

The opening of the seals continues with the seventh seal, which contains the seven trumpet judgments. Unlike the seal judgments, which indicate the general conditions on earth during the tribulation, the trumpet judgments point to more specific events and are described in greater detail.

¹ And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.

This silence is in stark contrast to the loud voices of the saints, beasts, elders and angels that John has been hearing proclaim the praises of God up until now. Even the four beasts which “rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” (Rev. 4:8b) have fallen silent at the opening of the seventh seal. Why the silence? Perhaps the silence is an expression of awe and respect for what God is about to do on the earth during the upcoming trumpet judgments. Perhaps it is in respect for what is represented by the angel’s actions in vs. 3-5. Or perhaps it is merely to listen as the sound of the trumpets signal the pouring out of the wrath of God in His righteous indignation upon sinful humanity.

² And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.

The phrase “the seven angels which stood before God” could refer to angels who always stand before God or else these angels had already taken their place before the throne of God to take their trumpets when John notices them. It’s not clear if he sees these seven angels during the half-hour of silence or at the close, but likely they are taking their place with the trumpets during the silence. Perhaps the purpose of the silence is to focus attention on the preparation for the trumpet judgments to sound.

Verses 3-5: John sees an angel with a golden censer offering up the prayers of the saints along with incense on the altar before God. When he is done he casts the censer filled with fire from the altar into the earth, perhaps showing that the upcoming judgments are God’s response to His people’s cries for help. God is about to judge those who have oppressed and martyred His people, as foreshadowed by the voices, thunders, lightnings and the earthquake. It may be these sounds which end the half hour of silence.

⁶ And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound. ⁷ The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.

“And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound” - All the preparations between the opening of the seventh seal and the sounding of the first trumpet seems to help make the case that the half hour of silence was in anticipation of the seven trumpets.

“The first angel sounded...” - This trumpet releases a strange storm presumably over the entire earth. The odd fire/ice combination of hail falling with fire would do double damage to property and people. The unusual presence of blood falling with the hail only adds to the horror of the event. The blood could be literal or it may be blood-like rain, which has happened before even in recent years. The fire burns one third of the trees on the planet while it appears that only green grass is burned.

⁸ And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; ⁹ And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.

One of the great fears today is that the earth will be hit by an asteroid and we will not have the technology to do anything about it. It seems that this fear will become reality during the tribulation as an asteroid hits one of earth’s oceans. The resulting heat and tsunami could be responsible for the death of a third of all life in the oceans, but the third of the seas becoming blood could be the result of the dead sea life or it could contribute to the cause. The heat and tsunami will also destroy a third of the ships that are at sea at the time.

¹⁰ And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; ¹¹ And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.

The third trumpet heralds another object falling to earth, this time a “great star” falling from heaven. Some commentators think this may be a comet releasing some sort of contaminant upon the earth as it burns up in the atmosphere, resulting in a third of earth’s water sources becoming poisoned. Wormwood was the name of a bitter herb that, although not poisonous, was noxious. This herb is used elsewhere in scripture to symbolize the bitterness of reaping divine judgment for one’s sins. The results of this “great star” cause many to die from its poisonous effects.

¹² And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.

This fourth trumpet seems to affect the atmosphere since it affects the light coming from the sun, moon and stars equally and simultaneously. Perhaps some sort of pollution or dust has filled the atmosphere, reducing the amount of light from heavenly sources by a third, or it could be a supernatural effect. Such a reduction of light from the sun would cause a significant cooling of the earth, depending on the duration of this judgment. The statement “the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise” seems to indicate that there may be a period of total darkness for some 8 hours (one third of a 24-hour period) spanning part of the day and part of the night. Perhaps a cataclysmic event occurs (previous trumpets?) with the side-effect that it darkens the skies and as it starts to dissipate only two thirds of the external light can penetrate.

¹³ And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!

The intensity and dreadfulness of these judgments are indicated by the warning from an angel that there are still yet three trumpets to sound. The angel is expressing their severity by the three “woes” because the upcoming trumpet judgments will be worse than the first four. These final trumpets are described later as “woes” due to their intensity and severity (Rev. 9:12; Rev. 11:14).

Revelation 9

¹ And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. ² And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

The next angel sounds the fifth trumpet and reveals a “star” falling from heaven to earth. Unlike the “great star” falling from heaven of the previous chapter (Rev. 8:10), this star is an intelligent being - probably an angel. The speed of this being’s descent gives the appearance of falling. Some commentators believe this “star” is Satan, but it seems unlikely that Satan would be entrusted with the key to the bottomless pit. This bottomless pit (Greek word means “the abyss”) seems to be a place of confinement for demonic beings because Satan himself will be locked away in this bottomless pit by an angel (possibly this same one) during the millennium (Rev. 20:1-3). When this angel opens the bottomless pit a great plumes of smoke pour out of the opening and obscure the sky to the point of blocking a significant portion of sunlight.

³ And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. ⁴ And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.

John continues to describe what he sees as locusts exit the bottomless pit and emerge from the smoke. However, these are not ordinary locusts, for they display characteristics that ordinary locusts do not have. These locusts have “power” (the ability) to sting like a scorpion and thus cause great pain and torment to people (v. 5). Another difference between these locusts and ordinary locusts is that they are commanded (presumably by God) not to harm the plant life that ordinary locusts destroy but to harm people who have not been sealed by God.

Verses 5-12: These locusts will torment the inhabitants of the earth for five months, during which time people will seek death as a way to escape without success. John describes the appearance of the locusts as looking like horses with breastplates, wearing crowns and having faces like men, hair like women, and teeth like lions. These locusts have a king whose name means “destroyer” (Abaddon in Hebrew and Apollyon in Greek). Theories abound as to the nature of these locusts, from modern war machinery (tanks manned by men) to demonic beings who have been temporarily released and allowed to torment men. Since they come from the bottomless pit they are most likely demonic beings.

¹³ And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, ¹⁴ Saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. ¹⁵ And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men. ¹⁶ And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them.

When the next angel sounds the sixth trumpet John hears a voice from “the four horns of the golden altar which is before God.” This is likely the same altar that John saw when the fifth seal was opened (Rev. 6:9-11) that had the souls of tribulation martyrs underneath. At that time they were asking God when He would judge and avenge their blood upon the inhabitants of the earth. They were told to wait because the time had not yet arrived; it’s possible that here in this verse the time may have arrived for that judgment to begin. The voice commands the angel with the sixth trumpet to release the four angels which were bound in the Euphrates river.

These four angels are apparently fallen angels who had been bound at some time in the past for their sins. When God bound them, He had apparently picked that location in preparation for this specific hour, day, month and year for the purpose of slaying a third of earth’s population. These four angels apparently have command of an army of 200 million horsemen. Some commentators say this is a human army of 200 million while others say it is a demonic army. Either is possible, since John’s description of these horsemen and their horses in vs. 16-19 could be seen as men driving modern war machines. It would not be the first time that kingdoms of the earth were influenced and led by evil spiritual beings.

Verses 17-21: These verses continue to describe the army, which could either be demonic or demonically controlled humans. John, who is doing his best to describe what he sees in first century terms, could be describing men driving tanks or other modern war machines with guns emitting “fire, smoke and brimstone” that eventually kill a third of the earth’s population. Otherwise John is describing legions of demons unleashed to do their worst to humanity as God removes the restraints He had placed on demonic behavior.

Perhaps the most chilling statements in this chapter are in vs. 20-21. There it is said that the survivors of these judgments still would not repent from worshiping devils and idols of gold, silver, wood, etc. They also would not repent of the murders, sorceries (the Greek word refers to drugs), fornication or thefts that they were committing. This refusal to repent demonstrates how rebellious men’s hearts can become despite the chastising hand of God being on them.