

Living Word Fellowship Church

An Expository Explanation of Revelation Chapter 8-9

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The Seventh Seal as the Conclusion of the Seal Series: The Last Judgment is Described Again as a Formal Response to the Saints' Petition in 6:10 that God Punish the Unbelieving World (8:1-5)^[1]

A. A General Overview of these Chapters:

1. The opening of the seventh seal is a most important event, confirmed by the fact that there was silence in heaven for about half an hour after it was opened. The contents of the seven trumpets indicate that they differ from the seven seals. W. Graham Scroggie states, "The trumpets, therefore, do not double back over all or some of the seals, but lie under the sixth seal, and proceed from it" (*The Great Unveiling*, p. 111). He also holds that the bowls of the wrath of God (chap. 16) "do not double back over the seal and trumpet judgments" (p. 112).^[2]

2. The content of the seventh seal is another vision of seven angels who are given seven trumpets of judgment. This is the first mention of seven specific angels before the throne, who are probably not the angels of the seven churches. Jewish tradition identifies seven holy angels who offer up the prayers of the saints as they enter before the glory of the Holy One (Tobit 12:15). Seven other angels are responsible later for pouring out the seven bowls of God's wrath (Rev. 15:1).^[3]

3. Unlike the previous judgments, which apparently were short in time, this judgment extended for five months (v. 10; cf. v. 5). This is important as it clearly refutes the notion that all these judgments will occur in a brief span of time immediately before the second coming of Christ.^[4]

4. The first two judgments affect nature and man only indirectly, but the third brings about the death of many. The blowing of the fourth trumpet brings about celestial disturbances so that a third part of the sun, moon, and stars are smitten, and their light diminished (cf. the ninth plague, Ex 10:21-23).^[5]

5. To the judgment of the fifth trumpet, which is called the first Woe (v. 12), John devotes more space than to all the preceding judgments combined. It is probable that, apart from the exact identification of Babylon in chapters 17 and 18, the meaning of the two judgments in this chapter presents the most difficult major problem in Revelation.^[6]

6. The blowing of the sixth trumpet is identified with the **second Woe** (11:14). We are now taken to a known geographical area on this earth, to the river **Euphrates** (v. 14), which here probably should be taken literally. Four angels bound somewhere along this river are now loosed, *that they should kill the third part of men* (v. 15). Armies of horsemen will bring about this fearful destruction. . Surely we here have come to the days of the beginning of the Antichrist. Todd has said, and Weidner and others agree, that “we are probably to look to this region as the scene of this great judgment, which is in exact conformity with the inferences to which we are led by the prophecies of Daniel, where those countries in the region of the Euphrates, once the stage of such mighty empires, are destined to become the scene of the last great struggle between the princes of the world and the people of God.”^[7]

a) The Euphrates and the Tigris were the two great rivers of Mesopotamia. Both were headwaters into which the river in the garden of Eden flowed (Gen. 2:14). Today, the source of the Euphrates is in eastern Turkey. The river drains a course of 1,780 miles before emptying into the Persian Gulf. In the Old Testament, the Euphrates is also called “the great river” (Deut. 1:7; Josh. 1:4), and it formed the northeastern boundary of the Promised Land (Gen. 15:18; Deut. 1:7).^[8]

7. In Revelation, the east is the direction from which both redemption (7:2) and destruction (9:14; 16:12) come. Israel’s eschatological enemy in the Old Testament came from the east (Isa. 41:2; 46:11) or from the north (Jer. 6:1, 22; Ezek. 38:6).^[9]

8. A warning was given that the next three trumpets would be more severe and devastating than those which preceded them. The triple woe announced by an eagle warned of coming judgment. Eagles are also mentioned in 4:7 and 12:14.^[10]

9. The fourth seal (Rev. 6:7–8) resulted in a fourth of the earth’s people being killed. Here a third of the remainder were put to death. These two judgments alone, disregarding all intervening judgments, would account for the death of half the earth’s population. This fact is to be taken literally as it confirms the statement by Daniel (Dan. 12:1) and the words of Christ (Matt. 24:21) that the Great Tribulation will be without precedent and would end in the death of all mankind if it were not stopped by His second coming (Matt. 24:22).^[11]

B. Background Information:

1. Before considering the judgments themselves, we do well to recall the significance of trumpets in the Holy Scriptures. All these phenomena (except the earthquake) are found in the account of God’s descending at Mount Sinai to meet Moses, where we have the first reference to the trumpet in the Bible (Ex 19:16).^[12]

a) The portrayal in vv 7–9 is based on Joel 1–2, which describes a plague of locusts devastating Israel’s land (whether the description there is literal or figurative for an invading army⁶⁷ is not crucial for the present purposes). Just as here a trumpet has signaled the coming of the locusts (Rev. 9:1), so also in Joel 2, the locust judgment is introduced and concluded with “sound the trumpet” (2:1, 15).^[13]

b) Trumpets were used for celebrations, to call sacred or military assemblies, and as alerts, often warning of impending invasions. In this last sense, the prophets usually employed the image, which is probably also why Revelation uses it.^[14]

c) In Joshua chapter 6, the seven priests blew seven trumpets in the destruction of the walls of Jericho. There is a historical trace of seven trumpets in the scriptures.

2. We will argue directly below (and in the introductory comments on 8:6ff.) that this is the Last Judgment because the fire results in “thunder, sounds, lightning, and

quaking,” which is almost identical to the description of the last assize in 11:19 and 16:18. [\[15\]](#)

3. Another type of furnace was used for smelting ore, mainly iron. Such furnaces required great and prolonged heat, and the fires produced thick, dark columns of smoke. The destructive judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah produced a similar effect: “and he [Abraham] saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace” (Gen. 19:28). Jesus’ use of “fiery furnace” in his parables suggests that the image is synonymous with hell (Matt. 13:42, 50). [\[16\]](#)

4. Falling stars are an apocalyptic motif heralding disaster and death and are mentioned four times in Revelation. Here and in 6:13, the stars represent cosmic phenomena; in 9:1 and 12:4, they are personified as angelic beings. At God’s judgment of Edom, “all the starry host will fall” (Isa. 34:4). Jesus alluded to this text in the Synoptic Apocalypse when he declared that, following the distress of the last days, “the stars will fall from the sky” (Matt. 24:9; Mark 13:25).

5. The eagle was a symbol of imperial Rome carried by the legions and used on Herod’s temple, but that symbolism is probably irrelevant here. Perhaps more to the point, eagles were used as messengers in some texts (4 Baruch); they could symbolize God’s protection (Rev 12:14), or—most likely—the term here means (as it often does, including in the LXX) “vulture,” indicating a bird of prey (see 19:17), and thus imminent doom. [\[17\]](#)

6. However, it is usually not lethal. In the Old Testament, bitter water symbolized disobedience, and wormwood was linked with judgment. After the Exodus, the Israelites came to Marah’s spring and tried to drink its bitter water. Although the people grumbled against Moses, God provided a piece of wood to sweeten the water before testing them to see if they would keep His commands (Ex. 15:23–25). [\[18\]](#)

a) Like the preceding plague, this judgment alludes to the poisoned water of Exodus 7:20–21, but through a sort of poisoning or embittering agent called “wormwood” (Jer 9:15; 23:15; cf. Jer 8:14), often used figuratively (for idolatry—Deut 29:18; fruits of adultery—Prov 5:4; suffering—Lam 3:19). This plague

strikes local fresh-water supplies and would naturally worry John's readers in Asia, especially in Laodicea (see comment on Rev 3:15–16).^[19]

7. This messenger is flying in midair or middle heaven. Revelation portrays a typical Jewish cosmology with three heavens (cf. 2 Cor. 12:2). The upper heaven is revealed in Revelation 4:1 when John begins to see a series of visions around the divine throne. The celestial middle heaven is the home of the sun, moon, planets, and stars (cf. Rev. 14:6; 19:17). The lowest atmospheric heaven is mentioned as clouds in 1:7.^[20]

8. The uncanny resemblance of locusts to horses was proverbial in antiquity: “They have the appearance of horses; they gallop along like cavalry” (Joel 2:4). Hence their arrival was likened to that of an enemy army (Rev. 9:5). Joel is a key source for John's description of the locusts. An army of locusts “has the teeth of a lion” (Joel 1:6), and they make a noise “like that of chariots” (2:5).^[21]

9. The venom of these locusts is sufficiently toxic to torture the victims for five months. This period of time again indicates incompleteness: God is not yet ready for his judgment to be terminal. The pain, however, is so great that everyone seeks death but cannot find it (cf. Job 3:21). There is no assisted suicide for these earth dwellers under divine judgment.^[22]

10. “Abaddon” is a Hebrew name for the lowest depths of the earth, the realm of the dead (cf. Job 31:12; Ps 88:11; Prov 27:20); the Dead Sea Scrolls also linked the “spirit of Abaddon” with the “angel of the pit.” “Apollyon” means “destruction” in Greek. (Some scholars have secondarily connected the name to Apollo, a Greek deity, one of whose totems was the locust and whose incarnation the emperor claimed to be; cf. Rev 2:18.^[23]

^[1] Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 445). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

^[2] Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 950–951). Victor Books.

^[3] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation](#). (Vol. 4, p. 299). Zondervan.

^[4] Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 953). Victor Books.

^[5] Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). [The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament](#) (Re 8:7). Moody Press.

^[6] Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). [The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament](#) (Re 9:1). Moody Press.

^[7] Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). [The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament](#) (Re 9:13). Moody Press.

^[8] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation](#). (Vol. 4, p. 306). Zondervan.

^[9] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation](#). (Vol. 4, p. 306). Zondervan.

^[10] Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 952). Victor Books.

^[11] Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 953). Victor Books.

^[12] Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). [The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament](#) (Re 8:1). Moody Press.

^[13] Beale, G. K. (1999). [The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text](#) (p. 499). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

^[14] Keener, C. S. (1993). [The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament](#) (Re 8:2). InterVarsity Press.

^[15] Beale, G. K. (1999). [The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text](#) (pp. 457–458). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

^[16] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation](#). (Vol. 4, pp. 304–305). Zondervan.

^[17] Keener, C. S. (1993). [The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament](#) (Re 8:13). InterVarsity Press.

^[18] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation](#). (Vol. 4, p. 303). Zondervan.

^[19] Keener, C. S. (1993). [The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament](#) (Re 8:10–11). InterVarsity Press.

^[20] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation](#). (Vol. 4, p. 303). Zondervan.

^[21] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation](#). (Vol. 4, p. 305). Zondervan.

^[22] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation](#). (Vol. 4, p. 305). Zondervan.

^[23] Keener, C. S. (1993). [The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament](#) (Re 9:11). InterVarsity Press.