Revelation 8

The Seventh Seal: Silence, Prayer and Four Trumpets

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION

"These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."
Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

Heaven goes quiet, and the prayers of God's people rise to His throne — and those prayers come back down as fire. The first four trumpets strike land, sea, water and light, but only a third. Judgment is real, it is measured, and it is a warning that worse is coming for those who will not turn.

Ed Smith · Started 20 October 2026

Scripture in the text and key-verse cards: King James Version (public domain). Quotations in the notes: New American Standard Bible® (NASB 1995), © The Lockman Foundation; used by permission. Commentary sources: David Guzik, Enduring Word.

00 The Text

REVELATION 8 (KJV), MARKED

▲ Gold God — His character & actions | Green Command / instruction | Sky Key repeated word
⚠ Rose Sin / warning | ★ Violet Promise / blessing | Amber Time / place / contrast

[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.

[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.

[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.

[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.

[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.

[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.

[13] And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, ⚠ Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabiters of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!

Marked in the text

- **v1** silence in heaven about the space of half an hour
- **v2** the seven angels which stood before God
- **v2** seven trumpets
- **v3** golden censer
- **v3** much incense
- **v3** ★ the prayers of all saints
- **v4** ★ the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God
- **v5** ▲ filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth
- **v5** ▲ voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake

- **v6** prepared themselves to sound
- **v7** sounded *(every occurrence)*
- **v7** hail and fire mingled with blood
- **v7** third part *(every occurrence)*
- **v7** all green grass was burnt up
- **v8** a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea
- **v8** the sea became blood
- **v9** the third part of the ships were destroyed
- **v10** there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp
- **v11** Wormwood
- **v11** many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter
- **v12** the third part of the sun was smitten
- **v12** the day shone not for a third part of it
- **v13** Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabiters of the earth
- **v13** which are yet to sound

Marks are drawn on the KJV text. Quotations in the notes are from the NASB95, so their wording may differ from the KJV above.

01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · REVELATION 8:7 (KJV)

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.

Setting

Chapter 7 held back the winds until God's servants were sealed. Now the Lamb breaks the last seal on the scroll (5:1–7), and what comes out of it is not an end but a new series — seven angels with seven trumpets. Before a single trumpet sounds, heaven goes silent, and the prayers of the saints rise before God.

Structure

- vv1–2 — **silence and seven trumpets:** "When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour" (v1). John sees "the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them" (v2).
- vv3–6 — **the prayers and the fire:** another angel stands at the altar "holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne" (v3). "The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand" (v4). Then the angel "filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth," and there followed "peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake" (v5). The seven angels "prepared themselves to sound them" (v6).
- v7 — **first trumpet, the land:** "hail and fire, mixed with blood" — "a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up."
- vv8–9 — **second trumpet, the sea:** "something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea"; a third of the sea becomes blood, a third of sea life dies, and "a third of the ships were

destroyed."

- vv10–11 — **third trumpet, fresh water:** "a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch," on the rivers "and on the springs of waters" (v10). "The name of the star is called Wormwood"; a third of the waters turn bitter, and "many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter" (v11).
- vv12–13 — **fourth trumpet, the lights, and a warning:** "a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck" (v12). Then John hears "an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, 'Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth,'" because of "the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!" (v13).

Repeated words

a third (twelve times, vv7–12); angel(s) (vv2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13); trumpet(s) (vv2, 6, 13); sounded (vv7, 8, 10, 12); altar (vv3, 5); incense (vv3, 4); prayers of the saints (vv3, 4); fire (vv5, 7, 8); blood (vv7, 8); threw / thrown (vv5, 7, 8).

Contrasts

the loud worship of chapters 4–7 ⟷ "silence in heaven" (v1). Prayers going up (v4) ⟷ fire coming down (v5). The same altar gives incense to God and fire to the earth (vv3, 5). A third struck ⟷ two-thirds spared (vv7–12). A great star "burning like a torch" (v10) ⟷ the sun, moon and stars darkened (v12). Four trumpets already sounded ⟷ three woes still to come (v13).

Chapter theme (my words)

Heaven goes quiet, and the prayers of God's people rise to His throne — and those prayers come back down as fire. The first four trumpets strike land, sea, water and light, but only a third. Judgment is real, it is measured, and it is a warning that worse is coming for those who will not turn.

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · REVELATION 8:5 (KJV)

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.

Silence in heaven (v1)

After all the thunder and song of chapters 4–7, this is startling. Guzik gives several possibilities — breathing space, or a hush so the saints' prayers can be heard — but he favors an awestruck silence before the storm of judgment. The prophets called for this kind of silence before the Lord's day (Hab 2:20; Zeph 1:7; Zech 2:13). When God is about to act, the right response is to stop talking.

Seven trumpets (v2)

In Israel trumpets sounded the alarm for war and gathered the people (Num 10:1–10; Joel 2:1). Seven trumpets brought down Jericho (Josh 6). Guzik mentions Jewish tradition of seven angels who stand before God (compare Gabriel, Luke 1:19).

The prayers of the saints (vv3–5)

Who is this angel? Some see Jesus, the Angel of the LORD, interceding as our High Priest. Others, Guzik reports, answer that the Greek for "another" means another *of the same kind* — another angel like the seven — which leans against that view. Clarke, in Guzik: "It is not said that the angel presents these prayers." The incense is added to the prayers; it does not replace them. Incense is a picture of prayer (Ps 141:2; Rev 5:8), and at the temple the people prayed outside while the incense burned (Luke 1:10). Guzik's point: the prayers of the saints — including the martyrs' cry "How long?" (6:10) and every "Your kingdom come" — help set the end in motion (2 Pet 3:12). Torrance, in Guzik, calls prayer "more potent, more powerful than all the dark and mighty powers let loose in the world." The same censer that carries prayer up carries fire down. God answers.

How do the trumpets relate to the seals?

Guzik lays out the options:

- **Recapitulation** — the seals, trumpets and bowls cover the same ground from different angles. Morris, in Guzik: "He goes over the ground again and again, each time teaching us something new." Many amillennial and idealist readers take this view.
- **Sequential / telescoping** — the seventh seal contains the seven trumpets, and the seventh trumpet contains the seven bowls, each series more severe than the last. Guzik sees difficulties with a strict version of this.
- **A heavenly perspective** — the order is real but not easy to pin down from our side of time.

Whichever view, Guzik insists the judgments are real events, not just symbols.

Literal, historical, or symbolic? (vv7–12)

Guzik, as a futurist, reads the trumpets as literal catastrophes coming in the tribulation. Seiss, in Guzik: "if earth, trees, and grass do not mean earth, trees, and grass, no man can tell what they mean." Historicist interpreters have matched the trumpets to events like the barbarian invasions of Rome, and later to Attila, Genseric and Arius for the falling star. Clarke lists these identifications and warns it is "easy to find coincidences when fancy runs riot." Idealist readers see the trumpets as pictures of God's judgments repeated through all of history. What all can see is the echo of Egypt: hail and fire (Exod 9:23–25), water turned to blood (Exod 7:20–21), darkness (Exod 10:21–23). The God who judged Pharaoh to free His people will do it again on a world scale. Guzik also stresses that God is the one acting — this is not just "nature" (compare 16:9, 11).

Land, sea, water, light (vv7–12)

The "something like a great mountain" (v8) is not an actual mountain — Guzik sees something like a burning meteor or asteroid, and rejects reading the mountain as a nation (as some do from Jer 51:25). The star Wormwood (vv10–11) may be a comet or meteor, though Guzik allows that God may mean more. Wormwood is a bitter plant, proverbial in Scripture for bitterness and sorrow (Jer 9:15; Lam 3:19;

Amos 5:7). The fourth trumpet is not a dimming but darkness for a third of the day and night (Matt 24:29). One textual note: the KJV lacks "a third of the earth was burned up" in v7; the NASB follows Greek manuscripts that include it.

Severity and mercy

Guzik notes the first four trumpets strike the basics of life — food, water, light, time. But only a third. Two-thirds is spared. These are warning shots meant to drive people to repentance before the end (compare 9:20–21).

The eagle's woe (v13)

The KJV reads "angel"; the NASB reads "eagle." Guzik explains that the two Greek words look very much alike, and some ancient copies read "eagle" — the reading the NASB follows. Either way the message is the same: three woes for the three trumpets left. The worst is still ahead.

Word study (Greek)

- **silence — *sigē* (G4602):** silence, stillness.
- **half an hour — *hēmiōrion* (G2256):** a half hour; used only here in the New Testament.
- **trumpet — *salpinx* (G4536):** a trumpet, war or assembly signal.
- **sound — *salpizō* (G4537):** to blow a trumpet.
- **altar — *thysiastērion* (G2379):** altar, place of sacrifice or incense.
- **censer — *libanōtos* (G3031):** a vessel for burning frankincense.
- **incense — *thymiama* (G2368):** incense, fragrant offering.
- **prayers — *proseuchē* (G4335):** prayer directed to God.
- **earthquake — *seismos* (G4578):** a shaking, earthquake.
- **hail — *chalaza* (G5464):** hail.
- **third — *tritos* (G5154):** third, a third part.
- **star — *astēr* (G792):** a star or heavenly body.
- **torch — *lampas* (G2985):** a torch, lamp.
- **Wormwood — *apsinthos* (G894):** wormwood, a bitter plant; bitterness.
- **made bitter — *pikrainō* (G4087):** to make bitter.
- **struck — *plēssō* (G4141):** to strike, smite.
- **eagle — *aetos* (G105):** an eagle.
- **woe — *ouai* (G3759):** an exclamation of grief and doom.

Cross-references

Exod 7:20–21; Exod 9:23–25; Exod 10:21–23; Num 10:1–10; Josh 6:1–20; Ps 141:2; Jer 9:15; Jer 51:25; Lam 3:19; Joel 2:1, 30–31; Amos 5:7; Hab 2:20; Zeph 1:7, 14–16; Zech 2:13; Matt 24:29; Luke 1:10, 19; 2 Pet 3:10–12; Rev 5:8; Rev 6:9–11; Rev 9:20–21; Rev 16:9, 11.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · REVELATION 8:3 (KJV)

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.

Command to obey — keep praying

The prayers of "all the saints" are gathered on the golden altar (v3). Not one is lost. The prayers I've prayed for years for men who seem unreachable — for sons, for brothers in prison, for friends still using — are going up before God. Today I'll keep praying instead of giving up.

Sin to confess — talking when I should be still

Heaven fell silent before God's judgment (v1). I am quick to explain, defend and comment, and slow to be quiet before Him. I confess my noise, and I want to learn to stop and listen.

Warning to heed — "Woe, woe, woe."

These trumpets are warnings, and only a third is struck. The eagle cries because worse is coming (v13). God's partial judgments are His mercy calling people to turn while there is still time. When hard consequences come into a man's life — an arrest, an overdose, a broken home — they can be God's trumpet. I don't want to waste mine, and I want to help the men I disciple not waste theirs.

Promise to trust — my prayers reach the throne

"The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God" (v4). A man in a cell with no one to call still has direct access to the throne of heaven. Prayer is not a last resort; it is one of the ways God moves history.

Example to follow — the angels who stand before God

The seven angels stand before Him, receive their trumpets, and prepare themselves (vv2, 6). They wait for His timing and then obey. I want to be ready — prepared, standing in His presence, and moving when He says move.

Worship

The God of Revelation 8 rules land, sea, rivers and stars. He hears every whisper of prayer and answers with fire. I worship Him in silence first, then with my voice.

Prayer

Lord God, thank You that not one of my prayers is lost before Your throne. Teach me to be still in Your presence. Wake me and the men I love with Your warnings before it is too late. Let my prayers rise like incense, and let Your kingdom come. Amen.