

# God's Unusual Methods Of Speaking To Us

By Tom Stephens

## In God's Earthly Sanctuary

“Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. And when the time for the burning of the incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John.” (Luke 1:8-13).

The Jewish Priest was a minister of God who worked at the temple managing its upkeep, teaching the people the Scriptures, and directing the worship services. At this time there were about twenty thousand priests throughout the country—far too many to minister in the temple at one time. Therefore the priests were divided into twenty-four separate groups of about 1,000 each, according to David's instructions in 1 Chronicles 24:3-19. Zechariah was a member of the order of Abijah. Each division served in the Jerusalem temple twice each year for one week.

Zechariah's division of priests was serving in the temple during this particular week (see Luke 1:5). Each morning, one of the priests would enter the Holy Place in the temple (the sanctuary) to *offer incense*. Incense was burned in the temple twice daily. Lots were cast to decide who would enter the sacred room, and one day during that week, Zechariah was chosen by lot. Offering the incense before the Lord was considered a great privilege. A priest was only allowed to do so once in his lifetime. It was not by chance that Zechariah was on duty and that day he was chosen to enter the Holy Place. God was guiding the events of history to prepare the way for Jesus to come to earth.

The other priests and people would wait outside for the chosen priest to offer the incense and pray on behalf of the nation. When the people would see the smoke from the burning incense, they would pray. The smoke drifting heavenward symbolized their prayers ascending to God's throne. These *assembled worshipers* were the faithful in Israel who were waiting and praying for deliverance. Faithful believers had been doing this since their captivity in Babylon six centuries before. This time their prayers received a very special answer.

As Zechariah discharged his duty in the Holy Place, an angel of the Lord *appeared to him*. The *right* side indicates a position of favor or blessing, perhaps indicating that the message was good, not foreboding. The exact location where the angel stood is a detail passed along by Zechariah himself and kept intact by writers (Luke 1:1-3). Only two angels are mentioned by name in Scripture—Michael and Gabriel—but many angels act as God's messengers. Here, Gabriel (1:19) delivered a special message to Zechariah. This was not a dream or a vision; the angel was a royal herald of God. The angel appeared in visible form and spoke audible words to the priest.

Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, had for many years petitioned God for a child. According to verse 7, “. . . Elizabeth was barren and they both were now well stricken in years.” Physically, Elizabeth was no longer able to bear children and likely the couple had given up on that

particular prayer. So imagine Zechariah's surprise when the angel told him God was now going to answer his prayer. God always hears our prayers and He never forgets them. God's timing is not our timing and God is not limited by seemingly impossible circumstances. Sometimes He's just waiting for the right time. In this case, a time when everyone would realize this child would not be your normal child. The couple realized this and raised him as a "Nazarite" denoting him as dedicated especially to God. Indeed, he would later be identified as the forerunner of the Messiah.

### **In God's Heavenly Sanctuary**

And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets. And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake. And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound. The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up. (Revelation 8:1-7)

The Great Tribulation is a time of divine judgment on an ungodly world that has rejected Jesus Christ, but it is also a time of satanic death and persecution against those who receive Christ and His Word during the tribulation (12:12). During this period, all who rejects Christ will suffer judgment as objects of the wrath of Almighty God (Rev. 14:10, 19; 15:1,7; 16:1,19; and 19:15). So intense is the conflict between righteousness and evil that it can only be called "The Great Tribulation."

**The Seventh Seal**—The breaking of the seventh seal initiates the seven trumpets of judgment. In other words the trumpet judgments are the seventh seal judgment. These judgments are partial judgments (chapter 8-9; 11:15-19), while the judgments of the seven bowls (chapter 16) are more severe. The seventh trumpet judgment will announce the seven bowls of judgment (16:1-21), and the silence in heaven is likely due to the horror of the coming judgments against sin.

The mentioning of the prayers of the saints (5:8; 8:3-4) indicates the intercessory prayers of the saints, not only by those in the Great Tribulation period, but also by every saint who ever lived on earth! Did you ever want to just give up? Sometimes, we believe God has fully forgotten us. We wonder if He even knows we exist, so prayer isn't a major part of our lives here on earth. We talk about the times we live in and the corruptions all around. We notice when our loved ones are away from the Lord; and yes, we sometimes pray for them in a half note manner. How does this picture look from your own point of view?

Imagine this with me. Jesus has every single prayer you ever prayed from the heart in His special place in heaven. He received every prayer from His children all through the ages past and present; and even those prayers of the Tribulation Saints. He hears our prayers, even when we do not believe they have been received. When we cry out for crimes against us, He is there for us.

Our prayers are extremely important to the Lord Jesus Christ. He sees every heartfelt prayer from this earth today, and He has not forgotten us. The prayers of the saints are extremely important in the destruction of evil and the establishment of righteousness on earth today, and especially during The Great Tribulation (5:8, 9).

Yet, John mentioned the prayers of *all* the saints, ever. So, not only does He keep our prayers in His heart now; but He will continue to keep them close to His heart tomorrow and through the time of Tribulation for the righteousness of all saints, even to the end of this seven year period.

We should also keep in mind the fact that all our prayers are joined by the intercession of all the saints in heaven—as this paper is being written (6:9-11)! We must always be aware that, though the Lord may leave some prayers unanswered, He does not cast them aside, but keeps them for the proper time of fulfillment.

**Hail, Fire, and Blood**—The first four trumpet judgments begin. *First*, one-third of the earth's vegetation is destroyed by fire and hail; one-third of the sea and rivers is polluted; the heavens, sun and moon are darkened for a third part of both day and night (vss. 7-13). *Second*, The judgments affect people also, for many are killed (vs.11). The judgment is limited to one-third of the world, because the purpose is partly to warn people and bring them to repentance. . .

In closing, God's Word does not lie. We can look back to the days when John was prophesied; how that, in the days of Herod, King of Judea, Zacharias, a priest of the course of Abia, the birth of John the Baptist, who was to bring into the world, Jesus the only begotten Son of God.

The important thing given in the book of Luke is this: "The angel of the Lord appeared to him (Zachariah), standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zachariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him, But the angel said to him, "*Do not be afraid, Zachariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John.*"

Our Lord God was introducing to the world the coming of the Christ Who came to earth to seek and to save *all* mankind. John was the forerunner; but Christ Jesus was the only begotten Son of God, who was to bring freedom to mankind on earth. Because Zacharias and Elizabeth prayed and believed, God answered by sending His Son to seek and to save those that were lost.

We can also be assured of the fact that He, Jesus Christ, is storing all prayers of the saints; awaiting the day He will take every prayer you and I have ever prayed in earnest, and have His angels pour all the prayers into the censer. Do you suppose the prayers of all the saints—as used in the heavenly censer—will be our participation in the death of all evil on earth?

*“. . . And I saw the seven angels which stood before God, and to them were given the seven trumpets. And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thundering, and lightnings, and an earthquake.”* (Revelation 8:2-5).

Today, you and I can be assured of this one thing. As we approach the Christmas season, we can know that Jesus Christ is the author and the finisher of our faith. He is the One Who brought the freedom of His Spirit into this corrupted earth simply because of a love that goes beyond our imagination. He cherishes our prayers – the ones He answers, “yes”; the ones He answers “no” and the ones He says, “wait.”

(For 2 other significant revelations that occurred at the temple, see 1 Samuel 3:4-14; and Isaiah 6:1-13).

***Church of Jesus Christ, let us be diligent in our prayers till the end.***

It is my personal prayer for God’s richest blessings to be upon all who read and take this teaching to heart. I cannot imagine the horrors from the enemies pit on any who have rejected Jesus Christ, while such rich opportunities lure them to the joy and peace in which comes only from Christ Jesus. If you are one of those who have not yet committed to Christ, now is the perfect time.

Call upon Him with all your heart, and He will hear you.

Jesus said: *“But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.”* (John 6:36-38)

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