

1. **Introduction:** The Lamb of God opens the final seal of the scroll which contains God's sovereign and unalterable plan for the culmination of history.

- The scroll is secured with 7 seals. When the 7<sup>th</sup> seal is opened, it is commonly held that the scroll's entire contents become accessible.
- In the scroll, God's judgment wrath at sin is depicted as three sequential, intensifying cycles of seven: Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls. Believers do not suffer God's wrath directly since Jesus took believer's sins and the wrath due those sins to Himself, paid the penalty, and suffered the wrath.
- The "seal judgments" destroy peace on earth through basic destructive situations that occur repeatedly between the first and second coming of Christ - war, murder, and natural disasters.
- The seals, trumpets, and bowls are 3 sets of judgments directed at the unredeemed and their sins. These judgments don't directly impact believers but can cause collateral damage. This is particularly true when God's wrath takes the form of natural disasters, virulent diseases, mob actions.
- For their steadfast belief, believers may be mistreated, tortured and killed by unbelievers.

2. **Examples:** Martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7), James (Acts 12), Antipas (Rev 2), the souls under the altar (Rev 6), Peter dying upside down on a cross, Paul beheaded, the martyrs of Hebrews 11, etc.

- As far as I know, God never promised believers a risk-free life on earth. Quite the contrary.
- Jesus said those who follow Him will inevitably face tribulation, persecution, and the need to "carry their cross" (John 16:33, Luke 14:27).
- Suffering for Christ is not pointless; it identifies the sufferer with Him and demonstrates faithfulness. Jesus reminds that these earthly sufferings are temporary. God's glorious promise is that whatever happens to their bodies, every believer's soul is safe and secure "in Christ."

3. **Revelation 8:1-5:** *When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. <sup>2</sup> Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. <sup>3</sup> And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, <sup>4</sup> and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. <sup>5</sup> 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.*

- As depicted in Revelation 4-5, God's throne room is typically filled with continuous, enthusiastic, reverent worship. But when the seventh seal is opened there is silence for about half an hour. Why?
- From Psalms: ***"Be still, and know that I am God."*** (Psalm 46:10). During the silence, the prayers of the saints rise to heaven. The silence also serves as a dramatic period of calm between the seal and trumpet judgments. The pause provides time to reflect that God is the source of true justice.

4. **Judgment In Revelation:** God's judgment and wrath against sin seem so severe to some people that they turn away from Him, thinking if God is good how can His wrath be so severe?

- **God's Nature:** There is no evil in God! His judgments are just. His intrinsic nature opposes evil and He acts to ultimately eliminate it completely. Since Adam and Eve's sin, both good and evil are always present in human affairs. God is never the source of evil, but He controls the evil in His fallen creation such that the ultimate result conforms to His Plan to restore all things to their original, holy, as created, state.

5. **God's Wrath:** God directs His wrath at sin to control and ultimately eliminate evil from creation.

- How did evil enter God's originally holy creation? In the spiritual world, sin entered through the prideful rebellion of Satan and some angels who followed him. In the physical world, sin entered through Adam and Eve's disobedience following Eve's temptation by Satan.
- For humans, sin brought both spiritual death (separation from God) and physical death (loss of biological life and physical decay).
- God's wrath is directed at sin and sin's damage to His human creatures. Since they acquired a "sin nature," humans by nature sin. Until glorification, redemption controls but does not eliminate sin.
- God's great enduring love for His human creatures is shown in that though they sinned against Him, causing their spiritual death, He provided a way for redemption and new spiritual life.
- God's divine wrath is directed at those who refuse to acknowledge Him and His principles. His wrath is unrelenting toward those who oppose Him and His people.
- God's wrath is not pleasant to contemplate nor to experience. His purpose in revealing the reality of His wrath against sin seems to be to show sin's futility and lead people to repent, obey, and enjoy what God has prepared for those who obediently follow Him.

6. **A Question:** Does God's judgment against sin seem to you to be excessive and cruel, about right, or too lenient? If we truly believe God is Who He says He, that He is sovereign, exists in infinite glory and majesty, holiness and purity, perhaps a more pertinent question to ask is, when a person sins, why doesn't God immediately obliterate them?

- God has great compassionate love for sinners. He is God of "second chances." When He calls, turn to Him and become like Him! Sin is like a slap to God's face, like yelling at Him – God, you think You can tell me what to do, but I do what I want! It doesn't work! God is Sovereign.

7. **Seven Angels Given Trumpets:** The seven angels standing before God were each given a trumpet. Then another angel stood at the altar with a golden censer and was given incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints. The smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints rose before God.

- *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. (8:5)*
- So, God responded to the prayers of the saints with judgment fires from heaven, accompanied by storms and an earthquake which signals God is coming in judgment.

8. **Comparison:** The 7 trumpet judgments seem to be related to the plagues inflicted on the Egyptians.

- Most of the Exodus plagues are in some form reflected in the judgments of Revelation. For example, the first 4 trumpet judgments are like the pattern of specific Egyptian plagues.
- The Egyptian plagues were historical events whose purpose was to cause Pharaoh to free the Hebrew slaves. But the trumpet judgments are eschatological events whose purpose is to demonstrate God's supremacy and warn unbelievers to repent before the final judgment. Differences between the trumpet judgements and the Egyptian plagues are both expected and seen.

9. **Differences:** (1.) The Egyptian plagues affected only Egypt and were for a specific reason (freeing the Hebrew slaves).

- (2.) The trumpet judgments are more universal in scope though they still affect only 1/3 of the earth.
- (3.) Some of the trumpet judgments are apocalyptic versions of the Egyptian originals. The locusts in the 5<sup>th</sup> trumpet judgment are described as demonic forces having the power of scorpions.
- (4.) Some of the Egyptian plagues such as gnats, flies, and boils do not seem to be directly involved in the trumpet judgments. However, boils appear later in the "bowl" judgments of Revelation 16.

Plague	10 Plagues of Egypt (Exodus)	7 Trumpet Judgments (Revelation)
Water to Blood	All Nile water turns to blood (1st Plague)	1/3 of the sea and 1/3 of fresh water affected (2nd & 3rd Trumpets)
Hail/Fire	Fiery hail destroys crops/livestock (7th Plague)	Hail and fire mixed with blood burns 1/3 of earth (1st Trumpet)
Locusts	Literal locusts consume all plants (8th Plague)	Demonic locusts from the Abyss torment humans (5th Trumpet)
Darkness	Total darkness over Egypt for 3 days (9th Plague)	1/3 of sun, moon, and stars are darkened (4th Trumpet)
Extent	Total local destruction in Egypt	Partial global destruction (limited to one-third)
People	Israelites often spared from the plagues	Those with the "seal of God" are protected from certain torments

10. **Revelation 8:6-12:** *Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them. <sup>7</sup> The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up. <sup>8</sup> The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became 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 blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell 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 became wormwood, and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter. <sup>12</sup> The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.*

11. **Question:** In Exodus, the plagues on Egypt are presented as literal realities. Are the descriptions in Revelation 8 intended as realistic descriptions or symbolic representations? Consider one by one.

12. **Trumpet Judgments:** In the first 4 trumpet judgments, the judgment involves degrading nature. In verse 8:7, as the first trumpet is blown, hail and fire mixed with blood followed. Actual or symbolic?

- This certainly could be an unusual but literal hailstorm. Clearly such a storm would not be difficult for God. But it is also possible the description is symbolic using apocalyptic language.

13. **Apocalyptic Language:** Of necessity, all language is “symbolic.” The apocalyptic language of Revelation is difficult for modern readers primarily because the symbols are unfamiliar.
- Egyptian hieroglyphs or Sumerian cuneiforms would pose similar interpretation difficulties.
  - Apocalyptic language was common in the prophetic language of the OT and widely used for a few hundred years in non-biblical writings ending about 100 AD.
14. **Example:** Consider **Psalm 18** - Written by David on the day God delivered him from his enemies.
- *<sup>6</sup> In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears. <sup>7</sup> Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because he was angry. <sup>8</sup> Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him. <sup>9</sup> He bowed the heavens and came down; thick darkness was under his feet. <sup>10</sup> He rode on a cherub and flew; he came swiftly on the wings of the wind. <sup>11</sup> He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him, thick clouds dark with water. <sup>12</sup> Out of the brightness before him hailstones and coals of fire broke through his clouds.*
  - David describes God as having ears, voice, nostrils, mouth, and feet, but God is Spirit. The point of David’s anthropomorphic language description of God is to add power to the apocalyptic imagery to convey the truth that God did unexpected and powerful things to deliver David from his enemies.
  - The message is that God often uses unexpected power in unexpected ways to deliver His people.
15. **Some Common Descriptions from Apocalyptic Writing:** (1.) “Coming in the clouds” symbolizes divine judgment, power, and the presence of God (theophany). The cloud usually but not always refers to a “Glory Cloud” (Shekinah) (2.) Cosmic Disruptions (darkened Sun/Moon/Stars) are used to signify the collapse of ruling powers, the breaking of established governments, or national collapse (Ezekiel 32:7-8; Joel 3:15-16). (3.) Earthquakes (a common symbol for shaking or overthrowing social, political, or religious control. (4.) The Sea/Waters often represents chaotic, instability.
- Other common images include (5.) Beast/Monsters symbolize ungodly political empires that persecute the faithful. (6.) Babylon symbolizes the epitome of human worldly power, idolatry, and anti-God society. (7.) Sickle/Harvest represents the separation of the faithful from the unfaithful, usually symbolizing final judgment. (8.) The Four Horsemen represent the coming of war, famine, and death as instruments of divine judgment to bring about the end of an era (perhaps the end of Jewish sacrificial worship in 70 AD).
16. **Old Testament Apocalypse:** The Book of Daniel is the only "full-blown" apocalypse in the Old Testament, but there are significant apocalyptic elements in several other books:
17. **Daniel** - Chapters 7–12 contain fully matured apocalyptic visions of beasts, world empires, and final judgment.
18. **(2.) Ezekiel** - Chapters 1 and 38–39 feature bizarre imagery (four-faced creatures) and the cosmic battle of Gog and Magog.
19. **(3.) Zechariah** - Contains "mini-apocalypses" and symbolic visions of horsemen and heavenly courts.
20. **(4.) Isaiah** - Chapters 24–27 (sometimes called the "Isaiah Apocalypse") and chapter 33 describe cosmic cataclysms and restoration.
21. **(5.) Joel** - Chapter 2 features locust swarms and images of the "Day of the Lord" that serve as precursors to later apocalyptic works.
22. **(6.) Malachi** - Chapter 4 describes the “Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord.”
23. **Next:** Back to Revelation 8:6-12.