

SOME NOTES ON REVELATION 8:1–6

notes by Tim Hegg

I. The Seven Seals

- The Seven Seals represent the unfolding of God’s ordained events, of earth’s history, and specifically in this case, the bringing about of the close of earth’s history and the ushering in of eternity.
- That the scroll is only able to be unrolled and reveal ordained events when a seal is broken emphasizes that God is in control, for He is bringing to pass His sovereignly ordained events throughout earth’s history.
- Ezekiel uses a similar motif when a scroll was handed to him which contained the prophecy regarding the woes to come upon disobedient Israel, which he was to announce to the nation.

Then I looked, and behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll was in it. When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back, and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe. (Ezek 2:9–10)

- That there are seven seals indicates that the scroll pictured in Revelation is the ordained history of the earth and its inhabitants.
- In our text in Revelation, it is the seventh seal that is broken by “the Lamb,” Yeshua. All that takes place in the finality of earth’s history, both the judgment of unbelievers and the eternal blessing up all who are His, rests upon the finished work of Yeshua as eternal Savior and Judge.

II. When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. (8:1)

- “Silence” is regularly used in the Scriptures to denote the awe which comes upon mankind when confronted with the utter holiness and sovereignty of God.

Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near, for the LORD has prepared a sacrifice, He has consecrated His guests. (Zeph 1:7)

Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD; for He is aroused from His holy habitation. (Zech 2:13)

- That the the silence is portrayed as being for “half an hour” is picturesque of the next phrase: “the day of the Lord is near.” The silences is for a brief period as the hosts of heaven realize the awesome final-

ity which is about to take place.

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

- Once again, the repeated use of the number “seven” represents the picture of completion. The “seven angels” represent God’s messengers and divinely appointed beings who will do His bidding to bring about the final chapter of earth’s history.
- The seven trumpets likewise depict the sovereignly ordained events which will bring about God’s final and eternal salvation of those who are His and, in contrast, the eternal judgment of all those who have rejected Him.
- This contrast is unfolded in the following chapters, even as the message of the Apocalypse calls people to repentance, the believers obey while the sinners harden their hearts and refuse to repent (9:21; 16:9, 11)
- It is as each of the trumpets are sounded that the events which follow in the chapters of Revelation unfold and are completed.

IV. Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censor; 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. (8:3)

- In the Scriptures, incense is used symbolically of prayer, even as David prays in one of his Psalms:

O LORD, I call upon You; hasten to me! Give ear to my voice when I call to You! May my prayer be counted as incense before You; the lifting up of my hands as the evening offering. (Ps 141:1-2)

- But what is the meaning of our text, that the golden censor with incense was given to the angel “so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne”?
- It is this: since even believers retain the sinful nature, and thereby constantly must strive to subdue the flesh, our prayers at times are incomplete and faulty. We don’t intend them to be so, but in our finite abilities, even though we pray with fervency and by seeking the direction of the Ruach as we prayer, we recognize we need help as we approach the throne of Grace in our prayers. Even as an established author seeks the help of proof-readers, so we likewise need help to make our prayers fit for the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

- The angel given incense “adds it to the prayers of all the saints” in order that their prayers should be fully patterned to fit the majesty of the Almighty, and so that these prayers might be combined together in a fitting way to be presented to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Moreover, in our prayers we often ask for guidance how to pray in specific situations, and thus the picture given to us in Revelation is that God enables us to pray in accordance with His will, thus being assured that as we submit ourselves to the leading of the Ruach in our times of prayer, we may rest securely in Him Who will surely accomplish His holy purposes and design.

“In this context, the prayers of the saints are perfected and the response to the saints is at times astounding. For instance, Elijah’s prayer influenced the weather so that the drought ended (1Ki 18:42–45).” [Kistemaker, *Revelation*, p. 270]

V. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel’s hand. (8:4)

- Here is another example of how important it is to have the Torah as a foundation for our understanding of the Apostolic Scriptures. For it is in the Tabernacle and Temple that the “altar of incense” is pictured, and that on Yom Kippur the Cohen Gadol, the High Priest, enters into the Holy of Holies, taking with him the golden censor with incense. This is a visual picture of how our prayers ascend to the Father through the work of the Holy Spirit and our High Priest, Yeshua, Who “always lives to make intercession for us” (Heb 7:25).
- Consider the grand privilege we have as those who are “in Messiah Yeshua” by faith! Surely our prayers, when given in the Name of our Savior Yeshua, are presented in the heavenly throne room of God.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. (James 5:16)

VI. 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. (8:5)

- Here we see the effect of the “prayers of the saints” which have been mingled with the incense of Heaven, even the intercession of Yeshua for His own. For as the believers are persecuted for their faith, so their prayers are accepted and the punishing hand of God upon His enemies is unleashed. This pictures the specific wrath of

God against the enemies of those who are His by faith in Messiah. But it also pictures the wrath of God against all who have rejected His Messiah, and who bear their sins before God Who is infinitely holy and Whose righteous wrath falls upon the unbelieving world.

- This is the fulfillment of Yeshua's words of judgment. "I have come to bring fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled." (Lk 12:19). These words of Yeshua express His desire, while in His time upon the earth, that the bliss of eternity would be realized for all those for whom He would suffer.
- Note that the consequences of the censor of fire thrown to the earth are reminiscent of the scene at Sinai, for at Sinai God also reveals Himself in the context of thunder and lightning as well as the sounding of a trumpet.

So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. (Ex 19:16)

Compare this text in Isaiah:

From the LORD of hosts you will be punished with thunder and earthquake and loud noise, with whirlwind and tempest and the flame of a consuming fire. (Is 29:6)

- Throughout Revelation, thunder, rumbling, lightning, as well as earthquakes are signs that usher in the end times (cf. 6:12; 8:5; 1:13, 19; 16:18).
- Yeshua also uses earthquakes as a picture of the end times:

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs. (Matt 24:7-8)

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

- The unfolding of the final eschaton is ordained and announced by the heavenly host, carrying forth the commands of the Almighty. The subsequent context (8:7-11:15) contain the seven trumpets and the events they proclaim.
- These are parallel to the Seven Bowls (16:2-16:21) which likewise picture the plagues sent by God upon the earth.