

## Chapter 8

**V.1-5 The Seventh Seal** In this chapter we finally get to see the opening of the 7<sup>th</sup> Seal after the interlude of the last chapter. After the opening of the 7<sup>th</sup> seal we will see that there is no delay before the trumpets begin to blow. There is however a significant pause immediately after the 7<sup>th</sup> seal is opened. It is extremely unusual to talk about silence in heaven. We have seen that there are millions and millions of angels and people in heaven along with the elders and the living creatures and they are described as worshiping before the Lord night and day. They are continually playing musical instruments, falling down in worship, and singing unto the Lord. To see in this first verse that there is silence in heaven for about half an hour is staggering indeed. A half hour of silence sitting in the woods by yourself may not seem like a long pause but it is more like being in the middle of a movie or at the orchestra and suddenly in the middle of the action there is complete silence. It is in this type of setting where we see how monumental this half hour of silence really is. As far as the interpretation of this silence maybe it is enough to know how significant the next thing to happen is perceived. Although we don't hear it in the opening of the 7<sup>th</sup> seal we see it communicated in the blowing of the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet and in the pouring of the 7<sup>th</sup> bowl. Because of the likeness in effect of these three events it is appropriate for us to envision that these events are happening simultaneously. The words that come forth at the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet are "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." The words that come forth at the 7<sup>th</sup> bowl are "it is done!" similar to the words of Jesus on the cross. On the cross the work was finished but the movie played on. It is at this point with the 7<sup>th</sup> Seal, Trumpet, and Bowl where we see that the movie is over. There is no more part to play and there are no more scenes to shoot. We will see the credits role and there may be a few post movie credits but this one is a wrap. This world and its story are no longer waiting. Every promise has been fulfilled and every work completed. Jesus said "For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass away from the Law until all is accomplished." It is at this point with the unveiling of the 7<sup>th</sup> seal that we can imagine heaven and earth have passed away and the new earth has come.

The exact order as John describes it is #1 the 7<sup>th</sup> seal is opened, #2 silence in heaven, #3 the seven angels are given seven trumpets, #4 an eighth angel throws an incense censer on the earth. The censer that is thrown on the earth is filled with incense from the golden altar in front of the throne in heaven. This incense is the prayers of the saints that have been collected for the incense altar which burns continually before the Lord. When the angel throws it on the earth there are peals of thunder, flashes of lightnings, and an earthquake. In the book of Hebrews, we are told that the earthly tabernacle was built to model the setting in heaven and we see that clearly in this scene. "They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, 'See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.'" (Hebrews 8:5) In the earthly tabernacle there was a brazen altar in the outer court for sacrifices and inside the temple there was a golden lampstand and the table of the showbread along with the altar of incense which stood just before the curtain entrance to the Holy of Holies. Just on the other side of the curtain inside the Holy of Holies was the tabernacle of the presence. In heaven this altar of incense burns before the Lord himself. That is why we see in Psalm 141 it says "let my prayer be counted as incense before you". The prayers of the saints are a precious thing to the Lord and they are significant every time we see them in the book of Revelation. (Rev. 5:8; 6:9-10; 8:3-4)

The final culmination of judgment and redemption is prompted by the prayers of the saints. God uses these prayers to complete His work and, in some way, bring the end of the story to a close. Your prayers matter to God. “The saints appear insignificant to men at large. But in the sight of God, they matter. Even great cosmic cataclysms are held back on their account. And the praises of the angels give way to silence so that the saints may be heard.” (Leon Morris, *The Revelation of John*, p. 119)

Who are the seven angels who receive the seven trumpets? John says they are the seven angels who stand before God. Are these the same seven angels from the churches in Revelation and are these the same seven angels who we will see with the bowls later in the book? This is a question of much debate and honestly there is no way of knowing because they are not identified further. Some commentators believe that these seven angels are the seven archangels who are identified in Jewish apocrypha. Two of those angels are identified by name in Scripture as Michael and Gabriel. The others we will have to wait and see once we get to heaven. It is possible that there could be three different groups of seven angels that are referred to or they could all be the same group. They don't care to be known anyway because they are co laborers for the Lord and His Christ.

**V.6-12 The Trumpets** While the seals were much more related to the events and acts of men, we will see that the trumpets primarily have to do with natural phenomena in the first four trumpets and supernatural phenomena in the final trumpets. Although we would not concur that every act of nature or troublesome plague happens by the finger of God these events certainly do. In this sense, we have already discussed our sober understanding of the events of Revelation. We are reminded that God has the authority to do whatever He wills with His creation and with His people. It is in this context that we pray in judgment remember mercy. Although these judgments do appear to be increasing in their intensity as they progress, we are reminded that God's goals are still the same – the salvation of His people, the repentance of unbelievers, the judgment of the wicked, and the cleansing of the earth. With the blowing of the trumpets, we see devastating effects on the earth but we also see the limitation repeated that only 1/3 of the earth can be destroyed. Let us not forget that at any time God could cause or allow all to be consumed, but it is His grace and mercy still that says at this point to an earth that is martyring His saints and cursing His name – only 1/3.

A call to repentance is often the point of trumpets blowing and it is certainly part of the purpose with these as well. In some way it is a final clarion call to a dying world that Jesus is returning soon and time is almost up so turn to the Lord while it is still today. We are reminded of the trumpet call in Joel 2 “Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!” It is this type of reminder that we hear with the blowing of the seven trumpets.

The first trumpet brings hail and fire mixed with blood. We are not told if this is blood falling from heaven or the appearance of blood or even if it possibly causing the spilling of blood on the earth but it is a significant presence in the mix. We often think of hail coming from heaven or fire falling from heaven but in this case, we see both. The result is that a third of the earth is burned up. Specifically, that means a third of the trees and all of the green grass is gone. When you think of a scorched earth this trumpet creates those circumstances and the consequences to the eco system, agriculture, and food supply will be devastating.

The second trumpet brings something like a great mountain burning with fire that is thrown into the sea. It is unclear what this great mountain is and consider the appearance of a meteor, a volcano, or some other phenomena that John has trouble describing. Regardless the result is catastrophic to the ocean and a third of it becomes blood with a third of the sea creatures dying and a third of the ships destroyed. Although it is possible that the sea appears as blood because of this natural disaster we should not dismiss the possibility of it actually being blood as we saw in the land of Egypt. Sea commerce is greatly affected, but apparently not stopped entirely although it is hard to imagine the effects of the waste, pollution, and stench that is created in this event.

The third trumpet causes a great star to fall from heaven blazing from the skies and it falls on a third of the rivers and springs of water. The appearance of the object sounds similar to the second trumpet but this object affects the fresh water instead of the sea. Is this a nuclear rocket that John is seeing? It is impossible to know exactly what John is seeing but we do know that the "star" is given a name called Wormwood. The word Wormwood means bitter and interestingly as we consider the causes of this bitterness it can be affiliated with the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. The nuclear reactor explosion happened in 1986 in the country of Ukraine close to the Russian border. The effects were devastating and continue to be mitigated to this day. If you look up the definition of the word Wormwood in the Ukrainian dictionary it says Chernobyl. Unfortunately, this is just a foreshadowing of the devastation that will occur with the third trumpet in the last days.

The fourth trumpet means that a third of the sun, moon, and stars are struck so that they are a third less bright than before the trumpet blast. We are not told how they are struck or what causes these conditions but it effects the light of the day and of the night. The consequences will be devastating and will affect everything from vegetation to temperature. There will be a palpable reminder anywhere on the earth that the end is coming. It is interesting to think about whether God will renew these heavenly bodies in the new heavens and the new earth or if this is meant to remind us that in the new eternal kingdom there is no need for their light because the glory of God will be its light.

Just as we saw the first four seals being differentiated from the final three seals, we see the same thing with the trumpets which is part of why we see the chapter division ending with these first four trumpets. As devastating as these trumpets are we will see next that they pale in comparison to those that are coming still.

**V.13 The Three Woes** After the first four trumpets John looks and sees an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew overhead. This eagle cries out three woes for those who are still dwelling on the earth at this point. This is a stark warning from heaven itself that the next three trumpets are troubling indeed. There is some question about whether this is an eagle or an angel that John sees but ultimately, I believe inconsequential to the message. We saw in Revelation 4 that one of the living creatures resembles an eagle anyway. It appears that the original Greek word was eagle but whether there was a transcription error or interpretational difference that has caused these questions there is a heavenly body notifying the earth that it is about to get really bad.