

firepan used for burning **incense**. The **golden altar** reflects the splendor of the heavenly throne room (4:2, 3). *Incense* here may speak of the fragrance of the infinite perfections of Christ that accompanies the prayers of all the saints or is mingled with their prayers. The addition of this incense is necessary to make our prayers acceptable before the throne. In breaking the silence in heaven (v. 1), the prayers of God's people for God to act in just judgment (6:10) are heard and responded to with **noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake**.

8:7–12 As in the sequence of the first four seals, the angels sound the first four trumpets in rapid succession. But the effects of the trumpet judgments on earth are far more devastating than the seal judgments. **A third of all trees and grass; a third of the sea, the living creatures in the sea, and the ships on the sea; a third of all rivers and springs of water; and apparently a third of all daylight and moonlight** are affected by the trumpet judgments. The first four judgments seem designed to reverse in part the original creation of God. The Lord initially assaults the environment. Food is destroyed; distribution of goods is crippled; water supply is severely limited; production is cut drastically.

8:7 When **the first angel** sounds the trumpet, a storm of **hail, fire, and blood** breaks forth. This incredible blend of destruction and horror sounds like a combination of the imagery of the first (Ex. 7:19, 20) and seventh (Ex. 9:22–25) plagues of God upon Egypt. **A third** here could be figurative for widespread, but not yet complete, destruction.

8:8, 9 **A great mountain burning** suggests a massive island volcano erupting explosively over a far-flung section of ocean waters. The description of the effects on the sea, however, indicates that this is much more than windblown pollution from volcanic ash. The sea becoming **blood** and the **creatures in the sea** dying are like an extension of the first plague on the Egyptians, the turning of the waters of the Nile River into blood (Ex. 7:17–21).

8:10 **Star** here translates the same term used for the angelic star in 9:1 and for Christ as “the Bright and Morning Star” in 22:16. But the precise meaning of each word must be carefully interpreted in its context. Here the star seems to be a huge asteroid that falls **from heaven** to earth, **burning like a torch** as it enters the atmosphere. The star could fall **on a third of the rivers and ... springs** by disintegrating as it passes through the earth's atmosphere. It is also possible that the pollution of the headwaters of a number of the world's major rivers and underground water sources could rapidly spread to a third of the planet's waters.

8:11 **Wormwood** is a plant found in the Middle East, known for its bitter taste. Here and elsewhere (Lam. 3:19) the term is figurative for bitterness. Normally wormwood is not poisonous, but the plague of the third trumpet involves effects far more potent than the taste of this bitter plant: **many men die from the water**. Rapid pollution of **a third** of the world's drinking water would set off a chaotic crisis. The Lord will now expose the infidelity of the human heart in an unmistakable fashion (9:21).

8:12 Reference to darkening of the **sun, moon, and stars** is reminiscent of the ninth plague upon Egypt (Ex. 10:21, 22), and of the heavenly disturbances involved in Christ's description of His second coming (Matt. 24:29, 30). It is also similar to the phenomena of the sixth seal (6:12). **A third of the day did not shine** could mean that the sun, moon, and stars will not be seen for

several hours of the normal cycle of day and night. But probably what is meant is that the intensity of light during the day and night is reduced by a third because of cosmic and atmospheric disturbances (vv. 7, 8, 10).

8:13 **Woe, woe, woe** refers to the impact of the three **remaining ... trumpet** judgments on the unbelieving **inhabitants of the earth**. The first woe is the fifth trumpet (9:12); the second woe is the sixth trumpet (11:14). The third woe is said to be “coming quickly” and may be the same as the seventh trumpet (11:15–19), although that is not stated. If not, the final woe may be focused on Babylon, the great harlot, because of the climactic use of “woe” (translated *alas* in 18:10, 16, 19).¹

Believer's Bible Commentary

8:1 After the parenthesis of chapter 7, in which we saw two companies of Tribulation saints, we now come to **the seventh** and final **seal**. This is introduced by a thirty-minute **silence in heaven**, an awesome hush which precedes ever-deepening judgments.

8:2 No specific judgment is mentioned when the seventh seal is broken. The narrative moves directly to seven trumpet judgments. From this we infer that the seventh seal *consists of* the **seven trumpets**.

8:3, 4 The **angel** in this verse is often understood to be the Lord Jesus. He is called the Angel of Jehovah in the OT (Gen. 16:13; 31:11, 13; Judg. 6:22; Hos. 12:3, 4). **The prayers of all the saints** ascend to the Father through Him (Eph. 2:18). He takes **much incense** to **offer it with the prayers**. The **incense** speaks of the fragrance of His Person and work. By the time **the prayers** reach God the Father, they are perfectly flawless and perfectly effectual.

In the context, **the prayers** are those of Tribulation **saints**, beseeching God to punish their enemies, although the order is true of all prayer.

8:5 In answer to their prayers, **the angel ... threw flaming coals to the earth**, causing loud explosions, **thunderings, lightnings and an earthquake**. As H. B. Swete says, “The prayers of the saints return to the earth in wrath.”¹⁷ Thus the seven trumpet judgments are introduced with violent disturbances of nature.

8:6 We have now come to the middle of the Tribulation. These trumpet judgments take us on to the time when Christ descends to the earth, destroys His foes, and ushers in His kingdom. The first four judgments affect man’s natural environment; the last three affect man himself. Many commentators note the resemblance between these plagues and the ones which fell on Egypt (Ex. 7–12).

8:7 When the **first angel sounded, a third part of the earth** (NKJV margin), **trees**, and **grass** were **burned up by hail and fire ... mingled with blood**. It is best to take this literally as a terrible calamity on the areas from which man gets most of his food.

8:8, 9 **Something like a great flaming mountain ... was thrown into the sea**, turning a **third of the sea** into **blood**, destroying a **third** of the marine life, and wrecking a **third of the**

¹Radmacher, Earl D. ; Allen, Ronald Barclay ; House, H. Wayne: *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*. Nashville : T. Nelson Publishers, 1999, S. Re 8:1-13

¹⁷ (8:5) Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, p. 109.
NKJV New King James Version

ships. This would not only decrease man’s local food supply still further but would reduce his means of obtaining food from distant places.

8:10, 11 This third trumpet signaled the fall of a blazing **star** called **Wormwood**, causing a **third** of man’s **water** supply to become **bitter** at its sources. Apparently the **bitter** water was also poisonous, since **many men died**. It is difficult to identify **Wormwood**. When the trumpet sounds, these verses will be all too clear to earth-dwellers. In the study of prophecy, it is good to remember that there are many things that will not be clear until they actually take place.

8:12 It appears that the **sun, ... moon, and stars** will be damaged in such a way that they will give only two-thirds of their usual light. This fourth trumpet resembles the plague of darkness in Egypt.

8:13 **An eagle** (NKJV margin)¹⁸ **flying** in mid-heaven pronounces a threefold **woe to the inhabitants of the earth**, that is, those whose outlook is utterly worldly, who are at home on the earth, who are not true believers. The three remaining judgments are also known as three woes because of their dire effect on men.²

Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament

The opening of the seventh seal introduces the next series of judgments, the seven trumpets. In the OT, trumpets were used to announce war (Num. 10:5–9), move the camp (Num. 8), announce the feasts (Num. 10:10), and bring judgment (Josh. 6:13ff). The trumpet sound is a symbol of power and authority (Ex. 19:16). Note that there is a parallel between the seven trumpets and the seven vials of chapters 15–16:

The trumpets	Recipient of Judgment	The vials
8:1–7	The earth	16:1–2
8:8–9	The sea	16:3
8:10–11	The rivers	16:4–7
8:12–13	The heavens	16:8–9
9:1–2	Mankind	16:10–11
9:13–21	Army/Euphrates	16:12–16
11:15–19	Nations in wrath	16:17–21

It would seem that the seven vials are an intensified judgment that follow the trumpet judgments. The trumpets belong in the first three and one-half years, while the vials are poured out during the last three and one-half years, the period called “the wrath of God” (14:10; 15:7).

I. The Preparation in Heaven (8:1–6)

A. *Silence (v. 1).*

¹⁸ (8:13) “Angel” and “eagle” look somewhat similar in Greek also (*angelos* and *aetos*), hence the copying error. “Eagle” is correct.

²MacDonald, William ; Farstad, Arthur: *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995, S. Re 8:1

This is the lull before the storm; see Zech. 2:13; Hab. 2:20; Isa. 41:1; and Zeph. 1:7, 14–18. In 7:10–12, we have a great expression of praise from the heavenly hosts; here we have breathless silence in heaven as judgment is about to fall.

B. Supplication (vv. 2–6).

We noted in chapter 4 that there is a heavenly sanctuary, and here we have the altar of incense, symbolic of prayer. See Lev. 16:12 and Ps. 141:2. This angel may be Christ, the Heavenly Priest. The “prayers of the saints” are not prayers given through the saints in glory. In 5:3, no man was found worthy to open the book save Jesus Christ; so why should we pray through any other name? These prayers are the prayers of God’s people, “Thy kingdom come!” This incense especially represents the cries of the martyrs (6:9–11; 20:4). Many of the prayers of vengeance in the Psalms will be used rightfully by God’s people during those days of intense suffering. The fire from the altar cast upon the earth speaks of the wrath of God about to be poured out on unbelievers. Compare v. 5 with 4:5, 11:19, and 16:18, and you will see that the thunderings always give warning that the storm is coming. The seven angels stand poised for action, then sound their trumpets one by one.

II. The Desolation on the Earth (8:7–11)

The first judgment parallels the seventh plague of Egypt (Ex. 9:18–26). Egypt was the center of a godless world system, so it is logical that the plagues in Moses’ day would be repeated on a worldwide scale during the Tribulation. Hailstorms can do terrible damage, but when fire is mixed with hail, the possibilities of desolation are staggering. One-third of the trees and green grass will be destroyed by this first trumpet of judgment. There are thirteen references to “the third part” in Rev. 8–9. Some students believe this refers only to the area covered by the revived Roman Empire, ruled over by the Antichrist.

The second trumpet affects the sea, turning one-third of it into blood and killing one-third of its creatures, as well as destroying one-third of the ships. This event parallels the first plague in Egypt (Ex. 7:19–21). The burning object that fell was not a literal mountain; it was “something like” a great mountain. “The sea” here may mean only the Mediterranean; but it is likely that all the seas on the globe are involved.

The third trumpet affects the rivers, making their waters bitter. The great star of v. 10 is known only to God, who calls the stars by their names (Job 9:9–10). Jeremiah prophesied that one day Israel would have to drink the bitter waters (Jer. 9:14–15). It seems that this bitterness will continue until the establishment of the millennial kingdom, for in Ezek. 47:6–9, it is prophesied that the healing waters will overcome the bitter effects of the Tribulation judgments.

Are these judgments to be understood literally? We think so. If God could send these same judgments to Egypt in Moses’ day, what is to prevent Him from sending them upon the whole world? We can only imagine the tremendous economic consequences from the loss of farm and pasture land and from the pollution of pure water. Mankind has never appreciated the blessings of God’s goodness in nature. Yet, even when He takes away some of those blessings, sinners will still not repent (9:20–21).

III. The Agitation in the Sky (8:12)

The fourth angel sounds and brings about tremendous calamities in the skies, for one-third of the light of the heavenly bodies is blacked out! This is the fulfillment of a prophecy by Christ in Luke 21:25–28 (see also Amos 8:9). It is interesting to note that God brought the heavenly

bodies into being on the fourth day of Creation; when the fourth trumpet sounds, He will darken them.

What will the consequences be? For one thing, terror will fill the earth. Mankind has always feared signs in the skies. This terror, however, will not bring men to repentance. The first judgment will devastate vegetable life, and shortened days will rob plants of sunlight. Jesus said that the shortening of days during the Tribulation would mean the saving of lives (Matt. 24:22). However, it is easy to imagine the sin, crime, and terror that will rule the streets when darkness comes early in the day, and when night is darker than ever. “Everyone practicing evil hates the light,” says John 3:19–20. This crime wave will be one such as humanity has never seen before.

IV. The Proclamation from the Angel (8:13)

This angel is a literal messenger from God, giving warning to the world that the next three judgments would be even worse! We would think that men would heed God’s call and repent, but such is not the case.

The phrase “inhabiters of the earth” is found also in 3:10, 6:10, 11:10, 13:8, 13:14, 14:6, and 17:8. It refers not to those who live “on” the earth, but those who live “for” the earth. They are “earthlings”—people who reject heaven and its Christ for the comforts of this world. They are perfectly described in Phil. 3:18–20. They are described in Exodus as the “mixed multitude” that lusted after the foods of Egypt and refused the manna from heaven. Such people will go through tribulation (Rev. 3:10) and will be responsible for the killing of God’s saints (Rev. 6:10). They will rejoice when God’s two witnesses are slain (11:10); but note the contrast in 12:12, where heaven rejoices at Satan’s expulsion! Revelation 13:8 makes it clear that these earth-dwellers will worship the Beast, which means they will reject Christ completely. Having rejected the Truth, they will believe the lie.

Every soul must answer: Is my citizenship in heaven, or do I belong only to this world?³

³Wiersbe, Warren W.: *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1997, c1992, S. 372

The IVP Bible Background Commentary

The sorts of judgments characterizing the judgments of the trumpets and bowls are mainly taken directly from the ten plagues of the exodus (except that they are numerically adjusted to seven; see comment on Jn 2:11, the first of probably seven signs in John). As in other Jewish texts (e.g., Pseudo-Philo, Artapanus), the sequence and even number of the plagues is not important for the point of the image. Some of the plagues are echoed in other judgment texts (especially Sibylline Oracles) but never as systematically as here.

8:7. This plague echoes the seventh plague in Exodus 9:24–25.

8:8–9. Waters running with blood would normally indicate war (e.g., Is 15:9), but these verses also echo the first plague in Exodus 7:20–21. The mountain hurled into the sea characterizes the sort of imagery standard in this type of literature (e.g., the burning star hurled into the sea in a roughly contemporary oracle in Sibylline Oracles). (The suggested parallel to Babylon as a burning mountain in Jer 51:25, 42 is not as obvious, although it would have been more available than the Sibylline Oracles; it is doubtful if either Revelation or the Sibylline Oracles depends on the other, but the writers of both had access to Jeremiah.)

This plague addresses contamination of the water supply, effecting not only many swift deaths by dehydration but also long-term devastation by destruction of Egypt’s irrigation and fishing (Ex 7:18) resources.

8:10–11. Like the preceding plague, this judgment alludes to the poisoned water of Exodus 7:20–21, but through a sort of poisoning or embittering agent called “wormwood” (Jer 9:15; 23:15; cf. Jer 8:14), often used figuratively (for idolatry—Deut 29:18; fruits of adultery—Prov 5:4; suffering—Lam 3:19). This plague strikes local fresh-water supplies and would naturally worry John’s readers in Asia, especially in Laodicea (see comment on Rev 3:15–16).

8:12. This plague echoes the ninth plague in Exodus 10:22–23; many ancient texts speak of darkness as a dreaded judgment, and the Old Testament (see comment on Rev 6:12–13) and some other Jewish texts also associate it with the end time.⁴

Pseudo-Philo **Pseudo-Philo.** Pseudo-Philo’s *Biblical Antiquities* retraces biblical history from Adam to the death of Saul. Possibly from Palestine, the work probably derives from the late first or early second century A.D., but betrays no specific Christian influence.

Sibylline Oracles **Sibylline Oracles.** Pseudepigraphic Jewish oracles modeled after pagan oracles of the same name, attributed to the ancient prophetess Sibyl and probably collected from Jewish circles in Alexandria, Egypt, and Asia Minor. Their composition spans a wide range of time, but they are mainly pre-Christian.

Old Testament ***Old Testament.** The common modern term for the Hebrew Bible (including Aramaic portions) as defined by the Jewish and Protestant Christian canons; Jewish readers generally call this the Tenach.

⁴Keener, Craig S. ; InterVarsity Press: *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament*. Downers Grove, Ill. : InterVarsity Press, 1993, S. Re 8:6