

## Lesson # 27 The Seventh Seal

## Revelation 8:1-5

Date: January 2, 2011

**Revelation 8:1-5 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup>When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.  
<sup>2</sup>Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.  
<sup>3</sup>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, <sup>4</sup>and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. <sup>5</sup>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.

**I. Ominous Silence**

v. 1

The gap between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> seals is bridged by a whole chapter ( chapter 7 ) in which God's 144,000 evangelists are introduced, and we are given a glimpse into heaven to see the vast multitudes worshipping the Father & Son, and we are also shown the extreme martyrdom that is opening the door to heaven for an innumerable group of people during the Tribulation. Chapter 7 ended with the promise of shelter, comfort, no more natural disasters, no more thirst or hunger, and the hope of living water and of God Himself wiping away every tear of those whom He has saved.

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Although there have been at least 5 major reasons why this silence occurs as this seal is opened, the best of the 5 is this: "It is a dramatic pause to symbolize the awe and dread with which the heavenly host awaits the events about to unfold."<sup>i</sup> As a result of the dramatic silence, what is about to unfold becomes even more awesome and terrifying. Notice the following passages where silence precedes God's wrath being outpoured: **Hab. 2:20; 3:3; Zeph. 1:7-8, 15,17,18; Zech. 2:13.**

Although limited to ½ hour – which may or may not be a literal ½ hour, this time of silence to John is lengthy and reverent in its' scope. The time mark is likely provided for John's benefit, as one wonders what time would mean to a person in the midst of such a vision as the one being given to him. What exactly does this silence prepare us for, since it seems that the 7<sup>th</sup> seal involves nothing more than what is described in v. 5? Is that it? Is that the judgment?

**II. The 7 Trumpets Prepare to Sound vv. 2-4**

It becomes apparent immediately that the opening of this seal reveals something that strikes awe in those who are observing Christ as He opens the scroll, one seal at a time. The fact that the very next verse introduces 7 angels standing before God, who are each given a trumpet, and that more intense judgments fall when these trumpets are blown, answers our question. The 7<sup>th</sup> seal judgment includes the 7 trumpet judgments and the 7 bowl judgments!

Some commentators disagree with this determination, and there are 2 major & 1 minor possibilities.

1. The trumpet judgments from 8:6ff are parallels to the 7 seals, but not identical to them. The term for this view = “recapitulation”, seeing them as a sort of review.
2. The telescopic or dovetail view sees the 7<sup>th</sup> seal as a compound of the 7 trumpets, and these trumpets are subsequent ( they chronologically follow ) to the 7 seals.
3. This is merely a literary development and does not intend to portray a historical development so it is neither 1 nor 2.<sup>ii</sup>

The context most strongly supports # 2 as the correct way to interpret the 7<sup>th</sup> seal. The angels and 7 trumpets begin to blow after the 7<sup>th</sup> seal is opened. As the trumpets sound, judgment is ratcheted to increasing intensity. Since the judgments become more & more intense, and quite likely more closely spaced as the return of Jesus Christ approaches, it can really only mean chronological progression which is time sequential. This occurs most definitely in the last 3 ½ years of the Tribulation.

Trumpets played a large role in Israel’s history. They announced ceremonies, calls to battle, were integral in the defeat of Jericho, announced feasts, signaled war, & would warn of the coming Day of the Lord. These are not necessarily arch-angels blowing these trumpets, and they are not named, so it is apparently not important that we know their names.

While these 7 prepare to sound, another angel ( in the Greek – another of the same type as the other 7 ) approaches the altar with a golden censer ( shovel ) and incense he has been given. His intention is to offer this incense with the ‘prayers of the saints’. Since this is another angel, it is not Christ, who would need no incense to throw onto the fire in the altar. According to the pattern of the use of “was given” throughout Revelation, it was God who gave this angel the incense he carries to the altar. ( 17 x in Revelation<sup>iii</sup> ) ②

Once this incense is placed onto the altar ‘before the throne’, the smoke of the incense rises with the prayers of the saints. Incense played a role in the OT rituals of worship ( Lev. 16; Ex. 30:34-38 for example ) and seems to provide a sweet aroma which signifies the pleasure that God gets from the prayers of His saints going up before Him. The particular specifics of this incense is not mentioned here, but we know the mixture was important and specified on earth – cf. Num. 3:4; Lev. 10:1-3 & Ex. 30:9. God had commanded that only the mixture He had given them was authorized for use in His temple.

Back in revelation, the angel who tosses the incense onto the fire is not acting as a mediator or priest, but is simply adding the incense to create a pleasant aroma to God as the smoke rises. I wonder if part of the image of God we’ve been created with is to enjoy the aroma of a wood fire, incense or certain foods being cooked?

Since this scene precedes great judgment being poured out on the wicked on earth, it makes sense that these prayers for ‘all the saints’ are prayers of those killed in the Tribulation thus far & already in heaven, along with those on earth being hunted down and arrested – crying out for God to avenge them. Surely the prayers of those long dead martyrs from all history ( now in heaven ) would also join in this cry for God to finally intervene.

Since the time of God’s divine purpose has finally arrived, these rising prayers reach Him as sweet smoke, and combine with the so far unanswered prayers over many

millennia of history, which God has not forgotten, serve to bring about acceptance from God, and the “wait” answers to those many prayers now find the answer is “yes” and the Great tribulation increases in intensity. “Vengeance is mine, I will repay” is God’s prerogative according to Paul in Rom. 12:19. We pray for it, and wait for it, but God alone decides when and how He will repay. We now see that the time is up, and man has reached the limits of God’s patience and benevolence, just as he had designed.

### III. Heavenly Fire Comes to Earth

v. 5

Now, the judgment requested by the prayers is about to begin. The angel takes the censer, fills it with fire from the altar and throws it down on the earth. See also Ezek. 10:1-2; 9:1-11. This describes judgment on the idolaters in Jerusalem. Ezekiel 8:6-13 tells us what God was so angry about – idolatry in His own temple!

In Rev. 8, there is much more evil to be dealt with and it will not just be a city that God will rain His wrath down on, but the entire world.

Fire is quite often used as a symbol for judgment in God’s word, and now the answer to the question: “How long O Lord before you judge?” of Rev. 6:10 is answered with action. Robert Thomas adds here;

“The saints pray for justice and their prayers play a part, but it is God’s business to determine the time and the nature of actions against their persecutors.”<sup>iv</sup>

The action of throwing the contents of the censer to earth results in ‘peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake’. This noise provides an immediate contrast to the silence which prevailed when the seal was opened. The physical manifestations on earth now match the mood in heaven – stormy, angry. This storm described and the earthquake must be something more than just a local disturbance, but for effect, must be worldwide in scope, intending to strike terror in the hearts of those on earth who have forsaken God for so long.

③

This is only the beginning of a time during which the 7 trumpets will sound, and with each blast of the trumpet, God will purge more & more of the earth – His earth to do with as He sees fit. After the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet, judgment will be complete except for the 7 bowls which will prepare the world for Jesus’ return.

Next lesson – Lesson # 28 The First Trumpet Rev. 8:6-7

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<sup>i</sup> Robert Thomas; Revelation 8-22; Moody; p. 2

<sup>ii</sup> IBID; p. 4

<sup>iii</sup> IBID, p. 10

<sup>iv</sup> IBID; p. 12