

Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the word of God

2020

AUGUST

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SILENCE IN HEAVEN FOR ABOUT HALF AN HOUR

As noted by contributors from Buckhaven and Podagatlapalli, Revelation 8:1 is the only mention in Scripture of ‘a silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.’

As an eternal being, God is not constrained by time. Yet, in His dealings with men on earth, He operates in hours, days, months and years, all set in motion when He made the world. Even though sun and moon were not created until the fourth day, on the very first day it is recorded: ‘There was evening and there was morning, one day’ (Gen. 1:5).

God is an active God, whether in creation—maintaining the vast complexity of the universe with awe-inspiring precision: ‘upholding all things by the word of his power’ (Heb. 1:3)—or, in divine love, directly intervening in the affairs of men: ‘When the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son’ (Gal. 4:4).

Several papers probe the contrast between the previous chapter’s jubilant praise and the profound silence of 8:1, which seems to indicate a cessation of activity. Will the four living creatures cease their sempiternal intonation: ‘Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God the Almighty...?’ Can we imagine the expectant hush as ten thousand times ten thousand, and

thousands of thousands of angels ‘hold their breath’ for thirty minutes? Mere mortals can hardly keep silent for two.

It is almost as if our Creator, who in the beginning (as described in Job 38-39) lavished such masterly attention to detail in the design of our beautiful world, pauses in solemn contemplation of the cataclysmic damage He is about to inflict upon it. He takes ‘no pleasure in the death of the wicked’ (Ezek. 33:11).

The seven trumpet blasts recorded in chapters 8, 9 and 11 announce the final phase of divine judgements on an unrepentant world. The final three are so severe in their impact, they are called ‘the three woes’. They culminate with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth as ‘KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS’ (Rev. 19:16).

With relief we look beyond such terrifying events to the glorious thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. In a world of increasing wickedness, we recognise that this cannot happen until ‘the wicked’ (Dan. 12:10), who persist in their defiance of God’s authority (Ps. 2:2-3) are rooted out. Only then, when ‘he to whom it belongs’ (Gen. 49:10 NIV) ascends the throne, will this world enjoy its Sabbath rest.

J.J.

From Study Groups . . .

THE SEVENTH SEAL AND THE GOLDEN CENSER (Revelation 8)

From Aberdeen: *The opening of the seventh seal* introduces the concluding seven judgements involving the seven angels who are given seven trumpets, with which they announce those seven final judgements. There seems to be a definite connection between the prayers of ‘all the saints’ and the judgements that follow. Fire, a symbol of judgement, is taken from the golden altar which is before the throne of God, and is cast ‘into the earth’ (Rev. 8:5 RVM). The first four judgements destroy the third part of each of the earth, the sea, the rivers and the light from the sun, moon and stars. Generally, Bible commentators view these seven judgements and woes as occurring during the reign of the Antichrist, shortly before the Lord’s return to reign on earth from Jerusalem.

The prayers of ‘all the saints’ indicate that our prayers are not in vain (Rev. 8:3). But particularly in view, in the context of Daniel’s seventieth week, are the prayers of the saints who will endure the Great Tribulation. This is further emphasised by the souls that will be ‘slain’ (Gk. *spházō*—‘to butcher’) during this time, and in the vision seen by John they ask, ‘How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?’ (Rev. 6:9-10). Perhaps this cry for vengeance will be appropriate to the coming state of apostasy that will characterise the tribulation time (2 Thes. 2:3). The gracious request for forgiveness made by Stephen was a fitting response during the time of the ‘green tree’, whereas the cry for vengeance by the saints who are slain during the reign of Antichrist and the coming apostasy will be a fitting response during that future time of the ‘dry’ tree, of which Jesus spoke (Luke 23:31).

James Johnson

From Aberkenfig: The first verse causes us to wonder why there was ‘silence in heaven for about half an hour’ and the tremendous praise of the previous chapter (7:10-12) suddenly ceases. Certainly it was ‘the lull before the storm’, for we can see some fulfilment of Old Testament scriptures such as Zephaniah 1:7,14-18 (especially v.16); Zechariah 2:13 and Habakkuk 2:20, where we find such clauses as ‘hold thy peace’, ‘be silent, all flesh’ and ‘keep silence before Him’. When God prepares to intensify His wrath, every creature is reduced to silence.

It was then that the seven angels were given seven trumpets. During this interlude, another angel approached the altar holding a golden censer (8:3). The ‘prayers of the saints’ (8:4) are not the prayers of a special group of people in

heaven who have arrived at 'sainthood'. All believers are saints—set apart for God—through faith in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:1; 9:1,12); nor can we find any reference in Scripture that people in heaven pray for believers on earth, or that we can direct our prayers to God through them. We pray in the Holy Spirit, through the Son, to the Father. Many scriptures bear this out, e.g. Ephesians 2:18 [Comment 1].

The sounding of the first trumpet by the first angel is followed by hail and fire mingled with blood, an unusual combination, with the third part of trees burned up and all the grass. The Greek word for 'trees' was often used of fruit trees, while the 'fire' may be the lightning of an electrical storm. The result of this would be devastation of the meat and milk industries. Joel 2:30 speaks about fire and hail. These judgements parallel to some extent those sent on the land of Egypt. We can imagine the whole world saying as Pharaoh did, 'Who is the Lord, that we should serve Him?'

When the second angel sounded we have devastation in the seas (vv. 8-9). John saw 'as it were a great mountain burning with fire ... cast into the sea'. One third of the sea became blood. This reminds us of the first plague in Egypt (Ex. 7:19-21). A third of saltwater is turned to blood, a third of marine life dies, and a third of ships is destroyed. Oceans form approximately 75% of the earth's surface.

When the third angel sounded, desolation in the rivers is next (vv.10-11). A great star falls 'burning as a torch'. Its name was Wormwood, and it is linked with gall, which would remind us of the bitter suffering of Jesus at Calvary. 'Bitter' means 'undrinkable'. Many Old Testament scriptures refer to this, e.g. Jeremiah 9:15, and Amos 5:7 (NAS): 'those who turn justice into wormwood.' Moses warned that 'idolatry would bring sorrow, like a root producing wormwood' (Deut. 29:18), and Proverbs 5:4 refers to bitterness like wormwood. It is a bitter, aromatic herb.

When the fourth angel sounds the entire world is affected. The very source of earth's life is involved—the sun together with moon and stars, so one third less energy supporting life on earth. Desperation and despair will result. There will be desolation in the heavens. No amount of government aid, relief efforts, or advanced preparation will be able to bring recovery. It reminds us of the Lord's words: 'For then shall be great tribulation, such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever shall be' (Mat. 24:21 RV).

Bill Paterson

From Buckhaven: *Incense and prayer* Prior to the judgements of chapter 8 there is silence in heaven for half an hour, the only occurrence of such an event in Scripture. Prior to the sounding of the trumpets an angel standing over the golden altar is given much incense to add to the prayers of the saints. Traditionally pure and holy, incense adds fragrance. It was associated with the prayers of saints in the

past, for example when the angel appeared to Zacharias 'at the hour of incense' (Luke 1:10). David also likened his prayer to incense (Ps. 141:2).

The prayers of the saints in Revelation 8 seem to call for the unfolding of God's purposes. Seven is a significant number in Revelation. The seven angels who stand in the divine presence are given seven trumpets. The first occurrence of a trumpet is found at Sinai. Two silver trumpets called the camp of Israel together for marching, for war, for feasts, and announced the year of Jubilee. They mustered God's people, alerted them to God's set appointments and inaugurated righteous judgement.

The angel who offered the prayers of the saints signals the beginning of judgements by filling the golden censer, not with incense, but with fire from the altar, which he casts upon the earth. Thunders, voices, lightnings and an earthquake follow.

The sounding of the first trumpet affects the land. Hail, and fire mingled with blood, burn up a third part of the earth including a third of all vegetation, trees and greenery. This affects food production and costs rise, causing hardship, fear and famine. These judgements follow a similar pattern to the plagues that fell on Egypt, a type of the world.

At the sound of the second trumpet the sea is affected. Something like a great mountain is cast into the sea and one third of it becomes blood. A third of both sea-life and shipping is lost. When the first plague fell on Egypt, the waters became blood. As a result of these first two judgements food supply and commerce suffer greatly.

At the sound of the third trumpet a flaming star ('Wormwood') falls from heaven. This affects life directly, because life-giving water is poisoned. A third part of the waters become bitter, causing death. When the fourth angel sounds, the heavenly bodies are affected. A third part of the day and night is plunged into darkness. Compare the ninth plague in Egypt (Ex. 10:21-29.)

The seven trumpets are grouped in an order: 4, 2 and 1. With these mighty, literal judgements God judges the unrighteous. The angel gives warning of three woes of far greater intensity than the judgments announced by the first four trumpets. The high-flying eagle seems to give imminent warning of these woes and the return of the Lord in vengeance against those who hate Him. These events may point to the final fulfilment of Jeremiah 25:15-17.

Martin Notman

From Cromer: *Silence in heaven* Verse one says, 'After the opening of the seventh seal there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.' An angel stands at the golden altar and offers much incense mingled with the prayers of the saints.

Israel of old offered incense on the golden altar in the Tabernacle, and later in the Temple. Incense is symbolic of prayers ascending to God. Psalm 141:2 (NIV) says, 'May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.' Revelation 5:8 says regarding the twenty-four elders who surrounded the throne of God, 'Each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints' (ESV). Is the mention of the prayers of the saints here, just before the first trumpet is blown and the first judgment poured out on the earth, to allow time for saints on earth to plead with God on the behalf of sinful mankind before He acted in judgment, just as Abraham pleaded for God to spare Sodom and Gomorrah? [This could well be the case—*Eds.*]

Alternatively, some have suggested that time does not exist in heaven, and therefore the half-an-hour of silence might have been a pause in the revelation coming to John on earth. This, however, seems unlikely as the scripture specifically says there was silence in heaven for about half an hour [Comment 2]. After the offering of much incense the angel filled the censer with fire from the golden altar and hurled it on the earth—a manifestation of the power of God, as at Sinai (Ex. 19: 16-19), and a precursor to what was to follow next.

The angel trumpeters Four angel trumpeters are referred to in chapter eight. After each trumpet is sounded judgement is dispensed. These four judgements fall upon the earth, and therefore indirectly affect mankind because they are its inhabitants. In chapter nine the three angels sound their trumpets and the three judgements fall directly on mankind.

We may wonder why punishments described in verses 7 to 12 were so severe, and in chapter 9 they were even worse. The answer is found in Revelation 9:20-21 (NIV), 'The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshipping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality, or their thefts'.

Three Woes These are pronounced by an eagle (or angel in some older translations) [Comment 3] before the last three angels sound their trumpets in chapter nine, and where even greater and more severe punishments are poured out on unrepentant mankind. Revelation shows us that God's will is always obeyed in heaven, but alas! Not always on earth. Let us pray as instructed by the Lord Jesus, 'your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'

John Parker

From Greenock: Silence is a very precious commodity. 'Selah' is used in the Psalms, an opportunity to reflect on the words just spoken. It occurs 71 times in the Psalms and 3 times in Habakkuk 3—in the prayer which is also in poetic style.

It occurs in psalms of joy (Ps. 68 three times) and in psalms celebrating mercy and deliverance, such as 32 where it separates the journey from ignoring God and the consequent melancholic depression which arose (v.4). Then follows the return to God, confession and forgiveness (v.5). The confidence of restored relationship with God and His goodness leads to another point for reflection (v.7). This is followed by the restored relationship from God's point of view and a final call for exultation [Comment 4].

We can observe similar structure here. God's wrath is foretold in Revelation 6. His blessings to the Jewish remnant and the Gentile host from the Tribulation are the focus of chapter 7 [Comment 5]. Now at the start of chapter 8 is the appropriate time to pause and consider the effect of those past events and the great contrast of the events immediately following.

These prayers have been made already by the sanctified ones. Through the history of the world God's set-apart people have made petitions which have not been answered. Many have gone to their gory fate without the answer to their pleas. Daniel's three friends were not putting God to the test. If He saved them—good; if not, they still would not bow. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were delivered, but millions of Jews suffered the gas chambers and then cremation in the Nazi death camps. Many Gentile believers have been martyred during the Church age.

Our prayers are so precious to God. Here we can see how they have been stored up—a precious collection reserved for a most special event. We must never feel our prayers have not been heard although our request may not have been granted.

Steve Henderson

From Halifax: *Silence* Following the interlude of chapter 7 a return is made to the opening of the seals with the final or seventh seal (8:1). When the Lamb opened this seal there came silence (cp. Zech. 2:13)—a stillness in which heaven solemnly anticipated the dreadful things to come. This half hour is so much in contrast to the songs of jubilation of Revelation 7:9-12, as well as the tumult upon the earth at the opening of the sixth seal (6:12-16).

To each of the seven angels who stood before God was given a trumpet (8:2). Another angel, not one of the seven, came and 'stood over' the golden altar (v.3 RV). The golden altar of the Tabernacle had its place before the veil (Ex. 40:26); the heavenly golden altar is before God Himself (Rev. 8:3,5; 9:13). As to the identity of the angel, there is a great variety of view: C.I. Scofield had no doubt that the angel is Christ (*The New Scofield Reference Bible*, 1967, p.1311). On the other hand, John Miller simply wrote, 'I do not share this view' (*Notes on the New Testament Scriptures*, p.673) [Comments 6 and 7]. Truly, our great high priest,

Jesus the Son of God, 'hath passed through the heavens' (Heb. 4:14-15; 8:1-3). The angel with his golden censer, however, had no incense himself, but much incense was given to him.

An eagle Following the blowing of the first four trumpets (Rev. 8:7-12), an angel (KJV) or eagle (RV, ASV, ESV) flew as in haste in mid-heaven [cp. Comment 3]. The eagle of Scripture is often a symbol of vengeance (Deut. 28:49; Hos. 8:1; Hab. 1:8). The eagle of 8:13, undertaking its awful duty, said with a great voice, 'Woe, woe, woe'. The voices of three more trumpets were yet to sound.

Robert J. Butler

From Mount Forest: *Silence in heaven* Some think the silence relates to a temporary halt in spoken revelation to John; but those occur repeatedly, the visions being punctuated by spoken instruction. So, why would a silence be mentioned only at this point? It is not that the exceptional worship mentioned in Revelation 7:11 leads to a silent termination, as only after the seventh seal is opened does this silence commence. Likewise, confession before the throne of those faithfully testifying to Christ on earth could halt upon them dying there as martyrs (Mat. 10:32; Rev. 7:14), and certainly those already in heaven appealing for vengeance had been told to rest (6:10-11). But such is not said to cause this silence. Perhaps it was not an absolute silence. Was cessation of worship involved? The same word is used in Acts 21:40 where the crowd were initially silenced, but then they became even more quiet (Acts 22:2). Thus, the word might allow some sounds to have continued [or mutters had started up again; or the crowd made only sounds caused by body-movement—*M.A.*]. For instance, we read of the four living beings (Rev. 4:8), whose worship may have been continually repeated rather than continuous.

It seems more likely that a remarkable silence occurs because a very major divine action of significance, transcending utterance, is about to begin (see Zeph. 1:7). What breaks the silence indicates the prior need for it. Hence, the trumpet sounders are prepared, who will introduce the final phases of inevitable divine destructive retribution. (A single silence only is needed if there is overlap in the three series of sevens—seals, trumpets, bowls.) On earth (presumably) there are thunders, rumbling and an earthquake (Rev. 8:5). In heaven, after the angel offers the incense with the prayers, from his hand without speaking, the trumpets break the silence. Joshua 6:10 may provide a limited comparison, where although the trumpets were heard, the people circled the city in silence until the command to shout, whereupon Jericho fell (cp. Eccles. 3:7-8).

John says this silence lasted for 'about half an hour'. Did he compare it to some well-remembered waiting period, perhaps in this context the familiar period of prayer while the regular burnt offering was sacrificed (Luke 1:9-10; Acts 3:1)?

Later John will repeatedly mention angelic predictions of 'one hour', but then it was expressive of a relatively short period (Rev.17:12; 18:10,17,19).

In Revelation 8:3 it is clear that the incense was brought to the true golden altar, of which the earthly one was a copy (Heb. 8:5). In verse 5, the angel fills his censer with fire from 'the altar'. It is not said (here or in 14:18) that this is the one to which the bronze altar corresponded, but we note in the earthly tabernacle the fire (coals) for the incense were brought from the bronze altar before the LORD' (Lev. 16:12,18). Only at the bronze altar were sacrifices made by fire. Presumably, Hebrews 13:10 speaks not of the cross but of this true altar of burnt offering of Revelation 8:5, where the once-for-all sacrifice was consummated (Heb. 7:26-8:6; 9:12-14; 10:11-12 and see *B.S.* 1972 Comment 8, p. 127 and 1983 Comment 5, pp.143-144). The same fire that consumed the offering and burned the incense becomes the fire of God's judgement on earth. We echo Psalm 139:6 [Comments 7 and 6].

Geoff Hydon

From Podagatlapalli: *The seventh seal and the golden censer* The silence among the celestial beings in no way shows rebellion against the rule of heaven, but rather a stunned awe that the time had come for God to take action. This is the only time we read of silence in heaven. The 30 minutes could be related to mourning, for the people mourned for 30 days on the death of Aaron (Num. 20:29) and Moses (Deut. 34:8).

Some would see the angel ministering at the golden altar as a picture of Christ in His intercessory work. Yet there are no appearances of Christ as an angel in the New Testament. He has been manifested, and throughout Revelation He is given His proper names and titles. Indeed, extra incense was given by the throne to that angel, and that would point to the intercession of the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit to be offered along with the prayers of the saints. Exodus 30 tells us of the balance of spices, assuring us of the fragrance God enjoys as our prayers ascend to Him. Fire from the burnt offering was used reminding us of the efficacy of the work of Calvary and the grounds for our prayers to have access to the throne. Can we associate the fire also with James 5:16, 'the effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much'? God stores our prayers until the rightful time for His response [cp. Comments 1, 6, and 7].

Not only was Zechariah's course of 24 priests selected for service in Luke 1, but of the 24 the lot fell on him to be the incense offerer. Gabriel announced that Zechariah's prayers had been heard. Outside all the assembled worshippers were praying. It has been reported that this usually was for about half an hour.

Revelation 9:13 tells us a voice came from the golden altar, a further indication of God's response to the collective prayers of the saints.

The seventh seal brought the commencement of the seven trumpet judgements. Devastation to earth and to its people is the tragic result of sin (Jer. 9:15; 23:15). It was time for the vindication of the martyrs and the establishment of Christ's kingdom. For that we still pray, 'Your kingdom come'.

B.V. Prasada Rao

From Ravulapalem: *Judgements signalled* God sent His Son not to judge but to save the world; however, He gave authority to judge (John 3:17; 5:27). Jesus omitted the phrase 'the day of vengeance' from the scroll of Isaiah (61:1-2) in Nazareth as divine vengeance will take place at His second coming to earth.

The purpose of judgements is to persuade mankind to repent. These are similar to the plagues against Egypt in the Old Testament. Like the ten plagues, these judgements are ultimately unheeded. We found a new number—3—as every angel blows a trumpet so that a third part of earth, sea, rivers, sun, moon and stars was affected. Why? To urge repentance? But sadly, no repentance in the people averts the final judgement. We can see Noah, Daniel and righteous Job could not save people from forthcoming punishments in their times (Ezek. 14:21).

When the first angel sounded the trumpet, hail and fire mixed with blood are hurled down upon the earth (Ezek. 38:22; Joel 2:30-31) and a third of trees and green grass are burned.

When the second angel blows the trumpet a huge mountain all ablaze was thrown into the sea: a third of the seas turned into blood, its creatures died and ships were destroyed. This is like what happened in Egypt (Ex. 9:22,25).

When the third angel's trumpet was sounded a great star blazing like a torch fell from the sky so that a third of the rivers and springs of water were made bitter and many died.

When the fourth angel's trumpet was heard the third of the sun, moon and stars was struck and became black (dark). A third of the day and night was without light (Joel 2:2,31). It seems that the literal meaning of these things is correct and the divine judgement falls upon the earth because of the wickedness of the people.

S.J.M. Edward

From Surulere: *Reason for the silence in heaven* We are reminded of the Lord Jesus' words to Nicodemus: 'If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is the Son of Man' (John 3:12-13 NKJV). Now John has ascended to heaven, howbeit, in the Spirit, and he records this momentous event of a half hour of silence in heaven.

We marvel at the possibility of silence in heaven and enquired, firstly, whether this was in the very dwelling place of the Most High God. We recall the words of Revelation 4:8: ‘The four living creatures ... do not rest day or night, saying: “Holy, holy, holy, LORD God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”’ If this was the unceasing preoccupation of these awesome beings, did they cease from their task for the half hour of silence? We make allowance for the fact that where they discharge their responsibility is in the very presence of the Almighty God: ‘And behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne’ (Rev. 4:2). We note further that all the succeeding events from Revelation 4 occur in this central place in heaven where a throne was set.

We are aware that while heaven is not necessarily a place of endless sound—as if the Almighty must of necessity be enveloped in human and celestial praise; but silence is often associated with the earth in regard to the presence of God: ‘Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD, for He is aroused from His holy habitation!’ (Zech. 2:13). ‘But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him’ (Hab. 2:20).

We considered some of the available commentaries, that the half hour of silence was perhaps the result of the expectation of the saints of that dispensation of the imminence of divine judgement on the wicked who had been responsible for their deaths. We wondered why this could possibly be a basis for silence, given that other judgements had followed with the opening of the earlier seals without the accompaniment of silence. We did admit, however, that the judgements ushered in by the seventh seal were the worst of the lot. Some had also commented that the silence was the possible outcome of a temporary cessation of the prayers of the saints of that dispensation, rising from the earth up to the throne of the Almighty in heaven. Our difficulty with this is being certain that there could ever be a cessation of prayers, not just in that dispensation but in any other. Others perceived this as the silence preceding worship of the Almighty God. This again raises the question as to why there was not such silence in earlier scenes of worship of the Almighty God [Comments 8 and 2].

Frederick F. Ntido

COMMENTS

1. (**Aberkenfig**): This would not be the prayers of all saints of all time, but more particularly those who are going through the tribulation on earth, having embraced the gospel of the kingdom, and are passing through times of great difficulty and testing of faith (Mat. 10:22-23; Mark 13:12-13; Luke 12:11-12). (Cp. Comment 6, paras. 2-3.)

R.B.F.

2. (**Cromer**): *Time and the half hour* Besides the rule that if the literal meaning is credible there must be very good reason to dismiss it, there is plenty evidence that periods of time are meaningful after this life. For example, (a) Daniel's 70th week is widely accepted to be 7 years; during which (b) the cry of the martyrs, 'How long before you will judge and avenge ...?' implies some form of measurement, as does the answer (Rev. 6:9-11). (c) There is no logical need to dismiss as non-literal the *1,000 years* of a divinely governed kingdom—especially on earth. Why then should we expect that time will have no function through eternity? Paul's mention of 'the coming ages' (Eph. 2:7 ESV), i.e. from Rapture onwards, and the Greek of 'for ever and ever' (2 Tim. 4:18) excellently rendered in RVM 'unto the ages of the ages', high poetry though it is, are ample pointers for me that God will purposefully measure out aeon after aeon in eternity.

Why is there a divided hour? The following is offered suggestively. Division of the seven years of the Antichrist's dominion, 'time, times and half a time' (Dan. 12:7), symbolises fracture—a broken covenant, dispelling the illusion that he was working for the nations' good. Job spoke of the wicked 'when the number of his months is cut off in the midst' (21:2—RV and NKJV expressing the repeated Hebrew word *chatsats*, lit. 'cut cut'). Conversely, the Christ of God was cut off in the midst of his years by lawless men (cp. Psa. 102:23-24). Here in Revelation 8:1, a divided hour marks a transition on breaking the 7th seal, from that series of portents to the final judgement. It's a solemn moment in this timescale, marked by silence, and highlighting the importance of the prayers of the saints being heard. (See 'Introducing' para. 4 and Comment 8.)

M.A.

3. (**Cromer**): The Greek word for eagle here is *aggelos* (Strong's Concordance, and other authorities), the very same word used for angel elsewhere, whereas *aetos* is the Greek word for eagle in Revelation 4:7 and 12:14.

R.B.F.

One older commonly used version, KJV, reads 'angel' in 8:13, since available (late) MSS. in 1611 had *aggelos*. The Revisers in 1881 followed recently confirmed

early manuscripts that had Greek *aetos*—‘eagle’. NKJV panel preferred to stay with later MSS, drawing sometimes from the older, but not here. All other modern, and new internet, translations, choose ‘eagle’, as in U.B.S. Greek N.T. The late MSS. were possibly influenced by 14:6—‘an angel flying in midair’ (NIV).

M.A.

4. (Greenock): ‘Selah’ Understanding of the term is still a matter of conjecture, either as Hebrew, or in the Septuagint’s *diapsalma* = ‘aside from psalm’. The most favoured views are either a musical interlude, or a pause while voices and instruments were stilled. The occurrences at the close of some Psalms could support either idea, if the intention was to invite reflection.

5. (Greenock): It is difficult to accept that John’s description of the great multitude in 7:9 as ‘from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages’ (ESV) could exclude his own nation. There seems more point in the Jewish sealed servants being assigned to minister especially to Jews among that multitude, while giving support to other nationals also. See July issue for further discussion, e.g. Cromer paper, and Comments 5 and 8.

6. (Halifax and others): *The angel offering incense* One can understand the concern that this angel might seem to be an intermediary whereas Christ Jesus is in fact the only mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5). But this fact is abundantly testified elsewhere, without ‘another angel’ (*allos aggelos*, meaning another of the same kind) being interpreted as Christ—who is already present as the Lamb. It is essential to the service of the great high priest that He is able ‘to sympathise with our weaknesses’ because He has been a man, ‘in every respect tempted as we are, yet without sin’ (Heb. 4:14-15 ESV; cp. 2:17-18). He alone serves as high priest for the people of God; and He is an Advocate for all believers (1 John 2:2) because He has lived among humankind—in this respect like the Spirit, who indwells believers, and as Helper *is* indeed ‘another of the same kind’ (John 14:16).

The golden altar Mr Miller notes that there is no mention of any golden altar in connexion with the prayers of saints in this dispensation, prayer being presently in the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father. In accord also with Comments and Q. & A. in *B.S.* 1972 pp.127-128, a case might then be made for only the prayers during the Tribulation of those saints on earth, and those already martyred (Rev. 6:12), being offered on the golden altar (8:5). (See May issue, p.72 and Comment 6, p.77.) With careful regard for such views, here is further consideration. The writer to the Hebrews draws lessons for the service of the people of God from the heavenly things, of which those in the earthly sanctuary were copies (Heb. 9:23). The word used in 9:4 usually meant a censer, though most modern versions and

F.W. Danker's Lexicon render it here as 'altar of incense'. But even if the author chose the censer because incense was associated with prayer (Ps. 141:2; Luke 1:10), it's another step to think that the golden altar was deliberately excluded, especially since we know there is one in heaven. This was not the view of J.L. Ferguson, in *The Parable of the Tabernacle*, Hayes Press, Rev. 2010, p.157f. We might, however, regretfully accept that others think in 8:3 'all the saints' means the saints of the Tribulation who are John's subject there, and have incense added to their prayers, offered as from the altar before the throne, because the work of Jesus as high priest belonged to the previous dispensation. (The emphasis on judgement in fellow editor P.D.'s Comment 7 to me belongs to the casting of the fire to earth, whereas there is surely distinct purpose in the description 'the golden altar' in 8:3 on which the prayers are being offered.)

In Revelation 5:8 the reasoning above cannot apply, where we are told the bowls of incense are the prayers of the saints. The word 'which' in Greek agrees in gender with 'bowls', showing that the whole picture—golden vessels filled with incense—portrays the prayers. Why should this be withheld from the saints of this dispensation? We read on from 'To him who loves us ...' (1:5-6 ESV), and see no suggestion in 5:8 that the bowls of incense are only for those of the period seen in 8:3, even though John beholds the throne when the judgements of the Tribulation are imminent.

M.A.

7. (Mount Forest and Halifax): This emphasises that we are not here dealing with the distinctions between the bronze and golden altars, important for the people of God today for teaching regarding divine service and its sphere, but with the work of judgment and vengeance upon the earth in a future dispensation. For that the distinctions between the altars are not important; also, the angel's use of fire from the altar does not warrant the contention that he is Christ the high priest, as identified (but not advocated) by Halifax since the angel's role is that of judgment and the altar's function an instrument of vengeance.

P.D.

8. (Surulere): Mount Forest para. 2, Podagatlapalli para. 1, Halifax para. 1 and Intro para 5 give some possible reasons for the half-hour of silence.

J.J.

Question . . .

We noted that Revelation 8:3-5 states prayers of *all* the saints, and linked this with 5:8,10, suggesting that this is how God listens to our prayers (smoke of the incense) and the answers coming back. But how do we explain the thunders, lightnings and the earthquake in verse 5? (J. Miller's *Notes on Revelation*, Hayes Press, omits this aspect.)

Bill Paterson, Aberkenfig

. . . and Answer

As Mount Forest's paper notes, the fire comes, not from the golden altar of incense but from the altar of burnt offering, which symbolically parallels the place where Christ our Saviour offered Himself to God as an atoning sacrifice on our behalf when He bore the wrath of God against the sins of a guilty world.

Those who refuse God's mercy at the cross, expose themselves to the wrath of God in judgement.

The phenomena you mention can either signal divine majesty or divine judgement.

For example, when the Lord descended on Mount Sinai, which 'burned with fire' etc. (Heb. 12:18 RV)—'so fearful was the appearance, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake' (12:21); whereas in Isaiah's prophecy against Assyria they signified judgement: 'thunder ... earthquake, and great noise, with storm and tempest, and the flame of devouring fire.' (Is. 29:6) and 30:30—'The LORD shall cause his glorious voice to be heard, and shall shew the lighting down of his arm, with the indignation of his anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones.' Ezekiel also foretells similar judgements on Gog (Ezek. 38:19,22).

J.J.

From the Mail-box . . .

Spirit beings and 'the seven Spirits of God' (See April, p.63, Comment 12.)

While we would be agreed the disbelief of the Sadducees may well have ruled out in their minds evil spirits too, the point of '(Cp. Acts 23:8)' in our submission was merely to establish that biblical possibility exists that there are spirit beings other than angels. It was not our intention to imply that in Acts 23:8 'spirit' means exactly the same being as seen before the throne in Revelation 4. However, would not Acts 23:9 at least indicate that evil spirits were not in view in that context, and

certainly in the Pharisees' minds both angels and spirits existed as separate beings? The question they addressed was whether a spirit or an angel had indeed spoken to Paul (as to his testimony in Acts 22). Why would the disbelief of the Sadducees then rule out the possibility that the 'seven spirits of God' before the throne in Revelation 4:5 may, like the four living beings and the twenty-four elders, be spirit beings rather than the Holy Spirit?

Geoff Hydon, Mount Forest

Two editors reply . . .

1. There is no question, first of all, that angels and spirits are different species of created beings, so we had no dissent from the intention in the contribution, as clarified above.

2. We know there is only one divine Spirit, and the fact that there is no other reference in Scripture to other benign spirit beings having a significant role to play in interrelation with human beings, as opposed to angels, is significant. Zechariah 4:2, showing seven lamps associated with one lampstand, and then the statement of explanation in verse 6 of 'My Spirit' (singular) carries weight, as with the one lampstand and seven lamps in Tabernacle and Temple furniture.

R.B.F.

We agree Acts 23:9 would be generally understood as having no reference to evil spirits. 'The seven lamps before the throne which are the seven Spirits of God' (NAS) is, to me and others, a depiction of the presence there of the Holy Spirit, since He would not be absent from Father and Son at the seat of Divinity. Father, Son and Spirit, being God, can of course be in more than one location simultaneously. As to the various thoughts of Bible students over centuries about the meaning of this sevenfold expression of the one Spirit of God, see earlier remarks by contributors, with their Scriptural basis where offered.

As to the possibility of benign spirits communicating with man, some might refer to the experience of Eliphaz in Job 4:12-16, see the views in B.S., 2003, pp.46-47, that this was either an angel or the Spirit of God speaking by means of a dream. Angels are described as 'ministering spirits' in Hebrews 1:14.

M.A.



New Testament churches in Asia Minor

Published by and obtainable from
Hayes Press, The Barn, Flaxlands, Royal Wootton Bassett,
Wiltshire, England SN4 8DY