

Hymns: 15 It Is Well with My Soul 40 He Leadeth Me

Scripture: Psalm 97; 29

Big idea: Wormwood

Wormwood. What is it, and what does it mean? Stay tuned as we continue our study of the fascinating book of Revelation. This final book of the Bible sometimes called *the apocalypse*, unveils or reveals Jesus **not** in His humanity as shown in the gospels but reveals Him in His glory. Let's review where we have been so far:

Chapter 1 sets the stage with the apostle John receiving a message from God and giving a glimpse of Jesus as He is in glory.

Chapters 2 and 3 contain letters that Jesus sent to seven churches located in the western end of what is now the country of Turkey which serve as examples of the kinds of churches with various strengths and weaknesses that have existed throughout the ages. Within each letter, Jesus describes tidbits of what our future with Him will be like.

Chapter 4, takes us to heaven where God appears before His own. We saw four cherubim who represented the creatures of God's creation and twenty-four elders representing the church seated before God's throne giving praise and worship to Him.

Chapter 5 remained before God's throne in heaven, but the attention turned to the seven-sealed scroll. No one was found worthy to open it until the Lion of the tribe of Judah who is the Lamb of God stood in the midst of the scene before the throne of God and took the scroll from God the Father. As he did, every creature in heaven and earth broke out in praise to Jesus Christ the Lamb.

Chapter 6 began the opening the seals of the scroll:

1. White horse ridden by the Antichrist.
2. Red horse of war.
3. Black horse of famine and poverty.
4. Light green horse of death.

These symbols of judgments are sometimes called *the four horsemen of the apocalypse*. The fifth seal revealed Tribulation martyrs under the Altar of Incense before the throne of God. And finally, He opened the sixth seal – describing cataclysmic but not fatal, judgments of the earth.

Last time in Chapter 7, we paused to witness three distinct groups of believers in heaven:

1. 144,000 sealed Jews.
2. Innumerable Tribulation martyrs.
3. 24 elders – representing the church.

That brings us to our text for today.

Revelation 8

- [1] *And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.*
- [2] *And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.*
- [3] *And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.*
- [4] *And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand.*
- [5] *And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings, and an earthquake.*
- [6] *And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.*
- [7] *The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.*
- [8] *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;*
- [9] *And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.*
- [10] *And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters;*
- [11] *And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.*
- [12] *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; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.*
- [13] *And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!*

Let's slow down now and see what treasures we can uncover in this passage.

Revelation 8

*[1] And*

*And links Chapter 8 with the events that just preceded it in Chapter 7.*

*when*

*When is a time marker.*

*he had opened*

*Who is opening these seals? It is the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, the only one found worthy to open them.*

*the seventh seal,*

*Recall that this scroll being opened was sealed with seven seals. This is the final seal*

which ushers in the next series of judgments revealed in the next verse.

*there was silence in heaven*

After all of the praising of God going on there, this silence is a major contrast.

*about the space of half an hour.*

We've all sung the song *When the Roll Is Called up Yonder*. It speaks of time being "no more" and leads some to a misconception about how we experience eternity. This is one of many references in Revelation to time. We will still experience it moment by moment.

*[2] And I saw*

This is still John, our narrator, in a body suited for heaven and able to see.

*the seven angels which stood before God;*

We've learned that sometimes the word *seven* represents completeness. Here, we will take it literally. We have seven angels standing before God. With all of the other creatures there, that seems like a pretty crowded place. I'm sure God can work that out.

*and to them were given seven trumpets.*

Who gave them these trumpets? We are not told – perhaps another angel.

*[3] And another angel*

This would be an eighth angel in the immediate context.

*came*

He wasn't there immediately preceding. He had to come there.

*and stood at the altar,*

Recall the Altar of Incense stands before the throne of God. This is that altar.

*having a golden censer;*

A censer is a vessel for burning incense. He had this censer in his hand (Revelation 8:4).

*and there was given unto him much incense,*

Who gave this angel this large cache of incense? Again, we're not told – perhaps another angel and maybe even the one who handed out the trumpets.

*that he should offer it*

This incense will be part of an offering.

*with the prayers of all saints*

The other portion of this sweet-smelling offering will be the prayers of the saints. Who are these saints? These are all of the children of God – Old Testament and New Testament believers. Does that include each of us who know Him? Yes, we need to remember despite the febleness of our prayers, God **treasures them** and **accepts them**

as an offering to Him having a **sweet** savor.

*upon the golden altar which was before the throne.*

This confirms the location and thereby the identity of this altar as the Golden Altar of Incense which we encountered in Revelation 6:9.

*[4] And the smoke of the incense,*

Burning incense produces a scented smoke.

*which came with the prayers of the saints,*

Prayers are not physical. In some mysterious way these non-physical prayers are mixed with physical smoke. Perhaps they come as a sound or in visual text form, we just do not know.

*ascended up before God*

The censer on the altar is positioned in front of God.

*out of the angel's hand.*

This angel is standing at the altar holding the censer of incense.

*[5] And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar,*

The censer already contained smoldering incense, but now he's doing something very different with it. According to this, the altar contained fire from which he filled his censor with fire. This would not be unusual as we recall that the LORD often brought fire and consumed things on the earth with it.

*and cast it into the earth:*

That's very strange imagery. Heaven is beyond outer space, but somehow this fire makes it from heaven to earth. Perhaps this can best be interpreted as being a symbol of the fire of God's judgment being sent to the inhabitants of the earth.

*and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.*

We've encountered this list back in Jesus' Olivet Discourse as He spoke of this time.

Luke 21

*[11] And great **earthquakes** shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and **fearful sights** and **great signs shall there be from heaven.***

We have also seen some of this list in Revelation 4:5 and will see it again in Revelation 11:19, Revelation 16:18. Obviously, God uses these phenomena to place particular emphasis on what is about to occur, that it involves judgment, that comes from heaven, and rests upon earth.

*[6] And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.*

We've seen this scene in the movies where royal soldiers lift their long-style trumpets. In

this case, our seven angels each have a trumpet and each is preparing to blow his.

[7] *The first angel sounded,*

That is, he blew his trumpet.

*and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood,*

Clearly, the first trumpet initiated a judgment. You may recall something similar in Exodus 9:23-24 where Moses raised his rod toward heaven and the LORD sent thunder, hail, and fire upon the land of Egypt.

As the LORD sent plagues upon Egypt to get the attention of Pharaoh, here He sends both

extreme persuasion to those remaining on the earth to turn to Him and judgment upon those who refuse.

Unfortunately, God's innocent creatures will also be caught up in this judgment resulting from man's sin.

*and they*

That is the hail mingled with blood.

*were cast upon the earth:*

Here's another picture of things moving from the throne of God outside of our universe to earth.

*and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.*

**After** the LORD destroyed life on the earth in the great flood, He promised to man and beast alike that He would never repeat that judgment and sealed His covenant with the rainbow as a token (Genesis 9:8-13).

Despite all of the terrible judgments to come, the LORD remains true to His word. Of course, that does not prevent Him from bringing judgment by fire. This judgment does just that creating the greatest forest fire and grassland fire the world has ever known.

Notice the word *third* in the text. It appears **twelve times** in just five verses. When this happens we need to try to see what the LORD is saying. Why does He repeat it, and what does that emphasis mean? In this case, perhaps it points to the **seriousness** of the judgment as well as His **restraint** in leaving the highest fraction of these things untouched – for now.

[8] *And the second angel sounded,*

Here comes the second trumpet judgment.

*and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea:*

Could this be some kind of meteor or perhaps a massive hydrogen bomb? We're not told exactly what this mountain-like object is besides that it is burning with fire. It could simply symbolize the sea receiving judgment. And what happens to the sea?

*and the **third** part of the sea became blood;*

We saw something similar to this back in Exodus also. Do you remember Moses touched his rod to the fresh water river and all of the river water turned to blood making it undrinkable and causing death (Exodus 7:20-21).

Man does not drink sea water, but the result of dead fish in one **third** of the ocean would produce a horrific level of death as we see in the next verse:

*[9] And the **third** part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died;*

Turning the oceans to blood has the same lethal effect it has on fresh water – putrid death.

*and the **third** part of the ships were destroyed.*

This destruction of ships likely comes from the mountain burning with fire.

*[10] And the **third** angel sounded,*

This **third** trumpet sound begins the **third** terrible judgment.

*and there fell a great star from heaven,*

The imagery here sounds like a meteor. A literal star would be far too large. It could just symbolize judgment.

*burning as it were a lamp,*

This further enforces that John actually saw a ball of light. He was familiar with lightning and did not refer to it as that.

*and it fell upon the **third** part of the rivers,*

The previous verses referred to the sea. We took that to mean salt water. Here the rivers in contrast are fresh water. Again, a **third** of these bodies of water were poisoned.

*and upon the fountains of waters;*

Judgment descended on sea water, rivers, and now aquifers or the water beneath the ground. It may very well be that the word *sea* also included fresh water lakes such as the Great Lakes and even the *Sea* of Galilee. If so, these judgments descended on one third of **all types** of water sources on the earth.

*[11] And the name of the star is called Wormwood:*

Wormwood means bitter and toxic.

*and the **third** part of the waters became wormwood;*

One **third** of the fresh waters contained this bitter poison.

*and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.*

Man needs fresh, pure water for survival. The poisoned water killed many men. We're

not told how many.

*[12] And the fourth angel sounded,*

Three trumpet judgments are complete. Here comes the fourth of seven.

*and the **third** part of the sun was smitten,  
and the **third** part of the moon,  
and the **third** part of the stars;*

Darkness is on it's way. Imagine how cold the earth would become if only 67% of the sun's normal radiation reached the earth. This is not a pretty picture.

*so as the **third** part of them was darkened,  
and the day shone not for a **third** part of it,  
and the night likewise.*

While light still blankets the earth, it's greatly diminished in intensity and duration.

*[13] And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven,*

Clearly angels can fly. Their wings are functional. They also make sound.

*saying with a loud voice,*

*Woe, woe, woe,*

To whom **is** this angel directing this three-fold pronouncement of woe?

*to the inhabitants of the earth*

The earth will become a more terrible place to exist during this time. Why?

*by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!*

Stay tuned next time for even more devastating judgments.

## Application

Now we spoke today of Wormwood meaning bitter and relating to bitter or poisoned water. You may recall in Exodus, Moses encountered some bitter water at a place called Marah. He took a piece of wood, threw it into the water, as the LORD directed, and the water became pure. This symbolized the act of the Lamb of God who died on a wooden cross to free all who believe in Him to have life and be cleansed from the **poison** of sin. We need not fear God's judgment as Jesus took our punishment that we who know Him will be free, purified, and glorified.

Life can have it's bitter moments, but we can take heart.

Romans 8

*[18] ... the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

**Benediction**

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen (Revelation 22:21).*

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