

Revelation 8 – Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

There's an old expression that applies well to the study of the Book of Revelation: "He couldn't see the forest for the trees."

It's the old problem of getting lost in the details so that you become blind to the larger picture.

If you're familiar with art, there's a style known as pointillism.

The artist paints a picture by using tiny dots of paint instead of long strokes.

[*Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* by French artist

Georges Seurat (7' X 10')^[1]]

When you stand back & away from the canvas, the dots blend together to produce the desired image.

But if you draw close to the canvas, your eyes see the individual dots of color and the image is lost.

You can do the same thing with a TV or computer monitor.

This is the challenge we face with the Book of Revelation.

We can lose sight of the larger message and theme of the Book in the individual visions of judgment.

So let's begin tonight by taking a step back and considering the larger theme of Revelation.

This Book teaches us that God is sovereign over History – that it truly is *His Story* and that while man has *genuine free will*, God has both the power and the wisdom to steer the events of history toward the end He has ordained.

Revelation teaches us that the rebellion of the human race in league with the devil, which began in the Garden of Eden and has gone on for some 6000 years, will eventually be put down.

Jesus Christ has reclaimed mankind's lost dominion and redeemed the Earth.

The Day will come when He will move decisively to reclaim what rightfully belongs to Him.

But when He does, rebel mankind will seek to resist His takeover.

And it's at this time that God will move in a dramatic way to reveal to the human race what the full result and consequences

are for having rejected their Maker and God.
For 6000 years, though man has rejected God, God has continued to pour out His grace on the Earth.
But finally, He will progressively remove that grace and let man experience life without it.
Let me explain it this way –
Picture a house next to a busy street.
In that house lives a family of three, a mother and father and single child.
Now, that little boy is a defiant and rebellious little brat who regularly tells his parents he hates them.
Yet they continue to give him all he needs – food, clothing, shelter, toys, school supplies – everything.
Because the house is on a busy street, they've built a fence so that their child, when he was young would not wander out on the road.
But finally the day comes when the boy is grown.
He is as defiant and willful as ever, and the parents decide it's time for him to be on his own.
So they stop buying him food and clothes and they take down the fence.
Because the young man has resisted his parents for years, he's not learned the lessons of how to live, and as a result has no idea how to buy and prepare food or clothe himself.
And seeing the fence gone, all he can think about is going where his parents have prohibited him from going.
So he runs out into the street where he is mashed by a passing truck.

That's what's happening in Revelation!

John presents the transition of the dominion of Earth from rebel man in league with Satan to the hands of Christ as 3 sets of judgments – represented by the breaking of 7 seals, then the sounding of 7 trumpets, and finally the pouring out of 7 bowls.
As we look at these things – don't get lost in the details.
The larger theme is Jesus taking possession of what rightfully belongs to Him as the Second Adam who has reclaimed mankind's forfeited heritage.

CHAPTER 8

¹When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

Up to this point, what have we learned about the sounds in heaven?

We've learned that God's voice is like the sound of a mighty waterfall, or the roaring of the waves. [1:15]

John has seen angels come forward to make pronouncements, and he always describes them as having loud or "mega" voices!

[4:1; 5:2; 11-12; 6:1]

The 4 cherubim, 24 elders, and great multitude, in union with all the host of heaven, cry out before God's throne continuously.

[4:8-11; 7:11-12]

But with the breaking of the final seal on the title deed to Earth, there is a dramatic moment of silence.

Great composers know how to use silence as an effective instrument in writing music.

The dramatic pause builds tension that is then resolved.

That's what's happening here.

There's been a lot of noise and activity up to this point, but now there's a pause, a tremulous moment when everything freezes.

The tension builds.

John says this silence lasted for **a half hour**.

That might not seem like long, unless we see it against the backdrop of what's been going on throughout John's vision of heaven.

It's been constant motion and overwhelming noise – then suddenly, it all stops!

[Be silent for 30 seconds] That was only 30 seconds!

How much tension would build, how uncomfortable would be if I stopped for a full minute; 10 minutes?

There's silence in heaven for a half hour!

Why?

Well, this is the 7th seal, the last seal on the title deed to Earth.

With its breaking, the scroll is now open and Jesus will move to reclaim that which belongs to Him.

The resistance of the devil and rebel man to His takeover becomes focused and fierce.

And God *rapidly* pours out His wrath now.

I don't want to be dogmatic here, but it's my belief this marks the *mid-point of the Tribulation* and that's why we have a period of a half hour of silence.

It's God's way of saying a *significant milestone* has been reached and now we enter a new phase of the Tribulation.

Bible students have long recognized that while the Tribulation lasts for 7 years, the mid-point marks a significant change. [Dan. 9:24-27; Rev. 11:2-3; 13:5 12:6, 14]

The first 3½ years are marked by widespread deception in which the antichrist goes forth to establish himself by lying signs and wonders.

He holds forth the promise of a new age of peace and prosperity if the world will just embrace him as its sovereign ruler.

He manages to gather the reins of political, military and religious power and though things on Earth are teetering on the edge of catastrophe, he seems to keep them at bay.

But then, at the mid-point of the Tribulation, he reveals his full plan, which is to demand that the world worships him as god.

He does this at the dedication of the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem.

But this act is so abominable, this is when God's wrath begins to fall in a way never before seen in history.

Heaven declares war on the kingdom of Satan, which is epitomized in the rule of the antichrist.

2And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.

John introduces some angels as if we should know who they are; he calls them "the seven angels who stand before God."

His vision here verifies an ancient Jewish tradition which speaks of 7 angels standing before God, each one having a different mission to perform for the Lord.

We know them as *archangels* who are given the names Uriel,

Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Saraqael, Gabriel, and Remiel. [2]

It's interesting that we find some further support for this in Luke 1:19 where Gabriel says to Mary - "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring

you these glad tidings.”

Now these archangels are given trumpets.

Trumpets are significant in the Bible.

According to Numbers 10, trumpets had 3 important uses:

- 1) They called the people together for assembly before the Lord (1-8)
- 2) They announced war (9)
- 3) They announced special times (10)

Everyone familiar with the OT would remember the trumpets at the conquest of Jericho (Josh. 6:13-16).

The people marched around the town for 7 days, and then on the last day marched around it 7 times.

The use of the number 7 here in Rev. 8 gives us a clue as to the meaning of *these* trumpets.

They blow to mark the fall of the rebellious kingdoms of the devil and man.

These are battle trumpets, announcing war!

But before they sound John sees -

3Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer *it* with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.

Another angel comes forward and stands by the golden altar which stands before the throne of God.

In his hands is a censer piled high with incense.

The ancient censer was an *open shovel*; not the metal ball suspended by chains or ropes you see Catholic priests use today.

We get a better idea of the scene here by looking at the temple, since the temple was a model of heaven. [Exo. 25:40 cf. Heb. 8:4-5]

In the temple, the golden altar stood in the Holy Place, right in front of the curtain that separate the Holy Place from the Holy of holies, which represented God's throne room.

On the golden altar were hot coals upon which the priests put incense.

As they did so, they would pray for the nation and ask that God would attend to their prayers.

The golden altar symbolized the prayers and praises of God's covenant people, rising before His throne.

That's the picture here.

This angel comes with a censer piled high with incense – symbolic of ALL the prayers of God's people who for ages and generations prayed for Christ to come.

4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand.

Meaning the angel placed the incense from the censer onto the golden altar.

5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw *it* to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake.

But now we have the angel *adding something* to the ritual the priests carried out in the temple.

Here the angel scoops some of the live coals and burning incense *back* into the censer, turns and flings it to the Earth.

The symbolism is that the prayers which have *gone up* before God, are now being *returned!*

They haven't been *rejected* – they are being *answered*.

What's *gone up* is *coming down!*

The noises, thunderings, lightnings, and earthquake are a quick *summary* of the trumpets that are about to sound.

In other words, the physical planet is going to be shaken to its core.

Never underestimate the *power of your prayers!*

Before the 7 angels with the 7 trumpets sound, this angel comes forth to mark the consummation of the prayers of the saints.

Really, it's the prayers of the saints that help bring in the consummation of the ages and the Return of Christ.

As it says in 2 Peter 3:12 – we can *hasten* the Lord's coming!

As Daniel read the scriptures and the prophecies concerning Israel's captivity, he came to realize the time was coming to an end and prayed for the fulfillment to arrive speedily. [ch. 9]

In the same way, as we study scripture and realize the signs of the last days are in abundant supply, we can and should pray "Even

so, come, Lord Jesus!” [Rev. 22:20]

6 So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

Okay – here we go; now comes the days of severe trial for the Earth-dwellers.

7 The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

The first trumpet marks a *judgment on the vegetation*.

The “hail & fire” give us a clue for interpreting this trumpet.

When the 7th plague fell in Egypt we read this in Exodus 9:23-24

23 And Moses stretched out his rod toward heaven; and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire darted to the ground. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt.

24 So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, so very heavy that there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. 25 And the hail struck throughout the whole land of Egypt, all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail struck every herb of the field and broke every tree of the field.

There are those who want to make these trumpet judgments “spiritual” or “symbolic.”

They deny that this is a literal judgment upon Earth’s vegetation.

There are two big problems in interpreting these trumpets as symbolic.

1) John uses terms here that for several of these trumpet judgments send us back to the *Plagues of Egypt*.

He is clearly drawing a *connection* between them.

And the plagues of Egypt were *literal*, not symbolic!

They were the judgments of God on the false gods of the

Egyptians and were the means by which He liberated His people by breaking the pride of the stiff-necked Pharaoh.

2) If these things are symbolic, the question is, symbolic of WHAT?

As Bible commentator Seiss says, “The truth is, if ‘earth, trees, and grass’ do not mean *earth, trees, and grass*, no man can tell what they mean. Letting go the literal signification of the record, we launch out upon an endless sea of sheer conjecture.”

When we read v. 7, we wonder just how this judgment will come.

What do the hail and fire mixed with blood mean exactly?

Well, in the 7th Plague of Egypt, it was a hail storm.

But it was a storm *sent by God*.

He used the forces of nature to affect His judgment.

That may be what we have here – God turning nature against rebel man.

8th Then the second angel sounded: And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. 9th And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

This is reminiscent of the 1st Plague, in which all the waters of the Nile were turned to blood. [Exo. 7:20-21]

John says he saw something LIKE a great mountain burning with fire thrown into the sea.

What *exactly* he saw is a mystery – if he’d know what it was, he’d have used *that* word.

The point is, the oceans are polluted to such a degree that a third of them become incapable of supporting life.

On top of that, a third of the ships are destroyed.

Again, we don’t know the *cause* for this, but if there was some kind of *nuclear* fallout that hampered the seas, it could account for this pollution, death, and why so many ships are ruined.

The meltdown of a nuclear reactor that spills into the ocean may be an apt description of a “mountain burning with fire.”

10th Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. 11th The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because

it was made bitter.

Here's another judgment from the heavens.

“Wormwood” is the name of a family of plants which are extremely bitter.

In the OT, the word was used to describe the bitterness of rebelling against God. [Deut 29:17-18 Jer. 9:13-16; 23:15 Lam. 3:15 Amos 5:7]

While the 2nd trumpet poisons a third of the *salt water* – the 3rd sees a poisoning of a third of the world's *fresh water* supply.

How this poisoning takes place is described as by a great star burning like a torch.

But it doesn't fall in just one location, for it's effect is to poison rivers and springs all over.

We can't be certain – but this may *also* be a manifestation of nuclear fallout or chemical poisoning.

Some have suggested that this might be a meteor which enters our atmosphere, and is so volatile that it explodes and rains down a bitter chemical cloud that pollutes the landscape.

12 Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night.

This is a judgment on the sky and reminds us of the 9th plague of Egypt, the plague of *darkness*. [Exo. 10:21-23]

That plague was not caused by a simple *obscuring* of the sun, moon, and stars, but by a sovereign act of God *removing the light altogether* and that's the way we ought to understand it here.

John says, “A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night.”

This isn't simply an obscuring of the light to 2/3's its normal luminosity.

John is saying that the light will be utterly turned off for 8 hours every day.

This will either be in the afternoon, or in the morning when day & night are transitioning into one another.

Imagine what it will be like without any light whatsoever for 8 hours at a time!

When we visit Russia, we have to endure irregular hot water supplies.

They turn it on for only a couple hours a day – and that seems hard to endure!

If you've ever been in a cavern when they turn the lights off, you know what utter darkness means.

The people of the earth will realize that the author of these judgments is God!

Consider for a moment how devastating these first 4 judgments will be to the Earth.

God attacks all the ordinary means of subsistence, such as food and water.

Then He attacks all the ordinary means of comfort and knowledge, such as light and the regular rhythm of days.

Mankind believes these aspects of the created order are impersonal, perpetual, imperturbable forces.

During the Great Tribulation, God proclaims His Lordship through their agonizing disruption. [\[3\]](#)

1) A third of the trees and all grass are consumed.

Fruit & vegetables
Grazing for livestock
Climate

2) A third of the oceans polluted.

Food
Commerce & Trade
Oxygen (plankton)
Stink!
Climate

3) A third of fresh water polluted

Thirst
Food (irrigation)

4) A third of the light

The sun is the main energy source for all earth and life systems.
Food
Climate

What God is doing with these first 4 trumpet judgments is turning nature against man.

The creation has been subjected to futility and the curse through the Fall.

And now that Jesus is moving to reclaim what belongs to Him, God is, in a sense, *animating* nature to fight back at rebel man and to repay him for the evils he's perpetrated against nature.

It has been God's gracious hand that has kept nature in check, and supplying man with the water, food, and light he's needed.

But as man has constantly rejected God and abused the earth, so now God withdraws His hand and let's man experience the fullness and reality of what it means to live without His loving grace and protection.

You know, all we need to do to see the *protective hand* of God is to look at the *surface* of the Moon.

What do you see? Craters – massive ones!

And the Moon is right there, right next to us!

Why isn't the face of our planet pocked with such craters?

Because of God's protecting hand!

One day that hand will be removed.

As bad as these first 4 trumpets are, the last 3 are even worse -

13And I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!"

CONCLUSION

What's interesting with the first 4 trumpet judgments – is that only a *third* of these things will be judged.

Why not all of it?

Because of God's mercy! "For now, [He] *s pares* more than He *smites*." [Guzik]

It may be hard to see it because it will be so horrendous, but God *could* kill *all* the trees, pollute *all* the salt water, kill *all* the fish, destroy *all* the ships, poison *all* the fresh water and plunge the world into utter darkness 24 hours a day.

He judges only a third of these things, and does so in such a way that everyone knows it's He that's doing it, so that men and women might realize they're rebels, come to their senses, repent, and find salvation through faith in Christ.

As we've seen in chapters 6 & 7, a great multitude *are* brought to faith and come out of the Great Tribulation to stand before God's throne.

The May 1984 issue of *National Geographic* had a long article on the destruction of the Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum in A.D. 79.

The explosion of Mount Vesuvius was so sudden, the residents were killed while in their daily routine.

Men and women were at the market, the rich in their luxurious baths, slaves at toil.

They died amid volcanic ash and superheated gasses.

Even family pets suffered the same quick and final fate.

It takes little imagination to picture the panic of that terrible day as it is now seen in the casts of their bodies which are found by the hundreds.

The tragic part is that these people did not have to die!

Scientists confirm what ancient Roman writers record--weeks of rumblings and shakings preceded the actual explosion.

Even an ominous plume of smoke was clearly visible from the mountain days before the eruption.

If only the people of Pompeii and Herculaneum had paid attention to Vesuvius's warnings!

There are similar "rumblings" in our world: warfare, earthquakes, the nuclear threat, economic woes, the shocking breakdown of morality that has even the most hard-boiled of liberals wringing their hands.

They all stand as signs pointing to the fact that we live in the last days and soon judgment will fall.

While what we're studying in Revelation is *yet future*, the Bible contains enough fulfilled prophecy to *prove* it's nothing less than the inspired Word of God.

The Bible says the day will come when God will move decisively to reclaim what belongs to Him.

Several passages gives us the signs that herald the approach of that

day.

You don't have to be a genius or Bible scholar to see that the signs are all here.

The next event will be the Rapture of the Church in which God takes His people out so that His judgment may fall.

Are you ready?

Will you be taken up in the Rapture, or will you be one of those who's left behind because you refused to heed the warnings?

[1] "Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte," *Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2000*. © 1993-1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

[2] 1 Enoch 20:2-8 as cited in Johnson, Alan, *Expositor's Bible Commentary: Revelation* pg. 488-9

[3] Guzik