**The Trumpets of Justice**

Revelation 8:1-13

So here we see the seventh and ***final SEAL opened and expect WORDS, right?*** When you fully unseal a scroll, you can then open it and the whole point is to READ IT, right? But what happens instead is SILENCE. The heavenly throne room we have been blessed to see into has been very noisy, with creatures, elders, angels and the martyred saints and all of creation singing praise to God on the throne and to the lamb.

But now silence. 30 minutes of quiet. Sounds nice, doesn’t it? [Breathe.]

But the seventh seal isn’t the end of the world, it now **activates another sequence of sevens**, with seven trumpets. And we know there’s a third and final sequence of seven coming with seven bowls full of the final judgments of God upon the earth. This is a really simplistic summary of the progression:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **7 Seals** | **7 Trumpets** | **7 Bowls** |
| 1 / 4 of the world | 1 / 3 of the world | All of the world |
| “The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.” Revelation 8:7 | | |

In the seal judgments one quarter of the world is destroyed. In the trumpets, a third is destroyed. And the bowls finish the job. You can see the first trumpet there in verse 7: a third of the earth, the trees and ALL of the grass was burned up. Big bummer there for those of us who play soccer. No more grass for us. It’s all turf at that point, I guess.

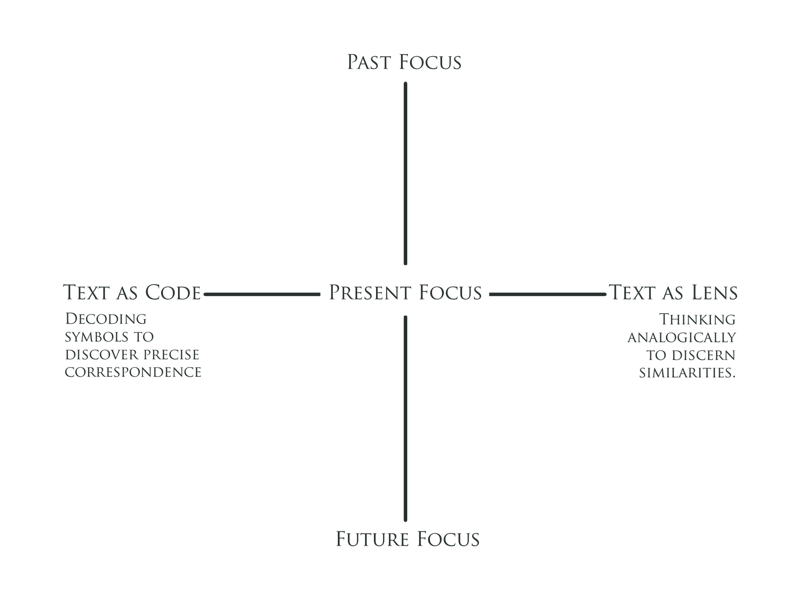
Ok, on that I’m being silly. But here is an important observation. In all three of these cycles of seven they lead to the cataclysmic undoing of the world in what Jewish readers would know was **the Day of the Lord**.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **6th Seal (Rev. 6)** | **7th Trumpet (Rev. 11)** | **7th Bowl (Rev. 16)** |
| “There was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell… The sky vanished like a scroll…” | “Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.” | “And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake.” |

Now, if all three cycles end in the same place, with the same “Day of the Lord” event language, doesn’t that lead us to believe that ***these are RECAPITULATING the same sequence just from a slightly different perspective?***

It’s like a movie where you see a scene from **one person’s vantage point** but later see it from another perspective, and that additional information changes your understanding of what happened. Some of us remember the TV show LOST and how it kept going back to the plane crash, showing 17 different perspectives on that moment.

Here is an important **interpretive framework** for us as we get into the heart of the prophecies in this book.

This is from Michael Gorman and his *Reading Revelation Responsibly.* 

I learned it from the Bible Project Podcast. Notice there are three approaches to a book like Revelation: a focus on the past, the present or the future. Many of us have been trained in an ***obsessively FUTURIST interpretation*** of this book, like that is the only way to read it. The locusts in Revelation 9 are Apache helicopters and the first head of the dragon in Revelation 12 is Vladimir Putin.

Those are examples of **seeing the text as a CODE**, looking for direct 1 to 1 correspondence between a symbol in John’s vision and a present or imminent future fulfillment.

Others have taken **a PAST view of this book**, showing how signs like these - and those in Daniel - had already taken place in the fall of Assyria, the fall of Babylon, the fall of the Medes and Persians, the fall of Greece and the impending fall of Rome.

But notice the alternative being proposed by Gorman in his book and Mackie in the Bible Project Podcast. Instead of seeing Revelation as a code to decipher signs of the times, what if it is a LENS through which we can see God and the world more clearly? ***What if these symbols function here in the same way they do in Ezekiel and Daniel and Isaiah?*** And Genesis and Exodus and Matthew?

What if this book is more **about US in the PRESENT**, seeing God and ourselves and our circumstances the way God sees them? Could it be that Revelation is a REVELATION to help us see, right now?

The seven letters certainly felt that way, didn’t they? So. Let’s look at Revelation 8 and put on our GLASSES to see what God is trying to show us through this pretty terrifying chapter. After the silence of the seventh seal.

“Then I saw seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.” Revelation 8:2

[https://crossroadsbible.net/2022/09/23/seven-trumpets-of-revelation-8/](https://crossroadsbible.net/2022/09/23/seven-trumpets-of-revelation-8/%5C)

The Jews were most familiar with horns called SHOFAR from the head of a ram. These curved horns make a very distinctive and not very musical or clear sound. The trumpets mentioned here use the Greek word for **a straight silver trumpet** used in the military to call soldiers to arms or sound an attack. It was also used in sporting events to announce the start of an event or the arrival or a famous athlete. So something new and significant is about to happen. ***A major change is about to be announced.***

“And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.” Revelation 8:3-4

It’s like the opening ceremonies of the Olympics or the assembly of soldiers before D-Day. Everyone is taking a deep breath for what is about to take place. But before the first trumpet is sounded, we are again back in God’s temple. Another angel takes a golden censer, a jar-like container to hold burning incense like many of us have seen in a Catholic worship service or funeral. What a picture of ***our prayers ascending as a sweet aroma*** before God, right to His throne in heaven! But this sweet worshipful scene doesn’t last long…

**“**Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.” Revelation 8:5

Here is another reference to the **Day of the Lord**, as we saw is triggered by the sixth seal, the seventh trumpet and the seventh bowl. The Day of the Lord is one of those LENSES in Scripture that help us see what God is doing now and what He will do one day soon. The Day of the Lord is the day God appears in the fullness of His power and glory and addresses the evil and injustice of people in the world. We have had many little “D” days of the Lord. But the big “D” Day is coming soon!

And don’t miss the key detail: ***our PRAYERS are part of that day.*** Part of the final justice King Jesus will bring is in response to our cries for justice. “How long, Oh Lord?” Just a little longer, our King is saying to us. He is coming. And with Him the hosts of heaven and the blazing fire of God’s unstoppable justice.

***Have you been hurt by someone?*** Are you struggling and in pain right now? Are you longing for real justice?

Thunder, rumblings, lightning, earthquake. ***Those are the GROWLS of the Lion of Judah.*** He is going to POUNCE one day soon. And the evil of the white witch and her kind will fall before Him. Here is a summary of the first four trumpet judgments:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Trumpet 1: 1 / 3 of earth** | **Trumpet 2: 1 / 3 of sea** |
| **Trumpet 3: 1 / 3 of rivers** | **Trumpet 4: 1 / 3 of heavens** |
| “The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.” Revelation 8:8-9 | |

The first trumpet sounds and a third of the land is burned up. The second trumpet brings devastation to the sea, turning a third of the sea into blood which would kill any living thing in that bloody water, worse than red tide. So bad it also destroys the ships in it. The third trumpet turns a third of the freshwater bitter. The fourth trumpet darkens one third of the heavenly bodies: the sun, moon and stars.

In other words, every part of the universe is affected ***as God lifts His holy arm and begins to bring justice and righteousness in answer to the prayers of His people.***

So, the main thing Revelation 8 is calling us to do is PRAY.

***Do you sometimes feel like your prayers don’t matter?*** Like they have no effect? Well, abolish that thought once and for all. Every single prayer is collected by King Jesus and stored up for this day. Every. Single. One.

Yes, Jesus answers prayers faster than that too - PTL.

Do you see how Revelation 8 is serving as **a lens through which we can see our current reality**? Whatever injustice you are experiencing, you’re not alone in it. Others before and after you have been through similar things.

***Whatever pain you’re experiencing, you’re not alone.*** And Jesus sees it. He hears your cries. He delights in your FAITH. He is building your steadfastness through adversity.

So, keep on praying. Keep on trusting. Lift your eyes to the heavens and see the Lord on His throne. This is our first lesson for today:

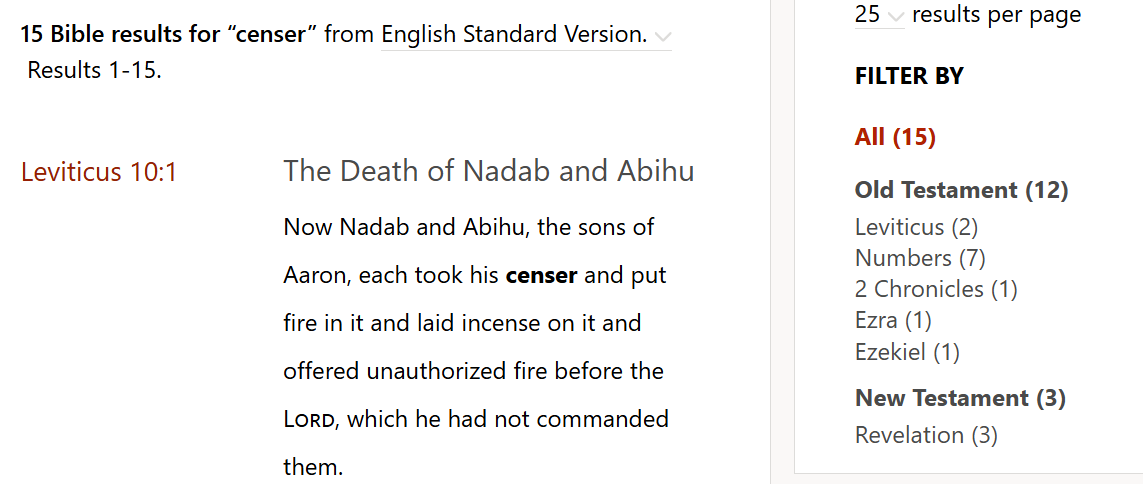
God’s perfect **Justice** is coming soon in answer to our **Prayers**

“And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth…” Revelation 8:4-5

The angels of God are standing ready in heaven, waiting for this signal from the Throne. At the nod of God the Father, and the verbal command of God the Son, these angels will start to sound their trumpets, and the righteous fury of God will be unleashed on this dark and broken world. Justice is coming. And it will be comprehensive. No part of existence will be left out.

***Just as God intervened for His people in Egypt***, bringing judgment on all the gods of the Egyptian pantheon, so He will intervene for all of us. So, keep praying. Don’t lose heart. “This light and momentary affliction is achieving for us an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs them all.”

Now, as they say in the Bible Project, **let’s double click on those golden censers**. That hyperlink is very important for understanding this whole chapter. It is, I think, the key lens to help us see what these trumpet judgments are about. Now, lest you think I’m super smart and you could never do this kind of linking, **here’s what I did**.



I typed CENSER into Biblegateway. Super advanced. You see there are 15 occurrences in the Bible, all OT except for Revelation 8. And look where there are 7 of the occurrences. Numbers 16. Let’s turn there. I mean, you get **a sense of foreboding** from the heading there in Leviticus 10:1, right? The death of Nadab and Abihu. Uh oh. A censer story that resulted in the death of two sons of the great high priest, Aaron.

“Now Korah the son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram… took men. And they rose up before Moses, with a number of the people of Israel, 250 chiefs of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men. They assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron…” Numbers 16:1-3

***Korah was a LEVITE.*** Not descended from Aaron in order to be a high priest. Just a Levite entrusted with the administrative care of the tabernacle and its furnishing. The other guys were descended from Reuben, so not even Levites in terms of serving in the holy places. Four men are named, but those four got 250 leaders from the rest of the nation, which numbered over a million at this point. And this large group of disgruntled leaders assembled themselves together AGAINST Moses and Aaron. Here is their complaint.

“And said to them, ‘You have gone too far! For all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?’” Numbers 16:4

Oooh. This is a sneaky one. You can see how it gained momentum among the leaders of Israel. ***EVERYONE is holy!*** Every Israelite has the Name of God upon them and is set apart for Him. Totally true statement!

The problem was not with Korah’s interpretation of Scripture, ***but his APPLICATION of it.*** Instead of saying “We are all holy and God is with each of us, so let’s worship Him together, let’s obey Him together, let’s follow Him together…” Korah chose to criticize the leaders God had appointed over them. Ruh roh.

“Why then do you exalt yourselves?”

Is that what Moses and Aaron had done? ***Or had God placed them over Israel?*** Hadn’t the nation actually DEMANDED that Moses go up on Mount Sinai alone because they were terrified of God’s presence?

***So this is a story about CONTENTMENT and SUBMISSION.*** God established 12 tribes in Israel. One of those, the Levites, was responsible for the tabernacle and its care. Within the tribe of Levi, those descended from Aaron were entrusted with the task of serving as priests. And only one person from Aaron’s line was commissioned each year as High Priest, with access to the most holy place.

Moses was special as both a prophet and priest. The nation didn’t have a king yet, but Moses was a forerunner of the kings in that he provided the Law of God for them and served as a judge to decide disputes among them. ***So Moses was an Old Testament picture of JESUS*** - the coming Messiah or King of Israel who would be a prophet and a priest as well as king.

So in questioning Moses and Aaron, ***these 250 leaders were questioning the prophet, priest and king God had placed over them.***

Just a tip: this is not recommended.

“When Moses heard it, he fell on his face, and he said to Korah and all his company, ‘In the morning the Lord will show who is his, and who is holy, and will bring him near to him. The one whom he chooses he will bring near to him.’” Numbers 16:4-5

Hearing this defiance, Moses immediately fell on his face. Not before these Jewish leaders. But before God. Right away Moses knew how serious this was. He knew how furious God would be. What is God going to show? ***Who is HIS and who is HOLY.***

***What is God going to do?*** Bring some person or people NEAR. And others… not so near? Others… cast out?

How will they know who belongs to God, who is holy and who will be brought near to God?

“Do this: take censers, Korah and all his company; put fire in them and put incense on them before the Lord tomorrow, and the man whom the Lord chooses shall be the holy one. You have gone too far, sons of Levi!” Numbers 16:6-7

Ok. So it’s a contest with fire and incense in censers. Let’s see whom the Lord will choose. Moses explained the problem with their complaint.

“Hear now, you sons of Levi:is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself, to do service in the tabernacle of the Lord and to stand before the congregation to minister to them… And would you seek the priesthood also? Therefore it is against the Lord that you and all your company have gathered together.” Numbers 16:8-11

Here is the rub. Korah and the other leaders ***were not CONTENT with the role God had assigned to them.*** They felt that they deserved a nobler, higher calling. Now, this is understandable. Every time the nation of Israel moved, which was frequent, if you read the accounts, the Levites had to pack up the tabernacle, which was a large, ornate mobile tent, and carry it.

**It’s kind of like the circus**. You put up this big tent, do your shows for a few days or weeks, then pack it up and move on to the next location. If you were one of those workers doing the set up and tear down every single time you can see how you would get tired of that eventually.

Do you see how this story is a LENS to help us see our own hearts? ***How do you feel about the role God has assigned to you?***

* Maybe you’re the mother of small children right now and they cry a lot and have so many diapers to change.
* Maybe you’re working a menial job, doing tasks beneath your understanding and skill level.
* Maybe you’re helping with the little kids in our kids program and some of them don’t behave super well all the time.
* Maybe you’re coming to our work day and worry that you’ll have to clean the gutters… again…
* Maybe you are caring for a loved one who is aging, their mind and body are failing and you are just so tired…
* Maybe you are a student and it’s crunch time in your semester and you are irritated with all the homework and tests.

**Are you content** with the place in life to which God has assigned you? Or are you like Korah, feeling tempted to complain and start a petition to bring against God? Here is our second lesson for today:

**Contentment** with your assigned role is a sign of **Faith** in the God who assigned it.

“Hear now, you sons of Levi:is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself, to do service… Therefore it is against the Lord that you and all your company have gathered together.” Numbers 16:8-11

God Himself has assigned us all a place in this world and in this church. He has separated us out for **two purposes**: first to draw us closer to Himself and second to assign us service, work to do. When we grumble and complain about our lot in life we are choosing not to trust in the God who assigned us this current role.

Do you see the application here? What you’re going through is designed to draw you closer to God and will open up avenues for you to serve others.

**So you have a choice**: complain about it or accept it as God’s assignment for you right now.

Moses called two of the rebel leaders, but they wouldn’t come before him. Here’s why:

**Contentment** with your assigned role is a sign of **Faith** in the God who assigned it.

“Moreover, you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards… We will not come up.” Numbers 16:14

This was the promise about the promised land: milk and honey; meaning cows, goats and bees. Fields and vineyards. So, remember your history of Israel. This is Numbers 16. ***Why aren’t the Jews in the promised land?*** What happened in Numbers 13 and 14? You all know.

***They sent 12 spies into the promised land*** and all 12 had heroic faith and boldness to go right in and conquer the Canaanites, right? Not quite. 10 of the 12 said, “They’re too big. They’re too powerful. We can’t do it.” Only Caleb and Joshua spoke with faith, but they got voted down. Democracy won. Faith lost. The 10 spies who spoke against God’s will all died; only Caleb and Joshua lived.

Now, like 10 minutes later, here is Korah with 250 other Jewish leaders, ***complaining that MOSES let them down***. HE didn’t lead them into the promised land. Let’s ignore that last business meeting we had and how the vote went. That isn’t relevant right now. You promised milk and honey, where is it?

What about you? ***What is your “milk and honey”?*** What did you expect God to give you when you started following Jesus? Health, wealth, romance, relationship, children, grandchildren, success, prosperity…?

For sure you can find preachers today who will promise you all of these things - usually in exchange for a nice donation to their public ministry. ***Did Jesus ever promise these things?*** “In this world you will have nothing but good things, comfort and privilege, power and wealth.” Somebody, find me that verse. The one I know is John 16:33, “In this world you will have TROUBLE.” Luke 9 “take up your cross daily and follow me.” Last I heard a cross was an instrument of execution, not comfort.

***Are you content with the life God has given you?*** Or have you been complaining recently? Let’s see how the complaining approach works out. Moses called Korah and his group together the next morning. All 250 of them brought censers full of fire and incense. Plus, Korah and Aaron. So, it was 251 against 1. Moses was the referee.

“And the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, ‘Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.’ And they fell on their faces and said, ‘O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and will you be angry with all the congregation?’” Numbers 16:20-22

The same thing happened with the 10 spies and the congregational meeting that went south just two chapters before this. God was about to wipe out the whole nation and start over with Moses, but ***Moses INTERCEDED for the people*** and God showed mercy. This is our third and final lesson for today.

**Protection** from God’s judgment is available through His **Mediator**

“And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Say to the congregation, Get away from the dwelling of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.’” Numbers 16:23-24

In response to the prayer of Moses, God spared the Israelites. But they had to listen to Moses’ instructions. “Get away from these men.”

**Protection** from God’s judgment is available through His **Mediator**

“And he spoke to the congregation, saying, ‘Depart, please, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest you be swept away with all their sins.’”

Numbers 16:26

***Lines were drawn.*** People could stand with Korah and his men. Or with Moses. There is the warning: judgment from God is coming and will sweep these men away with their sins. Flood language.

The people had to make a choice. And it involved the TENTS. ***Where are you going to LIVE.*** Is this world your home? Will you align yourself with someone who is questioning the God of Israel and His appointed leader? The consequences were massive.

**Protection** from God’s judgment is available through His **Mediator**

“And as soon as he had finished speaking all these words, the ground under them split apart. And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up.” Numbers 16:31-32

Korah and his whole family, with all of their tents, was swallowed up by the earth. Gulp.

**Protection** from God’s judgment is available through His **Mediator**

“And fire came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 men offering the incense.” Numbers 16:35

A massive earthquake that targeted just one man and his family. Then fire from the Lord that consumed all 250 men with their censers filled with incense. Whoosh.

It had been 251 against Aaron. Now it is just Aaron standing there with the incense.

You’d think the lesson would have gotten through. But no. Read the rest of Numbers 16 for yourself. The congregation of Israel immediately gathered to complain against Moses and again God was moving to destroy every one of them. But ***again, Moses interceded***.

“So Aaron took [his censer] as Moses said and ran into the midst of the assembly. And behold, the plague had already begun among the people. And he put on the incense and made atonement for the people.And he stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was stopped.” Numbers 16:47-48

What a picture of **the intercessory ministry of Jesus**! On one side of Aaron were 14,700 dead people. On the other side were the other million plus still alive. Aaron standing between them. Atonement with God achieved through proper worship applied with the censer by the appointed Priest of the Lord.

So here is our summary for today:

**The Lens of Future Judgment helps us see our Present Circumstances**

* God’s perfect **Justice** is coming soon in answer to our **Prayers**
* **Contentment** with your assigned role is a sign of **Faith** in the God who assigned it
* **Protection** from God’s judgment is available through His **Mediator**

First, as we saw the angels around God’s throne given trumpets, then another angel filled a censer and threw fire down on the earth it gave us a visual picture of God’s coming judgment in the Day of the Lord. Our prayers are being collected before God’s glorious presence and one day will be a part of His final judgment on this earth. That judgment will be comprehensive, as the four trumpets show us: affecting the land, the sea, the rivers and the skies.

Second, the link to Numbers 16 showed us that while these judgments are about a future action of God, they are very relevant for each of us right now. Contentment is a sign of faith. Complaining is a sign of unbelief and rebellion.

Finally, we saw Moses as the mediator and Aaron as the priest. Moses made intercession to save the nation. Aaron made atonement with a holy censer to stop the plague.

Our applications today.

* First, keep praying. Keep trusting. Justice is coming. Don’t grow weary or lose heart.
* Second, be content. Trust in the goodness of God and in His sovereign plan. He has assigned a role to you in both your life and your work. Don’t complain. Trust in the God who assigned the role to you.
* Finally, stand firm with the mediator, King Jesus. That’s where safety can be found. It’s the only place. In Korah’s case, it was Moses. Those who stood with Korah were swept away in his rebellion. Those who stood with Moses were saved.

Now it’s Jesus. **Those who stand with Jesus are protected by Him**. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” But for those who choose this world, who love this world and seek to gain this whole world, the fires of God’s wrath will fall and consume everything they tried to win.

God has given us His Word, in passages like Revelation 8 and Numbers 16, to more clearly see our present reality and our own hearts. What have these passages helped you see today?

Let’s pray.