# **Revelation 8**

Pastor Emeritus Joe Fuiten, January 29, 2020

The last book in the Bible, the book of Revelation, is about victory for a church and a people who have not been victorious in the earthly sense. They have suffered persecution in a fallen world. The Apostle John is the last living original Apostles. The rest have all been put to violent deaths and he is an old man imprisoned and in exile on a desert island. John was feeling the pressure and he knew the rest of the church was feeling it too. He was no doubt concerned about that very thing when the key elements of the book of Revelation were given to him.

How did God comfort John and those who were suffering? He showed them that he would reassert his claim on the earth and its people and his rightful place as the sovereign over all. He showed John what would happen to his persecutors, the Romans.

This chapter takes God’s reassertion to a new level and it is breathtaking. I want to highlight the role of prayer in this. God uses our prayers in an unusual way in this chapter. He uses our prayers in bringing about justice on the earth. As we think about it, we should be encouraged to pray and not to give up. I want to make the case that God wants to encourage prayer in the face of injustice, even unanswered injustice and suffering. We see that in the parables and here in Revelation.

Jesus told the parable of the unjust judge to encourage prayer in the face of injustice. (Luke 18:1-2) “*Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men*.” At the end of the parable Jesus drew his own application (Luke 18:7-8) “*And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"* There is both usual injustice but also the more spiritual injustice when prayers are not answered because of the fallen world.

This is the same point that God is making in chapter 8 of Revelation. God is bringing about justice for his chosen ones. Even though we go through a number of Scriptural details, the take away from this message should be that God will bring us justice in the end, even though we do not always see the answers to our cries for justice here and now.

## Silence in Heaven

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

The seals, opened by the worthy Christ, were to purchase salvation. In ancient times legal documents such as property deeds and slavery ownership papers had seals upon them. When property was redeemed, the seals on the document were opened in the presence of a number of witnesses. The public opening of the seals was to verify that nothing had been changed. The seals that were opened in heaven were upon the title document for the people and property of the earth.

We concluded that Christ alone is worthy, or has the proper authority to redeem men for God. Opening the seals is part of the process of Jesus taking the earth and its people back for himself, establishing his sovereign rule over it. In this act, Jesus is showing the world that he is the Christ, and beside him there is no other.

All sorts of speculation has been offered as to the half hour of silence in heaven. A wag has suggested this means there will be no women in heaven. His comment is so scurrilous that I will not dignify it with a response. Some have given it a symbolic meaning. For example, in ancient times some believed this was the silencing of persecution of the Church under Emperor Constantine. Rather than try for symbolism, I am happy to settle for the fact that there was silence for thirty minutes.

The better question is what sort of silence is this? I suspect this is the silence of anticipation and awe. I remember going to see Tiger Woods play when he came to the plateau. There were hundreds, if not thousands, of people present lining the fairways. There would be lots of talking, excitement, and even yelling as great shots were made. However, the moment Tiger stepped up to the tee-box, the marshal would lift his hands and there was absolute silence. Everyone was anxious to see what was going to happen.

When Jesus opens the seventh seal, all heaven knows what this means. Jesus is about ready to complete his conquest. Six seals have been opened with incredible consequence. There has been war, famine, disease, earthquakes, and death. What has happened up to now in the Tribulation knows no equal in all of human history yet the climax has not been reached. Everyone in heaven knows the condition of the world in which this occurs. They know the vast number of people it affects. The outcome is known. They all know that it has never been like this before in the history of the world and it will never be like this again. It is as though all heaven holds its breath in silence, waiting for it to break forth.

## The Seven Angels with the Seven Trumpets

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

There are all sorts of angels in heaven including principalities, powers, dominions, cherubim, seraphim, and archangels. These are distinguished as those who stand before God. They would have been known to many of John’s readers. Among these seven angels was Gabriel who said, “I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Michael would be among those seven because he is ranked with Gabriel in Daniel’s prophecy.[[2]](#footnote-2) Raphael is mentioned in Tobit as one of the seven.[[3]](#footnote-3) I also know the names Uriel[[4]](#footnote-4), Raguel, and Sarkiel. I do not know the name of the seventh.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The seven angels are given the seven trumpets that will dominate the next verses with their judgments. In Jewish thought, when you hear the sound of the trumpet, you are to think of its uses (of which there are ten).[[6]](#footnote-6) First, it is God’s call to have a people, as on Mt. Sinai, when God called Israel to belong to him. Second, it signals the judging of the wicked, as at Jericho. Third, it is a call to war. Fourth, it signals the advent of a new king, as with King Solomon at Gihon Spring. Fifth, it was used at the start of the year of Jubilee when all property and slaves were to be returned to their rightful owners. Sixth, it signaled the ingathering of the exiles. Finally, it is associated with the coming of the Messiah, to name seven. There are elements of all seven in this passage.

These Old Testament uses of the Trumpet give us a clue to these seven angels who stand in God’s presence. God has always used heaven as the template for his dealings with man. The Tabernacle and Old Testament worship was meant to reflect what is in heaven. I suspect there is a connection here as well.[[7]](#footnote-7)

## The Incense-offering Angel

*3 Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. 4 The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand.*

While the text does not specify who this angel is, I think this “angel” is the Jehovah-angel otherwise known as Jesus. This has been the traditional view held by Augustine and many others. There are several reasons for this view. First, he has a gold censer and uses it as only the High Priest was allowed to use it. The writer of Hebrews identifies Jesus as the high priest who is in heaven. “*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess*.”[[8]](#footnote-8) If he is in heaven and acting as only the high priest could act, then this must be Jesus. Secondly, he hurls fire on the earth. Jesus said, “*I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled*.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Thirdly, this angel offers the prayers of the saints to God. Paul said in Ephesians 2:18, “*For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*” In Hebrews 13:15 it says, “*Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise-- the fruit of lips that confess his name*.” In 1 Pet 2:5 it says, “*you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Chris*t.” In each case, these prayers or spiritual sacrifices are seen as delivered through Jesus. If the “angel” is performing these functions in heaven then the “angel” may well be Jesus.

Seiss, in his commentary, believes the incense is part and parcel of the prayer itself. “Not for those prayers, in the sense of in their stead, but in the sense of furthering them, benefiting them, and prospering them; for the prayers themselves are included in the offering**.”**[[10]](#footnote-10)In one place incense is said to be the prayers, and here it is with the prayers.

The seventh seal is opened, the seven trumpets have been issued. These are clearly the big events. The question is, why does John go on this seeming digression about offering incense? I believe the incense is related to what Jesus is accomplishing in the opening of the seals. As the “angel” Jesus is here carrying our prayers that have accumulated over the ages. We have often prayed, “*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.”*

How many times have we prayed for his will to be done, but it wasn’t? We have lived in a fallen world with sinful lives. How many times has a child prayed for their home to be ok but it wasn’t? How many wives have prayed for wayward husbands, and husbands for faithless wives? There have been the poor in tough times. Downtrodden people have longed for justice. The sick have suffered, the weak have staggered, the weary have stumbled, the lonely have ached, and the forgotten have wept as they prayed for the kingdom to come. Up until this very moment their prayers have been unanswered. These prayers have risen up over the centuries from the saints. In measure, they have been answered, but not perfectly because sin still reigns and the fallen nature is not yet redeemed.

The hand of God, which has been stayed because the time was not yet fulfilled, now fills heaven with the incense of those prayers. Now the seventh seal is opened, the end is in sight, the Kingdom is now being seen by the wicked. Those prayers will now be answered, because the day of the Lord is at hand. The kingdom, power, and the glory of the Lord are being revealed for which the prayers of God’s people have long appealed.

**The Decisive Act is carried out.**

*5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake. 6 Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them. 7 The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. 8 The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, 9 a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. 10 The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water—11 the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter. 12 The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night. 13 As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!" (NIV)*

*The fire* which moments ago was causing incense to rise is now being hurled to the earth with devastation in its path. We have come to the day that Malachi predicted in Malachi 4:1: *"Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the LORD Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them.*

How ironic that it is fire from the altar, the altar of Sacrifice, where people’s sins are forgiven. It is not that their sins were too many or too great for them to be saved. It’s just that they did not think it important. It’s not that the blood sacrifice burned there was ineffective. It’s just that they would not accept it. Instead of receiving the sacrifice of Jesus, they ignored it. In spite of his love and grace, they trampled it under their feet like so much common trash. Out of the Altar of Sacrifice that could have saved them, now comes their damnation. There was only one altar. For one person it is the altar of Salvation, to another damnation. There was only one censer. To one the smell is the savor of cries heard, while to another it is the smell of death. There was only one fire. For one person, it lifted them into God’s presence while for another it resulted in being cast into the pits of hell.

With each blast of a trumpet the supremacy of God was sounded over the earth. All rebels felt the fire, but it was not the worst fire they would ever feel.

1. Luke 1:19 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Jude 1:9 “But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

   Dan 10:13 “But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia.

   Dan 10:21 “... but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. (No one supports me against them except Michael, your prince.

   Rev 12:7 “And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels, which present the prayers of the saints, and which go in and out before the glory of the Holy One.” Tobit 12:15. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “The book of Enoch (Chap 20) has the following: “These are the names of the angels who watch. Uriel, one of the holy angels, who presides over clamor and terror; Raphael, one of the holy angels, who presides over the spirits of men, Raguel, one of the holy angels, who inflicts punishment on the world and the luminaries; Michael, one of the holy angels, who, presiding over human virtue, commands the nations; Sarakiel, one of the holy angels, who presides over the spirits of the children of men that transgress; Gabriel, one of the holy angels, who presides over Ikesat, over paradise, and over the cherubim.” Quoted from Page 21, Vol 2. Lectures on the Apocalypse by Seiss. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 1Enoch 20 lists the archangels as Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Sariel, Gabriel, and Remiel. The militaristic Michael is counted by many as an archangel and is mentioned in Rev. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See my book Special Appointments with God for a listing of all ten. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Seiss: “The true ideal is what John beholds in this book. These seven presence-angels, with their seven trumpets, are the true heavenly realities, with reference to which all the ancient laws relating to trumpets were ordained.” P25, Vol 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Hebrews 4:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Luke 12:49 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Seiss, p29 Vol 2. Lectures on the Apocalypse [↑](#footnote-ref-10)