

When Grace Pulls Back • Revelation 8

INTRODUCTION • vs. 1-5 • Can't See the Forest

1. There's an old expression that applies well to the study of Revelation:
"You can't see the forest for the trees."
2. The idea is You get so distracted by details you can't see the bigger picture.
3. You've heard of the style of art popular in Europe during the 19th C called **Impressionism**.
 - a. Claude Monet & Eduoard Manet were the 2 most famous **French** Impressionists.
 - b. The **early** Impressionists used **bold** brush strokes; large dashes of color.
 - c. **Later** Impressionists made much smaller stroke & dots.
 - d. Georges Seurat (George Serah) used a technique called **Pointillism**.
 - 1) Using a tiny brush, he put a dot of color on a huge canvas.
 - 2) Up close, all your eye sees is a **mass of colored dots**.
 - 3) But when you back up to view the whole canvas, the dots **merge into a beautiful painting**
4. That's the challenge we face with the Book of Revelation.
 - a. We can lose sight of the larger message & theme by **isolating** John's various visions.
 - b. So let's begin today by **taking a step back** to consider the theme of this book.
5. Revelation reminds us God is sovereign over History.
 - a. History is *His Story*.
 - b. While people are indeed *free to make their own choices*, God has both the power & wisdom to steer the events of history toward the end He's ordained.
6. This Book reveals that the rebellion begun thousands of years ago in Eden will be put down.
 - a. Jesus reclaimed humanity's lost dominion & has redeemed Earth.
 - b. He will come again to reclaim what rightfully belongs to Him.
 - c. But when He does, rebel mankind in league w/the devil resist His takeover.
 - d. So as Jesus closes escrow, He evicts the **squatters**, the "**earth-dwellers**" as John repeatedly calls them.
7. Another way to think of the judgments John describes in Revelation is this ...
 - a. Though humanity as a whole has rejected God ever since Eden, God continues to pour out His grace on the Earth.
 - b. He launches the plan to redeem man by bring the Messiah.
 - c. And He continues to shower the Earth with goodness in the rain & sun.
 - d. The PROOF God's grace has been at work is that ever since the Fall in Eden, people have forsaken their rebellion & turned TO God.
8. But what we see in Revelation is when God gives humanity what it's wanted all along; a world without Him.
9. God progressively **pulls back His grace** to let humanity see what life & Earth is like without it.
10. Like waves at the beach, John sees judgment coming in 3 sets.
 - a. The breaking of 7 seals, the sounding of 7 trumpets, & the pouring out of 7 bowls.
 - b. The point is, as we look at these things, don't get lost in the details.
 - c. Remember the theme = Jesus is closing escrow. He's evicting the squatters who've trashed Earth.
 - d. And once He's reclaimed Earth, He's going to remake it into the Paradise He always intended it to be.

Vs. 1-5

¹ When He opened the 7th seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

1. Till now John's visions of heaven have been marked by a lot of loud sound.
 - a. God's voice was like a mighty waterfall. [1:15]
 - b. Angels make loud pronouncements. [4:1; 5:2; 11-12; 6:1]
 - c. The hosts of heaven continually worship round God's throne. [4:8-11; 7:11-12]
2. Now, as the last seal is broken on the TD to Earth, there's **silence**.
 - a. Great composers use silence when writing music to build tension.
 - b. As we listen to a tune & a rest comes, something inside us is eager & anxious for it to resolve; to finish.

3. That's what's happening here.
 - a. With the breaking of each of the previous 6 seals, momentous things have followed in both Heaven & Earth.
 - b. With this last seal, we expect things to resolve. But they don't.
 4. John says this silence lasted for about **a half hour**.
 - a. That doesn't seem long if we're thinking about the whole scope of history, but ... [wait]
 - b. That pause was just a few seconds; yet it was awkward / unsettling.
 5. This half hour of silence comes because a dramatic change is about to occur IN History.
 - a. The judgments that follow make clear to everyone on Earth that God's wrath has come.
 - b. As we'll see, Creation **turns on man**. Everything goes haywire.
 6. Opinion: I think this marks the *mid-point of the Trib* & that's why there's this half hr of silence.
 - a. The Trib lasts 7 yrs, & the 1st ½ of it is marked by relative peace & prosperity under the reign of the Antichrist. That's why billions follow him.
 - b. But prophecy is clear, 3½ yrs. in Everything changes.
 - c. When the antichrist declares himself God and demands worship, Heaven declares war on him & his allies.
 7. So while the entire 7 yrs is called The Trib, the **last half** is called the **Great** Tribulation.
- ² And I saw the 7 angels who stand before God, and to them were given 7 trumpets.
8. John introduces angels **as if we know who they are**.
 - a. The Jews said there were 7 arch-angels.
 - 1) Arche = ruler / prince.
 - 2) Jewish tradition named them Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Saraqael, Gabriel, & Remiel.
 - b. Interesting that in Luke 1:19, Gabriel told Mary - "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God."
 - c. That's most likely who John means here – the archangels.
 9. They're each given a trumpet; in this case, they announce war.
 - a. They didn't have radios on the ancient battlefield.
 - b. Generals directed their troops by a system of flags & trumpets.
 - c. That's what these trumpets are for; they call creation to rise up against the antichrist & his rebel allies.
 10. Before they sound John sees -
- ³ Then 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. ⁴ And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. 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.
11. The temple in Jerusalem was patterned after Heaven
 - a. In the temple, right before the veil that led into the Holy of holies, was a small golden incense altar.
 - b. Every morning & evening a priest replenished the coals & incense so that it was always burning before the veil.
 - c. As the smoke rose, it was a symbol of the prayers of God's people that rise continually before His throne.
 12. Now John sees the real golden altar in heaven.
 - a. An angel puts incense on the altar, and as the smoke rises, he scoops up some of the coals and incense.
 - b. This censer wasn't the thing we're familiar with; a metal cup hanging from a chain. That came much later.
 - c. **This** was a shallow cup on the end of a pole; like a shovel.
 13. The angel scoops up a mixture of coals & incense, & hurls it to Earth.
 - a. Prayers have **gone up** before God, now they're being **returned**.
 - b. They not **rejected**; they're **answered**. What goes up, must come down.
 - c. The noises, thunderings, lightnings, & earthquake of v5 are a brief *summary* of the trumpets about to sound.

Vs. 6-7 = The 1st Trumpet

⁶ So the 7 angels who had the 7 trumpets prepared themselves to sound. ⁷ The 1st angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a 3rd of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

1. The 1st trumpet is a **judgment on vegetation**.
2. There are some commentators who make these trumpet judgments **purely symbolic**.
 - a. They deny this is a **literal judgment** upon Earth's vegetation.
 - b. There are 2 big problems in making these things symbolic.
 - 1) John describes several of these trumpet judgments in ways that send us back to the *Plagues of Egypt*.
 - a) In the 7th plague, all the vegetation of Egypt was hammered by hail & fire.
 - b) That was a literal plague, not symbolic!
 - c) No Hebrew could comfort an Egyptian farmer that had just lost his crops to a massive hailstorm by saying, "Oh, don't cry. It's all just symbolic."
 - 2) Let's suppose these things **are** symbolic. The question becomes **Symbolic of WHAT?**
 - a) If "earth, trees, & grass" don't mean *earth, trees, & grass*, what DO they mean?
 - b) Now we're in a place where interpreting these things is a grab bag of sheer conjecture."
3. Now, I don't know what hail & fire mixed w/blood means.
 - a. But in the 7th plague of Egypt, God used a fierce hail and lightening storm.
 - b. Since John uses terms that connect the 2 judgments, we ought to understand this judgment the same way.
 - c. God brings it, but uses the forces of nature to affect it.

Vs. 8-9 • The 2nd Trumpet

⁸ Then the 2nd angel sounded: And *something* like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a 3rd of the sea became blood. ⁹ And a 3rd of the living creatures in the sea died, and a 3rd of the ships were destroyed.

1. That's reminiscent of the 1st Plague. The waters of the Nile were turned to blood.
2. John sees something **LIKE** a great mountain burning with fire thrown into the sea.
 - a. **Exactly what** he saw he didn't have a word for.
 - b. The best he could describe it was like a burning mountain.
 - 1) We can only speculate what it will be. >> Is it a meteorite or comet?
 - 2) Could it be a massive oil leak like the Deepwater Horizon that ignites?
 - 3) Does a nuclear power plant like Fukushima in 2011 spill into an ocean?
 - c. Whatever it is, the oceans are so polluted a 3rd are incapable of supporting life.
 - d. A 3rd of shipping is wiped out.
3. Just think of the effect these 1st 2 trumpets has on the global economy!

Vs. 10-11 • The 3rd Trumpet

¹⁰ Then the 3rd angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a 3rd of the rivers and on the springs of water. ¹¹ The name of the star is Wormwood. A 3rd of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter.

1. While the 2nd trumpet poisons the **oceans**, the 3rd poisons the world's supply of **fresh** water.
2. John sees a great star fall from heaven called "Wormwood"
 - a. Wormwood was an extremely bitter plant.
 - b. The way John describes this, it looks like a comet that instead of hitting in one place, explodes and scatter pollution over a large area – poisoning lakes & rivers.
3. We're having a drought in CA right now & earnestly praying for rain.
 - a. But we're still able to go to the tap and turn on water any time we want it.
 - b. What would happen in a place like VC if we turned on the tap and no water came out, or the water that did made people so ill some died?

- c. What kind of chaos & mayhem would ensue?
- 4. Now, multiply that over a 3rd of the world's surface!
- 5. May I suggest? Don't be here.

V. 12 • The 4th Trumpet

¹²Then the 4th angel sounded: And a 3rd of the sun was struck, a 3rd of the moon, and a 3rd of the stars, so that a 3rd of them were darkened. A 3rd of the day did not shine, and likewise the night.

- 1. This reminds us of the 9th Plague of Egypt, when **thick darkness** covered the land.
- 2. While the previous 3 judgment are on Earth, this is in the skies.
- 3. Something happens in the atmosphere that dims the light of the sun, moon & stars by a 3rd.
 - a. The preceding judgments could kick up enough smoke & debris to cause this.
 - b. Since light has been reduced by a 3rd, 8 hrs of every day are total darkness.

V. 13 • A Warning!

- 1. As bad as these 1st 4 trumpets are, the last 3 are **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 3 angels who are about to sound!"

CONCLUSION

- 1. With the 1st 4 trumpet-judgments, a **third** of the trees, seas, fresh water, & light will be judged; **not ALL of them 2/3^{rds}** are left.
- 2. In other words, God **s pares** more than He **smites**.
- 3. See? God **draws down the grace** He's shown humanity since time began.
- 4. He doesn't **curtail** grace altogether, but He does begin to withdraw it so people can see what life is like without Him.
 - a. They're headed toward an eternity without a shred of grace -
 - b. So He begins to back it out that they might realize their destiny if they don't repent & turn in faith to Him.
- 5. All we need to do to see the God's protection is to look at the **surface** of the Moon.
 - a. What do you see? Craters; massive ones!
 - b. And the Moon is right there, **next** to Earth.
 - c. Why isn't the face of our planet pocked by such craters?
 - d. You might say, "The atmosphere burns meteors up."
 - e. Right - but Who **put** that atmosphere there? God.
 - f. One day, in answer t humanity's long rebellion & rejection of God, He will give them what they want.
 - g. His protection will be withdrawn & nature will strike back at man who's subjected it to the curse.
- 6. We've already seen in chs 6&7, w/each round of judgment, some DO turn to God. But most don't.
- 7. How is it 2 people can look at the same thing and come to such radically different conclusions?
 - a. The same sun that melts wax, hardens clay.
 - b. And the same judgments that move some to faith in God will harden the rest against Him.

Pompeii

- 1. On Oct. 24th 79 AD, Mt Vesuvius on the west coast of Italy erupted.
- 2. Thousands of people in the cities of Pompeii & Herculaneum were killed by the intense heat, toxic gas & ash.
- 3. The ash fell so fast & thick it preserved the cities till the 18th C when archaeologists began excavations.
- 4. Hundreds of human remains have been found as if frozen in whatever they were doing 2000 years ago.
- 5. When Vesuvius blew, it made no distinction between rich & poor, men & women, old & young.
- 6. The tragedy is that these people didn't have to die.
 - a. Scientists have confirmed what ancient writers recorded.
 - b. For weeks **before** the eruption, tremors shook the ground & the mountain rumbled.
 - c. Just days prior, an ominous plume of smoke ascended into the sky.

- d. The mountain was **warning** the people of Pompeii & Herculaneum, but they paid it no mind.
- 7. The Bible foretells what's coming.
 - a. And now we see global politics, economics, & technology all in place for a **literal** fulfillment of things forecast long ago.
 - b. The stage has been set for the grand drama called the End Times.
 - c. The curtain is about to rise.