

Revelation Chapters 8 and 9

The Trumpet Judgments...

The seventh seal and the golden censer (Revelation 8 v 1 to 5)

1. “When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour...” (verse 1) – the sealed scroll was introduced in Revelation Chapter 5, and the seals were opened one by one up to the sixth seal in Revelation Chapter 6. We waited for the last seal to be opened, and the contents of the scroll to be revealed, but then there was a pause (or ‘parenthesis’) with the sealing of the 144,000 and the appearance of the great multitude out of the tribulation (Revelation Chapter 7). Now the pause between the sixth and the seventh seal is emphasised by the “silence in heaven for about half an hour”. This silence suggests a sober, awestruck pause at the judgments to come, now that the seals are off and the scroll can be opened...
2. “And seven trumpets were given to them” (verse 2) – in the Old Testament, trumpets sounded the alarm for war, or they called an assembly of God’s people. These seven trumpets will sound as God’s battle-alarm during the Great Tribulation.
3. Prayer and incense (verse 3) are often related in Scripture. The idea is that just as incense is precious, pleasant, and drifts to heaven, so do our prayers. So here, before anything happens at the opening of the seventh seal, the prayers of God’s people come before the Lord, and set in motion the consummation of history...

The first four trumpets (Revelation 8 v 6 to 13)

The first four seals and trumpets present judgments directed against the earth. In the first four seals, these were the ‘four horsemen’, bringing tyranny, war, famine, and death upon the earth. The first four trumpets herald the ecological destruction of earth’s vegetation, seas, fresh waters, and sky...

These *first four trumpets* reveal the severity of God’s judgment. He attacks all the ordinary means of subsistence, such as food and water; and he attacks all the ordinary means of comfort, and knowledge, such as light and the regular rhythm of days. God may use whatever method he chooses to bring judgment, but people on earth know these events are from God, and do not think them to be merely natural disasters (Revelation 16 v 9, 11; Revelation 19 v 19).

The first four trumpets also reveal the God’s mercy: these are partial judgments, striking only “a third”, and are designed to bring a rebellious world to repentance before the final curtain. For now, God spares more than he smites.

- “A third of the trees... and all green grass was burned up” (verse 7) – how does this put the ‘environmental movement’ into perspective?
- Notice how the trumpet judgments escalate in their severity and results. What was the purpose of these judgments? See Revelation 8 v 13, 9 v 20, 21.
- How do these chapters show God’s control over all that happens? See Revelation 8 v 2, 9 v 1, 4, 13 to 15.

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The fifth and sixth trumpets (Revelation 9 v 1 to 21)

1. The last three seals focused on *heaven*: the cry of the martyrs, cosmic disturbances, and the heavenly prelude to the seven trumpets. But the last three trumpets focus on *hell*, in terms of the demonic.
 2. “The bottomless pit” (verse 2) translates the Greek phrase τὸ φρέαρ τῆς ἀβύσσου (*to phrear tes abyssou*), ‘the pit of the abyss’, a prison for certain demons (Luke 8 v 30, 31; 2 Peter 2 v 4; Jude 6). It may also refer to the realm of the dead, or ‘Hades’ (Romans 10 v 6, 7).
 3. “They have as king over them...” (v 11) – this is an indication that the creatures summoned by the *fifth trumpet* are not literally locusts, as Proverbs 30 v 27 tells us that “locusts have no king”. But why are these demonic spirits called ‘locusts’? Because locusts are agents of God’s judgment – this is a consistent Old Testament figure in passages such as Exodus 10 v 12 to 14; Deuteronomy 28 v 38; 2 Chronicles 7 v 13, 14; Joel 1 v 4; and Amos 4 v 9.
 4. Why are the four angels of the *sixth trumpet* connected with the river Euphrates (verse 14)? The Euphrates was the frontier of the Israel’s land as fully promised by God (Genesis 15 v 17 to 21), and was also the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire, which will be ‘revived’ under the Antichrist. The Euphrates area (the land of Shinar) is also associated with the first sin (Genesis 2 v 10 to 14); the first murder (Genesis 4 v 16); the first organised revolt against God (Genesis 11 v 2, 4); the first war confederation (Genesis 14 v 1); and the first dictatorship (Genesis 10 v 8 to 10).
 5. The 200 million mounted troops (verse 16) are also probably demonic, rather than human.
- What does the reaction of the “rest of mankind” (verses 20, 21) to these terrible afflictions tell us about man’s true fallen nature? See Mark 7 v 20 to 23.

Prayer –

Lord, as we read about these terrible judgments, we are in awe, and we are reminded of your majesty and greatness and holiness, and the seriousness of sin and rebellion against you.

Help us to be faithful and obedient to the truth of your Word. Amen.