

Following the "interlude" of the previous chapter, in which reassuring and comforting scenes concerning the saints were seen, **the seventh seals** are now opened. For about a half hour, there is silence in heaven (**1**).

In contrast to all that happened before, the silence must have been striking! Possibly it signifies awe in heaven for what has already been revealed, or for what is about to be revealed. When God acts, those on earth should be in awe (cf. [Hab 2:20](#); [Zec 2:13](#)). Should we not expect a similar reaction from His creatures in heaven ([Zep 1:7](#))?

Seven angels are seen standing before God to whom are given **seven trumpets**. Before they sound the trumpets, **another angel with a golden censer** comes and stands before the altar. To this angel is given much incense to offer along with the prayers of the saints upon the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense and the prayers of the saints ascend before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel takes the censer, fills it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. Noises, thundering, lightnings and an earthquake follow, and the seven angels with the seven trumpets prepare to sound (**2-6**).

The scene appears to suggest that the sounding of the seven trumpets and the things to follow is God's response to the prayers of the saints. It is reminiscent of what Jesus taught in His parable of the persistent widow: *"And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them?"* ([Lk 18:7](#); cf. also [Re 6:9-10](#)).

As the first four angels sound their trumpets in turn, the environment in particular is impacted:

- * The first trumpet - Hail and fire, mingled with blood, are thrown to earth; a third of the trees and all the green grass were burned up (**7**).
- * The second trumpet - Something like a great burning mountain is thrown into the sea, turning a third of it into blood; a third of the sea creatures died, and a third of the ships were destroyed (**8-9**).
- * The third trumpet - A great burning star named Wormwood falls on a third of the rivers and springs of water; a third of the waters became wormwood (a bitter wood) and many men died from the bitter water **10-11**).
- * The fourth trumpet - A third of the sun, moon, and stars are struck, so that a third of them were darkened; thus a third of the day and night did not shine (**12**).

The first four trumpets may signify **natural calamities** that God would use in His judgment **against apostate Israel** who oppressed His people. They are reminiscent of the Egyptian plagues (cf. **Exo 9-10**), brought now against herself that is later called "Egypt" ([Re 11:8](#)). That only a third is affected, along with the symbolism of trumpets, suggests that the purpose of these judgments would be to warn, giving many opportunities to repent.

Before the final three trumpets sound, an angel (or eagle, in some mss) flies through the midst of heaven with loud voice proclaiming a **three-fold woe** on the inhabitants of the earth (**13**). While the first four trumpets were bad enough, the worst was yet to come!

POINTS TO PONDER

- * The opening of the seventh seal, the angel with the golden censor, and the sounding of the first four trumpets
- * The possible significance of the silence in heaven and the first four trumpets

OUTLINE

I. THE SEVENTH SEAL - SILENCE IN HEAVEN (1)

A. THE LAMB OPENS THE SEVEN SEAL (1a)

B. SILENCE IN HEAVEN FOR ABOUT HALF AN HOUR (1b)

II. PREPARATION FOR THE SOUNDING OF THE SEVEN TRUMPETS (2-6)

A. SEVEN ANGELS PREPARED (2)

1. Seven angels who stand before God
2. To them were given seven trumpets

B. THE ANGEL WITH THE GOLDEN CENSER (3-6)

1. Came and stood before the altar
2. Was given much incense to offer...
 - a. With the prayers of all the saints
 - b. Upon the golden altar before the throne
3. The smoke of the incense and the prayers of the saints...
 - a. Ascended before God
 - b. From the angel's hand
4. The angel took the censer...
 - a. Filled it with fire from the altar
 - b. Threw it to the earth

-- Accompanied by noises, thundering, lightnings, and an earthquake
5. The seven angels with the seven trumpets then prepared themselves to sound

III. THE FIRST FOUR TRUMPETS (7-12)

A. THE FIRST TRUMPET: VEGETATION STRUCK (7)

1. Hail and fire, mingled with blood, thrown to the earth
2. A third of the trees burned up, and all green grass burned up

B. THE SECOND TRUMPET: SEAS STRUCK (8-9)

1. Something like a great burning mountain thrown into the sea
2. A third of the sea became blood; a third of the creatures in the sea died; a third of the ships destroyed

C. THE THIRD TRUMPET: RIVERS AND SPRINGS STRUCK (10-11)

1. A great burning star fell on a third of the rivers and springs of water
2. Named Wormwood, a third of the waters became wormwood; many men died from the bitter water

D. THE FOURTH TRUMPET: HEAVENS STRUCK (12)

1. A third of the sun, moon, and stars struck
2. A third of them were darkened, so that third of the day and night did not shine

IV. THREE-FOLD WOE ANNOUNCED (13)

A. AN ANGEL (EAGLE?) FLYING THROUGH HEAVEN (13a)

B. PRONOUNCING A THREE-FOLD WOE (13b)

1. "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth"
2. "Because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!"

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1) What are the main points of this chapter?

- The seventh seal - silence in heaven (1)
- Preparation for the sounding of the seven trumpets (2-6)
- The first four trumpets (7-12)
- Three-fold woe announced (13)

2) What happened when the Lamb opened the seventh seal? (1)

- There was silence in heaven for about half an hour

3) What did John see next? (2)

- Seven angels standing before God, to whom were given seven trumpets

4) What did another angel do? What was given him? Why? (3-4)

- Come stand before the altar with a golden censer; much incense
- To offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the throne

5) What did the angel then do with the censer? What then happened? (5-6)

- Filled it with fire from the altar and threw it to the earth
- There were noises, thundering, lightnings, and an earthquake
- The seven angels with the seven trumpets prepared to sound

6) Describe what happened when the first angel sounded (7)

- Hail and fire, mingled with blood, were thrown to the earth
- 1/3 of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass

7) Describe what happened when the second angel sounded (8-9)

- Something like a great burning mountain was thrown into the sea
- 1/3 of the sea became blood, 1/3 of sea creatures died, and 1/3 of ships destroyed

8) Describe what happened when the third angel sounded (10-11)

- A great burning star (named Wormwood) fell from heaven on 1/3 of the rivers and springs of water
- 1/3 of the waters became wormwood, many men died from the bitter water

9) Describe what happened when the fourth angel sounded (12)

- 1/3 of the sun, moon, and stars were struck
- 1/3 of them were darkened, and 1/3 of the day and night did not shine

10) What did John next see and hear? (13)

- An angel (eagle?) flying through the midst of heaven
- Pronouncing a three-fold woe upon the inhabitants of the earth because of the three remaining trumpets about to sound