

Then the Angel Took the Censer, Filled It with Fire From the Altar and Hurled It On the Earth

8: 2-5

DIG: Why the golden censer? What do the altar and the incense teach us about prayer (also see 5:8, 6-9-10 and 9:13)? The fragrance of the incense reminds God of what? Why would Jesus call for an earthquake?

REFLECT: When was the last time you cried out to ADONAI for justice? Does the Lord always answer our prayers? Is He obligated to do so? Why? Why not?

Apparently, during the interval of silence John saw the seven angels who stand before God. The number seven is of special significance (see Ag - **The Number Seven**). The use of the definite article indicates that these seven angels make up a specific group. They seem to be a different order from the cherubim (Ezekiel 1:4-25), as their mission and service are very different. The name of one of the angels is known to be Michael (12:7). Gabriel is certainly another of the seven. He identified himself to Zechariah by saying: I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God (Luke 1:19). He was also sent directly from God's presence to Dani'el (Dani'el 8:16, 9:21-23), and Mary (Luke 1:26).²⁴¹ The other five angels are not mentioned by name in the Bible; but, the Jewish tradition says that the seven angels are Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Saraqael, Gabriel, and Remiel, from the apocryphal book of First Enoch 20:2-8. The word stand is in the Greek tense that indicates that they are continually standing before the Lord ready for service.

They were given seven shofars, or trumpets, in preparation for the judgment that would follow shortly (8:2). Trumpets are the most significant musical instruments in the Bible. In the TaNaKh, shofars called the Israelite community together (Numbers 10:2), they sounded the alarm before going into war (Numbers 10:9; Second Chronicles 13:12; Ezekiel 33:3), they proclaim news (First Samuel 13:3), they praise new kings (First Kings 1:34), and participated in worship (Second Chronicles 5:12-13). Zephaniah 1:14-16 associates trumpets with the Day of the Lord. From the New Covenant we learn that the trumpet will announce the Rapture (First Corinthians 15:52; First Thessalonians 4:16).

Each of the **seven shofars** or **trumpets** unleashes a specific judgment that will grow in intensity. Like labor pains, **the trumpet** judgments are more intense than the seal judgments, and the bowl judgments that will follow, will be more intense than **the trumpet** judgments. Having been introduced and given **their shofars**, **the seven angles** now wait before **they** unleash the wrath of **Ha'Shem** on **the earth** below. As **the trumpets** of Isra'el were used at the battle of Jericho, so the walls of this world's opposition to **the Lord** will crumble and fall during the **Great Tribulation**. When **Messiah** comes **He** will put down the last trace of rebellion and establish **His Kingdom** here upon **the earth** (20:1-6).²⁴²

Yochanan saw **another angel** who outranked the previous **seven**. This is not **Jesus**. **He** had already been identified as **the Lamb** (5:6, 6:1, 7:17), and while the pre-incarnate **Christ** appeared as an **Angel of ADONAI** in the TaNaKh, **Messiah** is never identified as an **angel** in the B'rit Chadashah. In addition, the word **another** is *allos*, means another of the same kind. This is **another** high-ranking **angel**.

The golden censer was used in the Tabernacle and the Temple. It contained charcoal that was burned under a layer of **incense** (see my commentary on **Exodus Fp - The Altar of Incense in the Sanctuary: Christ, Our Advocate with the Father**). When the hot charcoal warmed the layer of incense, a sweet fragrance was produced. Although the Greek word for **censer** elsewhere means **incense** (Leviticus 16:12-13), the adjective **golden** indicates that **the Holy Spirit** had the container in mind rather than its contents.²⁴³ **Incense** was so sacred that its personal use was punishable by death (Exodus 30:34-38). It is no wonder then, that it was one of the gifts the wise men gave to the baby **Jesus** when they came to worship **Him** (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Av - The Visit of the Magi**). Its fragrance reminds **God of His Son** who came to die for the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2).

The angel came and stood at the **golden altar** like a priest ready to offer **incense** (Exodus 40:5; Leviticus 4:7; Hebrews 9:4). That **altar** will be the heavenly counterpart to **the altar of incense** in the Tabernacle, which was also made of **gold** (see my commentary on **Exodus Go - The Day of Atonement**). It was the same **golden altar** seen by **Isaiah** in his vision (**Isaiah 6:6**). This action is also somewhat parallel to that of **Ezekiel's** vision in which a man clothed in linen fills his hands with coals of fire from between the cherubim and scatters them over the city of Jerusalem (**Ezekiel 10:2**). In the Dispensation of the Torah (see my commentary on **Exodus Da - The Dispensation of the Torah**), the priests would take hot fiery coals from the bronze altar and transport them into the Holy Place to **the golden altar of incense** twice a day. Once in the morning and once in the evening when the daily sacrifices were made so **incense** would burn continually before **ADONAI** (Exodus 30:7-8). The continual burning of **incense** is an example of the need for persistent prayer (**Psalms 16:8, 17:1, 28:2, 55:17; Luke 18:1-8; First Thessalonians 5:17-18**).

The golden altar is the place where prayer is offered. The Lord will give the angel much incense to offer and it will be mingled with the prayers of God's people (8:3). These will be all the unanswered prayers of God's suffering believers for all the ages, not merely the souls under the altar (6:9). Earlier, around the throne of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders also held golden bowls full of incense, which were the prayers of God' people (5:8). Scripture clearly shows that incense is a symbol of prayer. When hiding in a cave from Saul, David said: **May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice (Psalm 141:2).**

The angel will take the censer containing the incense, together with the prayers of God's people and wave it around, causing the smoke to drift up before God on His throne (8:4). ADONAI, God will smell the incense, hear the prayers of the saints and prepare to answer. Then the same golden censer from which the prayers of God's people are sent to heaven, becomes a fiery weapon discharging judgment earthward.²⁴⁴

The time had come to answer those desperate pleas for God's intervention. As Deuteronomy 32:35-37a says: **Vengeance and payback are mine for the time when their foot slips; for the day of their calamity is coming soon, their doom is rushing upon them. Yes, ADONAI will judge His people, taking pity on His servants, when He sees that their strength is gone, that no one is left, slave or free. Then He will ask, "Where are their gods?"**

Then the scene of intercession becomes one of judgment, as the angel priest took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth. This will show that God's judgment will come in direct response to all the prayers of God's people. Yeshua Messiah will answer their prayers. And in direct response to the silence, there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightening and an earthquake (8:5). These are always associated with the awesome majesty of God's throne (Ex 19:16-19; Rev 4:5, 11:19, 16:18). No details are given about the earthquake, but it will probably be at least as powerful as the one associated with the sixth seal (6:12). So as a warning to the earth that the trumpet judgments are about to begin it is made to tremble with tremors of nature.²⁴⁵

However, the world will still refuse to believe the Gospel (9:20-21, 16:9 and 11). They will acknowledge that the terrifying judgments are coming from the Lord (6:15-17), but despite the worldwide preaching of the 144,00 and the witness of martyred believers, unbelievers will continue to love their sin more than the Light. This seems impossible, but the sad truth is that **the Light has come into the world, but men loved the darkness instead of the Light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the**

Light, and will not come into the light for fear that his or her deeds will be exposed (John 3:19-20). The unbelieving world rejected **Yeshua** when **He** came, it rejects the life-giving message of the Gospel now, and it will continue to do so during the judgment in the Great Tribulation (**Hebrews 10:26-27**). But for those who repent of their sins and come to saving **faith** in **Christ**, they will **have eternal life** because the person who **believes in Him will not be condemned (John 3:16, 5:24).**²⁴⁶

*Come, **Holy Spirit!** Let the Word of **God** burn in my heart. Let it purify my mind and teach me deeply that I am made to live with **You** forever.*²⁴⁷