

Revelation Chapter 8 Handout

Things go from bad to worse. God hears the prayers of those who want to be avenged and responds with devastations upon more of the earth than before. Notice that here we have moved from one quarter of the earth to one third of the earth. Usually this is called the seven trumpets, yet that gives no real indication of what is taking place. What we have is the beginning of the return of chaos. Suddenly those things upon which humanity depends (water, grass for animals, fish from the sea, etc.) are now being destroyed. Life will become very, very hard. Also take note of the reuse of the image of the plagues from Exodus. In a sense it is as if it will take a new series of plagues through which God's people will have to come in order for God's people to finally be set free. Freedom is through suffering.

When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. 2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. 3 Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.

Silence: could be used to describe an attitude of pious waiting or simply the awe that followed the ripping open of heaven. Sort of the silence before the storm.

Seven angels with seven trumpets: the ante has been upped. We are now in the second set of sevens...and this time the announcement...trumpets...will make people take notice of what God is doing.

Incense: the prayers of the saints are wafted up with the incense into the very nostrils of God. God breathes in the prayers of the saints for vengeance and is influenced by them as they remind God of the lack of justice in the world and the need for God to do something about it.

5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth; and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake. 6 Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets made ready to blow them.

Fire: this is the burning anger of God against the injustice of the world...against all of those things that hurt and destroy the creation God has made

Threw: God's response is to send his wrath upon the world. He will unleash his anger.

Thunder: all of the "natural responses" to the throwing down of the censer are also used to describe a theophony; that moment when God comes close to humans and acts in the world.

7 The first angel blew his trumpet, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were hurled to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

Earth: this first trumpet affects the earth.

Hail and fire: see Exodus 9:23-26. We have before us a new set of plagues. The plagues were intended to impress Pharaoh enough to let God's people go. Here they are intended to help folks see that they ought to become the people of God. This is nothing new in terms of the plagues, it is new in the sense of the scope of destruction. Suddenly a third of God's creation becomes useless. It cannot sustain life.

8 The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea. 9 A third of the sea became blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

Sea: this second trumpet affects the seas.

Became blood: this would make all in the sea die. Also look at Exodus 7:20-21

Great mountain: think of Jesus speaking of having faith to move mountains, or of the world coming apart where you have flying mountains. The vision also appears to be like a volcano rising from the sea and plunging down in...Vesuvius?

A third of the ships: this would make commerce come to an almost complete halt, raise the price of goods and make other goods scarce.

10 The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. 11 The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many died from the water, because it was made bitter.

Great star fell: notice how this follows the fall of all of the stars earlier in the book. In a sense this shows that we are not dealing with a logical sequential series of events. We are instead dealing with theological descriptions of a growing sense of tragedy.

Third of the rivers: we have moved from earth, to ocean, to fresh waters. In Turkey (where Patmos is located) rivers are the life blood of the people. They offer drinking water for humans and animals and irrigation for crops. This would deeply affect the people.

Wormwood: is a very bitter substance (Jer 9:15, Lam 3:19) and indicates affliction and misery. John may have had in mind the water at Marah, which was bitter but which the Lord made sweet, there the Lord promised not to bring any of the diseases that he brought onto the Egyptians provided they obey the laws of God (Exo 15:22).

Many died: this is the first mention of the loss of human life because of the new plagues.

12 The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light was darkened; a third of the day was kept from shining, and likewise the night.

Third of the sun: Again notice that we have returned to a previous image...the sun having already been blackened...now we have a third of the sun going out and a third of the moon which had already been turned red...a third of the stars which have already fallen...and now their light is out. First the earth and vegetation, then the sea, then the rivers and springs and finally the rest of the universe is affected.

Darkness: this is similar to the plague of darkness on the Egyptians (Exo 10:21) So how do you keep a third of a day from shining unless we are speaking metaphorically?

13 Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew in midheaven, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!"

Eagle crying: this is 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.

Woe, woe, woe: we are given a hint that what is ahead is more dire than what has come. It is a wonderful literary device intended to catch and rivet our attention. We can only assume that since only the physical earth has been touched that we are nearing travails for humanity.