



# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

## Bible Study 22

Text: Rev. 8:1-5

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**2. What the text means.**

# Seal 7 & the Trumpets

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### NLT

8.1 Καὶ ὅταν ἦνοιξεν τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν ἑβδόμη, ἐγένετο σιγὴ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ὡς ἡμιώριον. 2 Καὶ εἶδον τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλους οἱ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐσθήκασιν, καὶ ἐδόθησαν αὐτοῖς ἑπτὰ σάλπιγγες. 3 Καὶ ἄλλος ἀγγελος ἦλθεν καὶ ἐστάθη ἐπὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου ἔχων λιβανωτὸν χρυσοῦν, καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ θυμιάματα πολλὰ, ἵνα δώσει ταῖς προσευχαῖς τῶν ἁγίων πάντων ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον τὸ χρυσοῦν τὸ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου. 4 καὶ ἀνέβη ὁ καπνὸς τῶν θυμιαμάτων ταῖς προσευχαῖς τῶν ἁγίων ἐκ χειρὸς τοῦ ἀγγέλου ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ. 5 καὶ εἴληφεν ὁ ἀγγελος τὸν λιβανωτὸν καὶ ἐγέμισεν αὐτὸν ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου καὶ ἔβαλεν εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ ἐγένοντο βρονταὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ ἀστραπαὶ καὶ σεισμός.

1 Cuando el Cordero abrió el séptimo sello, hubo silencio en el cielo como por media hora. 2 Y vi a los siete ángeles que están de pie delante de Dios, y se les dieron siete trompetas. 3 Otro ángel vino y se paró ante el altar con un incensario de oro, y se le dio mucho incienso para que lo añadiera a las oraciones de todos los santos sobre el altar de oro que estaba delante del trono. 4 Y de la mano del ángel subió ante Dios el humo del incienso con las oraciones de los santos. 5 Y el ángel tomó el incensario, lo llenó con el fuego del altar y lo arrojó a la tierra, y hubo truenos, ruidos, relámpagos y un terremoto.

8.1 When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. 2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. 3 Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. 5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth; and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, and flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

8.1 When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence throughout heaven for about half an hour. 2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and they were given seven trumpets. 3 Then another angel with a gold incense burner came and stood at the altar. And a great quantity of incense was given to him to mix with the prayers of God's people, to be offered on the gold altar before the throne. 4 The smoke of the incense, mixed with the prayers of the saints, ascended up to God from the altar where the angel had poured them out. 5 Then the angel filled the incense burner with fire from the altar and threw it down upon the earth; and thunder crashed, lightning flashed, and there was a terrible earthquake.

## INTRODUCTION

With this study, we finish up the seven seals in chapters six and seven. Interestingly, seal number seven stands as an introduction to the seven trumpets, which is the second of the three series of sevens: seals, trumpets, and bowls of wrath. In the thematic progression with these three series the emphasis on

the wrath of God intensifies. In the first four seals plus the sixth seal the continual wrath of God upon those who harm the people of God down through the centuries builds toward a great climax at the end of human history. In these the preparation for the last final blast of this wrath is described, while the implementation of

it is put on hold until the authentic people of God on earth are marked out from the rest of humanity. Now with the seventh seal a momentary pause tasks place almost as if for one to 'catch his breath' to be braced for the unleashing of that full expression of divine wrath upon the earth. The seven trumpets represent the next stage in which the wrath of God in its final form is set loose upon the earth. The following bowls of wrath will represent the full expression of it.

By this repeated depiction John is preparing his first century readers to better grasp the full significance of the wrath of God in this world as a preliminary event to eternal damnation. But this outpouring of God's wrath on earth represents the justice of God in righting the incredible wrongs done against His authentic people by evil people over the centuries. It is God's response to the pleas of the martyred believers in 6:10: και ἔκραξαν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγοντες· ἕως πότε, ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός, οὐ κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν ἐκ τῶν κατοικοῦντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς; *they cried out with a loud voice, "Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?"*

To the believers in the seven churches of Asia who were experiencing persecution and already a few of them had suffered martyrdom, this came through as a profoundly reassuring message that God indeed is a holy God who is the ultimate in justice and righteousness. Faithful devotion to this God means that those who abuse and harm God's people will be held accountable for their evil deeds. And when that punishment is leveled at such evil people the people of God will have the presence of God enabling them to get through such a period unscathed by the divine wrath.

Then to true Christians in our world, especially those undergoing real persecution<sup>1</sup> and suffering harm from evil people around them, this same message comes through loud and strong. When we faithfully serve God within the framework of His expressed will in scripture and refuse to compromise that commitment under any circumstance, John's message in these chapters affirms that God knows us and should we pay the ultimate price His guarantee is the security and protection of heaven itself. During the experience of persecution He stands with us to enable us to endure persecution as a witness to His sustaining grace. And His promise is that those dishing out the harm will indeed be held accountable for their actions, both in

<sup>1</sup>By 'real persecution' is meant the parameters established by the biblical concept of θλίψεις, the term for persecution used in Revelation. This defines persecution in terms of actual physical harm that includes execution for one's devotion to Christ. Actions like verbal abuse and a hostile atmosphere where one lives and works do not fall within these parameters. These would not have been considered 'persecution' in apostolic Christianity.

temporal judgments and in the ultimate outpouring of His wrath upon evil people. He is truly a holy God and this outpouring of divine wrath unquestionably establishes that.

## 1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

As always we will take a look at the relevant aspects of the background of this passage of scripture.

### Historical Aspects:

Because of the literary nature of this text, only the external history possesses materials that are significant to the interpretation of the passage. The indirect background of worship patterns in the no longer existing temple in Jerusalem is more related to direct exegesis than to background history.

### External History.

The text apparatus of the UBS *Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed.) lists only those variations considered by the editors to have impact on the translation of the text. By this guideline, no variations in 8:1-5 were considered worthy of inclusion in their text apparatus.

The text apparatus of the N-A *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed), which lists virtually all variations in the currently existing manuscripts, contains nine places where variations in wording of 8:1-5 exist.<sup>2</sup>

#### <sup>2</sup>Offenbarung 8,1

\* οτε κ M (the indefinite temporal dependent clause conjunction ὅταν is replaced by the definite temporal conjunction ὅτε.)  
| txt A C 1006. 1611. 1841 pc

#### Offenbarung 8,2

\* εδοθη A al syh (the third person plural verb ἐδόθησαν is replaced by the third person singular form ἐδόθη)

#### Offenbarung 8,3

\* το -ριον A 1006. 1611. 1841. 1854. 2053. 2329 M<sup>A</sup> (The genitive case form of τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου is replaced by the accusative case form τὸ θυσιαστήριον)

\* δωση m (the future 3rd sing. δώσει is replaced either by the regular aorist middle subjunctive δώσει or the aorist active subjunctive δῶ)

| δω 1006. 1841. 2053 pc

| txt κ A C 1611 al

\* τας -χας 94 M<sup>A</sup> gig; Tyc (the dative plural form ταῖς προσευχαῖς is replaced by the accusative or the genitive plural form)

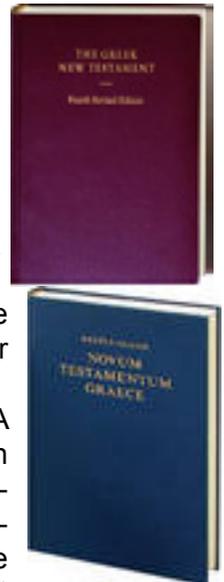
| των -χων 1611

\* κ 2329 (the article signalling an adjective role for the following preposition phrase is omitted)

#### Offenbarung 8,4

\* κ\* pc (the masculine article is omitted)

#### Offenbarung 8,5



And as is typically the case, the variations occurring here reflect mostly efforts at stylistic improvements that bring the language of the text 'up to date' which how Greek was being used at the time of the work of the copyist.

Consequently we can exegete the adopted reading of the Greek text in full confidence that it represents the original wording of 8:1-5.

**Internal History.** Although allusions to practices and events in the religious life of the Jewish people are present in these verses, they relate more to exegetical issues than to historical background issues. Thus they will be treated in the exegesis of the passage rather than here.

### Literary Aspects:

The literary aspects play a more important role for interpretation of this passage than do the historical aspects, in large part due to the apocalyptic visionary nature of the text.

**Genre:** Of course, 8:1-5 continues the broad genre of apocalyptic vision that typifies the entire book of Revelation.

At the small genre level this passage not only concludes the seven seals (v. 1), but introduces the seven trumpets (vv. 2-5). The actual narrating of the series of trumpets begins in 8:6, and concludes at 9:21 (the sixth trumpet) and 11:14-18 for the seventh trumpet.

This series of heavenly trumpets blowing is found only elsewhere in the [Apocalypse of Zephaniah chapters nine through twelve](#).<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately the existing

\* ελαβον A (εβαλεν is replaced.)

\* 1 4 5 1006 pc (the sequence of βρονται και φωναι και αστραπαι is altered by various manuscripts)

| 1 4 5 2 3 A 2329. 2344 pc sy<sup>h</sup>

| 3 2 1 4 5 1854. 2053 M<sup>A</sup>; Tyc Bea

| txt P115<sup>vid</sup> x 1611<sup>vid</sup>. 1841. 2351 mK latt sy

[Eberhard Nestle et al., Universität Münster. Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 647.]

<sup>3</sup>**The 1st trumpet: triumph & visitation of the righteous.**

**9.1** Then a great angel came forth having a golden trumpet in his hand, and he blew it three times over my head, saying, "Be courageous! O one who hath triumphed. Prevail! O one who hath prevailed. For thou hast triumphed over the accuser, and thou hast escaped from the abyss and Hades. 2 Thou wilt now cross over the crossing place. For thy name is written in the Book of the Living." 3 I wanted to embrace him, (but) I was unable to embrace the great angel because his glory is great.

4 Then he ran to all the righteous ones, namely, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Enoch and Elijah and David. 5 He spoke with them as friend to friend speaking one with another.

**A 2nd trumpet: opening of heaven & souls in torment.**

**10.1** Then the great angel came to me with the golden trumpet in his hand, and he blew it up unto heaven. 2 Heaven opened from the place where the sun rises to where it sets, from the north to the south. 3 I saw the sea which I had seen at the bottom of Hades. Its waves came up to the clouds. 4 I saw all the souls sinking in it. I

manuscripts of this documents are very fragmentary, and contain the contents of only the three trumpets rather than all of them. Written most likely prior to the destruction of the temple sometime in either the first century BCE or the beginning Christian century, the existing contents bear only basic resemblance to the seven trumpets in Revelation. If John made direct use of this document, it was only for the idea of a sevenfold series of trumpets as a communication technique for the revelation of divine truth to his audience. But the use of an angel blowing a trumpet as a structuring device between the two documents is not insignificant.<sup>4</sup>

saw some whose hands were bound to their neck, with their hands and feet being fettered. 5 I said, "Who are these?" He said unto me, "These are the ones who were bribed and they were given gold and silver until the souls of men were led astray." 6 And I saw others covered with mats of fire. 7 I said, "Who are these?" He said unto me, "These are the ones who give money at interest, and they receive interest for interest." 8 And I also saw some blind ones crying out. And I was amazed when I saw all these works of God. 9 I said, "Who are these?" He said unto me, "These are catechumens who heard the word of God, but they were not perfected in the work which they heard." 10 And I said unto him, "Then have they not repentance here?" He said, "Yes," 11 I said, "How long?" He said unto me, "Until the day when the Lord will judge." 12 And I saw others with their hair on them. 13 I said, "Then there is hair and body in this place?" 14 He said, "Yes, the Lord gives body and hair to them as he desires."

**The intercession of the saints for those in torment. 11.1** And I also saw multitudes. He brought them forth. 2 As they looked at all of the torments they called out, praying before the Lord Almighty, saying, "We pray unto Thee on account of those who are in all these torments so that Thou might have mercy on all of them." 3 And when I saw them, I said to the angel who spoke with me, "<Who are these?>" 4 He said, "These who beseech the Lord are Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. 5 Then at a certain hour daily they come forth with the great angel. He soundeth a trumpet up unto heaven and another soundeth upon the earth. 6 All the righteous hear the sound. They come running, praying to the Lord Almighty daily on behalf of these who are in all these torments."

**Another trumpet: the coming wrath of God. 12.1** And again the great angel cometh forth with the golden trumpet in his hand blowing over the earth. 2 They hear (it) from the place of the sunrise to the place of the sunset and from the southern regions to the northern regions. 3 And again he blows (it) up unto heaven and its sound is heard. 4 I said, "O Lord, why left thou me not until I saw them all?" 5 He said unto me, "I have not authority to show them unto thee until the Lord Almighty riseth up in his wrath to destroy the earth and the heavens. 6 They will see and be disturbed, and they will all cry out, saying, 'All flesh which is ascribed to Thee we will give unto Thee on the day of the Lord.' 7 Who will stand in His presence when He riseth in His wrath <to destroy> the earth <and the heavens?> 8 Every tree which groweth upon the earth will be plucked up with its roots and fall down. And every high tower and the birds which fly will fall ... (here are four missing pages)

[James H. Charlesworth, "Apocalypse of Zephaniah: Akhminic Text," [The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha](#). Note: the "I" in the text is the fictional prophet Zephaniah in an imaginary trip to heaven.

<sup>4</sup>"The only apocalyptic text that uses the blowing of trumpets as a structural device is Apoc. Zeph. 9–12 (first century B.C. to first

Consequently it is difficult to speak in terms of a literary genre for the series of trumpets. Although the idea for a series of trumpets may have been picked up from this Jewish apocalypse, what John does with his series of trumpets is distinctly different than what is found in Zephaniah. Plus the series of seven trumpets does not occur elsewhere in ancient prophet visions or apocalyptic visions materials.

**Literary Setting:** The literary context of 8:1-5 is rather clear from the very obvious arranging of the content in Revelation generally. It stands as a link between the seven seals (6:1-8:1) and the seven trumpets (8:2-11:18). The seventh seal mentioned in 8:1 represents a pause that paves the way for the seven trumpets.

Of course, 6:1-11:18 is but a part of the larger unit that includes the seven bowls of wrath (15:1-16:21). Overlapping of the three sets of sevens is extensive, especially between the trumpets and the bowls. The strategy of John is repetition of theme multiple times in order to underscore his points, in particular the pouring out of the wrath of God upon the evil upon the earth. This emphasis stems especially out of the cries of the martyred saints in 6:10,

καὶ ἔκραξαν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγοντες· ἕως πότε, ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός, οὐ κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν ἐκ τῶν κατοικοῦντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς;  
 they cried out with a loud voice, “Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?”

What God’s punishments signify is an establishment of His perfect purity and holiness that is built off the subsequent demand of holding all people accountable for this actions. When evil people harm God’s people God’s holiness is at stake in holding them fully accountable for such actions. Thus the gaining of justice (= [vengeance](#) in the Bible) is the prerogative exclusively

century A.D.). The same ‘great angel’ blows a golden trumpet to introduce three different scenes. Although the MS lacks the concluding four pages, which cannot be examined, it is not impossible that the same formal device was used to introduce subsequent scenes. The first scene is introduced with three blasts on a golden trumpet by a great angel proclaiming the triumph of Zephaniah over the accuser and his access to the place where famous righteous Israelites reside (Apoc. Zeph. 9:1–5). The second scene is introduced with a blast toward heaven of the golden trumpet, resulting in the opening of heaven and Zephaniah’s vision of the place where souls were being punished; a daily trumpet call summons the righteous to intercede for those in torment (10:1–11:6). The third blast of the golden trumpet by the great angel is directed toward earth and then again toward heaven as a prelude to the destruction of earth and heaven and the judgment of all people before God (12:1–8). Despite the many differences between this text and that of the heptad of trumpets in Rev 8:1–11:19, the use of an angelic figure blowing a trumpet as a formal structuring device is significant.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 497.]

of God as first affirmed in the OT and continued in the NT. When a follower of God studies carefully the scripture on this, it is easy to see why God takes over this responsibility and does not leave it to us. In Jewish and early Christian tradition, the fundamental issue is not the injury done to us for our commitment to God. Rather, the core issue is the reputation of God as a holy and just God, which is at stake and demands God’s holding humanity fully accountable for its actions.

The scope of this theme is all of human history, but with a developing emphasis upon the intensification of that wrath as human history moves toward its end and the realities of heaven (21:1-22:5) and hell (19:6-20:15). These are fixed eternal destinies for humanity, and are set forth in chapters seventeen through twenty-two. What punishments come upon evil people while still living on earth are but anticipations of a much greater punishment ahead for them in eternal damnation. Of course, the launch pad for all this has been chapters four and five with the dramatic scenes of worship of God and the Lamb in heaven. The absolute holiness of God and the indescribable provision of salvation by the ἀρνίον ἐσφαγμένον, [slaughtered Lamb](#) (5:6), establish the foundation for these actions from heaven.

The internal connection of the seven trumpets with one another and also with the bowls as well as with the seals in a lessor manner resembles something of a spiral. This means a very complicated structure that has overlaps, parallels, along with unique content. This we will attempt to sort out in the exegesis section below.



**Literary Structure:** The block diagram below in English represents a visual expression of the grammatical structure of the underlying Greek text. The English translation is in exceedingly literalistic English in order to illustrate the grammar structure of the Greek text. As anyone who works across two or more languages well understands, no two languages modern or ancient work the same way grammatically in the expression of ideas. The distances between two modern languages can sometimes be substantial. But when one works with a very precise ancient language such as Koine Greek and modern American English that is on the other end of the spectrum regarding precision of idea expression, the distances can often be huge. This stands as a fundamental reason for always working back to the original language of the biblical text in doing one’s interpretive work in making sense out of the biblical text. These gaps between ancient Koine Greek and modern American English are almost always huge. The same is also true with the Hebrew OT but for entirely

different reasons.

8.1           And  
          when He opened the seventh seal,  
225       **silence happened**  
          in heaven  
          about half an hour.

8.2           And  
226       **I saw seven angels**  
                          who were standing before God,  
  
          and  
227       **was given to them seven trumpets.**

8.3           And  
228       **another angel came**  
          and  
229       **was made to stand**  
          at the altar  
          while possessing a golden censer  
          and  
230       **was given to him much incense**  
          so that he would give (it)  
                          with the prayers  
  of all the saints  
                          upon the altar  
  golden  
                          before the throne.

8.4           and  
231       **rose up the smoke of the incenses**  
          with the prayers of the saints  
          out of a hand of the angel  
          before God.

8.5           and  
232       **took the angel the censer**  
          and  
233       **he filled it**  
          out of the fire of the altar  
          and  
234       **he threw (it)**  
          onto the earth  
          and  
235       **happened peals of thunder and rumblings and flashes of lightening and an earthquake**

### **Analysis of Rhetorical Structure**

Quite clearly this passage divides out into two core sub-divisions: the seventh seal (statement 225) and the seven angels (statements 226-235).

The seventh seal brings to a close the presentation of the series of seals (chapters 6 and 7). But also sets the stage for the introduction of the seven angels with seven trumpets in statements 226 - 235.

The second sub-unit (#s 226-235) then naturally divides into two clearly defined units of the seven angels (#s 226-227) and another angel (#s 228-235). In # 226 the seven angels are given their trumpets. But the

main attention falls upon the other angel in #s 228-235. He is introduced (# 228); positioned close to the altar (# 229); and instructed to take action (#s 230 - 235).

### **Exegesis of the Text:**

The most natural way to approach exegeting this passage is to follow the internal arrangement of ideas as analyzed in the above block diagram. Although at first glance the structural arrangement does seem rather involved, close examination reveals both the clarity and the simplicity of the arrangement. The literary

function of the seventh seal sets up the introduction of the eight angels which in turn functions to prepare for the action of blowing the trumpet by each of the seven angels which then will trigger an action of divine wrath being poured out upon the earth as the consequence of the prayers of the saints reaching the altar of God in heaven (cf. 8:6-11:18). This conceptual structure especially plays off the fifth and sixth seals with the pleas for justice by the martyred saints (fifth seal, 6:9-11) and the preparation for judgment (sixth seal, 6:12-17). But in the interlude of chapter seven, we see a continual stream of more martyrs entering heaven (7:9-17) coming from the ranks of those still suffering persecution upon the earth (7:1-8), even as divine punishments upon their persecutors are happening in the early stages in anticipation of the full force being unleashed at the end of the 'sealing of these saints.' The seven trumpets will continue the depiction of these same principles of divine protection and punishments, but with more descriptive intensity than in the seals. And this increasing insensitivity reaches its high point with the seven bowls of wrath that finish off the three sets of sevens.

#### A. The seventh seal, v. 1

1 Καὶ ὅταν ἤνοιξεν τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν ἑβδόμην, ἐγένετο σιγὴ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ὡς ἡμῶριον.

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

One interesting variation occurs with the indefinite temporal clause at the front of the sentence:

**Seal one (6:1)**, ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὸ ἄρνιον μίαν ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ σφραγίδων, when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals

**Seal two (6:3)**, Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν δευτέραν, and when He opened the second seal.

**Seal three (6:5)**, Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν τρίτην, and when He opened the third seal.

**Seal four (6:7)**, Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν τετάρτην, and when He opened the fourth seal.

**Seal five (6:9)**, Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν πέμπτην σφραγίδα, and when He opened the fifth seal.

**Seal six (6:12)**, ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν ἕκτην, when He opened the sixth seal.

**Seal seven (8:1)**, Καὶ ὅταν ἤνοιξεν τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν ἑβδόμην, and whenever He opened the seventh seal.

Six of the seven seals are introduced by the adverbial temporal conjunction ὅτε, that states definite time. But the seventh seal is introduced by the indefinite adverbial conjunction ὅταν suggesting indefinite time. To be sure, a few ancient manuscripts (x M) switch back to ὅτε for the seventh seal as well, but the overwhelming evidence favors ὅταν.<sup>5</sup> Although the cognitive meaning

<sup>5</sup>Variant: (1) ὅταν] A C fam 10061006 1841 fam 16111611; Tischendorf, NT Graece; WHort; von Soden, Text; UBSGNT4;

for the two conjunctions is essential the same, "when," the additional value of ὅταν is the implication of repetition. This would create the sense of the opening of the last section of the scroll containing the divine will itself will have seven parts, i.e., the seven trumpets, contained inside this seventh section of the divine scroll. This creates a certain uniqueness to this final seal being opened.

This uniqueness is further enhanced with the main clause statement to which the temporal clause is attached as a time indicator:

**Seal one (6:1)**, Καὶ εἶδον ὅτε... καὶ ἤκουσα, and I saw when...and I heard....

**Seal two (6:3)**, ἤκουσα, I heard....

**Seal three (6:5)**, ἤκουσα, I heard....

**Seal four (6:7)**, ἤκουσα, I heard....

**Seal five (6:9)**, εἶδον, I saw....

**Seal six (6:12)**, Καὶ εἶδον ὅτε, and I saw when....

**Seal seven (8:1)**, ἐγένετο σιγὴ.

The intentional pattern here is to stress both the seeing and hearing by John in ways that are appropriate to the content to each section of the divine scroll as it is unrolled. But clearly also is a signal of the grouping of these seals into the 4 + 3 sections with the first seal in an introductory, inclusive role. Then seals two through four stand together along with seals five and six that have seven in a climatic finishing roll. Seal four pulls together the content of the first three sections of the scroll in a summarizing manner. Seals five and six build off the first four seals and also set the stage for the interlude of chapter seven. This material then prepares for the seventh seal which in turn sets the stage for the seven trumpets.

The core expression in 8:1 is simply ἐγένετο σιγὴ, a silence happened. It is qualified by locational (ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ) and temporal (ὡς ἡμῶριον) prepositional phrases. That is, this σιγὴ took place in heaven and lasted for about half an hour.

What was the σιγὴ?<sup>6</sup> Although a variety of pro-  
Nestle-Aland27; TCGNT 1; TCGNT 2. (2) ὅτε] x 025 052 Andreas Byzantine. According to the plausible argument in TCGNT 1, 740, and TCGNT 2, ὅτε resulted from the assimilation of the frequent occurrence of ὅτε ἤνοιξεν in Rev 6. The term ὅταν, which usually means 'whenever' (and implies repetition), here clearly is used to mean 'when' (referring to a unique event) and is used as an equivalent for ὅτε, 'when,' which occupies a similar position in the six preceding instances in which John has narrated the opening of a seal by the Lamb (6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; see Mussies, Morphology, 345; Lohmeyer, 49); see 4:9; 11:7; 12:4." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 483.]

<sup>6</sup>"In contrast to the eschatological events inaugurated by the opening of each of the first six seals, the silence following the opening of the seventh seal is anticlimactic and functions to retard the narrative action. The significance of this brief period of silence is problematic, and several explanations have been proposed: (1)

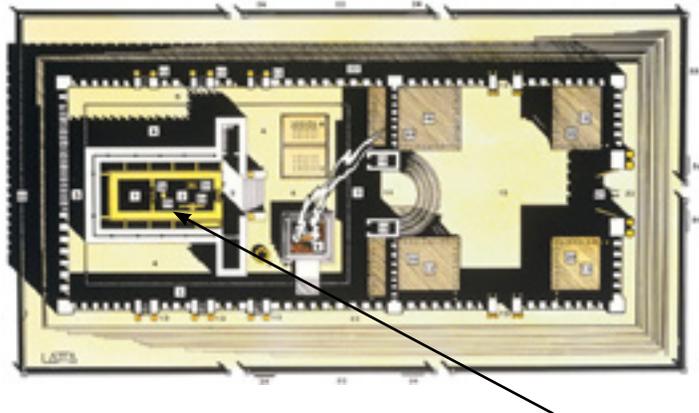
Silence makes it possible for the prayers of the holy ones (8:3–5) to be heard before the throne (Charles, 1:223–24), a view Charles bolsters by referring to b. Hag. 12b, where the angels of the fifth heaven are said to sing during the day but be silent at night ‘because of the glory of Israel,’ i.e., so that the praises of Israel might be heard in heaven. This view is problematic, however, for nothing in Rev 8:1 suggests that noise would prevent God from hearing prayer. (2) Silence signals the eschatological return to primordial silence (4 Ezra 6:39; 7:30 [‘the world shall be turned back to primeval silence for seven days, as it was at the first beginnings,’ i.e., a reversion to the chaos that preceded the first creation]; 2 Apoc. Bar. 3:7; Ps.-Philo Bib. Ant. 60:2 [‘there were darkness and silence before the world was’]; see Rissi, Time, 10–11). The weakness of this view lies in the fact that the text says nothing about a reversion to the silence that preceded creation. (3) Silence is sometimes a prelude to divine manifestations (Job 4:16; Zeph 1:7 [‘Be silent before the Lord God for the day of the Lord is at hand’]; Zech 2:13; see Prigent, 130). (4) Silence must be maintained in the presence of God, particularly during certain phases of the liturgy (Ps 62:1; Hab 2:20; according to Ep. Arist. 95, seven hundred priests in the temple in Jerusalem labor in complete silence [πᾶσα σιγή]; T. Adam 1.12 [fifth to sixth century A.D.]; see Mensching, *Das heilige Schweigen*, 80–89; Malina, *Revelation*, 136). In Greek tradition, silence was sometimes a ritual prelude to prayer (Iliad 9.171; Aristophanes *Thesmophoriazousai* 295–97; Thucydides 6.32.1; see Mensching, *Das heilige Schweigen*, 13–21).

“This view is the most convincing, for silence was very probably maintained during the incense offering in the Jerusalem temple cult (see m. Tamid 5:1–6; T. Adam 1.12), just as it is here during the heavenly incense offering narrated in vv 3–5.

“(5) The magnificence of God can be proclaimed not through speech but also, and perhaps even more profoundly, through silence (Corpus Herm. 1.31). Silence is an important motif in Ignatius, who says that it characterizes the bishop (Eph. 6:1; 15:1–2; Phld. 1:1), and silence appears to function as a metaphor for the role of bishop as a representative of God; i.e., God is silence, the bishop represents God, and therefore the silence of the bishop reflects divine silence (H. Chadwick, “The Silence of the Bishops in Ignatius,” *HTR* 43 [1950] 169–72; but see Schoedel, Ignatius, 56–57, who disagrees with this view). According to one ancient view (Corp. Herm. 1.30; 10.5), the essence of God is σιγή or ἡσυχία, ‘silence’ or ‘quietness,’ and he can only be approached in silence (Kroll, *Hermes*, 335–38). On Ignatius Magn. 8:2, which refers to Christ as the ‘Word which proceeded from silence,’ see Schoedel (Ignatius 120–22), who understands this as a strategy of Ignatius in attempting to explain the inability of Jews and Judaizers to understand Scripture; the appearance of Christ is from silence in the sense that the previously hidden purpose of God is revealed. Plutarch refers to silence as something profound, mysterious (μυστηριώδης), and awesome (De garrul. 504a). Here he is probably alluding to the role of silence in initiations into the mysteries, for he then observes ‘in speaking we have men as teachers, but in keeping silent we have gods, and we receive from them this lesson of silence at initiations into the Mysteries’ (De garrul. 505–6; LCL tr.); on silence in the mystery cults, see Hippolytus Ref. 5.8.39 and Grese, Corp. Herm., 116–17.

There are few specialized studies on the ritual role and function of silence; see G. Mensching, *Das heilige Schweigen* (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1926); M. Picard, *The World of Silence* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1952); E. McCumsey, “Silence,” *EncRel* 13:321–24. For discussions of the phenomenon of silence in the ancient world, see R. Mortley, “The Theme of Silence in Clement of Alexandria,” *JTS*

posed explanations have been put forth, the role of the incense altar and the rituals connected to it in the Jerusalem temple during the Feast of Tabernacles clearly stands in the background here.<sup>7</sup> And thus should provide the primary clue as to the significance for this silence in heaven depicted here.



In Herod's temple in Jerusalem the altar of incense was just outside the huge curtain across the entrance to the Holy of Holies in the innermost part of the temple.<sup>8</sup> The burning of incense was connected to the

24 (1973) 197–202; O. Casel, *De philosophorum Graecorum silentio mystico* (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1919); L.-M. Dewayilly, “Mystère et silence dans Rom. xvi.25,” *NTS* 14 (1967) 111–18; id., “Den ‘förtogade’ hemligheten: Rom. 16.25,” *SEÅ* 31 (1966) 114–21.

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 507–508.]

<sup>7</sup>“Tabernacles, Festival of (or Booths, Ingathering, Heb. Sukkoth), along with Passover and the Festival of Weeks, one of three major pilgrimage festivals of Judaism. Celebrated for eight days (from the 15th of Tishri [late September or early October]), it was Israel's joyous, thanksgiving, autumnal harvest festival for the ingathering from the threshing floor and the winepress (Exod. 23:16; 34:22; Deut. 16:13–15). Its main distinctive ritual is the requirement to ‘dwell in booths’ in commemoration of God's protection of Israel during the wilderness wanderings (Lev. 23:39–43; Neh. 8:13–18). The preeminent annual festival, called ‘the feast of God’ (Lev. 23:39; Judg. 21:19) or ‘the feast’ (1 Kings 8:2, 65; 12:32; Isa. 30:29; Ezek. 45:23, 25; Neh. 8:14; 2 Chron. 5:3, 7–8; John 7:10; cf. John 7:2), it was the occasion of the dedication of Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 8), the public reading of the Torah (every seven years, Deut. 31:10–11), and the future ingathering of all nations to Jerusalem to worship God (Zech. 14:16).” [Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 1014.]

<sup>8</sup>“Herod's temple (20 B.C.–A.D. 70) was begun in the 18th year of King Herod the Great's reign (37–4 B.C.). According to Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, Herod's temple was constructed after removing the old foundations. The old edifice, Zerubbabel's temple, was a modest restoration of the temple of Solomon destroyed by the Babylonian conquest. The central building was completed in just two years—without any interruption of the temple services. The surrounding buildings and spacious courts, considerably enlarged, were not completed until A.D. 64. The Temple was destroyed by the Romans under the command of Titus during the second Jewish revolt in A.D. 70.

1. Holy of holies (where the ark of the covenant and the giant

prayers of worshipers to God.<sup>9</sup> From the later Talmudic

cherubim were once enshrined).

2. Holy place.

2a. Veil (actually two giant tapestries hung before the entrance of the holy of holies to allow the high priest entry between them without exposing the sacred shrine. It was this veil that was “split in two” upon the death of Jesus).

**2b. Altar of Incense.**

2c. Table of Shewbread.

2d. Seven-branched Lampstand (Great Menorah).

3. Temple porch.

4. Court of priests.

5. Court of Israel (men).

6. Altar of burnt offerings.

7. Animal tethering area.

8. Slaughtering and skinning area.

9. Laver.

10. Chamber of Phineas (storage of vestments).

11. Chamber of the bread maker.

12. North gates of the inner courts.

13. South gates of the inner courts.

14. East (Nicanor) Gate.

15. Court of women.

16. Court of Nazirites.

17. Court of woodshed.

18. Lepers' Chamber.

19. Shemanyah (possible meaning “oil of Yah”).

20. Women's Balconies (for viewing Temple activities).

21. Gate Beautiful (?).

22. Terrace.

23. Soreg (three-cubit high partition).

24. Warning Inscriptions to Gentiles.

[M. Pierce Matheny, “Temple of Jerusalem,” ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1564–1565.]

<sup>9</sup>“The OT makes a distinction between lawful and unlawful worship, the unlawful worship being either a wrong execution of Israelite tradition or a pagan cult. The lawful worship, in which incense is employed, prescribes Aaron to burn incense (*qētōret*, based on the root *qtr*, the meaning of which is discussed in Edelman 1985 and Nielsen 1986: 54–59) regularly on the golden incense altar in front of the holy of holies in the morning and in the evening according to the priestly tradition in Exod 30:7–8. It is emphasized that it is unlawful to burn unauthorized incense, i.e., an incense material different from the one prescribed for lawful use in Exod 30:34–35.

“To understand this regular incense offering on the incense altar, it may be profitable to glance at the ritual which belongs to the Day of Atonement described in Leviticus 16. At this occasion (Lev 16:12–13), the high priest takes in one hand a shovel with charcoal and in the other hand some of the ritually correct incense. He enters the holy of holies, where he puts the incense onto the charcoal in the shovel to produce an incense cloud which prevents him from being killed while performing certain rites of expiation. This incense cloud provides the high priest with cover against the divine wrath or the divine ‘radiation.’ The incense smoke gives protection. In Lev 16:2, however, it seems that the incense being burnt produces a cloud, in which the deity appears; the incense cloud in v 2 is a symbol of the call upon the deity, a call which the deity answers favorably.

“It is hardly a coincidence that the place of the incense altar in the Tent of Meeting, or the temple in Jerusalem, corresponds to

sources, it seems as though during the Feast of Tabernacles especially that silence by those worshiping in the temple was mandated when the incense was being burned upon the altar in front of the Holy of Holies. This came out of respect for God and expressed confidence that He could and would hear the prayers of His people rising up in the smoke of the incense.<sup>10</sup>

Thus it most likely is against this backdrop that σιγή took place ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ so that no distractions from the prayers of God's people on earth would interfere with God hearing them. Note that the duration of this silence was but ὡς ἡμιώριον, *approximately half an hour*.<sup>11</sup>

A modern reader should remember that this does not mean thirty minutes. The calculation of a ὥρα generally was based on dividing the daylight hours between sun up and sun down into twelve segments with each segment in Greek known as a ὥρα. Interestingly in Hebrew the shortest time segment in the language is day, דַּי, *yôm*, which meant either sunset to sunset, or sunup to sunset. The daylight time could be divided up into morning, noon, or afternoon with individual word phrases in Hebrew. In Greek ἡμιώριον was the individual word specifying the shortest segment of daylight time. But it is only found here inside the New Testament, suggesting its rare usage. The ancient world was not interested in precise measurements of time.

the position of the incense altar or burner, which is used in the Assyro-Babylonian incantation rituals. It is always situated between the priest and the image of the deity. The Hebrew incense altar is likewise placed as close to the deity as possible so that it stands between the priest and Yahweh. Only on the Day of Atonement does the high priest dare to transgress this borderline between the human and the divine. The purpose of the regular morning and evening incense offerings at this altar is to secure the presence of God and his attention to man's prayer. The incense smoke carries the prayer to God, who is hopefully appeased when he smells the fragrant odor of the delicious incense.”

[Kjeld Nielsen, “Incense,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 406–407.]

<sup>10</sup>In a broader definitional sense of silence stand both Hab. 2:20 and Zech. 2:13.

**Hab. 2:20.** ὁ δὲ κύριος ἐν ναῷ ἁγίῳ αὐτοῦ· εὐλαβείσθω ἀπὸ προσώπου αὐτοῦ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ. *But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him!*

**Zech. 2:13 (LXX 2:17).** εὐλαβείσθω πᾶσα σὰρξ ἀπὸ προσώπου κυρίου, διότι ἐξεγήγερται ἐκ νεφελῶν ἁγίων αὐτοῦ. *Be silent, all people, before the Lord; for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling.*

<sup>11</sup>Some commentators connect up ἐγένετο σιγή ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ὡς ἡμιώριον here with ἄχρι σφραγίσωμεν τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν, *until we have marked the servants of our God on their foreheads*, in 7:3. But no justifiable basis for such a connection emerges from either the text or the ancient background sources. Rather this linkage reflects modern reasoning utilizing a questionable train of thought in the post Enlightenment era.

Thus the point of ἡμιώριον here is to underscore the very short momentary duration of the σιγή before the worship actions resumed. It doesn't take God a lot of time to hear and digest the prayers of His people on earth. And the additional literary meaning of the larger image of the seventh seal is to signal something of a pause of activities which allow one to be prepared for the next series of events, the blowing of the seven trumpets. And yet, these seven trumpets in certain ways are understood by the language of John to have taken place during this σιγή, as is signaled beginning in the next segment of vv. 2-5. Finally, the shortness of the time reference highlights the unexpected suddenness of the coming actions.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup>“Why the silence lasts ‘for about a half hour’ is not entirely clear. The prefixing of ὡς (‘as, about’) to ἡμιώριον (‘a half hour’) shows that this was only an approximation, so that it could be almost equivalent to ὥρα (‘hour’) elsewhere in the book, which figuratively refers to the suddenness and consequent crisis of an appointed time of judgment of the ungodly (3:3, 10; 11:13; 14:7, 15; 18:10, 17, 19, in chs. 14 and 18 referring to the sudden fall of ‘Babylon,’ ‘the great city’; so likewise the LXX of Dan. 4:17a; 5:5; 11:45). ‘A half hour’ could not so much refer to the precise temporal duration of the silence as figuratively emphasize the suddenness and unexpectedness of a decreed judgment and the crisis that it introduces (for ὥρα in this sense see on 18:10–19). Silence underscores the gravity of the crisis. The apocalyptic use of ‘half’ in numerical designations of time elsewhere in Revelation and in Daniel confirms that the number here concerns a time of crisis and judgment (11:3, 9; 12:6–9; 13:5; Dan. 7:25; 9:27; 12:7).<sup>223</sup>

“The closest verbal parallel is Dan. 4:19 Theod. (= v 16 in the Bagster LXX ed. and v 19 in MT), where Daniel stands speechless, ‘his thoughts troubled him,’ and he was ‘amazed about one hour (ὡσεὶ ὥραν μίαν)’ after hearing the dream foretelling Nebuchadnezzar’s doom. This silence is inspired by the gravity of the coming judgment (likewise Dan. 4:19 LXX). A similar idea lies close in Rev. 8:1, since the concept of ‘silence’ in some of the closest OT parallels refers to the hush of humanity prompted by the realization of the seriousness of the imminent judgment (Hab. 3:3–6; Zech. 2:13; Zeph. 1:7; cf. Zeph. 1:11).

“The closest analogies in the Apocalypse are in 18:10, 17, 19, where the severe gravity of Babylon’s final judgment is to occur in ‘one hour,’ and in each instance the time indicator is introduced by the grave, sorrowful expression ‘woe, woe.’ Furthermore, the last occurrence of the expression ‘one hour’ in 18:19 is directly followed in vv 22–23 by a description of the aftermath of judgment, which is absolute silence (note the repeated ‘will not be heard in you any longer’). The relevance of ch. 18 is enhanced by the fact that the references to ‘one hour’ allude directly to Dan. 4:17a LXX, which refers to the period of the Babylonian king’s judgment as ‘one hour’; John applies this to end-time Babylon’s demise (see on 18:10).<sup>224</sup>

“Interestingly, some who hold to an A.D. 70 preterist view of Revelation understand the silence to refer to the death of Christ, which has ended the OT cult administered by the angels.<sup>225</sup>”

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 453.]

## B. The Angels, vv. 2-5

2 Καὶ εἶδον τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλους οἱ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστήκασιν, καὶ ἐδόθησαν αὐτοῖς ἑπτὰ σάλπιγγες.

3 Καὶ ἄλλος ἄγγελος ἦλθεν καὶ ἐστάθη ἐπὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου ἔχων λιβανωτὸν χρυσοῦν, καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ θυμιάματα πολλὰ, ἵνα δώσει ταῖς προσευχαῖς τῶν ἁγίων πάντων ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον τὸ χρυσοῦν τὸ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου. 4 καὶ ἀνέβη ὁ καπνὸς τῶν θυμιαμάτων ταῖς προσευχαῖς τῶν ἁγίων ἐκ χειρὸς τοῦ ἀγγέλου ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ. 5 καὶ εἴληφεν ὁ ἄγγελος τὸν λιβανωτὸν καὶ ἐγένευσεν αὐτὸν ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου καὶ ἔβαλεν εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ ἐγένοντο βρονταὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ ἀστραπαὶ καὶ σεισμός.

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

3 Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. 5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth; and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

The second subunit of our passage centers on angels. First seven angels appear to John and are standing in front of God in readiness to carry out any assignment He gives them. Second, a single angel appears standing in front of the altar of incense which is also before the throne of God (cf. 8:3; 9:13). This altar of incense is the same altar in 6:9 where the souls of the martyrs are contained.

The structure being set up here for the actual blowing of the trumpets in 8:6-9:21 is that this initial action of the one angel in taking fire from this altar, placing it in the censer bowl, and then throwing the bowl onto the earth “activates” the outpouring of God’s wrath. It is then ‘triggered’ in seven segments by each of the seven angels blowing their trumpet. But this sevenfold blowing of the trumpets is not intended to be a temporal sequence. It is logical sequence mandated by written description. Instead, the outpouring is a simultaneous expression as signaled by 8:5, and also parallels etc. in the following depiction of the seven trumpets.

What is theologically important to keep in the foreground is that the outpouring of God’s wrath is an expression of the prayers of His people on earth being lifted up to heaven. Those prayers turn into divine wrath through the imagery of incense and fire from the altar in front of the throne of God in heaven. Through this dramatically graphic image John underscores that God indeed hears the cries of “Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?” in 6:10 and an-

swers them. The trumpets constitute a central part of God's answering of these prayers in parallel to seals one through four and six. And also as the seven bowls of wrath in even further parallelism will.

One powerful implication of this structure of John is that the very center segment of Revelation -- chapters 6 through 16 (i.e., the three series of sevens) and chapters 17 and 18 with Christ's end time conquest -- focus on the justice of God being imposed on evil people on earth who have harmed His people while on earth. That was a critically needed message to the members of the seven churches of Asia, most of whom were suffering persecution at the time of the writing of Revelation. And it remains a vitally important message especially to believers suffering persecution down through the centuries into our present day. God's absolute holiness and righteousness means full accountability for evil actions by people.

### 1) The seven angels & trumpets, v. 2

2 Καὶ εἶδον τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλους οἱ ἑνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἑστήκασιν, καὶ ἐδόθησαν αὐτοῖς ἑπτὰ σάλπιγγες.

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

Here just a brief introduction of the seven angels and their being given trumpets is placed on the table for the readers. The details will follow beginning in 8:6.

The single sentence here contains two main clauses. *The first clause* is Καὶ εἶδον τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλους οἱ ἑνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἑστήκασιν, *And I saw the seven angels who are standing before God*. All kinds of largely useless speculation surfaces in modern commentators about the collective identity of these seven angels. The most sensible explanation of the presence of the definite article τοὺς, *the*, is to signal the first instance of mentioning these particular, unnamed angels.

In Revelation mentioning of angels is mostly in regard to a particular angel, but groups of four (7:1; 9:14-15), seven (8:2, 6; 15:3, 6; 16:1, 7-8; 17:1) and twelve (21:12) are mentioned. There are two mentionings of groups of seven, which probably are the same set of angels since their jobs parallel one another. The first set in 8:2, 6 have trumpets which they blow in order to trigger the outpouring of God's wrath on earth. The second set in 15:3, 6; 16:1, 7, 8; 17:1 have bowls of wrath, also identified as plagues, which they pour out on the earth. Thus their task is to implement the wrath of God upon evil people on earth.

The different phrase locating their position in heaven is here stated as οἱ ἑνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἑστήκασιν, *who are standing before God*. More often the angels are depicted as falling before the throne as in 7:11

ἔπεσαν ἑνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου ἐπὶ τὰ πρόσωπα αὐτῶν. The phrase ἑνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου, *before the throne*, or ἑνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ, *before God's throne*, is far more common for most of those residing in heaven. Here the phrase ἑνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ, *before God*, rather than ἑνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου, *before the throne*, bypasses the Hebraistic indirect reference to God present in ἑνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου, although John returns to ἑνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου in 8:3. The direct expression ἑνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ is found in 8:2, 4; 9:13; 11:16; 12:10. However, the expression ἰστάναι ἑνώπιον, *to stand before*, is only additionally found in 11:4 in reference to two olive trees and two lampstands standing before God, who is referred to as *the Lord of the earth*, ἑνώπιον τοῦ κυρίου τῆς γῆς ἑστῶτες.

The meaning of the positional phrase οἱ ἑνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἑστήκασιν moves along the picture of being located in front of God as ready to serve Him instantly at His command.<sup>13</sup> Of course, every angel by definition stands fully prepared to do service to God. But this image present in 8:2 highlights even more the readiness of the seven angels to carry out God's will.

*The second main clause* in verse 2 is καὶ ἐδόθησαν αὐτοῖς ἑπτὰ σάλπιγγες, *and was given to them seven trumpets*.<sup>14</sup> The function of a trumpet is dominantly inside the Bible used to signal the judgment of God that is about to be implemented.<sup>15</sup> One should not think

<sup>13</sup>“The phrase ἰστάναι ἑνώπιον, literally ‘to stand before,’ can mean ‘to attend upon,’ ‘to be the servant of,’ so that the translation of v 2 could be ‘I saw the seven angels who serve God’ (Charles, 1:225; R. Sollamo, “Some ‘Improper Prepositions’ such as ἑνώπιον, ἐναντιον, ἐναντι, etc. in the Septuagint and Early Koine Greek,” VT 25 [1975] 778; K. G. C. Newport, “Semitic Influence on Revelation,” BT 37 [1986] 332–33). Examples from the LXX include Judg 20:28; 1 Kgdms 16:22; 3 Kgdms 17:1; 18:18; 4 Kgdms 5:16; Jer 15:16; cf. Luke 1:19. However, to translate this verse as ‘the seven angels who serve God’ is to say nothing more about them than about any other angel of God.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 508–509.]

<sup>14</sup>Interestingly of the total 11 uses of σάλπιγξ, in the entire NT, six of them occur in Revelation: 1:10; 4:1; 8:2, 6; 8:13; 9:14. Also with the verb form σαλπίζω, to blow a trumpet, all but two of the twelve uses occur inside Revelation

<sup>15</sup>“The sounding of the trumpet is occasionally part of the imagery used in early Christian apocalyptic to designate the point at which final events begin to unfold, particularly the Parousia (Matt 24:31; 1 Thess 4:16; 1 Cor 15:52; Did 16:6; Quaest. Esdr. [Rec. B] 11, ‘until the coming of Christ when the trumpet of Gabriel sounds’; see the Gnostic appropriation of this metaphor in Tri. Trac. 138.8–12). According to Ap. Jas. 15.11–13, the ascension of Christ was accompanied by the sound of war, a trumpet blast, and a great uproar. This use of the trumpet in eschatological scenarios is usually assumed to have been derived from Judaism. The trumpet is used in Revelation as a metaphor for a loud voice (1:10; 4:1) and as a structuring device for the plagues unleashed upon the sounding of each of the seven trumpets in 8:2–9:21 and 11:15–18. In Revelation the trumpet is never used to signal the return of Christ

here in terms of 'playing a song' as the English phrase "play the trumpet" would suggest. What σαλπίζω with the action of these seven angels did compares more to blowing a bugle with a single blast of air that produces a signal rather than a song. In 8:6ff, when each angel blows the trumpet, σαλπίζω, a signal is given for the implementing of a portion of God's wrath upon the earth.

## 2) The other angel, vv. 3-5

3 Καὶ ἄλλος ἄγγελος ἦλθεν καὶ ἐστάθη ἐπὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου ἔχων λιβανωτὸν χρυσοῦν,

as it is in other Christian texts. The seventh trumpet in 11:15–18 does, in some sense of course, mark the arrival of the end.

"Series of trumpet blasts were used in various connections in the OT and early Jewish literature, however. Seven trumpets were used in the ritual that resulted in the destruction of Jericho (Josh 6), and in the Qumran War Scroll seven Levites carry seven rams' horns into the eschatological conflict (1QM 7:14). The trumpet (whether the שׁוֹפָר *šōpār*, 'ram's horn,' the יַבֵּל *yōbēl*, or the חֲצֻצְרָה *hāḥṣṣrā*, both 'trumpet') was used in ancient Israel and in early Judaism for a number of purposes (see Str-B, 1:959–60; G. Friedrich, TDNT 7:71–88): (1) as a means of warning (Num 10:1–8; Ezek 33:3–6; Hos 8:1; Joel 2:1 [for the day of the Lord]); (2) to signal an attack by military forces (Num 31:6; Judg 7:8–22; 2 Chr 13:12; Zeph 1:16; 2 Macc 13:25; Pss. Sol. 8:1; Sib. Or. 8.253); (3) to give an alarm within a city to indicate an imminent attack (Jer 20:16; Hos 5:8; Amos 3:6; Zeph 1:16); (4) to signal a retreat (2 Sam 2:28; 18:16; 20:22; 2 Kgs 9:13); (5) as a cry to God for help (Num 10:9; 1 Macc 4:40); (6) to indicate that a victory has been won (Ps 47:5); (7) to signal the announcement of good news (Pss. Sol. 11:1); (8) as an accompaniment to religious ritual (Lev 25:9; Joel 2:15; 1 Macc 3:54; m. Sukk. 5:4; m. Ros. Hos. 3:3–4; m. Tamid 7:3); (9) as part of a theophany scene (Exod 19:13, 16, 19; 20:18; Aristobulus frag. 3 [10.13, 16–17; Denis, Fragmenta, 220]; Heb 12:19; Rev 1:10); and (10) in various eschatological contexts; the War Scroll exhibits an elaborate interest in describing various trumpets of the congregation, which have a variety of specific uses in the final eschatological war (1QM 2:16–3:11; 7:12–9:3; see P.R. Davies, 1QM, 29–32, 63). The sound of the trumpet can therefore strike terror or joy or reverent expectation into the hearts of the hearers, depending on the context and their expectations.

"The trumpet was absorbed into Jewish apocalyptic imagery, where it occasionally suggests eschatological salvation (Isa 27:13; Zech 9:14–15), though more commonly eschatological judgment (Isa 58:1; Joel 2:2–3; Zeph 1:14–16; 4 Ezra 6:23; Sib. Or. 4.174–75; Apoc. Mos. 22:3; Paral. Jer. 3:2; 4:1; Apoc. Zeph. 12:1; Gk Ap. Ezra 4:36). Michael is explicitly associated with the trumpet only rarely (Apoc. Mos. 22:1–3). The trumpet has an eschatological significance in the tenth of the Eighteen Benedictions in an ancient Palestinian version, which may allude to Isa 27:3 (tr. Petuchowsky, "Jewish Prayer Texts," 29):

Sound the great horn for our freedom,  
and lift up a banner to gather in our exiles.

You are praised, O Lord, who gathers in the outcasts of His people Israel.

"Finally, it should be mentioned that comets could be referred to as having a trumpet shape (Ptolemy Tetrabiblos 2.90–91; see Malina, Revelation, 113)."

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 510–511.]

καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ θυμιάματα πολλά, ἵνα δώσει ταῖς προσευχαῖς τῶν ἁγίων πάντων ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον τὸ χρυσοῦν τὸ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου. 4 καὶ ἀνέβη ὁ καπνὸς τῶν θυμιαμάτων ταῖς προσευχαῖς τῶν ἁγίων ἐκ χειρὸς τοῦ ἀγγέλου ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ. 5 καὶ εἴληφεν ὁ ἄγγελος τὸν λιβανωτὸν καὶ ἐγένευσεν αὐτὸν ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου καὶ ἔβαλεν εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ ἐγένοντο βρονταὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ ἀστραπαὶ καὶ σεισμός.

3 Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. 5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth; and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

The dominant emphasis in vv. 1-5 is upon the actions of the single angel rather than upon the seven. The mentioning of the seven here is merely to get them on the table in readiness to carry out their work which is then described beginning in verse six. But the work of the single angel in vv. 3-5 is critical to the work of the seven. Actually his action in v. 5 is essentially the same as that of the seven angels that is described in much greater detail. They blow their trumpet and he throws the divine fire down on the earth.

Three segments are depicted: a) his appearance and being granted incense (v. 3); b) the significant of the incense smoke before the throne (v. 4); c) the angel's throwing the incense fire down upon the earth (v. 5).

**a) Appearance and incense, v. 3:** Καὶ ἄλλος ἄγγελος ἦλθεν καὶ ἐστάθη ἐπὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου ἔχων λιβανωτὸν χρυσοῦν, καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ θυμιάματα πολλά, ἵνα δώσει ταῖς προσευχαῖς τῶν ἁγίων πάντων ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον τὸ χρυσοῦν τὸ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου, Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne. Here the rituals of the Feast of Tabernacles comes to the forefront very prominently as the earthly backdrop to this heavenly activity. This ritual grew out of the daily ritual of sacrifices made in the Jerusalem temple.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup>"The Mishnah's explanation of the background of the liturgy of the daily sacrifice in the temple makes even more cogent the association of prayer with the silence in Rev. 8:1 (cf. m. Tamid).<sup>219</sup> The order of the service roughly resembled the order of some of the significant images in the Apocalypse: (1) trimming of the seven lamps (Revelation 1–3), (2) slaying of the sacrificial lamb (Rev. Page 11

First, John sees the angel: *Καὶ ἄλλος ἄγγελος ἦλθεν, and another angel came.* No mention of where this angel came from is given, which is not considered important by John.

Second, what is important is the position that the angel takes up: *καὶ ἐστάθη ἐπὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου ἔχων λιβανωτὸν χρυσοῦν, and was made to stand at the altar while having a golden censer.* Two



separate altars are mentioned in Revelation and had their 'mirror copy' in the Jerusalem temple: the golden altar of incense (8:3, 5; 9:13) and the altar of burnt offering (6:9; 11:1; 16:7).<sup>17</sup> With the adjective 'golden'

5:6), (3) pouring of the sacrificial blood at the base of the altar (Rev. 6:9), (4) offering of incense, during a time of silence and prayer (so Luke 1:10; cf. Rev. 8:1, 4–5),<sup>220</sup> (5) the burnt offering and drink offering (Rev. 16:1) together with the sounding of trumpets (Rev. 8:6), and (6) singing of psalms (19:1–8).” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 452.]

<sup>17</sup>“The noun θυσιαστήριον, ‘altar,’ found eight times in Revelation (here; 8:3[2x]; 8:5; 9:13; 11:1; 14:8; 16:7), is derived from the verb θυσιάζειν, ‘to sacrifice,’ and is linked to the compound suffix -τηριον (the agentive -τηρ with the addition of -ιο-, a morpheme with diminutive significance), which is added to verbal stems to provide names for establishments, instruments, and utensils (an extension of the agentive significance); in this case the noun indicates the place where the sacrifice is made, i.e., the altar. The term appears for the first time in the LXX where it occurs over four hundred times (primarily as a translation of the Hebrew *mizbēah*, ‘altar’), where it is used of the altar of burnt offering (2 Kgs 16:10–15), of the incense altar (1 Chr 6:49), and of altars generally (Gen 8:20). Until the third century A.D. the term is limited to Jewish and Christian authors (Klauck, ZNW 71 [1980] 277). In the NT it is primarily used of the altar for burnt offerings in the Jerusalem temple (Matt 5:23–24; 23:28–20, 35; Luke 11:51; 1 Cor 9:13; 10:18; Heb 7:13; cf. 1 Clem. 41:2), four times for the altar of incense (Rev 8:3[2x], 5; 9:13), or for altars generally (Rom 11:3; Jas 2:21).

“In Revelation θυσιαστήριον is used four times of the altar of incense (8:3[2x], 5; 9:13), three times of the altar of burnt offerings (6:9; 11:1; 16:7), and twice by figurative extension with the meaning ‘sanctuary’ (11:1; 14:18; see Comment on 11:1). In the NT θυσιαστήριον refers to the heavenly altar only in Revelation (with the possible exception of Heb 13:10; see J. W. Thompson, “Outside the Camp: A Study of Heb 13:9–14,” CBQ 40 [1978] 58–59). In Herm. Man. 10.3.2–3, the term occurs twice of the heavenly altar, which is the goal of prayers, and the same conception is found in Irenaeus Adv. Haer. 4.18.6 (Harvey 4.31.5) and Gregory Nazianzus (Or. 42). In Herm. Sim. 8.2.5 the heavenly altar is again mentioned as the place for testing or judgment. The conception of an altar in the heavenly temple is apparently of Jewish origin. The view of some that the presence of an altar in the heavenly temple is modeled after the presence of an altar in earthly churches

added, e.g., 9:13, τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου τοῦ χρυσοῦ, it is clear that this is the altar of incense rather than the altar of burnt offering.

What is clear is that this angel was positioning himself to conduct the ritual of offering incense that was especially significant in the Jerusalem temple worship during the Feast of Tabernacles. But his doing of this ritual will possess added meaning to its parallel in the Jerusalem temple, in part because it is conducted in heaven rather than on earth.

Third, the angel receives a large quantity of incense to use in the ritual: *καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ θυμιάματα πολλὰ, ἵνα δώσει ταῖς προσευχαῖς τῶν ἁγίων πάντων ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον τὸ χρυσοῦν τὸ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου. And he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne.* The earthly incense used in the temple had to be a certain type or else it was soundly prohibited for use.

The incense, θυμιάμα, used in the temple had to be made out of specifically prescribed materials, spelled out in Exodus 30:34–38.<sup>18</sup> Although not spelled out here in Revelation, the assumption is that the θυμιάμα used by the angel conformed to regulations for proper incense to be used on the golden altar.<sup>19</sup> The ground is anachronistic. Minucius Felix (Octavius 32.1) observed *aras non habemus*, ‘we have no altars’ (see Origen, Cont. 8.17).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 405.]

<sup>18</sup>**Exodus 30:34–38.** 34 καὶ εἶπεν κύριος πρὸς Μωυσῆν Λαβέ σεαυτῷ ἡδύσματα, στακτήν, ὄνυχα, χαλβάνην ἡδυσμοῦ καὶ λίβανον διαφανῆ, ἴσον ἴσῳ ἔσται· † 35 καὶ ποιήσουσιν ἐν αὐτῷ θυμιάμα, μυρεψικὸν ἔργον μυρεψοῦ, μεμιγμένον, καθαρὸν, ἔργον ἅγιον· † 36 καὶ συγκόμεις ἐκ τούτων λεπτὸν καὶ θήσεις ἀπέναντι τῶν μαρτυρίων ἐν τῇ σκηνῇ τοῦ μαρτυρίου, ὅθεν γνωσθήσομαι σοὶ ἐκεῖθεν· ἅγιον τῶν ἁγίων ἔσται ὑμῖν· † 37 θυμιάμα κατὰ τὴν σύνθεσιν ταύτην οὐ ποιήσετε ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς· ἅγιασμα ἔσται ὑμῖν κυρίῳ· † 38 ὃς ἂν ποιήσῃ ὡσαύτως ὥστε ὀσφραίνεσθαι ἐν αὐτῷ, ἀπολείται ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ· †

34 The Lord said to Moses: Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (an equal part of each), 35 and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy; 36 and you shall beat some of it into powder, and put part of it before the covenant in the tent of meeting where I shall meet with you; it shall be for you most holy. 37 When you make incense according to this composition, you shall not make it for yourselves; it shall be regarded by you as holy to the Lord. 38 Whoever makes any like it to use as perfume shall be cut off from the people.

<sup>19</sup>“The special incense called *lēbōnâ*, “frankincense,” is mentioned as an addition to certain meal offerings in Leviticus 2. The part of the flour that is burnt on the altar of burnt offerings together with the frankincense is called an *’azkārâ*. This expression may be based on the Heb root *zkr* in Hip’il, which can mean to call upon the name of a deity; cf. the Akk *zakāru*, which also can refer to invoking the name of a deity. The frankincense of the *’azkārâ* facilitates the contact between the suppliant and God.

“Several stories in the Torah may reflect a ritual use of in-

up powder from these prescribed materials would be dropped on the coals of fire burning on the incense altar to produce the smoke of incense.<sup>20</sup> By the way, the Greek word θυμίαμα for incense can refer either to the powder substance or the act of burning it on the altar to produce the smoke of incense. In Revelation it is the substance of incense that is meant, while in Lk. 1:10, 11, the action of burning the substance on the altar is meant.

The religious meaning of incense centered on prayers of God's people being lifted up to God.<sup>21</sup> This is spelled out clearly in Rev. 5:8, *φιάλας χρυσᾶς γεμούσας*

cense which is no longer identifiable. In Leviticus 10, Nadab and Abihu appear to be performing a ritual with censers and *qēṭōret*. The fire they use, however, presumably was not prescribed. The fire is called an *'eš zārā*, i.e., an unconsecrated fire. Consequently, they are struck dead, 'devoured' by the fire. The Korah incident in Numbers 16 is depicted as a rebellion against the Aaronite privilege to serve in general and to burn incense in particular in front of the Lord. The consequences are grave for the Korah group. These stories may indicate that there once were rituals with censers which the present Torah does not prescribe.<sup>22</sup>

[Kjeld Nielsen, "Incense," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 407.]

<sup>20</sup>The ancient Israelite prescription of specific materials for making the powder of incense grew out of the widespread use of incense in religious ceremonies throughout the middle eastern world, which was made from using a wide variety of scented materials. The distinctive smell of the Israelite incense when burned in either the tabernacle or temple identified it as coming from God's people worshipping properly in the house of God.

<sup>21</sup>"When, exactly, incense was introduced into the religious services of the Church it is not easy to say. During the first four centuries there is no evidence for its use. Still, its common employment in the Temple and the references to it in the New Testament (cf. Luke 1:10; Revelation 8:3-5) would suggest an early familiarity with it in Christian worship. The earliest authentic reference to its use in the service of the Church is found in Pseudo-Dionysius ("De Hier. Ecc.", III, 2). The Liturgies of Sts. James and Mark — which in their present form are not older than the fifth century — refer to its use at the Sacred Mysteries. A Roman Ordo of the seventh century mentions that it was used in the procession of the bishop to the altar and on Good Friday (cf. "Ordo Romanus VIII" of St. Amand). The pilgrim Etheria saw it employed at the vigil Offices of the Sunday in Jerusalem (cf. Peregrinatio, II). Almost all Eastern liturgies bear witness to its use in the celebration of the Mass, particularly at the Offertory. In the Roman Church incensation at the Gospel of the Mass appears very early — at the Offertory in the eleventh, and at the Introit in the twelfth century, at the Benedictus and Magnificat of the canonical Hours about the thirteenth century, and, in connexion with the Elevation and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, about the fourteenth century. 'Ordo Romanus VI' describes the incensation of the celebrant, and in the time of Durandus (Rat. off. Div.) the assisting clergy were incensed. In the present discipline of the Western Church incense is used at solemn Mass, solemn blessings, functions, and processions, choral offices, and absolutions for the dead. On these occasions persons, places, and things such as relics of Christ and the saints, crucifix, altar, book of Gospels, coffin, remains, sepulchre, etc. are incensed. When used the incense is generally burned." ["Incense," *Catholic Encyclopedia*]

θυμιάτων, αἱ εἰσὶν αἱ προσευχαὶ τῶν ἁγίων, *golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints*. The most specific association was when the priest poured the incense material over the coals of fire taken from the incense altar in order to produce smoke that rose up. Its distinctiveness lay in the perfumed odor of the smoke due to the combination of scented materials contained in the incense. The rising smoke signaled the rising of the prayers up to God.

The angel in 8:3 was given a large quantity of incense, *θυμιάματα πολλά*, due to the largeness of his task. The purpose of this was *ἵνα δώσει ταῖς προσευχαῖς τῶν ἁγίων πάντων ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον τὸ χρυσοῦν τὸ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου*, *to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne*. The large quantity of prayers of all the saints required a lot of incense to be burnt on the golden altar.<sup>22</sup> The construction of *ταῖς προσευχαῖς τῶν ἁγίων πάντων*, can be taken two ways in the Greek. It either signals that the prayers and the smoke rise together with the smoke legitimizing the prayers, or that they rise together with the smoke visually symbolizing the prayers. Probably the latter meaning is the preferable one. Interestingly,

<sup>22</sup>"The dative phrase *ταῖς προσευχαῖς*, which occurs both here and in v 4, is problematic, and while the identical phrase occurs in 8:4, the two are not always construed similarly (see Note 8:4.a-a.\*). Bousset ([1906] 293) and Caird (107) consider it a dative of respect or reference, while Moule (*Idiom-Book*, 43–44) understands both phrases as examples of the temporal dative, which he translates 'simultaneous with the prayers.' The phrase *ταῖς προσευχαῖς* is sometimes considered a dative of advantage, in both vv 3 and 4; in v 3 the phrase *ἵνα δώσει ταῖς προσευχαῖς* could then be translated 'to offer it in behalf of the prayers' (Mussies, *Morphology*, 99), or 'as a complement to the prayers' (as I have rendered it above); then the incense functions as a supplement to the prayers to make them more acceptable or pleasing to God (Beckwith, 553; Charles, 1:230; Loisy, 172; Zahn, 2:383 n. 84; BDR § 188.1). If it is construed as a dative of association (as it is in the NRSV and REB), it can be translated 'with the prayers,' meaning that the smoke from the burning incense and the prayers of all God's people ascend to the throne together but have no intrinsic connection.

"The prayers of the holy ones must be the prayers of Christians living on the earth (on 'holy ones' = God's people or Christians, see Comment on 5:8). It is assumed that these prayers are prayers for divine vengeance on their opponents since the officiating angel mixes the prayers with incense on the heavenly altar and then throws fire down upon the earth with catastrophic effects (v 5). These prayers for vengeance are appeals to God from the living, analogous to the prayers for vengeance from the martyrs mentioned in 6:10 (Sattler, *ZNW* 20 [1921] 235).

"As in v 4, the incense is not metaphorically understood as the prayers of Christians, but rather the incense and the smoke that result from its burning are understood to be closely associated with prayer (see Comment on 5:8, where incense is equated with prayer)."

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 512–513.]

the offering of the incense is made on the heavenly altar positioned in front of the throne of God. Such location of the altar along with the description of it clearly identifies this as the heavenly equivalent to the incense altar in the Jerusalem temple. The throne was itself positioned on a high platform above the floor level of heaven where the altar was, so the smoke didn't have that far to go before reaching God with its scented aroma.

**b) Incense and smoke before the throne, v. 4:** *καὶ ἀνέβη ὁ καπνὸς τῶν θυμιαμάτων ταῖς προσευχαῖς τῶν ἁγίων ἐκ χειρὸς τοῦ ἀγγέλου ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ, And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.*

Here is depicted the ritual of burning the incense following the pattern used by the priests in the Jerusalem temple. During the ritual coals from the altar were placed in the fire pan and the incense powder was sprinkled on top of the coals, thus producing the smoke.

One should note that the incense smoke is not equated with the prayers of God's people. Rather *ταῖς προσευχαῖς τῶν ἁγίων*, with the prayer of the saints, signals a connection between the two, most likely understood as the smoke symbolizing the prayers but not becoming the prayers. In other apocalyptic literature the two tend to be equated with one another in highly spiritualized expression.<sup>23</sup>

The prayers here are attributed to *τῶν ἁγίων*, of the saints (v. 4) and *τῶν ἁγίων πάντων*, of all the saints (v. 3). Saints is here *ἁγίων* which means 'holy ones' who have been set apart to God. This is the standard NT designation of all believers in Christ, not some special sub-group inside Christianity. But the phrase in v.

<sup>23</sup>“During the incense offering, coals from the altar are heaped in the fire pan and the incense is sprinkled on top of the coals (m. Yoma 5). Here again (cf. v 3) the smoke from the burning incense is not spiritualized or interpreted figuratively as the prayers of Christians (on 'holy ones' = God's people or Christians, see Comment on 5:8), but rather the analogy between smoke and prayer is emphasized. This is unlike Rev 5:8 (see Comment on 5:8), where the incense is explicitly identified with the prayers of the holy ones. 3 Apoc. Bar. 11:3 mentions Michael descending to receive the prayers of people, though precisely what he does with them is left unstated. Philo (Quis Her. 205), apparently using traditions about Michael as a model, says that the Logos, the archangel of the Father, 'pleads with the immortal as suppliant for afflicted mortality.' The scene in Rev 8:3–4 is similar in several ways to that in Apoc. Adam 33:4 (Charlesworth, OTP 2:289), 'I myself saw golden censers [θυμιατήρια χρυσᾶ] and three bowls [τρεῖς φιάλας], and behold, all the angels with frankincense and the censers and the bowls came to the altar [θυσιαστήριον; the same term as in Rev 8:3] and breathed on them, and the fumes of the incense hid the sky.' The location of this scene is on the earth, though the particular altar used is left unspecified." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 514–515.]

3, *τῶν ἁγίων πάντων*, can easily designate all the authentic people of God including those out of the Old Testament. Some caution should be used in limiting the phrase to just true Christians, even though this is more likely John's intent.

The rising of the prayers and the smoke is attributed to *ἐκ χειρὸς τοῦ ἀγγέλου ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ*, out of the hand of the angel before God. This apocalyptic visionary depiction attributes the coming of prayers before God as a direct action of one of His angels. But this provides no basis for praying to angels rather than to God. The angel simply represents God's presence and actions. In 5:8, it is the twenty-four elders -- and possibly also the four living creatures -- using the *φιάλας χρυσᾶς γεμούσας θυμιαμάτων*, golden bowls full of incense, rather than an angel, as here.

**c) Throwing down fire, v. 5:** *καὶ εἴληφεν ὁ ἄγγελος τὸν λιβανωτὸν καὶ ἐγένετο αὐτὸν ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου καὶ ἔβαλεν εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ ἐγένοντο βρονταὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ ἀστραπαὶ καὶ σεισμός. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth; and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.*

The distinctive twist with this ritual at the heavenly incense altar is that the angel took *τὸν λιβανωτὸν*, censer, which contained the incense and the coals of fire, and threw the contents down onto the earth. Just used twice in the NT at Rev. 8:3, 5, *λιβανωτός* refers to the container in which incense is placed. This term was the more appropriate term rather than *φιάλας χρυσᾶς*, golden bowls, in 5:8 for what is down with the censer. In the background here clearly is Ezek. 10:2 with its amplification in vv. 1–22.<sup>24</sup> Whereas in Ezekiel the angel

<sup>24</sup>“Rev 8:5 alludes to Ezek 10:2 (cf. Isa 6:6), where a voice commands a man (= angel) clothed in linen: 'fill your hands with burning coals [πλήσον τὰς δράκας σου ἀνθρώκων πυρὸς] from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city,' i.e., in judgment (see Zimmerli, Ezekiel 1:250–51). There is a discussion of this passage in b. Yoma 77a (tr. I. Epstein):

Were it not for the fact that the coals in the hand of the cherub became cold [in the process of coming] in to the hands of Gabriel, there would not have been left over from the "enemies of Israel" [i.e., Israel] one to remain or one to escape.

“John, however, applies this imagery to the punishment of pagans rather than to the punishment of the disobedient people of God. While the incense offering is directed toward God, only the hot coals are directed toward the earth. This brief scene involving the casting of fire upon the earth is clearly a metaphor anticipating the judgments that attend the blowing of each of the seven trumpets. This divine punishment is simplicity linked with the prayers of the saints offered with the incense to God in v 4, while the prayers themselves should be read in light of the prayer for revenge uttered by the souls under the altar in 6:9–10. See Tg. Ezek. 1:8 (Levey, Tg. Ezekiel, 20):

Hands like the hands of a man were fashioned for them [the  
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inflicts punishments on the disobedient people of God in Jerusalem, here the angel inflicts punishments on those persecuting the people of God on earth.

The impact of this fire thrown down from heaven to the earth is βρονταὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ ἀστραπαὶ καὶ σεισμός, *peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake*. This depiction is similar to two other similar instances in Revelation:<sup>25</sup>

Rev 8:5b: καὶ ἐγένοντο βρονταὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ ἀστραπαὶ καὶ σεισμός “and there were thunder and rumbling and lightning and an earth-quake.”

Rev 11:19c: καὶ ἐγένοντο ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός καὶ χάλαξα μεγάλη “and there were lightning and rumbling and thunder and an earthquake and great hail.”

Rev 16:18–21: καὶ ἐγένοντο ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός ἐγένετο μέγας ... καὶ χάλαξα μεγάλη “Then there were lightning and rumbling and thunder and there was a great earthquake ... and great hail.”<sup>26</sup>

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four living creatures] from beneath their wings on their four sides, with which to take out burning coals of fire from among the cherubim underneath the expanse which was over their heads, placing them into the hands of the seraphim to sprinkle on the place of the wicked, to destroy the sinners who transgress His word.

“Fire that falls from heaven to earth is frequently a symbol of judgment (Gen 19:24; 2 Kgs 1:10, 12, 14; Job 1:6; Ps 11:6; 2 Thess 1:8). There is a reference to taking fire from the altar in Isa 6:6. On the term θυσιαστήριον, see Comment on 6:9.

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 515–516.]

<sup>25</sup>David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 517.

<sup>26</sup>“The comparison of these passages requires some comment: (1) Each passage has a narrative function different from the others: (a) 8:5b anticipates the divine judgments that follow the sounding of the seven trumpets (Bauckham, “Earthquake,” 203). (b) 11:19c is analogous to 4:5 (where lightning, rumblings, and thunder come from the throne of God) in that the atmospheric and seismic disturbances proceed from the heavenly ark as part of a manifestation of the power of God. Further, this theophanic manifestation functions as a conclusion to 11:15–18 but primarily as an introduction to 12:1–17. (c) In 16:18–21, the storm phenomena, but particularly the earthquake and the hail, constitute the destructive punishment of the seventh bowl.

“(2) An earthquake associated with the Sinai theophany (Exod 19:18) is frequently referred to in allusions to the Sinai tradition (Ps 68:8; Isa 64:3) and is often part of the physical manifestations that accompany theophanies in subsequent tradition. Exod 19:16–18 mentions five natural phenomena that are associated with theophanies: thunder, lightning, a thick cloud, a loud trumpet blast, and an earthquake. These five phenomena are essentially repeated in several subsequent revisions and expansions of Exodus in early Judaism, including Tg. Onq. Exod 19:16, Tg. Ps.-Jon. Exod 19:16, and Ps.-Philo Bib. Ant. 11:4. However, this list is enormously expanded, primarily through the use of seismic disturbances in Bib.

The depiction of these chaotic natural calamities on earth signal the outpouring of God’s judgment in answer to the pleas of the persecuted saints for justice. The implementation of it is ready to begin with the blowing of the seven trumpets. The throwing of the fire of incense by the angel affirms dramatically that God is just and is going to hold accountable every person who has harmed His people.

## 2. What does the text mean to us today?

Revelation 8:1–5 prepares every reader to understand what the justice of God means. And that is the tremendously strict accountability every person is held to in opposing the people of God, and in doing harm to

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Ant. 11:5 (tr. Charlesworth, OTP 2:318):

And behold the mountains burned with fire, and the earth quaked, and the hills were disturbed, and the mountains were rolled about, and the abysses boiled, and every habitable place was shaken, and the heavens were folded up, and the clouds drew up water, and flames of fire burned, and thunderings and lightnings were many, and winds and storms roared, the stars gathered together...

“(3) Earthquakes can be assigned several different kinds of religious significance (see TDNT 7:196–200; EDNT 3:236–37): (a) An earthquake can either anticipate divine judgment (8:5) or be an instrument of divine judgment (Rev 16:18–21; 2 Sam 22:8; Isa 24:18–20; Hag 2:6–7, 21; Heb 12:26). In Exod. Rab. 29.9, the sages express the view that the occurrence of an earthquake when God punishes the wicked matches the function of the earthquake at Sinai. (b) An earthquake, in concert with other atmospheric phenomena, can symbolize the presence or imminent arrival of God or of an agent of God (Judg 5:4; Pss 68:8; 114:6–7; 1 Kgs 19:11; Matt 28:2). (c) An earthquake can function like a prodigy and accompany an event of particular significance (Matt 27:51; Vergil Georgics 1.475) or be a sign of impending events (Mark 13:8 = Matt 24:7 = Luke 21:11).

“(4) Though Bauckham proposes that the earthquake language in particular is a conscious allusion to the Sinai theophany, it appears that such language has become so conventional that no direct allusion to the Sinai tradition should automatically be assumed. An earthquake is also linked to the Exodus tradition (Pss 77:18; 114:4–7). A similar list of four atmospheric and seismic disturbances, including the earthquake, for example, is found in LXX Esth 1:1de, where they are part of a dream in which violence against the Jews is anticipated:

And this was his dream: Behold, there were sounds and tumult, thunderings and an earthquake [φωναὶ καὶ θόρυβος, βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός], confusion on earth. And behold two great dragons [δράκοντες] came forth, both ready for battle, and their cry was great.

“Further, the earthquake as a theophanic manifestation is also part of Greek tradition. In Callimachus Hymn to Apollo 1–8 (ca. 305–240 B.C.), several signs outside Apollo’s temple reveal the imminent epiphany of the god: the quivering laurel, the shaking of the temple, a palm tree nodding, a swan singing, and the temple doors opening by themselves (for other occurrences of the theophanic earthquake, see Homeric Hymn 3.403; Apollonius Rhodius Argonautica 2.679–80; PGM I.305; III.255).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 517–518.]

them. The particulars of that judgment are going to be spelled out in the seven trumpet plagues in 8:6-9:21 and 11:15-18. Rev. 8:2-5 set the reader up to anticipate this just like Rev. 4:1-5:14 introduced the seven seals, and like 15:1-8 will set up the seven bowls of wrath.<sup>27</sup> These punishments are not intended to generate repentance for the evil people.

Instead, they express God answering the pleas of His saints on earth for justice against those harming and killing the people of God. In a very real sense they stand as God's answer to the pleas of the martyred saints in 6:10, ἔως πότε, ὁ δεσπότης ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός, οὐ κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν ἐκ τῶν κατοικοῦντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς; "Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?" These were pleas not just from the martyrs but from those left on earth and facing martyrdom.

God now moves to demonstrate that He indeed is a just God who defends His reputation of holiness and compassion for His people by inflicting both temporal and eternal punishments on those harming His people on earth.

The seven seals, with the first six seals, have begun setting up the scene of the final unleashing of these punishments that have been taking place in limited ways all across human history. But now toward the end of that history, the furry of those punishments will dramatically increase upon the evil people on earth. These seals have previewed what they will be like and now first the seven trumpets will intensify that depiction and the seven bowls to follow will unfold the full furry of God's wrath upon evil people.

In a culture where real persecution of believers is largely unknown, it is not easy to grasp the deeper intentions behind this depiction in Revelation. Superficial reading leaves a false impression that this is little more than human revenge using God for the billy club. But down through the centuries and even into our day, the believers who have suffered the harm up to martyrdom with indescribable cruelties inflicted upon them fully

<sup>27</sup>"The series of seven trumpet plagues narrated in 8:7-9:21 and 11:15-18 is introduced with a scene in the heavenly temple in 8:2-5, like the prelude to the seven seals in 4:1-5:14 and the prelude to the seven bowls in 15:1-8. The seven trumpet plagues, like the seven seals, exhibit a 4 + 3 structure, with the first four characterized by a succinct, tight structure (8:7-12) and the last three unified through identification with the structure of the three woes announced by the eagle in 8:13 (cf. 9:14; 11:12). Although the people of the earth afflicted by the seven trumpet plagues reportedly do not repent (9:20-21), the purpose of the plagues is not to elicit repentance but to exact punishment. The report of failure to repent is derived from a recurring motif found in Exod 7-14." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 545.]

comprehend what Revelation is talking about here. In the midst of such cruelty the issue goes way beyond 'getting revenge on one's persecutors.' Instead, it quickly moves to the issue of the integrity of the God being worshiped. His character as pure holiness that produces absolute justice in His dealings with people become the critical issue. Is God really just and holy as is claimed? It is the old "Why me, Lord?" question intensified a hundred times or more.

We worship a God who is not only holy and just, but One whose compassion and mercy go beyond description. He also promises to take care of His own people. Persecution puts Him to the test with those claims. If God is really all these things then He must act in holding fully accountable people who inflict such harm on His people.

We are presently in a section of Revelation -- chapters four through seventeen -- where the depths of God's holiness and His holding evil people accountable is being spelled out in tremendous detail. In typical apocalyptic visionary manner, John repeatedly hammers in this central point from a wide variety of depictions.

Sometimes we miss the full impact of the details of the vision with its many bizarre images. But to those first readers living not only in persecution but in a cultural world of Christian and Jewish apocalyptic traditions the full impact came through. And since this kind of writing did not exist in the Greco-Roman cultural world, Revelation was indeed an "insiders code book" affirming profound spiritual truths that seemed like religious gobble gook to the Roman censors who passed on this document in allowing it to be carried off Patmos to believing communities in the seven cities of ancient Asia.

May God help us to find the same level of encouragement and reassurance about our God as did these first readers in the seven churches of Asia! May we learn to stand in silent awe as encouraged by the opening of the seventh seal. We indeed serve a great and wonderful God!