

The Silence Before the Storm

Revelation 8

As we open to Revelation 8 today, we are going to find again that in each chapter there are incredible insights into our Great God. Each of this book's 404 verses are like tiny windows into understanding a bit more of our All Powerful and Almighty God.

Almost every one of the seven teaching truths or "doctrines"¹ that are presented in this chapter are tied to the same doctrines in the other books of the Bible that God has already taught us. Here is what we see taught in Revelation 8:

1. Doctrine of Inspiration: God Designed Revelation to Connect the Rest of the Bible (8:1a)
2. Doctrine of Prayer: God Designed Prayer As our Vital Connection to Him (8:1b-4)
3. Doctrine of Sovereignty: God Connects Our Prayers to His Plan (8:5-6)
4. The Doctrine that: God is the ONLY Giver & Sustainer of Life (8:7)
5. The Doctrine that: God ALONE Holds the Breath of Life in His Hands (8:8-9)
6. The Doctrine that: God EXCLUSIVELY Controls the Water of Life (8:10-11)
7. The Doctrine that: God is THE Source of the Light of Life (8:12)

Now walk with me through each verse as let me explain these doctrines.

1. The Doctrine of Inspiration: God Designed the Book of Revelation to Connect All the Rest of the Bible

Revelation 8:1a (NKJV) When He opened the seventh seal,

We are here introduced to the seventh seal. The amazing detailed numbers that God uses as a framework to our understanding of His plan, is part of what we need to see, to help us fit everything together that God is telling us.

¹ Doctrine is a translation of the Greek word *didake* "teachings" which comes from *didasko* "to teach". So doctrines are truths that God's Word teaches.

First, we see how God uses numbers at times to communicate truths to us. He has a set of seven numbered seals. That means that there were six seals before this one. Those seals started in chapter 6. We have already studied each one. But think of them as a literal set of events that happen in a specific order; and they are a tool in God's plan, that is yet future.

God's Word Uses Literal, Historical, Grammatical Communication

The Bible is very easy to understand when we look at it the same way that we look at almost all other communications in life. When we talk, read letters, assignments, menus, texts, and so on, we use this plain, normal sense of literal meanings of words.

For example: when someone tells us: "two days, three scratches, and five bumps", we interpret those words as literal and framed by the context of our communication.

If those words were medically tied we are looking for changes in health.
If those words are tied to our car, we are hearing about car body repair or damage.

To understand God's Word, just read the Bible as if God was trying to explain to us His plan, in plain English. That is what God has done.

Now for a moment look at the sets of sevens that God has already shown us. There is a reason for this repeated usage of sevens. God designed completed sets as being in groups of seven. Just like seven days represents a complete week of days.

So in chapter 2-3 the seven lampstands are the seven churches; and the seven churches represent all churches, of all the ages that Christ's church would exist on Earth.

The seven cities that were written to represents all the cities churches would ever exist in. God addresses this message to all believers in all churches for all the ages, and uses the seven to represent all as a set, a complete list.

So the seals in one sense represent all of God's plans to judge this sinful world, and put an end to the rebellion against His holy and absolute rule.

The Seven Seals Telescopically Cover all of Revelation 6-19

If we look closely, we can see that the seventh seal actually contains all the rest of the book of Revelations description of the Tribulation. The trumpets are telescopic. They flow out of the seventh seal. So the bowls of judgment also flow out of the seventh trumpet. So in the sense of seven seals, trumpets, and bowls, God has shown us numerically that He has an

orderly, well designed, and complete plan.

Seal 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 (Rev. 8:1)

Trumpet 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 (Rev. 11:15)

Bowl 1-2-3-4-5-6-7 (Rev. 16:15)

Another truth about inspiration is that God communicates consistently. There is one Author, one master plan, and a complete unity in every piece of God's Word. Each of these trumpets introduced in this chapter, as well as almost all the other elements, are also tied Biblically to other parts of God's Word. God has planned and given every Word of God. They are all Divine, powerful, inspired, and very profitable as Paul reminds us in 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

God designed the Bible as a unified message that leads from every part to Him.

2. The Doctrine of Prayer: God Designed Prayer As our Vital Connection to Him

Revelation 8:1b-4 (NKJV) there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. 2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. 3 Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand.

Prayers from saints get to Heaven and get stored. They rise before God's Face and are placed in special bowls (Rev. 5:8) that are right before Him. God wants us to realize the access that prayers give us: front row seats before God. Nothing gets us closer, nearer, or more front and center to all that God is doing than our prayers.

Some of those prayers were answered prayers (the yes's and no's) and some are the unanswered prayers (the not yet, please wait); but all the prayers of all the saints come as Hebrews 4: says "before the Throne". God wants to give us grace to help in time of need, and all prayers are a fragrant offering that comes as worship and offerings to Him.

The silence in Heaven may well be a precious insight into how vital our prayers are to God. Everything halts before the Throne as the prayers of His saints arise before our Almighty God. If everything else halts and God breathes in the sweet fragrance of the devoted prayers we offer, doesn't that make us want to pray, and pray, and pray: without ceasing, as Paul exhorts us?

The altar we see in this chapter (8:3) is just one piece of seven pieces of furniture that God designed, showed Moses the Heavenly ones, and had Moses copy earthly copies for usage in the Tabernacle to explain God's truths to us on Earth. The altar is the golden incense altar that was closest to the Presence of God represented by the Ark of the Covenant. There is another seven. A complete set of objects God designed for His meeting place with humans through the OT Tabernacle.

The Altar of Incense Shows up Seven Times in Revelation

This altar is seven times noted (6:9; 8:3 twice; 8:5; 9:13; 14:18 and 16:7) in heaven; and is not an altar of burnt offering. Jesus was offered once and there are no animal sacrifices in heaven needed.

So the only other altar is the altar of incense. This altar is found in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Books of Moses (Exod. 30:1-10; Lev. 16:12; Num. 16:46) just in front of the Holy of Holies, the tiny room of God's presence over the Ark of the Covenant.

This altar was hollow, rectangular box, covered with gold, standing 3 feet high and a foot and a half square. Along the top of this Incense altar was a small rail fence to hold burning coals from tumbling off as the priests came to offer burnt incense as a fragrant wrapping around the offered sacrifices.

Because the incense was offered before the first sacrifice and after the last, it is almost as if the offerings of the people were sent to God tied with the fragrant ribbons of perfumed incense smoke.

In the Old Testament, we saw last time the altar of incense in Exodus 30:1-10, shows the priority of prayer. Prayer (symbolized by the smoke rising from the golden incense altar), was closest to the Holy of Holies. In other words, prayer was what brought us closest to God.

But, the fire that burned the incense to make in smoke came from the coals taken off the brazen altar where the sacrifices for sin were burnt. So prayer is based on the sacrifice of Christ. Prayers can be made because Christ opened the way. Prayers rise before the very Throne of God. Prayer offers us immediate and constant access to Him at all and at any time.

In Luke 1:9-11 we meet Zacharias, father of John the Baptist as he tended the altar of incense. In Exodus 30 we find the detailed specifications of all each priest had to do twice a day. The time usually allocated for that rekindling of the coals, and refilling the incense spread on the coals was 30 minutes.

The altar of incense was closest to the Holy of Holies. It was the place that God specified as closest to Him. That altar was the one spot a priest could go at anytime and be closest possible to God. The fire was to never go out, just like our prayers are never to cease.

Prayer Connects Us to the Throne of God

Prayer was taught and commanded by Jesus as His constant tool for tuning our hearts, focusing our minds, and guiding our lives. Even those stages of prayer we learned in Matthew 6 are so evident now as we think of the destination of prayer.

Jesus told us when we prayer to first focus on where they were headed: Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Prayers are sent to God the Father, seated on the Throne, surrounded by the awesome reverence of Heaven.

There is one thing we are told to always do, remember? Praying always is how Paul says it in Ephesians 6:18. We are to pray without ceasing as Paul also said (1 Th. 5:17). Were those just words of hyperbole? Or is the obedient giving of our selves to Biblical praying the greatest source of blessing, growth, peace, and power?

Jesus prayed, the disciples prayed, we are commanded to pray unceasingly, and prayer is the vital connection to all that God, in His Word, by His Spirit wishes to do in and through us.

3. The Doctrine of Sovereignty: God Connects Our Prayers to His Plan

Revelation 8:5-6 (NKJV) 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. ⁶ So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

The picture of the prayers mixed with coals speaks of God in His perfect timing of His plan answering. One prayer that has perhaps most often been prayed is from the Lord's (or more accurately the Disciple's) Prayer. When saints for the past two thousand years have cried out to God the Father: "Thy Kingdom Come", they have asked for this moment.

The censer, the coals of fire, the incense of prayers, and the hurling to earth all graphically speak of God acting in concert with the prayers saints have offered in the Spirit and according to His plan.

Another amazing parallel is between the plagues that God sent through Moses onto Egypt, and the first four trumpets is another design feature that Good uses. In Egypt the plagues

matched up with the false claims of false gods, and showed that the Lord God Almighty was just that, the One, True, Living God.

To an earth long seduced by mother earth goddess worship. To all the false worship of the nature worshippers to “save the planet” God responds. He strikes with mortal blows the Earth, the Sky, the Sea.

4. The Doctrine that: God is the ONLY Giver & Sustainer of Life

Revelation 8:7 (NKJV) 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.

Green speaks of life. Grass and trees are signs of life, they provide food, shelter, shade, nutrition, and comforts. God says to the world, you don't worship Me, but worship the Earth, your food, your life, your comfort, and your security? Then I will show you that I am the giver of all green flourishing life. I am the only One that can give and sustain life. You have no hope apart from Me.

What a warning, what a wake up. The multitudes of martyrs out of the Tribulation that we see in chapter 6 and 7, that are saved out of this mess show that so many listen and heed.

5. The Doctrine that: God ALONE Holds the Breath of Life in His Hands

Revelation 8:8-9 (NKJV) 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. ⁹ And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

Can you even conceive of what the loss of the plankton factories that work constantly renewing the air we breath, when suddenly oxygen drops by 33%? The smoke produced when a third of grass and trees are burned up, have already made breathing difficult, but then comes the cessation of the richness of the sea's life.

The stench of death, the lifeless pallor of waters that formerly teemed with life. What a horror as the God of the Universe steps forward and through this plague says, I am the True God, the One who has always held your life's breath in My Hands (Daniel 5:23).

6. The Doctrine that: God EXCLUSIVELY Controls the Water of Life

Revelation 8:10-11 (NKJV) Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell

from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. ¹¹ The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter.

Most life on Earth is water-based. Humans are especially so, with a huge percentage of our bodies made up of water. Without water life withers, dries up, crumbles, and returns to dust.

Water connects, communicates, and controls so much of life as we know it. Mankind refuses the One who said that He is the only supplier of the water of life. So God introduces Himself by cutting off the water.

To an already water-impooverished planet, this trumpet is catastrophic. God sends a comet, meteorite, and asteroid that poisons a third of the fresh water. So desperate is humanity, and so deadly is the poison, that the God who speaks just truth plus no exaggeration, says “many”.

7. The Doctrine that: God is THE Source of the Light of Life

Revelation 8:12 (NKJV) Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night.

Almost everything we know is somehow tied to light. From photosynthesis to energy transfer to the Earth, all is tied to the Sun’s light. Our atmosphere is warmed, the great engines of weather and wind are all powered in part by the Sun. So God says, if you refuse the Light, I will send darkness.

Think of the violent storms this 4th trumpet precipitates. As the earth cools, and storms brew, the weather convulses, and earth slips into a twilight zone. God has already scorched the earth’s food chain leading to scarcity and an atmosphere of smoky air. Followed by trumpet two’s dead seas, and oxygen loss. Then trumpet three’s poison filled space invader’s water pollution and death.

God says you refuse Me and you find that earth is nothing apart from its Creator & Sustainer. No creation can satisfy, only the Creator can satisfy. No job, no possession, no person, no experience satisfies; nothing apart from our Creator can last, can continue, or can satisfy us.

After striking the ecology God says there is more. Not only have you abandoned the

Creator, you have made the Devil to be your God. So the wrath of God now is unleashed by removing the limitations and restraints upon Satan's evil.

As we will see, when God is rejected and abandoned, it is Hell on Earth, literally!

Finally, God Designed the Trumpet Judgments to Reveal the Evil's of Satan

Revelation 8:13 (NKJV) And I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!"

The ecology of Earth is struck. Just the thought of there being one-third less: air to breathe, Sun to shine, water to drink, and food to eat is incomprehensible.

Life becomes for the world a bit like being chained onto a sinking ship, or strapped into a crashing plane. But before anyone catches their breath while trying to make it in the smoke, looking for food, and cautiously searching for water, God says, it is going to get far, far, far worse.

There are no super heroes to save planet earth. There are no advanced civilizations out there that will be able to share life extending technology with humans. There is just God Almighty and His servants & the Devil and his mutant rebels. Finally all the movies & videos stop during the trumpet blasts and earth dwellers get confronted with the Real King, the Almighty God.

Truths to Live By

What can we take away from this? The doctrines of God are ours to hold, to believe, to trust, and to build our lives upon "the rock" as Jesus said in Matthew 7.

Lost people build their lives on sand and get washed away in storms. We the followers of Christ can build on the Rock, the truth we find in Christ. Here they are again:

- 1. Believe in Inspiration:** God Designed Revelation to Connect the Rest of the Bible (8:1a)
- 2. Practice Prayer:** God Designed Prayer As our Vital Connection to Him (8:1b-4)
- 3. Rest in His Sovereignty:** God Connects Our Prayers to His Plan (8:5-6)

4. God is the ONLY Giver & Sustainer of Life (8:7) **Thank Him**
5. God ALONE Holds the Breath of Life in His Hands (8:8-9) **Trust Him**
6. God EXCLUSIVELY Controls the Water of Life (8:10-11) **Drink Him**
7. God is THE Source of the Light of Life (8:12) **Follow Him**