

The Revelation 8

Written by K B Napier
Tuesday, 09 June 2015 15:12

“The Seventh Seal”

It is now time to open the seventh seal, and a strange thing happened – strange when compared with the previous activities, for there was complete silence in heaven for half an hour following its opening. This signifies the importance attributed to it by God. It is the silence of bated breath, of a gravity unsurpassed, of a respect for the Lord and His works that cannot ever be known in full. The first four verses describe preparation for what is to follow, events so dramatic and full of judgement that they require it.

Verses 1-4

1.

“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.”

The seventh seal was opened and a hush fell on all present in heaven. They knew something momentous was to happen and waited in silence for a literal half hour, as the words themselves dictate. Note how that even in a vision, time elapsed. Then, John saw the seven angels that were before God take up trumpets in readiness.

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A lone angel then came and stood before the altar, holding a golden censer containing an aromatic substance, likely to be frankincense. This is not 'spiritualising' the text, but is based on the wording used: 'censer' is **libanōtos**, which can have one of two meanings – the gum of the frankincense tree, and censer, the container of a variety of substances, often used in worship. The word here refers to both the object and what was contained in it. However, a different word – **thymiama**, is used for the contents, the incense.

The word *libanotos* is rooted in **libanos**, which refers to the resin, frankincense (white in its purest form, but yellow after the first drops have been obtained), or the tree it comes from. (Frankincense resin is brittle. It glitters, has a bitter taste, and was used in ceremonial fumigation. The root, *lēbownah*, confirms it is frankincense, and its root, *laban*, means 'white' – the colour of the purest frankincense; this meaning is further confirmed by another root, with the same spelling).

The first part of its name, **frank**, refers to the way the odour is given so freely and easily when the resin is burned. The *censer* part refers to the container it is in. It burns for a long time with a steady flame. Thus, it is reasonable to imply that the angel was burning frankincense in the censer. We can also assume this from what happened to the censer.

At first the incense was burned before the golden altar, whilst all the saints prayed before it. This was sited in front of God's throne. The smoke, along with the prayers, came before God, evidently pleasing Him. Yet, it was only a precursor to something about to happen.

Verses 5&6

1.

"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.

2.

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

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It would be impossible for any right thinking Christian to read these words without feeling the ice wind of godly fear on their hearts! Though we may, as God's children, rest in the assurance of His love, yet we must look upon what happens here as fearful and chilling, for God's Holy might and command are clearly displayed in acts of great power.

Though this is a vision and there is much symbolism, the things about to happen are given specific names. I have no reason to doubt that these actions by God refer to actual voices, thundering, lightning, and earthquakes. The word 'thunderings' is literal only. 'Lightning' refers to actual lightning, as well as to a bright light that dazzled... though lightning can have that effect.

The angel took fire from the altar and placed it in the censer... remember that frankincense was used to clean out or fumigate. When he had filled the container, the angel threw it at the earth. Instantly were heard many voices, with thunder and lightning, all accompanied by massive earthquakes, whilst the seven angels stood by, ready with their trumpets. Trumpets often accompany the presence or judgement of God, and blast loudly. This is global judgment, and not just for the Christians at the time. If it were only for local Christians at that time, John would have said so.

Verses 7-11

1.

"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.

2.

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.

3.

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.

4.

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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;

5.

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.”

It is the rule of interpretation that meanings of texts must be the most literal or obvious, unless the text itself supplies other meanings. Note that Christ Himself gave us meanings in earlier texts, otherwise we could not have known them. Here the text stands alone and we must seek out meanings. As the first rule is adhered to unless we are shown otherwise, we can only assume that the interpretation is literal.

Thus, when the first angel blew on his trumpet, the earth was hit by hail and fire and blood. The 'hail' here is literal hail, as the word itself is literal (*chalaza*). The fire is also literal (*pur*). It can also mean 'fiery', which need not be literal of course, but the whole context suggests literal actions.

The 'blood'? This can mean literal blood or blood shed by violence or murder. Either may apply here, as the rest of the text suggests. An overall meaning may be, then, that as the earth came under attack from hail and fire, either many people were killed by them, or they killed each other. The first choice seems most probable, as we are told the fire and hail destroyed a third of all trees and grass. The bush fires of Australia, for example, spread swiftly and kill everything in their path.

The same appears to occur here and so we can conclude that God will destroy a third of the earth's forested and grassy regions with fire and hail, which will also kill many people and animals. Thus, 'blood' remains literal, for it describes the result of judgement. This will be an actual event of catastrophic and global application, before the final end of days.

The second angel waited until this havoc had been wrought. Then, he also blasted on his trumpet to signal yet another judgement. A massive area of fire then dropped into the sea, and

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a third of all the sea was slain.

'Became blood' can, as we have seen, refer to the killing of what the sea contained. And this is indeed what the text tells us, for a third of all sea creatures died instantly, together with all the seafaring vessels on the sea at the time. This speaks of a total obliteration of one third of the earth's oceans. And all this is part of the build-up to the final day of time and the old creation.

Some might argue that this will be a 'natural disaster', perhaps from a mighty volcanic eruption, or a huge earthquake. But, this does not fit what we are told: that God commanded an angel to cast a colossal 'lump' of fire, the size of a mountain, into the sea. Some might think this will be 'natural' space debris, or a comet, etc., but again this is not what the text tells us. The text speaks of a deliberate act of God, not a natural disaster. We must not deny the ability of God to initiate actions that are above or beyond what He has already created.

The third angel blew his trumpet, heralding yet another massive onslaught, this time a 'star' from space (thus differentiating itself from the 'lump' of fire in the previous verse). We read that this star 'fell' and was not 'cast' down. This was a 'great' star, of huge proportion, but not big enough to throw earth from its orbit.

The 'star' was a previously created space object, but now God commanded it to fall from its own place in the heavens and to crash into the earth as it shuddered already under hail and fire, with many deaths. Now, this monolithic burning star crashes to earth, destroying a third of the earth's water supply. Note that it also destroys a third of the *sources* of the water. If it was a natural disaster it would have a random effect on everything. But, God targeted only the water supplies.

The star has a name: Wormwood, because its substance and effect is bitter and poisonous. After this star crashes to earth, then, it poisons a third of the water, killing many people. It must have been a swift death for a root word for wormwood is *pikros*, which suggests something that is virulent and quick-spreading. Such judgments should not come as a surprise, when we know what God did to the Egyptians.

Is all this a picture, or is it actual? I see no reason to see it as anything but literal, a vision of what God is going to do with the earth at the very end. Note that the 'name of the star IS Wormwood'. Though John was writing about a vision, historically, the Wormwood star exists

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today ('is' refers to here and now) and so is waiting for God's command to hurtle through space as a missile. Fear God and live!

Verses 12&13

1.

"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 like wise.

2.

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

Then the fourth angel blew his trumpet. There can be no doubt that each trumpet blast can be heard from earth, so that no human being can mistake what is going on. God is in control and the same God so dismissed as a myth is now executing judgement, as promised in the scriptures they reject!

As the stricken people of the earth struggle to maintain some kind of pathetic order, following already stupendously-massive disasters, they hear yet another trumpet sound and look to the heavens to see what awful thing is to come next! What comes next is even more chilling, for it affects the support of all life – the sun.

The light of one third of all heavenly bodies is snuffed out, including a third of the sun, a third of the moon, and a third of all stars and planets! The terror this will invoke can only be imagined. As light begins to disappear, along with a third of heat, so the earth enters a twilight zone becoming increasingly very cold, day and night.

After this horrific devastation an angel flew through heaven crying out 'Woe' ('alas!') to the people of earth. He cries this out three times, a sign of the severity and gravity of the situation; each 'woe' would be a different judgement. However, he is not crying out because of what has

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happened thus far... but about the continuing judgements that will come from the next three angels! What came before was bad enough – but what follows will be even worse. Will people cast themselves before Almighty God because of their fear? No, they will not! Therefore, their doom is secured.

Christians can read these words with assurance, but they must still fear, for these verses describe the last days of earth, when all who remain will be tormented and killed, by one ravaging disaster after another in quick succession, so that even the most sinful men will cry out in abject terror and distress... and yet will not repent. For those who think we are already in these final days because of an increase in natural disasters, think again, for these are as nothing compared to the events described in these texts. They may, though, be a minor pointer towards such days.

If we take these verses as they come, we see an unfolding of our future history and a breaking down of creation by God Himself. No star can fall without His command. No harm can befall the sun or moon unless He says so. There is no such thing as a 'natural disaster' that is unleashed without His consent or order.

So, even though we are not yet in the days described in these verses, we should still fear when we see major disasters occurring around the world, for they occur at His behest. God is in control, never forget that; a God of wrath and judgement. Do not let Christians fondly deceive themselves with a self-invented 'god' who only loves!

The following words, in the context of Revelation 8, are used literally:

- Voices
- Thunder
- Lightning
- Earthquake
- Fire
- Third
- Third part
- Sea
- Ships
- Trees
- Grass
- Burnt up

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- Star/s
- Rivers
- Fountains of waters
- Died
- Sun
- Moon
- Smitten
- Darkened

This supports my interpretation that the chapter speaks of literal doom.

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