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A0546 – November 13, 2005 – Revelation 8:1-6 – The Seventh Seal

The first six seals were broken in chapter 6. Chapter 7 intervened to answer the question of 6:17 “Who is able to stand?” The answer given is two-fold. First, 144,000 Israelites are given a protective seal so they will not be hurt by the Trumpet judgments which follow shortly after in chapter 8. Second, a great multitude from every tongue, tribe, people and nation has been martyred under the first six seals so that they are able to stand in heaven away from God’s wrath in the Trumpet judgments. In Chapter 8 we reach the 7th Seal.

Revelation 8:1-6 And when He broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. ² And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. ³ Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. ⁴ And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. ⁵ Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake. ⁶ And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them.

And when He broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven. The one breaking the seal is the only one worthy to break the seals. Earlier, a universal search was made for one worthy to break the seals in

Revelation 5:2-3 "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals?" ³ And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it.

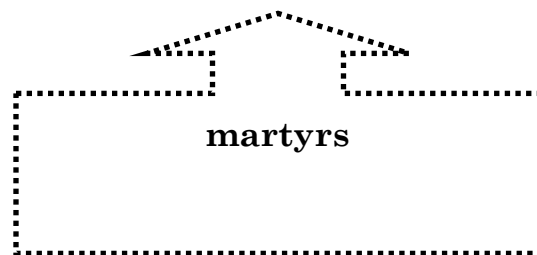
This caused John to weep loudly but then an angel came forward and told him to stop crying. This is not a time to weep but a time to rejoice because

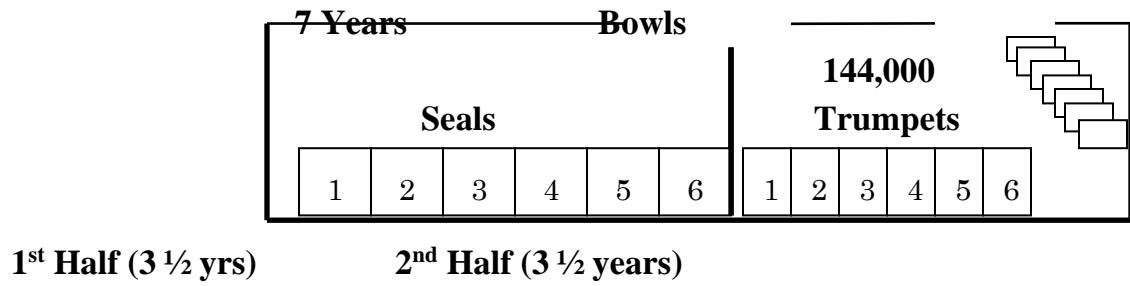
Revelation 5:5 the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the scroll and its seven seals."

Jesus is of the tribe of Judah and is of the royal house of David thus qualifying Him to break the seven seals, dispense the judgments, and rule on earth. At each stage of judgment He is progressively removing the usurpers from His earth so He can restore righteousness and peace in His earthly kingdom. We are currently at the seventh stage of this 21-stage plan which, when completed, will have cleansed the earth by complete removal of evil-doers.

The result of the *seventh seal* being broken is *silence in heaven*. This *silence* is the quiet before the storm that is about to come upon the earth through the trumpet judgments. Before great catastrophes such as tornadoes or earthquakes there is often a deafening silence and stillness and then suddenly, without warning, earth shattering destruction takes over the scene. The duration of the *silence* is *about half an hour*. This intermission in John's vision heightens the expectation of what God is about to do. Though God is not subject to the limitations of time His creatures are, even in *heaven*. According to Heb 11:3 "time" (i.e. *aión* – ages) is a creation of God and serves as one of four dimensions that humans are bound by (three spatial and one time). The *heaven* spoken of here is not the eternal New Heavens and New Earth but one which was created during creation week (Gen 1:1) and will either end or merge after the Millennium. This is the *heaven* which all deceased saints are presently in but they will not remain in this heaven for eternity. When Christ returns all deceased saints will return to earth in resurrected bodies and remain on earth for 1,000 yearsⁱ after which God will re-create a new order of the heavens and earth as described in Rev 21-22. Even in the present 3rd heaven and in the yet future NH & NE creatures are subject to time. We will always be time bound and here John observes *silence in heaven for about half an hour* which serves to increase our anxiety as to what God is going to do next.

70th Week of Daniel 9
2 Divisions of Birth Pangs



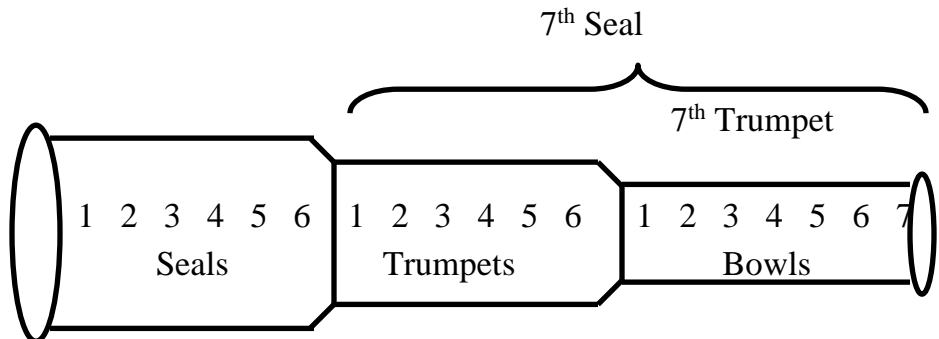


Revelation 8:2 *And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.*

And I saw (*kai eidon*) introduces a new phase of John’s vision. This scene follows the 30-minute interval. John sees **the seven angels who stand before God**. Due to the definite article (*the*) and the perfect participle (*stand*) there have been attempts to identify these **seven angels** with a group of angels from Jewish tradition; Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Saraqael, Gabriel, and Remiel. However, this identification is impossible. More likely, these are a group of **seven angels** who have a special commission to blow the **seven trumpets**. The **seven** have been reserved for this special hour and day to blow the trumpets and release the judgments upon the earth sequentially.

Next John sees them receive **seven trumpets**. This recalls the “telescopic” structure of the remaining seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments. Last week I showed you that “telescoping” is a literary form of writing that when illustrated appears much like a “telescope”.

7th Seal



The 7th Seal is the seven trumpets and the 7th Trumpet is the seven bowls. Thus, the 7th Seal corresponds to the 2nd half of the Tribulation. As you can see the 7th Seal, 7th Trumpet

and 7th Bowl all start sequentially but they all end at the same time. This is telescopic judgments and shows that the order is basically chronological although there are a few places where the text is not chronological but backs up to give additional information

trumpets played a major role in the history of the nation of Israel. They were used during ceremonial processions, in announcing the New Year, in warning of the coming day of the Lord, and in assembling people for war, journeys, or special feasts. Here, the seven trumpets signal the coming judgments in the eschatological day of the Lord.

Revelation 8:3 And another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne.

In verse 3 an eighth angel enters the scene (cf 7:1-2). This is another angel of the same kind (*allos*) or order. He ***came and stood at the altar***. This is the heavenly ***golden altar***. There is but one ***altar*** in the heavenly temple. The OT tabernacle and the Solomonic Temple were designed after the heavenly temple. The ***altar*** of incense stood directly in front of the doorway to the most holy place. So, it seems that this angel is standing at the heavenly ***altar*** just in front of the most holy place.

The angel is ***holding a golden censer***. A ***censer*** was a “firepan” shaped much like a bowl and having handles. It was ***golden*** as it was in the Solomonic Temple and here it is empty until ***much incense was given to him***. In the Apocalypse when something is given it is God who gives it (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). Though at times ***incense*** is symbolic of prayers (cf 5:8) here the ***incense*** is distinct from the prayers. Incense played a key role in the OT worship system and served as a reminder that intercessory prayer is like sweet perfume before the Lord (Walvoord). In the Solomonic Temple ritual the priest would pour the incense over the burning coals on the altar of incense and a cloud of smoke would ascend which in turn resulted in the Israelites bowing in prayer as both their prayers and the incense ascended heavenward. Here we have a similar scene.

The purpose of the ***incense*** is to ***add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne***. Again, the ***golden altar*** is located just outside the most holy place ***which was before the throne***. The ***throne*** of God is located above the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. This is probably what Isaiah saw in vision in Isa 6. So, standing just outside this most holy place at the ***golden altar*** this angel is ***given much incense*** to add to the ***prayers of all the saints***. The apparent reason is so that the incense when added

will go up with the *prayers of all the saints* and will make them more acceptable to God. We might be tempted to think of the *prayers of all the saints* as the prayers of the saints of all ages but that would not fit the context of the Apocalypse. The *saints* here are the Tribulation saints both those martyrs in heaven and those on earth who are crying out for vengeance. This recalls the prayer in

Revelation 6:10 "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

The question "How long?" is one we have all asked. How long will God wait to judge? His patience in waiting so long to judge reveals the vastness of His grace. When the incense is added to the prayers of these saints the prayers and incense will immediately go up together before God and He will answer immediately with the Trumpet judgments.

Revelation 8:4 *And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand.*

It is apparent that the angel added the *incense* to the *prayers of the saints* between v 3 and 4. The result, just like it was in the OT priestly ritual, was *smoke*. The *smoke of the incense* along *with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hands*. Thus far their prayers have gone unanswered, now they swiftly rise before God being enforced by the incense, and will be answered immediately by God in the Trumpet judgments.

EXCURSUS ON PRAYER:

Again, I think it is important to review the importance of prayer in bringing about God's purposes. *First*, God has a definite purpose for world history. *Second*, God's purposes cannot be thwarted. *Third*, believers are commanded to pray to God. *Fourth*, God is a person who answers prayer. *Fifth*, if we don't pray then God's purposes will not come about. *Sixth*, God has figured into His purposes the prayers of the saints. Thus, *seventh*, the prayers of the saints become the means God uses to carry out His purposes for world history. The entire sequence of Trumpet judgments is conditioned upon these prayers of the saints.

We always need to remember the importance of prayer because God has conditioned many of His purposes on prayer. A second thing to remember and which is observable in our context is that our prayers may remain unanswered for a period of time. Thus, while we may pray in the will of God it may not be God's will to answer that prayer until His perfect

timing. Unanswered prayer may not remain unanswered for long. We need wait patiently for God’s answer and we need pray earnestly and persistently. Prayer plays an intimate role in our relationship with God and bringing about future world history. We do not have a static God but a relational God who longs to hear from His children and is ready to listen if we will only take the time to ask. Asking God is a frank admission that we are not capable of fulfilling the need and that we are therefore dependent upon Him. Clearly, these saints who pray for vengeance realize that it is out of their hands. They can do nothing but pray to the one who has all things in His hands and is now ready to answer with acts of vengeance.

Revelation 8:5 *Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.*

This verse is what scholars call a “storm theophany”. You might write that in your margin along with the following references to other storm theophanies. The “storm theophanies” were first mentioned Rev 4:5 as coming from the throne showing that the source of the wrath is God.

Revelation 4:5 Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder.

Revelation 11:19 And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

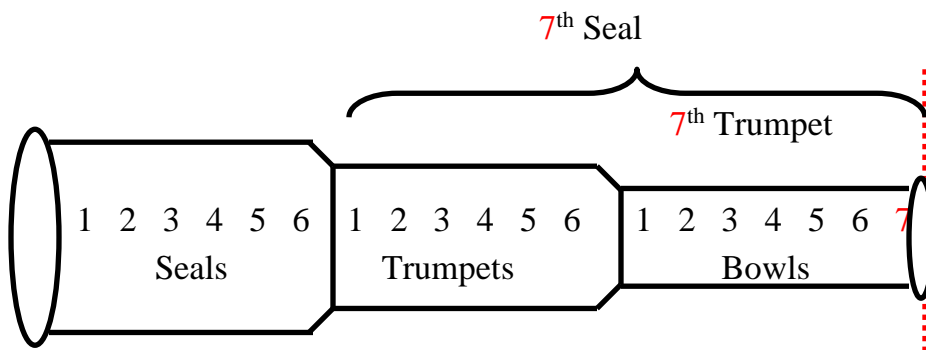
Revelation 16:18 And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake *was it, and* so mighty.

	Rev 8:5	Rev 11:19	Rev 16:18
Peals of thunder	✓	✓	✓
Flashes of lightning	✓	✓	✓
Sounds	✓	✓	✓
Earthquake	✓	✓	✓
Hailstorm		✓	

Another exciting observation here is that each “storm theophany” comes after the 7th judgment in each series:

- Storm Theophany 1: *After the 7th Seal*
- Storm Theophany 2: *After the 7th Trumpet*
- Storm Theophany 3: *After the 7th Bowl*

What this indicates is that the 7th Seal, 7th Trumpet, and 7th Bowl all end at the same time! And that time is the end of the Great Tribulation! If we compare this with our telescopic arrangement we find this fits perfectly. Since they all finish at the same time the storm theophanies are summaries of the remaining judgments which will be complete by the end of the Great Tribulation.

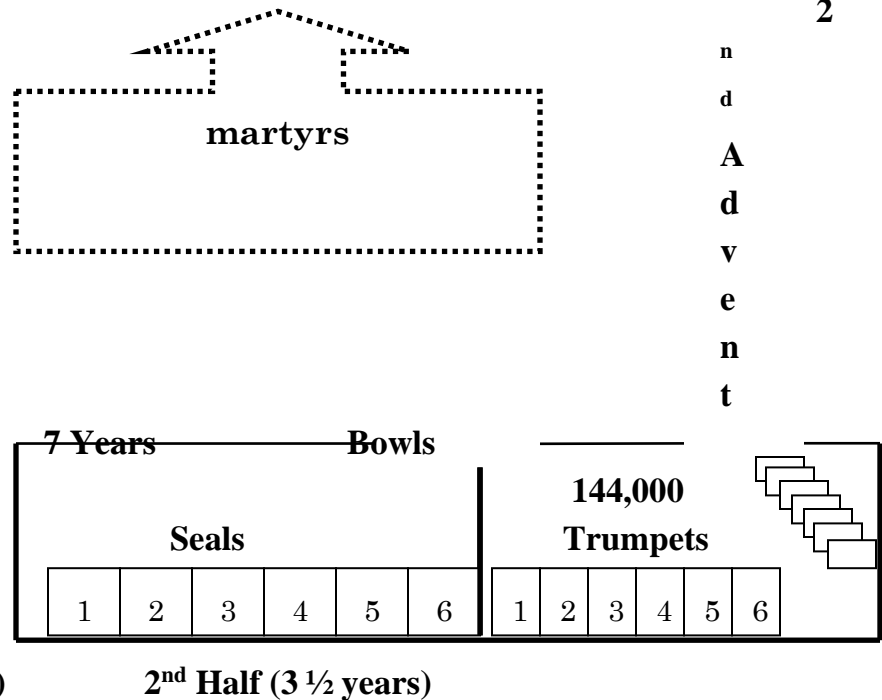


Let's exegete the first "storm theophany" in Rev 8:5. ***Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar.*** The eighth angel takes the ***censer*** which was originally filled with incense that was added to the prayers of the saints but has now become a ***censer*** of wrath. The ***censer*** is now ***filled with fire from the altar.*** ***fire*** is a symbol for divine torment of the wicked. The ***censer*** is then ***thrown to the earth*** with great force and devastation looking forward to the remaining Trumpet and Bowl judgments which are about to be released in increasing intensity. The results; ***peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.*** The silence of verse 1 has been dashed to pieces by the extreme nature of what heaven has cast upon the earth. When the course of these judgments is complete God will have purged His creation and the blessing phase of the "day of the Lord" can begin.

Revelation 8:6 And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them.

In verse 6 we return to the *seven angels who had the seven trumpets*. Their activity here is “preparing to sound”. They probably prepare by getting in the proper order and raising their trumpets to sound. At the sound of each trumpet a judgment will come upon the earth. When the judgment is completed then the second *angel* will *sound* and so forth until the seventh angel sounds his trumpet and the seven bowls are passed out by one of the four living creatures (Rev 15:7).

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Review

Verse 1 the worthy Lamb breaks the 7th seal and an eerie silence in heaven takes place for about 30 minutes. This is the silence before the stormy judgments of the Great Tribulation. Within the 7th seal are the seven trumpets and seven angels who stand before God are given seven trumpets. These trumpets will signal the release of each of the judgments upon the earth. Then an eighth angel comes and stands in front of the heavenly altar just outside the most holy place. He holds a golden censer which God Himself fills with incense. The incense is then poured out on the altar and the prayers of the saints who cried out for vengeance merge with the incense rising up before the throne of God, pleasing Him and now ready to be answered by God. This censer is then turned into an instrument of judgment as the angel fills it with fire

from the altar and hurls it to the earth with mighty strength. This is the second of four storm theophanies, the others in Rev 11:19 and 16:18, each following the 7th judgment of the seals, trumpets, and bowls. The peals of thunder, sounds, flashes of lightning and earthquake stifle the quiet and summarize the judgments which will desolate the earth dwellers and reach completion at the end of the Great Tribulation. At last the seven angels who had the seven trumpets line up in the proper order, readying themselves to blast their trumpet.

ⁱ Dillow disagrees in *Reign of the Servant Kings*.

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