similar to that of the seals. The precise nature of each is not altogether clear, though the end results are quite plain and quite tragic. The judgements generally recall the plagues of Exodus, which God visited upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians. The first 4 of chapter 8 are natural in that they affect the land, salt water, freshwater and stellar bodies. The 5th and 6th trumpets of chapter 7 unleash demonic forces that torment, then kill. The 7th trumpet (11:15-19) will constitute the 7 bowls of chapter 16. In the blowing of the first 4, four facets of God's sovereignty are made known.

1. **God is sovereign over the soil. 8:7**

Thirteen times the word third occurs in chapter 8. This destruction of a third may be scattered worldwide or, it may be specific in defining God's devastation of a particular third, a particular continent, a particular land and sea mass, a particular geographical location.

Hail & fire recall the 4th Egyptian plague (Exodus 9:23-26; Joel 2:30-31).

Mixed with blood intensifies the judgement as 1/3 of the earth, trees and all the green grass in that 1/3 is burned up. "Burned up" occurs 3 times in these verses. Blood is probably symbolic of the awesome color of the judgement that originated in heaven but is thrown to the earth. 1/3 indicates that although God is judging the earth, His judgement is not yet complete or final.

2. God is sovereign over the sea. 8:8-9

This judgement is reminiscent of the 1st Egyptian plague in which the rivers were turned to blood, killing the fish and making the water undrinkable (Exodus 7:20-21). Here, it is sea life and those who travel its waters who are affected and judged. Ecological and economic disaster of an unprecedented nature visits our planet. “Many such things had happened within the memory of John and his readers. God used such environmental phenomena to present his revelation of destruction to their enemies. A few years before this writing Mount Vesuvius had erupted (August, A.D. 79) pouring forth a fiery flood which engulfed Herculaneum and Pompeii and many other small villages with a horror long remembered by all in that country. The younger Pliny, writing to Tacitus, told some of the horrors of the event, which took the life of his distinguished uncle, Pliny the naturalist. Ashes from the burning mountain fell on ships far out in the sea and upon the distant shores of Egypt and Syria. Pliny relates that there was first an earthquake followed by the eruption, which sent an avalanche of fire down the mountainside into the sea. Many who eluded the streams of lava were suffocated by the sulphurous fumes, which reached far away. The sky was darkened so that Pliny said, “It was now day elsewhere, but there night blacker and thicker than all nights.” At another time the island volcano Santorin had erupted, giving the suggestion of a burning mountain. Fugitives told how fiery blasts destroyed vegetation, how sulphurous vapors killed the fish in the sea, and how the waters were turned red like blood. Such things were in the consciousness of John’s readers. Doubtless God gives his revelation through things they would understand. Thus is he saying to them, “I have the means of destroying your enemies.” And by just such things he called those enemies to repent and turn from their evil.

Note John says something “like a great mountain ...” speculating as to what it is, is both unnecessary and unprofitable. Was it a giant meteorite, an asteroid, or something altogether different? John did not know what it was. However, he is absolutely clear in what it does.

3. God is sovereign over the springs. 8:10-11

The reference to wormwood draws a parallel to the experience of the children of Israel at the waters of Marah (Exodus 15:23-25). The star receives the name Wormwood because of the effect it has on the water. The word referred to a plant with a strong bitter taste found in the Near East (cf. Jeremiah 9:15; 23:15; Lamentations 3:15, 19; Amos 5:7).

It is not clear whether John intends the star to be understood naturally or supernaturally, as an angel (cf. 9:1) or an asteroid. Again, its end result is indisputable. It poisoned the springs and the rivers that provide our drinking water, and many died as a result. The water becomes bitter and poisonous and the inhabitants of the earth become even more familiar with the bitterness and death of God’s just judgement.

4. **God is sovereign over the skies. 8:12-13**

This plague of darkness looks back to the 9th plague in Egypt (Exodus 10:21-23). Amos 5:18 teaches us, “The day of the Lord is darkness, not light.”

Wiersbe points out, “It is possible that this particular judgement will reverse itself, and the sun’s power will be intensified (Revelation 16:8-9, [4th bowl]). Joel 2 says the day of the Lord will be “a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness.” The darkness of the 4th trumpet anticipates the transition to demonic activity and even greater sorrow.

Verse 13 is something of a transition. The flying eagle should be understood symbolically and may have a connection with the eagle-like living creature of Revelation 4:7-8. Before the last 3 angels sound their trumpet, a 3-fold woe is pronounced upon the earth and in a loud voice. The 1st woe is to be identified with the 5th trumpet. The 2nd woe is to be identified with the 6th trumpet. The 3rd woe is to be identified with the 7th trumpet which constitutes the final series of judgements: the 7 bowls of chapter 16.

The phrase “those who dwell on the earth” is used throughout Revelation to designate those who live in rebellion and unbelief before the true and living God. It occurs 12 times in the book. These are persons who live not only on the earth, but for the earth. The things of God count for naught. The issues of heaven matter nothing at all. What a tragic way to live. What a terrible way to die.

Conclusion

“The gospel is not a tranquilizer for worried weaklings to help them sleep at night. It is not a mass of dead dogmas, deep frozen in some ancient cathedral to be carried as a burden through life and thawed out five minutes before death. The gospel is not a list of religious rules and regulations to be strung around the soul like a lucky charm in case of accidents. No, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is a message – and what a message! It is a living message from the living God for living people, just like us, for people with sins just like us, for people with sorrows and heartaches just like us. It is the only message on the face of the earth with concrete promises and absolute assurances of an eternal inheritance that will withstand the impact of death and the collapse of the universe.”

J. Boyd Nicholson (in *Uplook*, Nov. 1997, page 11)

Such a gospel is especially “good news” as we think about the 7 angels with 7 trumpets of Revelation 8.