

9. The Opening of the Seventh Seal and Seven Angels with Seven Trumpets (Revelation 8)

8:1 When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. 2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.

The preceding chapter ended with the great and loud celebration. Against this is set the opening of the seventh and last seal. When he (the Lamb) opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven, indicating a period of readiness for the momentous events to follow. One might say the suspense also increased as all of heaven awaited the final revelation of the Lamb. It is important to remember that what John is about to see has remained a mystery throughout the ages. The rulers of old did not know:

7 No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 However, as it is written:

"No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him" –

10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. 1 Corinthians 2:7-10

Nor did the prophets know, a case eloquently described by Peter:

10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, 11 trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. 12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things. 1 Peter 1:10-12.

As Peter concluded, not even the angels knew what God had prepared.

The silence is deafening, so we say, as the half an hour was passing. After the half an hour, John saw seven angels, described as the seven angels who stand before God. The description makes them unique in their identity. Who exactly are these seven angels? Two angels in the scriptures stand out as archangels. In addition, Jewish literature and tradition identify seven such angels. In Job 1:6, we find angels coming before the Lord: "6 One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD." Jesus identified angels who always see the face of the father in Matthew 18:10: "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven." Gabriel identified himself in Luke 1:19: "19 The angel answered, 'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.'" In *The Apocalypse: Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, Seiss quotes one of the Jewish writers:

"'I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels, which present the prayers of the saints, and which go in and out before the glory of the Holy One.' Whether we take this book as inspired, as the Romanists do, or as not inspired, as the Protestants generally regard it, there is no matter touching this point. The passage referred to (Tob. 12:15)."

Jude names Michael as the archangel in Jude 9: "9 But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'" Revelation 12:7 tells this story: "7 And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back." Both Gabriel and Michael play a role in the prophecies of Daniel (Daniel 8:16, 9:21, 12:13, 12:1-3). Michael is called one of the chief princes, implying more angels in this category.

In this study, we will only say the seven angels who stand before the throne of God are a class unto themselves, participating here in the final judgment of God. They are angels of presence and power, and each had a trumpet.

Another Angel with a Golden Censer

3 Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. 4 The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

In verse 3, another angel appears at the altar with a golden censer. Perhaps the Old Testament shadow of this event was in the atonement rituals of the Hebrews: "46 Then Moses said to Aaron, "Take your censer and put incense in it, along with fire from the altar, and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for them." Numbers 16:46. With the incense here in Revelation were the prayers of the saints. The prayers of the saints were also prevalent when the Lamb took the scroll in Revelation 5:8: "8 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." Two points need to be noted: A great deal happens in heaven when the saints pray. The saints' prayers play a large role in the advent of the judgment.

This angel is a priest angel. When the saints pray, there is mediation of the highest order in heaven. We have already seen in Revelation 5:8 that when the Lamb took the scroll that the four living creatures and twenty-four elders held our prayers in bowls of incense: "8 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." Paul taught in 1 Timothy 2:4-7 that Jesus Christ is our mediator: "5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all men – the testimony given in its proper time." 1 John 2:1, John also affirmed that Jesus Christ speaks for us: "2:1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One." To all this power is added the intercessory power of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8:26-27: "26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."

The saints' prayers play a large role in the advent of the judgment. When the prayers went up before the throne of God, judgment followed. The angel hurls fire from the altar of God to the earth and the power of heaven helps us as peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake. As the revelation moves to the sounding of the trumpets and the final judgment, the saints need not fear for the same power turned to destroy the evil ones, turns to help and protect the victorious saints.

A final note before we listen to the sounding of the trumpets, some say the angel here is the Lamb. They think he is the Christ because the Christ is the mediator between God and man. In addition, it

is true Revelation 10:1 describes a mighty angel in a way only fitting to the Son of God. However, this angel, in reference to the seven angels, is like a priest angel, a description fitting only to the Son of God. This description fits exactly with the teaching in Hebrews:

- For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. 18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Hebrews 2:17-18.
- 4 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Hebrews 4:14.
- 6 And he says in another place, "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." Hebrews 5:6.
- 19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 6:19-20.
- 1 The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, 2 and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man. Hebrews 8:1-2.

The angel's work is the fortifying of the saints' prayers in preparation for the destruction and chaos to follow. In this regard, it fits into the context and purpose of the opening of the seals: whatever comes in heaven or on the earth, those sealed are secure in eternity now and for evermore.

Seven Angels and Seven Trumpets (Revelation 8:6-13)

6 Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them.

The sounding of the trumpets parallels in meaning the opening of the seals. The opening of the seals demonstrates the protection and victory of the saints during the period of their individual lives whenever they might live. The destruction and chaos, the place of the martyrs, the destiny of the unrighteous, the sealing of the servants of God—all of these are real to each one who stands facing the temptations and trials of life or facing the end of this life by death or the sudden return of the Lord.

The sounding of the trumpets extends these tumultuous events across all dispensations and epochs of the struggle of good against evil, light against darkness, righteousness against unrighteousness. They are from before time, from in the beginning when the word was with God and the word was God (John 1:1), from the fall of Satan, from the sin and death of humankind, from the Paradise lost. They extend to the son who conquered sin and rose from the dead, and to the redemption of humankind. The soundings herald events before time, during time and lead right up to, but do not include, the final destruction and the restoration of all things in the Lamb and his bride, the church, in chapters 15 through 22. What happens next is from before the foundations of the world and extends into the ages of the ages. This is not the prophecy of puny oligarchs and transient historical events. This story is the climax of that one told of old: It is of heaven and hell; God Almighty and Satan; Christ and the antichrist; the apostles and prophets and the false prophets; the servants of God and the servants of the dragon; God the Alpha and the Omega and the Accuser.

Traditionally, trumpets are a call to battle. The trumpet sounds themselves are significant in announcing the presence of the Lord whose revelation this is:

16 On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. 17 Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18 Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, 19 and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Exodus 19:16-19

During the generations of humankind, we have all stood at the edge of horror and chaos. The picture painted at the opening of the seven seals repeats here with the sounding of the trumpets in grand and great proportions. In the first representation, the concluding message was the sealing of the servants of God described in chapter 7. In this representation, with the seven trumpets, the concluding message is to those who, facing the horrible plagues of life on this earth, fail to repent. The sounding of the sixth trumpet contains this pronouncement in Revelation 9:20-21:

20 The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood – idols that cannot see or hear or walk. 21 Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

The sin and death in this present world is horrible beyond imagination, and still some miss the point of repentance.

The First Angel Sounded His Trumpet. (Revelation 8:7)

7 The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

The first five soundings of the trumpet represent the absolute devastation unleashed upon the earth and upon humankind at the fall of man. They follow in main the substance of the creation story which adorned the Paradise—the garden of Eden—with splendor and beauty and immortality. The figures themselves show how devastated a place the earth has become since the fall. The imagery is foreshadowed in the scriptures. In Joel 2:30-31, there is the foretelling:

30 I will show wonders in the heavens
and on the earth,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.
31 The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

In Exodus 9:23-26, there is the foreshadowing:

23 When Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, the LORD sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to the ground. So the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt; 24 hail fell and lightning flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation. 25 Throughout Egypt hail struck everything in the fields – both men and animals; it beat down everything growing in the fields and stripped every tree. 26 The only place it did not hail was the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were.

From the beginning, vegetation brought sustenance and beauty to man:

11 Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. 12 The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing

fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening, and there was morning – the third day. Genesis 1:11-13

God gave this gift of sustenance and beauty to man: "29 Then God said, 'I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.'" Genesis 1:29. The gift was both pleasing to the eye and good to eat: "9 And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Genesis 2:9.

But because of the sin of Adam and Eve, God cursed the ground and made it hard to grow and made life correspondingly hard:

"Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat of it
all the days of your life.
18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.
19 By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return." Genesis 3:17-19

Therefore, a third of the earth burned up with the trees and green grass. The destruction of the tidal surges after storms cover the land with salt makes the grass unable to grow. Pestilence remains on the earth until the end. Even in our time of plenty, vast regions and enormous areas cannot grow. The lesson is clear: One would think that those of us who witness and experience this horrible state would repent and turn to the Lord; yet some do not.

The Second Angel Sounded His Trumpet, (Revelation 8:8-9)

8 The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, 9 a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

Once again, that which God created for man fails him in every way after his fall. How different is the destruction following the fall from the glorious plenty of the creation:

20 And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." 21 So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 22 God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." 23 And there was evening, and there was morning – the fifth day. Genesis 1:20-23

In our day, we witness a tsunami, an earthquake, a meteor fall, or an oil spill. Our sustenance departs, and famine reigns. Will man see his plight, sense what is coming, and repent? Many will not repent, according to Revelation 9:20-21.

The Third Angel Sounded His Trumpet (Revelation 8:10:11)

10 The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water – 11 the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter.

At the sounding of the third trumpet, a great star – perhaps a meteor – falls, striking the very springs of water. This is different from the waters of the second trumpet sounding which were habitats for a human food source and seaways for commerce. Here, the star – Wormwood – turns the water bitter and people die from drinking it. The word for wormwood means bitterness and has this meaning in Amos 5:7-10, where it also relates to the stars, Pleiades and Orion, to the water sources of the planet:

You who turn justice into bitterness
and cast righteousness to the ground
8(he who made the Pleiades and Orion,
who turns blackness into dawn
and darkens day into night,
who calls for the waters of the sea
and pours them out over the face of the land –
the LORD is his name –
9 he flashes destruction on the stronghold
and brings the fortified city to ruin),
10 you hate the one who reproves in court
and despise him who tells the truth.

Water, a life-sustaining miracle, is so abundant; yet when withdrawn or poisoned by drought and pollutions or a meteor's crash to earth, brings suffering and pain. Job 5:10 describes the source of water: "10 He bestows rain on the earth; he sends water upon the countryside." Perhaps, this is the very reason that spiritual water takes such a powerful meaning. John wrote in John 4:13-14: "13 Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'" Jesus added: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." John 7:37-38. Revelation concluded in Revelation 22:17: "17 The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. The analogy is clear and true: physical life needs water without poison; spiritual life needs the water of life without the poison of error.

Our very thirst and need for water should bring us face to face, as it were, with the desperation of man dying, and awaken in us the need to repent. Of all the plagues brought upon man by his fall, can any be worse than the need for and the lack of water? A world in the horror of drought and the sickness of polluted water should wake us to repentance.

The Fourth Angel Sounded His Trumpet (Revelation 8:12)

12 The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night.

God's habitat for man included the lights of day and night, described with elegance and beauty by Moses in Genesis 1:14-19:

14 And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, 15 and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. 16 God made two great lights – the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. 17 God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, 18 to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19 And there was evening, and there was morning – the fourth day.

However, with the fall of man, darkness took on the somber and dark cast of evil. So it is that the physical darkness should remind us of the spiritual darkness that finally will become the outer and blackest darkness. This story of man without light unfolds from the fall of man until the end. David poetically describes the inclusion of darkness in the plagues upon the Egyptians in Psalms 105:26-28:

26 He sent Moses his servant,
and Aaron, whom he had chosen.
27 They performed his miraculous signs among them,
his wonders in the land of Ham.
28 He sent darkness and made the land dark

Joel included darkness in his prophecy in Joel 2:31-32: "31 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. 32 And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved." The Lord himself gave light and dark their symbolic meaning: in Matthew 6:22-23: "22 The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" Not only is there this spiritual darkness but there is also a description of the final fate of the evil ones as the outer darkness, both in teaching of Jesus and in Jude. Jesus taught in Matthew 25:30 among other places: "30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Jude describes the end of false teachers in Jude 13: "13 They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever."

We have all experienced the despair of the dark. The electricity goes off in the nighttime. Dark storm clouds close out light even in midday. Huge sandstorms and snowstorms are known to cover the sun, stars, and moon for days. All of these and more should forewarn us of what we are in for if we do not repent.

The first four trumpets have sounded their warnings straight from the human experience created by God for man in the perfection of the garden, and lost to turn, oftentimes, against man after the fall. They bring us to the edge of desolation in the human experience. They should call us to repentance and obedience.

Before the sounding of the last three trumpets, an eagle shows a difference between the first four trumpets sounding and the last three trumpets sounding.

An eagle calls out in a loud voice (Revelation 8:13)

13 As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!"

At the end of the sounding of the fourth trumpet, an eagle flying in midair calls out "Woe!" three times. There are three points of notice.

First, the King James and the New King James versions have *angel* for *eagle*. Eagle is clearly the accurate reading according the other translations and the overwhelming weight of scholarly

opinion. The Law of Moses lists the eagle among the unclean birds. Perhaps the offensiveness of this vulture-like bird to the Jews kept the proper translation out of the older English versions. To translate *eagle*, *angel* misses the point of the figure in this passage.

Second, *woe* is an interjection of denunciation. Jesus used the word 27 times in the Gospels to condemn those not accepting his word. After that, the entire New Testament used the word only twice until Revelation, where the angels used it to pronounce the woes associated with the last three trumpet soundings and to denounce the wicked city of Babylon in Revelation 18. In his teaching, Christ mainly used the word *woe* in denouncing the Pharisees and false teachers (Matthew 23 and Luke 11). The prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, used the word *woe* to denounce the children of Israel for error and various conquerors for their assault against Jehovah.

Third, the entire 13th verse marks a transition from the hardships and misery emanating from those things created by God for man and perverted by the fall to those evil emanations created or allowed to happen for the punishment of man after his fall. Therefore, the first four soundings represented the degeneration of the creation. The last three soundings turn to the horrible happenings following the fall of man that did not exist before the fall: death and Hades, Satan's control of darkness, and the beast and false prophet leading man astray. These were all the results, not of God's creation, but of Satan's success in the fall of man and, perhaps, because of his own fall. All of these brought man to the most horrible circumstances imaginable—circumstances far worse than famine, worse than war, and worse than catastrophic events of nature. Oh yes, they are worse than imaginary wars and future events forecast by many.

Now a bird that feasts on carrion calls out these devastating woes!