

# **LECTURES ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

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## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **THE BREAKING OF THE SEVENTH SEAL**

(Lecture 8)

I AM to speak to you to-night on the breaking of the seventh seal, which opens fully the book of title-deed to this world,- the roll that was put into the hands of the Lord Jesus by the Father after the church, represented by the glorified elders, was seen around the throne in heaven.

First let me make a few remarks, which I think have not previously been made in the course of these lectures, in regard to the structure of the Book of the Revelation: The main body of the book is divided into four sevens. There are the letters to the seven churches of Asia; then the seven seals; then the seven trumpets; and farther on the seven vials of the wrath of God.

In connection with these last three sevens, there is something very striking. We have, first, six seals opened; then a parenthesis which takes up chapter seven. In chapter eight, the seventh seal is opened, and the book as a whole is open to view.

This seventh seal we find includes the seven trumpets. Six trumpets are sounded, and there is again a parenthetical portion, including chapters ten and eleven to verse fourteen. At the conclusion of this parenthesis the seventh trumpet brings us to the end of all things.

Chronologically, we are as far on when we reach chapter eleven, verse eighteen, as when we reach the Great White Throne in chapter twenty; for the seventh trumpet introduces the world-kingdom of our God and His Christ, and goes right on to the time when the dead shall be judged. So you see we really have a duplication, in measure, of prophetic truth from this point on. That is, from chapter four to the end of chapter eleven you have truth presented in orderly sequence - a prophetic outline of the things that shall take place after the rapture of the church right on to the end of time.

Then, commencing with chapter twelve, God seems to turn the roll over that we may view the other side, and He gives us a second view of the events, but especially in relation to Israel. We have details which bring before us the great actors for good and evil in the last days:

- the woman clothed with the sun;
- the Man-child, Christ, who is to rule the nations with a rod of iron;
- Michael, who is the archangel;
- The dragon, who is that old serpent, the devil;
- The coming world-confederacy and its blasphemous head;
- The lamb-like Beast, who I believe is the Antichrist, who looks like a lamb but speaks like a dragon - the counterfeit of the Lamb of God.

There follows a parenthetical portion in chapter fourteen, which in a very vivid way brings before us the final issues once more.

Then, in chapters fifteen and sixteen, we have the vials, or bowls, of the wrath of God; and once more, you will notice, we have the same structure that has engaged our attention in connection with the seals and trumpets.

We have six bowls, and then a parenthesis.

In this instance the parenthesis occupies only one verse (Chap. 16:15). Immediately following this, the seventh bowl of the wrath of God is outpoured, bringing us on to the doom of Babylon, described in detail through chapters 17 and 18; then in chapter 19 we have the Lord's descent to the earth, accompanied by the armies of heaven, to establish His millennial kingdom and reign for a thousand years.

At the close of this the final judgment takes place; the heavens and the earth as we now know them, with all the works of man, will be destroyed, and there shall be brought in new heavens and a new earth, where God will be all in all throughout an eternity of bliss: while the wicked - those who have persistently rejected the Lord Jesus Christ, both before the Cross and since, and the millennial dispensation of righteousness - all who have rejected the message of God, will be cast into the lake of fire.

I have searched this Book of God through and through, over and over again, to find one ray of hope for men and women who leave this world rejecting Christ, and I have never been able to find it. I have looked into all kinds of theories, and I have read hundreds of volumes, some depicting the annihilation of all the wicked dead, some, like the wild dream of the so-called "Pastor Russell," promising a second chance after death, but I have never found one statement in all these books, one based upon the word of God, to give the slightest hope to the Christ-rejecter.

This is the only world in which God is offering salvation to Christless men; and if you refuse the message of His grace now, if you deliberately steel your heart against the convicting power of the Holy Spirit and you die in your sins, go down to a Christless grave, you will be Christless for all eternity!

I think the most awful picture the Bible gives us of the doom of the lost is in the Epistle of Jude, which forms such a fitting preface to the Book of Revelation. He speaks of those who make light of God's salvation and who follow after unrighteousness, as "**wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.**" I cannot see the least hope for a Christless soul in that figure.

When I was a mere boy in my home in Canada, I remember how, night after night, a blazing comet appeared in the skies; and I heard older people telling that this particular "night wonder" had not been seen before for something like three hundred years. I asked in amazement where it had been, and for the first time in my young life I came up against the wonder of infinite space. I was told that that comet had been driving on with tremendous velocity millions and millions of miles away from the sun for one hundred and fifty years, and that one hundred and fifty years ago it had gradually begun to come back toward the sun, and that was why it was then visible. In a few weeks it passed out of sight, to appear to us no more for another three hundred years. I can recall pondering in my mind as to what would happen if that comet went off on a tangent (though I do not suppose I knew that word then, nor its meaning), and never came back! And, my friend, this is the appalling picture that Jude presents in the passage referred to. Those who turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, those who despise the boundless mercy He has bestowed upon them in His blessed Son, and persist in refusing His goodness, continuing in their sins, will be driven away from the Sun of Righteousness into the outer darkness, and will drive on, and on, and on, throughout eternity, nevermore to find their way back into the presence of God. He is giving a little space now for repentance, but the day of His grace will be over when He rises to shake terribly the earth. And how are you treating His offer of mercy?

But we return to our chapter.

**"And when he had opened the seventh seal there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour."**

In the first place, notice the opening verse. We are told that when the Lamb had opened the seventh seal there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. May we not say it is the "calm before the coming storm"? - the most awful storm that shall ever break over this poor world.

Some of you have lived in regions where thunder-storms are common, and you have often, no doubt, noted on a hot summer day the clouds suddenly gathering in the heavens, becoming heavier and darker every moment. You have heard the thunder reverberating in the skies, peal after peal, with ever increasing intensity. You have observed the lightning flashes striking terror into many a heart. Then suddenly all became still; there seemed to be not even a breath of wind to move the leaves upon the trees; and yet, an overcast, threatening sky, causing the fowls to run for a hiding place, the cattle to move uneasily, and all nature is expectant. A few moments pass by; then vivid flashes of lightning cause us to shrink back, dreading to be stricken; crash upon crash follow, and the windows of the heavens seem to be opened - the storm pouring down in a deluge!

We have something similar to this here. We saw in chapters four and five the saints gathered around the throne of God and of the Lamb, and we noted that from the throne proceeded thunder and lightning. As the seals were broken, one after another, judgment followed judgment in quick succession upon the poor world from which God had gathered out His beloved people. But even the crashing under the sixth seal is not the climax. In heaven lies the mystery of God's dealing with this world and the judgments yet to fall upon it. But when the last seal is broken it will be clearly manifested then just what side God takes in all the affairs of earth. He will judge according to the holiness of His character and the righteousness of His throne. The seventh seal, as we have before noted, introduces the final drama of the great tribulation. No wonder there is silence in heaven for half an hour before that seal is broken!

It is as though all heaven is waiting in breathless expectation. We seem to hear the questions: What will the Lamb do next? What will be God's next move toward judging and reclaiming that rebellious world? The verses that follow give the answer. John says:

**“And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets. 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. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. 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”** (verses 2-5).

Careful readers of the Bible will connect the seven trumpets with the fall of Jericho: that great city just across the Jordan that barred the progress of the people of Israel into the promised land - the city that fell with the blast of God alone.

The priests of Israel were given the trumpets of judgment, and for seven days they marched about the city blowing the trumpets; seven times on the seventh day they did so and at the seventh blast the walls fell down flat. Jericho is a type of this present world in its estrangement from God, with enmity to the people of God. Jericho fell at the sound of seven trumpets, and the world, as you and I know it, is going to fall at the sound of the seven trumpets of doom, blown by these angels of judgment.

The seal is broken, the book is fully unrolled. and the seven angels appear to whom are given seven trumpets. And as these angel messengers stand by, waiting one after the other to herald with a trumpet blast the coming judgments, we are told that another angel came and stood to officiate at the golden altar. He “is seen offering incense; therefore is an angel-priest.

Who is this angel-priest? I think you will agree that he can be no created angel. Scripture never speaks of any created angel offering incense with the prayers of saints to make them acceptable to God. The Church of Rome does; but nowhere in the Bible do you get anything of the kind.

Throughout the Old Testament, the pre-incarnate Christ is again and again presented as the Angel of The Lord.

- He was the angel who appeared to Abraham;
- He was the angel who guided the children of Israel;
- He was the angel who wrestled with Jacob and put his thigh out of joint by the brook at Peniel.
- He was the angel who appeared to Moses in the mount when the prophet prayed that he might behold God;
- He was the angel who appeared to Joshua to lead the people of Israel against their foes in the land of Canaan;
- He was the angel of The Lord again and again manifesting Himself throughout the entire dispensation.
- In the Book of Zechariah He is the angel-advocate who stands to plead for Joshua, the high priest.

So we again find Him in the Book of the Revelation presented as an angel-priest who still has a people on earth for whom to plead. They are not members of the church of God, but, as we saw in connection with the fifth seal and the parenthetical portion of chapter seven, the hundred and forty-four thousand, a remnant who will be taken out of Israel after the church of God will be called home.

The word of God is very clear on all this. The eleventh chapter of Romans pictures the Gentiles as having been grafted into Israel's olive tree of promise (Romans 11:17). And the Holy Ghost goes on in that chapter to make it plain that when the Gentile church becomes apostate, God is going to reject it, and turn back to Israel.

In the tribulation period they will again be grafted into their own olive tree. They will be the witnessing remnant of that awful time, and for them the Lord Jesus will make intercession in heaven, as He now does for His church. He will not be indifferent to their sorrows and their perplexities in those days of unparalleled tribulation; but He will, as the faithful High Priest, bear His people on His heart and on His shoulders, even as Aaron of old bore the names of the twelve tribes on the breastplate and on the onyx stones set in the ouches of gold upon his shoulders. So we see Him pictured by this angel-priest offering incense at the golden altar, in the very presence of God.

In this present time the Jews bewail their desolation, and cry out in anguish of heart year after year at the most solemn of their set-times, "**Woe unto us, for we have no Mediator!**" But when their eyes are opened and grace begins to operate in their souls they will know the blessedness of priestly intercession on the part of their once-rejected Messiah, whom they will learn to identify with the Angel of the Covenant of old.

They will search their Bibles; they will doubtless read the Book of Hebrews; they will study the four Gospels, and will see the truth. They will look upon Him whom they pierced, they will repent and mourn, as described in Zechariah 12:10-14, and God will receive Israel and make her His messenger to the nations. We are not surprised, therefore, when we get this look into glory, and see the Lord Jesus as the Angel-priest.

He has a golden censer. Is it not a blessed thing to think that Israel will have such an Intercessor in the coming day?

We are told that the smoke of the incense is the prayers of the saints - those suffering saints on the earth. The angel took the censer, and filled it with the fire of the altar, and emptied it upon the earth. Here is the answer to the cry of His afflicted ones down in that scene of tribulation. The prayers went up to the Father, and judgment came down, **“and there were thunderings, lightnings and an earthquake.”** The final storm breaks at last!

**“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”** (ver. 7).

I cannot explain the symbol fully, but I think I can see a hint of the awful time that is before the people of Christendom who have refused the gospel.

Do you remember that the grass is used as a symbol of man? (Isaiah 40:6.) Grass trampled beneath the foot is the picture of man in his frailty and weakness.

What about the tree? It is but another picture of man, but rising up in his pride and independence of God. You remember how Nebuchadnezzar is likened unto a great tree; how the rulers in Israel were spoken of as great cedars.

John the Baptist said, **“Now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree that beareth not good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.”**

Grass is man in his weakness, man in his littleness; the tree is man in his dignity, in his greatness, in his independence - man lifting himself up against God. So the first angel's trumpet distinctly indicates a fiery judgment upon that part of the human race that has rejected the gospel now so freely proclaimed. It is an appalling picture, but, remember, the reality is far worse than the picture!

This is followed by another fearful portent that has to do especially, I believe, with the judgment of the great world-church that has borne sway over the consciences of so many people, and enslaved so many nations.

**“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; 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”** (verses 8,9).

May I direct your attention to Jeremiah 51:25?

There we have the same symbol - a great mountain cast into the sea.

I have already said that every symbol in the Book of the Revelation was explained somewhere else in the Bible. Now here in the Old Testament a great mountain burning with fire is the symbol of Babylon, literal Babylon.

In the New Testament this great destroying mountain burning with fire, that is cast into the sea and brought to an end under the judgment of God in this coming day, is evidently spiritual Babylon.

Babylon of old was the fountainhead of idolatry. Every idolatrous system has had its root in Babylon. Spiritual Babylon is the direct successor of literal Babylon. The direct communication between the mystic religions of the old Babylon and spiritual Babylon of to-day is so marked that if anyone attempts to make a study of it he is perfectly astonished to find where many of the ritual services used in "Christian" churches sprang from.

In the coming day when the second angels trumpet sounds, Babylon will be cast into the great sea of the nations. That is, in the day of God's wrath, the false church will be utterly destroyed by the people over whom she once tyrannized. Of this we shall learn more when we come to chapter eighteen.

The third angel follows. We read:

**"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; 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"** (vers. 10, 11).

A great star falls from heaven. Stars in the prophetic Scriptures are religious dignitaries.

They that turn many to righteousness are to shine as the stars forever and ever, and the symbol is used again and again in the Bible for persons occupying places of importance in the spiritual, or religious world, as we say.

Here we have a star whose influence over man is so great that when he falls the third part of men are poisoned because of the evil influence of this apostate leader.

Who is this star? While I do not want to try to prophesy, let me give you a suggestion. Who occupies the highest place in the church in the minds of millions of professing Christian people? Many would say, the Pope. Can you imagine what might be the effect on vast numbers of people if to-morrow the newspapers came out with an "Extra" something like this: "The Pope declares that Christianity is all a sham, that religion is just a fraud!"? Can you imagine the effect that would have? Tens of thousands who would say, "Well, the man we looked upon as the head of the church, as infallible, as the authoritative voice on all matters of a religious nature, has denied it all. Now, whom can we trust, and what can we believe?" Leo X did this privately. Suppose a Pope in the future did it openly. I do not say certainly it will be so. I am just giving you a hint of what might be. Do we not see the same thing on a small scale to-day? When a professing Christian leader gives up what he has once stood for, it has a tremendous influence for evil upon people of lesser influence and lesser knowledge. And after the true church is gone, I gather from this symbol that one of the greatest "lights" in the false system left behind will openly apostatize, and his teachings become as wormwood, poisoning and embittering, to his deluded followers.

The darkness deepens when the fourth trumpet sounds.

**“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 likewise. 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”** (vers. 12, 13).

Again I do not attempt to tell you exactly what this symbolizes; but it is evident that light is being rapidly withdrawn. The third part of the sky is smitten. The third part of the moon and stars were darkened. What does it mean? Well, you know what the Lord Jesus says to the individual, **“If the light that is in thee be darkened, how great is that darkness.”**

“Light obeyed increaseth light  
light resisted bringeth night.”

Do you know why so many people in Christendom are going into what they call Christian Science and Theosophy and Spiritualism and so-called New Theology? Do you know why so few people ever get out of them? Because of this: They have had the opportunity to receive light from God and they have rejected it, and it is written in the Word that **“God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who obeyed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness”** (II Thessalonians 2:11, 12).

When God presents His truth to people, responsibility comes with it. When God presents Christ to them, tremendous responsibility is put upon them. If you hear the message and reject Christ, do not be surprised if you are caught in one of these unholy ideas of the present day, and perhaps never be delivered from it until you wake up in a lost eternity.

The thirteenth verse introduces, in a very solemn way, the three trumpets yet to follow, which are distinguished from the four we have already commented upon, as **“woe”** trumpets.

They speak of a more intensified form of judgment than any previously portrayed. These will occupy us in our next lecture. I only desire now to call your attention to the expression, **“the inhabitants of the earth.”** A similar term we find frequently in this book, **“Them that dwell upon the earth.”** Upon these the heaviest judgments fall. They are not merely they that live here upon earth, but they form a distinctive class. They are the people who have rejected the heavenly calling. When God offered them full and free salvation through the death of His beloved Son, they turned away from Him, because to have closed in with Christ would have meant to give up their worldly desires and love of sin, therefore they become the **“dwellers on the earth.”**

~ end of chapter 9 ~

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