

**Seventh Seal
Revelation 8
By Gary R. May
First Baptist Church of Diana, March 30, 2011**

Suspense and intrigue have reached a crescendo as the seventh seal of the mysterious document found in Revelation is finally broken and the contents begin to unfold. Chapter 8 contains two scenes, one in heaven and one on earth. The scene in heaven is found in verses 1-6 with the scene on earth in the remaining verses.

The Scene in Heaven

Some scenes of high drama find a climax with great jubilation, singing, and loud noises. Such is not the case with the opening of the seventh seal. As a matter of fact, the opposite is found in verse one of Revelation 8. Silence encompasses heaven at the breaking of the seventh seal. No one can direct the activities to come save the Lord Jesus Christ. He has earned the right to execute judgment on the earth and no one else can speak when the seal is broken. All eyes fall upon the Lord awaiting His command because He is clearly in control of the events. He is the one you remember found worthy to open the seals which leads to an unleashing of the judgments of God. Perhaps in the midst of the silence, seven trumpets are taken up and given to seven angels who will serve as God's messengers of judgment to come. If you have been in a courtroom scene, you know the suspense when the judge is about to announce the verdict and the following sentence of punishment. Tensions are high in such a courtroom setting. On the one hand there is an agreement that justice should be served, on the other, there is sadness over the events which led to the trial and even for the fate of the accused. There is also great reverence for the judge. In the American system his verdict stands as the final ruling subject only to appeals to higher courts. In the case of Jesus, there is no higher authority for appeal. It is time for execution of judgment according to the Scripture.

The use of trumpets is significant based on other biblical uses. Numbers 10 reveals three important uses of trumpets; they announced war, they announced special times, and they called the people together. A trumpet also sounded announcing the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. Trumpets were used to announce the anointing of a new king and they sounded at the battle of Jericho resulting in a Jewish victory and the defenses of the city falling to the ground. Jesus voice has been compared to the sound of a trumpet in Rev. 1:10 and it was the voice of a trumpet which summonsed John to heaven in Rev. 4:1. The saints are also called home both from the grave and from life in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.ⁱ The Bible speaks of several special uses of trumpets in the work of God among men. These trumpets of Revelation are eschatological trumpets. They herald the day of God's wrath. "Johns trumpet-angels call forth great calamities upon the physical universe (8:7-12) two demonic plagues upon unrepentant humankind (9:1-21), and the great proclamation that this world has fallen to the sovereignty of God (11:15)."ⁱⁱ

Once the angels have been given the trumpets, the spotlight moves to another angel holding a golden censer that has sometimes been described as a fire pan. Because the censer was described as golden, one must conclude that the reference is to a vessel and not the contents. The contents added include the prayers of the saints and much incense. The incense caused smoke to come from the altar when the censer was emptied into the fire. The picture is no more waiting for

God to bring a final and definite answer to the prayers of the saints offered over the course of history for God to be vindicated and His Kingdom to fall on the earth. The prayers of the saints find agreement with the will of God and action is set to follow. The action originates in heaven but will soon be felt throughout the earth as the angels deliver the will of God on earth.

The drama continues as the smoke is mingled with the prayers of the saints rising up before God and finding his approval. The scene begins its movement to earth in verse five when the angel fills the censer with fire from the altar and throws it upon the earth. As with the earth's response of trembling following the theophany at Mount Sinai, the heavens become bright with lightening, the sounds of thunder rumble, and the earth trembles with an earthquake. Drama is moving from heaven to earth and the inhabitants are being called to attention for the judgment to follow. Even though many earthquakes are occurring in our modern age, they continue to catch the attention of all of mankind. Regularly we are reminded of the fault lines all across the globe echoing the news of our vulnerability. With brilliant lightening, the sounds of thunder, and a trembling earth, notice has been sent to earth that something significant is about to take place.

The Scene on Earth

The scene in heaven extends to the earth and the consequences are felt by her inhabitants. In verse 6 the angels are preparing to sound their trumpets which likely means they are simply raising them and preparing their wind. When the first angel sounds the trumpet hail, fire, and blood fall upon the earth burning up 1/3 of the earth, trees and grass. There is a question regarding the grass as to whether this means all the grass on the earth or the grass on the 1/3 of the earth that burns up. This is significant because Revelation 9:4 gives a caution against harming the green grass. Either all the grass was not burned up in 8:7, the grass has recovered, or the trumpets do not blow in chronological order. Because only 1/3 of the earth is affected, a conclusion is easily drawn that God's judgment is not yet complete and there is more to come.

Dispensationalists and historical interpreters agree the church is not in view in these judgments. The dispensational group believe the church has been raptured and historical premillennialist believe the church is protected by the sealing and come into view again in chapters 11-13. They concede the church will be affected by the first four plagues but are kept from the demonic assaults which follow. The purpose of the plagues given through the blowing of the trumpets is not mere vengeance and destruction but rather to call the earth to repentance. The people are being warned of the impending danger.ⁱⁱⁱ

In the blowing of the first trumpet, two parallels can be seen relating to the history of Israel and the next three trumpets. First, you will notice the judgments have great resemblance to the plagues of the Exodus account of God dealing with Egypt while delivering Israel. Hail, fire, and blood are all a part of the plagues God used against Egypt while protecting Israel. Second, the plagues of the first four trumpets are directed toward the world of nature which parallels the four horsemen and events that take place on the earth. The parallels to the Old Testament Exodus account serve with great influence on Historical Premillennial interpretations that the church will go through the tribulation period and be taken from the earth with Christ at the end of that period. They easily see this horrible period on the earth as a prelude to the great and final exodus of the church.

At the sound of the second trumpet, a great mountain was burning and cast into the sea. The results were devastating. Again in limited fashion as with the first trumpet, 1/3 of the sea turned to blood, 1/3 of the living creatures of the sea were killed, and 1/3 of the ships of the sea were destroyed. There is surely a similarity here to the Nile River turning to blood during the plagues preceding the Exodus account. Again there are limitations to God's judgment with a focus toward repentance by the people on the earth. Hal Lindsey sees a super-thermonuclear weapon that will be set off in the ocean and destroy a large portion of marine life. He also believes one of the reasons such great devastation will occur on the ocean is that thermonuclear missiles are targeted toward large fleets of naval vessels.^{iv} Others see in this passage a reference to a large volcano. Less than twenty years prior to John receiving this vision, a large volcano had erupted destroying Pompeii and Herculaneum. The catastrophe was widely known and had been variously interpreted.^v The problem interpreters sometimes experience in discerning the pictures of Scripture arises from the limitations of our own experiences. In this line of reasoning, humans tend to interpret writings and life experiences based on previous experiences.

Mounce believes it was the lightening from heaven of the first trumpet which set the mountain ablaze in the second trumpet. This is consistent with a view of the devastation coming from heaven rather than some phenomenon of man. The third trumpet calls attention to a great star falling from heaven. This announcement helps us to know that only some of the stars of heaven fell upon the earth in Revelation 6. The falling of this star caused 1/3 of the fresh water supplies on the earth to be contaminated bringing death to many humans. The recent cholera outbreak in Haiti through contaminated fresh water supplies illustrates the vulnerability of humanity and the importance of a clean water supply. This plague comes from above and the reaches of its affects are also controlled by heaven. The limitation of 1/3 is again emphasized in John's writing of the vision. Time remains for repentance on the earth.^{vi} The recent earthquake and tsunami in Japan resulted in a backlog at funeral homes due to the limited capacity of the crematories to handle mass number of deaths at one time. It is apparent that this will be the case when many people are killed from drinking this contaminated water.

At the sound of the fourth trumpet 1/3 of the sun was turned dark along with 1/3 of the moon, 1/3 of the stars, and the corresponding portions of night and day had no light. The ninth plague of Egypt was a plague of darkness and serves as a biblical parallel. Lindsey finds this contamination to be the result of thermonuclear warheads that have been used in previous plagues.^{vii} Others such as Mounce and Allen avoid earthly origins and remind the readers that these are the judgments of God giving opportunities for repentance. Darkness is a symbol of judgment in the Old Testament and no doubt strikes terror in the hearts of all humanity. This fourth trumpet can be seen as the answer to Old Testament prophecies of Joel 2:2 which speaks of "a day of darkness and gloom" and Jesus quoting Isaiah in Mark 13:24. Darkness also represents the demonic and is likely signaling a transition from divine warnings to demonic woes.

One More Warning

Bible scholars typically divide the trumpet warnings into two sections as we have done in this study and as those who put chapter breaks in the Bible did as well. This seems to be a natural observation since due to the bird of prey that flies through the air in 8:13 announcing the future three woes. Many translators see an eagle in this picture while others see a vulture. It is the predatory nature of the bird that is in view and both vultures and eagles fall into this category. The bird is sent to give a warning to the people. For one who travels the desert or works primarily in uninhabited areas, the vulture and the eagle are signs of warning. Vultures fly over something that has died while eagles swoop down and grab their pray with their strong talons inflicting great damage. Large eagles can actually cut open sizable animals with one pass. Either of these birds represents warning of coming woes.

The announcement is made of three woes yet to come which correlate to the three trumpets yet to sound. Again, it is important to keep in mind the torments are directed toward the people who do not have the seal of God upon their foreheads. God's judgment is certain. God's judgment is swift. God's judgment is thorough. His grace abounds and He has made the offer of salvation to all who will believe. His blood is sufficient to avenge His natural wrath against sin. Man is without excuse and even during such great plagues as will be seen in the blowing of the first four trumpets, men will refuse to repent and submit to the living God. Hearts are turned inward and pride will continue to stand between man and his creator.

ⁱ Wiersbe

ⁱⁱ Mounce Loc 3386

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid. 3447

^{iv} Newport 204

^v Mounce 3487

^{vi} Allen 294

^{vii} Newport 205