

# **The Apocalypse**

## **A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ**

by  
J. A. Seiss, D.D.

### Lecture Seventeenth

SILENCE IN HEAVEN--ITS MEANING AND DURATION--THE SEVEN ANGELS OF GOD'S PRESENCE--THE HIGHEST CREATED BEINGS--ECONOMY OF THE HEAVENS--THE SEVEN TRUMPETS--SIGNIFICANCE OF TRUMPETS--ORIGINALS OF THE ANCIENT RITES--"ANOTHER ANGEL"--REASONS FOR REGARDING HIM AS THE SAVIOUR--WHY THE PRAYERS OF SAINTS ARE HERE OFFERED--THEIR GREAT BURDEN--THEIR ACCEPTANCE--THE POWER OF PRAYER--THE FIRE OF JUDGMENT--WHY MEN ARE DAMNED--THE FIRE CAST INTO THE EARTH--ITS EFFECTS--A VINDICATION OF THE STUDY OF THESE THINGS.

Rev. 8:1-5 (Revised Text):

*And when he opened the seventh seal, there followed a silence in the heaven, as it were half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand in the presence of God; and to them were given seven trumpets. And another angel came and stood over the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given to him many incenses, that he might offer [them] for [or with] the prayers of all the saints on the altar of gold before the throne. And the smoke of the incenses went up for [or with] the prayers of the saints, out of the hand of the angel, in the presence of God. And the angel took the censer and filled it out of the fire of the altar, and cast into the earth; and there followed thunderings, and lightnings, and voices, and an earthquake.*

There has been a somewhat protracted silence in the continuity of these lectures. In breaking that silence this evening, we come upon another silence--a silence in heaven. The rapt apostle is still in heaven. What he describes is viewed altogether from a heavenly point of observation. The subject is still the ongoing of the judgment. The roll, which was taken up amid thrills of celestial adoration, is still in the hands of the Lamb. He has broken six of its seals, and the action resulting we have considered. The breaking of the only remaining one, and the most momentous of them all, now comes before us. It will occupy us for some time before it is finally disposed of. Even the seven trumpets and the seven vials come under it. The immediate sequences of the breaking of it, we have in the text, in which we observe

- I. A MYSTERIOUS SILENCE IN HEAVEN.
- II. SEVEN ANGELS OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE.
- III. ANOTHER ANGEL OFFERING THE PRAYERS OF THE SAINTS.

To God, then, let us look for grace to understand these things according to the intent of the record, giving praise to His holy Name forever and ever.

When the first seal was broken, a voice like thunder was heard, saying, Go! It was the same at the opening of the three succeeding ones. At the breaking of the fifth, there was a great cry from beneath the altar. And when the sixth was broken, a fearful tremor ran through the whole frame of nature, filling the earth with consternation. But, at the opening of the seventh, not a voice is heard; not a motion is seen; an awful pause ensues, and all heaven is silent. A little while ago everything was ringing with triumphant exultation over the multitude which no man could number, but now silence takes the place of songs, and everything is mute and motionless.

This silence, nevertheless, has made a good deal of noise in the world, especially among commentators. It would be difficult to find another point upon which there have been so many different and discordant voices. Indeed, Hengstenberg gives it as the general rule, that when expositors come to this silence they break out into all sorts of contradictory conjecture. Though the marks of historic continuity are as distinct as it is possible to make them, some take this silence as a full stop to the chain of apocalyptic predictions, and so treat what follows as a mere rehearsal, in another form, of what had preceded. Others regard it as a blank, leaving everything belonging to the seventh seal unrevealed, so that its action can only be known when we come to the immortal life. Some pronounce it a mere poetic invention to heighten the dramatic effect, but having no particular significance. Others treat it as a prophetic symbol of scenes and experiences in the earthly history of man; some, as the suspension of divine wrath in the destruction of Jerusalem; some, as the freedom granted to the Church under the reign of Constantine; some, as the interval of repose enjoyed by Christians between the persecutions by Dioclesian and Galerius in A.D. 311, and the beginning of the civil wars toward the end of the same year; some, as the disappearance of human strivings against God and his Christ; others, as a lull in earthly revolt and persecution, equivalent to a jubilee for the truth among men; others, as the millennium of peace and righteousness to be induced by the triumphs of evangelic effort and the progress of liberty; and yet others, as the everlasting rest of the saints. And yet there is not a word in the record about the Church, nor about the earth. The whole thing is distinctly located *"in heaven,"* and its duration is specifically limited to *"about half an hour."*

Others find in this silence a mystic connection with Jewish rites, and the silent prayers commonly joined with the incense oblation. This is the more insisted on, as there is a subsequent reference to an incense offering. Even if such a connection could be made out, it is difficult to see what is thereby to be gained for an interpretation. But it cannot be made out. The facts prove that there is no such connection. The Jewish silent prayers occurred while the offering was in the act of being made; but here the silence occurs before the offering, and before ever the angel that makes it appears or takes his station at the altar. Nay, there is a distinct and separate vision intervening between this silence and the offering by the angel. It is also plain that this silence is connected with the breaking of the seal, and is the direct result of that act, whilst the incense offering connects with the series of actions by which the stillness is interrupted. It is impossible, therefore, for this silence to be a part of the ceremony of the offering by the angel, or that it should mean any of the things to which reference has been made. Nor can we but wonder that such wild and far-fetched conjectures should ever have found place in men's minds. The language is all simple and plain, and means exactly what is written. There is silence. It is in heaven. It lasts for about half an hour. It is a silence of intense interest and awful expectancy with reference to the results of the breaking of the seventh seal. And this is the whole of it.

We read in Acts of *"a great silence,"* induced by Paul, as he waved his hand to his boisterous accusers, from the stairs of the castle at Jerusalem, and began to speak to them in their sacred tongue. It was the silence of surprise, wonder, and interest to catch what was being said. It is written in the Psalms: *"Praise waits--is silent--for thee, O God, in Zion."* It was the silence of adoring expectancy waiting for the manifestations of the Divine presence. When Numa was made King of Rome, and the august ceremony had reached the moment that he was to look for the birds by which the gods were expected to foreshow his fate, the priest's hand was laid devoutly on his head, and *"an incredible silence reigned among the people."* It was the silence of anxious expectation. It was the result of an intense interest and awe, with reference to what the gods had decreed, and were about to reveal, concerning the destiny of their new king. And so

here. The Lion-Lamb of God has been engaged breaking the seals of the mysterious roll, which He only was worthy to touch or look upon. Six of those seals had been broken, enacting events of the most stupendous moment. But one more remained--the last in the series--and involving the final consummation of the great mystery of God. And as that seal is broken, an interest and awful expectancy rises in the hearts of the celestial orders, which renders them as silent as the grave. All heaven becomes mute and breathless. Saints and angels hush their songs to look and wait for the results. And even the Almighty pauses before the action proceeds.

It is not figure--not symbol--not extravagant rhetoric--not mere poetic delineation of something else. It is history--the literal narration of literal fact;--for fact it was to John in the vision. It is the natural expression of the deep sympathy of all-glorified existence with the momentousness of the occasion--a voiceless utterance more powerful than words, of the yearning awe of heaven at the arrival of the climacteric of the ages, and the forthcoming events which characterize it. Hence a motionless stillness, more awful, and fuller of thrilling import, than that overwhelming wave of adoration which went over the universe of holy beings when the Lamb first took the book.

*"As it were half an hour,"* this solemn stillness lasted. A half hour is not long in itself; but time is longer or shorter according to what is transpiring, or what the circumstances are. Moments of agonizing suspense stretch out into hours and days, in comparison with moments of ordinary life. Two minutes of delay when a man is drowning is an awful period to have to wait. A stoppage of ten minutes between the words I am speaking would be an intolerable interval. When on the margin of the realization of great expectations, or interrupted in the midst of what has been absorbing the intensest interest of the soul, every instant of delay expands into hours, and even ages. And when we consider the circumstances of this case--the world in which this pause occurs--the sort of occupations which it interrupts--the kind and number of beings it affects--the nature of the feelings, interests, and expectations which it holds in suspense--and the awfulness of the stillness itself--there is everything to make this half hour a thing so tremendous that we may be sure there never was the like before, and never will be again thereafter. Nor is the length of it the least remarkable of its features.

II. After this awful pause, the action of the throne is resumed. A company of angels make their appearance on the heavenly arena. They are seven in number. They are of particular rank and distinction, for not all angels are of the same dignity and office. Paul enumerates "dominions, principalities, and powers" among the celestial orders. Daniel speaks of some chief princes. Paul and Jude refer to archangels. Angelic beings are not, therefore, of one and the same grade. The sons of God, in general, come before him only at appointed times (Job 1:6), but the Savior speaks of some angels who "do always behold the face of the Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 18:10). And the sublime agents which John beheld after the opening of the seventh seal are described as *"the seven angels who stand in the presence of God."*

The Jews were familiar with seven angels of this particular class. Gabriel is one of them, as he himself said to Zacharias: "I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God" (Luke 1:19). Michael is another, as he is ranked with Gabriel in the book of Daniel, and there pronounced one of the princes, even "the great prince" of the prophet's people. In the Apocryphal book of Tobit, Raphael is named as still another, where he announces himself, and says, "I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels, which present the prayers of the saints, and which go in and out before the glory of the Holy One." Whether we take this book as inspired, as the Romanists do, or as not inspired, as the Protestants generally regard it, there is no matter touching this point. The

passage referred to (Tob. 12:15) shows what the ancient people of God held for truth, and the representation harmonizes with the text and with the accepted books of Holy Scripture. The ancients believed that there are *seven presence angels*, and the Apocalypse ratifies that belief.<sup>1</sup>

These presence-angels are the highest and mightiest of created beings. It is their privilege to "stand in the presence of God." They *stand*; this is the posture of service; but standing *in the presence of God* is to be above all other servants. The seven Persian princes who "saw the king's face" were the highest officers of the realm, and next to the monarch in rank and power (Esth. 1:14). And what these princes were to the Persian kings, these presence-angels are to God.

We thus get a glance into the economy of heaven. A democratic chaos for the state, and a Laodicean herd for the Church, constitute the world's ideal of perfection in these days. But the heavenly state is very different. It is not a monotonous and lawless commonalty, but a complete organism, in which each has his prescribed sphere and office, in orders towering above orders, and principdoms over principdoms, till we reach the seven *archangels* standing in the immediate presence of God, and holding place next to the eternal throne itself.

And these sublimest ministers of God appear here as the prime executors of the oncoming administrations. The Savior Himself said: "In the end of this world, the Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire" (Matt. 13:40-42). And here John beholds those angels--the glorious septemvirate of celestial archregents--the mightiest and the highest creatures in the universe--presenting themselves for the momentous work.

"*And to them were given seven trumpets.*" Trumpets are expressive instruments. The voice of the trumpet is the most significant voice known to the Holy Scriptures. God Himself gave His ancient people very special directions with regard to the use of the trumpet. It is itself described as *a cry*--a loud and mighty cry--which related only to important occasions. The time for the blowing of trumpets was always a time of moment--a time of solemnity--a time for men to bestir themselves greatly in one way or another.

Trumpets connect with war. The command was: "If ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresses you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets" (Num. 10:9). Jeremiah cries: "O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war!" (Jer. 4:19.)

Trumpets were for the convocation of the people and the moving of the camps of Israel. This is minutely prescribed in Numbers 8.

Trumpets proclaimed the great festivals. "Ye shall blow with the trumpets over burnt-offerings, and over the sacrifice of your peace-offerings." "Ye shall have a Sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation." "Thou shalt cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout the land." And so "when the burnt-offering began, the song of the Lord began also with the trumpets." (Num. 10:10; Lev. 23:24; 25:9; 2 Chr. 29:27.)

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<sup>1</sup> The book of Enoch (chap. 20) has the following: "These are the names of the angels who watch. Uriel, one of the holy angels, who presides over clamor and terror; Raphael, one of the holy angels, who presides over the spirits of men; Raguel, one of the holy angels, who inflicts punishment on the world and the luminaries; Michael, one of the holy angels, who, presiding over human virtue, commands the nations; Sarakiel, one of the holy angels, who presides over the spirits of the children of men that transgress; Gabriel, one of the holy angels, who presides over Ikesat, over paradise, and over the cherubim."

Trumpets also related to the announcements of royalty. Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet were directed to anoint Solomon king over Israel, and blow with the trumpet and say, God save King Solomon. It is also written: "They hastened greatly . . . and blew with trumpets, saying, Jehu is king." (Kings 1:34,39; 2 Kings 9:13.)

Trumpets are also associated with the manifestation of the terrible majesty and power of God. When the Almighty appeared on Mount Sinai, there was "the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled" (Ex. 19:16). And Amos says: "Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid?" (Amos 3:6.)

Trumpets connect with the overthrow of the ungodly. It was at the blowing of the trumpets that the walls of Jericho fell down, and the city was given into the hands of Joshua (Josh. 6:13-16).

Trumpets also proclaimed the laying of the foundations of God's temple (Esdras 3:10).

With these facts before us, we are already in a degree prepared to anticipate what these seven trumpets are to bring forth. Their number is the complete number, and we may expect from them everything to which trumpets stand related in the Scriptures. Are they related to war? Then war is coming; yea, "the battle of that great day of God Almighty." Are they for the calling of convocations and signals for motion? Then we may look for great gatherings and mighty changes. Do they herald great solemnities and blessed feasts and sacrifices? Then may we anticipate the sublimest festivals, and victories, and jubilee, and burning up of the victims of sin that the world has ever yet seen. Do they declare investiture with dominion and the commencement of a new reign? Then may we look for the setting up of a new administration and the opening of the reign of the true David, the greater than Solomon. Do they declare the presence of God in His awful majesty? Then may we expect a revelation of Divine power and Godhead which shall fill heaven and earth with trembling. Do they bring the fall of the cities of the wicked and the destruction of their inhabitants? Then we may look for the end of great Babylon and the sweeping of the dominion of Antichrist and all his confederates from the earth. Do they tell of the founding and building of the permanent temple of the Lord? Then may we look for the incoming of that true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man, and of that firmly-founded city whose maker and builder is God. And all this accords entirely with what John subsequently describes as resultant from the sounding of these seven trumpets.

We thus also come upon an important fact which is, for the most part, very strangely perverted. Writers on the Apocalypse generally treat it as if it depended for its imagery and materials upon the ancient Jewish regulations. They thus put the copy for the original, and deal with the original as if it were the copy. All the ancient regulations were nothing but copies and types. They were commanded to be made after some heavenly model, of which they were to be the remembrancers and prophecies. They were not the true--the real--but only earthly imitations of it. The true ideal is what John beholds in this book. These seven presence-angels with their seven trumpets are the true heavenly realities, with reference to which all the ancient laws relating to trumpets were ordained. What we here have is not the work of John elaborating a dramatic poem out of the elements of the ancient ritual, but an Apocalypse of the great realities themselves, with reference to which those old appointments were constructed, as earthly pictures and mimic predictions. We go back to the ancient laws and we there see reflected in earthly forms what John beholds in heavenly reality; and we reverse the whole order and involve ourselves in inextricable confusion when we take the images in his visions as mere earthly and

Jewish drapery, and not rather as the very things from which those Jewish ceremonies took their existence and peculiarities. The Apocalypse is not a poem in Jewish dress, but the Jewish ceremonies were an earthly poem of the Apocalypse. Let this be understood, and much of the darkness hanging over the meaning of this book will at once disappear.

III. But, before these presence-angels sound their trumpets, "*another angel*" appears and another scene intervenes, to which attention must be given.

Many understand by this angel the Lord Jesus himself--the Jehovah-Angel of the Old Testament, and the same referred to in the preceding chapter as the Sealer of the 144,000. In both instances the officer is called "*another angel*," which, while it associates him with angels as to ministry, seems to imply some Being very different from angels as to nature. This angel has a censer of gold, an implement belonging to the Holy of holies, and used only by the high priest; which would seem to indicate our great High Priest that has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God. This angel casts fire into the earth; and Jesus says of Himself, "I came to cast fire into the earth; and what could I wish if it were already kindled? . . . Suppose ye that I came to give peace in the earth? I tell you nay, buy rather division" (Luke 12:49-52). This is in some sense realized in the course of the history and doings of the Church; but we know that it is to be much more literally and terribly fulfilled in the day of judgment; and here would seem to be its exact accomplishment. This angel offers the prayers of all the saints, and renders them savory before God. Such an office is nowhere in the Scriptures assigned to angels proper, but is everywhere assigned to the Lord Jesus Christ.

There would seem to be strong reason, therefore, for supposing that this Angel is really the Jehovah-Angel, and none other than the Lord Jesus Christ in His capacity of our great High Priest. Primasius says: "The Angel here is our Lord, by whom all our prayers have access to God (Eph. 2:18; 3:12), and therefore the Apostle says, through Him we offer sacrifices of praise to God continually (Heb. 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:5); and St. John says, He is our Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1)." Wordsworth affirms that "this interpretation is sanctioned by other ancient interpreters, such as Augustine and Bede, and by Vitranga, Bohmer, and others, of later date;" and that "Christ, in His human character and priestly office, may be called *another Angel*", as the high priest on the day of atonement is called *an angel* with reference to his ministrations, and as he believes Christ is called in chapters 10:1; 14:17; 18:1; 20:1. Cocceius was of the same opinion.

Neither does it overthrow this view that the incenses offered up by this angel are represented as "*given to Him*." If the incenses here are to be taken as explained in chap. 5:8, that is, as the prayers themselves, of course they are *given to Him*, for he offers no prayers of saints which have not been put into His hands. And if it is the virtue of His Mediatorship that is to be understood by the incenses, there is still an important sense in which that is *given to Him*. It is given to Him in the sense of award, both by saints themselves, who credit and trust in Him as able to do for them, and by Sovereign Majesty, who adjudges Him entitled to exercise such offices and powers. Even all the glories of His Apocalypse are represented (chap. 1:1) as *given to Him*, though they are equally His own right, and the result of His personal obedience unto death, with His merits as our Advocate and Intercessor.

It was no evidence that a champion in the ancient games had not lawfully and in his own person entitled himself to the honors of the victory when the rightful judges and all Greece *gave him* those honors. It was rather a demonstration that he had justly merited and won them. And so, in the sense of judicial award, and general credit, confidence and acknowledgment, the

intercessorial prerogatives and mediatorial earnings of Christ may be spoken of as *given to Him*. He glorified not himself to be made a high priest; and the more excellent ministry of his mediatorship of the better covenant is everywhere spoken of as having been "obtained" by Him (Heb. 5:5; 8:6). All has really been *given to Him*--given to Him as the just due of His own perfect fulfillment of all righteousness--given to Him by eternal Deity and all saints. And such a giving to this Angel-Priest no more necessarily excludes him from being rightfully taken as the Christ than the *giving* of the Spirit or the *giving* of the kingdom or the *giving* of the possession of the nations to the Savior proves that He is not the only begotten Son of God.

The object of the giving of these incenses was, "*that He might offer [them] for the prayers of all the saints.*" Not for those prayers in the sense of *in their stead*, but in the sense of furthering them, benefiting them, and prospering them; for the prayers themselves are included in the offering. Strictly rendered, he was to offer them *to* the prayers; but τὰς προσευχὰς is a *dativus commodi*, and rather gives the sense of *in behalf of--with--*as a helper of their success. The idea is complex. There is an offering of incenses; those incenses come to the prayers to enrich and forward them; and the incenses imparted to the prayers are offered as the prayers. They are given *to* the prayers, and *with* the prayers, and *for* the prayers.

But why this offering just here, as the trumpets are about to be sounded? Many have taken it as denoting a state of much prayerfulness in the earthly Church about this time. But there is not a word said about an earthly church. Indeed, the Church proper is no longer on earth at the time to which these trumpets belong. There are still true worshipers of God on earth--the two olive trees--and those who refuse to adore the Beast; but their prayers cannot be taken for "the prayers of *all the saints.*" The words are very comprehensive, and take in all the holy prayers ever offered.

We had an allusion to these precious treasures in chapter 5, where the account is given of the Living ones and Elders falling down before the Lamb and holding up golden bowls full of incenses. Those incenses, like these of the text, were the prayers of the saints. There the saints themselves hold them up before the Lamb as an adoring act of confidence that He was now about to enter upon their complete fulfillment, and as yet standing back and waiting for an answer. Here *Christ* offers them, as the Great High Priest. He bears them in the golden censer, and perfumes them with the precious fragrance of His own meritorious favor and righteousness, and sanctifies them with the sacred fire, and presents them upon the golden altar before the throne of infinite Godhead. Not one of them is forgotten or lost. Those that came up when time was young, and those offered but yesterday, are all present and in hand. Jesus Himself is not ashamed of them, and handles them with holy care. He bears them in a heavenly vessel of gold and presents them on the highest altar in the universe. He offers them as approved and endorsed by Himself, and for such acceptance that their fulfillment may no longer be delayed. He presents them *now*, because the fullness of the time has come for them to be brought into remembrance, seeing that all things are in final readiness to execute what is to satisfy them forever.

I have heretofore referred to the great burden of all holy prayer (vol. I, p. 289). As put by Christ Himself into the lips and hearts of His people, it is: **THY KINGDOM COME! THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN!** This is truly the sum and substance of all saintly supplication, the very crown and goal of all holy prayer. And for what purpose are those trumpets in the hands of the seven angels? To what intent is this calling forward of such mighty ones to pour out blasts over the earth? What is to be achieved by the sublime activities in which

they stand ready to move? What, but the revelation of the power and the glory of that very Kingdom, for the coming of which the saints have never ceased to pray? What, but the enforcement of the reign of God where iniquity and usurpation now hold jubilee? What, but the dethronement of sin, and death, and hell, and the setting up in their place of a heavenly order in which God's will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven?

Need anyone ask, then, why this sublime offering of the prayers of all the saints is made just here, as the presence-angels are about to put their awful trumpets to their lips? When prayers are to be answered, then is the time for them to be brought into remembrance. That which results from the sounding of those trumpets is to fulfill what has been the great burden of the Church's prayers in all ages. Those prayers, therefore, have a most profound connection with the sounding of these mighty trumpets. And hence it is that they here come into view and appear upon the golden altar of God.

Nor are they offered in vain. The ascension of their sweet vapor into the presence of God is equivalent to an announcement that they are heard. The coming up before God of the prayers and alms of Cornelius was the good pleasure of God toward what thus ascended; and the like ascent of the sweet vapor of these perfumed prayers is the token of a like approval and a like speedy answer. It is the effectual going up of the voices of them who cry day and night unto God. It is the signal that the time has come to avenge His own elect. And at once the mighty action begins.

*"And the Angel took the censer, and filled it out of the fire of the altar, and cast into the earth."* The Savior himself thus initiates the oncoming climax of the day of wrath. The people under the sixth seal thought the last and worst had come, but it was only the herald of still greater things which now begin.

Nor is it to be overlooked that all this occurs in answer to the prayers of the saints. There are those who think meanly of prayer, and are always asking, "What profit should we have if we pray unto the Almighty?" (Job 21:15.) The true answer is, *"much every way."*

There is an eye that never sleeps  
Beneath the wing of night;  
There is an ear that never shuts  
When sink the beams of light.

There is an arm that never tires  
When human strength gives way;  
There is a love that never fails  
When earthly loves decay.

That eye is fixed on seraph throngs;  
That arm upholds the sky;  
That ear is filled with angel songs;  
That love is throned on high.

But there's a power which man can wield  
When mortal aid is vain,  
That eye, that ear, that love to reach,

That listening ear to gain.

That power is PRAYER, which soars on high,  
Through Jesus, to the throne;  
And moves the hand which moves the world,  
To bring salvation down!

Here, prayer moves the Son of God--moves eternal Majesty upon His everlasting seat--sets the highest angels in motion--brings on the awful scenes of the day of judgment--influences the administrations in the heavens and induces wonders upon the earth.

And as these climaxes of judgment come in answer to "the prayers of *all the saints*," the implication also is, that where there is no prayer there is no piety, no holiness, no salvation; and that people who do not wait, and long, and pray for the coming again of the Lord Jesus and this consummation are not saints, but belong to the population against whom these fiery revelations occur.

*Fire* is the great consumer. It always bespeaks wrath, torture, and destruction to the wicked. It tells of burning fury and the most dismal effects--even "vengeance upon them who know not God, and who obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is the common figure of divine terribleness toward the guilty--one of the great agents in the administrations of the great day--the chief torment of the lost. And when the sublime Priest-Angel of heaven turns His fire-filled censer on the earth, we have come to the day that shall burn as an oven, in the which all the proud and ungodly shall be as stubble to the devouring flames (Mal. 4:1).

This fire is taken from the altar. It is one of the fearful characteristics of God's gracious operations, that they breed and heighten the damnation of the disobedient and the unbelieving. It is not Adam's guilt, for there is full remedy in Christ against that. It is not the condemnation in which the Gospel finds them, for it comes with a full and everlasting reprieve. But here is the mischief--that when the great and costly salvation of God is carried to them, they despise it and make light of it and go their way as if it were nonsense or nothing. It is not that their sins are too great for them to be saved, but [it is] because they tread underfoot the Son of God, and count His sanctifying blood an unholy thing, and render despite to the Spirit of grace. Out of the very altar of sacrifice, therefore, comes their damnation. It is the saving word refused, which is a savor of death unto death in them who perish. The same fire which wafts the devotions of the obedient into the presence of God kindles the hell of the unbelieving and the neglectful. Perdition is simply abused or perverted grace. It is the same censer filled with the same ingredients, only turned downward in the case of those who believe not.

And when the glorious Angel of intercession emptied the fiery contents of his censer toward the earth, "*there followed thunderings, and lightnings, and voices, and an earthquake.*" These are the signs and instruments of God's judgments upon His foes. No age has ever been entirely without them, as no age has ever been without earnestness and foretokens of the great day. But they mistake, who think to find the description fulfilled in events of the past, or in anything but the scenes which are to terminate the history of this present world. Indeed, it is the very climacteric of the day of judgment which is here betokened.

John perceives the awful effects before they have passed into actual fact on earth. We read and know things only from their outward symptoms, in or after their accomplishment. In heaven

they read and know things from their inward principles, even before they have been wrought into historic fact. It is under the action of the trumpets that these thunderings, lightnings, voices, and convulsions are worked into the experiences of the earth and its inhabitants; and it is only according to the interior view of them, from the heavenly standpoint, that the events to be achieved are thus summarily described. As the trumpets are sounded and we come to consider the scenes they develop, we will see these thunderings, and lightnings, and voices, and convulsions as they manifest themselves on the earthly theater.

Meanwhile, I suggest just one thought more. It is in reference to the interest which holy beings take in these subjects of sacred prophecy. There is a very sublime picture, presented by the Apostle Peter in his first epistle, where he represents the ancient prophets as "inquiring and searching diligently" to understand "what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ, which was in them, did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow;" and the angels of heaven bending from their lofty thrones, desiring to look into these things. It is a masterly touch to set forth the greatness, majesty, and glory of the Gospel, which makes us feel as we read, that here is a theme at once the wonder of the universe, and challenging the profoundest attention and study of man. It is an overwhelming vindication of any amount of absorbing captivation by the topics referred to. All agree to this.

But what shall we say, then, for the themes with which the text stands connected? Here is a subject which has engaged the devotions of "all the saints" and been the grand goal of all their holy desires since time began. Here are transactions which fill heaven with awe and turn the songs of eternity into silence! Here are administrations which call the seven archangels into action, and for looking after the results of which the universe is spellbound and mute with solemn expectation! Here are things, the mere prayers for which the Son of God holds in the golden censer, and offers on the golden altar, and sends up with awful solemnity into the presence of eternal Majesty! Is not this, then, a subject to command and justify the holiest and profoundest interest, study, and attention of rational beings!

And yet there are people--men claiming to be Christians, leaders of religious thought, ministers ordained to teach the way of God truly--who have not hesitated to sneer at it as the theme of fools, the hobby of enthusiasts, or the plaything of religious idiots! You may agree with them if you like. But while I find these things treated with all soberness in the Scriptures and blessing spoken from heaven upon those who give them devout and studious attention, and the Holy Ghost interpreting them as involving the highest hopes and prayers of "all the saints," and the whole celestial world becoming mute and motionless in the intensity of its interest as they unfold into fact, and prophets of God, angels of glory, Archangels of the Almighty's presence, the blessed Christ at the heavenly altar, and the universe of holy beings occupied with heart and soul with reference to them, I must persist in a different judgment and ask to be excused for believing that we have here not only a legitimate and fitting theme for our devoutest study, but one as high and momentous as ever was presented to the contemplation of man. It grasps deep into everything dear to us for time or eternity, and he who willfully ignores it has reason to fear for his safety against the terrific plagues written in this book and for the security of his part in the holy city.

May God in mercy save us from such dangerous unseemliness. Amen.