

Thus we see that the church of Christ had grappled with the ancient pagan religions and, after centuries of trial and untold suffering, had won a glorious victory. The temples of Jupiter, Mercury and Mars were closed and their idol worship forbidden. If a person today could have visited Rome in the end of the second century he would have beheld a pagan world. Had they visited the eternal city in the latter portion of the fourth century he could have hardly believed his eyes, for he would have looked upon an empire blessed with churches filled with followers of the Christ.

Until this sealing of the saints, was completed, the four winds of destruction were held back. It was a definite act of God to see that they were restrained from their missions of destruction until Christianity had captured the empire.

Had these four destructive agencies done their work before this great victory of the church in the sowing of the seed of the kingdom everywhere, Christianity could never have survived the wreck of the empire and the passing of a civilization hoary with age.

Christ indwelling in the hearts of converted Romans helped them to rise above the ruins of the past. The invading hordes from the north laid aside their paganism and embraced the Christian belief from those whom they had vanquished.

We are now ready to consider the events accompanying the opening of the seventh seal.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE SEVENTH SEAL OPENED

*Text (8:1-13)*

**1** And when he opened the seventh seal, there followed a silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. **2** And I saw the seven angels that stand before God; and there were given unto them seven trumpets.

**3** And another angel came and stood over the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should add it unto the prayers of all the saints upon 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** And the angel taketh the censer; and he filled it with the fire of the altar, and cast it upon the earth: and there followed thunders, and voices, and lightnings, and an earthquake.

**6** And the seven angels that had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

**7** And the first sounded, and there followed hail and fire, mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of

the earth was burnt up, and the third part of the trees were burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.

8 And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; 9 and there died the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, even they that had life; and the third part of the ships was destroyed.

10 And the third angel sounded, and there fell from heaven a great star, burning as a torch, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of the waters; 11 and the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.

12 And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; that the third part of them should be darkened, and the day should not shine for the third part of it, and the night in like manner.

13 And I saw, and I heard an eagle, flying in mid heaven, saying with a great voice, Woe, woe, woe, for them that dwell on the earth, by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, who are yet to sound.

## INTRODUCTION

We have now arrived at the beginning of a new period in the history of the Roman Empire, the arena in which the history of the church is also unfolded. The saints having been sealed, the four agencies of destruction could no longer be held back. Let us say, in passing, there is nothing mysterious to be attached to this sealing of the saints. What Paul said of the Ephesians, could just as truthfully be said of the saints of this parenthetical period of time:

“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, *ye were sealed* with that Holy Spirit, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory.” (Ephesians 1:13,14)

After the sealing of the saints, the seventh seal is opened and we read,

vs. 1 “There was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.”

This silence comes as a sudden surprise. This comes in marked contrast with the *rejoicings* in heaven at the beginning of this series of visions, when the Lamb that was slain “came and took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne.” (Rev. 5:7).

This silence is too startling to be given over to conjecture in interpretation. Shall we let the scriptures help us. In Habakkuk 2:20, we read, "The Lord is in His Holy Temple; let all the earth *keep silence* before Him."

These words are spoken in connection with the going forth of Almighty God in judgment. Hence, when He is about to visit the earth (the Roman Empire, as understood by John), with the awful judgments of the seventh seal, nothing could be more fitting than that heaven itself should stand breathless, awaiting the blowing of the seven trumpets of the seventh seal.

Another passage will suffice. In Zephaniah 1:7, in a passage which incorporates the judgments of God Almighty, we read these significant words: "*Hold thy peace* at the presence of the Lord God; for *the day of the Lord is at hand*."

The word, "Hold thy peace" here is identically the same as that rendered "Keep silence" in (Hab. 2:20).

In the light of these passages, it can be clearly seen the appropriateness of introducing the fearful judgments to follow with a half hour silence in heaven.

It is, as it were, the hush before the march of events about to begin; the calm before the storms of judgment break.

It doubtless, also is designed to give great emphasis to the events that follow.

vs. 2, 3 "I saw the seven angels which stood before God". It seems that among angels there are ranks, degrees, dominions, powers. These are "the seven who stand before God." In Matthew 18:10, we learn that those who believe in Christ have angels who stand before God and behold His face:

"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, (In Matt. 18:6, Christ identifies 'one of these little ones' as, 'one of these little ones which believe in me') for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."

We even know the name of one of these angels, "And the angel answering said unto him (Zacharias), I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God, and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad things. (Luke 1:19).

"And to them were given seven trumpets." The fact that the trumpets are committed to angels of the highest order indicates the importance in God's sight of these trumpet judgments.

But before the first trumpet is sounded, "Another angel came and stood at the altar." (Rev. 8:3). The scene is borrowed from the service of the Old Testament tabernacle. In the Holy Place, before the second veil, stood the golden altar . . . Morning and evening, fire was placed upon it from the altar of sacrifice, and upon the fire was poured the sacred incense. The incense that Moses was commanded to make was a most hallowed thing—so hallowed that if any one should even attempt to imitate the fragrance, he was to be 'cut off from his people.' (Exodus 30:34-38).

The cloud of perfume which rose and filled the sanctuary, was a symbol of prayer.

To this ministering angel was given "A golden censor and there was given to him much incense." We have found that incense, in the Bible, is a symbol of prayer.

Here, however, another feature is added, or rather included. He was given *much incense*" that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints, upon the golden altar which is before the throne."

Two things present themselves here. First, a ministering angel matches the prayers of petitioning saints. The more we pray, the more is prayer offered from the heavenlies. Yea, more, *much* incense was given him, as if to say, heaven more than matches the volume of earthly prayers.

Second. It would seem that the prayers of the saints become acceptable only when there is added to them the incense of the prayers of heaven, or in other words, there must be added the intercession of Christ and the effects of his atoning work.

This brings to our mind the inspired statement of Paul, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." (Romans 8:26,27).

*vs. 4* "And the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand."

What a comforting thought! We can be sure that our prayers are acceptable to God, because of the added incense of the ministering angel. This gives us another insight of the work of angels. Paul said of them, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14).

But the symbolism suddenly changes. Rev. 8:5: "And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth." We have a similar instance in Ezekial 10:2. "And he spoke unto the man clothed with linen, and said, go in between the wheels, even under the cherub and fill thine hand with coals of fire from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city."

As here in Ezekial, so in Revelation, the fire of God, like coals from the altar, is cast upon the earth.

"And there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake," These symbolize the terrible things that will happen in the scenes to follow when the seven angels sound their trumpets. All things are now ready for the blast of the first trumpet.

# CHAPTER IX

## THE SEVEN TRUMPETS

*Text (9:1-12)*

*The Division of the Trumpet Series*

1 And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven fallen unto the earth: and there was given to him the key of the pit of the abyss. 2 And he opened the pit of the abyss; and there went up a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. 3 And out of the smoke came forth locusts upon the earth; and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. 4 And it was said unto them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree, but only such men as have not the seal of God on their foreheads. 5 And it was given them that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when it striketh a man. 6 And in those days men shall seek death, and shall in no wise find it; and they shall desire to die, and death fleeth from them. 7 And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared for war; and upon their heads as it were crowns like unto gold, and their faces were as men's faces. 8 And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. 9 And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to war. 10 And they have tails like unto scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men five months. 11 They have over them as king the angel of the abyss: his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek tongue he hath the name Apollyon.

12 The first Woe is past: behold, there come yet two Woes hereafter.

However, before we begin the actual "unfolding" of the symbolism of the seven trumpets, it is well that we take a long view of this division of the trumpet series, in order to get a proper perspective.

As with the vision of the seals, which were divided into two parts, so in the trumpet series, likewise is divided into two groupings; first, a group of four, followed by a group of three.

This is evidenced by the fact that after the sounding of the fourth trumpet (Rev. 8:12), the action is interrupted and John sees an angel flying in the midst of heaven, saying, with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth, by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels which are yet to sound." (Rev. 8:13).