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| Revelation 8 Expositor's Bible Commentary |
| [Revelation 8:1](https://biblehub.com/revelation/8-1.htm)  And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.  CHAPTER VI. THE FIRST SIX TRUMPETS.  [Revelation 8:1-13](https://biblehub.com/context/revelation/8-1.htm); [Revelation 9:1-21](https://biblehub.com/context/revelation/9-1.htm). THE two consolatory visions of chap. 7 have closed, and the Seer returns to that opening of the seven Seals which had been interrupted in order that these two visions might be interposed.   Six Seals had been opened in chap. 6; the opening of the seventh follows: -   "And when He opened the seventh seal, there followed silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. And I saw the seven angels which stand before God; and there were given unto them seven trumpets. And another angel came and stood over the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should give it unto the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel’s hand. And the angel taketh the censer; and he filled it with the fire of the altar, and cast it upon the earth: and there followed thunders, and voices, and lightnings, and an earthquake. And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound ([Revelation 8:1-6](https://biblehub.com/context/revelation/8-1.htm))."   Before looking at the particulars of this Seal, we have to determine the relation in which it stands to the Seals of chap. 6 as well as to the visions following it. Is it as isolated, as independent, as those that have come before it; and are its contents exhausted by the first six verses of the chapter? or does it occupy such a position of its own that we are to regard the following visions as developed out of it? And if the latter be the case, how far does the development extend?   In answering these questions, it can hardly be denied that if we are to look upon the seventh Seal as standing independent and alone, its contents have not the significance which we seem entitled to expect. It is the last Seal of its own series; and when we turn to the last member of the Trumpet series at [Revelation 11:15](https://biblehub.com/revelation/11-15.htm), or of the Bowl series at [Revelation 16:17](https://biblehub.com/revelation/16-17.htm), we find them marked, not by less, but by much greater, force than had belonged in either case to the six preceding members. The seventh Trumpet and the seventh Bowl sum up and concentrate the contents of their predecessors. In the one the judgments of God represented by the Trumpets, in the other those represented by the Bowls, culminate in their sharpest expression and their most tremendous potency. There is nothing of that kind in the seventh Seal if it terminates with the preparation of the Trumpet angels to sound; and the analogy of the Apocalypse therefore, an analogy supplying in a book so symmetrically constructed an argument of greater than ordinary weight, is against that supposition.   Again, the larger portion of the first six verses of this chapter does not suggest the contents of the Seal Rather would it seem as if these contents were confined to the "silence" spoken of in [Revelation 8:1](https://biblehub.com/revelation/8-1.htm), and as if what follows from [Revelation 8:2-6](https://biblehub.com/context/revelation/8-2.htm) were to be regarded as no part of the Seal itself, but simply as introductory to the Trumpet visions. Everything said bears upon it the marks of preparation for what is to come, and we are not permitted to rest in what is passing as if it were a final and conclusive scene in the great spectacle presented to the Seer.   For these reasons the view often entertained that the visions to which we proceed are developed out of the seventh Seal may be regarded as correct.   If so, how far does the development extend? The answer invariably given to this question is, To the end of the Trumpets. But the answer is not satisfactory. The general symmetry of the Apocalypse militates against it There is then no correspondence between the last Trumpet and the last Seal, nothing to suggest the thought of a development of the Bowls out of the seventh Trumpet in a manner corresponding to the development of the Trumpets out of the seventh Seal In these circumstances the only probable conclusion is that both the Bowls and the Trumpets are developed out of the seventh Seal, and that that development does not close until we reach the end of chap. 16.   If what has now been said be correct, it will throw important light upon the relation of the Seals to the two series of the Trumpets and the Bowls taken together; while, at the same time, it will lend us valuable aid in the interpretation of all the three series.   Returning to the words before us, it is said that, at the opening of the seventh Seal, there followed silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. This silence may perhaps include a cessation even of the songs which rise before the throne of God from that redeemed creation the voice of whose praise rests not either day or night.1 Yet it is not necessary to think so. The probability rather is that it arises from a cessation only of the "lightnings and voices and thunders" which at [Revelation 4:5](https://biblehub.com/revelation/4-5.htm) proceed out of the throne, and which are resumed at [Revelation 8:5](https://biblehub.com/revelation/8-5.htm) of the present chapter, when the fire of the altar is cast from the angel’s censer upon the earth. A brief suspension of judgment is thereby indicated, a pause by and during which the Almighty would call attention to the manifestations of His wrath about to follow. The exact duration of this silence, "about the space of half an hour," has never been satisfactorily explained; and the general analogy of St John’s language condemns the idea of a literal interpretation. We shall perhaps be more in accordance with the spirit in which the Revelation is written if we consider - (1) that in that book the half of anything suggests, not so much an actual half, as a broken and interrupted whole, five a broken ten, six a broken twelve, three and a half a broken seven; (2) that in the Gospel of St. John we find on more than one occasion mention made of an "hour" by which at one time the actions, at another the sufferings, of Jesus are determined: "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come;" "Father, save Me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour."2 The "hour" of Jesus is thus to St. John the moment at which action, having been first resolved on by the Father, is taken by the Son; and a "half-hour" may simply denote that the course of events has been interrupted, and that the instant for renewed judgment has been delayed. Such an interpretation will also be in close correspondence with the verses following, as well as with what we have seen to be the probable meaning of the "silence" of [Revelation 8:1](https://biblehub.com/revelation/8-1.htm). Preparation for action, rather than action, marks as yet the opening of the seventh Seal. (1 [Revelation 4:8](https://biblehub.com/revelation/4-8.htm); 2 [John 2:4](https://biblehub.com/john/2-4.htm); [John 12:27](https://biblehub.com/john/12-27.htm))   That preparation is next described.   St. John saw seven trumpets given to the seven angels which stand before God. In whatever other respects these seven angels are to be distinguished from the hosts of angels which surround the throne, the commission now given shows that they are angels of a more exalted order and a more irresistible power. They are in fact the expression of the Divine Judge of men, or rather of the mode in which He chooses by judgment to express Himself. We are not even required to think of them as numerically seven, for seven in its sacred meaning is the number of unity, though of unity in the variety as well as the combination of its agencies. The "seven Spirits of God" are His one Spirit; the "seven churches," His one Church; the "seven horns" and "seven eyes" of the Lamb, His one powerful might and His one penetrating glance. In like manner the seven Seals, the seven Trumpets, and the seven Bowls embody the thought of many judgments which are yet in reality one. Thus also the angels here are seven, not because literally so, but because that number brings out the varied forms as well as the essential oneness of the action of Him to whom the Father has given "authority to execute judgment, because He is a Son of man."\* (\* [John 5:27](https://biblehub.com/john/5-27.htm))  As yet the seven trumpets have only been given to the seven angels. More has to pass before they put them to their lips and sound. Another angel is seen who came and stood over the altar, having a golden censer in his hand. At the opening of the fifth Seal we read of an "altar" which it was impossible not to identify with the great brazen altar, the altar of burnt-offering, in the outer court of the sanctuary. Such identification is not so obvious here; and perhaps a majority of commentators agree in thinking that the altar now spoken of is rather the golden or incense altar which had its place within the Tabernacle, immediately in front of the second veil. To this altar the priest on ordinary occasions, and more particularly the high-priest on the great Day of Atonement, brought a censer with burning frankincense, that the smoke of the incense, as it rose into the air, might be a symbol to the congregation of Israel that its prayers, offered according to the Divine will, ascended as a sweet savour to God. It is possible that this may be the altar meant; yet the probabilities of the case rather lead to the supposition that allusion is made to the altar of sacrifice in the Tabernacle court; for (1) when the Seer speaks here and again in [Revelation 8:5](https://biblehub.com/revelation/8-5.htm) of "the altar," and in [Revelation 8:3](https://biblehub.com/revelation/8-3.htm) of "the golden altar," he seems to distinguish between the two. (2) The words fire of the altar are in favor of the same conclusion. According to the ritual of the Law, it was from the brazen altar that fire was taken in order to kindle the incense,1 while at the same time fire continually burned upon that altar, but not upon the altar within the Tabernacle. (3) The thought represented by the symbolism seems to be that the sufferings of the saints gave efficacy to their prayers, and drew down the answer of Him who says, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble, and I will answer thee, and thou shalt glorify Me."2 (4) The words of [Revelation 8:3](https://biblehub.com/revelation/8-3.htm), the prayers of all the saints, and the similar expression in [Revelation 8:4](https://biblehub.com/revelation/8-4.htm), remind us of the prayers of the fifth Seal, now swelled by the prayers of those New Testament saints who have been added to "the blessed fellowship" of the Old Testament martyrs. These prayers, it will be remembered, rose from beneath the altar of burnt-offering; and it is natural to think that the same altar is again alluded to in order to bring out the idea of a similar martyrdom. What we see, therefore, is an angel taking the prayers and adding to them much incense, so that we may behold them as they ascend up before God and receive His answer. (1 Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible, INCENSE; 2 [Psalm 50:15](https://biblehub.com/psalms/50-15.htm))   Further, it ought to be observed that the prayers referred to are for judgment upon sin. There is nothing to justify the supposition that they are partly for judgment upon, partly for mercy to, a sinful world. They are simply another form of the cry, "How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"\* They are a cry that God will vindicate the cause of righteousness. (\* [Revelation 6:10](https://biblehub.com/revelation/6-10.htm))   The cry is heard, for the angel takes of the fire of the altar on which the saints had been sacrificed as an offering to God, and casts it into the earth, that it may consume the sin by which it had been kindled. The lex talionis again starts to view; not merely punishment, but retribution, the heaviest of all retribution, because it is accompanied by a convicted conscience, retribution in kind.   Everything is now ready for judgment, and the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepare themselves to sound: -  "And the first sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast into the earth: and the third part of the earth was burnt up, and the third part of the trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up ([Revelation 8:7](https://biblehub.com/revelation/8-7.htm))."   To think, in interpreting these words, of a literal burning up of a third part of the "earth," of the "trees," and of the "green grass," would lead us astray. Comparing the first Trumpet with those that follow, we have simply a general description of judgment as it affects the land in contradistinction to the sea, the rivers and fountains of water, and the heavenly bodies by which the earth is lighted. The punishment is drawn down by a guilty world upon itself when it rises in opposition to Him who at first prepared the land for the abode of men, planted it with trees pleasant to the eye, cast over it its mantle of green, and pronounced it to be very good. Of every tree of the garden, except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, might our first parents eat; while grass covered the earth for their cattle, and herb for their service. All nature was to minister to the wants of man, and in cultivating the garden and the field he was to find light and happy labor. But sin came in. Thorns and thistles sprang up on every side. Labor became a burden, and the fruitful field was changed into a wilderness which could only be subdued by constant, patient, and often-disappointed toil. This is the thought - a thought often dwelt upon by the prophets of the Old Testament - that is present to the Seer’s mind.   One of the plagues of Egypt, however, may also be in his eye. When the Almighty would deliver His people from that land of their captivity, "He sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran along upon the ground; and the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous. . . . And the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field, and broke every tree of the field."\* That plague the Seer has in his mind; but he is not content to use its traits alone, terrible as they were. The sin of a guilty world in refusing to listen to Him who speaks from heaven is greater than was the sin of those who refused Him that spake on earth, and their punishment must be in proportion to their sin. Hence the plague of Egypt is magnified. We read, not of hail and fire only, but of hail and fire mingled with (or rather in) blood, so that the blood is the outward and visible covering of the hail and of the fire. In addition to this, we have the herbs and trees of the field, not merely smitten and broken, but utterly consumed by fire. What is meant by the "third part" of the earth and its products being attacked it is difficult to say. The probability is that, as a whole consists of three parts, partial destruction only is intended, yet not destruction of a third part of the earth, leaving two-thirds untouched; but a third part of the earth and of its produce is everywhere consumed. (\* [Exodus 9:23-25](https://biblehub.com/context/exodus/9-23.htm))  The second Trumpet is now blown: -  "And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; and there died the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, even they that had life; and the third part of the ships was destroyed ([Revelation 8:8-9](https://biblehub.com/context/revelation/8-8.htm))."   As the first Trumpet affected the land, so the second affects the sea; and the remarks already made upon the one destruction are for the most part applicable to the other. The figure of removing a mountain from its place and casting it into the sea was used by our Lord to express what beyond all else it was impossible to accomplish by mere human power: "Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do what is done to the fig tree, but even if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea, it shall be done."l In so speaking, our Lord had followed the language of the prophets, who were accustomed to illustrate by the thought of the removal of mountains the greatest acts of Divine power: "What art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain;" "Therefore will we not fear, though the mountains be carried into the midst of the seas."2 (1 [Matthew 21:21](https://biblehub.com/matthew/21-21.htm); 2 [Zechariah 4:7](https://biblehub.com/zechariah/4-7.htm); [Psalm 46:2](https://biblehub.com/psalms/46-2.htm))  Even the figure of a "burnt mountain" is not strange to the Old Testament, for the prophet Jeremiah thus denounces woe on Babylon: "Behold, I am against thee, O destroying mountain, saith the Lord, which destroyest all the earth: and I will stretch out Mine hand upon thee, and roll thee down from the rocks, and make thee a burnt mountain."\* (\* [Jeremiah 51:25](https://biblehub.com/jeremiah/51-25.htm))  The plagues of Egypt, too, are again taken advantage of by the Seer, for in the first of these Moses "lifted up the rod, and smote the waters that were in the river; . . . and all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood. And the fish that was in the river died; and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt."\* Here, however, the plague is extended, embracing as it does not only the river of Egypt, but the sea, with all the ships that sail upon it, and all its fish. Again also, as before, the "third part" is not to be thought of as confined to one region of the ocean, while the remaining two-thirds are left untouched. It is to be sought everywhere over the whole compass of the deep. (\* [Exodus 8:20-21](https://biblehub.com/context/exodus/8-20.htm))  The third Trumpet is now blown: -  "And the third angel sounded, and there fell from heaven a great star, burning as a torch, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of the waters; and the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became worm wood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter ([Revelation 8:10-11](https://biblehub.com/context/revelation/8-10.htm))."   The third Trumpet is to be understood upon the same principles and in the same general sense as the two preceding Trumpets. The figures are again such as meet us in the Old Testament, though they are used by the Seer in his own free and independent way. Thus the prophet Isaiah, addressing Babylon in his magnificent description of her fall, exclaims, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!"1 and thus also the prophet Jeremiah denounces judgment upon rebellious Israel: "Therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink."2 The bitter waters of Marah also lived in the recollections of Israel as the first, and not the least terrible, punishment of the murmuring of their fathers against Him who had brought them out into what seemed but a barren wilderness, instead of leaving them to quench their thirst by the sweet waters of the Nile.3 Thus the waters which the world offers to its votaries are made bitter, so bitter that they become wormwood itself, the very essence of bitterness. Again the "third part" of them is thus visited, but this time with a feature not previously mentioned: the destruction of human life, - many men died of the waters. Under the first Trumpet only inanimate nature was affected; under the second we rose to creatures that had life; under the third we rise to "many men." The climax ought to be noticed, as illustrating the style of the Apostle’s thought and aiding us in the interpretation of his words. A similar climax may perhaps also be intended by the agents successively employed under these Trumpets: hail and fire, a great mountain burning, and a falling star. (1 [Isaiah 14:12](https://biblehub.com/isaiah/14-12.htm); 2 [Jeremiah 9:15](https://biblehub.com/jeremiah/9-15.htm); 3 [Exodus 15:23](https://biblehub.com/exodus/15-23.htm))  The fourth Trumpet is now blown: -  "And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; that the third part of them should be darkened, and the day should not shine for the third part of it, and the night in like manner ([Revelation 8:12](https://biblehub.com/revelation/8-12.htm))."   This Trumpet offers no contradiction to what was previously said, that the first four members of the three series of Seals, of Trumpets, and of Bowls deal with the material rather than the spiritual side of man, with man as a denizen of this world rather than of the next. The heavenly bodies are here viewed solely in their relation to earth and its inhabitants. As to the judgment, it rests, like those of the first and second Trumpets, upon the thought of the Egyptian plague of darkness: "And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness that may be felt And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days: they saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days: but all the children of Israel had lights in their dwellings."\* The trait of the Egyptian plague alluded to in this last sentence is not mentioned here; and we have probably, therefore, no right to say that it was in the Seer’s thoughts. Yet it is in a high degree probable that it was; and at all events his obvious reference to that plague may help to illustrate an important particular to be afterwards noticed, that all the Trumpet judgments fall directly upon the world, and not the Church. As under the first three Trumpets, the third part of the light of sun, and moon, and stars is alone darkened. (\* [Exodus 10:21-23](https://biblehub.com/context/exodus/10-21.htm))  The first four Trumpets have now been blown, and we reach the line of demarcation by which each series of judgments is divided into its groups of four and three. That line is drawn in the present instance with peculiar solemnity and force: -  "And I saw, and I heard an eagle flying m mid-heaven, saying with a, great voice, Woe, woe, woe, for them that dwell on the earth by reason of the other voices of the three angels who are yet to sound ([Revelation 8:13](https://biblehub.com/revelation/8-13.htm))."   Attention ought to be paid to the fact that the cry uttered in mid-heaven, and thus penetrating to the most distant corners of the earth, proceeds from an eagle, and not, as in the Authorized Version, from an "angel;" and the eagle is certainly referred to for the purpose of adding fresh terror to the scene. If we would enter into the Seer’s mind, we must think of it as the symbol of rapine and plunder. To him the prominent characteristic of that bird is not its majesty, but its swiftness, its strength, and its hasting to the prey.\* (\*Comp. [Job 9:26](https://biblehub.com/job/9-26.htm))  Thus ominously announced, the fifth Trumpet is now blown: -  "And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star out of heaven fallen unto the earth: and there was given to him the key of the well of the abyss. And he opened the well of the abyss; and there went up a smoke out of the well, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the well. And out of the smoke came forth locusts upon the earth: and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was said unto them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only such men as have not the seal of God on their foreheads. And it was given them that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when it striketh a man. And in those days men shall seek death, and shall in no wise find it; and they shall desire to die, and death fleeth from them. And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared for war, and upon their heads as it were crowns like unto gold, and their faces were as faces of men. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses rushing to war. And they have tails like unto scorpions, and stings: and in their tails is their power to hurt men five months. They have over them as king the angel of the abyss: his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek tongue he hath the name Apollyon ([Revelation 9:1-11](https://biblehub.com/context/revelation/9-1.htm))."   Such is the strange but dire picture of the judgment of the fifth Trumpet; and we have, as usual, in the first place, to look at the particulars contained in it. As in several previous instances, these are founded upon the plagues of Egypt and the language of the prophets. In both these sources how terrible does a locust plague appear! In Egypt - "And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come up upon the land of Egypt, and eat every herb of the land, even all that the hail hath left. And Moses stretched forth his rod over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind upon the land all that day, and all that night; and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts. And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt, and rested in all the coasts of Egypt: very grievous were they; before them there were no such locusts as they, neither after them shall be such. For they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they did eat every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left: and there remained not any green thing in the trees, or in the herbs of the field, through all the land of Egypt."1 Darker even than this is the language of the prophet Joel. When he sees locusts sweeping across a land, he exclaims, "The land was as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness;"2 and from their irresistible and destructive ravages he draws not a few traits of the dread events by which the coming of the day of the Lord shall be accompanied: "The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run. Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array. . . . They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march everyone on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks. . . . They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief. The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining."3 (1 [Exodus 10:12-15](https://biblehub.com/context/exodus/10-12.htm); 2 [Joel 2:3](https://biblehub.com/joel/2-3.htm); 3 [Joel 2:4-10](https://biblehub.com/context/joel/2-4.htm))   It is no doubt true that in the description before us the qualities of its locusts are preternaturally magnified, but that is only what we might expect, and it is in keeping with the mode in which other figures taken from the Old Testament are treated in this book. There is a probability, too, that each trait of the description had a distinct meaning to St. John, and that it represents some particular phase of the calamities he intended to depict. But it is hardly possible now to discover such meanings; and that the Seer had in view general evil as much at least as evil in certain special forms is shown by the artificiality of structure marking the passage as a whole. For the description of the locusts is divided into three parts, the first general, the second special, the third the locust-king. The special characteristics of the insects, again, are seven in number: (1) upon their heads as it were crowns like unto gold; (2) and their faces were as faces of men; (3) and they had hair as the hair of women; (4) and their teeth were as the teeth of lions; (5) and they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; (6) and the sound of their wings was as the sound of many chariots; (7) and they have tails like unto scorpions, and stings.   Whether the period of five months, during which these locusts are said to commit their ravages, is fixed on because the destruction caused by the natural insect lasts for that length of time, or for some other reason unknown to us, it is difficult to determine. There is a want of proof that a locust-plague generally continues for the number of months thus specified, and it is otherwise more in accordance with the style of the Apocalypse to regard that particular period of time as simply denoting that the judgment has definite limits.   One additional particular connected with the fifth Trumpet ought to be adverted to. It will be noticed that the well of the abyss whence the plague proceeds is opened by a star fallen (not "falling") out of heaven, to which the key of the well was given. We have here one of those contrasts of St. John a due attention to which is of such importance to the interpreter. This "fallen star" is the contrast and counterpart of Him who is "the bright, the morning star," and who "has the keys of death and of Hades."\* (\* [Revelation 22:16](https://biblehub.com/revelation/22-16.htm); [Revelation 1:18](https://biblehub.com/revelation/1-18.htm))  At this point the sixth angel ought to sound; but we are now in the midst of the three last woes, and each is of so terrible an import that it deserves to be specially marked. Hence the words of the next verse: -  "The first Woe is past; behold, there come yet two Woes hereafter ([Revelation 9:12](https://biblehub.com/revelation/9-12.htm))."   This warning given, the sixth Trumpet is now blown: -  "And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the horns of the golden altar which is before God, one saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound at the great river Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed, which had been prepared for the hour, and day, and month, and year, that they should kill the third part of men. And the number of the armies of the horsemen was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates as of fire, and of hyacinth, and of brimstone. By these three plagues was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and the smoke, and the brimstone, which proceeded out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails are like unto serpents, and with them they do hurt. And the rest of mankind which were not killed with these plagues repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not 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 repented not of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts. ([Revelation 9:13-21](https://biblehub.com/context/revelation/9-13.htm))."   There is much in this Trumpet that is remarkable even while we confine ourselves to the more outward particulars contained in it. Thus we are brought back by it to the thought of those prayers of the saints to which all the Trumpets are a reply, but which have not been mentioned since the blowing of the Trumpets began.1 Once more we read of the golden altar which was before God y in His immediate presence. On that altar the prayers of all the saints had been laid, that they might rise to heaven with the much incense added by the angel, and might be answered in God s own time and way. The voice heard from the four horns of this altar that is, from the four projecting points at its four corners, representing the altar in its greatest potency shows us, what we might have been in danger of forgetting, that the judgment before us continues to be an answer of the Almighty to His people s prayers. Again it may be noticed that in the judgment here spoken of we deal once more with a third part of the class upon which it falls. Nothing of the kind had been said under the fifth Trumpet. The inference to be drawn from these particulars is important We learn that, however distinct the successive members of any of the three series of the Seals, the Trumpets, or the Bowls may seem to be, they are yet closely connected with one another. Though seven in number, there is a sense in which they are also one; and any characteristic thought which appears in a single members of the series ought to be carried through all its members. (\* [Revelation 9:3-5](https://biblehub.com/context/revelation/9-3.htm))  The judgment itself is founded, as in the others already considered, upon thoughts and incidents connected with Old Testament history.   The first of these is the river Euphrates. That great river was the boundary of Palestine upon the north east "In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates;"1 and in the days of Solomon this part of the covenant appears to have been fulfilled, for we are told that "Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river" (that is, the Euphrates) "unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt."2 The Euphrates, however, was not only the boundary between Israel and the Assyrians. It was also Israel’s line of defense against its powerful and ambitious neighbour, who had to cross its broad stream before he could seize any part of the Promised Land. By a natural transition of thought, the Euphrates next became a symbol of the Assyrians themselves, for its waters, when they rose in flood, overflowed Israel’s territory and swept all before them. Then the prophets saw in the rush of the swollen river a figure of the scourge of God upon those who would not acknowledge Him: "The Lord spake also unto me again, saying, Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah’s son; now therefore behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: and he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of Thy land, O Immanuel."3 When accordingly the Euphrates is here spoken of, it is clear that with the river as such we have nothing to do. It is simply a symbol of judgment; and the four angels which had been bound at it, but were now loosed, are a token - four being the number of the world - that the judgment referred to, though it affects but a third part of men, reaches men over the whole surface of the globe. When the hour, and the day, and the month, and the year - that is, when the moment fixed in the counsels of the Almighty - come, the chains by which destruction has been kept back shall be broken, and the world shall be over whelmed by the raging stream. (1 [Genesis 15:18](https://biblehub.com/genesis/15-18.htm); 2 [1 Kings 4:21](https://biblehub.com/1_kings/4-21.htm); 3 [Isaiah 8:5-8](https://biblehub.com/context/isaiah/8-5.htm))  The second Old Testament thought to be noted in this vision is that of horses. To the Israelite the horse presented an object of terror rather than admiration, and an army of horsemen awakened in him the deepest feelings of alarm. Thus it is that the prophet Habakkuk, describing the coming judgments of God, is commissioned to exclaim, "Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvelously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you. For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling-places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat. They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them: they shall deride every stronghold; for they shall heap dust, and take it."\* Like the locusts of the previous vision, the "horses" now spoken of are indeed clothed with preternatural attributes; but the explanation is the same. Ordinary horses could not convey images of sufficient terror. (\* [Habakkuk 1:5-10](https://biblehub.com/context/habakkuk/1-5.htm))  The last two verses of chap. 9, which follow the sixth Trumpet, deserve our particular attention. They describe the effect produced upon the men who did not perish by the previous plagues, and they help to throw light upon a question most intimately connected with a just interpretation of the Apocalypse. The question is, Does the Seer, in any of his visions, anticipate the conversion of the ungodly? or does he deal, from the beginning to the end of his descriptions, with righteousness and sin in themselves rather than with righteous persons who may decline from the truth or sinful persons who may own and welcome it? The question will meet us again in the following chapters of this book, and will demand a fuller discussion than it can receive at present. In the meantime it is enough to say that, in the two verses now under consideration, no hint as to the conversion of any ungodly persons by the Trumpet plagues is given. On the contrary, the "men" - that is, the two-thirds of the inhabitants of the earth or of the ungodly world who were not killed by these plagues repented neither of their irreligious principles nor of their immoral lives. They went on as they had done in the grossness of their idolatries and in the licentiousness of their conduct. They were neither awakened nor softened by the fate of others. They had deliberately chosen their own course; and, although they knew that they were rushing against the thick bosses of the Almighty's buckler, they had resolved to persevere in it to the end.   Two brief remarks on these six Trumpet visions, looked at as a whole, appear still to be required.   I. No attempt has been made to interpret either the individual objects of the judgments or the instruments by which judgment is inflicted. To the one class belong the "earth," the "trees," the "green grass," the "sea," the "ships," the "rivers and fountains of the waters," the "sun," the "moon," and the "stars;" to the other belong the details given in the description first of the "locusts" of the fifth Trumpet and then of the "horses" of the sixth. Each of these particulars may have a definite meaning, and interpreters may yet be successful in discovering it. The object kept in view throughout this commentary makes any effort to ascertain that meaning, when it is doubtful if it even exists, comparatively unimportant. We are endeavoring to catch the broader interpretation and spirit of the book; and it may be a question whether our impressions would in that respect be deepened though we saw; reason to believe that all the objects above mentioned had individual force. One line of demarcation certainly seems to exist, traced by the Seer himself, between the first four and the two following judgments, the former referring to physical disasters flowing from moral evil, the latter to the more dreadful intensification of intellectual darkness and moral corruption visited upon men when they deliberately choose evil rather than good. Further than this it is for our present purpose unnecessary to go.   2. The judgments of these Trumpets are judgments on the world rather than the Church. Occasion has been already taken to observe that the structure of this part of the Apocalypse leads to the belief that both the Trumpets and the Bowls are developed out of the Seals. Yet there is a difference between the two, and various indications in the Trumpet visions appear to confine them to judgments on the world.   There is the manner in which they are introduced, as an answer to the prayers of "all the saints."1 It is true, as we shall yet see, that the degenerate Church is the chief persecutor of the people of God But against her the saints cannot pray. To them she is still the Church. They remember the principle laid down by their Lord when He spoke of His kingdom in the parable of the tares: "Let both grow together until the harvest."2 God alone can separate the false from the true within her pale. There is a sense in which the Church can never be overthrown, and there is not less a sense in which the world shall be subdued. Only for the subjugation of the world, therefore, can "all the saints" pray; and the Trumpets are an answer to their prayers. (1 [Revelation 8:3](https://biblehub.com/revelation/8-3.htm); 2 [Matthew 13:30](https://biblehub.com/matthew/13-30.htm))  Again, the three Woe-Trumpets are directed against "them that dwell on the earth."\* But, as has been already said, it is a principle of interpretation applicable to all the three series of the Seals, the Trumpets, and the Bowls, that traits filling up the picture in one member belong also to the other members of the groups and that the judgments, while under one aspect seven, are under another one. The three Woes therefore fall upon the same field of judgment as that visited by the plagues preceding them. In other words, all the six plagues of this series of visions are inflicted upon "them that dwell on the earth;" and that is simply another form of expression for the ungodly world. (\* [Revelation 8:13](https://biblehub.com/revelation/8-13.htm))  Again, under the fifth Trumpet the children of God are separated from the ungodly, so that the particulars of that judgment do not touch them. The locusts are instructed that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only such men as have not the seal of God in their foreheads.\* (\* [Revelation 9:4](https://biblehub.com/revelation/9-4.htm))  Again, the seventh Trumpet, in which the series culminates, and which embodies its character as a whole, will be found to deal with judgment on the world alone: "The nations were roused to wrath, and Thy wrath came, and the time of the dead to be judged," . . . and "the time to destroy them that destroy the earth."\* (\* [Revelation 11:18](https://biblehub.com/revelation/11-18.htm))  Finally, the description given at the end of the sixth Trumpet of those who were hardened rather than softened by the preceding judgments leads directly to the same conclusion: And the rest of mankind which were not killed by these plagues repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and the idols of gold, and of silver, and of brass, and of stone, and of wood.\* (\* [Revelation 9:20](https://biblehub.com/revelation/9-20.htm))  These considerations leave no doubt that the judgments of the Trumpets are judgments on the world. The Church, it is true, may also suffer from them, but not in judgment. They may be part of her trial as she mixes with the world during her earthly pilgrimage. Trial, however, is not judgment. To the children of God it is the discipline of a Father’s hand. In the midst of it the Church is safe, and it helps to ripen her for the fullness of the glory of her heavenly inheritance. |
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