

# Power in Prayer

Revelation 8:1-6

By Phillip G. Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2016-06-12

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## Text

8:1 And when He opened the seventh seal there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. 2 And I saw the seven angels who stood before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. 3 And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer. He was given lots of incense so that he could offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar that is before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints went up before God out of the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it at the earth. And there were voices and thunders and lightnings and an earthquake. 6 And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to trumpet.

## Introduction - How important is prayer?

Historically Reformed people have always considered corporate prayer to be important. Now, it is true that critics will often ask, "If God is sovereign, why pray?" Our response is to say the exact opposite - "If God is not sovereign, why pray?" Why pray to someone to fix a situation if that someone cannot control all situations? So, Reformed people have never pitted prayer against the sovereignty of God. They have considered it to be very important. In fact, Calvin said that prayer is *the* distinguishing mark of a true believer. It is like the breath of a new baby; prayer shows we have life. He said, "The principal exercise which the children of God have is to pray; for in this way they give a true proof of their faith."<sup>1</sup> He said that a prayerless church is a faithless church, and Calvin also said the same gospel that produces faith within God's people will produce and train His people to be a praying people. And I could quote any number of Reformers and Puritans who insisted on the necessity of prayer.

Now I say all that because I am going to start with a quote that may seem extremely audacious to you. It's by another Calvinist by the name of Charles Spurgeon. Spurgeon said,

My own soul's conviction is that prayer is the grandest power in the entire universe, that it has more omnipotent force than electricity, attraction, gravitation, or any other of those other secret forces which men have called by name, but which they do not understand.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See his Sermon on 1 Timothy 2:1-2, quoted by Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), p. 271. See also his commentary on Psalm 88:2.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Spurgeon, volume 6, Spurgeon's New Park Street Pulpit, volume 6 (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim

And of course, he is talking about the greatest power in the *created* universe. But even there you might think he is engaging in hyperbole. But if you were to accuse him of hyperbole, he would point out that prayer (when done rightly) is ordained by God in His eternal decrees, commanded by God in His Word, is stirred up by God, made acceptable by both the Holy Spirit's inward intercession and Christ's heavenly intercession, is grounded in God's Word, and therefore cannot achieve anything less than God's omnipotence in answer. Why? Because the Scripture says that God cannot deny Himself.

The Puritan writer, Thomas Lye, said, "I had rather stand against the cannons of the wicked than against the prayers of the righteous." I used to cringe at the title of E. M. Bounds book, *Power Through Prayer*, because it seemed to exalt man. But the more I have studied the subject, the more I have realized that it actually exalts God. Unbiblical prayer accomplishes nothing because it is produced by our flesh. But prayer that is moved by God Himself has omnipotence behind it. That is the basic thesis of today's sermon. And I hope you are encouraged by it.

## **I. God is sovereign on even this topic of prayer (v. 1a)**

Who moved the prayers in this chapter? Look at verse 1. Verse 1 says, "When He opened the seventh seal..." The "He" is referring to Jesus. As Jesus opened each of the seven seals He was unleashing everything under that seal. The opening of each of the seals showed His control of everything that happened under that seal. So this first phrase indicates that Christ is the Sovereign who moves the church to prayer.

Never pit divine sovereignty against our human responsibility in prayer. Romans 8 says that we do not know how to pray as we ought, and therefore the Holy Spirit's inward intercession is needed to enable us to pray as we ought - but pray we must. Prayer is a work of both God and man. So we are not just talking about any prayer; we are talking about what the Bible speaks of as praying in the Spirit. We are talking about the kind of prayer that began revivals in history - humbling man and exalting God. And it is my hope that this sermon would be used by God to stir up a longing that Jesus would open a seal today and move the church to prayer. There is a desperate need for the church to be so moved.

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Publications), p. 336.

## **II. Yet God makes heaven wait for saints on earth to pray (v. 1b)**

Verse 1 goes on to say, "there was silence in heaven for about half an hour." Many people have puzzled over that half hour of silence. After all, the opening of the seal indicates that Jesus was ready to move. He opened the seal so that there would be a new chapter in history opening up. So you would expect a flurry of activity on the part of the angels the moment Jesus opened that seal. They have immediately responded to the opening of the seals in the past. But though the seal is opened, nothing happens. There is silence. We will see in a moment, that the silence is the wait of heaven for the prayers of the saints. This is the human responsibility side of the equation. Point I shows that God sovereignly moves prayer as a part of this covenant lawsuit process. Point II shows that without prayer nothing will happen. It is one of God's ordained means to the end, and you have not because you ask not. Until the church begins to pray in earnest we will not see major changes in our culture.

But why does he say that the silence was "for about half an hour"? I think the Jewish scholar, Alfred Edersheim, has the best explanation of this. He says that it is because of the patterning relationship of the earthly temple with the heavenly temple. Let me explain. Verse 3 speaks of the golden censer representing the prayers of Christ being offered up together with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar. Here's how it happened on earth.

The congregation would gather outside the holy place waiting for the priest to enter into the holy place to prepare for worship. Milton Terry and Edersheim both point out that it was about half an hour to accomplish all this. And verse 1 alludes to silence for about half an hour. Edersheim says,

Slowly the incensing priest and his assistants ascended the steps to the Holy Place, preceded by the two priests who had formerly dressed the altar and the candlestick, and who now removed the vessels they had left behind, and, worshiping, withdrew. Next, one of the assistants reverently spread the coals on the golden altar; the other arranged the incense; and then the chief officiating priest was left alone within the Holy Place, to await the signal of the president before burning the incense... It is this most solemn period, when throughout the vast Temple buildings deep silence rested on the worshiping multitude, while within the sanctuary itself the priest laid the incense on the golden altar, and the cloud of odours rose up before the Lord, which serves as the image of heavenly things...

When the cloud of incense rose up over the curtain, God's people began to

audibly pray. That incense was the signal for the prayer meeting to begin. Now here is the point. Having silence on earth before the prayer meeting was understandable. What is amazing is the *corresponding* silence in heaven. Verse 1 says, "When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence *in heaven* for about half an hour." That is an amazing statement when you realize the enormous activity, noise and undulating power that proceed forth from the throne of God. Heaven is usually described in Revelation as being abuzz with activity.

Let's take a small sampling. Look at 4:5 which is in the middle of a description of God's throne room: "And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices." It was not silent. It was the noise of activity. Look at verses 8-11 of chapter 4:

And the four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!' Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.

And you could go on through the book and find noises like the beating of wings, or the sound of mighty rushing waters. But during the preparation time before the temple's prayer meeting began, all was hushed and completely silent in heaven. Heaven's armies were waiting. Heaven is waiting on the corporate prayers of the church. They are waiting not for one or two prayers to ascend. The prayers of individuals do indeed ascend to God night and day. But they are waiting for the whole body of Christ to unite in prayer.

Corporate prayer is given special significance in Scripture that individual prayer does not have. Psalm 76 says that Israel's battles were won in the temple; not on the battlefield, but in the temple. Speaking of the temple the Psalm says, "There He broke the arrows of the bow, the shield and sword of battle." It was in the house of prayer that the definitive difference was made in Israel's battles.

Now don't get me wrong. God honors the prayers of individuals. They too have power. He gives even greater power to the corporate prayers of local churches. But God has chosen to unleash all the powers of heaven when the church as a whole rises up to pray. And statistics bear out this theological truth. In cities where the church as a whole has gathered for prayer, they

have seen crime plummet after such meetings and conversions of unbelievers have skyrocketed after such unified prayer. Heaven is waiting. Verse 1 is an enormously significant statement. As Graham Kendrick's song says, "All heaven waits with bated breath for saints on earth to pray."

Do you wonder about heaven's silence in the face of America's national apostasy? The church's lack of united prayer may help to explain that silence. And Jay Grimstead longs to see leaders in every city uniting the church in solemn assemblies of repentance, and prayer, and commitment to God's Word.

### **III. Majestic angels stand eager and ready for battle (v. 2a)**

But Kendrick's song not only says that "all heaven waits with bated breath for saints on earth to pray," but it goes on to say, "majestic angels ready stand with swords of fiery blade." If we long for the angelic battle trumpets to sound, then we must take corporate prayer meetings seriously.

Verse 2 says, "And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets." Again, the angels are eager and ready to advance into war, but nothing happens. They are given trumpets and are ready to sound their trumpets, but no sound comes forth until verse 6 - after the prayer meeting.

### **IV. But there is some necessary connection between prayer and spiritual battle (vv. 3-4)**

But this is also a very specific kind of prayer. It involves angels. It results in judgments. It comes in connection with fire falling from heaven. And once you understand those images, the spiritual warfare dynamic really comes to the surface. Let me quote from Vic Reasoner's commentary. He said,

This imagery is also based upon the concept of holy war. Under the old covenant, a holy war was initiated at God's command against extreme cases of immorality and blasphemy. Such peoples were placed under a ban. Fire was taken from the temple altar and used to burn up cities conquered in a holy war (Numb. 21:1-3; Josh. 6:15-19; Judges 1:17; 20:40). This fire had originally fallen from heaven (Lev. 9:25) and was to be maintained. God did not accept "strange fire" (Lev. 10:1-4). Under the new covenant, the principle of holy warfare is advanced through prayer. Fire is taken from the heavenly altar and cast down. In this instance, it is Jerusalem herself which is under the ban. Nothing under this curse will survive.

However, under the new covenant, we are now God's temple and what is voluntarily dedicated to God is spared as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). The true fire first fell at Pentecost and the fire on the altar in the old temple had become "strange fire" (see. Lev. 10:1). And so the fire from heaven cleanses us (see Isa 6:6) and that fire of the Spirit is not to be quenched (1 Thess 5:19; 2 Tim. 1:6). Thus, fire from heaven either destroys or sanctifies.<sup>3</sup>

Now, that was a mouthful, but I think he has absolutely nailed it. This passage has all the earmarks of holy war, covenant lawsuit, and God's heavenly judgments.

### ***A. This is imagery of the initial conquest of Canaan and of subsequent "holy war" passages***

What makes this a holy war passage? The connection between the prayer and the warfare of angels is seen in the fact that the trumpets start sounding in response to the prayers. And each trumpet is unleashing new regiments of angels and bringing judgments. Until the church as a whole recognizes that we are in all-out spiritual war for planet earth, we will not see the advances that we see in the book of Revelation. But these are battle trumpets that were especially symbolized at the Festival of Trumpets.

### **The coals of fire from the altar are thrown onto the "land" (v. 5) just as they were in Ezek. 10:2ff.**

Is fire thrown to the earth? Yes it is. In fact, commentaries point out that the background here is no longer Jericho and other cities of Canaan dedicated to fire. The background is Ezekiel 10 where the angel takes coals from the heavenly altar and scatters the coals all over Jerusalem as a symbol that Jerusalem is the new Jericho to be destroyed by Babylon. Just as in our passage, Jerusalem had become a harlot city that was under God's ban.

### **The fire comes from heaven (v. 5) just as the original fire on the first altar fell from heaven to the earthly altar (Lev. 9:25) and could not be substituted by "strange fire" (Lev. 10:1-4)**

Does God require the incense to be lit with coals from the altar? Yes he does. Just as strange fire was unacceptable in Leviticus 10:1-4, the only fire that is acceptable here is that which comes from the altar. Politics will not make these changes. Revolution will not make these changes. Our prayers must be lit by Christ's prayers or by Christ's incense. As Calvin put it, the Gospel is the means to train us to battle through prayer.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Vic Reasoner, *A Fundamental Wesleyan Commentary on Revelation* (Evansville, IN: Fundamental Wesleyan Publishers, 2005), pp. 278-279.

<sup>4</sup> Calvin said, "Jus as faith is born from the gospel, so through it our hearts are trained to call upon God's

**God's herem principle of destruction (cf. Numb. 21:1-3; Josh. 6:15-19; Judges 1:17; 20:40; etc) was intended to be lit from the altar (Ezek. 10) just as God's herem principle of destruction in Jerusalem would arise from the altar of incense, or the prayers of the saints (vv. 1-6)**

Do the same judgments happen in chapter 8 and following as happened in Ezekiel 10 and following? Yes they do. I will look at that connection near the end of the sermon when we deal with the fulfillment of the passage. But for now I just want you to see that all the imagery of holy war is present. The specific kind of prayers that this passage is talking about are spiritual warfare prayers; imprecatory prayers.

***B. Note the vital interest that angels have in prayer (vv. 3-5)***

And here is the next cool point - verse 4 shows the eagerness of the angels to answer such prayer. An angel was right there when the prayers were offered. He was involved in some way in bringing those prayers to the throne of God. We are not told how or why God involves the angels in this way, but this passage says that He does. "Majestic angels ready stand with swords of fiery blade." I've often wondered how frequently angels are disappointed that the signal for battle could not be given because the church was not in warfare prayer? I've talked to pastor after pastor about the imprecatory war psalms, but they will not use them. The church desperately needs a reformation of its theology of prayer.

In Scripture you find that angelic warfare is directly related to our own warfare in prayer. In Daniel we see that the angel who finally came to Daniel had been warring for the entire 21 days that Daniel prayed. There is a very real sense in which Majestic angels ready stand with swords of fiery blade. But you will not find their trumpet blast to advance the cause of the kingdom until you come to prayer.

All heaven waits. But it is not a discouraged wait. It is an expectant wait. The angels know God's purposes and plans will be accomplished. The angels know that God's people will be stirred up to prayer in God's due time. And often God uses persecution and trouble to stir up such prayer.

Kendrik's song goes on to say, "Astounding power awaits a word from God's resplendent throne. But God demands our pray'r of faith that cries 'Your will be done.'" Isn't that the message of verse 4? The text says, "And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God

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name." Calvin's *Institutes*, 3.20.2



from the angel's hand." If you could see your prayers being taken by those powerful angels and presented for an answer before the fiery undulating power of God's throne, you would realize that prayer enters into astounding power. It is not just the power of the angels that is unleashed in this chapter, but the power of God Himself.

And while God continues to uphold all things by the Word of His power without our prayers, there are some things that God has chosen to unleash *only at the request of the church*. The church in AD 66 had prayed for God's vengeance to be poured out upon the church's enemies. And as we will see, those prayers were like a switch to several nuclear missiles - seven to be specific. "Astounding power awaits a word from God's resplendent throne. But God demands our pray'r of faith that cries 'Your will be done.'" He has commissioned the church to stand ready to throw the switch and ask for God's judgments.

### **C. Note the blending of Christ's intercession with our own (vv. 3-4)**

Now, theoretically some people might think that Christ's prayers are sufficient for all of that. God always hears His Son, and we are not so sure that He always hears our prayers, so we don't feel the imperative necessity of prayer. Some Christians feel like their prayers are redundant. But Hebrews 2:12-13 indicates that Christ has chosen to pray some things in and through the congregation, his body; He has chosen to sing the imprecatory psalms in and through the congregation. Jesus says, "in the midst of the congregation I will sing praise to You." The very next verse speaks of Christ's faith in the midst of the brethren. And His faith binds up our weak faith like iron binds a broken stick. So there is a sense in which you cannot separate the prayers of the church and the prayers of Christ.

Kendrik's song says, "Come blend your prayers with Jesus' own before the Father's throne." It is not Christ's prayers as a substitute for our own, or ours as a substitute for His, but Christ's prayers making ours acceptable. Verse 4 says, "the smoke of the incense" - that's the symbol of the prayers of Christ. But it also says, "the smoke of the incense, *with the prayers of the saints*, ascended before God from the angel's hand." Do not think that Christ's intercession makes your prayer irrelevant. His intercession is blended with yours and makes yours acceptable; makes yours powerful.

Now, obviously His intercession goes way, way, way beyond your own. But your own is said to be essential to some things - at least the kinds of things

mentioned in this section - which I believe involves imprecations against God's enemies. Sometime study Luke 18 where Jesus speaks about the importunate widow and His guarantee that He will answer prayers for vengeance speedily. But He ends His discourse on that first century vengeance with a sobering thought - "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes [He is speaking there of an AD 66-73 coming], will He really find faith on the earth?" Revelation tells us that there was some faith when Christ came in judgment - the church was not extinguished. But the point I am making is that vengeance requires prayer. Why? For the same reason that a Judge can only grant a plaintiff a judgment if the plaintiff enters a lawsuit before the court. There are court procedures that must be followed if the church is to experience this incredible power unleashed in our day that was unleashed in AD 66.

But let me talk a bit more about the blending of our prayers with Christ's, because I think it will encourage you in your prayers. If you knew someone with the Midas touch - where every investment he ever made turned to proverbial gold, wouldn't you want to invest where he invests? If your investments were linked with his, you would become as rich as he was. Well, think of the power of Christ's prayers and what they avail. This passage says that ours can be linked with His, and any time they are linked with His, God answers with His omnipotence. To me that is incredibly encouraging. How can we know for sure that our prayers will be linked with His? Easy. You pray in Christ's name, according to His revealed will (the Scriptures - so the prayers must be grounded in the Scriptures), and thirdly, the prayers must be consistent with pursuing His kingdom and His righteousness. When our prayers are consistent with Christ's purposes they are always answered.

Let me ask you this: What more could God say or do to make your prayers seem more significant? What more could He do to stir you up to the glory of advancing His kingdom through prayer? He has given the Spirit to make prayer possible. He has given the Son of God to make our prayers acceptable. He has given promises to encourage prayer. He has given faith to make prayer certain. God has made prayer a royal privilege and to fail to come to corporate prayer is to fail to enter into the highest calling that it is possible for sinful men to achieve. Do not let anything come into the way of prayer. Do not let anything deviate you from that which God loves and honors. Pray even if your schedule is busy. Pray even if Satan opposes. If God is in you who can be against you? Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world and there is no reason why each and every one of you cannot join with the church of Jesus Christ to pray. We have midweek

opportunities for prayer, and I think it would be cool if we could have many gathered for prayer either Sunday before church or sometime in the afternoon.

***D. Note that the union of Christ's work of intercession and our work of intercession causes God's holy fire to fall to the earth (v. 5)***

But I also want you to notice in verse 5 that Christ's prayers linked with our prayers cause God's holy fire to fall to the earth.

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.

What is He throwing to the earth? He is throwing to the earth the censor of incense - the very thing that symbolizes Christ's prayers and our prayers. And those gracious prayers produce noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake. What an awesome display was unleashed by the power of corporate prayer. The song we are going to be singing afterwards summarizes this verse by saying, "And as the incense clouds ascend God's holy fire rains down."

Can you see why Spurgeon's comments on prayer were really not hyperbole? There is power in corporate prayer. There is history changing power in prayer. Patrick Johnstone in his book, *Operation World*, comments briefly on this passage in his introduction. He says,

"The seventh seal, the final one, is unusual! Why was there silence in heaven for half-an-hour? It was not just for dramatic effect, or the silence before the storm. It was because God would not act until His people prayed. Once their prayers had risen to the throne, God poured out the fire from the altar upon the earth. The fire of the Spirit comes in answer to prayer (Acts 1:4,14; Acts 2:1-8), but so does the fire of judgment!..."

"The implications are immense. Do you realize that prayer may have brought about the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan? This was judgment on a nation that had resisted Christianity and killed those who responded to the gospel message; and it was also redemptive, for never before have Afghans been so exposed and open to the gospel as today. Is it possible that mighty intercession for China stirred up Communism and the Cultural Revolution to turn an unresponsive nation into one of the most astonishing areas of Christian expansion the world has ever seen? Can it be that the Sahelian famines and Latin American revolutions may be the means of gospel breakthroughs long prayed for? It is a solemn thing to intercede for the nations of the world!

Let us mobilize prayer! We can tip the scales of history. Christians can be the

controlling factor in the unfolding drama of today's world - let us not allow ourselves to be chased around by the enemy, but let us go up at once and take the kingdoms of this world for Jesus (Numb. 13:30; Dan. 7:18) - He is delighted to give them to us (Dan. 7:22 and 27; Luke 12:32).

In practical terms, may these truths make our prayer lives as individuals, and in prayer meetings, outward-looking, Satan-shaking, captive-releasing, kingdom taking, revival-giving, Christ-glorifying power channels for God!"

And I say, "Amen! And Amen!" Before I show how these things were fulfilled in May of AD 66, let me point out a couple of other details.

### ***E. Note the movement of the very physical universe (v. 5)***

Verse 5 shows that when God responded to the prayers of the saints, there were not only thunderings in the sky and other strange noises (which I will document in a bit), but the very earth shook. There was yet another earthquake. The very earth (the physical universe) responds to prayer because it responds to God.

One of the books that I would like to write sometime is a book that documents the ways down through history that God has responded to the united prayers of the church by moving men, nations, weather, disease, and even the earth itself. And the reason I would like to write it is that people tend to be skeptical of these kinds of things until they actually see them documented. But what got me starting to research this was a Fireside Chat by R. J. Rushdoony in which he recited situation after situation where God moved the physical universe in response to the prayers of the church. And then there were the Transformation videos. This past Sunday my mother reminded me of some of the stories of this in Ethiopia - like the two police officers who had kept imprisoning Christians and confiscating their goods. And the church began to pray against these two officers. Out of a clear blue sky in which there were no clouds, a lightning bolt struck one of the officers, killing him, and the other officer, recognizing God's hand, backed off from his persecution. Peter Hammond has told me numerous similar stories of God's miraculous judgments in other countries, but they have only come after the church was willing to act as the importunate widow and ask the Judge of the universe to bring vengeance against her persecutors. Most of the churches that I have talked to in persecuted countries don't think that Christians are allowed to pray such imprecatory psalms. It's sad, because Luke 18 makes clear that if the church lacks faith to pray for vengeance the court of heaven cannot answer. May the church once again rise up to be a faithful witness by bringing similar lawsuits before the throne of heaven.

## **F. Note that the prayers result in the heavenly armies being summoned to battle (vv. 6ff)**

Look at verse 6. Verse 6 says, "So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound." Many have been frightened by these seven trumpet judgments that extend from chapter 8 through chapter 11, but they are judgments on God's enemies, and they result in the advancement of His cause. *These angels are joining ranks with the saints.* There is nothing to be frightened about; they are on our side. As Kendrick's hymn says, "In step with heaven's armies march to conquer and to reign!" All resistance to Christ needs to be prayed against. And once the church unites in agreement concerning a covenant lawsuit, God will answer speedily.

In this case, as trumpet after trumpet sounds in chapter 8, new regiments of soldiers begin to stream from heaven, Satan's kingdom takes hit, after hit, after hit, and God's people get relief; blessed relief. As the last trumpet sounds in chapter 11 in AD 70, it says,

...there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!

So that is chapter 11 - the last trumpet sounds in AD 70. Though the kingdom was established in AD 30, and though victories were achieved, Mir is not till 70 that the time to inherit the Gentile nations happens. We saw in a previous sermon that this is parallel to Moses establishing the kingdom at Sinai, but only inheriting the nations of Canaan 40 years later. So AD 70 is the turning point in history for Jesus to begin to inherit the Gentile nations. That's the seventh trumpet. But the first trumpet starts in 8:7. Verse 7 is when the Twelfth Roman Legion headed up by Cestius Gallus come into play.

## **V. The fulfillment in AD 66**

Before I look at the fulfillment of this paragraph in history, let me give you some additional background to this chapter from Ezekiel 10. In the large overview chart that I gave of this book several weeks ago, the right hand column shows how the subject matter of the chapters of Revelation are patterned almost chapter by chapter from Ezekiel's description of Jerusalem's previous judgment under Nebuchadnezzar. They are parallel kinds of events that describe the end of the temple, not the end of history. So Ezekiel 1's imagery forms the background for Revelation 1 and 4, Ezekiel 2-3 forms the background to Revelation 5, Ezekiel 5-7 forms the background

to Revelation 6, and Ezekiel 9-10 forms the symbolic background for Revelation 7-8.

Now this is not an academic sermon, so I'm not going to dig deeply into it, but let me at least list some of the similarities between the two passages. Ezekiel 9 and Revelation 7 both deal with the massive numbers of faithful believers who die. Both deal with the sealing on the foreheads of the rest of the faithful remnant within Israel so that they would not be hurt. Then there is a description of prayer being offered before God's throne. Then there is the description of the throne of God and angels coming before that throne. Both Ezekiel and our passage in Revelation show a connection between the temple on earth and the temple in heaven. Both show a tight connection between human prayer and God's cherubim angels. And just as the temple was completely perverted in AD 66, the temple was completely perverted in the time of Ezekiel. *Yet* God's glory cloud and God's angels were present in both temples long after their apostasy was obvious. And God's glory cloud leaves both temples in order to bring judgment. And in both our passage and in Ezekiel 10 the angels take coals of fire and cast that fire to the ground as a sign of God's impending judgment. And there is a great noise connected with the angelic response (cf. Ezek. 10:5).

And I am giving these comparisons to illustrate that we are not just talking about trivial comparisons. The Partial Preterist argument is solidly rooted in Ezekiel. The Jews who read Revelation 7-8 would have had Ezekiel in the back of their minds. It would not have been confusing to them at all. They would immediately recognize that John is speaking of a new judgment on Jerusalem, but also a judgment on the pagan nations that come against Jerusalem. So let me read a few verses from Ezekiel 10. The chapter starts by saying,

Ezek. 10:1 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. Ezek. 10:2 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. Ezek. 10:3 ¶ Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the temple when the man went in, and the cloud filled the inner court. Ezek. 10:4 Then the glory of the LORD went up from the cherub, and paused over the threshold of the temple; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the LORD'S glory. Ezek. 10:5 And the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard even in the outer court, like the voice of Almighty God when He speaks.

Now, I am going to be quoting historians who say that these same type of

things happened in AD 66 as happened in Ezekiel's time. Going down to verses 18-19:

Ezek. 10:18 ¶ Then the glory of the LORD departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. Ezek. 10:19 And the cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight. When they went out, the wheels were beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the LORD'S house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.

Now keep in mind that only the Bible is infallible, but I think it is interesting to see if there are any events that correspond to these verses in non-Biblical history. And there are. When the book of Revelation returns to this period of time in the second half of the book, we will look at this in much more detail, but let me at least summarize some of the evidence, and I will put the rest into footnotes. We have testimonies from ancient Jewish sources, Christian sources, and Roman sources that the following things happened on Sivan 6, of AD 66, which my computer program says was May 18. These things happened at the Festival of Pentecost.

1. First, angelic voices warned Israel that if they did not repent God would forever leave them. That happened on this date according to Tacitus,<sup>5</sup> Josephus,<sup>6</sup> Hegesippus,<sup>7</sup> PseudoHegesippus,<sup>8</sup> Sepher Yosippon,<sup>9</sup> Eusebius,<sup>10</sup> and an eye witness rabbi by the name of Jonathan.<sup>11</sup> And in my footnotes I will document where you can find those quotes. And Revelation will later speak of the warnings angels give. Our passage only speaks of noises in verse 5. But the literal Greek is actually "voices," not "noises." They heard voices. Well, several ancient historians say that they heard supernatural voices (plural) on this day. I believe it may be these seven angels who were speaking.
2. Second, the glory cloud, which had appeared in the temple with a

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5 Tacitus, *Histories* 5.13.

6 Josephus, *Wars* 6.5.3 [6.299]

7 HEGESIPPUS, TRANSLATED FROM LATIN INTO ENGLISH by Wade Blocker, Book V, xliv (see above).

8 Pseudo-Hegesippus, Chapter 44. (Translated from the Latin by Wade Blocker. This excerpt taken from the Latin edited by Vincente Ussani): "Moreover in the celebration itself of the Pentecost the priests entering the interior of the temple at night time, that they might celebrate the usual sacrifices, asserted themselves at first to have a felt a certain movement and a sound given forth, afterwards even to have heard shouted in a sudden voice 'we cross over from here.'"

[http://www.preteristarchive.com/ChurchHistory/0370\\_hegesippus-pseudo\\_jerusalem.html](http://www.preteristarchive.com/ChurchHistory/0370_hegesippus-pseudo_jerusalem.html)

9 Sepher Yosippon, Trans. Dr. Steven Bowman, Ch. 87, [Burning of the Temple]. Here is an extract: "When the holiday of Shavu'oth came in those days, during the night the priests heard within the Temple something like the sound of men going and the sound of men marching in a multitude going into the Temple, and a terrible and mighty voice was heard speaking: 'Let's go and leave this House.'"

10 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.8.6

11 See citation from Ernest Martin above.

bright light earlier that year (as recorded by Josephus and a couple of other historians) left the temple on the Festival of Pentecost - just like what happened in Ezekiel 10 back in the time of Babylon. Actually, according to Ernest Martin, there are three ancient witnesses that the Glory Cloud left the temple on Pentecost of AD 66, landed on the Mount of Olives, possibly resulting in the split in the Mount of Olives that you can see till today.

3. Third, according to the Roman historian Tacitus,<sup>12</sup> some kind of fire fell from heaven into the temple and illuminated everything in it on the same day that the Glory cloud left. So we are still on May 18, or the Festival of Pentecost. Our passage speaks of both fire and lightnings, and Tacitus could be interpreted either way. But he says fire fell. So we have at least that reference.
  4. Fourth, an earthquake accompanied this. Josephus, Eusebius, and Hegesippus speak of this.
  5. Fifth, a loud noise accompanied this, including a voice from heaven that called Israel to repent, and then said, "I will return to my place." Roman, Jewish, and Christian historians speak of this.
  6. And then sixth, angelic voices said they too were leaving the temple.
- So all of the details found in Ezekiel, Revelation 8, and the parallel parts of the second half of Revelation seem to have been fulfilled. Let me read just a sampling of quotes from these ancient authors.

Josephus says,

Moreover at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner [court of the] temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, 'Let us remove hence.'” [Wars 6.299 (6.5.3)]

Josephus gives the exact day and hour when this event happened - on the day of Pentecost at the hour when the evening sacrifices were supposed to have occurred. It's almost as if the angels are glad to be done with witnessing the blasphemy that the Jewish priests had been engaging in in that temple, and that they can finally leave that place to the demons.

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<sup>12</sup> Tacitus, Histories, v. 13. Granted, his reference to the temple being lit up could refer to the earlier Passover appearing of chariots or it could refer to the immediately following description that happened at Pentecost, or it could indicate that he conflated the two events, or it could indicate that there were witnesses to yet another appearing of chariots in the sky. But the grammar seems to tie to lightning or fire from the sky together with the voices saying they were leaving. After discussing the appearance of chariots in the sky, Tacitus says, "...and suddenly the temple was illumined with fire from the clouds. Of a sudden the doors of the shrine opened and a superhuman voice cried: 'The gods are departing': at the same moment the mighty stir of their going was heard."



Certainly there did seem to be a plunging into the irrational from Pentecost and on as there was nothing left in the temple to restrain Satan's hosts. When you read the historian Josephus it is mind-boggling the blindness and weird things that happened in the temple after May 18. That date was a major turning point

Another early church father by the name of Hegessipus stated, "Moreover in the celebration itself of the Pentecost the priests entering the interior of the temple at night time, that they might celebrate the usual sacrifices, asserted themselves at first to have felt a certain movement and a sound given forth, afterwards even to have heard shouted in a sudden voice: 'we cross over from here.'"<sup>13</sup>

Rabbi Jonathan was an eye witness of the war against Jerusalem, and he testified that "[A] Bet Kol [which is his Hebrew expression for a supernatural voice from heaven] issued forth announcing, 'Return, O backsliding children [Jer. 3:14]. Return unto Me, and I will return unto you [Mal. 3:7],' when they did not repent, it said, 'I will return to my place [Hosea 5:15]'"<sup>14</sup>

The pagan Roman historian, Tacitus, said, "...a superhuman voice was heard to declare that the gods were leaving it, and in the same instant came the rushing tumult of their departure." [Tacitus, Hist. 5.13]

The early church historian, Eusebius, also speaks of the Glory Cloud leaving the temple and resting on the Mount of Olives as a symbol that God had forsaken Israel and was now associated with the church.<sup>15</sup> And by the way, the faithful remnant would have had to go through that split in the mount of Olives to be able to reach Pellagra, where they were protected by the king for the duration of the war. You can trace their possible route using the ancient road maps. And I have included a couple of maps on the back of your outline

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13 HEGESIPPUS, TRANSLATED FROM LATIN INTO ENGLISH by Wade Blocker, Book V, xliv. A translation has been made available here by Wade Blocker - [http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pearse/morefathers/files/hegesippus\\_05\\_book5.htm](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pearse/morefathers/files/hegesippus_05_book5.htm)

14 Midrash Rabbah Lamentations Proems 25 cited in Ernest L. Martin, *Secrets of Golgotha: The Forgotten History of Christ's Crucifixion* (Alhambra, CA: ASK Publications, 1988), p. 84. The full quote is as follows: "R. Jonathan said: Three and a half years the Shechinah abode upon the Mount of Olives hoping that Israel would repent, but they did not; while a Bath Kol issued announcing, 'Return, O backsliding children (Jer. III, 14), Return unto Me, and I will return unto you (Mal. III, 7).' When they did not repent, it said, 'I will go and return to My place (Hos. V, 15).' Concerning that time it is said, 'Give glory to the Lord your God, before it grow dark' (Jer. XIII, 16): before it becomes dark to you for lack of words of Torah, before it becomes dark to you for lack of words of prophecy, 'and before your feet stumble upon the mountains of twilight.'" (Midrash Rabbah - Lamentations Prologue XXV)

15 He said, "Believers in Christ congregate from all parts of the world, not as of old time because of the glory of Jerusalem, nor that they may worship in the ancient Temple at Jerusalem, but . . . that they may worship at the Mount of Olives opposite to the city, whither the glory of the LORD [the Shekinah] migrated when it left the former city." (Eusebius Proof of the Gospel 6.18.)

that shows the split, mother earthquake fault line on the mount of Olives, and the route that Zechariah hints that the remnant travelled.

Now, we will dig into other references about these events a bit more in the second half of the of the book, but I just wanted you to see that even this warning on Pentecost Day was a warning that the unbelieving Jews could have taken to heart. It was God's mercy to issue such clear providential evidences that they were in deep trouble. But they did not repent. So in verses 7 and following, God allowed trumpet blasts from each angel to call forth the armies of heaven to afflict both Israel and Rome. And we will start looking at those trumpet blasts next week, Lord willing.

## **Conclusion**

But to return to our main theme of prayer, is prayer powerful? Yes it is. When God stirred up the church to pray for vengeance, vengeance began to fall just as Jesus had promised that it would. And in our own day it is important that the church begin to cry out to God for His redemptive judgments to fall upon His enemies, and that those judgments produce either repentance or destruction. But we cannot continue with the current status quo. The church of AD 66 stands as an example of how we ought to act when we face similar circumstances.

If we are passionate for the kingdom of Jesus, then we must begin to pray passionately that the Father would vindicate His Son and avenge His church worldwide. Pray to the One who is able to move heaven and earth. I've made changes to Graham Kendrick's song<sup>16</sup> to make it more theologically accurate, but after I lead us in prayer, let's sing it with gusto. Amen.

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16 Though it is possible to sing the song as is from the perspective of a pre-70 AD saint who is anticipating the soon coming of Jesus in judgment, I have made the following changes to make it more appropriate to our own period: All heaven waits with bated breath, for saints on earth to pray. Majestic angels ready stand with swords of fiery blade. Astounding power awaits a word from God's resplendent throne. But God demands our pray'r of faith that cries 'Your will be done.'

Ladies: Now in our hearts and on our lips the word of faith is near, Let heaven's will on earth be done let heaven flow from here.

Men: Come blend your prayers with Jesus' own before the Father's throne. And as the incense clouds ascend God's holy fire rains down.

As in the day when Rome and Isra'l both received God's wrath, Messiah wars against all nations turning from His path. He wields His iron rod and smashes nations one by one. And calls upon all kings of earth to bow before the throne.

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as is in heav'n We seek The presence and Thy pow'r advance Thy kingdom's leav'n Convert the earth, and fill the world with knowledge of The Son. And with the power of The Word destroy the devil's throne!

Awake, O church, arise and pray. complaining words discard. The Spirit comes to fill your mouth with truth, His mighty sword. Go place your feet on Satan's ground and there proclaim Christ's name. In step with heaven's armies march, To conquer and to reign!