

The Judgment of Thirds of Creation

📖 Revelation 8:1-13

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Q: What do you mean by Palm Monday rather than Palm Sunday?

A: I stated that in passing. I just mean that in my study of the chronology of the final week of Jesus I concluded that the day that He came from Bethany over the Mt of Olives and into Jerusalem, humble, mounted on a donkey, with a crowd holding palm branches, was Monday and not Sunday. I'm not alone in this conclusion as Dr Harold Hoehner in his *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* prefers Monday in his chronology. Dr John Walvoord also holds to Monday, as well as others. Saying that, I don't think it's a major issue. What is a major issue is the fact that that Sunday or Monday was not really the Triumphal Entry. It is called the Triumphal Entry by theologians who say that the kingdom of God is now. But there is no kingdom of God now. For it to have been the Triumphal Entry the nation Israel would have had to welcome Him as King, had a coronation ceremony. But they did not and as a result the kingdom was postponed. The postponement will conclude when the nation Israel repents and asks Jesus to return. Then the true Triumphal Entry will take place and the kingdom will come.

Last time we discussed Revelation 7, the 144,000 and the multitude from all nations. We said this was a very difficult chapter as far as placing it within the big picture of the Tribulation. I'm not sure anyone has totally understood this piece of the puzzle and it may not be possible to do so because there are a number of unknowns. For example, the 144,000 are not tied to any time designations such as 42 months or 1,260 days, so we really can't limit their ministry to one half of the tribulation only. But that hasn't stopped commentators from doing so. Also, there's no other chapter besides Rev 14 that mentions the 144,000 so we are very limited in the amount of information we have about them. My approach was to simply make some general observations so we can determine what we really can know. The first thing we know is that chapter 6 ended with the earthdwellers asking, "Who is able to stand?" The question seems to be asking who is able to finally take over the earth and rule it. Chapter 7 seems to be answering that question very simply; he who has washed his garments in the blood of the Lamb. In other words, the ones who will finally take over the earth and rule it are those who believe in Jesus as the Messiah. But how will anyone be able to remain alive on the earth to carry out the ministry of the

gospel so people can believe? The answer is 144,000 will be sealed. That sealing takes place in 7:1 where John has a new vision and in this vision he saw four angels standing at the four points of the compass, holding back destructive forces so they would not blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. When we look at the first two trumpets in chapter 8 we see that they affect the earth, the sea and the trees. So the earth, the sea and the trees seem to be literal. Destructive forces are about to be unleashed to destroy them and the men who depend upon them. In 7:2 John saw another angel rising in the east, he had the seal of the living God and he is crying out to the four angels who are about to unleash these judgments saying in 7:3, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads." The seal is to protect them from being killed by the coming judgments. Note that the ones to be sealed are already bond-servants, so they are already believers who are sold out to Jesus Christ. My thinking is that they believe soon after the rapture. So they've survived the seals and after the sixth seal they are sealed before the seventh seal is broken and the seven trumpets are announced. In 7:4 John says, "I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand." They come from "Every tribe of the sons of Israel." People have identified these as the Church or the Jehovah's Witnesses, or the Mormons. But the phrase "sons of Israel" always refers to literal descendants of Jacob, who was renamed Israel. The listing of the twelve tribes reinforces this interpretation. There are 19 listings of twelve tribes in the Bible. Every list differs from every other list because while Jacob had only twelve sons, Joseph was lost to him, and when he was found he blessed Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, as if they were his own sons. Thus, two more names were added to the twelve making fourteen. So whenever a list of the twelve tribes is made two names are left off. In this one Ephraim and Dan are left off. There are speculations as to why and the best speculation is that it relates in some way to the two tribes who went into idolatry first. But it might be best not to speculate at all. Of the twelve tribes that are mentioned, twelve-thousand from each tribe are sealed. So they will be sealed after the sixth seal and before the seventh. In 7:9 John has another vision. In this one he saw a great multitude from every nation standing before the throne and before the Lamb in heaven. They are clothed in white robes and have palm branches in preparation for the real Triumphant Entry. In 7:10 they are crying out "salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." These, we are told in 7:14, come out of the great tribulation. In other words, John is being enabled to see into the second half of the tribulation and they are being killed and coming out of the great tribulation. We're not told how they are killed, either under the persecution of the anti-Christ or from the trumpet and bowl judgments that are coming. But either way they end up in heaven and are seen as being able to ultimately stand. Why? Because they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. John is then permitted to see all the way into the new heaven and new earth where they are protected and provided for, with the Lamb as their shepherd and so it is a great vision where John was enabled to see all the way from the sixth seal to the new heaven and new earth and it really answers the question of 6:17, "Who is able to stand?" Very simply; those who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. They will be victorious and will rule the earth.

We come today to Rev 8 where we see the breaking of the seventh seal and this certainly relates to the sealing of the 144,000 because they were sealed so they would not be hurt by these judgments that are about to come upon the earth, the sea and the trees. This is another chapter that is very easy to tell what happens but more difficult to tell why? In other words, we know the early trumpet judgments are upon the earth, the sea and the trees, but why? I would posit that what is happening ties in directly with creation. When God created the heavens and the earth He created the materials and then He began to organize those materials. That's why Gen 1:2 says that the earth was *tohu wabohu*, meaning uninhabitable and uninhabited. This translation has been thoroughly confirmed over the last thirty years of scholarship. We really have no question now that there is no gap between 1:1 and 2 and even Merrill Unger, who was a great Hebrew scholar, realized the grammar could not support it. What is happening at creation which ties in here in Revelation is God is creating the heavens and the earth for man, organizing it for his habitation. And everyone here knows that we need the creation. We need the land, we need the sea, we need the plants, we need the sun, moon and stars, we need the birds and the animals. These are all things man depends upon for survival. Here's the kicker, when man fell he continued to depend upon these things. He ate the food from the field, he warmed himself in the sun, he planted in the earth, he told time by the stars. But he did not give thanks to God. This is Romans 1. Instead of thanking God for all that He constantly provides, man made an exchange and worshipped and served the creation rather than the Creator. So what God originally created for men's habitation and enjoyment; man continues to use but autonomously, without giving thanks to God, and even turning to worship the creation as an idol. This is the environmental movement, the tree huggers, the mother earth, Gaia people who God turns over to the lusts of their own hearts when they don't give Him thanks for all these things. And here we will see He is taking them away. He is saying, you use these things that I provide but you don't give thanks, so I'm going to take them away so that you will repent.

So keeping in mind the big picture of what's going on, let's look at 8:1. **When the Lamb broke the seventh seal.** Remember, this is a seven sealed document. Initially, no one was found who could open it but then the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the root and offspring of David was seen as overcoming so as to break the seals. He is the Lamb who was slain for our sins but raised to new life. Here He breaks **the seventh seal.** When He broke it they all saw what was coming and the result is that **there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.** Here's an indication that there is the passage of time in heaven. Lots of people don't believe that but Scripture seems to teach that at this time thirty minutes will pass in heaven with complete **silence.** This is an ominous thing because **silence** is one of the most uncomfortable things for humans to bear. There is a room in the world that boasts of being the quietest room. It has all kinds of sound dampening material that absorbs every soundwave. The longest anyone has been able to endure being in that room is the creator of the room; 47 minutes. Here there will be silence for 30 minutes. That is a long time. But what they saw was so stunning that they were speechless. In verse 2 we see what they saw through John's eyes. **And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.** Here is how we get our understanding of these

judgments as chronological and telescopic. By chronological we mean they happen one after another in a sequence; the seals before the trumpets, the trumpets before the bowls. By telescopic we mean that like a telescope can lengthen and expand so the last seal expands into seven trumpets and the last trumpet expands into the seven bowls. We make this point because there have been commentators who thought the seals, trumpets and bowls overlapped so that seals, trumpets and bowls were all going on at the same time. But here we see that the seventh seal opens up and is the seven trumpets. That argues for the judgments being both chronological and telescopic.

At this time those in heaven were overwhelmed to imagine that there are now seven more judgments slated to befall the earth because the first six seals brought death on an unprecedented scale. If you remember, during the fourth seal $\frac{1}{4}$ of the earth's population was killed. That is a massive judgment. But remember also that that's not nearly all the people that will be killed during the seal judgments because many died during war under the second seal or by the great shaking under the sixth seal. It probably would not be a stretch to say $\frac{1}{3}$ of the earth's population is killed during the first six seals. And that all occurs over about the first $1\frac{1}{2}$ -2 years of the Tribulation. The gravity of $\frac{1}{3}$ of the earth's population being killed is more than anyone can imagine. We are talking 2.3 billion people. 1 out of every 3 people on the planet. With such destruction already having taken place, when those in **heaven** are given a foreview of more judgment to come they are struck with **silence**.

The seven judgments are announced by **seven angels** with **seven trumpets**. **Angels** dominate the pages of the Revelation and are heavily involved in the judgments of God that come upon the earth. **Trumpets** are common in Scripture as a signaling device. They signal the feasts of Israel, the gathering for war, etc... Because there are seven trumpets some take the last trumpet and try to identify that with the trumpet related to the rapture in 1 Thess 4:16 and 1 Cor 15:52. This gives the mid-trib position. It's true that the trumpet in 1 Thess 4:16 and 1 Cor 15:52 are one and the same trumpet. But it's not clear that they are the seventh trumpet in this series, recorded in Rev 11:15. Nothing in the context is the same and the seventh trumpet in this series is not the rapture but the bowl judgments. So very few have held to a mid-trib position. It is inherently unstable and so people generally opt for one of the two more stable positions, pre- or post-trib. We maintain a pre-trib position and we added one argument to that last week in Rev 7 by noting that at the present time the Church is given the stewardship responsibility to go to all nations, but in Rev 7 the stewardship responsibility is given to 144,000 Jews. So, the Church must be gone. In any case, trumpets are common in Scripture as signaling devices and they will be used by these angels to announce the coming judgments.

Now verses 3, 4 and 5 are very significant as they show that prayer plays a role in the release of the trumpet judgments. In verse 3 **Another angel who came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne**. Now this is in the heavenly temple, which is the true temple, which Moses saw, and after which he was instructed to build a copy on earth. In the true temple there is a golden **altar** of incense in the

Holy Place just outside the veil that separates it from the Most Holy Place. Here we see an angel, much like a priest, coming into this room and standing **at the altar**. He entered **holding a golden censer**. A **censer** was a container in which incense was carried and burned. **Much incense was given to him**. The purpose of which was **that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne**. The incense is not the **prayers** but it is added to the **prayers of the saints**. In some way this addition of the incense makes **the prayers of the saints** go up before God as a pleasing aroma. Significantly, this is **the prayers of all the saints**. In other words, there is a collection of prayers of all saints that has been building up over the course of history which will be answered at this time. What is this prayer? It might be a prayer similar to the prayer in Rev 6:9-11 which was offered by the martyrs who asked God to execute justice on the earth by judging those who killed them. But it is more likely the most well-known and famous prayer in the Bible. Turn to Matt 6:9. Now before we look at this prayer I want to note one thing about this prayer. People pray this all the time without thinking about what it means. If they understood what it means they might not pray it because the implications of this prayer are a request for the most intense judgment of God in the history of the world to be unleashed on the planet where mankind is taken to the brink of extinction. Here's the prayer, "Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven." Every time you pray that prayer you are praying for the kingdom of God to come and the kingdoms of this world to be judged. Because the kingdom of God is not heaven, it's not in another realm, it's not floating in the clouds. It's coming in place of the kingdoms of the world. The Daniel 2 statue and its destruction is the picture of this prayer. In that chapter, the statue is four parts; gold, silver, bronze and iron, with parts of iron mixed with clay. The four parts represent four kingdoms. Then a stone cut out without hands comes hurling through the sky and obliterates the entire statue and grows to fill the whole earth. It's a picture of what this prayer will accomplish; Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. This has never happened. Though many have prayed this prayer, it will not be answered until this incense is added to the pile of these prayers. The trumpet judgments are the beginning of the answer to this prayer. Now by application, if you've ever wondered if your prayers were going unanswered, or worse, not even heard, remember that this passage is saying there are prayers being stored up awaiting the right time for God to answer them. This means prayer is no trivial thing. This means prayer is not just praying in front of something. This means prayer is not a psychological phenomena. This means prayer is real and God is going to answer Biblical prayers in due time.

So this angel takes **much incense** and adds it **to the prayers of all the saints** and puts it **on the golden altar...before the throne in heaven**. In 8:4, together, **the smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand**. Mixed in was a pleasant aroma before God so that now it is time to answer that prayer and bring the kingdom of God from heaven to earth which involves the destruction of kingdoms on this earth. In 8:5 **Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake**. The throwing of the censer from heaven to earth signifies heaven's answer to the prayers. "The

censer thus became a symbolic instrument of judgment in response to prayer.”¹ The **peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and earthquake** all occurred in heaven to signify the judgment that is about to come upon the earth. In 8:6 **the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.**

In 8:7 we come to the first trumpet. Now observe that the first four trumpets are set off in the same way that the first four seals were set off. The first four seals have been designated the four horsemen of the apocalypse and they trace the early career of the anti-Christ. The first four trumpets don't have a name but we might designate them the four judgments on thirds of creation because in each one a third of some area of creation is destroyed. These areas of creation were made for man and man depends upon for survival but man does not give thanks. Instead he made an exchange and worshipped and served the creation rather than the Creator. Because of that God is now going to obliterate one third of them. So they are not direct judgments upon man but they are indirect. The fifth and sixth trumpets will be direct. Robert Thomas said, “In contradistinction to the last three trumpets, the first four afflict natural objects, i.e., earth, trees, grass, rivers, and the like. The fifth and sixth have men as their special objects, and unlike the first four which are connected and interdependent, are separate and independent. In contrast to these two, the first four have only an indirect effect on mankind.” We might also observe that the trumpets are more intense than the seals. The seals used the proportion of one quarter. The trumpets use the proportion of one third. Thus, the trumpets are an intensification of judgment in the Tribulation. I place the trumpets in the first half of the tribulation, beginning about 1 ½ to 2 years into the Tribulation and ending at the mid-point. I think chapters 10-13 are giving us information at the mid-point, so chapters 6-9 that precede those chapters are the first half, and chapters 14-18 that follow those chapters, and include the bowls, are the second half. But through it all there is an intensification as you move from one-quarter in the seals to one-third in the trumpets to all in the bowls. So the intensification will continue through the trumpets and bowls until the kingdom comes. This follows the theme of birth pangs of Messiah which is OT terminology for the Tribulation. When a woman is pregnant and she starts to have birth pangs, they intensify until the baby is born. In the same way, when the world begins to experience birth pangs, they will intensify until the kingdom of God comes. It's going to get really intense. I'm not sure many Christians really understand that one of the major purposes of the Tribulation is to exterminate every man, woman, child, animal and bird on the planet. God is putting pressure, tremendous pressure on the world to receive Christ. And through this many will receive Christ. But this is the only way to get people to wake up by this time. So when you see this you understand another reason why the Church is not present on earth during the Tribulation. We're already believers. There really is no purpose for the Church to be in the Tribulation. And ministry to all the nations is being carried out by Jews. So as far as we are concerned, when we read these things what they should do for us is motivate us to tell people the gospel so they will be part of the Church and escape these things by way of the Rapture.

In 8:7 the **first angel sounded**. The result was **hail and fire, mixed with blood**. This is a bloody fire and ice precipitation that was **thrown to the earth**. The result was **a third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up**. He's hitting areas of creation that man depends upon, but that man worships. A third of the earth burning up is really unthinkable. The consequences will be dramatic. No drought in the history of the world can even reasonably be compared to this. The environmental repercussions will be astounding and it will happen over two or three months and when you think that it couldn't get any worse, verse 8, **the second angel will sound**. At this time **something like a great mountain burning with fire** will be **thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood, and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed**. The sea turning to literal blood, not like blood, blood. What do the first two trumpets remind you of? The Exodus plagues. Why does it resemble the Exodus plagues? Because in Egypt every part of creation had an idol attached to it. They were nature worshippers. Ancient environmentalists. They had the goddess of the Nile, a goddess of fertility, the goddess of frogs, etc., etc., God was judging all the gods and goddesses of Egypt to show them that He is the only true God. Why is God doing that again, but on a much larger scale? To show the world that He is the only true God and they should only worship Him. The world are idolaters. So there are many similarities between the Exodus and these trumpet judgments and that is why the OT prophets viewed the Tribulation in terms of the Exodus plagues. It's one of the reasons some people think Moses will be one of the two witnesses. In any case, under the second trumpet, a third of sea life will die because the water turns to blood. That is going to shake the world up pretty seriously. The cause is **something like a great mountain burning with fire**, perhaps a giant meteor, being **cast into the sea**. I imagine the sea being blood for a few months but then, just like an Exodus plague, when it is removed another one comes. In 8:10 **the third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch**. As it entered the atmosphere it broke into pieces which with laser precision were caused to fall **on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters**, causing pollution and thirst for the third of earth's inhabitants who depend upon them. What is being made clear is that nature is not self-sustaining and there is nothing man can do to fix the environment. God is in control and God is in control of nature and man cannot live without Him. In 8:11 we are told **the name of the star is called Wormwood**, which is the Greek *αψιθιον* which means "bitterness" and is the name of a poisonous herb, from which we gather that the waters are polluted beyond drinkability. And that is why we read that **a third of the waters became poisonous, and many men died from the waters, because they were made** poisonous. Millions will die from this water. Billions of people will have died by this point, probably more than 1/2 of the world's population and it's still just the first half, only 2-2 1/2 years have elapsed, there is still 4-5 years to go and the more immense judgments are still to come. If this was not bad enough, in 8:12 the second cosmic disturbance comes when **the fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way**. Such a cosmic effect would cause changes in plant growth, biological rhythms effecting men with famine, sleeplessness and loss of track of time. The world will be reeling to try to survive and that's not even the worst of

it. Now that creation itself has been decimated, reminding men that nature is not to be worshipped, only the God of creation is to be worshipped, and idolatry should be put away, men should repent, have a change of mind about God, but in 8:13 it is going to get worse. The judgments are going to shift from areas of creation that man depends upon to survive, to judgments upon man directly.

Then I looked, and I 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! A pronouncement of **woe** is a pronouncement of extreme pain. In the gospels, Jesus pronounced woe on the Pharisees. A triple pronouncement of **woe** is a pronouncement of unbearable pain. What is coming in the fifth, sixth and seventh trumpets is designated specifically for **those who dwell on the earth**, that is, the earthdwellers, the technical phrase for persistent unbelievers. Unbelievers who have decided that earth is their home and they are not going to believe in Christ and so they must go the way of pain because of their rebellion and callousness of heart.

So the judgments on thirds of creation are now complete. When you think of a third of each of these areas you are talking about a land surface area larger than North and South American, a sea the size of the Pacific, so the immensity of these judgments is beyond anything we can imagine. One author said, “People today are very concerned about saving the environment. Fears about the depletion of the ozone layer, pollution, the destruction of the rain forests, and global warming are constantly in the news. 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. 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. . . . Fallen mankind has failed to recognize and honor God as Creator, choosing instead to make a god out of the earth. But the environmental, evolutionary pantheism that devalues man, elevates animals and plants, and ignores the Creator will be severely judged. “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.” Yet through it all the 144,000 will be protected so they can minister the gospel to unbelievers. Those who respond by faith may die, but they will stand in the last day, victorious over death and co-ruler with Christ on the earth.

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Re 8:5.