

Revelation 8-9 (ESV)

The Seventh Seal and the Golden Censer

8 When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. ² Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. ³ And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar 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. 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.

The Seven Trumpets

⁶ Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.

⁷ The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon 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.

⁸ The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown

into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. ⁹ A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

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 people died from the water, because it had been made bitter.

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 might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.

¹³ Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!"

⁹ And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. ² He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace,

and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. ³ Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. ⁴ They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. ⁵ They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone. ⁶ And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them.

⁷ In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, ⁸ their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; ⁹ they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. ¹⁰ They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails. ¹¹ They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.

¹² The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.

¹³ Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, ¹⁴ saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." ¹⁵ So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind.

¹⁶ The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number.

¹⁷ And this is how I saw the horses in my vision and those who rode them: they wore breastplates the colour of fire and of sapphire and of sulphur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulphur came out of their mouths.

¹⁸ By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulphur coming out of their mouths. ¹⁹ For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails are like serpents with heads, and by means of them they wound.

²⁰ The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot

see or hear or walk, ²¹ nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Last week (in chapters 6 and 7), Jesus broke 7 seals, on the scroll that contains God's plan for history. And as these seals were broken, this both reveals God's **plan** for history, and sets into motion, the events that **wrap up** history, and bring about God's final judgment.

And I said last week, that as each of the 7 seals are broken, it's like we're being given a table of contents that gives us a 'heads up' of what's going to come, in the rest of the Revelation...

This week, we begin reading the 7 trumpets, which reveal God's judgment in greater detail. And in 2 or 3 weeks time, we'll encounter the 7 bowls, which reveal the wrath of God, in even **greater** detail...

And so we have to understand, that the Book of Revelation, doesn't just set forward a continuous series of events... John records it in the order that he **saw** it – he records the order of the vision – not the order that the events will take place...

So, for instance, here's a list of the 7 seals that we read about last week:

- **1st seal**: revealed a White horse – and its rider represented a world ruler, who was bent on conquest and war

- **2nd seal**: revealed a Red horse – representing anarchy and murder (*And we've seen another example of something like this, in Manchester this week*)
- **3rd seal**: revealed a Black horse – representing famine
- **4th seal**: revealed a Pale horse – representing death and hades – 1/4 of the world's population dies
- **5th seal**: reveals the faithful who have been slain, and how they cry out for justice
- **6th seal**: reveals the Cataclysmic global and cosmic upheaval – such that people would rather be buried alive, than to face God's judgment... And here we're told that the sun and the moon are darkened; Islands and mountains disappear; stars fall from the sky, and in fact, the sky disappears.
- And now, as the **7th seal** is opened, the 7 trumpets are revealed.

But, when we get into the 7 trumpets, on the 4th trumpet, the sun is darkened... But it's already gone dark (hasn't it)...

You see, the book of Revelation is not a 'start to finish' sequence of events – it describes the **same** events, several times, in different ways...

Now, my scientific mind, takes a bit to accept that... My logical way of thinking, and looking at things, assumes that the beginning relates to the beginning, the end relates to the end, and everything else, is a natural progression through from beginning to end... But when it comes to Biblical Prophecy, this is very often not so. And sometimes, the same event is foretold, in several different ways.

For instance, in the Old Testament, there were a **multitude** of prophets, all foretelling the destruction of Israel and Judah... And they used all sorts of images, to describe the one event.

Think also, about when Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream:

Pharaoh dreamed that there were 7 fat cows – and they looked like really **good** stock... But then 7 scrawny, and ugly cows, gobbled them up... And then he had a second dream. And he saw 7 ears of really good grain, growing on the one stalk... but then 7 thin and blighted ears turned up, and swallowed up the 7 good ears...

And *Genesis 41:25* Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do.

Genesis 41:32 And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about.

Alright, Pharaoh had one dream; Then he had another. Both different, but both describing the one event. So, we have 2 different views, of the one event. – one from the perspective of the livestock suffering, and the other from the perspective of the failure of the crops... And we accept that, don't we? - two different views of the one event.

And this is what we have to accept in the Revelation – several different views, of the one event.

*I heard Phillip Jenson give a talk on Revelation once, and he used the analogy of the instant replay that we have with our sporting events, and I thought that was a good analogy... In footy, somebody makes a spectacular try, and we don't only see it **once** on the tv – they show it 4; 5; 6 times, from different angles, shot with different cameras... Each time you're seeing something different, but it's recording the one event... And that's what we have in the book of Revelation...*

So, let's begin. I said before that we talked about the opening of the 7th seal, but we haven't really – we finished after the 6th.

When the 5th seal was broken, we caught a glimpse of something that's happening in heaven. Those who have been killed because they have been faithful to Jesus, were calling out to God, "How long until You will avenge our blood? How long until you will judge & bring justice?"...

And now the 7th seal gets broken... and there is silence in heaven for about half an hour... That is a long time, for complete silence.... Heaven is generally a pretty noisy place, the 24 elders; 4 living creatures; thousands of angels, all worshipping God... There's plenty going on in Heaven, but now we're struck by deafening silence...

On ANZAC Day and Armistice day, when we have a minute's silence, I find myself counting, because otherwise, it seems to never end...

But when the 7th seal is broken, there is 30 minutes of silence; 30 minutes of building expectation; 30 minutes of trembling at what is to come... *You know the saying "The quiet before*

the storm” ... When there’s a big storm coming, very often there is a quiet period – a lull... Where the leaves of the trees are motionless; You can’t even hear a bird singing... And then all of a sudden, the wind hits; and the storm arrives in all its fury...

And that’s pretty much what happens here – there’s silence... And then an angel was given incense to offer. In the book of Revelation, incense represents the prayers of the saints, and in fact, we’re given that very picture here. The smoke of the incense mixes with the prayers of God’s children... And what have they been praying???

“How long, O Lord, until you avenge our blood? How long, until you bring justice?” How long until you make all things new??? They’ve been praying, “Your Kingdom Come”....

And the angel uses the same bowl that the prayers were offered in, to then scoop up fire from the altar, and to hurl it upon the earth... **and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.**

That’s how long... God isn’t going to wait any longer... He’s going to act...

And this is the point at which we’ve finished the 7 seals – now comes the 7 trumpets.

Some of the events that are described here, are events that we’ve already seen, (such as the darkening of the sun). Some of the events, are different.

The 7 seals, gave us a view of the persecution, and the dangers for God's people... but now, the 7 trumpets, tell us more about the judgment of those who are **not** God's people...

And, the 7 trumpets are reminiscent of the plagues that God brought upon Egypt in the book of Exodus. Some of the plagues are almost identical. Some are very different. Some of them, we can have a reasonable idea of what they mean. Others, we have absolutely **no** idea of what they mean.

But is it a good thing, or a **bad** thing, that these plagues of judgment are coming upon the world? Well, it depends upon who you are... And in this regard, it is just like the plagues of Egypt... In Egypt:

- The Lord had seen the misery of His people Israel, who were slaves. He heard their cry, and He was concerned for their suffering, And so He decided, He was going to do something about it.
- And so, to the people of Israel, the plagues that God brought upon Egypt, was their salvation... It led to their release – it led to their freedom. They were rescued by God...
- But of course, to the people of Egypt, it was awful. They suffered greatly through the plagues...
- And now, with the plagues of the 7 trumpets, God has heard His children cry out because of their suffering... Their prayers have been “Lord, vindicate us. Avenge our blood. Come in justice.” And now the time has come, for the Lord to answer that prayer.

- And to those who are faithful to Jesus, this is their salvation... This is what we've been waiting for, for 2000 years
- But of course, to the people of the Earth - those who are being judged, it's awful, and they **will** suffer greatly.
- And just like the plagues of Egypt, some of the plagues impacted on the Hebrews and the Egyptians alike... But then later on, as the plagues got worse, they impacted on the Egyptians only, and the Hebrews were protected from them...
- And just like that, some of **these** plagues will come upon everybody, but as the plagues get worse, those who are faithful to God – those who have been sealed, will be protected.

.....

With the [1st Trumpet](#), came hail and fire, mixed with blood

This is almost identical to the 7th plague that hit Egypt.... The image of “fire” (by the way), probably means “lots of lightning”. There is going to be an enormous storm, of hail and lightning, that will destroy, maim and kill.

And we are told the result of it:

- a third of the earth was burned up
- a third of the trees were burned up
- all green grass was burned up

Now, living in Australia, we know how an electrical storm can burn the earth... In a dry land, lightning can set fires – Imagine an Australian summer, with a huge fuel load, and lightning bolts setting fires right across the land...

But the description of being “burned up”, doesn't mean that it has to be done by fire... The fury of a hail storm, can lead to total destruction... *Some friends of mine once told me about a furious hail storm that hit their place... Buildings were write-offs... Trees and grass were stripped bare... And the **stench**....., because every bird in the vicinity, had been killed by the hail...*

The 2nd Angel blew his Trumpet and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea

Is it a volcano? I don't know... But the result, is similar to the 1st plague of Egypt (not the same, but similar). The Sea became blood... ⁹ **A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.**

Similar, in that the water turned to blood and the aquatic life died. Different in that here the **ships** were destroyed, and only a third of aquatic life died.

But there is also the possibility, that it's also alluding to the judgment of Babylon... In the Revelation, Babylon represents

the centre of Godlessness, devoted to wealth, trade and worldliness...

In Jeremiah 51, God says that He will repay Babylon for its evil... And he says "I will make you a burnt mountain". And then in V63&64 of that same chapter, God tells Jeremiah, when you've written all this down, and you've finished reading this prophecy out, tie a stone to the book and throw it in the river, ⁶⁴ and say, 'Thus shall Babylon sink, to rise no more, because of the disaster that I am bringing upon her.....

Now, we don't know what this "great mountain" is (for sure). It could very well be referring to Babylon, and its downfall could well be accompanied by the plague of water turning to blood.. If so, we're catching a little glimpse of Revelation 18:
²¹ Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more;
And it goes on to talk about how the merchants will not be able to trade any more...

And here we have this burning mountain (which in the Old Testament represents Babylon) being thrown into the sea... and shipping – the great trade routes of the nations are affected – a third of them are lost...

So it could be alluding to the destruction of Babylon – metaphorical for the destruction of the world's trade), but we can't be sure...

The **3rd 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 (which here means "poison"). A third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter.

Now, we don't know what this plague means. It's not at all like any of the plagues of Egypt. In the Revelation, a star falling, usually represents "a demon" – one of Satan's fallen angels... But even though we don't know what the cause is, the result is obvious – a third of the world's water resources, are poisoned – and many people died from the water...

It could be some kind of Terrorist chemical attack, where water supplies across the world are poisoned. It could be some kind of water-borne disease – we do not know... But we'll know when it happens.... Drinking water, will kill....

The **4th Angel blew his Trumpet** and something very much like the 9th plague of Egypt occurs. Darkness.

1/3 of the sun; 1/3 of the moon; 1/3 of the stars... Now, I don't know whether that means that all luminance was reduced and darkened by 1/3; or whether there was some kind

of shift to the Earth's axis, so that nights become longer on a third of the Earth; or whether there be smog or haze that blocks out light; – We don't know what it means... But once again, we'll know when it happens. And it **will** happen. We've been told it will in Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; And we've been told once already, in Revelation 6, and now we're being told again, in Revelation 8.

V13

¹³ Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying (it could be a vulture – it's the same word in the original Greek) with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!"

This is a dreadful warning... The first 4 trumpets, have been bad enough... But the next 3 will be even worse. Woe!!!!!!

Just like the plagues of Egypt got worse and worse, so too will these plagues of judgment, get worse and worse.

And this is the point at which the plagues are suffered, **only** by those who have **not** been sealed by God. Up until **this** point, God's faithful are suffering along **with** the people of the world... And that's been OK, because we know that these events are leading to the fulfilment of God's new Heaven and New Earth...

But now at **this** point, the 3 woes (that are the last 3 trumpets), are God's wrath upon His enemies – not His children.

And so the 1st woe: The **5th Angel blew his Trumpet** and something **like** the 8th plague of Egypt (but different) – a plague of locusts is released.

A fallen star (which most probably represents Satan or one of his demons), **was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit.** (now that sounds ominous, doesn't it?[sound effect cello/double bass]) But this demon cannot do this, unless it's allowed to, by God... ² He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. ³ Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth,

Only these locusts, are not ordinary locusts... I first tried to think of some kind of modern military machine that they might represent:

⁷ In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, ⁸ their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; ⁹ they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise

of many chariots with horses rushing into battle.

¹⁰ They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails.

And I could picture great squadrons of attack helicopters, armed with rockets, and biological weapons, swooping in to kill and destroy...

But I don't believe this is describing some kind of war machine... Why not???

- Well, they don't harm the vegetation, in fact, they **only** harm those who are **not** sealed by God
- They could torment them for 5 months, but they couldn't kill them
- **their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings...** Alright – there was great pain involved.
- Their pain was so great, that they would attempt suicide, but their attempts at suicide (euthanasia) were thwarted...

This is **not**, a war machine. It's something else...

In the Old Testament book of Joel, we read about the locusts coming upon the land, and stripping the land bare... And there's some remarkable similarities in the description of the locusts in Joel and the description of the locusts here... And Bible scholars still don't know, if Joel is describing a literal locust plague that stripped the land bare, or if he's describing a marauding army that invaded and stripped the land bare...

But in Joel, it points us forward to "The Day of the Lord"... and here in the Revelation, we're seeing the Day of the Lord unfolding... It's a call to repentance while there's still time... God will judge the nations (that's what we learn from Joel)...

And here in the Revelation, are these locusts representing an army invading? Or, is it some kind of insect infestation, allowed by God – Locusts that don't eat what's green, but sting (like scorpions), but **only** those who **haven't** been sealed by God????

We don't know... But we do know, this is supernatural event. It is a demonic affliction, allowed by God. V11 says:

¹¹ They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.

You know, you'd think that the Devil wouldn't worry too much about those who are on his side, and against God,,,,, but not so... It has **always** been the case, that those who reject God, and those who worship the devil, end up with all sorts of spiritual oppression; possession; sickness; and disease....

As Hosea 8 says, If you sow the wind, you reap the whirlwind...

Now, that's only woe one. There's another 2 to come yet:

The **6th Angel blew his Trumpet** and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God,

14 saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet,
"Release the four angels who are bound at the great
river Euphrates."

To invade Israel from the North (Soviet countries) or from the
far East (Iran; Iraq; India; China), an army would have to
cross the Euphrates river...

To the ancients, "North of the Euphrates", was the land of the
Parthenians... You were out of civilisation, and into the land
of the barbarians (when you got to the Parthenians).... And
these barbarous people were greatly feared – there was no
"Geneva Convention" to set boundaries in the midst of war....
It was truly gruesome stuff- "full-stop"....

God has set a date on His calendar – **the hour, the day, the
month, and the year**; when this event will begin.

In Revelation 7, we've already had one view of these 4
angels... These angels, were the ones who were holding back
the final destruction of God. They were held back, until
God's people were sealed, so that they would be able to stand
strong in the faith as Christ's witnesses, through this time.....

But now these 4 angels are being released, to bring on the
final judgment...

And a massive army is released (an army such that has never
marched before) **16** The number of mounted troops was

twice ten thousand times ten thousand – that's 200 000 000...

Is this an army of Angels? Is it an army of demons? Is it a human army? We don't know... If it's a human army, there's only one nation large enough (China)...

We don't know **who** they are, but we **do** know the result - a third of mankind are killed.... But it's unclear, if this includes God's people or not (I suspect it doesn't include God's people, and this is why:)...

With this army there are 3 plagues associated with it: Fire; Smoke and Sulphur...

Now, we could try to tie these images to conventional weapons; nuclear weapons; and chemical weapons, but I don't think so... More likely is this: Fire, smoke and Sulphur are always a picture of God's wrath and judgment... And 1/3 of mankind are killed. And so if this is God's judgment, it's not going to be getting poured out on His children...

Vs 20-21 give us to the key to everything that we've read this morning. What is the **result** of this???:

Has anyone kept count of the number of times I've said this morning, "I don't know what this means..." I've said it a fair bit... We don't know exactly, what all these images mean... We **do** know, it is the terrible wrath of God, justly poured out, on an unjust world..

.. And what's the result???

²⁰ The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, ²¹ nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

If **all** these judgments, are God's final attempts to get humanity to repent of their sin, and to turn to Him,,, well they've failed... No... All of these progressive judgments, are not God's attempt to get people to take notice – our God understands the human heart, far better than that...

What it is, is proof, that a heart set against God, even under the pressures of judgment, will not allow it to be swayed from its own destructive direction...

We saw this in Egypt with Pharaoh... Pharaoh hardened his heart; And every act of God hardened it even more – and God knew it... And there was no sense to it...

You know, sometimes we Christians find ourselves wondering about our friends and loved ones – “Why can they not see???” Some people have been every opportunity to see the amazing acts of God... and yet they still won't repent and turn to Him....

Jesus said ^{Matthew 11:21} **“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you**

had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

But this is human nature – we don't... All of this obvious judgment of God... And in the final couple of judgments, the Christians are not affected.... And there's no sense to their response... The godless, **still** won't repent... They harden their hearts against God, and with each successive plague, they just harden their hearts some more...

And it's happening even in the world today ... In Luke 13, a couple of disasters have happened, and somebody asks Jesus about it, and his response was along the lines of "Do you think they were worse sinners than you?"... ^{Luke 13:5} **No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."**

Even now, when disasters unfold, they are a reminder for us, that the Day of the Lord is coming... They are a reminder for us, that we need to repent and turn to The Lord...

But what happens in our world today, when there's a drought; or a flood; or a cyclone; or a famine???? What's the news say? "Climate change. We have to take action on climate change.".... We can fix it. The power is in our hands...

It's interesting that our reading today finished with they **did** not repent of the works of their hands

The wrath of God is not something that we can ever fix...
The only thing we can do, is repent of our sin; repent of our
godlessness; repent of our idolatries; repent of our self-
sufficiency... And call on the Name of The Lord...

We're in a section of Revelation now, where we learn lot
about the wrath and the judgment of God... And some people
might say, "You're just trying to frighten people!!!"...

Actually, yes it is... It is a great big warning sign post, telling
us "What is to come", in the hope that some people will take
notice, take stock on their life direction, and turn to God...

*Cigarette packets these days, don't have enticing company
logos on them... They're covered in pictures of lung cancer &
mouth cancer , and all sorts of gruesome images... People
are being warned, and yet they keep on smoking...*

This section of Revelation, is warning people about the
coming judgment of God... But they still won't repent.

Well, there's still 1 trumpet to blow, and we'll continue with
this series next week.

Let's pray,
Heavenly Father,
We thank you that You are coming to save, all those who are
anxiously waiting for You.
We thank You, that You have given every opportunity to
repent.

We also thank You that You are a God of Justice;
And a God of Mercy and Love.

And so with confidence, we pray, "Come Lord Jesus".
Lord, help us to be sure and firm witnesses,
To our Lord Jesus Christ,
Always pointing our neighbour towards You.
And always preaching, "the need for repentance",
In the midst of the Judgments.

Lord,
Give us courage and faith to stand,
In Jesus' name,
Amen.