

<p>Revelation 8: ³ And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer; and he was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the throne; ⁴ and the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God. ⁵ Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth; and there were peals of thunder, voices, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.</p>	<p>3-6 As we have already seen, and as is repeated here, incense is regarded as a symbol of the prayers of the saints. The angel hurling the censer at the earth is an image of devastation, and it is the response to the prayers for vengeance heard in the previous layer. This suggests that it is the prayers themselves, or God's love for those who pray them, which causes him to reveal this next level, the supernatural signs of God's judgement. Perhaps through the prayers of the faithful inhabitants of earth for their sinful brothers and sisters, the conclusion is reached that the natural signs of judgement are insufficient to turn the hearts of all people.</p>
<p>⁶ Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets made ready to blow them. ⁷ The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, which fell on the earth; and a third of the earth was burnt up, and a third of the trees were burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up. ⁸ The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea; ⁹ and a third of the sea became blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. ¹⁰ The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the</p>	<p>6. The seven angels would have been well known to the audience from Hebrew myths: they are identified in the OT, and in some of the Deutero-Canonical texts as those angels who lead the heavenly hosts and stand around, and closest to the thrones: They are: Michael, head of the heavenly Army; Gabriel, the chief messenger of God; Uriel, chief bearer of the divine light; Raphael, chief of the angelic healers; Raguel, the Head of the Heavenly choir; Sariel, the Voice of God; and Azrael, the angel of Death, who bears the souls of the dead to their judgment. They do not appear here in any definitely discernable order. The trumpet is used as a symbol of something which definitely draws the attention—loud and clear, it is difficult to overlook.</p> <p>7-12. Like the seals in the first layer, the trumpets occur in the same sequence, and the first four trumpets make up a single set of images. Note that with the sounding of each trumpet, three different portions of the natural world are destroyed, and now, instead of there being just a quarter of the earth being affected, a third is affected in each case. These signs affect the natural world directly, and humanity secondarily. This is John's way of upping the ante, and showing us that these signs are more profound, harder to ignore, and the consequences more dire for those who do ignore them. All of the trumpets call up the imagery of the plagues sent on Egypt at the Exodus, reinforcing the correlation between Rome's abuse of the Early Christians, and Egypt's holding Israel slave. Again, this is a message of encouragement to those who read it, that God will avenge the wrongs done to His people and lead them out of trouble into the promised land. Vesuvius had erupted in John's lifetime,</p>

<p> rivers and on the fountains of water. ¹¹ The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died of the water, because it was made bitter. ¹² The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light was darkened; a third of the day was kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night. </p>	<p> destroying Pompeii, and having a significant impact on Rome, this may be the image evoked with the Mountain of Fire. It is interesting also to note that the Ukrainian word for “Wormwood” is “Chernobyl”, a fact often used by doomsday prophets as a point on the checklist of the events at the end of the world. It seems unlikely that it is exactly that, but it is a sign that is difficult to ignore, nonetheless. It is absolutely certain that the Asian churches knew nothing of Chernobyl, but they did know about Wormwood, as a plant that made the water noxious, and as an OT symbol of judgment from Exodus and the psalms. The darkening of the land is another direct reference to the plagues in the Exodus, but like all of them mentioned here, they may have correlates in reality: Volcanic activity, meteorite strikes, and Saharan sandstorms are all possible explanations for these catastrophic descriptions that would have been in Mediterranean lore at John’s time. Because of their infrequent appearance, and their inexplicable character, however, they would not have been seen as natural, but rather supernatural signs. </p>
<p> ¹³ Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice, as it flew in midheaven, “Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets which the three angels are about to blow!” </p>	<p> 13. The next two trumpets are introduced by an eagle, who announces the woe to befall. The reason for this seems to be that the ante is upped again, and the supernatural signs will change from affecting the natural world, to affecting the people directly, and they will change from nondescript calamity to specifically demonic influence. </p>
<p> Revelation 9:1 And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key of the shaft of the bottomless pit; ² he opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. ³ Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth; ⁴ they were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree, but only those of mankind who have not the seal of God upon their foreheads; ⁵ they were allowed to torture them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torture was like the torture of a scorpion, when </p>	<p> 1-12. The fifth trumpet calls forth a host of demonic locusts, which are given power to torment the tormentors of God’s people for the specific period of five months, which is the natural life-span of the common locust. They come in such swarms that they look like smoke, and they are there specifically to torment, and not to kill: another sign that the end goal here is to drive people to repentance rather than just to punish them. Note that the theme of seeking death and not finding it is repeated—death would be preferable to repenting and facing judgment. The vivid description of the locusts is also often used by doomsday prophets as proof that John saw the future: they tell us that this is John’s best </p>

<p>it stings a man. ⁶ And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death will fly from them. ⁷ In appearance the locusts were like horses arrayed for battle; on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, ⁸ their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; ⁹ they had scales like iron breastplates, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. ¹⁰ They have tails like scorpions, and stings, and their power of hurting men for five months lies in their tails. ¹¹ They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon. ¹² The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.</p>	<p>possible description of a battle helicopter. In reality, it is a conflation of imagery from the OT, and a description of Parthian warriors, combined to create a horrific image worthy of divine prophecy, and intended to spark the imagination. The bottomless pit, and the abyss are relatively new images in biblical writings: they call forth images of sheol, the Hebrew place of the dead, but there is not as yet a distinct theology of hell or purgatory, or even of the afterlife in general. Note that while these forces are demonic, an angel is in charge of them, and that all is still very much under God's control, and the hope is one of repentance rather than destruction.</p>
<p>¹³ Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, ¹⁴ saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." ¹⁵ So the four angels were released, who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, to kill a third of mankind. ¹⁶ The number of the troops of cavalry was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number. ¹⁷ And this was how I saw the horses in my vision: the riders wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulphur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulphur issued from their mouths. ¹⁸ By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulphur issuing from their mouths. ¹⁹ For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; their tails are like serpents, with heads, and by means of them they wound. ²⁰ The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and</p>	<p>13-21. The sixth trumpet releases an enormous cavalry of demonic horsemen. The army is two hundred million in number, which is greater than the population of the earth at the time this was written, and clearly intended to be a supernatural horde. They come from the Euphrates, which is, notably, the eastern edge of the Empire, beyond which lies the aforementioned Parthian Menace. The east is also the direction of the rising sun, with all its imagery of Christ's resurrection and return woven into it as well. This plague ends with a description that the rest of mankind failing to learn anything from the example of Rome's fall, and the supernatural destruction unfolded on them. As the axiom goes, 'those who fail to learn from history...' Again, the point is one of repentance, and even in the face of this sign, people stubbornly refuse to repent. And the heart of this failure to repent is Idolatry: worshipping or adoring something other than God, or putting something or someone else in God's place, whatever it may be: money, power,</p>

<p>idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot either see or hear or walk; ²¹ nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their immorality or their thefts.</p>	<p>magic, sex, even nature. This sign serves as a call to all who read it to examine our lives and think of the ways in which we are guilty of succumbing to this kind of temptation.</p>
<p>10:1 Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. ² He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, ³ and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring; when he called out, the seven thunders sounded. ⁴ And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down." ⁵ And the angel whom I saw standing on sea and land lifted up his right hand to heaven ⁶ and swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there should be no more delay, ⁷ but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled. ⁸ Then the voice which I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll which is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." ⁹ So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, "Take it and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth." ¹⁰ And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter. ¹¹ And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and</p>	<p>Now, with chapter 10, and the beginning of chapter eleven, we have another twofold interlude. The first part is in the descent of an angel, described with vivid imagery: the rainbow and cloud symbolizing God's mercy and incomprehensibility, the face shining like the sun, just as Jesus' face shone in the first chapter, and legs like pillars of fire. The key to this image is the little scroll that the angel carries: this is widely interpreted as the Holy Scripture, and this angel is its angelic personification: filled with symbols drawn from the whole of scripture: the exodus, the prophecies, genesis, and the Gospels. Then there is a peculiar pause while we are teased with another series of seven, which we are forbidden to hear. This may be for purely dramatic effect, or it may be like the message that was given to Paul that "no mortal is allowed to repeat" (2 Cor. 12:4), suggesting that there are parts of the unfolding of God's plan that are completely out of the sphere of human comprehension. John is given the scroll of scripture to eat: that is, symbolically to take it into himself. We think of the Scripture Sunday collect that tells us to "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest", digest meaning to really make it a part of ourselves. The scripture is sweet on the mouth, meaning that is a wonderful thing to receive it, and even to proclaim it. It is, however, bitter in the stomach, and perhaps this suggests that there are parts of God's revelation and plan which may make us mourn, or feel sad. This is the introduction of the theme of grief, which comes as a result of the loss of those parts of creation which were intended to be good, but were perverted into something that could not accept repentance and redemption, and must therefore be lost; for God's love is so great that it is willing to let go of its object</p>

tongues and kings."	rather than bend its will.
<p>Revelation 11:1 Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told: "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, ² but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample over the holy city for forty-two months. ³ And I will grant my two witnesses power to prophesy for one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." ⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands which stand before the Lord of the earth. ⁵ And if any one would harm them, fire pours out from their mouth and consumes their foes; if any one would harm them, thus he is doomed to be killed. ⁶ They have power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire. ⁷ And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that ascends from the bottomless pit will make war upon them and conquer them and kill them, ⁸ and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which is allegorically called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. ⁹ For three days and a half men from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, ¹⁰ and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹ But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. ¹² Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up hither!" And in the sight of their foes they went up to heaven in a cloud. ¹³ And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. ¹⁴ The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.</p>	<p>The beginning of Ch. 11, easily the most confusing part of the whole book, seems to be a conflation of a whole host of images from the OT, presented with a flavor of NT theology. For instance, the Temple clearly refers not to the building in Jerusalem, but to the whole of God's people in the Church, which is consistent with Paul's and Peter's use in their letters in the NT. The rest of the imagery is drawn from all over the OT, we hear about Moses, and the altar, and Sodom, and Egypt, and Daniel's beasts. This perhaps suggests that the whole of the OT is best to be understood in the light of the Gospel, and that yet the persecution of God's people will go on. The noting of specific times from Daniel suggests that the persecution is not indefinite, and it will come to an end. But yet that the Church will not be delivered from persecution, but through persecution to the imperturbable state of resurrected life in heaven. And the church will continue to give faithful witness, even in the light of all of this trouble.</p>
<p>¹⁵ Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever." ¹⁶ And the twenty-four</p>	<p>Finally, this section of the Book closes with the sounding of the last trumpet, which, just as was the case with the seals,</p>

elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, ¹⁷ saying, "We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign. ¹⁸ The nations raged, but thy wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear thy name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth." ¹⁹ Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

does not come as we expect it to, but with the worship of God in heaven, and the opening of His Temple (here again a figurative use, indicating the face-to-face worship of God in heaven by His people). We are given a segue into the next vision, and the final series of seven with the mention of the Ark of the Covenant.