



"To pray aright is right earnest work."
—Jacob Boehme

31-Jul-15

Silence in Heaven (Part Two)

As we saw in Part One, when the seventh seal is opened, silence descends on heaven "for about half an hour" ([Revelation 8:1](#)). The silence is a profound one, a seemingly rare and meaningful occurrence. During this time of quiet, an angel carrying a golden censer enters and stands at the altar before God's throne. The smoke that rises from the incense he offers is mingled with the prayers of all the saints, connecting the silence with prayer. From this we can learn that, when we hear nothing from heaven in answer to our prayers, it does not mean that [God](#) will not act for us. Most likely, it means God is waiting for the perfect time to act.

Returning to the flow of events, [Revelation 8:5](#) shows the angel filling the censer with fire from the altar and throwing it to the earth with terrible effect. [Ezekiel 10:1-2](#) describes a similar scene:

And I looked, and there in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubim, there appeared something like a sapphire stone, having the appearance of the likeness of a throne. Then He spoke to the man clothed with linen, and said, "Go in among the wheels, under the cherub, fill your hands with coals of fire from among the cherubim, and scatter them over the city." And he went in as I watched.

The coals of fire are indicative of God's judgment on Jerusalem, and by extension, on the whole nation. The rest of the book of Ezekiel is filled with references to fire and burning, symbolic of either destruction or purification. Back in Revelation 8, after the angel throws down the censer, the trumpets are sounded, and many of the ensuing plagues involve fire, burning, or smoke (see [Revelation 8:7-8](#), 10; 9:2, 17-18). The casting down of the censer marks the beginning of the trumpets, as God begins to judge and purify the earth.

Considering again the prayers of all the saints, we can find a serious application for those of us awaiting the end of the age and the establishment of God's Kingdom over the earth. What is the connection between the prayers that ascend to God and the angel hurling the censer down to earth, initiating the seven trumpets? Further, what sort of prayers would be a pleasing aroma to God at this juncture?

The context of the above verses in Ezekiel 10 contains an example of what God expects as the people's iniquity becomes full. Notice what precedes the scattering of coals of fire over the city:

... and the LORD said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who [sigh and cry](#) over all the abominations that are done within it." To the others He said in my hearing, "Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were before the temple. ([Ezekiel 9:4-6](#))

The people with whom God is pleased—and who He rewards with protection—are those who are in anguish over the same things that [offend](#) God. The prayers that please Him are the ones that match His will, and they do so because the people agree with Him on what is good and what is evil. He is pleased with the prayers of those who are dismayed at the nation's mounting sins, for their prayers are proof that His work of creating children in His own character image is succeeding.

When prayers rise before Him that reveal His children's response to [sin](#) to be similar to His own, He is pleased. When He can receive the outpouring of our hearts, and know that His standard of righteousness is being engraved in our very beings, He is delighted. When our prayers, as well as our lives, demonstrate that we love what He loves and hate what He hates, our Father is elated.

Consider also the censer that is thrown to the earth: If the prayers of the saints contain God's standard of righteousness as expressed by His people, they may serve as more than just a pleasing aroma. Such prayers could also serve as evidence that God presents against [the world](#). If the saints have cried out to God because of mounting sins, it is certainly fitting that those prayers would be included as testimony when God executes judgment on them.

The question for us is, then, how closely we are in alignment with God regarding the world that He is about to judge? In [Revelation 18:20](#), God's servants are told to rejoice over Babylon when she is silenced and judged, because God has avenged us. In contrast, the kings of the earth and the merchants lament and weep and wail, and they throw dust on their heads in [mourning](#). The saints will hate Babylon the way God hates her, but much of the world will love her and will mourn her destruction. How do we see Babylon—as friend or foe?

God's impending judgment should move us to take stock of our hearts, to consider what parts of Babylon we may find ourselves siding with rather than hating. Our prayers come from the abundance of our hearts ([Matthew 12:34](#)). What they contain—and what is absent—is testimony before God of how much we are in alignment with Him, as well as how much Babylon has pulled us in. Those who are in harmony with God will have come out of her ([Revelation 18:4](#)), and their prayers will testify against her. They stand a much better chance of being spared the plagues that will fall on "that mighty city."

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

Prayer and Fervency

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Zealous, sincere, human, religious faith may not be godly, but ironically, because of its fervency, often puts our faith to shame. Our faith has to have as its object a dynamic personal quality with habitual fellowship with God in prayer, meditation, and Bible study. Quality fellowship with our brethren offers frequent opportunities for exhortation and a safeguard against loss of faith. When we fellowship with a small, intimate group, chances for this productive exhortation (Hebrews 10:23-25) greatly increases, increasing our faith. Living faith has its roots in fervently, diligently seeking God and His righteousness with intense desire (like a passionate lover) through habitual prayer.

From the Archives: Featured Article

Out of the Abundance of Our Prayers

by John O. Reid (1930-2016)

Jesus remarks that our lips tell the tale our hearts try to hide. Using this proverb as a foundation, John Reid asks us to consider our prayers in a similar way. What do they tell God about us?

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