

The Seven Trumpets, Part One: Interlude (Revelation 8:1-5)

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Introduction

1. The Revelation is difficult because it is filled with strange pictures and unfamiliar language.
 - a. Beware of reading into the text what you want it to say or of simply accepting what others think it says.
 - b. Understand that Revelation is built on OT imagery and symbolism that is not always familiar to us.
 - c. Do not force literal interpretations on visions not meant to bear explicit details.
2. Focus on images such as the *throne* (1:4; 3:21; 4:2–7; 5:1ff; 6:16; 7:9, 10; 8:3; and many others) that appear repeatedly as the book unfolds. The central message of Revelation to the suffering saints in this wicked world is that God is sovereign and that He rules over all things in truth and righteousness.
3. The seventh seal (8:1-5) continues the final judgment of the sixth seal and prepares for the seven trumpets.
 - a. The seventh seal follows the vision of the unnumbered multitude completed in heaven (7:9-17).
 - b. The vision of the sealing of the 144,000 answers to the promise of 3:10 and shows how they are not hurt.
 - c. Living saints will be protected from final judgment but not from persecution provoking final judgment.
4. In a very real sense, final judgment began with the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus (John 12:23–28, 31, 32, 35, 36, 48).
 - a. The seals depict the *reason* for final judgment in four horsemen.
 - b. The trumpets depict the rumblings of judgment as the prelude to the final judgment. Trumpets warn (Ezek. 33:3).
 - c. The bowls depict the final out-pouring of God’s wrath on the rebellion of sinful humanity (15:1).
5. Note also the pattern of the seals and trumpets (4+3).
 - a. The numeric significance: 4 = creation + 3 = the God-head. God is dealing with His rebellious creation.
 - b. The four horsemen portray the conquering Christ and the Satanic reaction, first in persecution of the saints (horses 2 and 3), then in the general suffering due to the seven trumpets (4th horse).
 - c. The first four trumpets depict limited natural- disaster judgments on sinful rebels throughout the gospel age. The last three trumpets depict demonic calamity inflicted with God’s permission. The trumpet judgments reveal to the saints why they suffer along with others even when they are not persecuted. They are also designed to encourage unbelievers to repent.

It is the responsibility of every human to obey God and to seek His face.

I. The Silence of Heaven

1. The Revelation unfolds a panorama of church history in order to prepare and encourage God’s people.
 - a. In the first depiction (the first chapters), we saw Jesus as the light of the world, walking among the churches, admonishing, rebuking, and warning. They are, as His lampstands, to be the reflection of His light in the sin-darkened world.
 - b. In the second depiction, we find Him, as the Lion of Judah, riding forth “conquering and to conquer.” This success provokes Satan to brandish his sword. However, as terrible as these seals

appear to be, God has preserved His own and intends to avenge their suffering upon their persecutors.

2. As the fourth horse (6:7) demonstrates, the trumpet judgments are synchronous with the seals.
 - a. However, we must be careful to note that while 8:1–5 prepare for the trumpets, they focus on the final judgment addressed in the sixth seal.
 - b. The introductory verses (8:1–5) show the throne of God and that He has answered the plea of the martyred saints in 6:9, 10.
3. Silence is the typical way that the OT prophets announce impending judgment (Zech. 3:13–3:2; Zeph. 1:7–10; Hab. 2:20).
 - a. Silence prepares us for the terrible nature of judgment.
 - b. Silence demonstrates God’s reticence to judge (Ezek. 33:11; Lam. 3:33; Luke 19:41).
 - c. Silence indicates that God has heard the prayers of His people and is about to act on their behalf.

II. The Prayers of the Saints

1. Next, John sees seven angels with trumpets *given* to them.
 - a. Another angel appears before the altar of incense in heaven with a golden censer to whom is *given* much incense (the “divine passive”).
 - 1) *Given* is a clear evidence that prayer is being answered.
 - 2) The angel at the altar is possibly a reference to Christ’s intercessory work before the throne.
 - b. The incense is offered with the prayers of all the saints.
 - 1) Christ’s work of intercession sanctifies and purifies our imperfect and pathetic prayers.
 - 2) Christ sympathizes and encourages the saints by empowering their prayers and making them effectual (Isa. 63:9).
2. The smoke of the incense ascends before God, indicating that He has heard their prayers.
 - a. Incense offered with the sacrifices made them pleasing to God (Lev. 16:12, 13).
 - b. The angel threw the fire-filled censer to the earth, indicating that God was answering their prayers to punish the persecutors.
3. The casting of the censer was accompanied by “peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake” (Psa. 18:6–15).
 - a. Note Ex. 19:16, 19.
 - b. Verse 5 is clearly about the final judgment (14:18, 19).
 - c. Thus, vv. 1–5 prepare us for the judgments of the trumpets that will lead us to the final judgment.

Use

1. The Silence of God

When suffering saints ask, “Where is God?” (Psa. 79; Rev. 6:10), God would have them know that He sees and that He will make everything right in His time.
2. The Power of Prayer

The effectiveness of our prayers is directly related to the sacrificial nature of our living for God. Prayer that is powerful is kingdom-related, not selfish requests for relief or prosperity.