

MONDAY 11<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER

## Read: Revelation 8:1-9:12

*'And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.'* **Revelation 8:4**

Why bother praying? If on occasions heaven has seemed silent, maybe this question has crossed our mind? And if true in our setting, how much more for the hard pressed Christians Revelation first spoke to, or persecuted believers today. Does God hear? Does prayer do anything? These verses say yes and yes!

There is silence in heaven (8:1) as Jesus progresses God's plan. What is heaven holding its breath for? Part of the answer is prayer. Verses 3 and 4 might seem like an ill-timed advert break in a gripping drama. But they are central. They tell us believers' prayers are heard, rising before God's throne. Valued. Precious incense is offered with them, a sign they please God. Powerful. Their reaching to heaven is the Lord's means of bringing His purposes on earth (8:5).

Stern purposes. The first four trumpets signal God's disciplining judgements in the physical realm. The land, sea, waters and sky face catastrophe. As we look around at once lush forests now arid deserts or flourishing oceans poisoned, we see an echo today. But this is more than simply the outworking of human actions. Shipping and the stars are destroyed or darkened. This is divine action against sin.

In the spiritual realm too. The eagle, a sign of impending danger, signals the first woe (8:13). A humanity which has rejected the life-giver is allowed to feel the consequences, left under the control of the Destroyer (9:11) - Satan and his demonic servants. He promises life in turning from God. But his promises are hollow (9:5-6).

Yet there is mercy. Only a third of creation is destroyed (8:7). The forces of evil cannot kill nor are they eternal (9:5). The trumpets are to warn. God is not yet bringing the end.

I suspect we will be left with 'what's and 'why's? But let us take one thing away. Why pray? Because those prayers are heard, valued and powerful. Through them the Lord chooses to work out His eternal purposes. Stern purposes at times. But always tempered with mercy. So let us give ourselves afresh to prayer today.

**Let us pray:** *Holy and merciful Father, who hears the prayers of Your people, strengthen us in this confidence that we might be persistent in calling upon You, that Your just and merciful ways might be seen on earth. In the name of the Lamb, our Lord Jesus. Amen.*

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