



This ministry is dedicated to a progressive understanding of truth apropos to the last generation to live on earth.

Welcome to *EndTime Issues...*

Revelation is a book of conflict between two powers superintending created beings. This comes into sharp focus as probation time diminishes. Demonic forces thrive by harming the other side. Those persecuted people soon cry, "How long?" (5th Seal). God, at an appointed time, initiates deadly judicial authority, beginning with the Seven Trumpets. When they begin to sound, the end of history is in view. A preface to those Trumpets:

Burning Incense – Hurling Coals

(Revelation 8:2-6)

Introduction

A dramatic segment of the apocalyptic end occurs in the sixth Seal with:

1. A massive earthquake (Revelation 6:12, 14)¹
2. Falling stars, darkened sun, and the blood red moon (Revelation 6:12-13; cf. Matthew 24:29)
3. The wicked trying to hide from Christ's face as He returns, sitting on His throne (Revelation 6:16; cf. Matthew 24:30)

Expositor White notes regarding that end: "Then the whole world will know and understand. They [the wicked] will realize who and what they, poor, feeble, finite beings, have been warring against. In awful agony and horror, they will cry to the mountains and rocks, ***"Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"*** Revelation 6:16, 17."²

The seventh scroll Seal is not broken until Revelation 8:1. The in-between chapter, seven, is a "prophetic break" called an "interlude." There, the sealing of the 144,000 and a heavenly scene

¹ *The Great Controversy*, pp. 636-637.

² *The Desire of Ages*, p. 739.

of those translated is portrayed. Then, as often occurs in prophecy, a ***new, unexpected narrative*** begins with 8:2! The seven Trumpets are introduced. Since Christ arrived in the sixth Seal at the eschaton, the Trumpets simply cannot be *sequenced* as following that event! They herald the ***onset*** of God's wrath preceding and going up to His return.³ They additionally describe what Satan's wrath and hatred will be like right at the end!

- The Seven Trumpets stand by themselves as a unique block of messages.
- They inaugurate God's response to the saints needing divine help, noted in that fifth Seal. Stunning! Satan and his minions will finally take out their animosity against their own in the fifth and sixth Trumpets!

Revelation 8:3-5 reveals heavenly activity that occurs before and during the Trumpet period.

That focus is in the throne room, similar to just before the breaking of the first Seal (Revelation 4 and 5)!

The Setting

“And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them” (Revelation 8:2 – NIV).

John often marks a new phase in the prophetic narrative when he says simply, “*and I saw.*”

- He sees these seven angels before God's throne as a unique group before the throne of the universe. They are commissioned to sound those Seven Trumpets.⁴ Are these the same angels who will carry the Vial Plagues in Revelation 15 and 16? That is not discussed but possible.
- They “*stand before God*” as does Gabriel, declared by Zechariah (Luke 1:19). They are in constant readiness for service.⁵ “*Standing before God*” also means “whom I serve” (I Kings 17:1, 18:15; II Kings 3:14, 5:16).

It appears that God gave the Trumpets to these angels.⁶ In the New Testament, Trumpets announce the eschaton (Matthew 24:31, I Corinthians 15:52, I Thessalonians 4:16). In Revelation they are used as symbols of eschatological promise (1:10, 4:1) as well as harbingers of judgment connected with the seven Trumpets.⁷

The scene is in answer, though with a divine delay, to the prayers of the saints in Revelation 6:9 and 10 (NIV): ***“When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.***

³ Mounce, Robert H.; *The Book of Revelation* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1977), p. 173.

⁴ Thomas, Robert L.; *Revelation 8–22 – An Exegetical Commentary* vol. II (Moody Press, Chicago, 1995), p. 17.

⁵ Mounce, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

⁶ Stefanovic, Ranko; *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Andrews University Press, Berrien Springs, MI; 2002), p. 284.

⁷ Osborne, Grant R.; *Revelation* (Baker Book House; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 343.

They called out in a loud voice, ‘How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?’”⁸

Revelation 8:3-5 represents another amazing “interlude.” The angels are now holding the Trumpets. But – before they prepare to blow them, the message is interrupted with “before we go on, you need to be aware of this pending heavenly activity.” What follows is a storyline of heavenly drama that occurs while the Trumpets sequentially sound!

Dramatic Intercession

“Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God’s people, on the golden altar in front of the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God’s people, went up before God from the angel’s hand” (Revelation 8:3-4 – NIV).

This “angel” is distinct from the other Trumpet seven. Many scholars conclude that this is Christ because of the mediatorial work in bringing prayers before God. The imagery also suggests that it is He in His priestly atonement role.⁹

“In the model sanctuary the golden censer was kept in the most holy place. (Heb. 9:4; EW 252). It was only used by the high priest in the *holy place* on the day of atonement. (Lev. 16:12,13). The censers used by the priests for the daily holy place ministry were brass. (Numbers 16:39 [contrast Revelation 5:8]. The fact that the Angel has the golden censer ... is incontrovertible evidence that this is part of the final activity of Jesus in the day of atonement ministry! The incense represents the blood of the atonement (7BC 971), and the offering of that blood is the central focus of the intercessory ministry of Jesus. No one else could be the Angel described here!”¹⁰

God apparently gives angel Christ much incense to put onto the golden altar’s coals. The odors that rise to God are symbolically accompanied by the prayers of the saints. Later (unknown period), the coals and incense were transferred to the golden censer in the angel’s hand, as occurs on the Day of Atonement. The imagery again means that that day has come.

- There is here a fascinating but ill-defined association to the priestly function of the elders in 5:8 with golden bowls of incense, “*which are the prayers of the saints.*” These elders represent those taken to heaven at Christ’s ascension (Matthew 27:52-53; cf. Revelation 5:8-10). They are redeemed individuals.
- The saints were promised that they would become kings and priests unto God (Revelation 1:6). That role appears to be functioning in Revelation 5. There is a unique but indistinct association between the mediatorial work of Christ and those 24 elders!

This became possible when: “All Heaven was waiting to welcome the Saviour to the celestial courts. As he ascended he led the way, and the multitude of captives whom he had raised from the dead at the time when he came forth from the tomb, followed him. The heavenly host, with songs of joy and triumph, escorted him upward. At the portals

⁸ Beckwith, Isbon T.; *The Apocalypse of John* (Baker Book House; Grand Rapids, MI; 1967), p. 552.

⁹ Walvoord, John F.; *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 152.

¹⁰ Hauser, Robert, M.D.; *Give Glory to Him – The Sanctuary in the Book of Revelation*, p. 76

of the city of God an innumerable company of angels awaited his coming. As they approached the gates of the city, the angels who were escorting the Majesty of Heaven, in triumphant tones addressed the company at the portals: ‘Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in!’¹¹

- These are the elders introduced in the previous chapter: *“And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold ... thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation”* (Revelation 4:4, 5:9b).

They are performing priestly roles, receiving the imprecatory prayers for justice by those symbolically martyred saints under the altar (Revelation 6:9-11).¹²

- As noted, there was a predicted delay in answering those cries.
- The Trumpet plagues at last begin the divine response to the *“How long?”* cry!

Here, one can see God accepting those prayers as a *“sweet-smelling savor.”* This is the only place in Revelation where the incense smoke is coming from the *“hand”* of the priest and then ascending to God. This is assurance that those prayers reach the throne of grace on this special atonement day. Did those prayers first go through the vials of the 24 elders? We aren't told.¹³

- The allusion to “all the saints” under the altar was further addressed eloquently by Beale.
- The martyrs under the altar (6:9) are not a narrow reference to literal martyrs but a representation of all the saints who suffer.¹⁴

Their cry is detailed in the fifth Seal, which notes further:

- *“They called out in a loud voice, ‘How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?’ Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been”* (Revelation 6:9-11 – NIV).
- Finally, the *“Trumpets”* answer. His love and fairness are vindicated when the suffering saints experience Him begin that strange work of vengeance.

There is often confusion between the incense, censer, Christ's merits, and prayers of the saints. Expositor White has shared helpful thoughts:

¹¹ *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, p. 252.

¹² Beale, Gregory K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan – 1999), p. 454.

¹³ Osborne, *op. cit.*, pp. 344-345.

¹⁴ Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 455.

- “He holds before the Father the censer of His own merits, in which there is no taint of earthly corruption. He gathers into this censer the prayers, the praise, and the confessions of His people, and with these He puts His own spotless righteousness. Then, perfumed with the merits of Christ’s propitiation, the incense comes up before God wholly and entirely acceptable.”¹⁵
 - The censer holds Christ’s merits.
 - Prayers of His people are gathered into that censer.
 - Christ mixes His merits with them.

Christ’s collective merits can be summed up through the merits of His shed blood!

- “That blood alone is efficacious. It alone can make propitiation for our sins. It is the blood of the only-begotten Son of God that is of value for us that we may draw nigh unto God, His blood alone that taketh ‘away the sin of the world.’ Morning and evening the heavenly universe behold every household that prays, and the angel with the incense, representing the blood of the atonement, finds access to God (MS 15, 1897).”¹⁶

The incense: “Then [the saint’s prayers], perfumed with the merits of Christ’s propitiation, the incense comes up before God wholly and entirely acceptable. Then gracious answers are returned.”¹⁷

“Let words of penitence and grateful praise come up before God as sweet incense in His heavenly sanctuary.”¹⁸

The incense is the perfuming vehicle that rises to God. The prayers are transformed by Christ’s grace and unending merits of love – a divine perfume!

“Lift up your eyes toward the heavenly sanctuary, where Christ your Mediator stands before the Father to present your prayers as fragrant incense, mingled with his own merit and spotless righteousness. You are invited to come, to ask, to seek, to knock, and you are assured that you will not come in vain.”¹⁹

Where did this incense come from? All it says is that the incense was given to Him. One can only assume that it is from God the Father to accommodate the growing number of the saints’ prayers as persecution accelerates nearing earth’s end. The working unity of the two is exemplified by these thoughts:

“I and my Father are one” (John 10:30).

“The world’s Redeemer was equal with God. His authority was as the authority of God. He declared that He had no existence separate from the Father. The authority by which He spoke,

¹⁵ *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 154.

¹⁶ *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, p. 971.

¹⁷ *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 344.

¹⁸ *Selected Messages*, vol. 2, p. 272.

¹⁹ *Christian Education*, p. 127.

and wrought miracles, was expressly His own, yet He assures us that He and the Father are one.”²⁰

The Father and Son appear to be working jointly in this amazing sanctuary atonement imagery.

Adding additional incense to the coals increases the sweet-smelling odor from their prayers.²¹

- Trouble and conflict fill the earth at the same time God’s people seek to bring the pure gospel to every person.

“In the time of confusion and trouble before us, a time of trouble such as has not been since there was a nation, the uplifted Saviour will be presented to the people in *all* lands, that all who look to Him in faith may live.”²²

“The commandment-keeping people of God ere long will be placed in a most trying position; but all those who have walked in the light, and diffused the light, will realize that God interposes in their behalf. When everything looks most forbidding, *then* the Lord will reveal His power to His faithful ones.”²³

- Christ now has intensified His intercessory work before God!
- God interposes to neutralize opposition with *wrath mingled with mercy* (vs 5).

Refining the wonders of these divine actions are these additional thoughts:

“Christ proclaims Himself our Intercessor. He would have us know that He has graciously engaged to be our Substitute. *He places His merit in the golden censer to offer up with the prayers of His saints, so that the prayers of His dear children may be mingled with the fragrant merits of Christ’s perfections* as they ascend to the Father in the cloud of incense.”²⁴

God has a sensitive ear to the prayers of His people. In turn, He gives Christ more incense to make those prayers a welcomed experience in heaven, all emanating from that golden censer. Christ has already added to those human faltering prayers His purity, His righteousness, His merits, so *the human plea becomes a divine plea!* Amazing!

- That makes you of infinite value to God.
- That is also why you can be seen as a *son* or a *daughter of God!*

“The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God’s people, went up before God from the angel’s hand” (Revelation 8:4 – NIV).

The incense smoke in the ancient tabernacle had a pervasive aroma.

“Within the second veil was placed the ark of the testimony, and the beautiful and rich curtain was drawn before the sacred ark. This curtain did not reach to the top of the

²⁰ Ibid., p. 1142.

²¹ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

²² *Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 50.

²³ *Maranatha*, p. 194.

²⁴ *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 19, p. 215 (emphasis added)

building. The glory of God, which was above the mercy-seat, could be seen from both apartments, but in a much less degree from the first apartment. Directly before the ark, but separated by the curtain, was the golden altar of incense. The fire upon this altar was kindled by the Lord himself, and was sacredly cherished by feeding it with holy incense, which filled the sanctuary with its fragrant cloud, day and night. ***Its fragrance extended for miles around the tabernacle.***²⁵

The narrative changes!

Wrath with Mercy

“Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake” (Revelation 8:5 – NIV).

The priestly angel now becomes an avenging being. Revelation 8:3-4 *mirrors* Levitical intercessory rites. Now the picture moves to an apocalyptic setting with fire and coals being hurled to the earth. This is judicial fire. (cf. Genesis 19:24; II Kings 1:10, 12, 14; Job 1:6; Psalm 11:6; II Thessalonians 1:8). This is not a transition from Christ’s intercessory work but an addition to that mediatorial activity in heaven.

- It echoes Isaiah 28:21: *“For the Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act.”*
- A parallel is in Ezekiel 10:2-7, where a man clothed in linen is told to take coals of fire in his hands from the throne and scatter them on the city – a fiery judgment.²⁶
- Bauckham notes that the symbolism of Ezekiel’s casting of coals is associated with both judgment (Ezekiel 1:12-13) and the sealing of the righteous in their foreheads (Ezekiel 9:4).²⁷ Many expositors have similar understandings.

The fiery judgments in the first four Trumpets are God’s response to the cries of His people and bring exoneration and justice to His loyal, persecuted followers. In Ezekiel the coals are *“scattered.”* Here, they are *“hurled down.”*

- The saints *“under the altar”* cry out for justice and vindication of God’s love (6:9).
- The response: “Angel Christ” fills the censer with coals from the altar and hurls them (the coals) to the earth. This heightens the expectancy of what judicial events will occur when the Trumpets begin to blow.²⁸

The atonement mediatorial instrument turns against the wicked. It echoes one of Jesus’ statements: “I have come to cast fire upon the earth” (Luke 12:49).²⁹

²⁵ *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, pp. 8-9 (1870).

²⁶ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 346.

²⁷ Bauckham, Richard; *The Climax of Prophecy* (T&T Clark Ltd; Edinburgh, Scotland; 1993), p. 82.

²⁸ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

²⁹ Stefanovic, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

- Jesus came to judge and divide people related to their decisions about Him and His redeeming grace.
- This is the period of time when eternal decisions are made on a large scale. A divine judicial crisis moves forward the convictions of those living on planet earth!³⁰

Dramatic Result

When the coals (fire) are cast to the earth, there are peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

- An instructive purpose accompanies such events.
- Similar references instruct:

Revelation 4:5: *“lightnings, sounds, and thunders”* – these come from God’s throne. Judicial decisions are concluding.

8:5: *“thunders, sounds, lightnings, and quaking”* – executive responses move to the earth – anticipating the Trumpet Plagues with destruction are presently anticipated.³¹

11:19: *“lightnings, sounds, thunders, quaking and great hail”* – final destructive wrath is inaugurated.

16:18-21: *“lightnings, sounds, thunders, and quaking ... with great hail”* – final destructive wrath – “It is finished!”

The events proceeding from the throne in 4:5 is an introductory message that God’s executive wrath is anticipated. The first few Trumpets detail what happens. When an earthquake is added (8:5), it portends that an eschatological period on earth has been inaugurated!

- “God’s judgments will be visited upon those who are seeking to oppress and destroy His people. His long forbearance with the wicked emboldens men in transgression, but their punishment is nonetheless certain and terrible because it is long delayed. ‘The Lord shall rise up as in Mount Perazim, He shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that He may do His work, His strange work; and bring to pass His act, His strange act.’ Isaiah 28:21. To our merciful God the act of punishment is a strange act. ‘As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.’ Ezekiel 33:11. The Lord is ‘merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, ... forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.’ Yet He will ‘by no means clear the guilty.’ ‘The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked.’ Exodus 34:6, 7; Nahum 1:3. By terrible things in righteousness He will vindicate the authority of His downtrodden law. The severity of the retribution awaiting the transgressor may be judged by the Lord’s reluctance to execute justice.”³²

Yet, in the Trumpets, elements of mercy are pervasive:

³⁰ Bock, Darrell L.; Luke 9:51–24:53, vol. B (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI; 1996), p. 1192.

³¹ Walvoord, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

³² *The Great Controversy*, p. 627.

- “The figures of guilt rapidly accumulate, yet the judgments of God are tempered with mercy, until the figures have reached their appointed limit. God bears long with the transgression of human beings, and continues through His appointed agencies to present the gospel message, until the set time has come. God bears with divine patience with the perversity of the wicked; but He declares that He will visit their transgressions with a rod. He will at last permit the destructive agencies of Satan to bear sway to destroy [his own] (MS 17, 1906).”³³
- “All the judgments upon men, prior to the close of probation, have been mingled with mercy. The pleading blood of Christ has shielded the sinner from receiving the full measure of his guilt; but in the final judgment, wrath is poured out unmixed with mercy.”³⁴

Thomas concludes that 8:5 begins the “*hour of trial*,” or “*temptation*,” noted in the Philadelphia church (Revelation 3:10).³⁵

This imagery of a “storm theophany” is a dramatic advisory that the eschaton is very close! God is bringing the history of this world to a close.³⁶ The sound of the first Trumpet inaugurates that move.

Conclusion

“The offering of the incense on the golden altar ... [and censer then] hurling ... the fire on the earth served as a signal to the seven angels to blow, one after another, their trumpets and herald the plagues being sent on the earth and its inhabitants. This is another indication that the trumpet judgments are affected by the prayers of the slain saints in the scene of the fifth seal: ‘How long, O Lord, will you not judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ (6:9-10). Now God responds to these prayers by sending the trumpet plagues, thus judging ‘those who dwell on the earth’ (8:13).”³⁷

Understanding the final calamitous events protects the hope of the saints!

Franklin S. Fowler, Jr., M.D.
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³³ *The Seventh Day Adventist Commentary*, p. 1171.

³⁴ *The Great Controversy*, p. 628.

³⁵ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

³⁶ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

³⁷ Stefanovic, Ranko; *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, “The Angel at the Altar (Revelation 8:3-5): A Case Study on Intercalations in Revelation,” vol. 44, No. 1, pp. 79-94.