

Lesson 19

Chapter 8

Revelation 8:1-2

1 And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. 2 And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.

After much anticipation, we finally reach the opening of the seventh seal. The removal of this final seal reveals seven trumpets that warn of impending judgment. Remember that these judgments are coming in waves of sevens — first the seven seals, and now the seven trumpets. Later we will see the seven bowls of wrath.

Verse 1 tells us that when this final seal is opened there is silence in heaven for one half hour. **Why the silence?** This short moment of silence dramatically heightens the anticipation of what is about to happen. The time for talking is over; the time for judgment has begun. The scene reminds us of Habakkuk 2:20 — “But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.” But the silence here is in heaven rather than on earth.

Why half an hour? The word “hour” is often used in the Bible to indicate a time of critical importance or activity.

John 12:23 — The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.

John 12:27 — Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.

1 John 2:18 — *Little children, it is the last hour.*
[ASV]

Most likely the symbol of a **half hour** just means that the time of critical importance is near, but has not yet come. Yes, there is a delay, but it is a very short delay. **The hour is coming!** Once again, we are reminded of the time frame for this book — a time frame that we are seeing over and over again as we study the text. **The time is near!**

In verse 2, we meet seven angels with seven trumpets. Each of these trumpets will soon sound, just as each of the seven seals we saw earlier has now been uncovered, and just as each of the seven bowls we will see later will be poured out.

What is the purpose of the trumpets? The trumpets serve the same purpose that the plagues did against Egypt, at least the early ones. The ungodly may yet be able to heed the trumpets' warnings and repent. But Rome will almost certainly not repent. Instead, Rome will harden its heart against God just as Pharaoh did, and Rome will suffer a similar fate.

Much of this book is intended for us to think about prior deliverances of God's people — most notably the deliverance from Egypt and the deliverance from Babylon. Once again, the more we know about the Old Testament, the better our ability to understand this final book in the New Testament.

As we saw with the first six seals, we will see that these trumpets are not yet final judgments against Rome. They will strike fractions rather than the whole of their targets. God's final word as to Rome is coming, but this is not yet it.

Why is Rome being warned? 2 Peter 3:9 tells us that God is "longsuffering" and "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." That verse applies just as much to Rome as it does to anyone else, and we see that on display here in the text.

God could have hit Rome with a lightning bolt in Chapter 1, but he did not. God does not want anyone to perish, and God offers an opportunity for repentance up until that last opportunity — but make no doubt about it: there will be a final opportunity after which repentance is no longer an option. Rome will soon reach that point, but it has not happened yet. Yes, 2 Peter 3:9 reminds us that God is longsuffering — but Galatians 6:7 reminds us that God is not mocked!

Revelation 8:3-6

3 And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. 5 And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake. 6 And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

The altar in verse 3 reminds us of the **golden altar of incense** in Exodus 30 that stood before the curtain leading to the holy of holies in the temple. In a sense that altar also stood before the throne of God because God was often pictured as sitting enthroned upon the cherubim that were on the ark in the holy of holies.

But the altar in verse 5 reminds us the **brazen altar of burnt offering** from which the coals were taken in Leviticus 16:12 for the incense offering. The judges of Israel marched from this altar in Ezekiel 9:1-2.

So which altar do we see here? Both and neither. Neither because what we are seeing here is a symbol rather than an actual altar. But both because, as we saw with the altar in 6:9, the symbolic altar in these verses is likely intended to be a combination of those two altars from the Old Testament.

Incense is sometimes used to represent prayers, as in Psalm 141:2 — “Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense.” We have already seen this same image use this way earlier in the book.

*Revelation 5:8 — And when he had taken the book,
the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down*

before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

When we studied that verse we noted that the harps are symbols for praise. Likewise, the incense in 5:8 is a symbol for prayer — that is precisely what the text tells us. The harps are symbols, just as the incense is a symbol. Neither is authorized by this verse (or by any other verse) as proper in the worship of God by the church.

But we do see a difference here in verse 4 with what we saw earlier in 5:8. Here we see incense that is offered **with** prayers. **What does that mean?**

One commentary suggests that the incense in this context denotes the intercession of Christ on our behalf as we pray to God in his name.

Romans 8:34 — Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

Also, notice that here we see the prayers of **all** the saints, as opposed to the prayers of just the martyrs that we saw earlier in Chapter 6.

What do these verses show us? These verses reveal the heavenly response to the prayers of these suffering Christians as those prayers came up from the earth to God like incense. Many other verses about prayer come to mind as we read this description:

James 5:16 — The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Luke 18:7-8 — And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.

Note that last word in Luke 18:8 — **speedily!** **That is how God responds when his children cry out to him. Speedily!** It seems that everywhere we turn we are reminded of our time frame!

Why does the angel fill the censor with fire and throw it on the earth in verse 5? That scene depicts for us the heavenly response to these prayers from all the saints. Their prayers will be answered, and judgment is coming for the enemies of God who dwell on the earth.

We see a similar image in Ezekiel 10, where it precedes an approaching judgment by God against Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 10:2 — And he spake unto the man clothed with linen, and said, Go in between the wheels, even under the cherub, and fill thine hand with coals of fire from between the cherubims, and scatter them over the city.

Here we have the same picture: God's people are pictured as being safe in heaven. God's enemies are shown as still on the earth, and the judgment on earth is about to begin. As before, thunder, lightning, and earthquakes are used to depict the impending judgment of God. The seven angels prepare to sound the seven trumpets. These verses are showing us the divine drumroll preceding those trumpets!

If you have ever shopped for audio copies of the Bible, you know that some of the available choices are the so-called **dramatized** audio Bibles. Here is how one such audio Bible is described: "Multiple-voice dramatization brings the Bible to life with world-class narration and colorful, engaging character renderings. Fully orchestrated background with sound effects provides **maximum enhancement** of the text reading."

I'm not being critical if you have such an audio Bible, but the whole idea always makes me laugh, and especially when I read verses like the ones we just read and are about to read in this book of Revelation. The Bible has all of the drama it needs; it does not need to have any drama added to it by man. The Bible is the word of God; it cannot be enhanced by man.

If (God forbid) we find the Bible boring, the problem is not with the Bible — it is with us. And the problem will not be fixed by trying to enhance the Bible; if we find the Bible boring, then we are the ones who need to be enhanced!

Revelation 8:7

7 The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.

We talked earlier about the purpose of these trumpets, and we saw that one purpose of a trumpet is to sound a **warning**. Viewed more broadly, the purpose of a trumpet is to get people's attention, **to alert them**, perhaps as a warning, but possibly to alert them for some other reason. In the Bible, trumpets are most often used to alert people to an intervention by God into the affairs of men.

We saw such an alert when God intervened at Mount Sinai.

*Exodus 19:19 — And when the voice of the **trumpet** sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice.*

We saw such an alert when God intervened specifically against Assyria and generally against all of the enemies of his people.

*Isaiah 27:13 — And it shall come to pass in that day, that **the great trumpet** shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem.*

We saw such an alert when God intervened in the affairs of Jerusalem by bringing an invasion against them from the north.

*Joel 2:1 — Blow ye the **trumpet** in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand.*

We saw such an alert in Zechariah's prophecy of God's intervention against Greece at the time of the Maccabean revolt.

*Zechariah 9:14 — And the Lord shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning: and the Lord God shall blow the **trumpet**, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south.*

We saw such an alert with God's intervention in the judgment of Jerusalem in AD 70.

*Matthew 24:31 — And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a **trumpet**, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

We will see such an alert (or more accurately, **hear** it!) in the great intervention by God into the affairs of men that will occur at the end of time.

1 Corinthians 15:52 — In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 — For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.

And we see such an alert here in Revelation with God's intervention into the affairs of Rome.

Why a trumpet? The reason God uses a trumpet is the same reason I chose to play the trumpet when I was a sixth grader at Katy Junior High School — **trumpets are very loud!** They get people's attention! That is what happens when God intervenes into the affairs of mankind! Interventions by God *generally* get noticed!

Why do I say *generally*? Because not all of God's interventions come with the blast of a trumpet. The greatest intervention of all came with the sound of a baby in a manger. But what began with the sound of a baby will end with the sound of a trumpet, at which time every knee shall bow to the occupant of that manger. We are not hearing that last trumpet here in Revelation 8, but we are hearing trumpets.

We are living today in a time in which God is **not** intervening in the affairs of mankind as he has done in the past. In these current days, God is speaking to the earth by his Son (Hebrews 1:2), which means that God is speaking to this earth by his word and by his church proclaiming that word.

What that means is that if a trumpet is to sound today, we must be the ones to sound it. God will blow the last trumpet, but we must blow the warnings that precede that last trumpet. We must proclaim the word of God, because if we don't, who will? If we don't sound the trumpet, who will? **It will be an indictment against the church if the first trumpet of God that some men hear turns out to be the last trumpet of God at the end of the world.** We should be sounding God's trumpet now.

And what should we proclaim with that trumpet? We must proclaim the good news — but no one will ever believe the good news unless they first be-

lieve the bad news. And the bad news is that judgment is coming for all who are opposed to God — the day of wrath is coming for all such men, just as it came from Rome and for the many other enemies of God that we read about in the Bible.

Most people today have the same attitude that Peter described:

2 Peter 3:4 — Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

The first thing such people need to know is that all things will **not** continue on forever as they are today. **First**, because we all have appointment with death unless we are alive at his coming, and **second**, because some day Christ will return to **judge** this world and then **destroy** this world. **A big change is coming!** No one will fail to notice that final intervention into the affairs of mankind! No one will be able to sit on the sidelines and just watch the show. That day is coming for all!

But, based on the context and the time frame, I do **not** believe that final day is the day we see here. Instead, what we see here is the coming intervention into the affairs of **Rome**.

The hail and fire remind us of the plagues against Egypt, which are the origin of many of the symbols used in these verses.

Exodus 9:24-25 — So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous, such as there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. And the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field.

As with the plague of hail and fire, this casting of hail and fire in verse 7 destroys trees and vegetation. Although man and beast are not mentioned in verse 7, the image of hail and fire falling to earth certainly suggests that man and beast would be harmed if they were out in it. Of course, this is all figurative — this is not a literal trumpet, and this is not literal hail and fire. It was literal in Exodus, but that literal event is being used here as a figure for the coming judgment against Rome.

Why are only a **third** of the trees affected? As we discussed before, these trumpets are intended to warn. This trumpet is not a bowl. Bowls, as we will see,

pour out God's final judgments against Rome. As with the earlier seals, these trumpets depict partial judgments that warn of the impending doom to come but that leave an opportunity for repentance.

But why a third and not a half or a fourth? There may be no particular reason why a third was chosen over some other fraction. It may simply be that a third represents a large portion but a portion that is still less than half. We may also be seeing **thirds** because we have **three** waves of sevens — seals, trumpets, and bowls — each of which takes away a third until nothing is left.

It is also possible that the use of a third here comes from its use in Zechariah, which we studied earlier.

***Zechariah 13:8-9** — And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the Lord, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the **third** shall be left therein. And I will bring the **third** part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The Lord is my God.*

Those verses describe God's deliverance of his people from the destruction of Jerusalem and from the persecution by Rome. Perhaps a third part is used here as a reminder of that earlier deliverance of God's people from the judgment of Jerusalem and a promise of their coming deliverance from the judgment of Rome.

As with the seals, we should not try to attach a specific chronology to the trumpets. They are part of the overall picture. We have already discussed how Revelation is in some ways like a painting from God. You do not look at a painting as you would a timeline. A painting is spatial rather than temporal.

We know we are not seeing a strict timeline here. Why? Because God started by telling us the ending! We already know how this will end for Rome, and we already know how this will end for the church. Remember that we have already seen the saints emerge victorious from the events that are now being described.

Revelation 8:8-9

8 And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; 9 And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.

With the second trumpet, we see a great burning mountain thrown into the sea. Once again, this trumpet affects only a third of what it touches. This judgment is not final or complete. We have not yet reached the bowls of God's wrath.

God's power is often described in the Bible with images involving mountains — either by leveling them or by creating them.

Zechariah 4:7** — Who art thou, O great **mountain**? before Zerubbabel **thou shalt become a plain.

***Amos 4:13** — For, lo, he that formeth the **mountains**, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, The Lord, The God of hosts, is his name.*

***Micah 1:4** — And the **mountains** shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place.*

Mountains are also sometimes used in the Bible to depict kingdoms. Jeremiah, for example, describes Babylon as a destroying mountain that will become a burnt mountain, and Isaiah describes the Lord's kingdom as the highest of the mountains.

***Jeremiah 51:25** — Behold, I am against thee, O **destroying mountain**, saith the LORD, which destroyest all the earth: and I will stretch out mine hand upon*

*thee, and roll thee down from the rocks, and will make thee a burnt **mountain**.*

***Isaiah 2:2** — It shall come to pass in the latter days that the **mountain** of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the **mountains**.*

The mountain here in verse 8 also represent a kingdom, but rather than Babylon, this mountain represents Rome. As with the mountain in Jeremiah 51, this mountain also becomes a burnt mountain, but this mountain in verse 8 is also cast into the sea.

Where else in the Bible do we find a mountain being cast into the sea?

***Matthew 21:21-22** — Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and **be thou cast into the sea**; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*

We often speak of a faith that is able to move mountains. **The book of Revelation is evidence that the early Christians had that faith!** They prayed to God that the mountain of Rome would be cast into the sea, and it was. One of the recurring themes in this book is the power of prayer, and perhaps nowhere is that power better illustrated than here in verse 8.

Verse 9 tells us what happened to the **sea** after that great burning mountain was cast into it.

What does the sea represent? We have already looked at the recurring image of the sea, and we saw before that the restless sea is often used to depict the wicked and the ungodly. I think that is what the sea represents here in verses 8-9.

If the mountain is Rome, then the sea is the mass of humanity that made up Rome. Rome's judgment would affect not only Rome, but it would affect all who depended on Rome. Here we see commerce affected as ocean life is destroyed and ships are destroyed.

Again, we see the image of a third here, which we discussed before. And again we see images from the plagues of Egypt that we also discussed before.

Although these images are not literal, Rome at this time did have some recent familiarity with a literal mountain burning with fire. The famous eruption of

the Mount Vesuvius volcano that buried the city of Pompeii in ash occurred in AD 79, which is about the same time that this book was written. That history makes these images even more vivid to those who initially read about them.

Revelation 8:10-11

10 And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; 11 And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.

With the third trumpet, a great star falls and strikes the drinking water. Again, we are reminded of the Egyptian plagues when the water of the Nile became blood.

A star is often used in the Bible to indicate a **divine visitation**. The great visitation in Matthew 2:2 was accompanied by a “star in the east.” In Matthew 24:29, God’s coming in judgment against Jerusalem in AD 70 was described as a time when “the stars shall fall from heaven.”

We have also seen this same image used before in Revelation. The sixth seal in 6:13 was described as the stars of heaven falling unto the earth. A falling star often depicts the judgment of God upon the earth.

But falling stars don’t just remind us of divine visitations and divine judgments. **They also remind us of Satan**, about whom Jesus said in Luke 10:18, “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.” We are also reminded of Isaiah 14:12 — “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!”

We will soon see that although Satan plays a role in these events, Satan plays a role that has been defined by God. Satan is a defeated enemy, and God will use Satan in the judgment against Rome — just as God used Rome in the judgment against Jerusalem.

Satan and Rome had much in common. Both were consumed by their hatred for God's people, and both were filled with arrogance and pride. And both had the same fate in their future.

Why is the star named **Wormwood**? Better yet, **what is wormwood**?

Wormwood is a plant whose juice is very bitter. It was offered to the false prophets in Jeremiah 23.

Jeremiah 23:15 — Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets; Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall: for from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land.

Barclay tells us that “wormwood always stood for the bitterness of the judgment of God on the disobedient.”

Hailey: “When men prefer the bitter waters of idolatry to the fountains of the living water, they will receive these bitter waters with the fatal consequences that follow.”

I think what we see here is something we have seen before in this book and will see again: **Men makes choices, and sometimes the worst punishment is simply to receive that which you have chosen!** I am reminded of one of my favorite C.S. Lewis quotes:

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, in the end, “Thy will be done.”

Did you know that hell has a theme song? Sinatra recorded it. “**I did it my way!**” Yes, we are free to choose our actions — but we are not free to choose the consequences of our actions!

Revelation 8:12

12 And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the

day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.

The fourth trumpet, as did the sixth seal, affects the sun, the moon, and the stars. And with each, only a third is affected for the same reasons we discussed earlier. These judgments are not yet final when it comes to Rome. There is still time for repentance. These trumpets are providing a warning of what is yet to come.

But if the sun, the moon, and the stars are affected, then surely we must be looking here at the end of the world, right? **No.**

First, the time frame of the book, which is stated at least seven times from the first chapter to the last chapter, tells us we are not looking at the end of the world.

And, **second**, we have already seen language such as this use to describe events that were **not** the end of the world.

Listen to how Jesus described the judgment of Jerusalem that occurred in AD 70.

***Matthew 24:29** — Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.*

Listen to how Peter described the establishment of the church that also occurred in the first century (quoting Joel 2:31).

***Acts 2:20** — The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come.*

Listen to how Isaiah described an earlier judgment against Edom.

***Isaiah 34:4** — And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree.*

Listen to how Isaiah described an earlier judgment against Babylon.

Isaiah 13:10 — *For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.*

Listen to how Joel described an earlier judgment against Judah.

Joel 2:10 — *The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining.*

If none of those five examples is describing the end of the world, then who can argue that the language here in Revelation 8 must be describing the end of the world? We are not looking at the end of the world here any more than that last great day was in view in Matthew 24, Acts 2, Isaiah 34, Isaiah 13, or Joel 2.

But what is the source of this imagery? Why are the sun, moon, and stars affected in this way? What does the darkening of the sun, the moon, and the stars symbolize?

To answer that question, let's first turn it around — **what does the light from the sun, the moon, and the stars depict in the Bible?** That question is easy — that shining light depicts the greatness of God, the power of God, and the goodness of God.

Psalms 19:1 — *The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.*

Psalms 8:3-4 — *When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?*

Psalms 148:3 — *Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light.*

Isaiah 9:2 — *The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.*

Romans 1:20 — *For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.*

2 Corinthians 4:6 — *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

That's what it means when the sun, the moon, and the stars are **shining** — so then what does it mean when the sun, the moon, and the stars are **darkened**?

What it means is that these symbols of joy are ashamed at the wickedness of men, and they refuse to shine their light on those who are rebelling against God. Their darkening is a symbolic picture of the total darkness that engulfs any society that turns its back on God and casts the word of God behind its back.

John 3:19-21 — *And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*

History tells us that before total darkness descends on a society, there will always be the sound of warning trumpets. Can we hear those trumpets today? We had better be able to hear them! Why? Because we should be the ones blowing those trumpets!

Ezekiel 3:17 — *I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.*

Much like Rome, our own society is in free fall. The only thing that can slow down that descent into darkness are the warnings in the book that we hold in our hands. If we don't sound those warnings — who will?

The cure for darkness is brightness, and the world needs to know that. We sing about it:

There's a bright day coming,
A bright day coming,
There's a bright day coming by and by;
But its brightness shall only come to them that love the Lord,
Are you ready for that day to come?

But let's make sure we do more than just sing about it. We need to be blowing the trumpet of God's word!