

Text: Rev 8.1-13

The three-fold outline of Revelation (1.19):

1. The things you have seen (the vision of Christ) Rev 1
2. The things which are (the letters to the churches) Rev 2-3
3. The things which must come after these things (Rev 4-22)
 - a. The overture: the scene in heaven (Rev 4-5)
 - b. The seal judgements begin (Rev 6)
 - c. (Parenthesis): the believers of the Tribulation (Rev 7)
 - d. The seventh seal which reveals the seven trumpets (four in chapter 8)

In chapter 8, the progression of judgement resumes with the opening of the seventh seal of the book (generally thought to represent about the mid-point of the tribulation).

I. The pause of preparation (1-6)**A. Silence in heaven (1)**

1. All sound ceases in heaven with the breaking of the seal
2. The 'half-hour' is probably literal
3. The silence continues through all the first six verses (my view) – a solemn preparation for the trumpet blasts to follow

B. The assembly of the angels (2)

1. John is now aware of seven unidentified angels standing before they throne
2. These angels are given seven trumpets
3. In Scripture, the sounding of trumpets always precedes something of outstanding importance
 - a. The giving of the Law (Ex 19.16, 20.18)
 - b. The arrival of the Lord for his saints [Rapture] (1 Thess 4.16)
4. These trumpets are unique to themselves, they are not the "last trump" or any other trumpet identified in the Scriptures

C. The angel and the incense (3-5)

1. Another angel appears bearing a golden censer (3)
 - a. Some identify this angel as Christ because of his priest-like role, but nothing in the text explicitly confirms this (Gaebelein)
 - b. A censer is an implement containing hot coals on which the priests offer incense before the Lord
 - c. The angel receives “much incense” to add to the prayers of the saints, offered before the throne (see Rev 5.8)
 - d. Identifying the additional incense
 - 1) Some suggest it could represent more prayers
 - 2) Ryrie identifies it with the “sweet savor” of Christ’s work on our behalf, giving “efficacy to the prayers of the saints.”¹
2. The smoke of the incense accompanies the prayers of the saints (4)
 - a. The prayers in view are at least the prayers of tribulation saints (see Rev 5.8), but the prayers of all saints over time could also be in view
 - b. The implication is that God accepts these prayers
 - c. One commentator suggested that this is the conclusion of the prayer, “Thy kingdom come...” (Newell)
3. Coals from the altar flung to the earth produce cataclysmic events (5)
 - a. Thunder, lightning, earthquake (all earthly) are the results
 - b. The silence in heaven is broken by sounds of judgement on earth
“After prayer ascends, judgement descends.”²
 - c. These events are a prelude to the seven trumpets about to sound

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), 56.

² Ryrie, 57.

D. The seven angels lift the trumpets to their lips (6)

“The whole scene quite clearly symbolizes God sending judgment on the earth in response to His people’s accumulated prayers.”³

I believe that all these events in heaven occur during the half hour of silence. It is a dramatic scene.

II. The first four trumpet blasts (7-12)

“The judgements which follow can hardly be fully interpreted at this time. It would be folly to dogmatize about them. The historical application we reject, because the scope of this book makes it clear that these judgements have not yet taken place. What many of these things mean may perhaps never be fully understood till they are actually in fulfillment.”⁴

Note: after making this good statement, Gaebelein proceeds to interpret much of the rest of this chapter as specific, non-literal symbols.

A. The first trumpet (7)

1. Remember the angels of the four winds? (7.1-3)

- a. God restrained their judgement until he sealed the bond-servants
- b. It is likely that the first four trumpets are the letting loose their ‘wind’
- c. The implication of the sealing is that these judgements are more severe than the six seals

2. At the sounding of the trumpet, a judgement occurs like the plagues of Egypt: Hail and fire and blood thrown to the earth

³ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Rev 8.6.

⁴ Arno Gaebelein, *The Revelation: An Analysis and Exposition of the Last Book of the Bible* (Chicago: Our Hope Press, n. d.), 60–61.

3. Consequences

- a. One third of the earth burned up
- b. One third of the trees burned up
- c. All the grass burned up

But grass reappears later, grass is resilient, reseeds itself relatively quickly after a fire (9.4)

B. The second trumpet (8-9)

“The interpreter of these and later judgments is constantly faced with the problems of how far to take the literal and the symbolic. The point of view here expressed is that these judgments should be interpreted literally insofar as this can be reasonably followed. ... Though all questions cannot be answered, the unmistakable implication of these judgments is that God is dealing in righteous wrath with the wicked earth.”⁵

1. “Something” like a great mountain is cast into the sea (8)

- a. The huge object is burning with fire
- b. One third of the sea “became blood”
 - 1) The context does not give any clues about this transformation
 - 2) It could be literal blood, or only appear as if it is blood, either result will satisfy the language of the vision

“It is best to interpret these events literally though the description of the sea being turned into blood may be the language of appearance as in the mention of blood after the first trumpet blast.”⁶

⁵ John F Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 155.

⁶ John F. Walvoord, “Revelation,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 951.

2. The consequence of the burning mountain (9)

- a. It destroys one third of sea life
- b. It destroys one third of shipping

“As of January 1, 1981 there were 24,867 ocean-going merchant ships registered. Imagine the shock waves that would hit the shipping industry if 8,289 valuable ships were suddenly destroyed! And what about their cargoes!”⁷

“John was clearly describing supernatural interventions, not natural happenings.”⁸

“It would be very inconsistent to understand these judgements symbolically and interpret the plagues of Egypt plainly and actually.”⁹

C. The third trumpet (10-11)

1. A great star falls from heaven (10)

- a. The star is burning like a torch
- b. The star falls on one third of the rivers and springs of fresh water

2. The name of the star is Wormwood (11)

- a. Wormwood means ‘bitter’; it is the name of a bitter herb that is fatal to some people
- b. The waters in which it fell became wormwood
- c. Many men died because of the poison in these waters

D. The fourth trumpet (12)

1. Affects the light sources

2. Somehow one third of the light is reduced

- a. Most likely this is a reduction of the light coming to earth, not an effect in the sun itself
- b. With such a reduction of light it is possible that heat would also reduce dramatically: global cooling?

⁷ Warren W Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996), 593.

⁸ Constable, *Expository Notes*, Rev 8.8.

⁹ Ryrie, *Revelation*, 58.

III. A warning of the final three trumpets (13)

A. Now John sees a flying eagle, sounding warning

1. Certainly, this could be a literal eagle (God gave a voice to Balaam's donkey)
2. Or could be a symbolic reference to another angel (note, the KJV translates "angel" here, contrary to the Textus Receptus, which has "eagle")
3. This interrupts (briefly) the blowing of the trumpets

B. "Terrible as the first four trumpet judgements will be, the last three will be worse and are thus designated 'woes.'"¹⁰

1. OT "woe" is an expression meaning "you're as good as dead": a voice of certain judgement
2. These "woes" are against the people of the earth: the first four trumpets focused on the earth itself, these three on the people

Conclusion:

When modern scientists measure an earthquake or a tornado, the scale is not a simple progression of intensity. Each number of magnitude is ten times more violent than the number that precedes it: Magnitude 2 is ten times worse than 1, 3 ten times worse than 2, and so on.

As we work through the judgements of Revelation, it seems that they increase in intensity as well. It is hard to imagine the Lord leaving the church on the earth to experience these judgements. One OT example that supports this idea is Israel during the plagues – God limited most of the Egyptian plagues to Egyptian areas, sparing Israel. In a like manner, the Rapture spares the church from this hour of trial.

¹⁰ Ryrie, 59.