

The Seventh Seal

Revelation 8 Notes

A Prayer And Response (vss. 1-5)

- Now resumed is the opening of the seals which had been interrupted by the interlude of chapter 7. This interlude revealed by imagery the sealing unto God of those on earth and assured the saints on earth of the welfare of the martyrs who had died in the faith.
- In contrast to the constant singing of songs and shouts of praise which have filled heaven's court, there is now a solemn and awe-inspiring silence for a half hour bringing in an air of expectation shared with heavenly beings.
- The seven angels and seven trumpets signify the unity, perfection, fullness and completeness of whatever the angels were to do and the trumpets were to signify.
- The altar in this scene is not the same as the one of 6:9 under which the souls of the martyrs rested, of which the altar of burnt offerings was the prototype. This altar upon which the incense was offered was foreshadowed by the golden altar before the veil of the tabernacle and nearest to the mercy seat (Exodus 30:6; Hebrews 9:3-6). In the vision, the angel assumes the place of the priest of the Old Covenant who burned the incense; he simply appears as a servant.
- The prayers of the saints are now before God as clouds of sweet aromatic incense, symbolic of prayer, sanctioned and commended by the mediator of the redeemed, the Lord Christ.
- The angel is the same one to whom the "much incense" had been given and who had offered it upon the coals placed on the censer. After offering the incense, the angel next takes the censer and fills it with coals from the same altar and casts the coals upon the earth. This symbolic action reveals the heavenly response to the prayers ascending from the saints upon earth.
- In the vision, the prayers of the saints on earth, crying that they be avenged, now come before the Father. He responds to their cry by casting the fire of His righteous judgment upon the world of the ungodly. As in so many instances in Revelation, "the earth" signifies the realm of the unregenerate in contrast with the kingdom of God's people. The earthquake as an expression of judgment was introduced at the opening of the sixth seal in response to the cry of the souls beneath the altar. The fire from the altar sums up the judgments of the trumpets which follow.

The First Four Trumpets (vss. 6-12)

- The seven trumpets are not a continuation of the seals; that is, the seventh seal does not extend to include the seven trumpets. The seals are complete, and the altar scene serves as a prelude or introduction to the trumpets. The seven trumpets in the vision before symbolize partial judgments upon the wicked, serving as warnings of greater judgments to come.
- When the first four trumpets are blown, various aspects of the physical or natural world are affected, and at the sounding of the last three the physical and spiritual lives of men are involved. Although it is very difficult explain the phenomena which follow the trumpet sounds, it can be concluded with certainty that these trumpets represent warnings of a supernatural judgment from God.
- The first trumpet seems to point to judgment upon the heathen as their blood is brought upon their own heads. The burning of a third part of the earth and the trees and all the grass seems to indicate suffering and destruction among the earth-dwellers, the world of the unregenerate in which the seat of world powers operate.
- The judgment is against the wicked and upon the realm in which the unregenerate find their life and objects of worship. Living only for the material and physical, theirs is a life spent in rebellion against God and the spiritual. With the destruction of that for which man lives, his pride is humbled.
- The "mountain" likely symbolizes the fall of an eminent unidentified power cast down as Babylon of old; it could be any such city at any period in time. The sea, which signifies the mass of humanity or society (cf. 13:1), is greatly affected. The vision indicates judgment upon a worldly society when its center of power is cast down and its economy falls with it.
- In the overall vision of the trumpets, the first affects vegetation, the second the sea with its marine life and ships, and this, the third, involves the inland waters and springs. All these trumpets appear to have a broader significance than describing simple natural calamities within the Roman Empire; in fact, the Roman Empire has not been specifically introduced.
- Wormwood and gall aptly symbolize calamity, sorrow and bitterness of life. The fall of this star, Wormwood, caused a third of the inland waters to become wormwood, that is, charged with trouble, sorrow and death. Pride and arrogance, which are part of idolatry and rebellion against God, are destined to fall, carrying misery and sorrow with them.
- The symbols of joy and wisdom (the sun, moon and stars) are ashamed at the earth's wickedness, and in the vision a third of them

are smitten, indicating a partial judgment meant to serve as a warning to the ungodly. It seems that the darkness in the vision indicates a lack of understanding and insight on the part of those who direct human affairs. No specific people or time is indicated in this vision, making general its application as were the first three. These four trumpets call for the reformation, not the destruction of mankind.

The Herald Of Woes (vs. 13)

- The next three trumpet blasts are introduced as three woes which will befall the non-Christian dwellers of earth. The KJV uses the word "angel," but according to most authorities "eagle," as in the ASV, is correct. Some think the object of John's vision is a vulture; however, since the eagle flies alone and not in a flock as do vultures, it seems that in Revelation 8:13, as in 12:14, it is more probable that an eagle is in the seer's vision, warning the world of the wicked and ready to swoop down upon its prey.
- The eagle was noted for its strong wings (Exodus 19:4; Revelation 12:14), but the Bible also emphasizes the keenness of sight with which the eagle sees its prey and the swiftness with which it swoops down upon it (Job 39:29; 9:26). The disasters now to come upon the earth are heralded by the voice of this eagle as it cries, "Woe, woe, woe." This takes the form of an ominous warning set forth in the trumpets which follow.