

# Introduction to the Seven Trumpets

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**“And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.”** – Revelation 8:2

Please consider four introductory points as we begin our study on the seven trumpets:

- 1. The seven trumpets of Revelation are seven horrible judgments that will impact Earth during the great tribulation.** These judgments will devastate the ecosystems of this planet so completely that Earth will not be able to recover. The book of Revelation describes these judgments as “seven trumpets” because a trumpet will sound in Heaven’s temple each time a judgment occurs. The first four trumpets will occur in rapid succession. These four judgments will be so catastrophic that they will sever the past from the future. Life for everyone on Earth will dramatically change once these events begin. Thousands of cities will be destroyed by fire and water. Twenty-five percent of the world’s population will die during the first few weeks, and global infrastructures such as communication, travel, banking, manufacturing, and shipping will all but disappear. God’s judgments will impose great tribulation on everyone. The first four trumpets will cause the whole world to relate to God in a way that is presently unimaginable.
- 2. The “full cup principle” is a prerequisite to the study of the seven trumpets.** The “full cup principle” is a policy that God consistently uses to manage groups of people. A group of people can be cities like Sodom and Gomorrah, a nation like Israel, a world empire like Medo-Persia, or even the whole world, as in Noah’s day. This principle is fairly easy to understand. When the majority of a group becomes so degenerate and defiant that extended mercy has no redeeming effect, God reveals His love for the innocent victims of sin and future generations. He responds to the current generation by sending warnings and redemptive judgments, so that if possible, His wayward subjects will change course. If His warnings are ignored and His **redemptive** judgments do not produce repentance and reformation, God destroys that group by sending totally **destructive** judgments. This principle explains the appearance and disappearance of civilizations. The full cup principle is found throughout the Bible. For example, God destroyed the world with a flood in Noah’s day, God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah in Abraham’s day, God collapsed the walls of Jericho for Joshua, God destroyed two-thirds of Israel and sent the remainder into Babylonian captivity (605-536 B.C.), and finally, God sent the Romans to destroy Jerusalem in A.D. 70. God will soon apply the “full cup principle” again to the whole world as He did in Noah’s day. The seven trumpets will be redemptive judgments (seven first plagues) and then the [seven bowls](#) (seven last plagues) will be totally destructive.
- 3. God thoughtfully designed the seven trumpets to accomplish many objectives.** One objective is confrontation. God wants to confront the false religions of the world with “gospel truth.” The first four trumpets will set the stage for this confrontation. When billions of people see the sudden destruction of notably wicked places all over Earth and the obliteration of twenty-five percent of the world’s

population, almost everyone will be found in a state of genuine anguish, fearing the wrath of Almighty God. The first four trumpets will produce unimaginable destruction, and the chaos that will follow will be so great within each nation that each government will question whether it will be able to continue functioning. After the first four trumpets occur, the nations of Earth will realize that mankind is dealing with one angry God. All of Earth's political and religious leaders will humbly unite in an all out effort to appease God so that His wrath will immediately cease. Driven by fear and humbled by overwhelming destruction, the religious and political leaders of the world will implement a terribly misguided solution to appease God's wrath. Unfortunately, their solution will stand in direct opposition to what God actually wants, and the confrontation between man's solution and God's plan will begin.

Another objective embedded in the seven trumpets is redemption. The "shock and awe" of the first four trumpets will shatter religious paradigms. All people, despite religious backgrounds, will listen and intelligently consider a gospel that is different from anything they have ever heard. This receptivity to another paradigm will be miraculous given the religious antagonism that has existed for centuries between Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Atheists, Catholics, Protestants, and Pagans. Today, no one religious body can claim that it knows more about Almighty God without being condemned by the other six. God will displace man's arrogance by uniting mankind through fear. Overwhelming destruction will produce unimaginable suffering and hardship. God will level the playing field through humiliation so that people will hear His gospel. This will provide an opening wedge that will cause people to listen to God's servants, the [144,000](#). The [144,000](#) will boldly proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. Thus, every religious and nonreligious nation will hear and thoughtfully consider a gospel which they would have refused to hear at any other time. (Matthew 24:14)

There are other important objectives in the seven trumpets, but these two examples should demonstrate the point that God has thoughtfully planned His forthcoming actions. God is love. He is deliberate and purposeful in all of His actions. It is a shame that God has to implement His full cup principle and destroy a large portion of Earth to get mankind to listen to Him. Yet, the good news is that millions of people in every nation will listen. The [great tribulation](#) will ultimately produce two distinct groups of people. One group, the sheep, will consist of people with pure hearts who will exalt righteousness and love truth. The other group, the goats, will consist of people who will do anything to save themselves from suffering and death.

Because God is deliberate in everything He does, I call the seven trumpets and [seven bowls](#) designer judgments. God's plan for Earth and its inhabitants predates Creation, and His plan will be consummated soon. The Bible teaches "Intelligent Design:" Jesus created this world in six literal days and rested from His creative works on the seventh day. (Genesis 2:1-3) The Bible also teaches "Intelligent Demise:" Jesus will also destroy this creation over a course of 1,335 days. Nothing can stop Him once He starts the process.

- 4. Some people believe the book of Revelation was written in chronological order.** Consider these two verses: **"When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets."** (Revelation 8:1,2)

Many people think these two verses are in chronological order. This is not the case. If we approach the book of Revelation with the presupposition that its contents were written in chronological order, we will become hopelessly confused. For reasons that were discussed in the chapter titled, "Getting Started with the Book of Revelation," we know the book of Revelation contains twelve prophecies. There is chronological order in Revelation, but this order is found *within each prophecy*. Remember, I use four rules as a basis for my understanding of apocalyptic prophecy. Specifically, Rule One of Apocalyptic Prophecy states: "An apocalyptic prophecy has a beginning and ending point in time and the events occur *in their stated order*." (If you would like to examine the four rules of interpretation used in this commentary, please review "Notes and Comments on Chapter 1," pp. 21-30 in my book [Daniel, Unlocked for the Final Generation](#))

If you are not technically inclined, you may wish to skip the following section and return to it after you read the rest of this chapter. I have elected to include this segment early in the story of the seven trumpets because you need to understand that references in more than one apocalyptic prophecy can tie to the same event.

Take a moment to consider Diagram 12.1. Notice that the six seals in Prophecy #1 and the six trumpets in Prophecy #3 are in chronological and numerical order.

### Chronological Order within Each Prophecy

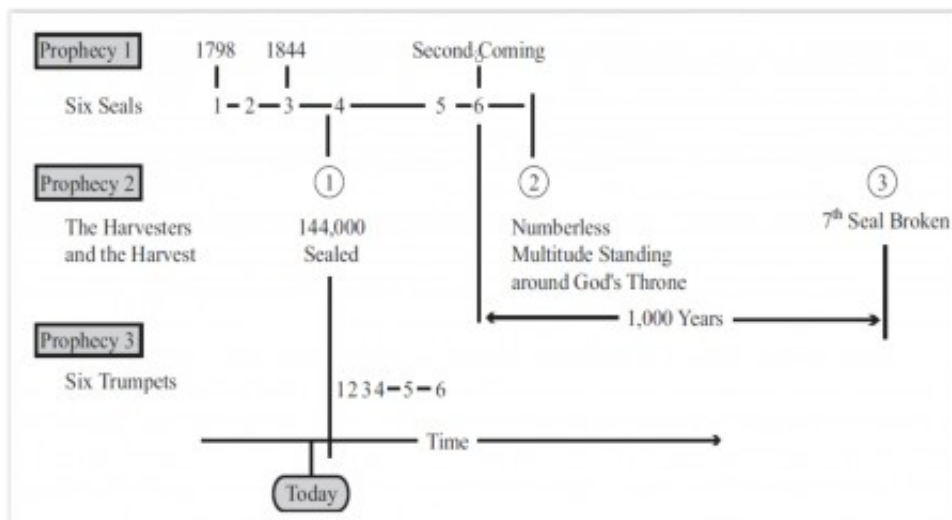


Diagram 12.1 (Not drawn to scale)

Next, look at the three elements within Prophecy #2. The first element is the sealing of the [144,000](#), and by simple deduction, we know that this sealing occurs *before* Earth is hurt and the Great Tribulation begins. The second element in Prophecy #2 is a scene that takes place in Heaven *after* the Second Coming: An innumerable number of people who went through the [great tribulation](#) are seen standing around God's throne. Finally, the third element in Prophecy #2 is a numbered element – it is the seventh seal. Carefully notice that the events within Prophecy #2 are in chronological order even though the seventh seal is the only numerical item

in this prophecy.

At first, it might seem that the seventh seal in Prophecy #2 is disconnected from the six seals in Prophecy #1. God deliberately put the seventh seal at the end of Prophecy #2 so that we could accurately determine the timing of the seventh seal!

Notice how this works: Obviously, the seventh seal has to occur *after* the sixth seal (the sixth seal is the Second Coming). Then, because there is chronological order in Prophecy #2, we know that the seventh seal occurs *after* the numberless multitude are seen standing around God's throne. This also confirms the seventh seal occurs after the Second Coming. And, according to Revelation 20:12, the *Book of Life* is opened once – at the end of the 1,000 years. From our study on the [seven seals](#), we know that the *Book of Life* is the “book” that was sealed with [seven seals](#). Therefore, the breaking of the seventh seal on the *Book of Life* occurs at the end of the 1,000 years. There is no wiggle room on this conclusion because God put the twelve prophecies together in a very tight matrix. When we use valid rules of interpretation, there is harmony from the sum of all the parts!

The prophecies in both Daniel and Revelation have many elements that occur simultaneously. For example, in Revelation, the breaking of the fourth seal in Prophecy #1 (God's four judgments – sword, famine, plague, and wild beasts) and the sounding of the first trumpet in Prophecy #3 occur at the *same time*. In fact, the seven trumpets cause sword, famine, plague, and wild beasts to occur!

This next point is important, but few Bible students understand it. Rule One of apocalyptic prophecy forces *a new prophecy to begin whenever chronological order is broken*. This concept explains why Revelation 8:2 starts a new prophecy. In other words, the seven trumpets cannot be given to the seven angels *after* the seventh seal is broken and the 1,000 years have ended, even though both events are contained in the first two verses of Revelation 8. Rule One forces Revelation 8:2 to become the starting point of a new prophecy because Revelation 8:2 *does not chronologically follow* Revelation 8:1. Whenever chronological order is broken, Rule One forces us to declare the ending point of the previous prophecy and the starting point of a new prophecy. It is a challenging, time consuming process to find the twelve prophecies in Revelation, but with God's help, we can identify the twelve prophecies. Blessed is the one who reads and understands the book of Revelation. (Revelation 1:3)

## The Bottom Line

If a person does not properly understand the timing, nature, and purpose of the seven trumpets, he cannot understand Revelation's story. Ironically, most Christians do not appreciate the necessity of understanding the seven trumpets for three reasons: First, millions of Christians have been misled by the doctrine of a pretribulation rapture. Because these Christians believe they will not be on Earth during the seven trumpets, they are not especially concerned about them. Their attitude is, “Yes, the seven trumpets are interesting, but not critically important. As long as we are ready for the rapture, we have nothing to worry about.” A second group of Christians have also been misled on the seven trumpets. They believe the seven trumpets occurred in the distant past, but interestingly, their attitude is similar to the first group. Their

attitude is, “Yes, they are interesting if you are interested in history, but they are not critically important today. As long as we have a good relationship with Jesus, we have nothing to worry about.” The last group of Christians scoff at the importance of [Bible prophecy](#). Their attitude is, “Bible Prophecy is a nose of wax that people manipulate according to whim and bias. The Bible can be made to say anything. [Bible prophecy](#) has no bearing on my salvation. As long as I have a good relationship with Jesus, there is nothing to worry about.” Even though all three Christian views are in opposition to each other, they produce the same attitude, “The seven trumpets are interesting, but they are nothing to worry about.”

This indifference reminds me of the ten virgins in Matthew 25. **“The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ ”** (Matthew 25:5,6) Christians have gone to sleep, but the first four trumpets will awaken them and many will suddenly discover that they have been deceived. Many will become angry and bitter toward God and whose fault will it be?

## What Happens before the Seven Trumpets Begin?

There is an unusual service that occurs in Heaven just before the seven trumpets begin. Once you understand the significance of this special service, the judgments that follow will make a great deal of sense. As you investigate the seven trumpets, keep this thought in mind: God is love. This means that God’s actions *are eternally consistent* with principles of love. The Father gave us Jesus because He “so loved the world” and Jesus willingly died on the cross because He “so loved the world.” God’s wrath against evil and degenerate behavior is motivated by His love for righteousness, fairness, and equity. Do not forget the flood in Noah’s day. A “God of love” destroyed the *whole* world when a majority of people became hopelessly wicked. (Genesis 6:7) God’s love for oncoming generations demanded action.

The full cup principle is based on love, and God’s love is expressed through a perfect balance of justice and mercy. God hates to see individuals and nations self-destruct through degeneracy, rebellion, and sexual immorality. (Genesis 13:13) God is patient and longsuffering, not willing that anyone should perish. (2 Peter 3:9) We often forget that God – who sees the past, present, and future with the same clarity – loves oncoming generations just as much as He loves the present generation. Therefore, His love for oncoming generations moves Him to destroy the current generation so that the oncoming generation can be free of the degenerate and destructive behaviors that would be passed down to them. Remember, the sins of the fathers are passed down to the third and fourth generations! (Exodus 20:5)

Over time, sin multiplies, it metastasises like cancer cells. Sin penetrates society quickly and exponentially. Sin is like gravity. It creates a steady downward tug that eventually pulls everyone (especially the innocent and uninformed) into its deadly vortex. A new generation only gets a chance of having a better life when the old order is destroyed. Thus, it becomes necessary for a God of love to destroy degenerate groups of people when they pass the point of no return.

Innocent people sometimes perish when God destroys degenerate groups because God’s wrath against a group of wicked people is not necessarily discriminating. For example, many

little children were drowned in Noah's flood. Many good people were killed during King Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem. When God's wrath breaks out against a corporate body whose majority is beyond redemption, it is like the indiscriminate destruction caused by an atomic bomb. The loss of innocent life does not prohibit God from doing what needs to be done because (a) God knows that everyone on Earth dies sooner or later anyway, and (b) He has the power to resurrect every dead person. Remember, Jesus will judge each person individually. Jesus will decide each person's case accordingly. So, whether a child died in Noah's flood or a person dies of illness, a crime, a tragic accident, or during some expression of God's wrath, the cause of death has nothing to do with one's eternal destiny. (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14, 2 Corinthians 5:10)

## The Angel Hurls the Censer Down

The story of the seven trumpets begins with Revelation 8:2. Take a few moments to get acquainted with this segment of the story: **“And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar [of Incense]. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand [and God granted the request of His saints]. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came <sup>a</sup>peals of thunder, <sup>b</sup>rumblings, <sup>c</sup>flashes of lightning and <sup>d</sup>an earthquake. Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them. [A few days later,] The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came <sup>e</sup>hail and fire mixed with blood [mercy], 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 [including food crops] was burned up.”** (Revelation 8:2-7, insertions mine)

**Note:** I have found that one of the best ways to offer Bible commentary is to insert a few words or phrases into those portions of Scripture that are being discussed. This is *not* an attempt to translate nor change Scripture. Rather, it is an attempt to be as direct as possible. This technique often accelerates understanding. Therefore, you will find my words, notes, and phrases throughout this study enclosed in brackets [ ].

## Events at the Beginning of the Seven Trumpets

Five small superscript letters were inserted into the verses above. Each letter identifies a fearful and spectacular event. These five events form a package and this “package of five events” will occur on *three separate occasions* during the [great tribulation](#). The first package will occur at the beginning of the seven trumpets. The second package will occur at the end of the seven trumpets (Revelation 11:19) and the final package will occur at the end of the [seven bowls](#) (Revelation 16:18-21). The Bible does not say whether these events will transpire over a few hours or a few days. However, according to Rule Three of apocalyptic prophecy, we can be sure these five events will be phenomenal! They are designed to bring the world to a halt. Everyone on Earth will be intimidated by these violent and powerful displays of nature. The

whole world will witness these violent events *at the same time*.

Even though Revelation 8:5-7 does not explicitly say these five phenomena will be global events, they have to be understood as global events because:

1. The seven trumpets will affect the whole world.
2. The Great Tribulation will affect the whole world.
3. The seven trumpets will terminate world order as we presently know it. The seven trumpets will put the world on notice that Jesus Christ now rules over Earth as *Almighty God*.
4. These five phenomena will occur three times. The third package occurs at the Second Coming, which will be a global event. Since the Second Coming and the seven trumpets are global in nature, I believe it is safe to conclude that all three packages are global. These five events are designed to get worldwide attention at the same time.
5. God's wrath and offer of salvation will be global in nature. The story in the book of Revelation is universal, that is, the story is the same in every nation. Therefore, these five phenomena will occur *in the same way at the same time in every nation*.

## Commentary

**“And I saw the seven angels who stand before God and to them were given seven trumpets.”** (Revelation 8:2)

The story of the seven trumpets begins with a simple statement. John saw seven angels standing before God – actually, Jesus Christ. Earlier, in our study on the [seven seals](#), we found that Jesus ascended the throne as “Lord God Almighty” in 1798. (See also Revelation 11:17 where Jesus is called “Lord God Almighty.”) The angel’s *standing* posture before God’s throne indicates these particular angels have positions of highest authority. These seven angels are described throughout Revelation in different ways, such as the seven spirits of God, the seven angels of the seven churches, the seven angels who received the seven trumpets, and the seven angels who will eventually pour out the [seven bowls](#).

## When Do the Events of Revelation 8:2 Begin?

As a result of my study, I have concluded the seven angels were given the seven trumpets in the spring of 1994. Since this date is not explicitly declared nor predicted in Scripture, some people scoff at the suggestion that 1994 is prophetically important. To be fair, I agree that a certain amount of skepticism<sup>1</sup> is warranted, but the fact remains that the seven angels are given the seven trumpets at some point in time. When I ask people to put a biblically reasoned date-stamp on Revelation 8:2, the responses range from silence to avoidance. Some people have suggested the seven angels were given the seven trumpets at the cross, or when Jesus returned to Heaven, or at the end of the seventy weeks, or at the time of Noah’s flood, or 1798, or 1844. Some people have even said, “It does not matter when they received the seven trumpets because if it did matter, God would have told us.”

\* **Note:** Bible prophecy does not always explicitly state important dates, but through studying [Bible prophecy](#), we can determine these dates. For example, 457 B.C., A.D. 30, 1798, and 1844 are not explicitly mentioned in Scripture, but these dates are very important. In another case, the date of Christ's birth was not announced in Scripture, but the wise men figured it out!

Nothing in Scripture explicitly dates Revelation 8:2. However, for those who would duck the dating of this verse, my response is simple: "There are seventeen prophecies and eighteen prophetic time periods in the books of Daniel and Revelation, and God has not declared a starting date for most of them. This silence does not mean that starting dates are unimportant or that starting dates cannot be determined. In fact, God's silence is an invitation to see if a solution date can be found!

Everyone wanting to date-stamp Revelation 8:2 faces a thorny problem. Here is the problem: The torment of the fifth trumpet lasts five months. (Revelation 9:5) Should these five months be regarded as five literal months or should they be translated (using a day for a year) as 150 years (thirty days per month times five months equals 150 days which translates into 150 years)? This question raises more questions: *If time is translated as a day for a year in apocalyptic prophecies, like the seventy weeks mentioned in Daniel 9:24, when does a day for a year translation begin? Does the day for a year translation ever end? If so, when?*

By God's grace, I believe that I stumbled upon the answer to this problem and this discovery produced Rule Four of apocalyptic prophecy. Rule Four states, "The presence or absence of the Jubilee Calendar determines how God measures time." In other words, when the Jubilee Calendar is operating, the day for a year translation occurs. A day is translated as a year. When the Jubilee Calendar is not operating and there is no translation, prophetic timing is to be understood as stated. Therefore, I have concluded that the seven angels received the seven trumpets in the spring of 1994, at the expiration of the Jubilee Calendar. (Please examine this matter further by reading the "Addendum" located at the end of this study.)

## The Next Prophetic Event

For the purpose of explaining Revelation 8:2-5, let us proceed under the assumption that the seven angels were given the seven trumpets in the spring of 1994. So, the four angels in Revelation 7:1-3 have been *waiting* to hurt Earth for several years. We know they are waiting because (a) the five phenomena described in Revelation 8:3-7 have not occurred at any time in history, and (b) the first four trumpet judgments have not yet fallen. Therefore, the four angels in Revelation 7 are patiently waiting for the service described in Revelation 8:3-5 to occur.

**"Another angel [that is, not one of the seven angels], 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 [of Incense] before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. 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."** (Revelation 8:3-5, italics and insertions mine)



The golden altar in front of God's throne is the Altar of Incense. We know this because the golden altar in the earthly temple was the Altar of Incense (Hebrews 9:3,4) and it was positioned before the Table of the Presence (Exodus 26:35; 40:5) which represented God's throne.\* Further, the bronze Altar of Burnt Offering was located in the outer court and it was covered with bronze. (Exodus 38:2) To understand the significance of the service conducted at the Altar of Incense in Heaven's temple, we have to first understand how the Altar of Incense functioned in the earthly temple because the tabernacle Moses built was a copy and shadow of the *true temple* in Heaven. (Hebrews 8:1-5)

\* Note: For further discussion on the Table of the Presence, see pages 185-189 in my book [Jesus, The Alpha and The Omega](#)

## The Special Service in Revelation 8:3-5

The special service in Revelation 8:3-5 marks the close of corporate mercy and the beginning of the [great tribulation](#). You need to understand and synthesize four prerequisites to understand why this service is conducted at the Altar of Incense:

### 1. Corporate Mercy

Before sin began, God commanded Adam and Eve to obey this law: **“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.’ ”** (Genesis 2:16,17, KJV)

Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. Neither person *defiantly* sinned against God, although they did sin. On the basis of love for Adam and Eve *and their future offspring*, Jesus interceded. God's law demanded immediate death, but instead of killing the guilty pair, Jesus went to the Father and offered to die – not only in their place, but on behalf of all of their future offspring. The Father consented and on that very day, Jesus became “subject” to the will of the Father for the next 6,000 years. (Psalm 2:7-12, John 6:38, Hebrews 5:4-7) The emphatic point is that Adam and Eve were not immediately executed. Jesus mediated a “stay of execution” and Jesus has been holding back God's wrath for 6,000 years. Many people do not understand this intercession. Even worse, they do not know that the intercession will soon end.

Jesus intercedes for sinners on two levels, the individual level and the corporate level. Both levels are separate, distinct, and important to understand. For example, corporately speaking, the world became corrupt in Noah's day. When a majority of the antediluvians grieved away the Holy Spirit, the world went beyond the possibility of repentance. Jesus told Noah that since a majority of mankind was beyond redemption, He was going to destroy the world in 120 years. Jesus commanded Noah to build an ark and Noah went to work. Noah informed the world of God's coming wrath and Noah encouraged people to enter the ark and be saved. When the appointed time arrived, the flood came and destroyed *all* but eight people. Even though God was angry with the *corporate* behavior of mankind, He extended mercy to *individuals* by offering refuge in Noah's ark.

When it comes to understanding God's goodness and grace, it is important to distinguish between corporate mercy and mercy for individuals. God can be angry with a nation like Israel and at the same time be happy with individuals like Daniel. Consider this: There were two altars in the wilderness tabernacle. Individuals used the bronze Altar of Burnt Offering (located in the courtyard). Families brought their sin offerings to the bronze Altar of Burnt Offering each day. However, the golden Altar of Incense (located inside the tabernacle) was only used for *corporate* atonement. (Leviticus 4) Every evening and morning, priests offered atonement for the nation of Israel on the golden altar. Because there was continual atonement, sinners were not immediately executed when they sinned!

Notice how corporate grace aligns with grace and mercy for individuals. If an individual sinned in July and his family's turn at the Altar of Burnt Offering came in November (services at the Altar of Burnt Offering were rotated monthly according to tribe), the sinner knew that his death would be "stayed" because corporate intercession was made every evening and morning. In other words, corporate intercession provided a period of grace for individuals. This grace gave sinners time to make atonement if they wanted to make atonement.

Because Jesus has been corporately interceding for the whole world for the past 6,000 years, life on Earth has continued for the offspring of Adam and Eve. God's corporate grace has given billions of sinful individuals a chance to discover their need of a Savior. Once a person discovers Jesus as his Savior, he then realizes the wonderful corporate grace that was extended to him while he was in darkness. Out of joy and thanksgiving and praising God for the grace that He has provided, the sinner repents of his sins and offers himself as a living sacrifice unto the Lord.

At times, God dealt with Israel corporately, as though the whole nation was an individual. For example, God imposed the Babylonian captivity on everyone in Israel when a majority in Israel became hopelessly defiant and rebellious. Even though God punished the nation as one man, there were some individuals who pleased God, men like Ezekiel, Daniel, and Daniel's three friends. Nevertheless, God raised up a destroyer, King Nebuchadnezzar, to destroy Jerusalem and His temple. Of course, the Bible clearly indicates that God deals with individuals, too. You may remember the punishment of Achan (Joshua 7), Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Numbers 16), and King David who was also punished for having an affair with Bathsheba. (2 Samuel 11). Individual consequences were not limited to Old Testament characters. God also punished Ananias and Sapphira for their rebellion against Him. (Acts 5)

Summarizing, the first thing that we need to remember about the special service at the Altar of Incense in Revelation 8:3-5 is that the Altar of Incense concerns corporate intercession. *The casting down of the censer indicates the cessation of corporate intercession.* When the censer is cast down, God's destructive wrath will be released throughout Earth. This is why the seven trumpets occur after the censer is thrown down. God's corporate wrath begins when corporate mercy ends.

## **2. The Role of Prayers and Incense**

Have you ever heard the expression, "Well, that just stinks!"? The idea behind this expression

is that something went wrong and the consequences stink, that is, they are offensive. This may come as a surprise, but sinners dressed in their finest clothes are a stench in God's nostrils. This stench is not body odor, but our unrighteousness. God's heart is totally selfless and pure, and our hearts are just the opposite, totally selfish and impure. Sin cannot be washed away with water. Pilate did not remove his guilt in the death of Jesus by washing his hands. (Matthew 27:24) To teach Israel that even in their finest clothes, their hearts were still a stench in God's nostrils, God required the offering of a special fragrant incense each evening and each morning.

**“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Take fragrant spices – gum resin, onycha and galbanum – and pure frankincense, all in equal amounts, and make a fragrant blend of incense, the work of a perfumer. It is to be salted and pure and sacred. Grind some of it to powder and place it in front of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting, where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you. Do not make any incense with this formula for yourselves; consider it holy to the Lord. Whoever makes any like it to enjoy its fragrance must be cut off from his people.’ ”** (Exodus 30:34-38)

The Jews gathered around the temple when evening and morning services were offered because they reasoned that their petitions would be more favorably presented if they ascended with the sweet fragrance of holy incense. Think about this: If you petitioned a great king to grant a very important request, obviously a fragrant atmosphere would be more favorable than a smelly one! The practice of burning incense with corporate offerings explains why the angel in Revelation 8:3-5 was given much incense to burn on the Altar of Incense. God's people on Earth (a dear group of stinkers) will be desperately praying for God's help when Revelation 8:3-5 occurs, and the angel will add much incense on the Altar to “sweeten” their petitions – and the Lord will not disappoint.

### 3. The Use of Censers

In Bible times, small metal pans or censers were used to carry fire from one place to another. Since there were no matches or butane lighters, it was a lot easier to carry fire around than to start a fire. (Genesis 22:6) Thus, censers were rather common household devices in Bible times. Censers were also used in the temple for the purpose of carrying fire *during atonement services*. Notice how a censer of burning coals was used on the Day of Atonement: **“He [the high priest] is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the Lord [the Altar of Incense] and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain. He is to put the incense on the fire before the Lord, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover** [The atonement cover was a removeable lid on the golden box that held the Ten Commandments. Two figurines of angels were attached to this lid and God's glory radiated as a brilliant light from between these two angels. This light radiated] **above the Testimony** [the Ten Commandments are often called “the Testimony” in the Old Testament and the smoke from the incense protected the priest from this brilliant light], **so that he will not die.**” (Leviticus 16:12,13, insertions mine)

The fire on the bronze Altar of Burnt Offering in the courtyard burned continuously. (Leviticus 6:13) Priests sustained this fire around the clock. However, there is no evidence in the Bible that the fire on the golden Altar of Incense was provided or sustained by man. I understand that God

Himself ignited and sustained the fire on the Altar of Incense and this made that fire *holy* or set apart. In other words, the fire on the Altar of Incense was God-made and the fire that burned on the Altar of Burnt Offering was man-made. I mention this point for two reasons. First, the “strange” fire that Aaron’s two sons, Nadab and Abihu, used was most likely taken from the Altar of Burnt Offering. Evidently, they came before the Lord with man-made or “unholy” fire to burn incense. This action was a defiant sin and an insult to God. God responded to their impudence by killing them. (Leviticus 10:1,2) Second, I believe that God ignited and sustained the fire on the Altar of Incense because this perpetual burning fire represents Jesus’ unilateral and perpetual intercession for humanity. In other words, corporate grace has nothing to do with the efforts or desires of mankind. Corporate intercession is God’s gift to all sinners. The perpetual burning fire on the Altar of Incense represents His grace, His perpetual love for us that never goes out.

Summarizing, the priests used fire in the temple services and carried it in censers to burn incense. The casting down of the censer indicates the atonement service conducted on the Altar of Incense is finished. Since the Altar of Incense is limited to matters of corporate mercy, the casting down of the censer indicates the end of corporate mercy.

#### **4. The Termination of the Daily**

There is one more topic that will secure the conclusion that Revelation 8:3-5 marks the end of corporate mercy. Daniel 12:11,12 says, “**From the time that the daily [service] sacrifice<sup>1</sup> is abolished [in Heaven] and the abomination that causes desolation is set up [This abomination that causes desolation points forward to a universal death decree that will be set up to kill all of God’s saints on the 1290<sup>th</sup> day of the Great Tribulation.<sup>2</sup>], there will be 1,290 days. Blessed is the one who waits for [patiently endures] and reaches the end of the 1,335 days [allotted for the Great Tribulation].**” (Insertions and strikethrough mine)

<sup>1</sup> The word “sacrifice” in verse 11 is not in the Hebrew text. It is supplied by well-meaning translators. However, the word “sacrifice” is misleading. A better choice would have been the word “service.”

<sup>2</sup> See pages 228-233 in my book [Daniel, Unlocked for the Final Generation](#).

The tabernacle on Earth was a copy and shadow of Heaven’s temple. According to Hebrews 8:1-5, Jesus serves in Heaven’s *true tabernacle* as our High Priest. This wonderful truth enables us to understand things about services in Heaven’s temple that would be impossible to otherwise understand. For example, since there was a daily service in the earthly temple, there must also be a daily service in Heaven’s temple. The daily service in the earthly temple consisted of two routines. The first routine centered around corporate atonement. Every evening and morning, the priests presented an atonement offering before the Lord on the Altar of Incense. The priests conducted a second routine at the Altar of Burnt Offering. During daylight hours, people brought their sin offerings to the Altar of Burnt Offering. Both services were considered perpetual, continual or “daily.”

The book of Daniel mentions “the abomination that causes desolation” two times. The first

mention points to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. (Daniel 11:31, Matthew 24:15) The second mention (Daniel 12:11) points to a daily service that will end in Heaven's temple and 1,290 days later, a universal death decree will be imposed on God's saints. How do we know that Daniel 12:11 is speaking about the daily service that occurs at the Altar of Incense in Heaven's temple?

Rule Three of apocalyptic prophecy further requires that we examine the context. The context in Daniel 12 clearly concerns the end of time. Consider the first two verses in chapter 12: **“At that time Michael [Jesus], the great prince who protects your people, will arise** [indicating that His mediation for mankind has been completed. He will stand up – a position that kings take when moved by indignation]. **There will be a time of distress** [the seven last plagues – the [seven bowls](#)] **such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people** [who are alive] – **everyone whose name is found written in the book** [of Life] – **will be delivered** [from further martyrdom]. [Then, at the Second Coming] **Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others** [including those who participated in the crucifixion of Jesus. will be raised] **to shame and everlasting contempt.”** (Daniel 12:1,2, insertions mine)

\* **Note:** See Revelation 1:7 and Matthew 26:64.

Now that we know the context in Daniel 12 is the end of days and the Second Coming, consider the final words in Daniel 12: **“He [Gabriel] replied,** ‘[Daniel, you have been shown things about the distant future.] **Go your way** [go about your business], **Daniel, because the words** [of this prophecy] **are closed up and sealed until the time of the end.** [There will be many difficult centuries for the saints.] **Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand** [these visions], **but those who are wise will understand** [how these words apply to them]. **From the time that the daily** [service in Heaven] **sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation** [a universal death decree for God's people] **is set up, there will be 1,290 days. Blessed is the one who** [patiently] **waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days** [for he will see Jesus coming in clouds of glory without seeing death]. **As for you [Daniel], go your way till the end** [of your life]. **You will rest** [with your fathers in death], **and then at the end of the [1,335] days you will rise** [with all of God's saints] **to receive your allotted inheritance.’**” (Daniel 12:9-12, insertions mine)

Because the context in Daniel 12 is the end of the age, it should be rather easy to see that “the daily” in verse 11 points to an event that is 1,335 days before the Second Coming. Moreover, if there was a daily service on Earth at the Altar of Incense, then there has to be a daily service in Heaven at the Altar of Incense because services in the earthly temple parallels services in Heaven's temple. We already know that corporate mercy will end when the censer is cast down and God's wrath (the seven trumpets) will follow, therefore, the timing of the daily in Daniel 12:11 is the same as the casting down of the censer in Revelation 8:3-5.

Thus far, we have found that the Altar of Incense concerns the administration of corporate mercy. The casting down of the censer indicates the end of atonement at this altar, that is, the

end of corporate grace for the world. After corporate grace is terminated, the four angels will sound the first four trumpets which will harm the Earth. God's wrath will break out on the whole world. There will be physical phenomena announcing God's wrath. These physical phenomena will occur simultaneously all over the world. There will be a global earthquake. The whole world will be halted, unexpectedly arrested by awesome and violent displays of nature. Mankind will be put on notice with these physical phenomena that God's anger cannot be contained any longer. A few hours, or perhaps days, after the censer is cast down, the first trumpet will sound and a firestorm of burning hail will fall from the sky and burn up one-third of Earth. There is perfect harmony in the sum of all the parts!

## The Prayers of the Saints

Returning to verse 3: **“Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar [of Incense]. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of *all* the saints, on the golden altar [that stands] before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints [their petitions], went up before God [a very sweet aroma filled the court] from the angel's hand. 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.”** (Revelation 8:3-5, insertions and italics mine)

Notice the chronological sequence of events. Verse 3 says that *all* of God's saints are praying for something. Then, in verse 4 the angel presents their petitions to God, and in verse 5, God favorably responds to the petitions of His saints by commanding the angel at the altar to cast  
down the censer.

**\*Note:** To be proper, this angel serves as a priest to Jesus. Jesus alone, as our High Priest, authorizes the casting down of the censer. Given the nature of this special service, it does not seem likely that an angel would presume to throw the censer down of his own accord.

The Bible says that **“all”** of the saints (God's children everywhere) are petitioning God when Revelation 8:3-5 occurs. The *only* thing that could move *all* of God's children at the *same* time, as religiously diverse as we are, is a global crisis. What global crisis, after 1994, but prior to the end of corporate grace, would cause Jesus to issue a command to cast down the censer?

## Nuclear War?

There is one possibility that could cause *all* of God's saints to pray for the same thing at the same time, namely, nuclear war. Here is a possible scenario. One day, simmering hostilities could erupt and quickly escalate into a nuclear exchange. Tens of millions could die in this war. This war could affect our struggling global economy and immediately affect the distribution of oil, food, clothing, building materials, and commerce of all kinds. If nations joined in, this war could quickly become a fearful event for most everyone on Earth. If such a war occurred – and the global consequences would be far reaching – the whole world would cry out (demand) “peace and safety.” In other words, a nuclear exchange could bring *all* of God's people to the point of praying for God's intervention.

Paul wrote: **“While people are [frantically] saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ destruction [from God] will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.”** (1 Thessalonians 5:3,4, insertions mine)

There is no reason to be surprised about sudden destruction coming from God if we allow Revelation 8 to speak. We can be sure of two things. First, it’s only a matter of time until there is a nuclear exchange. Second, when a nuclear exchange occurs, human efforts will be made to stop the war for the sake of *global* “peace and safety.” The problem is that the speed of intercontinental missiles is measured in seconds, but getting nations to negotiate peace can take years. Besides, once a nation’s sovereignty and survival is threatened by nuclear bombs, what would be the point of any nation using restraint against such a enemy? The maxim for nuclear war is simple: “Annihilate or be annihilated.”

Suppose an angel rushes to the Altar of Incense after a nuclear exchange, and together with the petitions of *all* the saints, he puts much incense on the coals of the altar and a sweet fragrance ascends before God’s throne. As Almighty God, Jesus answers the prayers of His saints by stepping into the din of war with overwhelming power and authority. Jesus sends physical manifestations that are so magnificent and awesome that the war actually stops! He who calmed the storm on Galilee calms this war. Then, the first trumpet sounds and a hailstorm of burning meteors burn up a third of Earth. The nations of Earth suddenly discover that man’s nuclear bombs are no match for “the wrath of the Lion from the tribe of Judah.” Sudden destruction from God will miniaturize man’s nuclear exchanges. The destructive power of Jesus will dwarf anything that mankind has to offer. Suddenly, man’s biggest problem is not nation against nation, it is a whole world facing the wrath of one God!

### **Summary on Revelation 8:2-5**

By now, you should understand that (a) there were two altars in the earthly temple because there are two levels of atoning grace, corporate and individual, (b) incense was used each evening and morning on the Altar of Incense to mask the stench of sin and sinners, (c) censers were used during the atonement services to carry fire, and (d) the termination of *daily* services at the Altar of Incense in Heaven’s temple is dated 1,335 days before the Second Coming. When we align these four topics with the events described in Revelation 8:3-5, it is safe to conclude that Revelation 8:3-5 describes the end of corporate mercy because *this was the only form of atonement offered on the earthly Altar of Incense*. Moreover, the punitive judgments (the seven trumpets) that follow the casting down of the censer perfectly align with this conclusion. When corporate grace ends, corporate wrath begins.

Just before the censer is cast down, all of God’s saints will be praying for divine help. A nuclear exchange could move all of God’s people to pray for peace. The point here is that Jesus responds to the prayers of the saints by terminating the daily service at the Altar of Incense. He will command the angel to cast down the censer. After the censer is cast down, the Bible continues the sequence saying, **“Then the seven angels who had [been waiting with] the seven trumpets [since 1994] prepared to sound them.”** (Revelation 8:6, insertions mine)

For a detailed review of the seven trumpets, see the article [The Seven Trumpets of Revelation – Part 1](#).