

Revelation Chapter Eight

(Trumpets 1-4)

Opening of the 7th Seal (v.1)

VERSE 1 **When the Lamb [He] broke the seventh seal** (Καὶ ὅταν ἤνοιξεν τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν ἑβδόμην [*conj kai + conj hotan when + aor.act.ind.3s. anoigo open + art.w/noun acc.f.s. sphragis seal + art.w/adj.acc.f.s. ebdomos seventh*], **there was silence in heaven for about half an hour** [ἔγένετο σιγή ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ὡς ἡμιώριον [*aor.dep.ind.3s. ginomai come to be + noun nom.f.s. sigē silence, quiet + prep en + art.w/noun loc.m.s. ouranos heaven + conj hos as, like, something like; “about” + noun acc.nt.s. hemiorion half an hour; 1x*]).

ANALYSIS: VERSE 1

1. The intercalation on “The Servants of God” (chap. 7) having ended, the numerical sequence of the seals picks up from the end of chapter 6 as the Lamb opens the 7th and last seal.
2. The repetition of “And when He opened the seventh seal” signals a continuation of the seal-series from 6:12 (cf. also 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9).
3. The scene shifts back to the throne room in the 3rd heaven with the Lamb as the approved agent for opening the seals with the corresponding wrath poured out on the nations.
4. The breaking of the final seal brings an unexpected result: “there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.”
5. This silence contrasts with the previous openings and has proved a puzzle for interpreters, resulting in five proposals: (1) It is a silence at the beginning of the sabbatical rest or the Millennium. (2) It is not literal silence because of the continuing heavenly songs, but is a brief cessation in judgment. (3) It is a temporary suspension of the revelations granted to John. (4) It is a pause in the heavenly praises to allow the prayers of the saints to be heard before the throne. (5) It is a dramatic pause to symbolize the awe and dread with which the heavenly hosts await the events about to happen.
6. View number makes the 7th seal a display of blessing when in fact it is a display of wrath like the preceding seals.
7. This same consideration rules out view number 2 since the 7th seal is not a cessation in judgment.
8. The third proposal has merit only in the sense that there is a very brief cessation of judgment, but it is more accurate not to call it a cessation of revelation.
9. The problem with view number four is that the prayers of the saints come after the period of silence and not during it.
10. The fifth view has the silence as preparatory for what is about to happen and is most consistent with the immediate context of chapter 8.
11. So when the 7th seal is opened a great hush settles over the worshipping hosts of heaven.
12. For a period of about thirty minutes there is a breathless silence as all await the judgments of the scroll now fully unsealed.
13. Kiddle judges it a “brilliant device for deepening the suspense.”

14. It is akin to the restraining of the four winds of destruction (7:1-3) and the sealing up of the utterance of the seven thunders (10:4).
15. So the silence is neither a symbol of eternal rest nor a necessary precaution so God can hear the prayers of the saints.
16. It is a dramatic pause that makes even more impressive the judgments about to fall upon the earth.
17. Although thirty minutes is a relatively short period, it would be an impressive break in such a rapidly moving drama.
18. One view sees the angelic activity of verses 2-5 taking place during this interval of silence.
19. Trumpets are given to the seven angels before the throne.
20. An angel standing over the altar mingles incense with the prayers of the saints, and taking fire from the golden altar fills his censer and casts it down upon the earth.
21. The intensity of the scene is heightened incredibly by the complete absence of any sound.
22. The silence is broken by the sounds described in verse 5.
23. The natural view is that the actions described in verses 2-5 as taking place immediately after the thirty minutes of silence (and in inactivity).
24. Earlier chronological placement of the first six seals in the first half of the prophetic week of Daniel dictates that the first trumpet (v. 7) happens early in the last half of that week.

Preliminary to the Sounding of the Trumpets (vv. 2-5)

VERSE 2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God (καὶ εἶδον τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλους οἱ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστήκασιν [*conj kai + aor.act.ind.1s. eidon see + art.w/adj.acc.m.p. heta seven + noun acc.m.p. angelos angel + rel.pro.nom.m.p. hos who + prep enopion before + art.w/noun gen.m.s. theos God + perf.act.ind.3p. histemi stand*], **and seven trumpets were given to them** [καὶ ἐδόθησαν αὐτοῖς ἑπτὰ σάλπιγγες [*conj kai + aor.pass.ind.3p. didomi give + pro.dat.m.p. autos + adj.nom.f.p. hepta seven + noun nom.f.p. salpingz trumpet*]).

ANALYSIS: VERSE 2

1. A new development of “and I saw” marks a new phase of John’s 7th seal vision.
2. This scene presumably follows the half hour of silence and includes preparatory actions relative to the trumpet series (8:2-6) and the sounding of the first four trumpets (vv. 7-12), the next “and I saw” not coming until 8:13.
3. Because of the definite article with “angels” some have identified these angels as a special group within the angelic hierarchy, possibly archangels.
4. The perfect indicative “stand” indicates continuing results from some undetermined time in the past.
5. Another support for this identification is a similar description of Gabriel’s position before God in heaven in Lk. 1:19.
6. Two things work against this proposed identification.
7. These seven are missing from the description of the heavenly company in chapters 4-5.
8. An angel distinct from this group offers ceremonially the prayers of the saints in vv. 2-5.
9. If such were a special group of long-standing, certainly one of them would have performed this task.

10. The perfect tense of the verb “stand” simply puts them in a position similar to that of Gabriel.
11. The view that sees them as seven archangels is based on a Jewish tradition that identifies them as Uriel, Raphael, Michael, Saraqael, Gabriel, and Remiel.
12. We must not place any stock in the traditions of men!
13. The preferable course is to explain the definite article as pointing out a specific group, not one based on Jewish tradition.
14. This group was chosen by God to sound the seven trumpets which symbolically initiate the trumpet afflictions.
15. This satisfies the natural sense of the language, and no valid reasons points to another understanding.
16. John saw the seven angels receive seven trumpets.
17. Trumpets played an important role in the national life of ancient Israel, finding use in procession (e.g., Josh. 6:1; 1 Chron. 15:24), in assembling people for war and special feasts (e.g., Num. 10:9-10), and in announcing the new year (e.g., Num. 29:1).
18. The New Year began with a holiday called the Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:24).
19. The Rapture of the church will be associated with the sound of a trumpet (1 Thess. 4:16); in fact, a trumpet blast will signal the resurrection of church age believers, whether alive or deceased.
20. Here the trumpets and the wrath they unleash are precursors to “the war of the great day of God, the Almighty” (Rev. 16:14, e.g., Armageddon).

Prayers of the Saints (vv. 3-4)

VERSE 3 Another angel came and stood at the altar (Καὶ ἄλλος ἄγγελος ἦλθεν καὶ ἐστάθη ἐπὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου [*conj kai + adj.nom.m.s. allos another + noun nom.m.s. angelos + aor.act.ind.3s. erchomai come + conj kai + aor.pass.ind.3s. histemi stand + prep epi, on, at + art.w/noun gen.nt.s. thusiasterion altar*], **holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him** [ἔχων λιβανωτὸν χρυσοῦν, καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ θυμιάματα πολλὰ [*pres.act.part.nom.m.s. echo have; “holding” + noun acc.m.s. libanos frankincense; but with the adjective “golden” is means here and in v. 5 “censer” or “firepan” + adj.acc.m.s. chrusous golden + conj kai + aor.pass.ind. didomi give + pro.dat.m.s. autos “to him” + noun nom.nt.p. thumiama incense + adj.nom.nt.p. polus much*], **so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne** [ἵνα δώσει ταῖς προσευχαῖς τῶν ἁγίων πάντων ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον τὸ χρυσοῦν τὸ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου [*conj hina so that (purpose) + fut.act.ind.3s. didomi give; “add” + art.w/noun dat.f.p. proseuche prayer + art.w/adj.gen.m.p. hagios holy; saint + adj.gen.m.p. pas all + prep epi on + art.w/noun acc.nt.s. thusiasterion altar + art.w/adj.acc.nt.s. chrusous golden + art.w/prep enopion before + art.w/noun gen.m.s. thronos throne*]).

ANALYSIS: VERSE 3

1. As John watched, another angel with a golden censer came on the scene and stood before the altar of incense.
2. The purpose of this angel is not to perform a mediatorial function, but rather to serve to underscore something that is in the process of taking place, e.g., the answering of a particular prayer petition offered up by believers through the ages.
3. The only mediator between God and man is Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:5 “For this one God, *and* one mediator between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus.”)
4. Therefore all prayers to angels and saints are completely bogus.
5. The protocol of prayer is to address God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ (cf. Lk. 11:2 “And He said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come.’”).
6. This angel of the same category (*allos*, “another of the same kind”) as those in verse 2.
7. He simply is assigned the duty of taking the provided incense with a view to performing a ritual.
8. The elements of the ritual are incense and glowing coals of fire.
9. The reality behind the ritual is God answering the prayers of the saints with respect to the establishment of the promised messianic kingdom (i.e., the Millennial Age).
10. Incense is used in Scripture as a symbol for prayer.
11. The stimulating aroma of the incense depicts acceptable prayer before God (cf. Ps. 141:2 “May my prayer be counted as incense before You.”).
12. Under the ceremonial code (part of the Mosaic Law) of ancient Israel, the holy incense was a particular formulation, which was forbidden for common usage (cf. Ex. 30:34-38).
13. This incense was to be brought to the altar of incense situated before the veil in the holy place before the most holy place of the tabernacle and temple.
14. It was there the officiating priest was to offer up incense daily symbolizing the prayers of the nation before God.
15. The prototype (archetype, first of its kind) in the throne room is the one in view in the present verse.
16. The altar of incense is featured in the Apocalypse at 6:9; 8:3, 5; 9:13; 16:7; but not 11:1).
17. The altar of incense in the Jewish tabernacle and temple was built according to divine specifications (cf. Ex. 37:25-27; cp. Ex. 30:27; 31:8; 35:15; 40:5; 1 Chron. 6:49; 28:18; 2 Chron. 26:16, 19; Lk. 1:11; Heb. 9:4).
18. Incense that was not according to the spices and their proportions prescribed under the Law illustrated “strange incense” or bogus prayers (cf. Ex. 30:9; see Doctrine of Prayer for details).
19. This prototype stands before God’s throne.
20. The “golden censer,” sometimes referred to as a “firepan,” was an implement used in Solomon’s temple (cf. 1 Kgs. 7:50; 2 Kgs 25:15; 2 Chron. 4:22; Jer. 52:18-19).
21. The term is derived from *libanos* (“frankincense”) (Matt. 2:11; Rev. 18:13), *libantos* is used in the LXX to refer to “incense” or “frankincense” (e.g., 1 Chron. 9:27, LXX).
22. It is found only in Rev. 8:3, 5 in the NT, and it means “censer.”
23. The adjective “golden” decides for the meaning “censer” instead of “incense.”
24. Frankincense was the lead ingredient in the holy incense of the ritual code of Israel.
25. The angel approaches the throne with a golden censer containing burning coals.

26. The next step in the drama was for the angel to receive from God “much incense” to offer on the altar of incense.
27. Though the source of the incense is unstated, customary usage in Revelation of “was given” indicates that it was from God (cf. 6:2, 4, 8, 11; 7:2; 9:1, 3, 5; 11:1, 2; 13:5, 7, 14, 15; 16:8; 19:8; 20:4).
28. Incense in OT ritualistic worship served as a reminder of intercessory prayer.
29. The sweet aromatic fragrance put off when the incense was placed on coals of fire symbolized the efficacy of prayer before God.
30. When the officiating priest performed the ritual a fragrant cloud filled the tabernacle.
31. It was a reminder of the importance of prayer in the life of the people.
32. This connection between incense and the prayers of the saints occurs here and in 5:8.
33. In this 8:3 “much incense” is the same as the prayer of the saints.
34. Grammatically “the prayers” can mean “consisting of the prayers of the saints.”
35. But this metaphor differs from 5:8, with the prayers corresponding to the live coals on which the grains of incense fall.
36. The meeting of the incense and hot coals produces a fragrant smoke cloud, a symbol of divine acceptance.
37. It is better to observe the contextual distinction between incense and prayers.
38. The angel adds “much [more] incense” to the prayers to increase greatly the volume of aromatic smoke.
39. The prayers and the incense ascend together (8:4).
40. The preferable understanding of *tas proseuchais* (“on behalf of the prayers”) is a dative of advantage.
41. The offering of incense is to help the prayers, i.e., to make them more acceptable to God.
42. This does not assign a mediatorial role to the angel, but it simply says that h prayers rise directly to God, being reinforced by the accompanying incense.
43. In the context of the Apocalypse the prayers are unquestionably the cries of the saints during the future Great Tribulation for judgment against their persecutors.
44. The prayers are prayers for vindication with an understanding that the long promised kingdom is about to be established.
45. This being the case, it is improper to see them as the prayers of all the saints of all time.
46. Martyrs in heaven will be a significant element in these added prayers, but the number of future tribulation causalities will not be limited to them.
47. It is very important to keep in mind that the “much incense” given to the officiating angel is the prayers of the all the pre-tribulational saints of all the ages who have petitioned God on behalf of the promised kingdom.
48. The model prayer features a petition of this kind (Matt. 6:10 “Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”).
49. Again, the prayers that are added are the prayers of the tribulational saints in heaven, that they offered while under duress on earth, and the incense represented by the incense given to the angel, represent the prayers through the past ages of the saints, who of course are in heaven at this juncture; namely, the mid point of the tribulation.
50. The focal point of the prayers is the golden altar before God’s throne, the place of origination of the final judgments, or the trumpet judgments, culminating in the coming of Christ to establish on earth the eternal kingdom.

Answered Prayer Illustrated (v.4)

VERSE 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints (καὶ ἀνέβη ὁ καπνὸς τῶν θυμιαμάτων ταῖς προσευχαῖς τῶν ἁγίων [*conj kai + aor.act.ind.3s. anabaino ascend, go up, move upward; “went up” + art.w/noun nom.m.s. kapnos vapor, fume, smoke + art.w/noun gen.nt.p. thumiama incense + art.w/noun instr.f.p. proseuche prayer + art.w/adj.gen.m.p. hagios saint*]), **went up before God out of the angel's hand** [ἐκ χειρὸς τοῦ ἀγγέλου ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ [*prep ek from + noun abl.f.s. cheir hand + art.w/noun gen.m.s. angelos angel + prep enopion before + art.w/noun gen.m.s theos God*]]).

ANALYSIS: VERSE 4

1. The symbolism of verse 4 suggests prayers answered.
2. All the prayers of the saints to this point in the angelic conflict, namely the mid point of the tribulation are seen the process of being answered.
3. The drama with the angel at the golden altar to incense before God’s throne underscores this fact.
4. The many prayers on behalf of the inauguration of the kingdom age are now in the final process of being answered.
5. This process includes the subjugation of all enemies angelic and human.
6. “The smoke of the incense” represents divine acceptance.
7. An answered petition is one that God is free to act upon.
8. When He acts He honors the request of the one offering the prayer.
9. In all prayer there is either instant response or there is necessary delay.
10. Prayers related to the inauguration of the kingdom have all been put on hold since other factors have to be in place before the prayer for the Lord’s coming can be realized.
11. The smoke resulting from the burning of the incense indicates prayer that is answered.
12. The incense itself indicates the prayer itself.
13. The contact with the fire of the coals and the resultant smoke indicates answered prayer.
14. Here, the answered prayer is for the final seal judgment to be enacted so Christ can return in power and glory.
15. This petition has been offered in forms and times over the course of human history.
16. Because of the maturation of the season, the smoke indicates realized immanency.
17. All that stands in the way of the messianic kingdom is the judgments associated with the seven trumpets of the 7th seal.
18. In v. 4 the phrase “with the prayers of the saints” is an associative instrumental.
19. The smoke produced by the burning incense, which symbolizes the prayers of pre-tribulational saints, rises in the company of the prayers of the tribulational saints.
20. Their prayers are “added” to the prayers of previous generations of believers.
21. This ceremony is accomplished not at the end of the tribulation but at the mid-point.
22. This fact underscores the significance of the 7th seal with its seven trumpets and seven bowls of wrath as compared to seals one through six.
23. The second half the seven years is the home stretch so to speak.

An Interlude (v.5)

VERSE 5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar (καὶ εἴληφεν ὁ ἄγγελος τὸν λιβανωτὸν καὶ ἐγέμισεν αὐτὸν ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου [*conj kai + perf.act.ind.3s. lambano take, receive + art.w/noun nom.m.s. angelos + art.w/noun acc.m.s. libanos frankincense; “censer” + conj kai + aor.act.ind.3s. gemizo fill + pro.acc.m.s. autos it + prep ek from; “with” + art.w/noun abl.nt.s. pur fire + art.w/noun gen.nt.s. thusiasterion altar*], **and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake** [καὶ ἔβαλεν εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ ἐγένοντο βρονταὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ ἀστραπαὶ καὶ σεισμός [*conj kai + aor.act.ind.3s. ballo throw + prep eis to + art.w/noun acc.f.s. ge earth + conj kai + aor.dep.ind.3p. ginomai become; “followed” + noun nom.f.p. bronte the rolling sound associated with a flash of lightning + conj kai + noun nom.f.p. phone sound; reverberation + conj kai + noun nom.f.p. astrape lightning + conj kai + noun nom.m.s. seismos earthquake, a shaking; used of the sea during a tempest or violent storm*]).

ANALYSIS: VERSE 5

1. The final item before the trumpet series begins brings the inhabitants of the earth into the picture.
2. The angel takes burning coals from the heavenly altar of incense and fills his censer and hurls the coals earthward.
3. This connotes judgment about to be unleashed in answer to the prayers connected with the altar of verses 3 and 4.
4. The connection between the divine wrath about to fall and the prayers of God’s people is conspicuous.
5. The censer with its burning coals is associated with judgment.
6. Whenever God honors prayer it is an act of God’s will and is in effect a judgment rendered by Him on behalf of those who pray according to the will of God.
7. In this case, the answer includes bringing wrath against humanity living in the second half of the tribulation.
8. Because until this is done, it is not in the divine program to bring in the kingdom age.
9. Christ cannot return in victory and vindication until the things associated with the seven trumpets have transpired in accordance with the eternal decrees of God.
10. Fire is associated with judgment in the Bible whether it is the eternal fire of the unbelievers or the fire of the altar of burnt offering.
11. The fire associated with the altar of incense indicates divine judgment executed even on behalf of the adjusted.
12. God always renders judgment in accordance with His perfect character and the truth of His revealed word.
13. Even in acts of grace God renders judgment.
14. His perfect love does not extend its benefits a part from the satisfaction of God’s +R and J.

15. It is the responsibility of believers to pray for the inauguration of perfect righteousness on earth, and it is God's prerogative to determine the time and the means of its accomplishment.
16. Following the violent casting of burning coals toward the earth, follows a storm theophany.
17. The hurling of fire to the earth recalls the saint's question of 6:10, "How long?" and signals that an answer to their plea is on the way.
18. This is the second such theophany thus far in the Apocalypse (cf. 4:5).
19. A theophany is a manifestation of deity either on earth (like the burning bush) or in heaven proper, such as we see here.
20. What we see here is a storm theophany, accompanied with an earthquake or a shaking.
21. The earthquake is an added feature not seen in the earlier theophany of 4:5.
22. This heavenly theophany does not necessarily imply associated natural trauma on earth.
23. It seems best to relegate this theophany with the breaking of the silence of verse 1.
24. Earth's inhabitants are about to experience this display of divine displeasure in the form of the trumpet and bowl judgments that immediately follow.
25. Like the theophany at Sinai, at the giving of the Law, the world will soon tremble at the onslaught of divine wrath designed to purge the heavens and earth of wickedness.

Close of the Interlude (v. 6)

VERSE 6 And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them (Καὶ οἱ ἑπτὰ ἄγγελοι οἱ ἔχοντες τὰς ἑπτὰ σάλπιγγας ἠτοίμασαν αὐτοὺς ἵνα σαλπίσωσιν [*conj kai + art.w/adj.nom.m.p. hepta seven + noun nom.m.p. angelos + art.w/pres.act.part.nom.m.p. echo have + art.w/adj.acc.f.p. hepta seven + noun acc.f.p. salpingx trumpet + aor.act.ind.3p. hetoimazo prepare, make ready + conj hina (purpose) + aor.act.subj.3p. slapinzo sound or blow the trumpet*]).

ANALYSIS: VERSE 6

1. To close the interlude, the seven angels reappear and prepare to blow their trumpets.
2. Their preparatory activity, probably in a deliberate arranging of themselves in the proper order and raising their trumpets in readiness to sound, heightens the sense of expectancy even more.
3. The signal for them to prepare was the presentation of incense on the altar (v.3) and the casting of fire earthward (v.5).
4. Following the pattern of the seal series, the first four trumpets are different in kind from the last three.
5. These four set in motion the forces of nature to achieve their destructive effects within the natural world.
6. Of the fifteen items affected by the plagues associated with the blowing of the first four trumpets, one-third receives major injury or complete destruction in twelve instances (vv. 7, 10, 11 being the exceptions).
7. On the other hand, in the last three trumpets, sustaining human life in the face of demonic onslaughts is the major concern.

8. Like the seven bowls to follow (arising out of the 7th trumpet), the trumpet series has reminiscences of OT plagues against Egypt—the 1st trumpet paralleling the 7th Egyptian plague (Ex. 9:24), the 2nd trumpet recalling the 9th plague (Ex. 10:21), and the 5th trumpet paralleling the 8th plague (Ex. 10:12).
9. Both series are judgments against the enemies of God.