

## **Revelation Ch. 8: The First Four Trumpets**

Jeff Randolph  
December 2007

Now that the servants of God are sealed, the great tribulation begins with the seven trumpets. Though some are connected with the same or similar events, the trumpets are warnings of partial devastation and calls to repentance (cf. 9:20, 21), while the seven bowls of wrath represent God's vengeance in its entirety (cf. 15:1).

### **Verse 1**

**When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.**

This is the silence before the storm (cf. 1:7; 4:5), a short period of time to reflect on the events that have lead up to this point. The days of vengeance have come (Lk. 21:22; cf. Heb. 10:31). This could also refer to God's listening ear, as He answers the prayers of His people (v. 3-4; cf. Ps. 66:19; 1 Pet. 3:12).

### **Verse 2**

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

These seven angels, with their trumpets, symbolize the warnings of this tribulation period, the alarm of war (cf. Jer. 4:19; Rev. 1:10). These warnings are sufficient and complete. Though God knew that all who would turn back to Him had done so (cf. 22:11), this warning period is still a chance for them to turn from their wicked deeds (cf. 9:20; Pr. 17:16).

### **Verses 3-4**

**Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand.**

Earlier, incense was used to symbolize prayer itself (5:8), and is now pictured as being added to the prayers of the saints. This could refer to the intercession of Jesus and the Holy Spirit on our behalf (cf. Rom. 8:26, 34). The "much" incense might emphasize God's part in helping us.

The fact that prayers often accompanied the incense offering (cf. Lk. 1:10) might be a foreshadowing of this idea (cf. Heb. 10:1; see also Acts 10:4). These prayers could have been the reason for the silence (v. 1), since they are the petitions for vengeance (cf. 6:9-11).

The golden censer and golden altar allude to the Old Testament altar of incense, upon which blood was sprinkled once a year on the Day of Atonement (cf. Ex. 30:1-10; cf. Heb. 9:3, 4). These prayers were from those who had been slain for their testimony (cf. 6:9), and who also had their sins atoned (6:11; cf. Heb. 9:24-26).

The prayers have found their way to the throne of grace and are about to be answered (Heb. 4:16).

### **Verses 5-6**

**Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake. So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.**

In the Old Testament, the high priest was to fill the censer with coals of fire from the golden altar, and use it to burn incense to cover the mercy seat in the Most Holy Place (Lev. 16:12-13). This symbolizes the consuming of the incense, the wrath of God (cf. 4:5; 2 Sam. 22:8-21) as an answer to the prayers (cf. 6:9-11).

#### **Verse 7**

**The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.**

Hail and fire symbolize punishment, war, and destruction (cf. Ex. 9:23-25; Ezek. 13:11-16; 38:22). The green grass and trees burning symbolizes the fading of good times and commencement of trouble (cf. Lk. 23:31).

The fact that only a third were burned up symbolizes partial devastation; this was just the beginning (cf. Matt. 24:8). This may refer to Galilee, said by Josephus to be filled with “fire and blood” when the Romans marched through in 67 AD (Josephus, Wars 3.4.1).

The four angels that were holding the four winds had been restrained, and now the winds (not the angels), were allowed to blow on the earth (7:1-3). The angels themselves, the four horsemen, would be released in their full fury later (9:14, 15).

#### **Verses 8-9**

**Then the second angel sounded: And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.**

Mountains often symbolized governments and nations (cf. 6:14; Jer. 51:25; Amos 6:1; Mic. 6:1-2). The sea may symbolize society in general (17:15). This could also refer to part of the nation of Israel being overthrown at sea (Josephus, Wars 3.9.2-3). Contrast this with 16:3, in which all the sea became blood (Josephus, Wars 3.10.9). See also Ex. 7:20, 21.

#### **Verses 10-11**

**Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter.**

It has been noted that stars often represent rulers or leadership of one sort or another (cf. 6:12-13; Matt. 24:29), and so this star symbolizes some power that has fallen.

Since rivers often connect larger bodies of water, they may symbolize channels of influence and power accessed by the leadership. It might be that the news (spread via word of mouth) of this fallen star through these channels was what made people bitter. Wormwood is a plant with a bitter taste, and is simply a symbol for bitterness that accompanied God's wrath (cf. Pr. 5:4; Jer. 9:14-16; Lam. 3:15).

It is hard to decipher the identity of this fallen star, but it could have reference to the forces in Galilee. Ogden contends that it refers to Josephus, the General in Galilee that was supposed to be dead, but was found to be with the Romans, which enraged his countrymen (Josephus, Wars 3.9.5-6).

Note the contrast between waters being made bitter here, and bitter waters being made sweet for God's people (Ex. 15:23-25). Within this same context in Exodus, God also exhorts the people to obey Him,

and thus avoid the plagues of the Egyptians (Ex. 15:26). It is interesting that so many of these symbols of wrath allude to those ten plagues.

**Verse 12**

**Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night.**

The lights were growing dim on the Jews, and were about to go out (cf. 6:12-13; Ex. 10:22; Isa. 13:10; Matt. 24:29).

**Verse 13**

**And I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!”**

Things were getting bad, but this was just the beginning. Some translations render “angel” as “eagle” here, which would tie in nicely with the idea that the Romans, whose ensign was an eagle (cf. Matt. 24:28), would continue to make the land desolate.

\*All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. All rights reserved.