

The Seventh Seal
Revelation 8:1-5
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INTRODUCTION

1. We now come to the opening of the 7th seal in Revelation chapter 8.
2. Up to this point we have seen:
 - a) A door open in heaven (4:1-2a)
 - b) A throne set in heaven (4:2b)
 - c) The One who sat on the throne (4:2c-3a)
 - d) A rainbow around the throne (4:3b)
 - e) Twenty-four thrones (4:4a)
 - f) Twenty-four elders on thrones (4:4b)
 - g) Lightnings, thunderings, and voices (4:5a)
 - h) Seven lamps of fire (4:5b)
 - i) A sea of glass (4:6a)
 - j) Four living creatures (4:6b-9)
 - k) The twenty-four elders in worship (4:9-11)
 - l) A seven sealed scroll (5:1-5)
 - m) A Lamb (5:6-7)
 - n) The four living creatures and the twenty four elder singing a new song (5:8-14)
 - o) The first six seals opened by the Lamb (6:1-17)
 - p) The sealing of the 144,000 (7:1-8)
 - q) The multitude in heaven (7:9-17)
3. And now we come to the opening of the seventh seal that will take us from 8:1 to 18:24.
4. Let's begin this morning by reading Revelation 8:1-13.

5. As we have been studying the opening of the six seals, the sealing of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists, and the multitude in heaven, which I believe is the church, we are now seeing the opening of the 7th seal.
6. As we will see from this point on that this seal is the most dreadful of them all.
7. Just when you thought the 6th seal was bad enough – wait until you see what’s in the 7th.
8. As we will see in this chapter and the chapters to follow of the seven trumpets – none of those can compare to the bowl judgments that begin in chapter 16. For in “them,” we are told, “the wrath of God is complete” (15:1).
9. The opening of the 7th seal is the beginning of “The Day of the Lord.”
10. Scripture describes “The Day of the Lord” in this way:
 - a) It is a “dreadful day” (Mal.4:5)
 - b) It is a day of “terror” (Isa.2:10)
 - c) It is a day of “the glory of His majesty” (Isa.2:10)
 - c) It is a day of “destruction from the Almighty” (Isa.13:6)
 - e) It is a day “cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger” (Isa.13:9)
 - f) It is a day where He will “lay the land desolate; and...destroy its sinners from it” (Isa.13:9)
 - g) It is a day of punishment “to the world for its evil and the wicked for its iniquity” (Isa.13:11)
 - h) It is a day “of the Lord’s vengeance” (Isa.34:8)
 - i) It is a day of “recompense for the cause of Zion” (Isa.34:8)
 - j) It is a day of “battle” (Ezek.13:5)
 - k) It is a day of “destruction from the Almighty” (Joel

- 1:15)
- l) It is a day of “darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness” (Joel 2:2)
 - m) It is a day that is “great and very terrible” of which Joel asks, “Who can endure it?” (Joel 2:11)
11. The language in Joel 2:11 is similar to that of Revelation 6:17 which says, “For the great day of His wrath has come [aorist - future impending], and who is able to stand?”
 12. Amos 5:18-20 says, “Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, And a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, Leaned his hand on the wall, And a serpent bit him! Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?”
 13. Zephaniah 1:14-18 says, “The great day of the Lord is near; It is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; There the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, A day of trouble and distress, A day of devastation and desolation, A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of trumpet and alarm Against the fortified cities And against the high towers. “I will bring distress upon men, And they shall walk like blind men, Because they have sinned against the Lord; Their blood shall be poured out like dust, And their flesh like refuse.” Neither their silver nor their gold Shall be able to deliver them In the day of the Lord’s wrath; But the whole land shall be devoured By the fire of His jealousy, For He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land.”
 14. So as you can see this day will be the “climactic time of judgment that ends man’s day and Satan’s rule on earth.”

15. “When the Lamb opens the seventh and last seal on the little scroll that was the title deed to the earth (5:1), the judgments of the Day of the Lord will intensify and expand dramatically” (John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11, p.236).
16. This dreadful day begins in chapter 8, verse 1 with one word “silence.”
17. John says, “When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour” (v.1).

I. Silence in Heaven (v.1)

A review of the visions up to this point makes it clear that John had heard a good deal of noise in heaven.

“Emanating from God's throne were "sounds and peals of thunder" (4:5). "The four living creatures ... [did] not cease to say, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come' " (4:8), while the twenty-four elders added their song of praise (4:11).

In 5:2 John heard a "strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?' " In response to the Lamb's taking of the title deed to the earth (5:5-7), first the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders (5:9-10), then an innumerable host of angels (5:11-12), and finally all of creation (5:13) joined in praising God. When the Lamb opened the first seal, John "heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, 'Come' " (6:1)-as he would when the second (6:3), third (6:5), and fourth (6:7) seals were opened. With the opening of the fifth seal came the cries of the martyrs for vengeance (6:9-10), while the breaking of the sixth seal brought the loud roar of a powerful earthquake (6:12).

In the interlude between the sixth and seventh seals, an angel "cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, 'Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads' " (7:2-3).

Later in that interlude John saw a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they [cried] out with a loud voice, saying,

"Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen." (7:9-13)

But after all that loudness, as the full fury of the final judgments is about to be released, silence falls on the heavenly scene.

The implication is that when the judgment about to happen becomes visible as the seventh seal is broken and the scroll unrolled, both the redeemed and the angels are reduced to silence in anticipation of the grim reality of the destruction they see written on the scroll.

The half an hour of silence is the calm before the storm. It is the silence of foreboding, of intense expectation, of awe at what God is about to do" (John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11, p.237).

A. Silence is the Only Proper Response to Divine Judgment

1. The psalmist said in Ps.76:8-9, "You caused judgment to be heard from heaven; the earth feared and was still, when God arose to judgment, to deliver all the oppressed of the earth."
2. Habakkuk declared, "But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him" (Hab.2:20).
3. Zephaniah exhorted, "Be silent in the presence of

the Lord God. For the day of the Lord is at hand” (Zeph.1:7).

4. Zechariah 2:13 commands, “Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord, for He is aroused from His holy habitation!”

B. While Eternal Heaven Has No Time, The Apostle John Who is Seeing the Vision Does

It says, “There was silence in heaven for about half an hour” (v.1).

1. Each minute of that half hour of silence must have increased the sense of agonizing suspense for John
2. Heaven, which had resounded with loud praises from the vast crowd of redeemed people and angels, became deathly still

“The hour of God’s final judgment had come – the hour when the saints will be vindicated, sin punished, Satan vanquished, and Christ exalted. The greatest event since the Fall is about to take place and all heaven is seen waiting in suspenseful expectancy” (John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11, p.238).

Next John says he “saw”:

II. Seven Angels Before God (v.2)

A. These Angels Stand Before God (v.2a)

1. The use of the definite article appears to set them apart as a unique group, which some have called

the “presence angels.”

2. The verb translated “stand” is in the perfect tense, which indicates that they were in the presence of God and had been there for a time
3. Scripture describes the various ranks and orders of angels, such as:
 - a) Cherubim (Gen.3:24)
 - b) Seraphim (Isa.6:2)
 - c) Archangels (1 Thess.4:16; Jude 9)
 - d) Thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities (Col.1:16)
 - e) Powers (Eph.6:12)

“These seven appear to be one such order of high-ranking angels. Gabriel, who appeared to Zacharias and Mary, may have been one of them, since he identified himself to Zacharias as ‘Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God’” (Luke 1:19)” (John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11, p.238).

B. These Angels Were Given Seven Trumpets (v.2b)

1. As angels participated in the seal judgments (6:1,3,5,6,7), they will participate in the trumpet and bowl judgments (16:2,3,4,8,10,12,17)
2. Jesus taught that angels will play an important role in God’s eschatological judgments
 - a) Mat.13:36-50 (separation of wheat & tares)
 - b) Mat.24:30-31 (gathering of the elect)
3. Trumpets are the most significant musical

instrument in Scripture, being associated with many different events

- a) They were used to summon the congregation of Israel - Num.10:2

“Make two silver trumpets for yourself; you shall make them of hammered work; you shall use them for calling the congregation and for directing the movement of the camps.”

- b) They were used to sound the alarm in time of war - Num.10:9

“When you go to war in your land against the enemy who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, and you will be remembered before the Lord your God, and you will be saved from your enemies.”

- c) They were used to announce news - 1 Sam.13:3

“And Jonathan attacked the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. Then Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, “Let the Hebrews hear!”

“Saul used the trumpet to summon additional troops for battle” (The MacArthur Study Bible).

- d) They were used to declare new kings - 1 Kings 1:34, 39

(1:34) “There let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king over Israel; and blow the horn, and say, ‘Long live King Solomon!’”

(1:39) “Then Zadok the priest took a horn of oil from the tabernacle and anointed Solomon. And they blew the horn, and all the people said, “Long live King Solomon!”

“Horn” Heb.shofar, “ram’s horn.” It’s translated “trumpet” in the KJV and NASB

e) They were used in worship

(1) 1 Chron.16:6 - “Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests regularly blew the trumpets before the ark of the covenant of God.”

(2) 2 Chron.5:12-13 - “And the Levites who were the singers, all those of Asaph and Heman and Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, stood at the east end of the altar, clothed in white linen, having cymbals, stringed instruments and harps, and with them one hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets— indeed it came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord, and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying: “For He is good, For His mercy endures forever,” that the house, the house of the

Lord, was filled with a cloud.”

- f) Zephaniah 1:14-16 associates trumpets with the Day of the Lord

“The great day of the Lord is near; It is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; There the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, A day of trouble and distress, A day of devastation and desolation, A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of trumpet and alarm Against the fortified cities And against the high towers.”

- g) The New Testament teaches that a trumpet will announce the Rapture

- (1) 1 Cor.15:51-52 - “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”
- (2) 1 Thess.4:16 - “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.”
- (3) Mat.24:31 - “And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of

heaven to the other.”

“Each of the seven trumpets unleashes a specific judgment of greater intensity than the first six seals, but not as descriptive as the seven bowls (16:1-21). The first four trumpets destroy the earth’s ecology (8:6-12), the next two produce demonic destruction of humanity (8:13; 9:1-11, 13-19), and the seventh trumpet introduces the final outpouring of God’s wrath contained in the seven bowl judgments” (John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11, p.239).

Before the seven angels sound their trumpets, they had to wait for other important events to transpire.

III. Supplication of the Saints (vv.3-5)

A. This Angel is Another of the Same Kind (v.3)

1. The angel in verse 3 is described as “another” (Gr.allos - “another of the same kind”)
2. Because of his priestly work some have identified him as Jesus Christ
 - a) The problem with that identification is that Christ is already identified in the heavenly scene as a Lamb (5:6; 6:1; 7:17) distinguishing Him from this angel
 - b) Second, while Jesus appeared as the Angel of the LORD in the Old Testament, He is now where identified as an angel in the New Testament
 - c) Third, the reference in verse 2 to the seven actual angels defines the meaning of the term

in this context. The angel in verse 3 is described as another angel like those in verse 2

- d) Finally, everywhere Jesus appears in Revelation, He is clearly identified. He is called:
- (1) “The faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth” (1:5)
 - (2) “The Son of Man” (1:13)
 - (3) “He who is holy, who is true” (3:7)
 - (4) “The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the Creation of God” (3:14)
 - (5) “The Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” (5:5)
 - (6) “The Lamb” (6:1, 16; 7:17; 8:1)
 - (7) “Faithful and True” (19:11)
 - (8) “The Word of God” (19:13)
 - (9) “King of Kings and Lord of Lords” (19:16)

“If He were the One at the altar, it is reasonable to assume that He would be specifically identified” (MacArthur).

B. John Notes that the Angel Came and Stood at the Altar (v.3)

1. That altar is the heavenly counterpart to the altar of incense in the temple, which also was made of gold (Ex.30:3)
 - a) It was the same golden incense altar seen by Isaiah in his vision (Isa.6:6) and by Ezekiel (Ezek.10:2)
 - b) The further description of this altar as “before the throne” assures John’s readers that the altar of incense was the earthly counterpart to this heavenly incense altar

“The altar of incense in the tabernacle and the temple was the nearest thing to the Holy of Holies where God’s glory dwelt (Ex.30:6). Consistent with that identification is that fact that the angel held in his hand “a golden censer” or firepan” (MacArthur).

“In the Old Testament era, the priest would twice daily (morning and evening) take hot, fiery coals from the brazen altar (where sacrifices were offered) and transport them into the Holy Place to the incense altar (Ex.30:7, 8:2; 2 Chron.29:11). They then ignited the incense, which rose toward heaven, emblematic of the prayers of the saints” (MacArthur).

A New Testament illustration of this can be seen in Luke 1:8-10 of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist:

“So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense.”

While the people stood outside praying, Zacharias burned incense inside, symbolizing the ascending of those prayers to God.

2. The angel took the “much incense” that was given to him “that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne” (v.3).
 - a) The “much incense” symbolized the multiplied prayers of God’s people (5:8; 6:9-11)
 - b) This “incense, “ though it does not say, was perhaps given to him by God

The verb “was given” (didomi) is used frequently in Revelation to something given by God (6:2,4,8,11; 7:2, 9:1,3,5, etc).

3. The purpose of the angel being given the “much incense” was that “he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints” already rising from the altar

“Those prayers were for Satan to be destroyed, sin to be defeated, their deaths to be avenged, and Christ to come” (MacArthur).

As the angel added his incense to that already burning on the altar, verse 4 says, “the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel’s hand.”

4. Now we begin to see the fulfillment of the saints’ prayers in verse 5

Heaven’s half hour of silence is abruptly shattered and judgement prepares to begin as a divine firestorm bursts upon this planet.

“On the great Day of Atonement, the high priest would put incense on the coals in the censer and, with the blood of the sacrifice, enter the holy of holies (Lev. 16:11-14). But in this scene, the angel put the incense on the altar (presented the prayers before God) and then cast the coals from the altar to the earth! The parallel in Ezekiel 10 indicates that this symbolized God’s judgment; and the effects described in Revelation 8:5 substantiate this view. A storm is about to begin! (see Rev. 4:5; 11:19; 16:18)” (Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*).

“The censer...filled with the fire of the altar, usually linked with the prayers of God’s people, becomes here a symbol of divine wrath. The angel’s act of throwing it to earth reveals that God’s judgment will come in direct response to those prayers” (MacArthur).

The immediate effects of the firestorm of wrath that bursts upon the earth were “noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake” (v.5). This in direct contrast to the silence of verse 1.

CONCLUSION

1. The unbelieving world rejected Jesus Christ when He came, it rejects the life-giving message of the gospel now, and will continue to reject the truth even during the future outpouring of God's wrath and judgment.
2. Having gone on "sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth," wicked people have nothing to look forward to except "a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries" (Heb.10:26-27).
3. But for those who repent of their sins and come to the saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the blessed reality is that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16), because "He who believes in Him is not judged" (Jn.5:24).