

# REVELATION

## Chapter 8

### *The Seventh Seal and the Golden Censers*

**When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. <sup>5</sup> 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.**

### **Excursus – Angelic Mediators in Jewish Tradition and the Book of Revelation.**

#### **The Seventh Seal and the Second Vision**

The opening of the seventh seal of the scroll by the Lamb does not reveal another scene in the first vision of events on earth (as do the first six seals). Rather, it introduces a vision of the preparation of the seven angels in heaven (8:1–5), which leads to the second vision of events on earth between Christ's ascension and return (8:6–11:19). In contrast to the seventh seal, the seventh trumpet-angel and the seventh censer-angel do reveal a seventh earthly scene in their respective visions (11:15–19; 16:17–21). This results, then, in a total of twenty (six plus seven plus seven) scenes of events on earth in the three visions. There are twenty-one scenes if one includes the seventh seal, which introduces a scene of the seven angels in heaven being prepared (8:1–5). (CC pp. 205-209)

While the first five scenes in each of the three sevenfold visions correspond to each other, the sixth and seventh scenes in the three visions do not. The sixth scene (the sixth seal, 6:12–17) of the first vision of events on earth (6:1–8:5) corresponds to the seventh scenes (the seventh trumpet-angel, 11:15–19 and the seventh censer-angel, 16:17–21) of the second and third visions (8:6–11:19 and 15:1–16:21). The sixth scenes of the second and third visions (the sixth trumpet-angel, 9:13–21, and the sixth censer-angel, 16:12–16) correspond to each other. But there is no corresponding scene in the first vision. This is so because the sixth scene (the sixth seal, 6:12–17) of the first vision is used to reveal the sight of the end of this world, while that vision of the end of the present world in the second and third visions is depicted by the seventh scene in each (the seventh trumpet-angel, 11:15–19, and the seventh censer-angel, 16:17–21). The sixth scenes of the second and third visions reveal the sight of the last battle just before the End, but there is no corresponding battle scene in the first vision

introduced by the seals. This difference between the sixth and seventh seals, and the sixth and seventh trumpet-angels and censer-angels is due to the seventh seal (8:1) being used to introduce a heavenly scene of the seven angels which immediately gives way to the second vision of earthly events. (CC pp. 205-209)

The seventh seal introduces the second vision of events on earth (8:6–11:19). But it also functions to introduce the remainder of the message of Revelation (12:1–22:5): the vision of the cosmic war (12:1–14:20); the third vision of earthly events (15:1–16:21); and the conclusion with the visions of the End and the new heaven and new earth (17:1–22:5). (CC pp. 205-209)

### **Angels as Mediators of the Visions**

Angels now take over from the Lamb the mediating role of the remainder of the message of Revelation. But the fact that the seventh seal introduces this portion of the message indicates that Jesus Christ is still the overall mediator. He directly mediates to John the first part of Revelation’s message (2:1–8:5), and through the angels indirectly mediates the remainder of the prophetic message (8:6–22:5). (CC pp. 205-209)

In the prologue (1:1–8) John is told that the “revelatory-unveiling of Jesus Christ” (ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) was from God, who had given it to Jesus Christ, and that Jesus Christ, in turn, would give it to John through an angel (1:1). This suggests that (for whatever reason) the Lord Christ would use an angel and/or angels in mediating the message of Revelation to John. So John probably was not surprised when angels began (as of 8:6) to mediate the message in place of and for Jesus Christ. (CC pp. 205-209)

But as to why this happens, and why beginning here at 8:6 and not elsewhere, John neither receives nor gives an answer. The Lord Christ certainly *could have* mediated the entire message, or he *could have* used angels as his mediating agents throughout the entire message, but he does neither. The triumphant Lord begins mediating the first part of the prophetic message of Revelation (2:1–8:5), and then, after the first vision, angels take over and in the stead of Christ mediate the remainder of the message. The Lord Christ disappears from view; he will not again confront John until the epilogue (22:6–21). Through the first vision of events and up to 8:6, angels within the vision and its individual scenes helped to interpret for John the scenes (with two exceptions, where elders did so). But these angels never were the mediators of the visions. Now, from 8:6 onward, angels not only continue to attend John within the visions and their various scenes, they also for the first time mediate the visions and their scenes. Why might this be? (CC pp. 205-209)

### **The Reason for Angelic Mediators**

We know from elsewhere in the Bible that no human being in this present age of sin and unrighteousness can actually see God in his majestic holiness and live to

tell of it. God must condescend in some way or in some form so that he can meet people and communicate with them. Even heroic men of God like Moses, while still on earth, could not with their human eyes behold God in all his holy righteousness and glory (see Ex 33:18–20). God used various natural forms through which he approached and spoke to human beings, things such as the burning bush (Ex 3:2), a cloud (Ex 19:9; cf. Mt 17:5), a pillar of cloud (Ex 13:21; Ps 78:14), and a pillar of fire (Ex 13:21; cf. Ex 14:19–20). But in particular and in a personal manner God often appeared to individuals *in the form of an angel* or *by a heavenly figure in human form*. To Abraham (Gen 18:1–2), to Jacob (Gen 32:24–30), to Moses (Ex 3:1–4), to Joshua (Josh 5:13–15), to Gideon (Judg 6:11–16), to Samson’s parents (Judg 13:3–11), and to others (e.g., Gen 21:14–19) God thus appeared and communicated. The NT also reports that God gave the Torah to Moses on Mt. Sinai *through angels* (Acts 7:38, 53; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2). (CC pp. 205-209)

Jewish tradition held that God used mediating angels to appear to and confer with human beings because that was the only way the spoken words of God could be received. For example, Philo said this was so because of the exceeding might and power of God, before which no human could stand. In Jewish tradition God is said to have given the Torah to Moses on Mt. Sinai through angels.<sup>7</sup> In another instance a Jewish tradition states that it was through one angel that the Law was given (cf. Acts 7:38) and that the name of this angel was Metatron (3 Enoch 48D:1–5). Because Metatron mediated the Torah, he was also called the Prince of the Torah (3 Enoch 48D:4). In the Book of Jubilees (1:26–2:1) the angel of God’s presence spoke to Moses the Word of God, including the creation story, which Moses was to write into a history that could have been the Pentateuch. Such angelology thus developed in Judaism because of the belief in the remoteness and transcendence of God, a part of which was due to his terrifying and overpowering majesty, which no human could approach. (CC pp. 205-209)

Was this the reason that Jesus Christ used angels to mediate the major part of the prophetic message of Revelation—that in his exalted status as the glorified Lord, no human could stand before him? This appears to be the case. In Rev 1:17, when the exalted Son of Man appeared to John to commission him to write Revelation, John could not stand before the majesty of the glorified Christ but rather fell before him as dead (cf. Mt 17:5–7). No human being in the fallen state of this earth could any more stand before the glorified Christ than he or she could stand before the holy majesty of God and see his face and live (cf. Acts 9:3–6; 22:6–11). Only by the grace and strength of the gracious God can any mortal, sinful human being stand before God. In like manner only when touched by the right hand of Christ can a human being stand before the heavenly majesty and holy power and presence of the Lord Christ (Rev 1:17). As God in the OT had his angel (or angels) through whom he appeared and communicated with his people, so now Christ in his exalted status has his angel (or angels) by which he also approaches and speaks to his prophet John. (CC pp. 205-209)

## **The Reason Why Jesus Himself Mediates the First Part**

If this is so, why then does the exalted Christ begin mediating the first part of the message of Revelation directly to John before turning the role of mediator over to angels? Again, no explicit answer can be derived from Revelation. Nor does Scripture elsewhere reveal the mind of Christ in this action of mediation. However, one may conjecture that the exalted Christ first wanted to establish beyond doubt *that this revelation came from God and himself*. Once this was established, then he could turn the mediation of the message over to angels. The unique and esoteric character of the message of Revelation, different from the other writings of the Scriptures, would make it difficult enough to receive. If, in addition, there were any doubt as to its origin, it would perhaps not have been received at all by the earliest church, even if it had come from angels out of heaven, for they alone could not vouch for its godly veracity. *But since the exalted Lord Christ himself by direct appearance and command told John to receive and write the revelation (1:1–3, 12–16, 19; cf. 22:6–7, 16), there is no doubt or question as to its origin and godly purpose*. Moreover, John immediately recognized the One who appeared to him and told him to write, for he had seen him before like this in his glorified state—at least in a preview of it—at the transfiguration (cf. Mt 17:2; Rev 1:16). *Once the Lord Christ had established the origin and the authority of Revelation by mediating the first part of it, he could safely turn over the mediation of the remainder of the revelatory message to angels, knowing that John would surely continue to receive it as from Christ himself*. John would assuredly know that, though angels were now to mediate the following message of Revelation, the seventh seal's control of the rest of the message would indicate that the mediator is still Jesus Christ, his Lord, even though angels now take Christ's place. (CC pp. 205-209)

Another possible reason that the Lord Christ began the mediation and then gave it over to angels is that he wanted John to know without doubt that, because Jesus was now in his glorified state as the Lord of lords (19:16), John could no longer stand before his holy presence and see his face—just as Moses on Mt. Sinai could not look on God's face. To do so would mean death. Even while still on earth Jesus began to make this point. After his resurrection he told Mary Magdalene not to continue to hold on to him because, although he had not yet gone to his heavenly Father, he was soon to do so (Jn 20:17). Their relationship, when he would be in his state of glory and she still in her earthly life of decay, would sensately be quite different. After Christ had come into his exalted glory and met John in that glory on Patmos, this new relationship was clearly defined, for John fell down before the mighty Lord as one dead (Rev 1:17). Now he could no more approach the Lord Christ and look on his face than he could attempt to look on God's holy face. Unless Christ had given him a special grace, he would have remained dead. But the exalted Son of Man did give him that grace by touching him with his right hand (1:17–18). John could now, for the moment, stand before the majestic and all-powerful Lord. (CC pp. 205-209)

The point, then, that the Lord Jesus wanted to make was this: John could not *continue* to stand face to face before the holy, majestic presence of Jesus because of his earthly state of decay and Christ's exalted state as holy God. *The Lord Christ, for the moment, permitted and empowered John to stand before him until John knew for certain that the message of Revelation was of God.* But after that moment the Lord Christ withdrew his visible presence and gave the remainder of the message through angels. "Flesh and blood" of sinful humankind "are not able to inherit the kingdom of God," are not able to live in the presence of the holy God and his exalted Son, the Christ (see 1 Cor 15:50). John would have to wait for that gift when he had, in the resurrection, put on an immortal body in an incorruptible state (1 Cor 15:53–55). (CC pp. 205-209)

Therefore, just as God in the OT had angel(s) by whom and through whom he spoke to Moses (and others), so now Jesus Christ in his state of heavenly glory also has his angel(s), through whom he speaks to John (see Rev 1:1; 22:6, 16). These angels through whom Christ will now continue the revelatory message are introduced to John in 8:1–5. (CC pp. 205-209)

**8:1 SEVENTH SEAL** – The opening of the seventh seal of the scroll by the Lamb does not reveal another scene in the first vision of events on earth (as do the first six seals). Rather, it introduces a vision of the preparation of the seven angels in heaven which leads to the second vision of events on earth between Christ's ascension and return. (CC p. 205)

The opening of this seal inaugurates the next set of visions, that of the seven trumpets. The opening of the seal is greeted with a half-hour silence, by which point all who are caught up in it cannot help but be ready for that which is to come. (LL)

*silence in heaven.*† A dramatic pause before the next series of plagues—the final act of the drama is left undisclosed here, reserved to be presented later. The pause indicates that what follows is of great significance. (CSB)

This silence might seem anti-climatic. However, Jews at this time expected just such a silence on the heavens before God ushered in the new creation (cf. pseudepigraphal 4 Ezra 6:39; 7:30). This glorious revelation of the new heavens and earth must wait, however, as John transitions to another scene about the end times: the seven trumpets (8:6). (TLSB)

When the Lord Christ opened the seventh seal, there was "a silence ... in heaven for about half an hour" (8:1). This half-hour period of silence seems to indicate an intermission between the first act of this revelatory drama (Revelation 6–7) and the second (chapters 8–11). But for what purpose? Oecumenius (sixth century) says that the opening of the seventh seal refers to "the second coming of the Lord and the giving in return of the good things" (ἡ δευτέρα τοῦ Κυρίου παρουσία καὶ ἡ ἀντίδοσις τῶν ἀγαθῶν). He says that the half-hour silence is a reminder of

the silence that will be at the advent of the King of creation when at the consummation of the kingdom of God every angelic power will be astonished at the superlative glory of the One who has come. By referring to creation in the context of the *seventh* seal, Oecumenius may be suggesting that this silence, which will come about in the new creation at the Lord's second coming, is an antitype of the seventh day of rest after the first creation (Gen 2:2). Thus one may infer that the silence portends the eternal rest of the heavenly Sabbath (cf. Heb 4:1–11). (CC pp. 212-213)

Perhaps Rev 8:1 does not refer directly to the eternal heavenly rest to be initiated at the end of the present world, but it is, nevertheless, similar to the silence which preceded God's original creation according to an intertestamental Jewish tradition. According to this tradition there was a silence before God spoke and thus created light (Gen 1:3). 4 Ezra 6:39 says that darkness *and silence* covered everything before God commanded light to appear. According to 2 Baruch 3:7, at the original creation there was *silence*. Also according to this tradition, a silence would occur before God's new creation. 4 Ezra 7:30–36 states that there will be a "primeval silence," like that of the first creation, which will precede the resurrection and the judgment at the End (cf. 2 Baruch 3:5–9). Whether John himself, in his reflective thoughts on this silence in Rev 8:1, connected it to the silence of God's first creation, and perhaps also to the eternal Sabbath rest, can only be conjectured. (CC pp. 212-213)

If one searches Jewish tradition for an interpretive direction, perhaps more to the point is the silence of God which preceded the revelation of his judgment on Pharaoh and the Egyptians. In the Wisdom of Solomon (18:14–19), a silence and peaceful rest preceded the angel of death's descent from heaven to strike the doomed land. Like the plagues that struck Egypt in God's wrath and judgment (Exodus 7–11), so the first four trumpet-angels reveal natural plagues that will strike the earth (Rev 8:6–12), plagues that are somewhat similar to some of those sent upon Egypt. And the natural woes revealed by the trumpet-angels have a similar purpose, that of serving God's people (cf. Ex 7:1–5; Rev 8:6–13; 16:1–9). (CC pp. 212-213)

In the OT a silence is enjoined or commanded from time to time. In Hab 2:20 the whole earth is to keep silent before the Lord because he is in his holy temple (cf. Zech 2:13). In Zeph 1:7 God's people are urged to keep their peace in his presence, because the day of Yahweh is near. When Pharaoh and his army approached the Israelites before the Red Sea and the people were terrified, Moses told them not to be afraid but to stand firm and they would see the great salvation of the Lord. Moses told them to stop voicing their unbelief and to "be silent" (יִשְׁרָטוּ; LXX: σιγήσατε), for God would act for them (Ex 14:10–14). In Ps 46:10 (MT 46:11), God speaks, "Be still [יִשְׁרָטוּ] and know that I am God." Human strength and action cannot save; God himself will put an end to war, and so the Lord is about to be exalted among the nations and exalted in the earth. The silence enjoined upon God's people of the OT was an act of faith and

worship before the awful majesty of God's action of judgment toward their enemies, which actions would also save his people. The judgment and salvation brought about in and by the great day of Yahweh moves God's saints to a fearful and awe-inspired silence before the mighty God as he acts for his people. John would be mindful of this OT theme of silence as he experienced and later meditated on the "silence" of the "half an hour" (Rev 8:1). It was a silence of awe and mystery as the exalted Son of God made ready to unfold the remainder of the message of Revelation (involving the acts of the judgment of God upon the earth), which would be revealed by the seven angels. All these acts are for the glory of the exalted Lord Christ and for the assistance of his church on earth. (CC pp. 212-213)

Our most important model is Jesus, who frequently retreated to the hills to pray and commune with His Father, especially before such major decisions as choosing the 12 apostles (Luke 6:12-16). (Joy in our Weakness – Marva Dawn)

**HALF AN HOUR** – The silence lasts "for about half an hour" (8:1), that is, for "a relatively short period." Nevertheless, the silence "would form an impressive break in such a rapidly moving drama." It is not known whether it was a common practice to reckon time in the interval of a half hour. The NT often refers to a (full) "hour," and perhaps an hour-long interval could have been just as beneficial. But John says "about half an hour." John often uses the word ὥρα ("hour") as a designation of an interval of time (E.g., Jn. 1:39; 4:6; 19:14; 1 Jn. 2:18; Rev. 3:3; 9:15; 17:12). In 1 Jn 2:18 the word is used in an eschatological sense to refer to the time before the End. The "hour," ὥρα, in 1 Jn 2:18 could possibly refer to the whole time period from the time of Christ's first advent up to his second coming, but with an emphasis on the time just before the End. If one were to see in the "half an hour" of Rev 8:1 an eschatological nuance, it would suggest that while in the end time of the "hour," ὥρα, mentioned in 1 Jn 2:18, the End itself would not come until the seven angels had sounded their trumpets. And throughout the time period covered by Revelation, the Christian is to stand before God in faith, in fear and awed silence, as he witnesses the judgments of God. That is, this awe-inspiring silence (Rev 8:1) is to be a part of the Christian's daily worship of the Lord Christ. The "half an hour," then, reminds the Christian to take time out for intervals of silent meditation in view of God's acts of judgment on earth—acts which, though fearful now to behold, will in the end serve the Christian's eternal hope. (CC pp. 213-214)

**8:2–11:19**† Another symbolic representation of an aspect of the entire NT era. Some see the seven trumpets as symbols of various false teachings or heresies that have plagued the church; others view them as foreshadowings of physical calamities. In either case, these interpretations are historical judgments. (CSB)

**8:2 SEVEN ANGELS** – John sees seven angels before the presence of God. Because of the article (τοῦς) these seven angels are a definite group. John evidently assumes that they are known and recognized by his hearers and

readers. But which group of seven are they? A Jewish tradition holds that there are seven archangels. This tradition goes back at least to the second century B.C. In Tobit 12:12–15 Raphael identifies himself as one of the “seven holy angels” who enter into the presence of God and offer up the prayers of God’s people. In 1 Enoch 20:1–7 the names of six of these seven “holy angels” are given together with their respective duties. Only two archangels are known from the Bible: Michael (Dan. 10:13, 21: 12:1; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7) and Gabriel (Dan. 8:16; 9:21; Lk. 1:19, 26). It is not certain when the seven angels in Jewish tradition were first designated “archangels,” for this identification does not appear in the OT nor in the Apocrypha. In Dan 10:13 Michael is called “one of the foremost princes” (אֶחָד הַשָּׂרִים הָרְאשֻׁנִים; LXX: εἷς τῶν ἀρχόντων τῶν πρώτων). In Dan 10:21 he is called שַׁר, “prince,” not מַלְאָךְ, “messenger/angel,” but the LXX has ὁ ἄγγελος, “the angel/messenger.” And Dan 12:1 calls him “the great prince” (הַשָּׂר הַגָּדוֹל; LXX: ὁ ἄγγελος ὁ μέγας, “the great angel/messenger”). Gabriel is not explicitly identified as an angel, appearing only as a heavenly figure “like the appearance of a human [גִּבּוֹר]” (Dan 8:15) or as a “man” (אִישׁ) who nevertheless flies (Dan 9:21). Though the designation “archangel” does not appear, terms such as “the great prince” (הַשָּׂר הַגָּדוֹל, Dan 12:1) and “the great angel” (ὁ ἄγγελος ὁ μέγας, LXX Dan 12:1) probably were instrumental in the creating of the term “archangel” later. Apparently “archangel” appears for the first time in literary form in the NT. In Jude 9 Michael is called an “archangel” (ἀρχάγγελος), and in 1 Thess 4:16 Paul speaks of the “voice of an archangel [ἀρχαγγέλου]” which will announce the second coming of the Lord. In Jewish literature terms for “archangel” began to be used about the same time (one appears in 4 Ezra 4:36, written around A.D. 100). As a group of seven, these angels seemed to have been at first called “holy angels” (1 Enoch 20:1–7), but because they stood before the holy presence of God in heaven, they were also known as the “angels of the presence.” (CC pp. 214-218)

The idea of an “angel (or angels) of the presence” is known in the OT. This designation is first mentioned in Is 63:9, which describes how the “angel of his [God’s] presence” saved the people of God. This is probably a reference to Ex 33:14, where the Lord said to Moses when the Israelites were in the wilderness, “my presence [פָּנָי, literally “my face”] will go with you.” In Jubilees 1:27–29 God’s presence is identified with “the angel of the presence” who went before the Israelites in the wilderness, thus equating that angel with the presence (or face) of God (Ex 33:14). (CC pp. 214-218)

*This Jewish tradition thus speaks of seven archangels, but no reference to seven such archangels exists in either the OT or the NT. While the terms “angel of [God’s] presence” (Is 63:9), “great angel” (LXX Dan 12:1), and “archangel” (1Thess 4:16; Jude 9) are attested in Scripture, no group of seven angels is ever mentioned in Scripture, except in Revelation. Are the seven archangels of Jewish tradition the seven angels of Rev 8:2? John says that they are “the seven angels*



who stand in the presence of God.” This description suggests angels like the “angel of his [God’s] presence” mentioned in Is 63:9; they are also similar to Gabriel, “the one standing in the presence of God” (Lk 1:19). Most commentators offer the seven archangels of Jewish tradition as the only known group of seven angels to which the article (τούς) in Rev 8:2 could refer. However, there is another possible interpretation of the seven angels of 8:2. (CC pp. 214-218)

In Revelation groups consisting of seven angels are mentioned ten times (Rev. 1:20; 8:2, 6; 15:1, 6, 7, 88; 16:1; 17:1; 21:9). In addition, the seven angels of the seven churches mentioned in 1:20 are referred to, one by one, as the recipients of the letters sent to the seven churches Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). Six of the seven trumpet-angels of 8:2 are also listed separately, one by one, as they sound their trumpets. (CC pp. 214-218)

These references to groups of seven angels can be divided into categories. First, there are references to the seven angels of the seven churches (chapters 2 and 3), who are symbolized by the seven stars in the right hand of the exalted Son of Man (1:20). A second category of references is to the seven trumpet-angels (8:2), who introduce the seven scenes of the second vision of earthly events (8:6–11:19). And the third category of references is to the seven censer-angels (15:6–8), who introduce the seven scenes in the third vision of events on earth (16:1–21). One of these censer-angels is referred to again in 17:1 and 21:9. Each of these three categories has a group of seven angels to whom a different task is assigned: the angels of the seven churches, the angels with the trumpets, and the angels holding the seven censers. *Does this mean that there are three different groups of angels, making twenty-one in all? Or do the same seven angels fulfill all the functions in the three categories of references?* The use of the article (τούς, 8:2) may help to determine the answer, as well as to suggest a possible identification of the angels. (CC pp. 214-218)

The article first appears in the mention of the seven trumpet-angels (8:2, 6). The use of the article here serves as a “pointer” to these angels as a definite, known group, either because they are well-known beyond the literary work involved or because they have already been mentioned earlier in the literary work. It could be that the article is used by John to point his readers to the group of seven archangels known (as described above) in Jewish tradition. *Or he could have—and this is the interpretation of this commentary—used it to point to a group of seven angels mentioned earlier in Revelation.* That means that *John uses the article in 8:2, 6 to tell his readers and hearers that the seven trumpet-angels are to be identified with the seven angels of the churches.* (CC pp. 214-218)

When John introduces the seven censer-angels in 15:1, he does not use the article. This may suggest that these censer-angels are not the same as the trumpet-angels and the seven angels of the churches, but rather a second group of seven angels. However, the absence of the article in 15:1 does not of itself rule out the possibility that the seven censer-angels are also the seven trumpet-

angels, as well as the angels of the seven churches. When a substantive, in this case the seven censer-angels, is well known because of previous appearances, the article is not needed to make a substantive definite. Thus the absence of the article when the seven censer-angels are introduced (15:1) may actually identify these seven angels with the previously known seven angels, who are the angels of the churches and of the trumpets. (CC pp. 214-218)

The seven censer-angels have a unique dress (15:6), while there is no description of the dress of the trumpet-angels. Another difference between these two groups of angels is that the seven censer-angels receive their assigned mission from God through one of the four winged creatures (15:7), while the trumpet-angels begin their tasks (8:6) after the introduction of the angel of the incense altar (8:3–5). These differences could suggest that these are two different groups of angels. However, the differences could just as well demonstrate that the same group of angels has a different role later. The same group of seven angels introduces the scenes of the second vision (8:6–11:19) by means of trumpets, and also the scenes of the third vision (15:1–16:21) by means of censers. (CC pp. 214-218)

*It is the interpretation of this commentary that there is only one group of seven angels fulfilling three different roles: in chapters 2–3 they are the messengers to the seven churches; in 8:6–9:21 and 11:15–19 they are the mediating angels of the seven trumpets; and in chapters 15–16 they are the mediating angels of the seven censers.* (CC pp. 214-218)

The identification of the trumpet-angels with the angels of the seven churches agrees with the purpose and subject matter of the second earthly vision and its seven scenes, which are introduced by the trumpet-angels. While the first vision of earthly events, introduced by the seven seals, had as its purpose the assurance that the church will be defended and kept in her faith no matter what she suffers, the purpose of the second earthly vision is the assurance that God will protect the church in such a way and manner that she will be enabled to carry out her mission—again, no matter what she suffers. As the trumpet-angels introduce each scene in the second vision, the plagues that are unleashed have as their purpose to strike in particular the *unbelieving* portion of the human race (9:4), all in the service of aiding the church in her mission (9:20; cf. 11:3–6). Who better to introduce these scenes than the angels of the seven churches? In the whole context of the prophetic message of Revelation, and in particular within the second earthly vision in relationship to the rest of the message, *it thus seems better to interpret the trumpet-angels as the angels of the seven churches rather than the seven archangels of Jewish tradition.* (CC pp. 214-218)

Intertestamental Jewish literature names up to seven chief angels in heaven (see, e.g. 1 Enoch 20:1-8). (TLSB))

*seven trumpets.* In OT times the trumpet served to announce important events and give signals in time of war. The seven trumpets of Rev 8–9; 11:15–19 announce a series of plagues more severe than the seals but not as completely devastating as the bowls (ch. 16). (CSB)

Seven trumpets were sounded to bring about the fall of the walls of the wicked city Jericho. Indeed, the end of the world will be heralded with the sound of the sound of the “trumpet of God which will be the last trumpet. The return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead will be the events that bring this age to a close. (LL)

Trumpets were given to the seven angels. With the sounding of his trumpet each angel in turn introduces events to take place on earth. Trumpets in the ancient world were used not so much in musical entertainment but as instruments to give signals for the initiation of events like battles in a war or to accompany announcements of important events. In the OT we find the following uses of the trumpet. In Num 10:1–10 trumpets were to be used to call the Israelites for assembly before the tabernacle, to signal the camp to move, to remind Yahweh of his people in war so that he would save them, and in festival worship with sacrifices so that Yahweh would remember his people. They were used also at the coronation of kings (1 Ki 1:34, 39; 2 Ki 9:13). And trumpets were blown as the people marched around Jericho (Josh 6:4–9, 13, 16, 20). But in particular trumpets are referred to in the announcement of eschatological events. For example, the great day of Yahweh is likened to the day of the trumpet (Zeph 1:14–16), that is, a trumpet will be a part of that which will announce its coming and arrival. In Is 27:13 the blowing of a trumpet heralds the promised deliverance of Israel. In Zech 9:14 the sound of a trumpet attends the appearance of the Lord in judgment against the enemies of Israel and at the same time announces the deliverance of his people. The sounding of the trumpet serves, then, to draw attention to the coming judgment of God over the wicked, and also to signal the coming salvation of his people. (CC pp. 218-219)

In 4 Ezra 6:23 a loud blast of a trumpet will announce the coming of the Lord in judgment, which judgment will be accompanied by plagues of various kinds (4 Ezra 6:18–22). When people hear the trumpet blast they will be filled with terror (4 Ezra 6:23). The Apocalypse of Abraham 31:1–3 says that God will sound a trumpet to announce the coming of his “chosen one” who will summon his people and judge the wicked with the fires of hell. Thus in both the OT and in Jewish tradition, trumpets are associated with the eschatological coming of the Lord God in judgment, which judgment results in the vindication and deliverance of his faithful people. (CC pp. 218-219)

The NT continues this tradition of the OT and of Judaism. At the second coming of the Lord Christ, angels will be sent out with a great trumpet (σάλπιγξ) to gather God’s elect (Mt 24:29–31). A trumpet sound will accompany the resurrection at the End (1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16). In Revelation the voice of the exalted Lord

Christ is likened to the sound of a trumpet (1:10; 4:1). The remainder of the references to trumpets in Revelation are all in connection with the trumpet-angels—with one exception. Rev 18:22 states that, because of God's judgment, never again will the sound of trumpeters (σαλπιστῶν) be heard in Babylon. (CC pp. 218-219)

The trumpets given to the seven angels here in 8:2 are to be used to announce various plagues, both natural and demonic, which will strike the human race—in particular those who do not belong to God. The purpose of these acts of God's judgment is to move people to repentance (9:20–21). Such acts of judgment, the plagues, aid the church in her ministry of announcing the judgment of God (Law) against human sin and rebellion, and this in the end serves the proclamation of the Gospel to those who are brought to repentance by the Law (10:11; 11:3–12). The trumpets, and the plagues of God's judgment which they herald, thus point to the judgment and deliverance in the great day of the Lord at the end of this world (10:7; 17:1; 21:9). (CC pp. 218-219)

Why do the angels use trumpets and not loud voices (as an angel does in 5:2; cf. 14:6–7, 9; 18:1–2; 19:17)? Because the exalted Son of Man speaks with a trumpet-like voice (1:10; 4:1), the trumpets given to the angels demonstrate that the angels act within and under the mediation of the Lord Christ even though he now no longer stands before John as the visual mediator of the message (cf. 8:13). (CC pp. 218-219)

**8:3 ANOTHER ANGEL** – Before the seven trumpet-angels can begin to mediate the second earthly vision, an angel enters who carries out an action which prepares the way for them to begin their task. It is “another” (ἄλλος) angel (not one of the seven) who enters the heavenly scene of God's throne (cf. 8:2). He takes his position by standing before (over?) the altar (ἐπὶ τοῦ θουσιαστηρίου). Here the altar is clearly the incense altar and not a sacrificial or burnt offering altar. (CC pp. 219-220)

*censer.* A firepan used to hold live charcoal for the burning of incense (cf. Ex 27:3; 1Ki 7:50). (CSB)

The angel has a golden incense censer, filled with a large quantity of incense. The incense censers of the tabernacle of Moses were made of brass (Ex 27:3), while most of those of Solomon's temple were of gold (1 Ki 7:50; 2 Chr 4:22) and some were also of silver (2 Ki 25:15). Here in Rev 8:3 the censer is of gold. The incense has the purpose of attending the prayers of the saints. As the smoke and sweet odor rises from the smoldering incense on the altar, so the prayers of God's people rise to his heavenly throne. The angel here is analogous to the priests who daily ministered in the holy place of the temple in Jerusalem, offering up incense while the people before the temple prayed (Lk 1:9–10; cf. Ex 30:7–8). As God—in anthropomorphic language—loves the fragrant smell of offerings and of incense (Gen 8:21; Lev 2:1–2), so he loves the prayers of his saints. For this

reason the psalmist prays that God will accept his prayer as incense (Ps 141:2). Paul says that the gifts of Christian love are a fragrant offering and sacrifice acceptable to God (Phil 4:18). So also are the prayers of God's people. (CC pp. 219-220)

ALTAR – Cf. 6:9. The Jerusalem temple had a similar altar, on which incense was offered (cf. 1 Chron. 28:18). (TLSB)

*with the prayers.*† Most translations consider the incense to be mingled “with” prayers. The Greek for this phrase also allows a translation that takes the incense “to be” the prayers (“incense ... consisting of the prayers”); also in v. 4. (CSB)

At Revelation 6:9-10, the sainted martyrs are depicted as praying for vindication. Here however, John identifies the intercessors as God's people both in heaven and on earth. (TLSB)

**8:4** Although the angel is involved in presenting the prayers of the saints to God, he does not make them acceptable. The Jewish apocalyptic concept of angels as mediators finds no place in the NT. (CSB)

As the smoke and the fragrant odor of the incense, together with the prayers, ascend to God, the angel takes the incense censer and fills it with fire from the altar. The perfect tense of the verb *ἔιληφεν* (from *λαμβάνω*) both heightens the drama of the scene and suggests the continuity of the results of the action of the angel. That is, the angel takes fire from the altar and pours it out on the earth, and the results of this action continue after the angels sound their trumpets and initiate the scenes of the second earthly vision. The angel fills his censer with the fire and pours it out upon the earth. The trumpet-angels then begin their mediation of the scenes while the other angel, bit by bit, continues to pour out the fire on earth. He continues to pour out his censer, having filled it once from the altar, while the seven angels, one after the other, blow their trumpets. The other angel's censer is not completely emptied until the seventh angel has sounded his trumpet. Then, with the seventh trumpet-angel, the wrath of God is completed, and, as the reader may envision it, also the other angel's censer of fire is emptied (see Rev 10:7; cf. 15:1). (CC p. 220)

**8:5** HURLED IT ON THE EARTH – Signals the seven angels to begin blowing their trumpets. (TLSB)

When the angel empties his censer and thus casts fire upon the earth, it is an action of judgment. A similar action is recorded in Ezek 10:1–8. In a vision Ezekiel sees a man dressed in linen who is commanded by God to go among the cherubim of God's heavenly throne and fill his hands with coals of fire. He is then to scatter the burning coals over the city of Jerusalem (Ezek 10:2, 6–7). The scattering of the burning coals indicated the judgment of God and the resulting

punishment and suffering (Ezek 11:1–2). In the OT fire often represents or manifests the “unapproachable and overpowering holiness of God’s person and glory,” and as such he “cannot be approached except by cleansing and purification” (Ex 19:10–19; cf. Heb 12:18–21). In particular the fire here in Rev 8:5 images God’s fierce and consuming anger, which can sorely punish and even destroy all before it on the face of the earth. When David was delivered from the hand of Saul, he sang a hymn of praise in which he declared how God’s anger blazed like a consuming fire with burning coals, before which the earth trembled and quaked (2 Sam 22:8–9; cf. Pss 50:3; 97:3). So here in Rev 8:5, as the fire hits the earth, it will tremble and shake under God’s judgment, resulting in all manner of suffering for the human race (8:6–13). (CC pp. 220-221)

As the angel poured out the fire on earth “there came about thunders and noises and lightning flashes and an earthquake” (8:5), that is, a great trembling and shaking of the earth occurred. In Revelation descriptions similar to the one of “thunders and noises and lightning flashes and an earthquake” (βρονταὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ ἀστραπαὶ καὶ σεισμὸς) here in 8:5 are used only in reference to God’s majesty and awesome presence (see also 4:5; 11:19; 16:18). These descriptions are related to and reminiscent of God’s awesome and fearful presence on Mt. Sinai. In Ex 19:16–18 when God came down to meet his people, the holy mountain was covered with a thick cloud and there were lightning flashes and thunder (קִלְתָּ וּבְרָקִים; LXX: φωναὶ καὶ ἀστραπαὶ). The smoke was like the smoke of a furnace (cf. Rev 9:2) as God descended on Sinai in a fire, and the whole mountain was violently shaken. Though involving natural phenomena known in this world, this display and demonstration of God’s holy presence was so awesome and fearful that the people of Israel were terrified (Ex 20:18; Deut 9:18–21; Heb 12:18–21). In Rev 4:5 these phenomena, which draw attention to the awesome and terrifying presence of the holy God, were present when John saw the majesty of the One sitting on the heavenly throne. Here in 8:5, in connection with the angel pouring out fire on the earth, this extraordinary display of natural phenomena attending God’s majestic presence attests to the holiness of God, whose *anger* is being poured out on the fallen earth. As Mt. Sinai shook violently because of God’s presence, so the whole earth will be violently shaken (cf. Heb 12:25–29) by the plagues that will strike the earth with the blowing of the trumpets by the angels (Rev 8:6–13). The fact that these “thunders and noises and lightning flashes and an earthquake” (8:5), signals of God’s holy presence, accompany the casting of this fire upon the earth attests that the judgments introduced by the seven trumpet-angels and caused by the pouring out of the fire (8:5) not only come about because God *permits* them, but even because he *sends* them. The plagues that strike the earth serve his purpose and ultimate glory and are for the benefit of his people, as were the ten plagues that shook ancient Egypt. (CC pp. 220-221)

*thunder ... earthquake.* See note on 4:5. (CSB)

### *The Trumpets*

**<sup>6</sup> Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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, <sup>9</sup> a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. <sup>10</sup> 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— <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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!”**

### **The First Four Trumpet-Angels Upheavals of Nature**

After the priestly action of the angel before the incense altar and after he emptied the incense censer of its fire onto the earth (8:3–5), the seven angels with their trumpets were ready to begin introducing the seven scenes of the second vision of events on earth. The prayers of the saints had been offered as sweet incense, and now God will answer the pleadings of his people as each angel blows his trumpet (cf. 6:9–11). The plagues introduced and ushered in by the first four trumpet-angels are reminiscent of some of the features of the judgments and plagues that struck Egypt (Exodus 7–10) (CC pp. 224-225)

Since the first four seals of the second vision were all events that took place on earth before the judgment, it is likely that these four trumpets describe the same area and time period. Then, if we view all four trumpets as a single picture, without forcing meaning on every detail, we see that this whole section describes natural disasters on earth. (CSB)

The first four trumpets of the seven angels are God’s warning to the church that the degeneration of the natural world signals its final destruction on judgment day. This thought aligns with what Scripture teaches. “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (Romans 8:22). It is not hard to see how sin has taken its toll in the created world with forest fires, pollution of waterways, the destruction of wildlife, and sun-darkening smog. The rate of natural destruction and the appearance of great natural disasters will accelerate as the end nears. (PBC p 94)

**8:6** Builds dramatic tension by underlining the gravity of what follows. (TLSB)

**8:7 SOUNDED HIS TRUMPET** – As was true with the breaking of each of seven seals (cf. 6:1, 3, 5), so also here successive calamities are unleashed by trumpets blasts. (TLSB)

*hail and fire mixed with blood.* Cf. the imagery of the seventh plague on Egypt (Ex 9:13–25; cf. Eze 38:22). (CSB)

Recalls two of the plagues visited upon Egypt. They were a clarion call to repentance, yet went unheeded by Pharaoh. (TLSB)

At the sound of the first trumpet “hail and fire, [both] having been mixed in blood” (Rev 8:7) were poured out on the earth. In Ex 9:13–33 a plague of hail struck the land of Egypt. As the hail rained on Egypt, it was accompanied by thunder and flashes of lightning (Ex 9:23–24). So destructive was the hail storm that it crushed everything in the fields, plants and trees, as well as hurting animals and human beings (Ex 9:25). However, no blood is mentioned. Perhaps here in Rev 8:7 the “blood refers to the awesome color of the storm rather than the fire and destruction which the lightning would cause.” In the Sibylline Oracles (5:375–85) the imagery of fire and blood falling on people like rain from heaven symbolizes the destruction of warfare on the land and people. Whether one interprets the hail and fire mixed with blood as a natural phenomenon of the elements or as a symbol of the horrors of warfare on the land, the devastation to the earth, with its foliage of plants and trees and grasses, is catastrophic. One third of the earth’s vegetation is burned and ruined. While warfare is terribly destructive to the earth’s vegetation, so as to leave it desolate and unproductive for years, here in 8:7 the emphasis is more likely on the destruction caused by the natural elements of nature. However all this is understood, all through the time period covered by Revelation the earth’s surface will be unable to yield produce according to its Edenic original capacity. As a result humanity will suffer from such a devastation of the earth’s plant life. (CC p. 225)

*A third of the earth was burned up.* This fraction indicates that the punishment announced by the trumpets is not yet complete and final (the same fraction appears in each of the next three plagues: vv. 8–9, 10–11, 12). A smaller fraction (a fourth) of devastation accompanied the opening of the fourth seal (6:8). (CSB)

“A third” (8:7) suggests partial, not total destruction. The expression “a third” appears in the OT with a similar meaning.

For example, in Ezek 5:8–12 God tells the prophet that because of his judgment of Jerusalem a third of its population will be destroyed by famine, a third will be killed by the sword, and a third will be scattered to the winds and pursued by the sword (Ezek 5:12; cf. Zech 13:7–9). This prophecy of judgment is introduced by Ezekiel performing the symbolical action of dividing the hair shorn from his head



into three parts: a third to be burned, a third to be struck by a sword, and a third to be scattered to the wind (Ezek 5:1–2). Here in Revelation 8 “a third” indicates that at any given moment in history some parts of the earth’s vegetation will be affected. The expression “a third” thus appears throughout the second earthly vision in connection with each of the first four trumpet-angels. Each of the plagues, as it strikes the earth and its environment, destroys “a third” of what the plague hits. While the first four plagues (plagues of seemingly natural forces) strike the earth directly, humanity is also affected as a result (see 8:11). But in the fifth and sixth plagues (which are not disturbances of nature but demonic in character), a third of the human race is directly affected (9:15, 18). All through the prophetic time period of Revelation (between Christ’s ascension and return), the plagues of this second sevenfold vision will destroy a part of natural life as well as a large portion of the human race. (CC pp. 225-226)

**8:8 MOUNTAIN ABLAZE** – The second trumpet-angel introduces a scene in which John sees “a gigantic mountain burning with fire” that “was cast into the sea” (8:8). Perhaps it can be imagined as a huge ball of fire being thrown into the bodies of water. Because of this plague a third of the seas become blood, and, as a result, a third of the seas’ creatures perish and a third of the ships are destroyed—that is, a third of man’s commercial activity as well as human life is affected. This is somewhat reminiscent of the first plague that struck ancient Egypt: the plague of blood (Ex 7:14–24). All the rivers and bodies of water in Egypt were turned into blood. Fish died and the water could not be used for drinking. (CC p. 226)

*sea turned into blood.* Reminiscent of the first plague on Egypt (Ex 7:20–21). This is an eschatological judgment rather than natural pollution resulting from widespread volcanic upheavals. (CSB)

**8:8-9 – A THIRD OF THE LIVING CREATURES IN THE SEA...SHIPS WERE DESTROYED** – Further evokes the Nile plague, since when that river turned to blood, the creatures living within it died (Ex. 7:21). Amazingly, the people surviving this plague do not repent. (TLSB)

As John later meditated on what he had seen here in Rev 8:8–9, did he think of “some movements among the volcanic islands in the Aegean,” with which he was most likely familiar, or even of the volcanic eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, which devastated the Bay of Naples in A.D. 79? Perhaps he recalled the imagery in Jer 51:24–25: in God’s judgment Babylon, once “the burning mountain ... that destroys the whole earth” would be destroyed like a burned-out mountain. 1 Enoch 18:13–15 depicts seven stars (symbolizing seven evil angels) like burning mountains that had apparently fallen from heaven to the place of imprisonment, that is, hell. The fiery mountain that John sees probably symbolizes natural events that strike the earth’s seas, that is, volcanic eruptions (rather than evil angels). Such hurling masses could readily be described as burning mountains falling into bodies of water. From such eruptions, and to whatever other natural

forces the human imagination can relate such imagery, the earth's bodies of water will be so affected that much of the marine life will be destroyed. And humanity itself will be made to suffer as people traverse the seas. When a third of the seas become blood, it symbolizes this maritime death and destruction. (CC p. 226)

**8:10** *great star ... fell.* See notes on 6:13; 9:1. (CSB)

Some scholars see a parallel with Jesus' seeing Satan falling from heaven like lightning (Luke 10:18; cf. Rev. 9:1-2; 12:9). Others argue that this simply refers to the kind of celestial disturbances that will accompany the final days (cf. 6:13; Mk. 13:25). (TLSB)

With the blowing of the third trumpet John sees a burning star described as "a great meteor ... flashing across the sky like a blazing torch." It strikes the rivers and springs, that is, the bodies of fresh water. As a result, the fresh waters of the earth are embittered and made unfit to drink, perhaps even poisoned, so that people die from drinking their water. "From heaven," ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (8:10), suggests not only the star's place of natural origin, but also metaphorically the origin of the judgment which the star represents. The judgment is from God, and the star falling *from heaven* signals God's involvement in the sending of the plagues, just as was the case with the plagues of Egypt (Ex 9:1-3; 11:1). All through the time period of Revelation (from Christ's ascension to his return) a portion of the fresh waters of the earth will be so polluted as to make them unfit for human consumption. (CC p. 227)

**8:11** *Wormwood.* A plant with a strong, bitter taste (see NIV text note). It is used here as a metaphor for calamity and sorrow (see Pr 5:3-4; Jer 9:15; La 3:19). It is not poisonous, but its bitterness suggests death. (CSB)

A very bitter herb, thus a symbol associated with judgment throughout the OT (cf. 3:15, 19). (TLSB) LSB – 436 v. 2

*waters turned bitter.* The reverse of the miracle at Marah, where bitter waters were made sweet (Ex 15:25). (CSB)

The falling star is given the name "Wormwood" (ὁ Ἄψινθος). In the OT לְעֵנָה, often translated "wormwood," is a kind of bitter poison. As a divine punishment, it represents sorrow and bitterness in the human heart (e.g., Lam 3:19; cf. Prov 5:3-4). In Jer 9:15 (MT 9:14) the prophet is told that the Lord God has given the people wormwood to eat and poisoned water to drink because they had sinned against him. Thus embittered and poisoned waters represent lamentation and sorrow on the one hand, and on the other hand, to drink them means to receive God's judgment and punishment. However, God in his mercy can restore such bitter and poisonous waters to their original purity and sweetness so that they again become suitable for human use, as he did in the case of Moses and the

Israelites in the desert (Ex 15:24–25). The “third of the waters” (Rev 8:11) can also mean, then, that, according to God’s will that permits but also limits the extent of the plague, not all the fresh waters will be embittered. But the emphasis here in 8:11 is that a portion of the waters at any given time will be so polluted as to be unfit for human consumption. (CC p. 227)

**8:12** *a third of the sun was struck.*† In the ninth plague on Egypt, thick darkness covered the land for three days (Ex 10:21–23). References to the Egyptian plagues suggest that in Revelation we have the final exodus of God’s people from the bondage of a world controlled by hostile powers, signifying final deliverance for God’s people and much suffering for the people of the world (cf. v. 13: “the inhabitants of the earth”). (CSB)

At the sound of the fourth trumpet a third part of the heavenly bodies is struck—so much so that the sun, moon, and stars are not able to give their full light and brightness to the earth (cf. Job 9:7). This causes a third part of the day and night to be darkened. In the ninth plague that struck ancient Egypt, a darkness came over the whole land, a total darkness for three days (Ex 10:21–23). Here in Rev 8:12 the darkness is not total nor is there a time limit, for this partial darkness lasts throughout the period of Revelation’s prophecy (from Christ’s ascension to his return). It is difficult to relate this partial darkness to human experience, for, as Swete says, “By this partial eclipse of the lights of heaven a partial darkness would obviously be produced, but not a shortening of the duration of daylight and moonlight and starlight.” Partial or total eclipses of the sun or moon are, of course, common. However, eclipses of the sun and moon do not seem to correspond completely to this inability of the heavenly bodies to produce their full light for the benefit of life on earth. Could it be that, throughout the time period that Revelation covers, clouds and smog and pollution of the atmosphere will so cover the earth that it will be increasingly difficult for the light of the heavenly bodies to penetrate? (CC pp. 227-228)

TURNED DARK – Throughout the Bible darkness is often used as a metaphor for human sin and wickedness and for God’s judgment, in contradistinction to light, which symbolizes God and the purity and holiness he would graciously give to mankind (see Jn 1:5, 9; 1 Jn 2:8–11). In Is 13:9–10, when the day of the Lord comes, the sun and moon and stars will be darkened and not shine forth. However, even if what John saw in Rev 8:12 could be understood as a symbol of this *spiritual* darkness (as demonstrated by the darkening of the heavenly bodies in the day of the Lord), that does not seem to relate to what John here describes. For here in 8:12 the heavenly bodies are not totally destroyed or made incapable of producing their light—as they will be in the End (see 6:12–14; cf. Joel 2:31). Perhaps even more important, the plague that hits the heavenly lights is not so much a *symbol* of the darkness of God’s judgment as it is a *sign* of his judgment. The *actual* heavenly bodies are being struck, and, because they are no longer able to give their full light on earth, life in general and mankind in particular will suffer accordingly. (CC p. 228)

Whatever this plague of the heavenly bodies implies and entails, it is a part of the total picture of what the first four trumpet-angels introduce. All through the time period covered by the message of Revelation, nature and its components are being physically struck, and, as a result, humanity is made to suffer. This is to display God's anger and judgment against the human race, *for the purpose of moving human beings to repentance* before it is too late to repent (see 9:20–21). In particular, the partial darkening of the heavenly bodies points to that End when it will no longer be possible to repent. That is, this partial darkening is a sign of God's judgment, a reminder all through the time period from Christ's ascension to the end of this world at his return. It is a visible sign which urges all people to *repent* while there is still time, for the *total* darkness of God's final judgment will soon envelope the earth, and then repentance will no longer be possible (see Rev 10:5–7, 11; Jn 9:4). (CC p. 228)

Another plague visited upon Egypt is evoked. (TLSB)

**8:13** Transition from the first four trumpet blasts to the last three. The cry of a bird of prey also emphasizes the horror of what is being unleashed. (TLSB)

The partial darkness of the plague of the heavenly bodies, together with the plagues of the first three trumpet-angels, “anticipates the transition from divine warnings” by way of these natural disasters “to *demonic* woes” which will be shown to John in the scenes of the remaining three trumpet-angels. To emphasize this transition from natural calamities to those that are demonic, and then to the End itself, an eagle flying in the highest point of heaven cries out in a loud voice for all to hear, “Woe, woe, woe to those dwelling upon the earth because of the remaining” three trumpet-angels and what they will cause (8:13). So terrible and horrifying (in comparison to the scenes of the first four trumpet-angels) will be the scenes which the last three angels will introduce that they are called woes. (CC pp. 228-229)

AN EAGLE – ἄετός is a bird of prey like a vulture or an eagle. Depending on the context it could be either. Here, because the bird of prey is *announcing for God* the coming woes, it is probably better to view it as an eagle (see 4:7; 12:14). However, if the woes causing death are emphasized, then it would be better to understand it as a vulture, which feeds on carrion (cf. Ezek 39:4). (CC p. 223)

This eagle is the only earthly creature in Revelation which God uses to speak a word. In all other instances where God speaks through an intermediary, an angel speaks (E.g., Rev. 5:2; 7:2; 9:13; 10:1, 3; 14:6-7, 9; 18:1-2). Since angels are always used elsewhere, it would be natural to expect an angel here in 8:13 to fly “in mid-heaven” and to speak for God a word of warning to the human race. In 14:6–7 such an angel does fly “in mid-heaven” (ἐν μεσουρανήματι as in 8:13) and cries out in “a loud voice” (φωνῇ μεγάλῃ as in 8:13). And he also cries out a similar warning to the inhabitants on earth to repent, actually, “to fear God and

give to him glory, because the moment of his judgment has come” (ὅτι ἦλθεν ἡ ὥρα τῆς κρίσεως αὐτοῦ, 14:7). However, the angel in 14:6–7 proclaims not only judgment but also urges the people on earth to worship God the Creator, and he has the eternal Gospel (εὐγγέλιον αἰώνιον), which is to be proclaimed to all people. Thus the roles of the eagle in 8:13 and of the angel in 14:6–7 are not identical, for the one proclaims only woes while the other proclaims both judgment and grace. Still, one might well have expected an angel here in 8:13. (CC p. 229)

In Mt 24:28 Jesus refers to an ἀετός, an “eagle” or “vulture,” in connection with the finality of God’s judgment. This would be somewhat similar to the bird here in John’s vision, though the eagle in Mt 24:28 does not speak. That the inspired writer would see and hear an eagle as a spokesman for God would not be out of keeping with what he saw elsewhere in Revelation. For in the heavenly throne scene of God’s glory three of the four winged creatures are pictured as similar to earthly creatures: like a lion, like a calf, and “like a flying eagle” (ὅμοιον ἀετῷ πετομένῳ, 4:7), and they do speak for God (6:1, 3, 5, 7). Perhaps here in 8:13 the Lord God used an eagle to speak the woes in connection with the last three trumpet-angels because the eagle serves as a transition from the natural plagues to those of demonic character. The natural plagues in the scenes introduced by the first four trumpet-angels are bad enough, but the cry of the eagle signals that the remaining three plagues are going to be far worse. (CC p. 229)

*Woe! Woe! Woe ... !* † Implying that the three remaining trumpets will usher in developments (physical calamities or false teachings) even more dangerous than the first four. These three woes correspond to the three final trumpet plagues (see 9:12; 11:14 [10:1–11:13 is a parenthesis]; the seven bowl judgments of chs. 15–16 constitute the third woe). The woes fall on the unbelieving world (the phrase “the inhabitants of the earth” refers to the wicked; see note on 6:10), not on the righteous (see 9:4). (CSB)

Repeatedly introduces oracle of judgment in OT and NT prophecy (cf. Mt. 11:21; 18:7; 23:13). (TLSB)

The eagle cries out “woe, woe, woe” (8:13), one woe for each of the three following scenes in this earthly vision. The three woes of the flying eagle point to the horrors of the demonic plagues of the fifth and sixth trumpet-angels (9:1–21) and to the horror and fear of the unbeliever in the judgment at the End (11:15, 18). The threefold woe suggests that the situation is very, very grave. (CC p. 230)

TRUMPETS...THREE ANGELS – The eagle cries out the three woes in reference to “the remaining voices of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to blow their trumpets” (8:13). “The trumpet,” τῆς σάλπιγγος, of “the three angels who are about to blow their trumpets” is singular. The plural might have been expected. The singular here could refer to *the one* trumpet, the trumpet-like

voice of the exalted Lord Christ (1:10; 4:1). “The *trumpet*” (8:13) that the last three angels will blow is on behalf of Jesus Christ, for it is in his stead that they sound their individual trumpets as they mediate the woes. (CC p. 230)