

Living Word Fellowship Church

An Expository Explanation of Revelation Chapter 8-9 (Continued)

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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. Key Words and Apocalyptic Definitions:

1. There are a number of possible ways to interpret “silence” here.

a) In this context of worship (7:9–12) and intercession (6:9–11; 8:4) in heaven, “silence” could mean a brief delay in God’s reception of his people’s prayers for vindication (Ps 50:3, 21; 83:1), or silencing heaven’s praises to receive his people’s prayers (Rev 8:4), as in some later Jewish texts.^[2]

b) Perhaps more likely, it could be a form of awed worship (Ps 65:1) or perhaps of fear, grief, or shame, as with the muzzled mouths of the guilty with nothing to say in their defense at the judgment (Hab 2:20; Zeph 1:7; Zech 2:13; cf. Ps 31:17–18; 76:8–10; Is 23:2; 41:1; 47:5).^[3]

c) The Lamb’s opening of the seventh seal does not bring the anticipated Parousia but instead heavenly silence. Up to this point, Heaven has been full of sound with uninterrupted praise around the throne. In the Old Testament, silence is frequently a precursor of judgment (cf. Isa. 41:1; Amos 8:3). During the final plague of the firstborn, the Israelites and their animals were commanded to remain silent (Ex. 11:7). After Babylon’s judgment was

determined by the Lord from his heavenly temple, “let all the earth be silent before him” (Hab. 2:20; cf. Zech. 2:13). With the opening of the last seal, the scroll is finally opened, and its contents are fully seen. The fury of the coming judgments has now moved even heaven to silence. Half an hour symbolizes a brief time and is the shortest period mentioned in Revelation.^[4]

2. Another angel appears and stands by the heavenly altar. This may be “the angel of the presence” (as in Isa. 63:9 and *Jub.* 1:29) or even Christ Himself (as in 10:1 and 14:14). The altar in view is the altar of 6:9, under which the souls of persecuted saints stand (see on 6:9). It is possible but unlikely that this altar is to be distinguished from the one mentioned in the last part of 8:3; some identify the first “altar” and the one in v 5 as the altar of burnt offering and the second “altar” in v 3 as the altar of incense.

a) As in apocalyptic literature in general, here, the heavenly altar combines aspects of both the incense altar and the altar of burnt offering in the earthly temple. At this altar, the saints petition God to punish their persecutors (6:10).^[5]

3. The “much incense ... with the prayers” which “went up ... before God” is metaphorical of acceptance by God: “prayer ... as incense” in the OT connotes prayer accepted by God (e.g., Ps. 141:1–2; cf. *Midr. Rab.* Num. 13.18). Divine acceptance was also indicated by the fragrant “smoke of incense” in the OT temple (e.g., Lev. 16:12–13; cf. θυμίαμα [“incense”] in the LXX and its equivalent in the MT). This means that the saints’ petition for retribution is already in the process of being positively received by God.^[6]

a) That “the smoke of the incense went up with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God” indicates that the petition of 6:10 is now being formally presented before God with angelic favor and authority. The angel also represents the saints as he bears their prayers before God’s presence (note the angels’ representative function in the letters; see 1:19; cf. Tob. 12:12, 15).

4. This is the only reference to censers in the Book of Revelation, though golden bowls full of incense, which probably were not censers, are mentioned in Revelation 5:8. Like the golden bowls of 5:8, however, the golden censer offering incense here is symbolic of the prayers of all the saints.^[7]

5. The **star** was named **Wormwood**. Wormwood is a bitter desert plant mentioned only here in the New Testament. It is mentioned seven times in the Old Testament, representing sorrow and bitter judgment (Deut. 29:18; Prov. 5:4; Jer. 9:15; 23:15; Lam. 3:15, 19; Amos 5:7).^[8]

a) But this is not a mere shortage of good water. The severity is emphasized by the fact that people are forced to drink bad water and suffer from doing so.^[9]

6. The “Abyss” (*abyssos*) is the home of demons (cf. Luke 8:31; Rev. 9:11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3; in Rom. 10:7, it is translated “deep”). Satan will be confined for a thousand years in the Abyss during the reign of Christ on earth (Rev. 20:1–3).^[10]

7. These locusts, however, did not eat vegetation but had the power to torment people for five months (cf. Rev. 9:10). Thus, they might be demons who appeared in the form of locusts. This is confirmed by the fact that they came from the Abyss, the home of demons (Luke 8:31). Their demonic control over people was such that though the victims desired to die, they could not take their own lives.^[11]

8. The placement of the eagle figure here in 8:13 is natural since it was part of the exodus tradition. In Exod. 19:4 God compares Himself as the protector of His people to an eagle, in connection with the plagues on the Egyptians: “You saw what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself” (cf. Deut. 32:11). Here the link with the eagle’s plague-like wrath from the Exodus text is emphasized. The Exodus 19 background in common between 4:5 and ch. 8 may

explain why only the eagle-like creature was chosen here from among the other three creatures introduced in 4:7.^[12]

B. Summary of Commentators:

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)^[13]

1. **The First Four Trumpets:** God Deprives the Ungodly of Earthly Security Because of Their Persecution and Idolatry in Order to Indicate Their Separation from Him (8:6–12).^[14]

2. **The Fifth Trumpet:** Demons are Commissioned to Torment Hardened Unbelievers by Further Impoverishing Their Souls and Reminding Them of Their Hopeless Spiritual Plight (9:1–12)^[15]

3. **The Sixth Trumpet:** Demons are Commissioned to Judge Hardened Unbelievers by Ensuring the Final Punishment of Some Through Deception Until Death, Leaving the Deceived Remainder Unrepentant (9:13–21)^[16]

4. The trumpet of darkness provides an appropriate transition to the demonic judgments of the fifth trumpet. In both, the sun is darkened, which the fifth trumpet clearly associates with demonic harm (probably deception: see 9:3–4). Those who abide in spiritual darkness must be plagued by the forces of darkness, whose work is to draw the dark curtain of unbelief permanently over the spiritual eyes of the ungodly.^[17]

5. The seventh seal probably continues the sixth theme, which introduced the beginning of the last judgment by portraying the cosmic conflagration and the shrieking cries of terror by the ungodly in response to their imminent judgment (6:12–17).^[18]

6. This has been contrasted in ch. 7 with the portrayal of the sealed saints, whose faith is thereby protected (7:1–8). The result of this protection is that the saints can forever stand in God's presence as a reward for their perseverance (7:9–17). The focus of the last half of ch. 7 is on time after the final judgment when the saints receive their eternal reward.^[19]

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

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[3] Keener, C. S. (1993). [*The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament*](#) (Re 8:1). InterVarsity Press.

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

[5] Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (pp. 454–455). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

[6] Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 456). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

- [7] 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. 951). Victor Books.
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- [13] Beale, G. K. (1999). [The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text](#) (p. 445). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.
- [14] Beale, G. K. (1999). [The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text](#) (p. 472). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.
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- [16] Beale, G. K. (1999). [The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text](#) (p. 505). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.
- [17] Beale, G. K. (1999). [The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text](#) (pp. 485–486). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.
- [18] Beale, G. K. (1999). [The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text](#) (p. 445). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.
- [19] Beale, G. K. (1999). [The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text](#) (p. 445). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

