

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 21ST–22ND, 2024 // REVELATION

THE SEVENTH SEAL & THE GOLDEN CENSER (REVELATION 8:1–5)

- Seals 1–5 (Rev. 6:1–11): The tribulation begins; the 4 horsemen, the martyrs cry out for vengeance.
- Seal 6 (Rev. 6:12–17): There's a cataclysmic earthquake and worldwide natural disasters.
- INTERLUDE (Rev. 7; 144,000 and multitude)
- Seal 7 (Rev. 8–16): The events of the "Great Tribulation," containing 7 trumpet and 7 bowl judgments; it encompasses all of God's final wrath up to the return of Christ.

When Jesus broke the seventh seal, a unique response occurred—silence (v. 1).

- Up to this point, John had heard a lot of noise in heaven—thunder, the songs of the four living creatures, the songs of the elders, the cries of angels, and the cries of the martyrs.
- But after all the noise, when the reality and finality of judgment become apparent, all of heaven is reduced to silence.

The silence that lasts for "half an hour" is one of great somberness and awe at what God is about to do.

- While eternal heaven knows no time, the apostle John, who is seeing the vision, did know time.
- Each minute of that half hour of silence must have increased the suspense, expectancy, and anticipation as all of heaven waited to see the greatest event since the fall take place.

Following the half hour of heaven's silence, John saw a special group of "seven angels who stand [before] God" being given trumpets.

- The use of the word "the" appears to set them apart as a unique group, which some have called "the presence angels."
- The Greek verb translated "stand" indicates that they were in the presence of God and had been for a time.

Scripture describes various ranks and orders of angels, and these seven appear to be an order of high-ranking angels (Gabriel may have been one of them, Luke 1:19).

- As John watched, seven trumpets were given to these angels in preparation for the trumpet judgments that were to follow.
- These trumpets weren't *shophars*, but metal instruments of the first century.

John then sees an eighth angel with a "golden incense burner" standing at the altar.

- An "incense burner" is a bowl or firepan designed for holding live coals and incense.
- In the Old Testament, the priests in the temple would twice daily take hot, fiery coals from the brazen altar and transport them into the Holy Place to the incense altar (Ex. 30:7–8). Incense was a representation of prayer.

John saw an altar when the fifth seal was broken, and under it he saw the souls of the martyrs, and from under it, their prayers were rising.

- This angel John now sees was given much incense to offer "with the prayers of all the saints."
- The smoke of the incense rose before God from the hand of the angel before he filled the censer with fire from the altar and threw it on the Earth resulting in disasters (v. 5).

The cries and prayers of Believers in the Great Tribulation are pictured as rising with the smoke of the incense to the throne of God.

- The angel's act of throwing the censer to the Earth reveals that God's judgment will come in direct response to those prayers.
- The deeper theological principle at work: what the saints pray on Earth has a direct effect in the very presence of God.

The trumpets and bowls of God's wrath and judgment are poured out on Earth as an answer to the prayers of the saints.

- Jesus told His disciples to pray, "Your Kingdom come. Your will be done..." (Matt. 6:10).
- Jesus' disciples have been crying out for centuries for God to bring a righteous resolution to all things and usher in His Kingdom. One day He will answer that prayer in a dramatic fashion.

PRAYER IS A POWERFUL WEAPON.

What have you been praying about this week?

- Have the distractions of daily life led you to a "prayer-less" week?
- Have you been praying with faith and believing there is a valid reason, a holy purpose, and a specific point behind God's command to pray?

SEVEN TRUMPETS (REVELATION 8:6–13)

INTERPRETING THE SEVEN TRUMPETS

The "preterist" understanding of the 7 trumpets is that these blasts were like war trumpets against apostate Israel in the 1st Century and they corresponded to events in the Jewish Wars (66–135 A.D.).

- For example, the second trumpet is the nation of Rome depicted as a mountain, which is symbolic of great nations in the O.T. (Jer. 50).
- The "futurist" understanding of the 7 trumpets is that these are judgments that haven't happened yet but will happen during a period known as the Great Tribulation before Christ's return.
- This will be a time of horror and judgment upon the Earth that will be unmatched by any other time in human history.
- There are valid reasons Christians hold to either a preterist or futurist view, and there's room for some disagreement.

MY 3 MAIN PROBLEMS WITH THE PRETERIST VIEW:

1. Date of authorship problem: Revelation would have had to have been written before 70 A.D., but early church fathers place John's writing during the reign of Domitian, A.D. 81–96.
2. Church history problem: The Christians alive during 70 A.D., as well as the church fathers, believed the Second Coming was a future event. The Didache (80 A.D.), Papias, Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, and Justin Martyr all wrote of a future Second Coming, not a past event that ushered in the age of the Church.
3. Relies on over-allegorizing Scripture: that can mean anything we want it to mean! ("The truth is, if earth, trees, and grass do not mean earth, trees, and grass, no man can tell what they mean. Letting go the literal signification of the record, we launch out upon an endless sea of sheer conjecture" (Seiss).)

INTERPRETING THE SEVEN TRUMPETS (CONT.)

By dismissing most Biblical prophecy as already being fulfilled, we can run the danger of taking our eyes off the glorious hope we have in Christ and placing it on ourselves.

- We can fall prey to the temptation of not being ready and watchful for the day of Christ's return.
- There is a future coming judgment for the world, and we need to be ready.

TRUMPET ONE: HAIL, FIRE, AND BLOOD (V. 7)

The first trumpet describes a series of disasters that directly affect the earth.

- An ecological catastrophe is described that takes place worldwide.
- A third of Earth will be "burned up," including a third of trees and all grass.
- This could be fallout from the sixth seal.
- This is also mentioned in Joel 2:30–32.

A COUPLE OF POINTS THAT APPLY TO THE FIRST 3 TRUMPETS:

- We don't know the mechanism for this destruction, but it is easy in our nuclear age to see how this is possible.
- John's concern is not mechanisms, just that God is doing it.
- God has struck vegetation before due to sin (Genesis 3:17–18).

THE FIRST TRUMPET IS NOT FATAL...YET.

It doesn't directly kill, but because civilization cannot survive long without healthy vegetation, it sets it up for severe devastation.

- If scientists believe Earth cannot exist with just a mild shift from climate change, what will society make of these events?
- Something like this would impact agriculture, industry, and commerce on a global level.

TRUMPET TWO: A GREAT MOUNTAIN (V. 8)

The first trumpet judgment fell on the land, but the second trumpet judgment is toward the sea.

- The text describes what seems to be a giant meteor or asteroid surrounded by flaming gases hitting the sea.
- "The sea" mentioned refers specifically to the Mediterranean Sea, but this could also extend to all the world's oceans.

THREE CATASTROPHIC EFFECTS...

1. A third of the sea became "blood" (maybe not literal, simply speaking of contamination).
2. A third of the creatures in the sea died (think of the food supply issues).
3. A third of the ships on the world's oceans were destroyed, most likely due to giant waves capsizing huge vessels and completely swamping ports and harbors.

TRUMPET THREE: A GREAT STAR FALLS (VS. 10–11)

The Greek word for "star" can refer to any celestial body other than the sun or moon (megas aster).

- This is most likely a giant meteor or asteroid that lands on the Earth in bodies of fresh water.
- Because of its deadly effects, the star is called "Wormwood"—an extremely bitter plant that can make a person sick if they take too much.

DOES THIS PLAGUE LOOK FAMILIAR?

In Exodus 7:14–24, God struck the Nile River in Egypt, and its water became undrinkable.

- Something like this would most definitely have a devastating impact on the animal kingdom and aquatic life.
- NASA's Near-Earth Object Research Center has started planning for such an event (if possible), concluding the impact would be catastrophic.

TRUMPET FOUR: THE SKY DARKENS (V. 12)

As the fourth trumpet sounded, the focus shifted from the Earth to "the heavens."

- The heavenly bodies are hit so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night the same way.
- At this point, temperatures would plunge drastically all over the world.

THIS IMPACTS EVERYTHING!

Something like this would severely disrupt Earth's weather patterns and the seas' tides.

- This would lead to violent, unpredictable storms and tides, the destruction of crops, and further loss of animal and human lives.
- The O.T. prophets associated such signs in the heavens with "the day of the Lord" (Ezk. 32:7–8, Isaiah 13:9–10, Amos 8:9, Joel 2:10).

As severe as the first four trumpet judgments have been, the worst is yet to come.

- The first four attacked nature (with humanity affected indirectly), but the new judgments will attack humanity directly.
- As John looked, he heard an eagle (probably an angel) flying directly overhead, crying out, "Woe! Woe! Woe to those who live on the earth, because of the remaining trumpet blasts."

"Woe" is used throughout Scripture as an expression of judgment, destruction, and condemnation.

- "High overhead" means at the top of the sky, where the sun shines at noon.
- The eagle's (angel's) cry is for "people who live on the earth" to take warning. This phrase describes the pagan world which is hostile, rebellious, and expresses hatred toward God.

Although "those who live on the earth" will acknowledge that the disasters have come from God (6:15–17), they will not repent.

- The plagues poured out in chapters 8 and 9 give humanity one last chance to repent.
- What we are seeing is a dismantling of creation in order to bring it back to perfection.
- God has started to tear apart nature, land, sea, and the cosmos in order to restore it.

DO WE REALLY WANT CHRIST'S KINGDOM TO COME AND HIS WILL TO BE DONE IN OUR LIVES?

- John 15:2

DISMANTLING FOR RESTORATION AND CHANGE.

- While God will "prune" on a cosmic level so that perfection will come to the universe, He also "prunes" each of us on a personal level.
- Sometimes, for His will to be done in our lives, God goes to great lengths to get our attention.
- Other times, for us to submit to His kingship, He prompts us to remove things from our lives to produce spiritual fruit through us.

"YOUR KINGDOM COME. YOUR WILL BE DONE..."

- What is God doing in your life?
- Are you fighting this process?
- What may God be "pruning" from your life in order to activate repentance, change, and progress?