

Revelation Eight (vv.1-13)

This chapter introduces the *second* cycle of judgments in Revelation – the **seven trumpets**.

- These judgments are *successive* (or telescopic) since the seventh seal opens out into the seven trumpets. The seventh seal *is* the seven trumpets. The first trumpet likely sounds the commencement of the Great Tribulation.
- The trumpets are loud, public judgments – an announcement of warfare. They are blown by *angels* because spirit beings will release (fallen) spirit beings (cf. 9.1-5). The trumpet judgments are because men have sided with the devil. They have worshipped him, and thus God gives them what they desire – mass demonic activity.
- Both the trumpets and the bowls clearly echo the plagues of Egypt. God’s deliverance and redemption of His people is something He has done before, on a smaller scale, and will now accomplish again. The plagues of Egypt were in *three* groups of *three* (nine in total), followed by a *divine visitation* (the Passover). So the judgments of the tribulation will be in *three* groups of *seven* (21 in total) followed by a *divine visitation* – the return of Christ Himself.
- As with the seals, the series of *seven* trumpets is clearly divided into *four* and *three* by the voice of an eagle (8.13). Only the last three trumpets are introduced as “woe” judgments (8.13; 9.12). *“The first four trumpets affect primarily the natural world (earth, sea, fresh water, sky), albeit with substantial collateral effects on humans, while the final three target humans specifically.”* (Fanning). Two of the last three trumpets describe demonic activity.

Trumpet	Reference	Impact	Description
One	8.7	Earth	Hail, fire, and blood on land – one third burned
Two	8.8-9	Sea	Burning mountain cast into the sea – one third blood
Three	8.10-11	Rivers and springs	Burning star falls on rivers and springs – one third polluted
Four	8.12	Sky	Sun, moon, and stars smitten – one third darkened
<i>Interlude [8.13] – Flying eagle declaring three woes</i>			
Five	9.1-12	First woe	Demons from the abyss
Six	9.13-21	Second woe	Demons (invasion) from the east – one third of mankind killed
<i>Interlude [10.1-11.14] – Angel with a little scroll; Two witnesses</i>			
Seven	11.15-19	Third woe	Kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of God

Seal Seven: Silence in Heaven [v.1]

v.1. Though there appears to be no specific judgment associated with the **seventh seal**, actually, the seven trumpets *are* the contents of the seventh seal. A similar telescoping of judgments is also evident in the seventh trumpet (11.15) which consists of the seven vials (15.1). In a contrast to the noise of preceding chapters, **silence in heaven** appears ominous. Silence is often enjoined by OT prophets when there is an expectation of impending divine judgment. For example, *Zephaniah 1.7: “Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God: For the day of the Lord is at hand.”* Or *Zechariah 2.13: “Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord: For he is raised up out of his holy habitation.”* See also Habakkuk 2.20; 3.3. It seems, then, that this is a dramatic pause to symbolise the dread anticipation with which heaven awaits the unleashing of the storm of the Great Tribulation. Interestingly, there are ancient Jewish traditions (pre-AD70) that say a period of silence occurred at the time of incense offering in the temple in Jerusalem. As this is about to take place in heaven (v.3), it is possible the silence is to emphasise the special attention God is giving, at this particular time, to the prayers of His people. The silence extends for the **space of half an hour**. Heaven is, of course, not subject to limitations such as time – but the earthly measurement is for the sake of a human prophet (John) and human readers. Again, Vine notes that half an hour was *“a period corresponding to the time customarily spent in silent worship in the temple during the burning of incense”*.

Prelude in Heaven: The Supplications of the Saints [vv.2-6]

v.2. Before each cycle of judgment, there is a prelude in heaven to show that God is in complete control – every judgment is controlled, measured and appropriate. John saw **seven angels** who are distinguished by a definite article, ‘the’ seven angels. The Jewish apocrypha names seven archangels, two of whom are mentioned in Scripture (Gabriel and Michael), but the article here is merely pointing out a specific group. They are ‘the seven’ because to them has been given the special commission of sounding the trumpets. The angels **stood before God**, being their customary and characteristic position. Their nearness to God’s throne indicates they are ready to serve at a moment’s notice (Luke 1.19). To these angels **were given** (passive) **seven trumpets**. The *passive* implies God as the giver of their commission. Trumpets are frequently mentioned in Scripture, often in association with Israel. They used two different kinds of trumpets, silver trumpets [*ḥšōšērâ*] and the ram’s horn [*šôpār*]. The silver trumpets were fashioned from the silver redemption money and reminded Israel they were the redeemed of the Lord and under His direction. They were used to assemble the people to journey, to sound an alarm in times of war and at times of rejoicing during the annual feasts (Numbers 10.1-10). The

ram's horn announced the presence of deity at Sinai (Exodus 19.19), impending judgment at Jericho (Joshua 6.4), a rallying call to war (Judges 6.34), the tidings of victory (1 Samuel 13.3) or to acclaim a new king (1 Kings 1.34). The ram's horn is also associated with the Day of the Lord (Joel 2.1; Zephaniah 1.14-16), the coming of Christ (Zechariah 9.14-16) and the regathering of Israel (Isaiah 27.12; Matthew 24.31). A trumpet will also announce the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4.16). In the context of Revelation, trumpets announce and declare impending judgment and warfare upon earth dwellers. As RL Thomas says, they are "*precursors of divine judgment in the Day of the Lord*".

v.3. Before the trumpets sound, the reason for their sounding is explained – it is a divine response to the prayers of God's people. **Another** [*allos*] **angel** came and **stood** at the (golden) **altar**. The word *allos* means another of the same kind – this angel is another of the angel class but distinguished from the seven about to sound the trumpets. Some identify this angel with Christ, but this is not the case. Not only does the use of *allos* rule this out (Christ is not a mere angelic being, cf. Hebrews 1.4-13), but, as Jim Allen says, "*The incarnation of Christ and His assumption of permanent manhood rule out any subsequent appearance in angelic form.*" The angel stands at the heavenly counterpart of the golden altar, which, in the tabernacle was the nearest item of furniture to the immediate presence of God in the Holy of Holies (Exodus 30.6). Hence this heavenly golden altar is described as **before the throne**. This angel had a **golden censer** and was **given** (passive) **much incense** to offer **with the prayers of all saints**. The golden censer was a firepan (Exodus 27.3; 1 Kings 7.50) which was used to carry incense into the holy place (Ezekiel 8.11) and burning coals from the brazen altar to the golden altar (Exodus 30.7-8). The incense was added to the coals on the golden altar to produce a cloud of sweetly smelling fragrance ascending to the Lord, emblematic of the prayers of the saints (Revelation 5.8). **Much incense** (which speaks of Christ) was given to the angel which he offered *with* the prayers of the saints. The incense comprised four spices indicating the perfectly balanced and blended character of the Lord Jesus (Exodus 30.34-38). The prayers of the saints are made acceptable to God by the fragrance of Christ. The **prayers of all saints** probably embraces both the cry for justice from Tribulation believers and martyrs (cf. 6.9-10) and prayer for the coming kingdom which has been offered from all believers down the ages (Matthew 6.10). **v.4.** The incense having been poured on the coals of the golden altar, the **smoke** rises **before God** as a sweet aroma with the **prayers** of the saints – to ensure their acceptability before Him.

v.5. In a dramatic and unexpected turn of events, the angel takes the **censer**, fills it with **fire** (burning coals from the golden altar) and hurls its contents **into the earth**. The act of worship (incense) has become a gesture of judgment – the prayers of God's people are being answered in judgment on the earth (cf. Ezekiel 10.2-7). The **thunderings, lightnings** and an **earthquake** (contrast v.1) are convulsions of nature to warn earth dwellers of the impending wrath to come. In Revelation, a thunderstorm and earthquake regularly signal that final judgment is coming (cf. 6:12; 11:13, 19; 16:18). **v.6.** Resuming the scene from v.2, the **seven angels prepared** themselves to sound the trumpets, probably in a deliberate arranging of themselves in the proper order and raising their trumpets in readiness to sound.

Trumpet One: Burning of the Earth [v.7]

v.7. The first trumpet calls **hail and fire** mixed with **blood** to fall upon the earth. This is similar to the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19.24) and replicates the seventh plague in Egypt (Exodus 9.23-24). Many of the trumpet judgments show a close parallel with those in Exodus. In one respect, God is showing that what He has already done *locally* (in Egypt), He will now accomplish *universally* in the whole earth. Additionally, the OT prophets believed the plagues of Egypt would be repeated on a far grander scale of judgment in the future (cf. Isaiah 10.24; Micah 7.15; Amos 4.10; 8.8-9). That future has arrived. The violent thunderstorms of hail and fire cause men and animals to die, their blood being caught in the cyclonic winds. The fire results in a **third part** of the earth (see JND, RV) and **trees** being **burnt up**, as well as **all green grass**. Thus, a third part of the earth's land surface (including cultivated soil) is consumed by fire, as well as a third of the earth's trees. To show the universal impact of the judgment, **all green grass** (at the time of the plague) was also burned by the fire.

Trumpet Two: Blood in the Sea [vv.8-9]

v.8. The second trumpet uses the language of simile, "**as it were a great mountain burning with fire.**" Whatever John saw, it closely resembled a large mountain on fire being cast into the sea. This *could* describe an extra-terrestrial body, like a meteor the size of a large mountain, hurtling towards earth. It would blaze with fire from the friction of entering and passing through the earth's atmosphere and hit the sea with the impact of several nuclear bombs. However, this interpretation would seem too similar to the third trumpet (see notes). In addition, the 'mountain' in v.8 is not described as falling "from heaven" as the 'star' in v.10. It is therefore more likely this describes the collapse of a super volcano, and the resulting devastation huge tsunamis would cause from the land displacement. The recent eruption of Vesuvius (AD79) would no doubt have loomed large in the mind of John as he considered the vision. The effect was a **third part of the sea** quite literally turned to **blood**, just as the waters of the Nile (Exodus 7.14-25). Later, under the second vial judgment (16.3), *all* the sea is turned to blood causing the death of every living creature. **v.9.** As a result of the impact, a third of all sea life died, as well as a third of the world's ships being destroyed, probably by huge tsunamis.

Trumpet Three: Bitterness of the Waters [vv.10-11]

v.10. The third trumpet reveals a **great star** falling from **heaven**, **burning** like a **lamp**. In Revelation, stars can be literal and refer to heavenly bodies (6.13), or they can represent angels (1.20; 12.4). In fact, under the fifth trumpet, a star clearly symbolises an angelic person (9.1). One wonders if this is also the case here – the angel’s name being Wormwood. Alternatively, this could be a heavenly body like a meteor. It was **burning** (blazing) like a **torch** [*lampas*], a word used in ancient times to describe comets and meteors. The great star fell upon a third part of the earth’s fresh water supplies – both a third of the rivers and a third of its natural springs (fountains). This again recalls the first Egyptian plague with its contamination of the drinking-water supply (Exodus 7.21). **v.11.** The name of the star is **Wormwood** [*apsinthos*] – a word mentioned eight times in the OT. *Lamentations 3.19: “Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall.”* Wormwood was a shrub with a bitter taste and therefore a symbol in the OT for sorrow (Proverbs 5.3-4) and judgment (Jeremiah 9.15; 23.15). Fanning says, “*the leaves are used in making a bitter-tasting medicine to treat intestinal parasites and other ailments. It contains a compound that is safe yet quite bitter in low concentrations but can cause fatal seizures in higher amounts.*” A **third part** of the earth’s drinking water became contaminated with wormwood, making the waters **bitter** (toxic). As a result, **many men died**. This is the reverse of the miracle at Marah, where the Lord made bitter waters sweet (Exodus 15.23).

Trumpet Four: Blackness of the Heavens [v.12]

v.12. The fourth trumpet resembles the ninth Egyptian plague in which darkness covered the land of Egypt for three days (Exodus 10.21-23). A **third part** of the **sun**, **moon** and **stars** were **smitten** [*plēssō*], the verb from which the noun ‘plague’ derives – the heavenly bodies are smitten by a plague from God. That a **third part** of these heavenly bodies **was darkened** does not describe a partial eclipse as if only two thirds of the sun’s rays reach earth. Instead, the darkness will be total for those periods – there will be no light from the sun for a third of the day, and no light from the moon for a third of the night. How will God accomplish this? We are not told. Jim Allen says, “[*It is not*] explained how God gave a long day in Joshua’s time (Joshua 10.12-14), nor how He caused the shadow on the sundial of Ahaz to go back ten degrees (Isaiah 38.7-8). Faith still accepts that He will bring to pass this unprecedented astronomical happening.” Loss of radiation from the sun will no doubt disrupt and change weather patterns all over the world. Darkness is an important symbol of judgment – Amos calls the Day of the Lord a “day of darkness” (Amos 5.18; Joel 2.2).

Interlude: Beware the Final Woes [v.13]

v.13. With the first four trumpets having sounded, this verse introduces the final three. These last trumpet judgments are so severe they are called “woe” judgments. Though the AV says John **beheld** and **heard an angel**, most textual authorities agree the true reading should be **eagle**. “*And I saw, and I heard an eagle flying in mid-heaven...*” [JND]. The eagle presents the idea of strength, power, speed, and height (exaltation). The eagle (likely an angel) therefore suggests the image of the *rapid* approach of God’s remaining vengeance (cf. Deuteronomy 28.49; Habakkuk 1.8; Hosea 8.1). It flies in the **midst of heaven**, high in the sky at the height of the noonday sun and thus *visible* to all. It speaks with a **loud voice** and thus is *audible* to all – this message must be heard! It is a message of threefold woe [*ouai*], describing the last three trumpets yet to sound. The Greek *ouai* may be onomatopoeic, resembling the sounds an eagle makes. Woe is used throughout Scripture as an expression of judgment, destruction, and condemnation. Such is about to fall on the earth dwellers (a *moral* not *physical* description). They have chosen to identify with the beast and must share in the judgment of their appointed king.