***The Angels with the Sharp Sickle and with Fire

RV191-02***

Please open your Bibles this morning to Revelation 14:14-20. Our subject is "The Vision of Armageddon." This is section number two.

There are two primary issues which now determine the future of mankind on planet earth. We are in the midst of a swirling presidential campaign, and these issues will be touched on in a variety of ways. But it all shakes down to two fundamental factors that are going to determine where the United States and the rest of the world goes.

**The Bible**

The first factor is the attitude of people toward the Bible as the sole, inerrant expression of the mind of God. The question everybody has to decide is: is the Bible the book from God to guide sinful human beings into heaven; that is, into salvation? This is a very important question. And it might seem self-evident to you that that's where it is.

**Roman Catholicism**

However, if you were a Roman Catholic, you would know that that is not what you are taught. You would be taught, as a Roman Catholic, that the Bible is a secondary book for a knowledge of God. The primary source of the knowledge of God is the hierarchy of the church – the Pope; and, the College of Cardinals. These are the people, you would be taught, who wrote the Bible. Therefore, they alone are capable of interpreting the Bible.

The average Catholic himself does not really know what his church teaches. So, you might say to a Catholic, or if you were to face some of your relatives who are Catholics (as some of mine are), "Do you realize that, as we sit here, either you are going to be in heaven, or I'm going to be in heaven, but we're not both going to be there? Only one of us is going to be there, because we have diametrically opposite beliefs." When you say that to them, they say, "Oh, no, no, you are separated brethren. John Paul made it clear in Vatican 2 that you who are not Catholics are separated brethren. But unfortunately, they don't understand that one of the things Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI said at Vatican 2 was that everything that the Council of Trent ordained is held by the Catholic Church today. The Council of Trent was the council to try to undo the Protestant Reformation. It began in 1545, and it went for 18 years. In it, they declared piece-by-piece what Catholicism believed. And at the end of it, they said, "Anybody who doesn't believe this is anathema; that is, you are condemned to hell.

The average Catholic doesn't realize today that the Council of Trent, which John Paul, the present pope, declared on one occasion, in speaking to a group of ecclesiastic in the Catholic Church, was that everything that the Council of Trent ordained is held by the Catholic Church to this day. And one of the things the council ordained was that anyone who is not in the Catholic Church will not go to heaven. That's their position to this day. Without the church, you cannot get to heaven, because only the Catholic Church can hand out salvation.

Now, if you believe that the Bible is the authority, as Martin Luther and the other reformers did, then you say, "That's not what the Bible says. And I do not accept human authority as speaking for God. Only the Bible speaks for God. Therefore, if we're going to talk about morals; if we're going to talk about going to heaven; or, if we're going to be talking about rights and wrongs, we go to the laws of God, and not to the laws of man or to the opinions of human beings.

The Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent also declared that anybody who says, "I know I'm going to heaven" is anathema. Anybody who says, "I know that I am headed for eternal life in heaven" is anathema, because all you can know in the Catholic Church is that you're going to purgatory. Anybody who says that purgatory does not exist is anathema. You are condemned to hell. Now, that has pretty well wiped out everybody in this audience. Obviously, if the Bible is the Word of God, and that's the authority, we have a great difference, and you cannot pretend that we're all just separated brethren.

All of the discussions that are going to be swirling around you this political year, ultimately come back to: what has the Bible said? What has God said? As Francis Schaeffer, the late Christian philosopher, said, "He is there, and He is not silent." He has spoken. And the only place he has spoken is not through the hierarchy, and not through priest and preacher, but He has spoken only through the Scriptures, the inerrant Bible.

So, the question is: is the authority of the Bible so absolute that its teachings and its doctrines must be obeyed, and that there are no alternatives to that? You must decide. If it is the Word of God and if it is without error, it will be self-evident that there are no alternatives to what it says. It must be obeyed.

However, the truth of the matter is that most of mankind today, and its religions, do not believe that the Bible alone speaks for God. They have other authorities. Mormons have their Book of Mormon. The Eastern religions have their religions. The Hindus have the Bhagavad Gita. And they all have their additional writings that speak for God.

So, where mankind goes, and where we as a nation go, is going to be decided, first of all, by what the people of America decide toward the Bible – that it is the inherent Word of God. And I can tell you right now that that's a minority position.

**The Four Divine Institutions**

The second issue that faces mankind is their attitude toward the four divine institutions of God. Are the four divine institutions of God enforced over all of humanity? A divine institution is a law which God sets down, which is an arrangement which God sets down for human relationships, for the explicit purpose of keeping mankind from destroying itself while Satan is in charge of the world. The divine institutions, therefore, apply to, and are imposed upon, believer and nonbeliever alike. This is not just for believers. A divine institution is for the whole human race. There are four of them.

**Volition**

The first one is the divine institution of volition – your freedom to choose. This is established for us first in Genesis 2:16-17: "And the Lord God commanded the man saying, 'From any tree at the garden you may eat freely. But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you may not eat, for in the day that you eat from it, you shall surely die." There were two people totally innocent of sin, and they had one rule they had to follow. They had to choose to obey God by not eating of a certain tree. So, the freedom of volition was established, along with the consequences for what you choose. Every person has from God the freedom of choice, with its consequences. You have the right to determine the course of your life within the sovereignty of God. Any human institution, therefore, which denies freedom of volition is opposing God's order for mankind. And that's a bigger sentence than you have grasped. Any human institution in government; in religion; in business; in schools; or, in whatever institution of society that denies freedom of religion, is opposing God's order for mankind.

This is a principle that the founding fathers of the American Republic understood well. This is why they did everything that they possibly could to restrain the role of government in the lives of people, because they knew the government is always a tyrant, unless it is bound with the chains of the Constitution – some restriction. And the result of not maintaining those chains is that government increasingly denies people freedom.

There is now a bill in Congress, promoted by such pristine and magnificent characters as Teddy Kennedy, to have a law that you cannot buy vitamins without a doctor's prescription. It wants to bring all the health food (the enterprise of personal health) under government authority. Why would anybody want to do that? Why would anybody want to come in and say, "We must deny you this freedom to act on your own behalf?" Because when government is a tyrant, the first thing it says, "We know what's good for you; and, you don't."

The divine institution of volition is something that Satan is always attacking. He attacked it immediately in the book of Genesis. We have this recorded in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:1-5: "Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field, which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Indeed, has God told you that you shall not eat from any tree of the garden?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat. But from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said,' You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.''"

The Devil says, "You must be kidding me – that God told you that there's a restriction on your freedom. You can't eat of this tree? You don't know what you're missing. And I want to tell you why He's doing that:" "The serpent said to the woman, 'You surely shall not die. God is lying. For God knows that in the day that you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. The moment you eat this fruit, Eve, you're going to become a goddess.'"

In this clever way, Satan used volition in the wrong way for personal self-destruction. In that moment, when Adam and Eve followed Satan's advice, they lost their freedom. We have all been enslaved to a sin nature ever since, and our volition now is considerably restricted.

This is a divine institution. And how Americans respect it; how Americans live by it; and, how Americans tolerate the imposition of controls over themselves will determine where the future lies. Eventually, when we get to the tribulation, the antichrist will wipe out all volition. It will be a world government; it'll be total control; and, there won't be any questions asked.

**Marriage**

The second divine institution, also established in the Garden of Eden, is the divine institution of marriage. We have this in Genesis 2:24. God created the woman out of the rib of Adam, and brought her to Adam and said, "For this cause, a man shall leave his father and his mother." For what cause? For marriage: "And shall cleave to his wife (shall be glued to his wife), and they shall become one flesh in their sexual relations. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." This is a very precise principle here of marriage. This is designed for the protection, and the perpetuation of the human race. This consists under God's order of a male and female designed by God for one another. The union of a man and woman is formed by their personal commitment to spend their lives together in marriage consummated by their sexual union. This cannot be dissolved once it has been consummated, except for the cause of persistent adultery or desertion. This is a very serious matter. Marriage is a lifelong intimacy of the spirit and of the soul and the body between the husband and wife.

Obviously, Satan also attacks the divine institution of marriage. He attacks it with homosexuality: marriages of male and male; and, of female and female. It is attacked by divorce. It is attacked by sexual infidelity. Satan attacked it early on, we have recorded in Genesis 4:19 by breaking the order of male to female chosen for one another, by bringing females together with demons. He also attacked it by polygamy: Lamech took himself two wives. The name of one was Adah, and the name of the other was Zillah. In Genesis 6:1-4, Satan brings women together with demons: "Now it came about, when men began to multiply in the face of the land, and the daughters were born to them and the sons of God."

This is a term for spirit, angelic beings. "The sons of God" is not a term for human beings, but angelic beings: "Saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose. Then the Lord said, 'My Spirit shall not strive with men forever, because he is also flesh. Nevertheless, his days shall be 120. And Nephilim (which is a word for giants) were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came into the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old – men of renown. These mighty men of old (men of renown) were immortalized in Greek and Roman mythology, where the gods intermarried with human women, and bore these super creatures. Well, they once did roam this earth (these half-breeds – half-demon and half human), and they were all wiped out in the flood. And the angels guilty of that were incarcerated in the section of Hades called Tartarus so that they cannot do that again.

This was Satan's attempt to break down the family. I need not remind you that the family is the thing that has broken down, and that it is under attack today, and in very subtle ways. Two people get married. The woman says, "I must maintain my freedom. You're John Brown; and, I'm going to Joan Green. I'm not taking your name 'Brown.' I'm going to stay 'Green.'" And there are women who are very proud of that, because they have demonstrated that they have arrived at some kind of a superior position.

What they are saying is, "I don't like the order of marriage. I don't like God's arrangement." The grossest kinds of human relationships are now being presented as marriage, and the government is called is being called upon to legitimize these things. Politicians have a very hard time understanding that the laws of man are not supreme. They are not the supreme law of the land. The laws of God are the supreme laws of the land, and the laws of man must be compatible with the laws of God. But it's very hard for people in a political campaign to say, "This is what the Bible says." They can't do that. They're scared stiff, because Americans don't trust the Bible. So, they have to talk about traditional values and codewords like that. But if it's traditional values, they may be traditionally wrong. I know a lot of traditions that native people have that are anything but right. The divine institution of marriage is going to determine where this nation goes.

**Family**

The third divine institution, closely related to it is the divine institution of the family. Genesis 1:28: "And God blessed them (Adam and Eve), and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" By the way, you animal right freaks, please notice that verse, will you? Animals don't have any rights. Only man has rights over animals. Man is not to be cruel to anybody or anything, but animals have no rights. They are for man's benefit; for man's use; and, for his blessing as He chooses to use them. But we won't get into that now.

The divine institution of the family, however, is clearly enunciated here. This is the basic building block of a civilized society, and it has been ordained by God. And again, I must stress to you that these are not things that people have come upon and agreed upon. The freedom of your will comes from God; the establishment of marriage comes from God; and, the structure of the family comes from God. It has established lines of authority and responsibilities within the home. Those lines of authority go from the father; to the mother; and, to children. Parents are responsible, under the divine institution of the family, to care for and to train their children into morally responsible adults.

We have one person on the political scene now who believes that children, as they grow older, should have the right to pursue interests whether their parents desire it or not. Therefore, this person wants to have a law passed in this country such that children can bring their parents under legal action, if at a certain stage their parents will not allow them to do something that they believe they should be able to do, and that they want to do. If you think that's crazy, you better think again, because in the highest echelons of this political campaign, that is an issue – the issue of the law of children and the rights of children over their parents.

However, God has said, "I have established millions and millions of judges who decide when my child is old enough to do something. I'll decide when he can run the lawnmower." I have found that when your child wants to run the lawn mower and is eager to run it, he's not ready to do it. But when he doesn't want to do it anymore, that's when he's ready. Now he's responsible; now he can carry it; and, now he can handle it. That's one of the things you may notice, as I have observed. But parents decide when I'm going to let you do something. Parents decide when I'm going to let you step up one more step in carrying responsibility, because what am I doing? I'm trying to untie you from myself piece-by-piece, until you're a morally responsible adult, and you make it on your own. Yes, some say that this is crazy, but it is not so crazy. There is the desire to undermine the family unit in American society. That's what this is all about.

Husbands are to love their wives, and they’re to earn the livelihood. ... God told Adam to live by the sweat of his own brow. And what is so terrible as to have a home with small children, and a wife who's off there sweating it out in employment? I sit and I look at small children, with my recent visit with my grandchildren, and now from an older perspective, I see more and more of the wisdom of God, and the thrill, and the privilege of spending all day long with your small children, moving them along; influencing them; guiding them; and, having them associate with you, and then having those eyes look up at you in trusting confidence for your leadership. And everything you say is a word from God to them. They believe you. Are you ready to take that child, in his preschool days, and hand him off to somebody else?

The institution of the family says, "That's a violation, and you should not do that." Husbands are to love their wives and earn the livelihood. The wife is to reverence her husband and to care for the home. The children are to honor their parents. That's a system that works. That's a divine arrangement, and you can't change it. Satan, of course, seeks to destroy the biblical family, needless to say, as a family social unit. He does this with alternative family structures, such as we read in Genesis 6, with the new structure of a family build with demons and the human women.

**Nationalism**

The fourth divine institution, which is going to determine the place that humanity goes now is the one of nationalism. This one was established in Genesis 9:5-6. The great flood has now wiped out the half-breed demon-human beings. Eight people are all that are left who believe God, after 120 years of preaching. Now, the ark rests upon Ararat, and the earth is dried up. It's in shambles, and a new civilization must be built. God says, "I'm going to change things into a new dispensational order, because now I'm going to establish human beings who, by a properly constituted procedure, will become judges, and will make decisions, and will apply punishments for those who break the laws of man and the laws of God.

So, He established the divine institution of nationalism with human government. Civil authority was established with Noah. Genesis 9:5-6: "And surely I will require your lifeblood. From every beast I will require it, and from every man. From every man's brother, I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man, his blood shall be shed, for the image of God, He made man." For you to fully understand that new regulation, you must remember the previous description before the flood of what mankind had come to. God said, "I looked down upon this world and these human beings that I created, and there is nothing but violence. Every thought is a thought of evil. Every thought he has in his mind is how to do something wrong, and violence and death and murder are widespread.

So, God says, "We're going to bring that into line. And anybody who takes another person's life willfully, that person will be executed. That will be just punishment, and it will keep him from doing it again. The role of government then was very clearly to maintain order in a nation in order to give all of its citizens equal opportunity to exercise their unequal abilities. That's what government is all about: nothing more; and, nothing less. Butt-out of the lives of people, and stay out of their personal freedom. Stand there as the policemen (internally), with civil authorities and judges; and, (externally) with a military force exercise judgment upon those who threaten the peace and stability of the nation. It is the purpose of nationalism that nations operate as entities with constituted lines of civil authority.

These legally constituted civil authorities are given by God the duty to punish lawbreakers from capital punishment for murder on down to lesser penalties for lesser violations. Citizens themselves are to appoint their civil authorities – not a king born supposedly by the divine right from God. Citizens appoint their civil authorities, and they operate on an economic system of free enterprise capitalism. Needless to say, this kind of maximum freedom for people is something that Satan hates. So, Satan seeks to undermine nationalism and civil government with the concept of internationalism – with a world government. He did this early on.

We had the record of this in Genesis 11:1-9, where we have related for us the ambition of men to have a world government; to stay together; and, not to break up into national entities: "Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. And it came about, as they journeyed East, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and settled there (Iraq, Babylon, and the Tigris Euphrates Valley). And they said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.' And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar." I must remind you that this civilization was at a high technical development. They were not a bunch of cavemen running around with spears and clubs. That's a totally false picture. These people could do things that we only in modern times have learned to do technically – like building pyramids. I'm not sure that we know how to do that yet.

"And they said, 'Come, let us build for ourselves a city and a tower whose top will reach into the heavens. And let us make for ourselves a name, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth into individual nations." They said, "We're not going to do that. We don't care what God says."

"And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built." That's an anthropomorphism. God doesn't have to come down to look to see what's going on. He, in His omniscience, knows that. But the Bible talks like this so that we can grasp it in our human ways of thinking.

Verse 6: "And the Lord said, 'Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them." With internationalism, they will be able to squelch every access to the Word of God. They'll be able to stifle every avenue toward God, because there will be a super control that will restrain everything, as was demonstrated in modern times with communism.

"Let us go down." Oh, dear, there's that word for Trinity again: Father; Son; and, Holy Spirit. ... "'Let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.' So, the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth, and they stopped building the city. Therefore, its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. And from there, the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth." People never learn. The divine institutions are going to be frustrated by some rinky-tink human beings. These four institutions are going to be executed as per God's purpose. Volition will not be denied. Marriage will not be changed. The family unit will not be fractured. And nationalism will not be overridden, except in the total destruction of all of society. And you can see that these four divine institutions are what are under attack today. Everything you're going to hear in the political campaign in the weeks to follow has to do with these two issues: Is the Bible really God, and is it absolute and what it says? And are the four divine institutions applicable and in place over all mankind?

In time, as people demonstrate their unwillingness to accept the Word of God, the Bible, and to refuse to subject themselves to these four divine institutions, the results will be what we read about in Revelation 14:14-20. This is the climax at the end of the tribulation, and the end result will be, at the final moment, the great battles of the campaign of Armageddon. In Revelation 14-16, which we have looked at, we have the Lord Jesus Christ portrayed as a farmer harvesting His crops. The grain that He is harvesting is rotted and dried up, so it is reaped for destruction, thus symbolizing the horrendous sin of tribulation humanity destined for destruction in the lake of fire. The unbelievers of the tribulation are simply rotten with evil, and they are lacking eternal life. They're dead. Therefore, they're going to be cut down and destroyed in hell. Jesus Christ Himself holds a sharp cycle of divine judgment in this analogy, and the word "sharp" indicates that this judgment is severe.

In verse 17-20, we have an angel portrayed as a reaper in a vineyard, gathering grapes for the wine press. This refers to the same tribulation judgment of God as portrayed by the farmer analogy in verse 14-16. There, Jesus Christ is the reaper. In verses 17-20, an angel, as an agent of Jesus Christ, is the gatherer. The arrogance of the New Age followers of the antichrist will end in being crushed to death in the winepress of God.

**Another Angel**

Verse 17: "And another angel." The word "another" is the Greek word "allos," which means "another of the same kind." What's it referring to? Well, we've had, thus far, a number of angels (four to be exact) in this chapter. These are the angels of God. These are elect angels. These are angels who have remained loyal to God, and they're ministering in God's name. This is angel number five here in Revelation 14. He is the same kind as the previous four of the loyal-to-God type. God will use his angels, with their great superhuman powers, to carry out His judgment of death on the tribulation rebels.

"And another angel came out of the temple." This angel arrives out of the temple. This word for "temple" is the Greek word "naos." That tells us that he's talking about not coming out just from the vicinity of the temple, which was a large enclosure, and had a wall around it, and had various courts, but that he came out of the temple proper itself – out of the holy place, and out of the holy of holies. So, this angel is coming right from God. He comes very specifically, we're told, from the temple: "Which is in heaven." This refers to the third heaven, which constitutes God's heavenly temple. It is the place of God's presence. This angel comes from within this temple in heaven as an agent of Jesus Christ. The heavenly temple was represented on earth, of course, first by the tabernacle that the Jews had in the wilderness, and later by the temple that Solomon built. And everything on that temple that was on earth reflects, in some way, qualities of the temple in heaven.

We have this pointed out in Hebrews 9:23-25: "Therefore, it was necessary for the copy of the things in the heavens (that is, the earthly temple, copied after the heavenly temple) to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these." On the earth, they would go through ceremonies of purification: the sprinkling of blood; the burning of incense; and, the sprinkling of water. But in heaven, it took something more. It took the sacrifice of Christ to meet the demands of the heavenly temple.

Verse 24: "For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of this true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." So, the temple in heaven is the place where God is. It's His throne room.

Verse 25: "Nor was it that He should separate Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year-by-year, with blood not his own." The heavenly temple required only one sacrifice – the sacrifice of Christ, which was once for all. Jesus Christ is there ministering as our high priests now, and, unlike the priests on earth, while the earthly temple was patterned after the heavenly temple, its rituals reflected things about the person and the character of Christ, and the mission of Christ. All that had to be repeated on this earth, because it was ceremonial. But the heavenly temple was complete, once-for-all, with the sacrifice of Christ.

Here again, I must point out to you that the Roman Catholic Church sends people to hell by the millions. Remember that there are 800 million Catholics in the world now. Their church tells them that the only way you get to heaven is through the sacraments. One of the sacraments that you must have is the sacrament of the Mass, where: "You must eat that bread that we turn into the body of Christ. You must drink that wine which we turn into the blood of Christ. Without that, you cannot go to heaven." So, every time a Catholic goes to a church service, he goes there to have Christ sacrificed before him again. I don't care where you go, in Europe or in this country, it's all the same. I stood in churches in Europe, and I watch the priest come to that high point where he takes that chalice, and he raises it up on high, and in that moment, supposedly, that wine transforms itself into the blood of Christ. He holds that bread up, and it, supposedly, transforms itself into the body of Christ. And I look at the faces of these people, and they sit there with their eyes open, and are awed. And I don't care whether it's some little rinky-tink little small-time church in Slovakia someplace, or the great Notre Dame Cathedral on Sunday morning in Paris, France – the effect is the same. This is awesome superstition.

Is it any wonder that Martin Luther finally realized: "Something is wrong here?" He made the mistake of reading the Bible and believing it. It is no small thing to realize that Jesus spoke the truth – that the gate into eternal life is small, and the way is narrow, and few there be that find it. 800 million Catholics alone will not find it. But can you imagine the outrage if you told your relatives that, and if you told your friends that? How could so many people be wrong? Well, they're wrong because they have not judged themselves by the Word of God, and that's what's wrong with our society.

**A Sharp Sickle**

So, this angel in heaven comes out of the inner temple itself, where Jesus Christ is seated as the Christian's High Priest and intercessor, and where He is directing His angels. And, we read that this angel comes out of the temple, obviously dispatched – on a mission. And in his hand, he has again what we have seen in the hand of Christ previously – a sharp sickle. This is a tool for harvesting. This angel himself has one now, as Christ had in the previous verses. The sharpness, again, indicates the severity of God's judgment when it is executed. When God finally judges, there is not going to be any namby-pamby "Let me think it over. I'm going to excuse you." The justice of God will be sharp, and the cut will be clean.

At this point, the patient waiting of the grace of God is at an end. And every person in the tribulation must have accepted Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, or he will be cut down to the lake of fire.

So, John is standing there on the field of Megiddo in his vision, and he is seeing the armies of the antichrist being gathered. Now he sees this angel coming out with this sharp sickle in his hand, coming out from the very presence of God.

**Yet Another Angel**

In verse 18, we have: "Another angel." Here is angel number six. Again, the word "another" means "of the same kind." He is another angel loyal to God. The sixth angel comes, and this angel has power over fire. The word "power" is the Greek word "exousia." "Exousia" means authority. This angel has authority over fire, and he comes out of a place where this fire is; namely, from the altar. This angel comes out of the temple from the presence of fire.

**Fire**

Well, as we look back upon the arrangement in the temple, and earlier in the tabernacle, there were two places where there was fire. Perhaps this refers to both, or to one or the other. But as you know, fire may refer to the altar of sacrifice – that brazen altar upon which animals were sacrificed. This altar of fire speaks of the judgment of God against sin and sinners. Fire in the Bible is a symbol of divine judgment.

This is illustrated in Luke 9:54: "And when His disciples (James and John) saw this, they said, Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" Here they were going to exercise their judgment against certain people that were irritating them, and they were calling down for God's fire from heaven as divine judgment.

2 Thessalonians 1:7 indicates the same thing – that fire is a symbol for God's judgment. The angel of fire here may be from the altar of sacrifice. He comes to execute God's wrath upon those who have rejected Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who was sacrificed on the cross. The basis of this angel's action is the holiness of God.

This is illustrated by the altar of sacrifice, from whence the heavenly martyrs called for vengeance earlier in Revelation 6:9-10. Here are the martyrs from the tribulation: "And when He broke the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain." Here under the altar of sacrifice were the souls of those who had been slain: "Because of the Word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained. They cried out with a loud voice saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, will you refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

Is this a legitimate prayer? Is this a legitimate request – to ask God to bring His judgment and vengeance upon those who are abusing you as a believer? You betcha it is. Anybody who abuses you as a Christian; anybody who attacks you as a Christian; or, anybody who would seek to do ill to you as a Christian, always remember that behind him is the spirit of a demon, and always commit that person to God. Turn to God and say, "Father, I want You to deal with this person. I want You to come into this life, and I want You to exercise vengeance." We do that because the doctrine principle says, "'Vengeance is mine,' says the Lord. 'I will repay.'" God is in the business of repaying the consequences of your volition. What you choose is what you get.

Here, this angel has come on that very mission, on the basis of the holiness of God, to take vengeance upon tribulation humanity from the antichrist on down, who sent all these believers to their deaths because of what? Because of the testimony which they had maintained for Jesus Christ. And they are crying out, "Lord, how long, how long before you exercise judgment?" Well, they're told, "Just a little. Just be patient." And what we are reading now in Revelation 14 is the answer to that prayer.

The fire may also refer to another altar – the altar which was in the holy place. It was called the altar of incense, or the golden altar. This is where they burned incense before God. Incense in the Bible, in connection with this altar, symbolized the prayers of believers rising up to God. Here we're having a prayer for God's justice and vengeance to be exercised toward the antichrist and his followers.

In Revelation 8:3-5, we have this connection made: "And another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer, and much incense was given to him." This angel is standing before the altar of incense in the holy place. He's holding a censer, which is a shovel, and on it, he has coals. Where did the coals come from? The coals came from outside, off the altar of sacrifice. You cannot approach God except on the basis of Christ. Now, with the coals having established justification symbolically, he comes in, and he brings those coals into the altar of incense, that he might: "Add to the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne." So, he places these coals, and places upon them incense which represents the prayers of believers: "And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God, out of the angel's hands." So, the incense burns, and creates a smoke, and creates an odor, and wafts upward toward God, as prayers going to God.

Why can you pray to God? Because you're a Christian. Because you're in a family God, you have a right to approach the throne of grace. You only short-circuit that when you are out of fellowship with God, when you've kept out of touch with the people of God, and out of the Word of God. So, you're off there in goony-land on your own, and God is no longer dealing with you. And until you correct that by your confession, the only thing your prayers are going to go is do is that all the smoke is going to float to the. A person who is in temporal fellowship – his prayers go upward.

Verse 5 says, "And the angel took the sensor and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there followed peals of thunder, and sounds and flashes of lightning, and an earthquake." So, here you have demonstrated the fact that the prayers of God's people are heard. So, maybe this angel comes from fire which is on the altar of incense, creating this smoke representing the prayers of God, rising to God, and ignited by the justifying coals from the altar of sacrifice, which is the only way you can approach God. The prayers of God's saints here are then thrown to the earth, and this is what we're reading about in Revelation 14:18.

These people who are crying out for vengeance on what had happened to them – their prayers are now taken off the altar, and the angel throws them upon the earth as God's judgment. And things really begin to happen. This angel with the fire, whether it comes from the altar of sacrifice, or from the altar of incense, is acting on the basis of God's holiness.

Now, at this point, angel number six speaks to angel number five, and commands him to do something which turns loose one of the most horrendous scenes that will be on the face of the earth. I must remind you that, just as what took place on the hill of Calvary was in time and space history, so this, which we shall look at next time, and the horrendous results that will come upon mankind, is going to be in time and space history. This is so staggering. We will go back to the book of Joel next time, and look at it in detail, which is the background of the rest of this verse 18. Mankind will shake its head and will laugh in your face, and say, "That's never going to happen." This is beyond anything that the human mind could comprehend – that such carnage; such devastation; and, such slaughter could come upon this earth, and mankind could not control it.

God is on His throne, and He is in charge. He is in control. Next time, we will see, with strong impact, what happens when a society says, "The Bible does not speak for God, and I don't have to subject myself to the four divine institutions." God says, "OK. Then here is the result." Join us next time.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1992

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