

 Properties

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Revelation 8: The Seventh Seal and the First Four Trumpets

Quick Recap: Last Week

Structurally, chapter 8 breaks into three movements:

1. **8:1** — The seventh seal: silence in heaven.
2. **8:2–6** — Interlude: seven angels given trumpets; an eighth angel offers incense with the prayers of the saints; the censer is hurled to earth.
3. **8:7–13** — The first four trumpets sound, striking earth, sea, fresh water, and sky — followed by an eagle's warning of three woes to come.

A few threads for review

1. **The power of prayer.** The silence and the incense scene (8:1-5) is easy to skip past, but it's striking: heaven pauses, and the prayers of ordinary believers — accumulated over time — become the catalyst for God's action in history. Worth asking the group: do we actually believe our prayers carry that kind of weight?
2. **Judgment touches creation** — we discussed the land aspect last week. That judgement and the ones to come echo the plagues of Exodus (deliberately — John is drawing that parallel for a persecuted audience who'd know their Old Testament). It's less a literal weather forecast and more a signal: God's judgment on a rebellious world is total, not random.

3. **"A third"** — repeated five times in this chapter. It's severe but *partial*, not final. God's judgment is escalating but keeps holding back total destruction, which points to patience and an ongoing call to repentance rather than pure wrath.

8:7 — First Trumpet: Hail, Fire, and Blood Upon the Earth

7The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down on the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

Observations:

- Clear echo of the **seventh Egyptian plague**, hail mixed with fire (Exodus 9:22–25), where hail "mingled with fire" struck "every herb of the field, and broke every tree." John's trumpets consistently draw on the plague narrative, reinforcing that these are covenantal judgments in the Exodus pattern — God judging a rebellious world-system to vindicate and deliver His people.
- The first trumpet hail, fire and blood upon the earth, because of the close ties to the Egyptian plagues, this is just about God judging a rebellious world system to deliver His people than it is about the physical impact judgements have on earth.

8:8–9 — Second Trumpet: A Burning Mountain Cast into the Sea

8The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, 9a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

Observations:

- KJV **"As it were** a great mountain burning with fire" — John's careful qualifying language ("as it were," *hōs*) throughout Revelation signals

visionary, symbolic description rather than a woodenly literal claim to be describing, say, a literal geological mountain.

- This grammatical pattern recurs across the book (cf. 8:10, 9:7) and is worth noting for the group: John repeatedly tells us he is describing what a vision *looked like*, not offering a scientific report.
- Historically and interpretively, readers have connected this image to a range of different things —
 - Volcano: From ancient descriptions of erupting volcanoes cast into the sea,
 - Meteor: (in modern popular treatments) meteoric impact,
 - Kingdom: Purely symbolic reading of a "mountain" as a common biblical image for a **kingdom or great power** (cf. Jeremiah 51:25, where Babylon itself is called "a burning mountain" destined for destruction, and Daniel 2:35, 44–45, where a kingdom is pictured as a mountain).
 - The Jeremiah 51:25 parallel is striking enough that many interpreters — across preterist, historicist, and idealist camps — read this trumpet as, at least in part, judgment on a great corrupt worldly power collapsing catastrophically into the "sea" (itself often symbolic in Revelation of the restless nations, cf. 17:15).
- **Sea to blood** Echo of the first Egyptian plague — the Nile turned to blood (Exodus 7:20–21), which likewise killed the fish and made the river foul.
- **Living Creatures, Ships** Practical devastation described: a third of sea life dies, a third of shipping is destroyed — an economic and ecological catastrophe affecting trade, food supply, and commerce, not merely an abstract or purely symbolic image -- this is so specific that I find it hard to view this as symbolic.
- **On the literal-asteroid reading:** the futurist/literal camps often point to real asteroid science to illustrate scale. Scientists have flagged an actual asteroid, "1950 DA," with roughly a 1-in-300 estimated chance of striking Earth around the year 2880 — about a kilometer wide. For comparison, an impact from an object roughly half a mile wide is estimated to release energy on the order of a million tons of TNT.
 - The point isn't that this specific asteroid fulfills Revelation 8, but that it illustrates how physically plausible — not merely fantasy — a "mountain burning with fire" cast into the sea would be if read literally.
- **The oxygen point worth raising with the group:** popular conversation often focuses on rainforests as earth's "lungs," but oceanic plankton is estimated to produce somewhere between 50–80% of the planet's oxygen. A third of

the sea's life dying off, on a literal reading, wouldn't just be an ecological tragedy in the abstract — it would meaningfully affect the air people breathe worldwide, alongside the practical devastation of the roughly 50,000 merchant ships (carrying several million cargo containers at any given time) that keep global trade running.

- The point is that the judgments will get your attention!

8:10–11 — Third Trumpet: Wormwood Falls on Fresh Water

***10The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water—
11the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter.*

Observations:

- Where the second trumpet struck salt water (the sea), the third strikes **fresh water** — rivers and springs, the very sources of drinking water and life.
- "**Wormwood**" (Greek *Apsinthos*) — a genuinely bitter, though not inherently lethal, plant (associated with *Artemisia absinthium*). In the Old Testament, wormwood is a recurring metaphor for **bitter judgment, idolatry, and covenant unfaithfulness**: Deuteronomy 29:18 warns against a root bearing "gall and wormwood" among those who turn from God to idols; Jeremiah 9:15 and 23:15 pronounce God's judgment on a faithless people by feeding them "wormwood" and "water of gall"; Amos 5:7 condemns those who "turn judgment to wormwood." By naming the star itself "Wormwood," John draws directly on this prophetic tradition — this judgment is explicitly tied to covenant unfaithfulness and false teaching poisoning what should sustain life.
 - The Hebrew word for "wormwood" is *la'anah* (לֵאנָה) — it shows up about eight times in the Hebrew Bible, almost always in judgment or covenant-curse contexts (Deuteronomy 29:18, Proverbs 5:4, Jeremiah 9:15, 23:15, Lamentations 3:15, 19, Amos 5:7, 6:12). When Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek in the centuries before Christ (the Septuagint, or "LXX" — the translation John and most of the early church would have known and quoted from), they consistently

rendered *la'anah* as *apsinthos* (ἀψινθος). That's the exact same word John uses for the star's name in Revelation 8:11 — the Greek text literally says "the name of the star is called Apsinthos."

- **Why that matters** Revelation was written in Greek to communities who mostly knew their Scripture through the Greek Old Testament, not the Hebrew. For them, *apsinthos* wasn't primarily "a bitter plant" — it was a loaded word that showed up specifically at moments where God pronounces judgment on covenant unfaithfulness. A few of the sharpest instances:
 - **Deuteronomy 29:18** — Moses warns Israel, as they're about to enter the land, against any person or tribe whose heart turns to idols, "a root bearing bitterness and *apsinthos* [wormwood]." This is covenant-curse language spoken *before* the sin even happens — a warning against apostasy.
 - **Jeremiah 9:13-15** — God explains *why* judgment is coming: "because they have forsaken my law... and have walked after the stubbornness of their own heart and after the Baals." His response: "I will feed this people with *apsinthos* [wormwood] and give them poisoned water to drink." The wormwood is explicitly the *punishment for idolatry*.
 - **Amos 5:7** — condemns those "who turn justice into *apsinthos* [wormwood]" — here it's not even about literal poison, it's a metaphor for corrupting something that should be good (justice) into something bitter and harmful.
- So by the time John writes, *apsinthos* functions almost like a technical term in Greek-speaking Jewish and Christian circles — shorthand for "the bitterness God sends in response to covenant betrayal, idolatry, and corrupted leadership."
- **Say All That To Say This** When John names the star "Wormwood," he's not being poetically vague — he's making a precise theological claim using vocabulary his readers would recognize instantly: *this judgment on the waters is happening for the same reason it always has in Scripture — unfaithfulness, false worship, corrupted teaching poisoning what should give life.*
- It's the same move as when Revelation calls Rome "Babylon" a few chapters later — using an OT-loaded name to tell the reader how to interpret the event, not just what happened but *why*.
- **The message** "waters" going bitter isn't a new problem, it's the oldest one.

- A "star" falling to earth is Revelation's regular image for a **spiritual or angelic being**, often a fallen or judged one (cf. 9:1, "a star fall from heaven"; 12:4, 9). Some interpreters connect this to a corrupting spiritual/false-teaching influence poisoning the "waters" (spiritual sustenance) of the people — consistent with the wormwood/idolatry background above. Others read it more literally as a physical celestial event (meteor/asteroid), consistent with a futurist reading of a literal end-times catastrophe. Both readings can affirm the same theological point: something that should give life becomes a source of death and bitterness because of judgment.
- **A well-known modern illustration** in Ukrainian, "wormwood" translates as *Chernobyl* — the site of the April 26, 1986 nuclear plant disaster, which killed thousands and affected hundreds of thousands more, and rendered the surrounding area uninhabitable for an estimated 20,000 years.
 - Note: Chernobyl is **not** claimed as a fulfillment of Revelation 8, but as a striking real-world "glimpse" or preview of the kind of bitter-water catastrophe this trumpet describes — a useful illustration precisely because it shows the image isn't merely fantastical, without overclaiming prophetic fulfillment.

8:12 — Fourth Trumpet: The Heavens Struck

12The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, 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 turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night.

Observations:

- Echo of the **ninth Egyptian plague**, darkness over the land (Exodus 10:21–23), and consistent with widespread prophetic imagery of the "Day of the LORD" as a day of cosmic darkening: Isaiah 13:10, Joel 2:10, 2:31, 3:15, Amos 5:18–20, and Jesus' own Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:29, quoting this same prophetic tradition: "the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light").
- Unlike the first three trumpets, this judgment strikes **above**, not the earth, sea, or fresh water directly — completing a fourfold pattern (earth / sea / fresh water / sky) that systematically touches every major sphere of the created order.

- This ordered totality (even while remaining a partial "third") underscores that the entire cosmos is implicated in, and groaning under, the judgment (cf. Romans 8:22).
- What did the gods of Egypt represent?
- The darkening of sun, moon, and stars carries deep symbolic freight beyond physical light: in the ancient world, celestial bodies were widely worshiped as gods, and rulers were often associated with heavenly light/glory (cf. Genesis 37:9–10; Isaiah 14:12). Their darkening can be read as God's judgment extending even to the false gods and powers the nations trust in — a theme reinforced by the plague-parallel to Exodus, where God explicitly declares He is executing judgment "against all the gods of Egypt" (Exodus 12:12).
- **Practical consequence worth mentioning:** a third reduction in the sun's brilliance would plausibly cool the earth's overall temperature, compounding the crop and livestock devastation already set in motion by the first trumpet — the four trumpets aren't isolated, independent disasters so much as an escalating, compounding collapse of the created order's ability to sustain life.

8:13 — The Eagle's Warning: Three Woes to Come

13As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!"

Observations:

- Some manuscripts read "eagle" (*aetos*) rather than "angel" (*angelos*) at this point — the two Greek words are visually similar in manuscript form, and "eagle" is the reading followed by the KJV's underlying textual tradition and many modern critical texts alike. An eagle flying overhead, crying out, evokes ancient battlefield imagery of carrion birds circling before a coming slaughter (cf. Matthew 24:28), heightening the sense of impending doom.
- **Why this isn't a contradiction** most modern translations (NKJV, ESV, NIV, etc.) render this "angel," following the majority Greek text, but even the NKJV carries a footnote noting some manuscripts read "eagle" — and the

underlying Greek word there is specifically *aetos* ("eagle"), not *angelos* ("angel").

- This isn't as strange a variant as it first appears: Revelation 4:7 describes four living creatures around God's throne, the fourth of which has "the face of a flying eagle." Since these living creatures are themselves angelic beings, an eagle-faced angel is a perfectly coherent identity for this messenger — the two readings describe compatible realities rather than contradictory ones.
- Four trumpets sounded and now we have a transition into the next chapter
- **The 3 Woes** Right after the first four trumpets in Revelation 8, an eagle flies overhead crying out three times: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!"
- **What do they represent?** So the "three woes" are simply John's way of labeling and separating out the last three trumpet judgments (trumpets 5, 6, and 7) as being in a different category — worse than the first four.
 - Think of it like a warning system with escalating alarms:
 - **Trumpets 1-4** hit *creation* — land, sea, water, sky. Nature itself is disrupted.
 - **Trumpets 5-7 (the three woes)** hit *people* directly — not just the world around them, but their bodies, their fears, their lives. That's why the eagle interrupts the sequence with an urgent warning: things are about to get personal.
- **The point** The easiest on-ramp isn't debating whether these are literal locusts or symbolic armies — it's the *pattern*: judgment escalates, but people still don't repent (9:20-21), and yet the story doesn't end in destruction — it ends in God's kingdom coming (11:15). That arc — increasing warning, human stubbornness, and God's ultimate victory — is the takeaway.
- **"The inhabitants of the earth"** (Greek *tous katoikountas epi tēs gēs*) is a technical phrase in Revelation, used repeatedly (3:10; 6:10; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 17:2, 8) to designate not humanity in general but specifically the **earth-dwelling, unrepented** or those in opposition to God and His people — as distinct from those "written in the book of life." The woes are directed at this group specifically, not indiscriminately at every human being, and this phrase becomes an important interpretive key for the rest of the book.
 - **3:10** — "the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, **to try them that dwell upon the earth.**" The faithful church in Philadelphia is promised protection *from* this trial; "them that dwell on

the earth" are the ones it's aimed at. Already a contrast, not a synonym for "everyone including us."

- **6:10** — the martyred saints under the altar cry out, "how long... dost thou not judge and avenge our blood **on them that dwell on the earth?**" Here the phrase names the *persecutors* of God's people specifically — not humanity broadly, but the ones responsible for the martyrs' blood.
- **11:10** — when the two witnesses are killed, "they that dwell upon the earth" celebrate, send each other gifts, and rejoice — because the witnesses had been "tormenting" them. This is a group actively hostile to God's prophets.
- **13:8** — "all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him [the beast], **whose names are not written in the book of life.**" This is the most explicit one: the phrase is directly defined *by contrast* with the book of life. Whoever these people are, they're specifically the ones *not* written there.
- **13:12, 14** — the second beast forces "them which dwell" on the earth to worship the first beast and makes an image to him through deception.
- **17:2, 8** — "the inhabitants of the earth" are made drunk on Babylon's wine and marvel at the beast — again tied to the "not written in the book of life" formula from 13:8.
- Structurally, this verse functions as a **dramatic pause and warning** before the intensity ramps up dramatically in chapter 9 — the narrative equivalent of the silence in 8:1, again slowing the pace right before greater severity.

Looking Ahead: Trumpets Five and Six (Chapter 9 Preview)

Your notes stop at chapter 8, but since the group will likely ask "what's next," here's a brief preview worth having on hand — this is where the "three woes" of 8:13 actually land:

- **Trumpet five (the first woe):** demonic beings, described using locust/scorpion imagery and associated with "the abyss" and its angel *Abaddon* (Hebrew) / *Apollyon* (Greek, both meaning "Destroyer"), are released to **torment** — not kill — unbelieving humanity for five months.

Those "sealed" (the 144,000 from ch. 7) are explicitly protected. The torment is severe enough that people will "seek death, and shall not find it" (9:6).

- **Trumpet six (the second woe):** four bound angels (demonic, since genuinely holy angels wouldn't need to be bound) are released and permitted to **kill** a third of remaining mankind through an assembled army — a staggering death toll on any population estimate.
- Chapter 9 closes on a sobering note that ties directly back to this chapter's themes: despite the severity of these judgments, the survivors "repented not" (9:20–21) — underscoring the summary point above that these judgments are meant to provoke repentance, but hardened hearts can and do resist even this level of severity.

This sets up a natural transition point for a future session and reinforces one of this chapter's central threads: **judgment, however severe, does not automatically produce repentance** — which is itself a sobering challenge to consider personally, not just study academically.

Summary: Theological Threads Running Through Revelation 8

1. **God is sovereign over the timing and measure of judgment.** The half-hour silence, the "preparing" of the angels, and the repeated "third part" all emphasize that nothing here is chaotic — it is ordered, bounded, and purposeful.
2. **The prayers of God's suffering people matter and are acted upon.** The censer scene (8:3–5) directly links the church's prayers to the unleashing of judgment on a rebellious world — a strong encouragement to persistent, even urgent, prayer regarding injustice and evil.
3. **These are covenantal, Exodus-patterned judgments.** Nearly every trumpet directly echoes an Egyptian plague, casting God's judgment on the world-system as a new exodus — deliverance for His people through judgment on their oppressors.
4. **Judgment here is partial and (implicitly) corrective, not yet final.** The repeated "third part" distinguishes the trumpets from the total, final judgments of the bowls in chapter 16. As chapter 9 will make explicit, the

point of these judgments is, in part, to call people to repentance — a call largely refused (9:20–21).

5. **The whole created order is implicated in and groans under human sin.** Earth, sea, fresh water, and sky are struck in turn — a strong echo of Romans 8:19–22, "the whole creation groaneth." The sermon's real-world illustrations (livestock and crop collapse, ocean oxygen production, global shipping) are useful precisely because they show this isn't abstract poetry — a systemic ecological and economic collapse, however you place it on the timeline, is what the text actually describes.
6. **Even severe judgment does not guarantee repentance.** A thread that becomes explicit in chapter 9 (9:20–21) but is already implicit here: God can turn up the pressure dramatically and human hearts can still remain hardened — a sober reminder that repentance is ultimately a matter of the will, not merely of sufficiently painful circumstances.

Group Discussion Questions

1. Revelation 8 pairs the prayers of the saints (vv. 3–5) directly with the unleashing of judgment. How does this change how you think about prayer's role in the world — is prayer merely comforting, or does Scripture picture it as genuinely consequential?
2. The trumpet judgments are patterned after the plagues of Egypt. What does it mean that God's judgment on evil follows a *pattern* — that He has acted this way before, and (Revelation suggests) will act this way again?
3. Every judgment in this chapter is explicitly partial ("the third part"). What's the significance of God restraining full judgment here rather than ending everything at once? What does that say about His patience (cf. 2 Peter 3:9)?
4. "Wormwood" (v. 11) draws on an Old Testament pattern where bitter judgment follows idolatry and unfaithfulness, not just "sin" in the abstract. Are there "waters" in our own lives or culture — things meant to sustain and give life — that have been made bitter by false teaching or misplaced worship?
5. The chapter opens with silence and closes with a warning cry. As men, how do we hold together reverent silence before God's holiness *and* urgent, sober warning to those around us who don't yet know Him?

6. **(New)** The sermon frames God's judgment as, in part, an expression of love — "turning up the heat" because He cares, not despite caring. Where have you personally experienced God allowing discomfort or hardship that ultimately turned you (or someone you know) back toward Him?
7. **(New)** Chapter 9 will show that even severe, undeniable judgment doesn't guarantee repentance (9:20–21). What does that tell us about the limits of circumstances alone to change a heart — and what does it suggest about our own role in sharing the gospel with people before a crisis forces the issue?

Suggested Cross-References for Further Study

- **Exodus 7–12** (the ten plagues — background pattern for the trumpet judgments)
- **Exodus 19:16–19; 30:1–10** (Sinai theophany; incense altar)
- **Hebrews 8:5** (the earthly temple as a shadow/copy of the heavenly one)
- **Psalms 141:1–2** (prayer as incense)
- **Isaiah 13; 27:13; Joel 2–3; Amos 5:18–20; Zephaniah 1** (Day of the LORD imagery)
- **Jeremiah 9:15; 23:15; Deuteronomy 29:18; Amos 5:7** (wormwood/bitterness as covenant judgment)
- **Matthew 24:29–31** (Jesus' own use of this same prophetic "cosmic darkening" tradition)
- **Romans 8:19–22** (creation's groaning under judgment, awaiting redemption)
- **Revelation 4:7** (the eagle-faced living creature — background for the "eagle/angel" textual note at 8:13)
- **Revelation 6:9–11; 9:1–21; 11:14–19** (immediate narrative context — the martyrs' cry, trumpets five and six, the seventh trumpet)