

Charts: The Tribulation: Chart #9

PREFACE

As we approach v1 of Chapter Eight we must remind ourselves of the flow of the text. All of Chapter Seven is an inset parenthesis, an interruption of the chronological flow of the end-time narrative. Its first half points back to a scene on earth at the beginning of the Tribulation, while the second half points forward, revealing a scene in heaven that will transpire at the end of the Tribulation—but before Christ returns in power.

Thus Chapter Eight picks up where Chapter Six leaves off: The breaking of the sixth seal, up till then the most terrifying consequences of the Tribulation period. The centerpiece of this event is a cataclysmic earthquake, in which “every mountain and island were moved out of their places” (v14). It is so bad that people from all social strata seek either safety or a quick death by hiding in the very quaking mountains.

Read Revelation 6:16-17.

v1

This is followed by v1 of Chapter Eight:

When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

If your version has “when He...,” you have the more literal translation, but we need the reminder that the “He” is the Lamb, the Lion of Judah, the very Son of God, who is running the show. *He* has been the one—the only one—sufficiently worthy to break open the seven seals of the scroll.

Read Revelation 5:2-5.

Since *all* of the events of the Eschaton are contained within the scroll, then we know that Christ Jesus is the director, the orchestrator of this drama from beginning to end—which brings a poetic symmetry to the narrative. Christ is the one drawing this world to an end that He created in the first place. The writer to the Hebrews describes the creation as God working *through* the Son.

Read Hebrews 1:1-3.

Paul, in Colossians, paints a picture of the Son as not just the Creator, but the focal point of it all—not only the center, but the center who holds it all together and makes it all work.

Read Colossians 1:16-17.

These passages, as well as those to come later in Revelation, give us a proper long view of the life of the second member of the Godhead and help us realize the true depth of His character and importance to the whole.

- In majesty and creative might He made the universe and man within it.
- During the OT He took on the role of the Father’s most important messenger: *the* angel of the Lord.
- Then, in an even more subservient role, Christ Jesus came to earth as the Suffering Servant, the Son obedient unto death, the Lamb—offering us, not insignificantly, salvation.
- And we find Him still in the role of the Lamb as He inaugurates the final days of the earth He created. But soon, in just seven brief years, He will be reintroduced in His full majesty and might as “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”

A Dramatic Suspension

...there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

It is a common technique in cinema, right before a huge explosion or climactic visual effect, for the director to pull out all sound from the soundtrack—a second of “dead air”—to maximize the impact of the shattering explosion on the audience.

This is precisely how the Lamb orchestrates the introduction of a series of seven trumpets lying within the seventh seal. All sounds in heaven—all worship and praise, all hearing of prayers, all speaking and revelations—are silenced for about thirty minutes to build anticipation for the approaching disasters.

Albert Barnes: The most simple and obvious interpretation is likely to be the true one; and that is...that it refers to silence in heaven as expressive of the fearful anticipation felt on opening the last seal that was to close the series, and to wind up the affairs of the church and the world. Nothing would be more natural than such a state of solemn awe on such an occasion; nothing would introduce the opening of the seal in a more impressive manner.

And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.

From this text we cannot identify these angels; these should not be confused with the seven spirits of God from Revelation 5:6, and they are no doubt different angels from the seven who will be later pouring out the bowls of wrath. Yet we are given a clue in the phrase, “who stand before God.”

The angel answered and said to [Zacharias], “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.” (Luke 1:19)

This suggests that the seven are archangels, “angels of the presence,” such as Michael and Gabriel who stand before the throne of God. In fact, seven archangels are identified by name in the Pseudepigraphous Book of Enoch.

Sidebar: Pseudepigrapha are early writings that were not included in either our canon or even the Apocrypha (removed from the protestant canon, but still included by Catholics). The word Pseudepigrapha comes from the Greek word *pseudo* meaning false, and *epigraphain*, meaning to inscribe or write falsely. Thus I include the following because it is interesting (as do scholars and commentators), not because it is Holy Scripture.

1 And these are the names of the holy angels who watch mankind.

2 **Uriel**, one of the holy angels, who is over the world and over Tartarus.

3 **Raphael**, one of the holy angels, who is over the spirits of men.

4 **Raguel**, one of the holy angels who takes vengeance on the world of the luminaries.

5 **Michael**, one of the holy angels, to wit, he that is set over the best part of mankind and over chaos.

6 **Saraqael**, one of the holy angels, who is set over the spirits, who sin in the spirit.

7 **Gabriel**, one of the holy angels, who is over Paradise and the serpents and the Cherubim.

8 **Remiel**, one of the holy angels, whom God set over those who rise.

(1 Enoch 20:1-8)

While we cannot accept the preceding text as Scripture, it is true that the original text of v2 includes the definite article “the,” which tells us that this is an official, established group of seven angels that holds a special place before the throne of God.

Each of these select angels is handed a trumpet (*salpinges*). We might think of the traditional ram's horn, but Israel had several types of trumpet, some of which were hammered metal. These horns were used to call men to battle ([Nehemiah 4:20](#)) or throw an enemy into a panic, to summon worshipers, to make celebration, as during the Feast of Trumpets ([Numbers 29:1](#)), or to declare that the Day of the Lord has arrived, as in Joel 2.

Blow a trumpet in Zion,
And sound an alarm on My holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
For the day of the LORD is coming;
Surely it is near,
A day of darkness and gloom,
A day of clouds and thick darkness.
As the dawn is spread over the mountains,
So there is a great and mighty people;
There has never been anything like it,
Nor will there be again after it
To the years of many generations. (Joel 2:1-2)

v3

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.

We cannot say with certainty whether this is another angelic being or, as some say, is actually Christ Jesus. His work here as an advocate of prayers leads some to claim it is Christ, but the Greek behind the word “another” (*allos*) means “another of the same kind,” meaning in this context that the one in v3 is of the same kind as the previous seven. Contra Walvoord, I incline toward it being, as the text states, “another angel” rather than Christ Jesus, who is consistently referred to throughout the Revelation by His divine titles.

Walvoord: This is a beautiful picture of the prayers of the saints as seen from heaven. In the Old Testament order the priests would burn incense upon the altar of incense, and the smoke would fill the Temple or the Tabernacle and would then ascend to heaven. Incense was symbolic of worship and prayer and a reminder that intercession to the Lord has the character of sweet incense.

v4

And this is pictured for us in v4:

And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand.

I find v5 fascinating.

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.

Originally these censers or firepans were made of hammered bronze ([Numbers 16:39](#)). Later, however, for Solomon's temple, they were made of pure gold ([1 Kings 7:50](#)), as here in heaven's temple. The Greek word here translated "censer" is *libanoton*. Literally the word means frankincense, the gum of the *libanus*, or frankincense tree, which was the key component of the incense burned on the altar.

Although it is not stated explicitly, it is assumed by most (but not all) that "the prayers of all the saints" offered in vv3-4 were similar to those cried out by the martyrs under the altar 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?"

Thus what the angel does in v5 is taken by most as God's answer to these prayers. They have cried out for judgment and vengeance, and His response is that the time is ripe for just that. Here is the scene: The angel is given (by whom, we don't know) incense which he adds to the glowing fire on the altar; he does not add the prayers, but he adds the sweet incense *to* the prayers. Both are wafted into the "nostrils" of God. Putting action to God's unspoken or at least unrecorded answer, the angel scoops out of the altar some of the burning coals—not the prayers, just the fire—and throws it onto the earth.

Barnes: The new emblem, therefore, is the taking of coals, and scattering them abroad as a symbol of the destruction that was about to ensue.

and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

Alan F. Johnson refers to this as a theophany, a physical manifestation of the presence of God, and one not dissimilar to how He presented Himself at Mt. Sinai.

Read Exodus 19:16-17.

And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them.

Here again I sense a dramatic, anticipatory pause. Verse 6 really isn't necessary except to build tension for the coming events.

As we are now preparing to do battle with the seven Trumpets, this is a good time to remind ourselves of the ground we have covered so far.

- This study began by establishing that the Last Things, the Eschaton, technically began in Bethlehem. In our first chart we designated the starting point of the Church Age at Pentecost, with the giving of the Holy Spirit to all believers.
- We currently remain in the Church Age, with the next milepost on the timeline being the Rapture of the church.
- In Chart 6 we established that the timeline splits at the Rapture: believers both dead and alive rise into heaven with Christ Jesus in resurrected, glorified bodies, while the rest of humanity remains on earth to suffer the trials of the Tribulation, or “Daniel’s Seventieth Week.”
- In Chart 7 I made the case for Daniel’s Seventy Weeks beginning in 457 BC, with Artaxerxes’ authorization for Ezra to restore and rebuild Jerusalem and its temple. We traced those seventy weeks through Christ’s crucifixion, the destruction of the Jerusalem temple—the Church Age, which Daniel did not see—the Rapture, and finally the seven years of the Tribulation (Daniel’s Seventieth Week).
- In Chart 8 we presented the Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls of the Tribulation period as a nested series of events; that is, everything is contained in the scroll of Seals: the seventh seal *is* the seven trumpets, the seventh Trumpet *is* the seven Bowls of Wrath.
- Next we spent several weeks examining, in Chart 9, the details of the seven Seals, along with the first of several parenthetical visions set outside the narrative stream.
- Thus we are now ready to launch into the seven Trumpets which, like the Seals begins with four events that are set apart from the even more traumatic—and in this instance, bizarre events—of the last three.