

**Revelation as Trilogy**  
**The Two Powers**  
**Chapter 8: Chaos Expands – Part 1**

**Introduction:** Chapter eight begins the second section of the Revelation trilogy which I am calling The Two Powers. At the heart of The Two Powers will be a confrontation between the forces aligned with the Holy Trinity and the forces aligned with the Unholy Trinity; between the forces of flourishing and the forces of destruction. Chapters eight and nine offer us a glimpse of the ever-increasing scale of chaos that God is allowing to be poured out upon the earth. This happens because God is removing God’s protective power which has kept the primordial chaos at bay. This unleashing is illustrated through a vision of another set of seven; the seven trumpets. With each successive trumpet blast, we witness an ever-increasing level of destruction; destruction of those things upon which humanity depends (water, grass for animals, fish from the sea, etc.). Finally note the literary connections between the plagues from Exodus and the individual incidents of chaos in this chapter.

**The Story:** The chapter begins with the opening of the seventh seal. There is a moment of silence which could be a time of pious waiting or prayerful preparation. Then the seven trumpets are given to seven angels who will blow them at the right moments. The next image is of a golden censer that is filled with incense upon which the prayers of the saints will be lifted into the very nostrils of God. What we need to understand here is that these prayers are from those who have been killed for their faith and they are asking God to bring about justice on earth. One way to think about this is a person asking God to unleash chaos on the earth as God had done in the time of Noah with the purpose of destroying the evil that exists there. When the censer is thrown down the trumpets begin to blow, and chaos is unleashed.

As each angel blows their trumpet, new “plagues” are visited upon the earth. The first angel brings the first plague (Exodus 9:23-26) by destroying a third of creation itself, reversing a third of God’s initial creative act. The second angel brings the second plague (Exodus 7:20-21) by turning the sea to blood and ending all commerce across the empire. The third angel initiates the third plague that destroys a third of the fresh waters (we began with earth, then oceans and now fresh water). This would cause extended disasters because people and crops would die of thirst and a loss of irrigation. The next angel blows his trumpet and the scale of chaos moves from the earth and into the heavens. Here, a third of the sun, moon and stars are darkened, again destroying some of God’s earliest creations, mimicking Exodus 10:21.

The final portion of this chapter (and not of the trumpets) is of an eagle crying. Eagles are often seen as a vulture and not as the noble eagle that we in the US are used to. Thus, we have a sign that death is ahead as the bird waits for the pickings. The three woes offer readers a hint that what is ahead is more dire than what has come. It is a wonderful literary device intended to rivet attention. We can only assume that since only the earth has been touched that we are nearing travails for humanity.

**Reflection:** This chapter draws us into multiple Old Testament stories; the days of creation, Noah and the ark, Moses and the plagues, and finally Jeremiah (there is a wormwood reference in Jeremiah 9:15). These references remind us that there is nothing new in Revelation. What they present is a reminder that humanity’s existence is a precarious thing; that there are always powers and events in this world (earthquakes, volcanoes, droughts, floods, etc.) that can and often do threaten humanity and disrupt an orderly world. Part of what we can take from this is that it is only by God’s grace that the earth survives.

Questions:

1. What do you make of the prayers of the saints wafting into the presence of God?
2. Which of the trumpet events intrigues you the most and why?
3. Where have you seen chaos unleashed and have you ever connected that with God?