



## Parish of Finchampstead and California

# THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

## 9 - 14 November 2020

### INTRODUCTION

The NT readings for Morning Prayer continue their progress through Revelation; each day's thought is based mainly on the parts of the readings in bold type. There is a general note on Revelation after Saturday's Thought.

### MONDAY - Revelation 5:1-14

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw in the right hand of the one seated on the throne a scroll written on the inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals; <sup>2</sup> and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?' <sup>3</sup> And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it. <sup>4</sup> And I began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. <sup>5</sup> Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.'

<sup>6</sup> Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. <sup>7</sup> He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one who was seated on the throne. <sup>8</sup> When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. <sup>9</sup> They sing a new song: '**You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; <sup>10</sup> you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth.**'

<sup>11</sup> Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, <sup>12</sup> singing with full voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!'

<sup>13</sup> Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, 'To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!' <sup>14</sup> And the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' And the elders fell down and worshipped.

### ***Thought for the day***

*This passage continues Chapter 4's vision set in heaven where the defining characteristic is the continuous praise of God. But we are also introduced to the Lamb (v6), the pictorial representation of Jesus, the one who is worthy to share God's rule because of his self-sacrifice (v9). His example is an encouragement to Christians under persecution, whose suffering will not go unrewarded (v10). Please pray today for our brothers and sisters who are still persecuted in so many countries.*

### TUESDAY - Revelation 6:1-17

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw the Lamb open one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures call out, as with a voice of thunder, 'Come!' <sup>2</sup> **I looked, and there was a white horse! Its rider had a bow; a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering and to conquer.**

<sup>3</sup> When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature call out, 'Come!' <sup>4</sup> **And out came another horse, bright red; its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth,** so that people would slaughter one another; and he was given a great sword.

<sup>5</sup> When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature call out, 'Come!' I looked, **and there was a black horse. Its rider held a pair of scales in his hand,** <sup>6</sup> and I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, 'A quart of wheat for a day's pay, and three quarts of barley for a day's pay, but do not damage the olive oil and the wine.'

<sup>7</sup> When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature call out, 'Come!' <sup>8</sup> I looked and **there was a pale green horse. Its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed with him;** they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, famine, and pestilence, and by the wild animals of the earth.

<sup>9</sup> When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given; <sup>10</sup> they cried out with a loud voice, 'Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?' <sup>11</sup> They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number would be complete both of their fellow-servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed.

<sup>12</sup> When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and there came a great earthquake; the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, <sup>13</sup> and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree drops its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. <sup>14</sup> The sky vanished like a scroll rolling itself up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. <sup>15</sup> Then the kings of the earth and the magnates and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, <sup>16</sup> calling to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; <sup>17</sup> for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'

## ***Thought for the day***

*As we now move away from scenes of instruction, encouragement and worship we need to be prepared for much more difficult and stark imagery. Remember throughout that these are pictorial, poetical images, not literal ones. The four horsemen of the apocalypse seem to be based on the horsemen and chariots of Zechariah (see 1:8-11; 6:1-7), reimagined for the world of the Roman empire in which Christians were killed for their faith (v10). Such injustice is to be righted by the justice of God brought to the powerful of this world (v15). Here death (v8) is the servant of God. Just as Jesus was vindicated by the resurrection, so too will his martyred followers be.*

## **WEDNESDAY - Revelation 7:1-4;9-17**

<sup>1</sup> After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth so that no wind could blow on earth or sea or against any tree. <sup>2</sup> I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to damage earth and sea, <sup>3</sup> saying, 'Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads.'

<sup>9</sup> After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup> They cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!'

<sup>11</sup> And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, <sup>12</sup> singing, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever. Amen.'

<sup>13</sup> Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?' <sup>14</sup> I said to him, 'Sir, you are the one that knows.' Then he said to me, 'These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup> For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. <sup>16</sup> **They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat;** <sup>17</sup> **for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'**

## ***Thought for the day***

*The faithful are to be saved from destruction (v3); their endurance keeps them in the company of those who have gone before them, whose praise of God never ends (v9-15). Their eternal future in the presence of God is assured (v16), with Jesus as their shepherd (v17) and God himself as their compassionate Father (v18). It's no longer fashionable to learn scripture passages by heart - if it were, verses 16-18 would be well worth memorising.*

## **THURSDAY - Revelation 8:1-13**

<sup>1</sup> When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. **<sup>3</sup> Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne.** <sup>4</sup> And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. <sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets made ready to blow them. <sup>7</sup> The first angel blew his trumpet, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were hurled to 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. <sup>8</sup> The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. <sup>11</sup> The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many died from the water, because it was made bitter. <sup>12</sup> The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light was darkened; a third of the day was kept from shining, and likewise the night.

<sup>13</sup> Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew in mid-heaven, 'Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow.'

## ***Thought for the day***

*We are reminded that worship is always accompanied by prayer (prayer of all sorts not simply asking for things we need) and these prayers are fragrant like incense to God (v3-4). The power of prayer is suggested by the way in which the censer, thrown on the earth, brings forth thunder and earthquake, traditional manifestations of God (v5). God's power is further displayed in plague-like events (remember the Egyptian plagues in Exodus 7-11). Once again the glory awaiting the saints is contrasted with the impending judgement on the ungodly. How do you react to this contrast?*

## **FRIDAY - Revelation 9:1-12**

<sup>1</sup> And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit; <sup>2</sup> he opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. <sup>3</sup> Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given authority like the authority of scorpions of the earth. <sup>4</sup> They were told not to damage the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> They were allowed to torture them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torture was like the torture of a scorpion when it stings someone. <sup>6</sup> And in those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will flee from them.

<sup>7</sup> In appearance the locusts were like horses equipped for battle. On their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, <sup>8</sup> their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; <sup>9</sup> they had scales like iron breastplates, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. <sup>10</sup> They have tails like scorpions, with stings, and in their tails is their power to harm people for five months. **<sup>11</sup> They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.** <sup>12</sup> The first woe has passed. There are still two woes to come.

## ***Thought for the day***

*The fifth plague is even more ferocious than the others, with hellish furies released onto the earth. We are to assume, perhaps, that the seeds of this tumult have been born out of the evil already evident in the earth, but nurtured and hideously refined in the underworld. In Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress Apollyon* (v11) is one of Christian's strongest and most devious assailants. He knows Christian's failings and hopes to trick him into denying Jesus, but Christian has recognised his shortcomings and repented of them. His power lies in the fact that he has been forgiven and he prevails.*

## **SATURDAY - Revelation 9:13-21**

<sup>13</sup> Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, <sup>14</sup> saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.' <sup>15</sup> So the four angels were released, who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, to kill a third of humankind. <sup>16</sup> The number of the troops of cavalry was two hundred million; I heard their number. <sup>17</sup> And this was how I saw the horses in my vision: the riders wore breastplates the colour of fire and of sapphire and of sulphur; the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulphur came out of their mouths. <sup>18</sup> By these three plagues a third of humankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulphur coming out of their mouths. <sup>19</sup> For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they inflict harm.

**<sup>20</sup> The rest of humankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands or give up worshipping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk.** <sup>21</sup> And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their fornication or their thefts.

## ***Thought for the day***

*And here at last we have an explanation of why so many people have been so harshly treated. As well as being complicit in the persecution of the saints, they have refused to turn away from their worship of false idols (v20), as we know from the OT the sin against God's holiness which he most hated. Unlike Christian (see yesterday's Thought) they refuse to repent (v21) and thereby turn towards God. It's perhaps a good time to consider the extent to which we truly repent of the things that set us apart from God, or whether we pay only lip-service to our need for repentance, thinking that we're not that bad really.*

## **General comment on Revelation**

Many people find this book one of the most difficult to understand in the NT. Partly this is because it is in a genre of its own (though sharing some characteristics with parts of the OT book of Daniel), described as *Apocalyptic* which means 'relating to the end times'. It is a work of inspired imagination which, with its depictions of the ultimate victory of good over evil in the world and its visions of heaven, was written as an encouragement to Christian churches at a time of persecution. In spite of many attempts to conform subsequent human history to its stylised timescales, it is not a predictive prophecy of that literal kind. For anyone who might be interested in an overview of Revelation, I have a handout to a lecture which I could send you (j7r7e7@gmail.com).