

## Revelation week # 20

### Revelation 8:6-13

#### Divine Destruction of Earth's Ecology: The First Four Trumpets

##### I. Introduction

- a. Read
- b. People today are very concerned about saving the environment.
  - i. Fears about the depletion of the ozone layer, pollution, the destruction of the rain forests, and global warming are constantly in the news.
  - ii. There is a passionate concern to save endangered species, everything from whales to spotted owls to California condors, and a host of lesser-known species.
  - iii. For many, protecting the environment has become far more than a concern for health and safety; it has become an issue of idolatry, as they worship "Mother Nature" by trying to protect and perpetuate the earth.
- c. There is no question that fallen man has failed in his responsibility to properly care for God's creation (cf. Gen. 2:15).
  - i. But the damage man has done to the earth pales in comparison to what God will one day do to it.
  - ii. The powerful judgments of the future time of tribulation will utterly devastate the earth, causing wholesale, unimaginable destruction of the environment.
- d. Eventually, after the Millennium, God will completely destroy (or uncreate) the present heaven and earth (2 Pet. 3:10), and, after the whole universe has gone completely out of existence, He will replace it with a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1ff.).

- e. There is a sense in which the present age is man's day; he is free to do what he wants within certain limitations.
- f. It is also Satan's day, during which the "god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4) has been granted certain liberties within the parameters of God's purposeful, sovereign tolerance.
  - i. But God will not permit the present state of affairs to continue forever.
  - ii. He will end man's day, overthrow the usurper, Satan, destroy the present evil world system, and establish the earthly kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - iii. That future time of judgment is known, appropriately, as the Day of the Lord (see the discussion in chapter 15 of this volume).
  - iv. That Day involves a complete renovation of the universe and the earth by judgment and restoration.
- g. As the time for the trumpet judgments to begin approaches, the world will have already experienced for years the frightening and relentless reality of God's wrath.
  - i. As that seven-year tribulation period unfolds there will be wars, famines, plagues, devastating earthquakes, fiery celestial objects smashing into the earth, and a worldwide reign of terror by Antichrist.
  - ii. But the trumpet judgments will be even worse.
- h. As we talked about last week, 8:1 depicts a brief, half-hour interlude in heaven in response to the opening of the seventh and final seal.
  - i. So horrifying are the trumpet and bowl judgments contained within the seventh seal that its opening stuns the heavenly host of angels and redeemed people into silence.

- ii. That half hour of silence came to an abrupt end when the angel who stood before the altar flung his censer to the earth.
    - iii. The resulting powerful earthquake (8:5) was the signal for the seven angels who had the seven trumpets, and they prepared themselves to sound them.
  - i. The serial judgments the trumpets unleash will hit the earth and its wicked people just as they are crawling out of the caves and rocks where they futilely attempted to hide from the fury of God's wrath during the sixth seal (6:15–17).
    - i. Thinking that things are returning to normal, they will be hit with the terrifying, rapid-paced trumpet terrors, followed by the bowl judgments.
    - ii. These final judgments are likely the ones held back until the sealing of the 144,000 (7:3).
  - j. The first four trumpets are described in a brief and straightforward manner; far more detail is given about the last three.
    - i. The first four trumpets all deal directly with the earth.
    - ii. They do not symbolize political, social, or economic judgment; those types of judgment come later in Revelation.
    - iii. Nor do they describe any judgment that has ever happened in history in some locale or region.
  - k. The trumpet judgments are actual, literal, physical events that will affect the whole earth.
    - i. God will use nature to punish sinners in that day.
    - ii. The partial destruction described by the repeated use of the word “third” in each of the first four trumpet judgments indicates that these are not the final judgments.
- II. The First Trumpet.

- a. 8.7 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.
- b. Hail is frequently associated in Scripture with divine judgment (cf. Ex. 9:13–25; Job 38:22–23; Ps. 105:32; Isa. 28:2; Hag. 2:17), as is fire (cf. Gen. 19:24; Ps. 11:6; Ezek. 38:22).
- c. The combination of fire mixed with blood is reminiscent of Joel 2:30, which also describes the Day of the Lord.
- d. The specific cause of the hail and fire ... thrown to the earth is not revealed, but from a scientific standpoint an earthquake of the magnitude and extent of the one in 8:5 would likely trigger worldwide volcanic eruptions.
  - i. Besides spewing vast quantities of flaming lava (which could be bloodred in appearance) into the atmosphere, the atmospheric disturbances caused by those eruptions could trigger violent thunderstorms that would produce large hail.
  - ii. Such thunderstorms would be in keeping with the imagery of 8:5; after the angel hurled his censer to earth “there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning.”
- e. Dr. Henry Morris suggests that the blood may be actual blood, or John may be using descriptive language: “The masses of water vapor blown skyward might well condense in the intense updrafts as hailstones. ... The blood of entrapped men and animals might be mingled with them, or possibly showers of liquid water drops might be so contaminated with dust and gases as to appear blood-red” (*The Revelation Record* [Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1983], 146).

- f. Morris also offers an alternative explanation for the fiery phenomena:
  - i. It may be possible that angelic hosts will divert the path of one of the many comets with which the solar system abounds so that the earth will pass through its tail. The most spectacular comet with which we are familiar—Halley’s Comet—would not need to stray too far from its normal orbit to envelop Earth in its fiery train. Whether such an experience would produce the phenomena described in this passage we do not know, since our scientists have no experimental data to go on yet. (Morris, *Revelation Record*, 146)
- g. Whatever the scientific explanation, this deluge of death was thrown to the earth by God with devastating effects.
  - i. The shocking result was that a third of the earth was burned up, rendering the soil in which crops are cultivated unusable.
  - ii. Then a third of the trees were burned up, destroying fruit all over the earth. Finally all the green grass was burned up.
- h. The fire falling from the sky kindled raging infernos that consumed one- third of the earth’s vegetation and forests (cf. Ex. 9:25, which records the destruction of vegetation in Egypt).
  - i. The effects of such catastrophic fires would be widespread and devastating, including destruction of crops, death of animals on a massive scale, loss of wood for construction, and the destruction of watersheds.
  - ii. That is a fitting judgment for those who “exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom. 1:25).

- iii. Fallen mankind has failed to recognize and honor God as Creator, choosing instead to make a god out of the earth.
    - iv. But the environmental, evolutionary pantheism that devalues man, elevates animals and plants, and ignores the Creator will be severely judged.
  - i. “Earth Day” that year will be a gloomy and dismal affair; in a scorched and ravaged world there will be little of the environment left to celebrate.
    - i. And worse judgments are still to fall.
- III. **The Second Trumpet.**
- a. 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. <sup>9</sup> A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. (8:8–9)
  - b. While the earth’s population was still trying to recover from the devastating fire falls, John saw an even more terrifying sign of doom appearing in the sky.
  - c. As the second angel sounded his trumpet, something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea.
    - i. The judgment of the first trumpet fell on the land, that of the second trumpet on the sea.
    - ii. God created the sea to be a blessing to mankind, to provide food, oxygen (much of Earth’s oxygen comes from the phytoplankton and algae in the world’s oceans), and water from the rainstorms on the land that is originally gathered up by evaporation from the oceans.
    - iii. But people have repaid God’s gracious provision with ingratitude and idolatry, revering the sea as the

supposed source of their remotest evolutionary ancestors.

- iv. As He had devastated the land environment, the true God judges the sea.
- d. The massive object plunging through the sky looked to the terrified observers on earth like a great mountain burning with fire.
  - i. This is evidently a giant meteorite or asteroid, surrounded by flaming gases set ablaze by the friction of the earth's atmosphere, on a collision course with the earth.
  - ii. The current doomsday scenarios about an asteroid hitting the earth will come true with a vengeance.
  - iii. Everyone will see it, either live or on television, and as the world's telescopes see it coming, many predictions will no doubt be made about whether it will hit the earth or not.
  - iv. It will hit, striking somewhere in the world's oceans with an explosive power far greater than that of an atomic bomb.
  - v. Because all the world's oceans are connected, the devastation from that hit will spread across one-third of the ocean waters, causing a third of the sea to become blood.
- e. Three catastrophic, supernaturally designed effects result from the collision:
  - i. a third of the sea became blood, as a result of that effect a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died.
  - ii. As with the first trumpet, it is impossible to say whether the blood was the miraculous deposit of actual blood.

- iii. Perhaps more likely, the death of countless billions of sea creatures as a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died, could certainly account for the reddish tinge of the water. (This is reminiscent of the plague in which the waters of the Nile turned to blood; Ex. 7:20–21; cf. Zeph. 1:3.)
    - iv. The reddish hue of the sun shining through the pall of smoke from the impact might also give the oceans' surface a bloodred appearance.
  - f. The impact will also generate unimaginably huge tsunamis (tidal waves).
    - i. Those giant waves will destroy a third of the ships on the world's oceans, capsizing huge ocean-going vessels and completely swamping ports.
    - ii. The resulting disruption of commerce and transportation will cause economic chaos.
  - g. So the first two trumpets will bring devastating judgment on both the land and the sea, which are the beginning of the final catastrophes God will unleash on the sinful, rebellious world.
- IV. **The Third Trumpet.**
- a. 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.<sup>11</sup> 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. (8:10–11)
  - b. As the third angel sounded his trumpet another flaming object hurtled toward the earth.
  - c. John described this latest of the “terrors and great signs from heaven” (Luke 21:11) as a great star that fell from heaven. *Astēr* (star) can refer to any celestial body other than the sun and moon.

- d. The massive object that smashed into the ocean remained intact, but this object (possibly a comet or a meteor because of its fiery tail) disintegrated as it reached Earth's atmosphere.
- e. The fact that it is described as burning like a torch supports that interpretation, since *lampas* (torch) was used in ancient times to describe meteors and comets.
  - i. The celestial object's fiery debris fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters, polluting the fresh water around the globe.
  - ii. This also is reminiscent of the polluting of Egyptians' drinking water (Ex. 7:21, 24).
- f. Because of its deadly effects, the star will be called Wormwood, although the text does not reveal who will name it.
  - i. Wormwood translates *apsinthos*, a word used only here in the New Testament.
  - ii. Wormwood is a shrub whose leaves are used in the manufacture of absinthe, a liqueur so toxic that its manufacture is banned in many countries.
  - iii. Wormwood is mentioned eight times in the Old Testament, where it is associated with bitterness, poison, and death (Deut. 29:18; Prov. 5:4; Jer. 9:15; 23:15; Lam. 3:15, 19; Amos 5:7; 6:12).
  - iv. In three of those uses, wormwood is connected with poisoned water.
  - v. In Jeremiah 9:15, for example, God says of rebellious Israel, "Behold, I will feed them, this people, with wormwood and give them poisoned water to drink" (cf. Jer. 23:15; Lam. 3:15).

- g. Whatever the poison represented by the name Wormwood is, it is lethal, since a third of the fresh waters became poisonous like wormwood.
- h. This is the reverse of the miracle at Marah, where the Lord made bitter waters sweet (Ex. 15:25).
  - i. It is also reminiscent of the first plague on Egypt, when “all the water that was in the Nile was turned to blood” (Ex. 7:20) and became unfit to drink.
- i. The repeated pattern of one- third destruction (one-third of the earth and the trees burned up, v. 7; one- third of the sea turned to blood, v. 8; one-third of the sea creatures killed and one-third of the ships destroyed, v. 9) demonstrates clearly that these are not random natural events, but divine judgments.
- j. No human deaths were mentioned with the first two trumpet judgments, although they undoubtedly will take a severe toll of human lives.
  - i. But with the third trumpet judgment, John records that many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter.
  - ii. The rivers will run with deadly poison; the wells will become springs of death; the lakes and reservoirs will be filled with toxic waters.
  - iii. People will be able to survive, for a time, the destruction of food supplies caused by the first two trumpet judgments, living off stored provisions.
  - iv. But people cannot long survive without fresh water, and the loss of a significant portion of the world’s fresh water supply will cause widespread death.
- k. The devastation caused by the first three trumpet judgments will leave the earth’s inhabitants in a state of shock and fear.

- i. Still, God has not finished pouring out His wrath on sinful mankind.
- ii. The death of many is only an indirect result of these first three blasts.
- iii. The direct killing of sinners comes with the sixth trumpet (9:15).

V. The Fourth Trumpet.

- a. (8:12–13) 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. 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!”
- b. As the fourth angel sounded, the focus of divine judgment shifted from the earth to the heavens.
- c. Still reeling from the effects of the first three ecological judgments, people will be desperately seeking answers to the crisis.
  - i. There will no doubt be seminars, conferences, emergency sessions of the United Nations, discussions among scientists—all desperately and futilely seeking to cope with the damage to the earth’s ecosystems.
  - ii. In the midst of all that frenzied activity comes a new disaster in the sky, as a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were smitten.
  - iii. *Plēss ō* (were smitten) is the verb from which the noun “plague” (cf. 11:6; 16:21) derives.
  - iv. The heavenly bodies are hit with a plague from God 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.

- d. This partial eclipse, reminiscent of the ninth Egyptian plague (Ex. 10:21–22), is temporary, as God will later increase the amount of heat coming from the sun (cf. 16:8–9).
- e. At this point, however, the loss of heat from the sun will cause temperatures to plunge drastically all over the world.
  - i. That will severely disrupt the earth’s weather patterns and the seas’ tides, leading to violent, unpredictable storms and tides, the destruction of crops, and further loss of animal and human lives.
- f. The Old Testament prophets associated such signs in the heavens with the Day of the Lord.
  - i. Isaiah wrote, “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” (Isa. 13:9–10).
  - ii. Speaking through the prophet Ezekiel, God declared, “I will cover the heavens and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud and the moon will not give its light. All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you and will set darkness on your land” (Ezek. 32:7–8).
  - iii. “The heavens tremble,” wrote Joel, “the sun and the moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness. ... The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. ... The sun and moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness” (Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15). It will come about in that day,’ declares the Lord God, ‘That I shall

make the sun go down at noon and make the earth dark in broad daylight' ” (Amos 8:9).

- iv. The Lord Jesus Christ added His own prediction to that of the prophets, warning, “There will be signs in sun and moon and stars” (Luke 21:25; cf. Mark 13:24).
- g. The dimming of the celestial lights sets the stage for a startling and ominous announcement.
  - i. As John looked, he heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!”
  - ii. The imagery is that of a strong bird of prey rushing to consume its victim, in this case referring to the rapid approach of God’s final vengeance (cf. Deut. 28:49; Hos. 8:1; Hab. 1:8).
  - iii. Depicted in the vision as flying in midheaven, the bird would be at the height of the midday sun, thus visible to all.
  - iv. His loud voice assures that all will be able to hear his pronouncements.
  - v. The eagle’s dire warning is that the last three trumpet judgments will be even more devastating than the first four.
- h. While double woes are used for emphasis (cf. 18:10, 16, 19; Ezek. 16:23), the eagle’s triple pronouncement of woe, woe, woe introduces one threat for each of the remaining three trumpets about to sound (9:1–21; 11:15ff.).
- i. Woe is used throughout Scripture, an expression of judgment, destruction, and condemnation (cf. Num. 21:29; 1 Sam. 4:7–8; Job 10:15; Ps. 120:5; Eccl. 10:16; Isa. 3:9; Jer.

4:13; Lam. 5:16; Ezek. 13:3; Hos. 7:13; Amos 6:1; Mic. 2:1; Nah. 3:1; Hab. 2:6; Zeph. 2:5; Matt. 11:21; Jude 11).

- j. God's wrath and judgment will come upon those who dwell on the earth.
- k. That descriptive phrase is used in Revelation as a technical term for those who reject the gospel (cf. 6:10; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 17:2, 8).
- l. Although they will acknowledge that the disasters they have experienced have come from God (6:15–17), they will not repent.
- m. Later in Revelation John records that “the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts” (9:20–21; cf. 16:9, 11).
- n. They will be destroyed because they fail to heed the warning God addresses to all sinners: “Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts’ ” (Heb. 3:7–8).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 1–11*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 244–253.