

Charts: The Tribulation: Chart #11 (The Trumpets)

PREFACE

Read Revelation 8:7-9.

As a preface to this study of the next three trumpet judgments, let me read what J. A. Seiss wrote as part of his remarks on the *first* trumpet—but which also pertains to our consideration of *all* these fantastical events of the Eschaton.

J. A. Seiss: Wordsworth says the trees mean princes and great men, and grass the glory and power of men. Lord says the trees mean stronger men, and the grass the young, the feeble, and the aged. Hengstenberg and Williams say the trees mean great men, and the grass people generally. Wetstein says the trees mean apostles and great doctors, and the grass common Christians. Durham says the earth means the visible Church, the trees what seems most strong in it, and the grass its lesser excellencies. The truth is, if earth, trees, and grass do not mean earth, trees, and grass, no man can tell what they mean. Letting go the literal signification of the record, we launch out upon an endless sea of sheer conjecture, turn the whole Apocalypse into an incomprehensible riddle, and force the conclusion that God was mistaken when He named it the lifting off of the veil; nay, that, if it is a revelation, it has not yet become manifest what that revelation is, and never will, by the light which we now possess.

He adds in his discussion of the next trumpet,

The simple truth is, that if it does not mean what it says, as men ordinarily use language, no man can tell what it does mean; and the opinion of one is just as good, and just as *bad*, as that of another.

THE SECOND TRUMPET (REVELATION 8:8-9—THE SEA)

So now we come to the second trumpet, which follows the pattern of the first in that it announces a supernatural event, or judgment from God—this time directed at the sea—then itemizes the effects that result. Different from the first, the text actually lends a hand with its interpretation—at least initially.

The second angel sounded, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea;

There is the judgment event, and right off the bat the text tells us explicitly that it is not literally a mountain—John knew it was not an actual mountain being thrown into the sea, but something *like* a mountain.

The Greek is *hos* (ohs), which means “as, or like, just as, or nearly.” So from this we know that the Lord God did not scoop up Mount Vesuvius, for example, and drop it into the sea.

When we add up the clues in vv8-9 we can easily deduce that “something like a great mountain burning with fire”—but not *literally* a mountain—could very well be an asteroid or overly huge meteoroid, which, passing through the earth’s atmosphere, would surely be “burning with fire.” And at the end of v9 we can see the obvious result of such an event: “and a third of the ships were destroyed.” Of course; a mountain-sized asteroid or meteoroid would cause huge, violent surges to ripple out from the impact, destroying shipping for at least hundreds of miles in every direction.

Note: You might be thinking, “Such an occurrence, though catastrophic, could be by natural cause. Why call it supernatural?” What renders this event supernatural is the trumpet. Whatever this is that crashes into the sea, the Lord God and His Christ have delivered it at precisely this moment, for this particular reason: an expression of their wrath against an unbelieving, sinful world.

and a third of the sea became blood, and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed.

And once again we have an association with one of the Egyptian plagues.

Read Exodus 7:20-21.

Notice that John ([back in Revelation](#)) does not say that the sea became *like* blood, as he did the mountain. Just as with the first trumpet, blood is blood (*haimati*), which would explain at least one reason why “a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life died”; the first reason may have been the seismic shock of the object hitting the sea, but those who survived that would then be swimming in blood rather than salt water. Even some expositors favoring a literal interpretation to the judgments say it is possible that the blood mentioned here is the *result* of the sea life dying. But that’s not really how it reads; “a third of the sea became blood, and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died.” Wouldn’t that be stated in the reverse if the blood came from the dead sea creatures—e.g., *a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died, and a third of the sea became blood?*

Where the text does not help us is in knowing the *amount* of sea affected by this. Is it one third of just one localized sea—say, the Mediterranean—or is it one third of *all* seas around the earth? What is one third of the sea here will be the *entire* sea in the second bowl of wrath in Revelation 16:3: “The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died.”

But that still doesn’t help us to know the scope of this sea. The consensus among commentators—even those in our camp—is that this is localized, and probably the Mediterranean. I prefer to conclude that we do not know either way. Again, as discussed last week, perhaps these judgments are measured, and less than the whole, because God will be giving people a chance to repent.

Regarding that possibility I would submit an upcoming passage in Chapter Nine. Note that in the fourth seal and the trumpets, harm to the earth or mankind is measured: in the seal, one fourth; in the trumpets, one third. In the final bowl judgments, however, all such restrictions are removed; the earth and its people suffer the full force of God’s unlimited wrath. Near the end of Chapter Nine we read of the judgment of the sixth trumpet, and its effects.

Read Revelation 9:18-21.

I would posit that the mention—twice—that the people “did not repent” suggests that repentance was indeed the intended response. So when even the horrific consequences of the sixth trumpet did not bring about repentance, the Lord God as much as concludes, *All right, then I’m going to remove all limitations and to let loose the full fury of My wrath on the entire earth. No more fourths or thirds; now it will be 100%.* And the narrative of the seven bowls makes that purpose clear: He is now through with giving people a chance to bow down before Christ.

Sidebar: Let me insert here a few more thoughts regarding the “one third,” which we see repeatedly in the trumpet judgments.

I first made a closer examination of the word itself (*tritos*). Vine doesn’t even mention it; C.J. Hemer, in *The Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Brown), writes, “In 14 [\[of the 72 occurrences of this word\]](#) in the Rev.,... it represents the fraction 1/3, referring to disasters in which a “third” part is destroyed.”

No mention of it *not* meaning just that.

However, Hemer does point to a comparison of Revelation 12:4 and Daniel 8:10—two accounts of the same prophecy. In the Revelation passage it says, “and his tail swept away *a third of the stars of heaven...*,” whereas in the Daniel passage it says, “and caused *some of the host and some of the stars to fall to the earth*” (emphasis added). You may make of that comparison what you will.

THE THIRD TRUMPET (REVELATION 8:10-11—FRESH WATER)

The third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters. The name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter.

With the third trumpet things get a bit sticky. The word translated “star” is the Greek *aster* (ah-STEER) which is used twenty-eight times throughout the NT, with only five of which clearly referring to literal stars in the heavens. In the first chapter of Revelation, Christ is described by John, in part, as “In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength” (Revelation 1:16). Christ Himself explains in v20, “As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”

The evidence would show that just as in our understanding of the “stars of the sky [falling] to the earth” like unripe figs in 6:13, we must be careful not to press our preferred *literal* approach to the extreme. The Greek *aster* is repeatedly used in a metaphorical sense in the NT, including the Revelation. Many interpreters prefer to read here an apostate falling out of the church to “poison” the waters of the gospel, but I do not think we need to subscribe to something like that.

The first four trumpets are being inflicted—at least to start—on the natural world. And the effect of this “star” plummeting to earth seems to suggest something like a mineral that contaminates the fresh water on a third of the earth’s fresh water: rivers and underground springs. As with the second trumpet, this star could very well be a fiery (“burning like a torch”) meteoroid—yet smaller than a mountain (v8)—that poisons the waters to the extent that people die. The prophet Jeremiah relays the Lord God’s judgment on idolatrous Judah—the “now” to the “not yet” of our passage in Revelation. [Turn please to Jeremiah 9 \(see also Exodus 7:21\)](#).

Read Jeremiah 9:13-16.

The term “wormwood” is fairly common in the Bible (10 occurrences), both OT and NT. Literally it is the name for the herb *artemisia absinthium*, known for its intense bitterness. The Greeks called it *absinthion*, which means “undrinkable.” More often than not in the Bible the term “wormwood” is used symbolically to refer to a terrible bitterness of spirit, affliction or suffering. Thus here the object that rockets to earth is called Wormwood, and what it inflicts on the earth, through the fresh water supply, is wormwood. We might conclude that the “star” delivers a particularly lethal strain of *absinthium* since the text states that “many men died from the waters.” In most instances the effects of consuming beverages made from the herb are unpleasant, but not generally fatal. But the waters poisoned by this star will be.

THE FOURTH TRUMPET (REVELATION 8:12—CELESTIAL OBJECTS)

The fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way.

J.B. Smith: It is of considerable interest to note the progress—one third of the green trees and grass, one third of marine life and shipping, one third of the waters, and one third of the heavenly bodies. Food is destroyed; distribution is crippled; water supply is limited; production is hampered [i.e., from lack of sunlight].

Few natural things speak to the power and grandeur of God for earthlings than the glories of the heavens, be it the arc of the Milky Way or the sun setting in the west. This is not just the perspective of lowly earth-dwellers, but God has designed this universe to evoke such a response.

Read Psalm 19:1-6.

Yet, as we see here, part of God’s judgment on man is to *dim* this splendor, to remove some of those things that most handily pronounce His majestic glory. The darkness that results is the measure of His wrath. The prophet Isaiah foresaw this moment; he wrote of it in Isaiah 13:9-11.

Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger, To make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not flash forth their light; The sun will be dark when it rises And the moon will not shed its light. Thus I will punish the world for its evil And the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud And abase the haughtiness of the ruthless.

The Greek here is interesting; the word *eplege* comes from *plesso* (PLACE-so), which means to strike so as to flatten, much as a blacksmith repeatedly hammers hot metal to flatten or shape it.

It's not clear from the text precisely what will be God's method of dimming these celestial objects.

- Will He reduce their lumens by a third, as we would dim the lights in a room?
- Or will He just turn them off earlier than usual?
- Will He throw into place obscuring objects: a partial eclipse of the sun and moon, with accompanying layers of clouds or pollution to reduce visible stars at night?

Whatever His means, this reduction of light could have a devastating effect on the earth, affecting crops—and causing problems for those relying on solar panels for their electricity.

Note that as God's judgments, whether on the natural world or on mankind, move from one quarter, to one third, to eventually far more—note that we are not told that any of them are reversed:

- Sea water that has been turned to blood remains blood.
- Fresh water that has been poisoned remains undrinkable.
- Light that sustains life on this earth that has been either dimmed or turned off early each day will become “the new normal.”

Each new judgment will not *replace* previous judgments, but will be *added to* them. That is, conditions on earth will steadily get worse and worse, darker and yet darker. By the last half of the Tribulation life, where it exists at all, will be intolerable. I close with this from the prophet Amos.

Alas, you who are longing for the day of the LORD,
For what purpose will the day of the LORD be to you?
It will be darkness and not light;
As when a man flees from a lion
And a bear meets him,
Or goes home, leans his hand against the wall
And a snake bites him.
Will not the day of the LORD be darkness instead of light,
Even gloom with no brightness in it? (Amos 5:18–20)