

Revelation 8: The 7th Seal

As we continue our journey through Revelation remember that this book is meant to be an encouragement. It is easy to get sidetracked by the symbolism and the unique *Lord of the Rings*, creatures that are present in the book. You have to be cognizant of the overarching theme that is being communicated. God is on our side and things will turn out good for God's people when it is all said and done, no matter what happens in this life. God will not allow sin and rebellion to go unpunished.

As we look at chapter eight, the lamb is about to open the seventh and final seal. The sixth seal ended with the vision of the important rulers of the world afraid of God's wrath. Then last week we had an interlude where John introduced 144,000 witnesses, which no one agrees on with regard to who they are, and multitudes of people from every tribe, race, and language worshipping God on the throne in heaven because they made it through the Great Tribulation.

Now the Lamb is about to open the seventh seal, but it is not what you would expect. Instead of one more judgment, this seal actually paves the way for 7 more judgments to follow, known as the seven trumpets. You'll see what I mean as we make our way through this text.

8:1 When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. **2** Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. **3** And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, **4** and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. **5** 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.

Vs. 8:1 The half an hour silence dramatizes the seriousness of the matter. What is to take place is so significant that that one must take time to ponder where we have been and where we are going. There are times when out of respect we give a deceased person a moment of our time because of what they meant to us. Here the moment of silence is given with regard to what is about to take place.

Vs. 2 After the period of silence, we discover that the seventh seal introduces us to seven angels, who represent new characters in the drama that is unfolding. They stand before God and are given seven trumpets. In the meantime, John lets us know about another development. There is another angel who appears with a golden sensor, which was used to usher a fragrance of smoke to God the Father. This fragrance is symbolic of prayers of the saints being offered up to His throne. I have read a commentary where it is suggested that the prayers of God's people are so important to him that He wants all worship in heaven to cease just so he can hear the prayers of the saints.

Notice the angel was not just given some incense, but *much* incense. God's people have been praying for a long time and it is important for God to listen to every one of them. The context of this passage seems to go back to 6:9-11 where we get a glimpse of martyred saints upon the throne. In the scene we are told that the saints want to know when God will avenge their deaths. Unfortunately, they are told to wait a while longer until the number of those who will be martyred will be complete.

Many of us can relate to that scene. We may not necessarily want vengeance for something to happen to us; but we have been praying for something that is very important to us. The reality is that often we must wait for God to respond to our prayers. Sometimes God does not give us what we ask for—but the passage here does tell us how important prayer is to Him. It is a fragrant offering.

Here the time limit for this waiting period for the martyrs is finally over. God will now tend to their prayers. Their wait consisted of waiting for the seventh seal of God's judgment to take place, which was no doubt a very long period of time. We must remember when God listens to our prayers; He answers them according to His glory. Ultimately that is the way Jesus taught his disciples they should pray. Remember the pattern he stated in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:9-13). *"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. 10 Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."*

We often forget that our prayers should include petitions for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Many times our prayers revolve around *our* will to be done. We do not mean to disrespect God and do this intentionally. It is just in our sinful condition, we tend to focus on what we want to happen on earth; not what God wants. Jesus told his disciples to pray that God's kingdom would come to earth because he knew that should be the ultimate goal of prayer, we should eagerly pray that God will set this earth right and usher in a time of a righteous time for our world.

So we must remember it is not about our will that should drive us to prayer; it is about God's. If we want this earth to get better it will not take place because of what we think would make the world a better place; it is what God thinks. Our prayers should be thought of as a means by which God can be glorified. We must remember when God doesn't answer our prayers; it may be because they do not ultimately glorify Him. It is also possible the timing is not right.

Jesus once called John the Baptist the most righteous man who ever lived (Matthew 11:11). Yet his father and mother had been praying for years to have a son. In fact, they were both described as righteous, yet God did not answer their prayers immediately. Luke's gospel tells us they were advanced in years (Luke 1:7). But one day an angel of the Lord appeared to John's father, who just happened to be a priest and was offering of all things, incense to God. Afraid of the angel, he was reassured that the angel came in response to his prayer for a son. Now I imagine, John's father probably had reached a point where he recognized his age and stopped praying. He must have gotten to the point where he said to his wife, "honey it is probably not God's will for us." Well it was God's, but in order for Him to be glorified he had to wait until he had probably given up. But God did hear his prayer at the altar of incense. He heard his prayer just like he heard the ones of the martyred saints in heaven. Remember it is not about our will that should drive our prayers; it is about God's will. But as far as our prayers are concerned; He hears them and they are a fragrant offering. In the next verses, we will discover just how God responded to the prayers of those martyred saints.

6 Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.

As we read about these trumpets, which signify upcoming victory (Remember the Walls of Jericho); there is a controversy in regards to how these should be interpreted. The question is do the 7 seals, the 7 trumpets, and the 7 bowls, represent a sequence of future judgments or does it simply repeat the events which previously happened? Depending on who you read there will be an opinion of whether the 7 trumpets is chronological or merely a recapitulation.

Here are the strongest arguments these judgments are chronological.

1. It seems the most natural to read the 7 seals, 7 trumpets, and 7 bowls as sequential. John appears to be telling us what he saw and what happened next.
2. There is an intensification of these judgments. The 7 seals represent actions that will affect 1/3 of the earth, the 7 trumpets 1/3 of the earth, and the 7 bowls seem to effect the entire population that is present.
3. The book ultimately leads to Jesus on a white horse, judgment of those not written in the book of life, and then heaven itself.

Arguments for Recapitulation

1. The number 7 symbolizes completeness.
2. Many events seem to describe the same thing, only with more detail. For example, the blackening of the sun in one of the seals seems to be explained by the locusts in the 5th seal.
3. The sixth and seventh Seals, Trumpets, & Bowls lead to the destruction of the world, judgment, and Christ being worshipped in heaven. In other words, the all seem to follow the same sequence where God is victorious at the end of time.

Both these scenarios are plausible. I used to think these events are just a recapitulation, but now I think there seems to be an intensification mainly because we are told the seals affect 1/4 of the earth, the trumpets, 1/3, and the bowls lead to judgment and heaven. But it is quite possible that John is giving more detail to what he said previously. It is also quite

possible I could change my mind again. But we cannot allow ourselves to get stuck here. Regardless of our view it does not change the message. God's people have been praying for vengeance and these seals, trumpets, and bowls are the answer to their prayers. Let's look at the first three.

7 The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon 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.

If you are an environmentalist you probably wouldn't appreciate these verses because they involve a third of the vegetation and trees being burned up and all the grass. There will be a time where you won't need a lawnmower. Having very bad allergies and living in the grass seed capital of the world there is a part of no grass this that is appealing. But the point here is that different realms of life will be affected. Remember, Romans 8 tells us that even creation itself is under a curse because of the original sin of Adam. But one day, all creation will be liberated. The reality is that sometimes you have to tear up your old yard before you can have a yard that is truly beautiful. Think of this in terms of preparing the earth for God's future glory.

8 The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. **9** A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

I have read a commentary by John Courson where he feels there is a strong possibility that John is doing his best to describe a nuclear war. One of his reasons is because John does not say that a mountain was thrown into the sea, he says *something like a mountain*. This "something" could be a mushroom cloud that falls into the Atlantic Ocean, which represents 1/3 of the seas in the world. This would fit nicely into the idea of a third of the sea creatures were killed and a third of the ships destroyed. Now though this may be possible, we can not know this for certain. All we can say for certain is that you won't want to go near the water.

10 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. **11** The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter.

The next trumpet affects the places where one likes to swim, the rivers and the springs of water. Whatever this star is, it will make the water bitter. Courson also makes a point in his commentary to say the Russian word for Wormwood is cherynobl, which of course is the sight where the biggest nuclear spill ever occurred, registered a level 7. Again, this is good food for thought, but it must be noted the wormwood is also a plant that is bitter and is used seven times in the Old Testament to describe great times of sorrow and bitterness. The best explanation seems to be that this is a literal star or better yet, a meteor that causes water to be bitter.

12 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 might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.

The last judgment we will look at today represents the diminishing of light. John says 1/3 of the light from the moon, stars, and sun are kept from shining. This could be the result of the sun being covered by an invasion of locusts or from an eruption of a volcano where ash hinders the sunlight. It could also be a reference to God simply causing these lights to operate at full capacity. Again, we cannot be certain. The only certainty is it will happen. If there is anyone who has the right to destroy creation and civilization, it is by the One who created it all. This is a sobering thought; but it is also one that provides God with the reverence, awe, and respect that He has been robbed of and rightly deserves.

Finally, if this hasn't been enough to swallow, there is more to come.

13 Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!"

If the four trumpets weren't bad enough, God's carrier pigeon, known as the talking eagle, makes us aware that the next three trumpets are only going to be worse. Initially, this seems like an odd insertion. But it also reminds us that God is providing a warning. In other words, He is giving people a chance to get their lives right. This is important because Scripture teaches us that God is slow to anger and that he gives us an opportunity to repent. There is no doubt that these catastrophes needed to happen for people to reconsider their view of God. I suspect many will take heed of this woe and turn to Jesus. Sadly however, we will find out that many still will not repent. That is the cycle of life since Jesus; some believe and are saved; others simply continue in their unbelief. But regardless of our response, God is and has always been the God of second chances. Perhaps you haven't considered accepting Jesus in your life. If so, I urge you to reflect on this book and get yourself right with Jesus. In the end, if you do, you will position yourself on God's team. In the end if you haven't discovered, His team always wins.