

Saint Paul Sunday Morning Bible Class
Book of Revelation, Chapter 8 Notes and Questions

Rev. 8:1

“Seventh Seal – silence in heaven for about half an hour” – What is the meaning of this silence? There are many interpretations. Some suggest that it is nothing more than an intermission between the first set of judgments and the second which are about to come. Others believe that it is a time of prayerful meditation as God makes ready to unfold the remainder of the message of Revelation. But, none of the interpretations which has this silence being related to what is about to take place in the message makes much sense, considering the fact that this silence comes at the opening of the seventh seal. This would seem to indicate that it belongs to the first set of seal judgments as its conclusion.

But, what then could this silence indicate? There is good reason to believe that the answer can be found by looking at some of the Jewish apocalyptic writings, which were well known in the first century. According to 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch, the original creation of the universe was preceded by silence and a similar silence will precede the creation of the new heavens and earth on the Last Day. Basing our interpretation on this tradition, the silence would belong to the first set of seal judgments as its conclusion, which makes sense. Following the opening of the sixth seal, we get a glimpse of Judgment Day. First, we see the judgment of our Lord upon the unbelievers (6:15-17), then we see again the ongoing Glory of the Lord upon the believers (7:1-17).

Then comes this silence as God prepares to create the new heavens and earth. Then, after the silence comes eternity in the new heavens and earth. Why this silence lasts “for about half an hour” we cannot say. The only thing we can say is that this period of silence is brief. After the judgment, the whole company of heaven joins in silent prayer and meditation as the Triune God prepares their eternal residence. Putting all of this together, we note that this verse (8:1) should really be the last verse of chapter 7 (7:18).

The OT often speaks of maintaining silence in the presence of the Lord to prepare for His works (see Hab. 2:20; Zech. 2:13; Zeph. 1:7; Exod. 14:10-14; Ps. 46:10; et. al.). We, too, follow this tradition by maintaining silence in the Lord’s House to prepare for His presence among us during the Divine Service.

Rev. 8:2

“The seven angels” – Again, we must look beyond Scripture to Jewish tradition as recorded in the Jewish apocalyptic writings to identify this group of seven angels. Fortunately, when we do, they are easily identified as the “seven archangels of God.” Two of these archangels are mentioned in Scripture: Gabriel and Michael. The other five names we find in the Jewish apocalyptic writings: Suruel, Raphael, Raguel, Saraquel, and Uriel (cf. 1 Enoch 19:1-3, 20:1-7; Tobit 12:12-15). These archangels are God’s elite force and are employed by Him to make extremely important announcements and to carry out His judgments. These seven angels are NOT the seven angels of the seven churches we encountered earlier in Revelation (1:20). But, they are the same seven angels we will encounter again later (15:6).

“and seven trumpets were given to them” – In Scripture (and in the ancient world), trumpets were used to give signals for the initiation of events like battles in a war or to accompany announcements of important events. These seven archangels blow their trumpets to announce various plagues, both natural and demonic, which will strike the human race – in particular those who do not belong to God. The purpose of these acts of God’s judgment is to move people to repentance (9:20-21).

These acts of God’s judgment will occur throughout the NT era (from the time of Christ’s first coming until He returns). We, again, are given a picture of life on earth throughout history until the Last Day comes. These archangels act within and under the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ – they “blow

their trumpets,” even as Christ speaks with a “trumpet-like voice.”

Rev. 8:3-5

“And another Angel came and . . .” – This Angel is Christ Himself, who alone is in control of the events which are about to take place. He is the Sole Mediator between God and man and holds a “golden censer” filled with “much incense” to offer with the prayers of all the saints upon the altar before the throne. Our prayers are offered through Jesus Christ, who makes sure they are placed on the altar in heaven. After offering the prayers of all the saints upon the altar, Christ fills the golden censer with fire from the altar and throws it upon the earth initiating the seven-fold trumpet judgments. Christ is often depicted as an Angel (in OT, He is the “Angel of Yahweh [the Lord]” and we have already encountered Him as an Angel in Revelation [7:2-4] and will again).

Reel Three Begins- the Second Vision, 7 Trumpets

Rev. 8:6

Now that Christ has made things ready, the Vision comes again, heightened and intensified. He commissions the seven archangels to blow their trumpets.

Rev. 8:7

“The first trumpet” – When the angel blows the first trumpet, “hail and fire, mixed with blood” are thrown upon the earth. As a result, “a third of the earth and its trees, and all green grass, were burned up.” This first judgment corresponds to the seventh plague inflicted upon Egypt (Exod. 9:22-25), but, unlike that plague, this judgment is not to be taken literally, as if we should expect literal hail and fire, mixed with blood, to fall upon the earth. Instead, this judgment indicates that throughout the NT era, the earth will constantly suffer the destruction of warfare, natural phenomena, etc., causing parts of the earth to be inhabitable and unproductive to the dismay and danger of the human race. “A third” suggests partial, not total destruction throughout these judgments. While the earth will suffer these judgments, it will not be totally destroyed and has the ability to rejuvenate.

Rev. 8:8-9

“The second trumpet” – The second judgment affects the sea, as the first affected the land. It corresponds to the first plague inflicted upon Egypt (Exod. 7:20-25). The same interpretation applies. Throughout the NT era, the waters of the earth will be destructive to mankind as well: volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, hurricanes, shipwrecks, etc. The waters, like the land, will not always yield its Eden like qualities for the human race, but will bring about the destruction of many, though not all (again, a “third”).

Rev. 8:10-11

“The third trumpet” – A “great star” falls from heaven upon “a third of the rivers and springs of water.” The star’s name is “Wormwood,” which is a kind of bitter poison. This is related to the second judgment and corresponds with it to the first Egyptian plague. This judgment indicates that throughout the NT era some of the earth’s fresh waters will be unsuitable for consumption and that drinking from these poisoned waters will result in disease, sickness, and death.

Rev. 8:12

“The fourth trumpet” – The land, seas, and fresh waters having been affected by God’s judgment, so now the heavens are affected. This judgment corresponds to the ninth plague upon Egypt (Exod. 10:21-23).

Throughout the NT era, the heavenly bodies will be struck in such a way as to cause suffering to the human race on earth.

Rev. 8:13

“I heard an eagle flying in midair” – In the OT, many announcements of coming judgment include an image of an eagle as a metaphor for destruction (Deut. 28:49; Jer. 4:13; 48:40; 49:22; Lam. 4:19; Ezek. 17:3; Hos. 8:1; Hab. 1:8). Particularly relevant are Hos. 8:1 (“Put a trumpet to your lips, like an eagle against the house of the LORD”) and Jer. 4:13, where the destructive image of an eagle is followed by “woe to us,” together with a threefold sounding of a trumpet (vv. 5, 19, 21) as an announcement of judgment. The reason an eagle is used as a metaphor for destruction is because eagles hover over the earth to spot prey and, once they spot their prey, they swoop down and devour it. Thus, the fact that St. John hears an “eagle” here means that something bad is coming!

That something bad is announced by the eagle in the three “Woes!,” which signal- that what has been seen thus far is nothing in comparison to what is about to come. “You think the judgments of the first four trumpet blasts were bad, wait till you see the judgments of the last three!”

However, for the believer, this “eagle” which announces the three-fold “Woe!,” can be a source of comfort, for the believer knows that their Lord, Jesus Christ, is in control of the events which are about to unfold and can rest assured that, just as He delivered the Israelites out of Egypt “on eagle’s wings,” He will deliver him/her through this series of judgments.

The stage is now set: The first four trumpets have sounded and revealed the judgments which will take place in this world throughout the NT era via *natural* causes. Now, we are about to witness the judgments which will take place in this world throughout the NT era via *supernatural* causes. Woe! Woe! Woe! to all who do not have Christ on their side.

Study and Discussion Questions for Revelation Chapter 8

1. Are we living in an easy time for Christians, or a time of difficult challenges to our very faith? Give examples.
2. What are some things that make Christianity "stylish" today?
3. What are some things that make Christianity difficult today?
4. One commentator has said that these 4 trumpets encourage us to give up all hope in worldly powers for a better world. Do you agree? Explain.