
Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation

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Revelation 8:6-13: “The First Four Trumpets”

General idea: Now they are ready; the seven angels stand at the cusp of unleashing God’s sentence, His decree of judgment by pestilence and other nasty endeavors. They are given to a world that refuses to see Him as Lord and refuses to seek forgiveness for their doings. God has no choice other than to protect His faithful, and do as He must. Thus it begins, as the first angel blows his trumpet, a mighty blast that will send shock and awe to the entity of creation on earth as hail, fire, and blood are sent as weapons against man’s environment. The second angel blows his trumpet, striking with great burnings as mountains are cast into a sea that has turned to blood. The third angel blows his trumpet, and more great burnings accrue as stars fall into the rivers of earth. The fourth angel blows his trumpet and the sun, moon, and stars become dark and eerie. Then, one—third of earth’s land, sea, and water is sentenced and perhaps reduced to ashes; people die in these devastations. However, as each of these judgments escalates and the resulting intensity grows, God’s grace remains the main, strong core as He spares over two-thirds. Then an eagle cries out saying, “terror and woe to all who endure such calamities,” as the fifth angel gets ready to blow his trumpet against man’s achievements.

Vs. 6-13: It is interesting to note that this passage parallels the ten plagues in Exodus, adjusted to seven trumpets or waves. God is attacking idolatrous motivations and followings with natural calamities, just as He did with Egypt. It seems a characteristic of God’s judgment not to do it all at once; rather He uses an order that is slow, giving time for His grace to work and people to see His forgiveness, even when they do not seek Him (Ex. John 2:11). The succession, systematic order, and number of these plagues are not an issue or even important; rather, its purpose is to show God’s patience, even though He is ready at any time to unleash the plagues. The plagues also seek to distinguish between those who are deserving and wicked and those who are spared and are righteous in His sight, just as He did in Egypt (Ex. 9:4-6; 10:22-23; 11:1-14; Rom. 8:18-25).

- *Seven trumpets* indicates the pronouncement of God’s voice by the angels, who present His judgment, monitored by His grace. These are not to be feared by Christians. They are the answers to the prayers of the saints. His decisive judgment is answering them by His complete victory; His final victory is at hand (see previous study; Rev. chaps. 7-8).
- *Sound them.* This “sounds off” the warnings that proclaim that a sequence of devastating plagues from the will of God is about to take place.

- *Hail and fire mixed with blood.* This shows that God's judgments are slowly and powerfully unveiled just as they were in Egypt (Ex. 7:14-24; 9:13-25; Job 38:22-23; Psalm 18:13; 78:48; 105:32; Ezek. 38:22).
- *A third of the earth* indicates that God is in control and allows only a fraction by His grace. This also sets God up in a position that suggests He may not have completed His final punishment yet.
- *Huge mountain, all ablaze... great star, blazing.* "Mountains," in Scripture, mean kingdoms (Isa. 2:2; Zech. 4:7; Psalm 46:2; Jer. 51:25). This wording is typical of apocalyptic literature such as "Sibylline Oracles" (a collection of 4,000 verses, supposed prophecies by Hellenistic Jews in Alexandria in the second century B.C.). These are hyperbole metaphors, meaning they are plagues from God and not man, and that will affect our daily life such as our water supply; people will die from dehydration (Jer. 51:25-42).
- *Sea turned into blood.* This term is indicative to the first plague in Egypt (Ex. 7:20-21). It means the ultimate destiny of mankind as being judged and the preparation for the Second Coming and or the Last Judgment. This is called "eschatological;" it is from God and His judgment, not the pollution from man's industrial machine. Volcanic upheavals can also produce this effect from God's direction, see Revelation chap 6 notes (Isa. 15:9; 2 Pet. 3:10-12; Rev. 6:13; 9:1).
- *Wormwood.* This refers to an herb (*Artemisia absinthium*, of the family Asteraceae) that is not poisonous but has a harsh, sour taste, and was used as an insect repellent. This was a metaphor for suffering, disaster, mourning, and idolatry. This may mean plagues will strike the earth's drinking water supplies (Deut. 29:18; Ex. 15:25; Prov. 5:3-4; Jer. 8:14; 9:15; 23:15; Lam. 3:19; Rev. 3:15-16).
- *Turned dark.* Like the other plagues, this one parallels the ninth one of Egypt (Ex. 10:22-23). "Darkness" means foreboding judgment that first invokes fear, and then a response for repentance. It is associated with "End Times" by other apocalyptic literature (Rev. 6:12-13).
- *Woe/terror* is reminiscent of an O.T. prophetic oracle, such those of Jeremiah and Amos, giving further warning as more is to come. In fact, there are three more "trumpet plagues," each one a "woe" or a stern warning (Amos. 5:18-6:1; Rev. 6:10; 9:12; 10:1-11:14).
- *Inhabitants of the earth* refers to wicked people who refuse to repent or acknowledge God as Lord. This is not referring to those who are righteous and "sealed" (Rev. 9:4).

These judgments seem to come against the Roman Empire, as the word

meanings and Jewish metaphors suggest those found in Jesus' "Olivet Discourse" in Matthew 24, and thus may have already occurred. However, that does not mean the final accumulation and sentence of God's judgment has occurred; we are still waiting for that. These themes seem to repeat themselves throughout the history of the Church and society. However, a final buildup and its fruition still is to occur before Jesus comes back.

These seven angels stand before God and His Throne. They have His approval and empowerment to carry out His plan. You are in His plan! Remember, as faithful Christians who are sealed, we have His approval. We may still face these persecutions and tribulations, but the difference is we have His love that turns a sentence of judgment and death into martyrdom for His glory. This passage attests to the fact that we must be dependant on God, and not bow to lethargy in our spiritual formation. This is the mark of a mature Christian. This is not a time to be lazy, to rationalize our situation, seek sympathy from others, or think He does not care, that we are useless. When we face darkness in our lives, it is a time to shape up and seek Christ as Lord. We must be discerning, courageous, hopeful, and proactive in our faith. Be obedient and trusting, regardless of your situation, and remember you are His special child whom He has sealed. Keep in mind that God wants to rescue His people from those who are hostile to Him, and who want to oppress, control, or persecute us.

The Preterist view: They see this passage as the result of and further explanation from the first four seals being opened. The setting, as they see it, is that of the Jewish wars with Rome and the destruction of Israel as a nation in 66-70 A.D. and the resulting disasters, as these are the "Last Days" of the commonwealth of Judaism that has come to be a "Babylon" of evil (Deut. 29:18; Jer. 9:15). The trees and grass represent the remnant of Jews who are left after 70AD. These plagues do not come against the Church, as we are saved from God's wrath (Rom. 2:7-9; 1 Thess. 5:9). The mountains are symbolic of the government of Israel as God's mountain falling (Ex. 15:17; Matt. 21:21). The "sea" represents the Gentiles and the "land" represents Israel. The Romans slaughtered the Galileans and tossed their bodies into the Sea of Tiberius. Wormwood refers to the decaying bodies left by the Romans and how they tainted the waters. The sun, moon, and stars refer to the fall of a series of Roman Emperors in the first century; others say it is the fall of the Herod dynasty and the Jewish Priests who had the power. The "woes" refer to the warnings of more Roman devastation, which the early church saw, and left Jerusalem, saving themselves before its destruction, where perhaps a million people were killed.

The Futurist view: They see this passage as literal. This camp is greatly divided over the meaning of this passage, seeking newspaper interpretation rather than word meanings or looking to the Old Testament. Some of the more "credible" theories are that the trumpets are the final, drastic judgments of God. The trees and grass represent the fall of the western nations and God's divine wrath upon us by His attacks on water and aquaculture. Some see this as nuclear war and

the resulting "fallout." Some see the mountains falling into the sea as literal, much like an asteroid. Others see it as symbolic for everything that is popular falling. Some see it is the Gentile nations at war led by the antichrist, or God destroying the false church led by false teachers. Others see this as the destruction of the Catholic Church. Wormwood is seen as the Pope or Antichrist. The "great star" is seen as the political leaders who are apostate, or a comet from space hitting the earth. In the eighties, this group saw the Soviet Union as Wormwood; others said it was Reagan because each of his names had six letters. The sun, moon, and stars refer to the diminishing of spirituality during the tribulation (2 Thess. 2:11-12). Others see this as literal such as eclipses and astronomical phenomena. Some say it is the result of nuclear fallout. They associate all kinds of ideas to the eagle, and see the "woes" as inferring that they are warnings and not necessarily judgments, which is a contradiction to their other theories. Or they could be demonic woes to their coming judgment, or a warning of the coming three judgments (which makes more sense.) Their view would be better off if they weaned themselves from their misguided conjectures, and concentrated on reading their Bible more!

The Idealist view: They see this passage as series of happenings and calamities that will occur again and again throughout Church history. Most in this camp do not see it as pertaining to a specific period. The trumpets are synchronous with the "seals" of the previous passages. They see these plagues as attacking the foundations of life support, water, and crops as natural calamities so we do not take things for granted. Some in this camp see these as attacks against the Church; others see them as God's wrath against the wickedness of the world as reminiscent of the Egyptian plagues. Some see these as literal; others as symbolic. The mountains are images from Babylon's fall and the punishment of wickedness (Jer. 51:25-42). Others see it as a volcano and the eruption of Vesuvius in 79AD. Wormwood is seen as the effects of natural disasters or God's judgment. The "great star" is seen as punishment from God and its severity; others see this as idol worship that pollutes the mind and faith (Jer. 2:13-23). The sun, moon, and stars refer to the fall of Rome. Others see those as the doom of the ungodly who look to astrology and idols as their guide and or God's control over the universe (Isa. 13:10; Luke 21:28). Others see "one-third" as a warning and not a final, determined judgment. The "woes" refer that the worst is still to come.

The Historicist view: They see this passage as four great blows to the Western Roman Empire, first in 408-410, and then in 476 A D. Hail and fire are symbols of God's judgment reminiscent of the Egyptian plagues. The trees and grass represent the results of war and bloodshed and the consequential calamities to His Church. The fraction of one-third represents Rome that occupied one-third of the known earth then. The "mountains" are a symbol of strength or seats of power. Many see this as the fall of Rome by the Goths and primarily the Vandals in 428-468 AD who destroyed their ships and commerce. The "great star" is seen as the invasion of the Huns in 440 AD against Rome where they killed over

300,000. Others see this as evil politicians and heretics such as Pelagius, who corrupted the Church. Wormwood is seen as false teachings affecting the Church. The sun, moon, and stars refer to the Roman political firmament in 476-479 A.D. during the last of the Roman Emperors. Others see this as events that affect the Church. The “woes” suggest that a turning point is about to happen, from the Roman Empire to the Dark Ages or Gothic period, in three waves, a Turkish invasion, the Saracens conquest, and then the French Revolution.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. Did you fear the dark when you were a child? If so why or why not? Now that you are an adult, how do you deal with life when it seems obscure?
2. Why does the world refuse to see Christ as Lord and why do so many people refuse to seek forgiveness for their doings, even Christians? Do you believe that God has no choice other than to protect His faithful and do as He must to pass judgment?
3. When these events come to pass (if they have not already), what do you think they will look like? How will these events send shock and awe to the average person?
4. Why would God send weapons against man's environment? Have you considered that this is also God's grace remaining as the main strong force as He spares over two-thirds of the world?
5. Why does it seem that a characteristic of God's judgment is He does not do it all at once, rather He is slow and uses order? Do you think that He is slow to give time for His grace to work and people to seek forgiveness, even when they do not seek Him?

6. God is patient, but He is ready at any time to unleash these sentences. How do you feel about this? Are you ready?
7. Do you think this passage is literal? If so how will this be played out? If you think this is symbolic, how do you think it will play out? How do people's idolatrous motivations and misguided followings influence His judgment?
8. How do you think the world will respond to the warnings of the eagle when it comes? How will the average Christian handle the terror, woe, and endure such calamities?
9. Why is God's judgment monitored by His grace? Do you believe that these judgments are not to be feared by Christians? How so?
10. Keep in mind that these judgments are the answers to the prayers of the saints and His decisive judgment in answering them. Does this give you confidence in God's control and His love for you?
11. What will you do if these events come about? How can you prepare? How will they have an effect on your daily life? How can you deal better with your faith and confidence in Christ when life becomes obscure and dark?
12. What do you need to do to take seriously that God is in control? Because of His grace, He only allows a fraction of His judgments. How can you have more confidence in Christ to deliver you out of your tough situations?