

The Book of Revelation, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 8: The Seven Trumpets Sound

Revelation 8:1–9:21

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this lesson must establish how to read the seven trumpets rightly, because this is exactly the passage where premillennial and dispensational systems go badly astray. Teach the trumpets as a recapitulating cycle of partial, warning judgments that God sends across the whole age between Christ's comings, not a chronological countdown to a future seven-year tribulation and not a code for modern headlines. The repeated "a third" is the key: these blows are limited on purpose because they are not the end but the alarm before it. The plagues are cast in the shape of Egypt's plagues to show that the same God who judged Pharaoh still warns a hardened, idolatrous world, calling it to repentance. The class should leave able to say plainly why the trumpets are mercy in the form of severity, and why any literal calendar reading misses the text's own point, sealed by the verdict of 9:20, "the rest of mankind... did not repent."

Just as importantly, this lesson aims at the heart of the student. The passage opens with silence and rising prayer, assuring suffering believers that their prayers reach the throne and shape what God does. It marks the sealed as untouchable even amid demonic torment, steadying the fearful. And it ends with a sober mirror: a world that heard every warning and would not turn. The aim is not merely to inform students how to interpret trumpets but to move them to pray with confidence, to rest in God's sealing, and above all to examine their own hearts. The trumpets are still sounding. The most dangerous response to this lesson is to study it and remain, like the rest of mankind, unrepentant.

So hold both together. The student should leave with clearer conviction (these are God's merciful, recapitulating warnings, not a futurist timetable) and with a softened, examined heart (taking God's warnings seriously and turning while there is time). Doctrine that diagnoses everyone else's hardness but never our own has missed the point of chapter 9.

Question 1

Student Question:

The seventh seal opens not into a louder vision but into "silence in heaven for about half an hour" (8:1), and then an angel offers incense so that "the prayers of the saints" rise before God (8:3–4). Why does heaven fall silent, and what does it mean that the prayers of suffering, ordinary believers are gathered and presented at the very throne of God before any judgment falls?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

After the crescendo of the first six seals, the seventh opens into stillness: "silence in heaven for about half an hour" (8:1). The silence is not emptiness but reverence and expectancy, the

universe holding its breath as God prepares to act. It is the hush of a courtroom before the verdict, the quiet that says something weighty and holy is about to happen.

Into that silence steps an angel at the golden altar, offering incense “with the prayers of all the saints” (8:3). This is the answer to the martyrs’ cry under the altar in 6:9–10, “how long?” Their prayers have not evaporated. They are gathered, mingled with incense, and presented at the very throne of God. The smoke of those prayers rises before Him (8:4), and then the angel fills the censer with altar-fire and hurls it earthward (8:5). The trumpet judgments that follow come, in part, as God’s response to the prayers of His suffering people.

For a persecuted church this is staggering comfort. To Rome, these believers were nobodies whose prayers meant nothing. Heaven says otherwise. The prayers of ordinary, hurting saints are kept like treasured incense and move the hand of God in history. Keep the reading symbolic and pastoral: this is not a timetable but a window into how heaven values the prayers of the faithful.

Help the class feel both the awe of the silence and the dignity given their prayers. The same God before whom heaven falls silent bends to receive the whispered prayers of His weakest child.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues
- The silence is reverent expectancy before God acts, not emptiness (8:1).
- The prayers of suffering saints are gathered and presented at God’s throne (8:3–4).
- This answers the martyrs’ cry of 6:9–10; God has not forgotten His people’s prayers.
- Read the scene pastorally and symbolically, not as a chronological countdown.
- Heaven honors the prayers of ordinary, persecuted believers as precious incense.

Discussion Prompts

- Why might heaven fall silent before the trumpets sound?
- What does it mean that the saints’ prayers are kept and presented at the throne?
- How does this scene answer the martyrs’ cry of “how long?” in chapter 6?

Question 2

Student Question:

The angel takes fire from the same altar where the saints’ prayers ascended and throws it to the earth (8:5). When you pray under pressure, do you actually believe your prayers reach the throne and matter to what God does? What would change this week if you prayed like someone heaven is listening to?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the altar scene toward the student. The same fire the angel takes from the altar (8:5) is the altar where the prayers of the saints ascended (8:3–4). The unmistakable

message is that the prayers of God's people and the actions of God in history are connected. Heaven is not indifferent to what believers cry out under pressure.

Press gently on our practical unbelief. Many of us pray as a duty or a last resort, not really expecting our words to reach anywhere or change anything. The text confronts that quiet despair. Our prayers are not lost in the ceiling; they rise as incense before the throne of the God who governs all things.

Move the class toward a changed practice. James says "the prayer of a righteous person has great power" (James 5:16). If we believed heaven were actually listening, we would pray more honestly, more boldly, and more often. Invite each student to name one situation where they have stopped praying out of discouragement, and to take it back to the altar this week as someone heaven hears.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues
- The prayers of the saints and God's action in history are linked (8:3–5).
- Practical unbelief treats prayer as duty or last resort, expecting nothing.
- Scripture insists believing prayer has real power before God (James 5:16).
- Faithful endurance includes praying boldly as those heaven actually hears.

Discussion Prompts

- Do we really pray as though heaven is listening? Why or why not?
- Where have we stopped praying out of discouragement?
- What would change this week if we prayed like our prayers reach the throne?

Question 3

Student Question:

As the trumpets sound, the judgments are deliberately partial: "a third of the earth was burned up" (8:7), a third of the sea, a third of the waters, a third of the sun and moon and stars (8:8–12). Read symbolically, what is God teaching by striking a third and not the whole, and how does this "a third" reveal that these are warning judgments and not the final, total end?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

As the trumpets sound, John keeps repeating one limiting word: a third. "A third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees" (8:7); a third of the sea, a third of the rivers, a third of the heavenly lights (8:8–12). The number is symbolic, not a precise measurement. To strike a third is to strike a significant but partial portion, real judgment that stops well short of total destruction.

This is the interpretive key to the whole passage, so make it clear. These are warning judgments, not the final end. If God meant to make an end, He would strike the whole. By striking only a third, He signals restraint and patience. The trumpet is, by its very nature, an alarm, a summons

meant to be heard and heeded, not the last word. The full and final judgment still lies ahead; the trumpets sound to call a rebellious world to turn before it comes.

Hold the amillennial, recapitulating reading firmly. The trumpets are not a chronological sequence ticking toward a future seven-year tribulation. They portray God's repeated, partial judgments throughout the whole age between Christ's comings, the wars, disasters, and upheavals through which a patient God keeps sounding His warning. The same age-long conflict is being replayed from a new angle.

Draw out the mercy hidden in the math. A third, and not the whole, is the measure of God's patience. Every partial judgment is a postponed final one, a space still left for repentance. The God who could end it withholds His hand and sounds the trumpet instead, because He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues
- "A third" is symbolic of a partial, limited judgment, not a literal measurement (8:7-12).
- Partial judgments signal that these are warnings, not the final, total end.
- The trumpets recapitulate God's repeated warnings across the whole age, not a future tribulation countdown.
- Restraint in judgment reveals God's patience and His call to repentance (Ezekiel 33:11).

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God strike only "a third" and not the whole?
- How does the partial nature of these judgments show they are warnings?
- What does this restraint reveal about God's heart toward a rebellious world?

Question 4

Student Question:

These trumpet plagues fall again and again across the whole age, hail and fire, water turned bitter, darkness, sounding their alarm over and over. Where in your own life has God sounded a repeated warning, the same lesson coming back around, and how have you been responding to a God patient enough to warn you more than once?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question presses the recapitulating pattern of the trumpets into the student's own experience. Just as God sounds the same kind of warning again and again across the age, He often sounds repeated warnings in a single life, the same lesson coming back around, the same conviction stirring, the same consequence returning until we finally listen.

Help the class see the patience in the repetition. A God who warns only once and then strikes would be just; a God who warns again and again is merciful. Romans 2:4 says it is the kindness

of God that is meant to lead us to repentance. Every repeated warning is a fresh act of that kindness, a door still standing open.

Invite honest reflection without shame. Where has the same lesson come around more than once? A relationship that keeps fracturing the same way, a temptation that keeps winning, a restlessness that will not quiet. The aim is not guilt but response. Name the recurring warning, and name one concrete way to finally turn toward the God patient enough to sound it more than once.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues
- God often sounds repeated warnings in a single life, mirroring the recapitulating trumpets.
- Repeated warning is an act of God's kindness meant to lead us to repentance (Romans 2:4).
- Each renewed warning is a door of mercy still standing open.
- Faithful living means responding to God's warnings rather than ignoring them.

Discussion Prompts

- Where has the same warning or lesson come back around in your life?
- How is a God who warns more than once showing mercy, not just patience?
- What is one concrete way to respond to a recurring warning this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

The trumpet plagues deliberately echo the plagues of Egypt, hail and fire (8:7; Exodus 9:23–25), water turned to blood (8:8; Exodus 7:20–21), and darkness (8:12; Exodus 10:21–23). What is John teaching the church by casting these judgments in the shape of the Exodus, and what does it tell us about the God who reigns over a rebellious world?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

John shapes the trumpet plagues to look like the plagues of Egypt on purpose. Hail and fire fall on the earth (8:7) as they fell on Pharaoh (Exodus 9:23–25). The sea and rivers turn to blood (8:8–10) as the Nile did (Exodus 7:20–21). The sun, moon, and stars are darkened (8:12) as Egypt lay in darkness (Exodus 10:21–23). For a church soaked in the Scriptures, the echo is unmistakable.

The point is theological, not merely literary. The Exodus is the great Old Testament picture of God judging a proud, oppressive, idolatrous world-power and delivering His people out of its grip. By casting these judgments in Exodus shape, John tells the suffering church a powerful word: the God who broke Pharaoh still reigns, and He still strikes the hardened, idolatrous world that oppresses His people. Rome is the new Egypt, and her Pharaohs will fare no better.

Keep the amillennial frame. This is not a forecast of literal future plagues on a literal future empire; it is the unveiling of how God deals with beastly, God-defying world-power throughout

the age, in the pattern set at the Exodus. The same divine warfare against entrenched evil recurs until the end.

Let the class draw comfort and warning together. To God's oppressed people, the Exodus shape says: your Deliverer is at work, and the empire will not have the last word. To a hardened world, it says: the God of the plagues is not mocked, and Pharaoh's road ends badly.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues
- The trumpet plagues deliberately echo the Exodus plagues (Exodus 7–10; Revelation 8:7–12).
- The Exodus is the pattern of God judging proud, idolatrous, oppressive world-power.
- Rome (and every later persecutor) stands as a new Egypt under the same God.
- Read this as God's age-long way with beastly powers, not a forecast of literal future plagues.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does John shape these judgments to look like Egypt's plagues?
- What does the Exodus pattern say to a church suffering under Rome?
- How does the God of the plagues comfort His people and warn the proud?

Question 6

Student Question:

The Exodus plagues fell on Egypt but spared God's people in Goshen; here the demonic locusts may harm only those "who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads" (9:4). How does it steady your heart to know that the very torments these chapters describe cannot touch the one God has sealed as His own?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question links the Exodus echo to the sealing of chapter 7. At the Exodus, God's people in Goshen were spared the plagues that fell on Egypt. Here the demonic locusts are told they may harm only those "who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads" (9:4). The sealed, the people God has marked as His own, are off-limits to the very torments these chapters describe.

Make the comfort concrete. The seal is not a magic charm against all earthly hardship; faithful believers still suffer and even die in Revelation. But it is God's unbreakable claim of ownership, His pledge that the deepest harm, the torment of the pit, the second death, cannot touch those who belong to Him. "The Lord knows those who are his" (2 Timothy 2:19).

Guard against false security at the same time. The seal belongs to those who are God's, those who have come to Christ on His terms and remain faithful to Him. Within the Church-of-Christ understanding, we wear that seal not by a bare profession or a once-saved-always-saved presumption but by belonging to Christ and enduring in Him (Revelation 2:10; 3:5). Steady the

faithful heart: if you are His, the worst these chapters describe cannot lay a finger on you. Then call every heart to make sure it truly bears the seal.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues
- The sealed are untouchable by the demonic torment of chapter 9 (9:4), echoing Goshen at the Exodus.
- The seal is God's unbreakable claim of ownership, not a charm against all hardship (2 Timothy 2:19).
- The deepest harm, the torment of the pit and the second death, cannot touch those who are Christ's.
- We bear the seal by belonging to Christ and enduring faithfully, not by presumption (Revelation 2:10; 3:5).

Discussion Prompts

- How does the sealing of chapter 7 protect God's people here in chapter 9?
- What does the seal protect against, and what does it not promise to spare us from?
- How can we be sure we truly bear the seal of God?

Question 7

Student Question:

Out of the bottomless pit come locusts with the faces of men, the teeth of lions, and the tails of scorpions, led by a king named Destroyer (9:7–11), and from the Euphrates an army of two hundred million (9:16). Reading these as symbols of real demonic torment and overwhelming judgment rather than literal insects or modern weapons, what are these armies meant to show a complacent, idolatrous world?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The imagery turns nightmarish: a star falls, the bottomless pit opens, and out boils smoke and then locusts with crowns, human faces, women's hair, lions' teeth, iron breastplates, and scorpions' tails, led by a king named Abaddon and Apollyon, that is, Destroyer (9:7–11). Then comes a cavalry of two hundred million from the Euphrates (9:16). These are not literal insects or literal soldiers, and they are emphatically not modern helicopters, missiles, or armies to be matched to headlines.

Read them as what the text presents them to be: symbols of real demonic torment and overwhelming, terrifying judgment loosed upon a world that has chosen the darkness. The locusts come from the pit, the abode of evil, and their king is the Destroyer. They picture the anguish that descends when God hands a hardened world over to the very powers it preferred to Him. The Euphrates army pictures judgment vast and unstoppable, the kind of overwhelming force God can unleash against the impenitent.

Keep the Church-of-Christ guardrail firm against date-setting and newspaper exegesis. Matthew 24:36 and Acts 1:7 forbid us to assign these symbols to specific modern persons, nations, weapons, or dates. The two hundred million is a symbolic number for an overwhelming host, not a census of a future army. To turn these visions into a code for current events is to abandon the text for speculation.

Draw out the sobering point. These armies show a complacent, idolatrous world what it is really courting. Sin is not harmless; to refuse God is to invite torment, to give oneself over to the Destroyer. The vision is a mercy precisely because it is terrible, a warning vivid enough to wake the sleeping if they will be woken.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues
- The locusts and the Euphrates army are symbols of demonic torment and overwhelming judgment, not literal insects, weapons, or modern armies (9:7–16).
- Their origin (the pit) and their king (Destroyer) mark them as the powers of evil a hardened world has chosen.
- Reject date-setting and matching symbols to modern headlines or technologies (Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:7).
- The two hundred million is a symbolic number for an overwhelming host, not a literal count.
- The vision warns a complacent world of the real torment of life given over to evil.

Discussion Prompts

- Why should we read the locusts and the Euphrates army as symbols rather than literal forces?
- What danger lies in matching these images to modern weapons or events?
- What is this terrifying vision meant to wake in a complacent world?

Question 8

Student Question:

John says these demonic locusts may not touch the sealed, yet they torment those who refused God for “five months” until people “will long to die, and death will flee from them” (9:5–6). What does this picture of restless, God-haunted misery say to anyone tempted to think life away from God is the free and comfortable road?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question lingers on a haunting detail. The locusts may not touch the sealed, but on those who refused God they inflict torment for “five months,” and “in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them” (9:5–6). This is the misery of a soul that has shut out God yet cannot escape the consequences of doing so.

Use it to confront a lie our culture tells loudly: that life away from God is the free, comfortable, unburdened road, and that the believer is the one who misses out. Scripture says the opposite.

“The way of the transgressor is hard” (Proverbs 13:15). A life built against God becomes restless, God-haunted, unable even to find rest in the death it sometimes craves.

Be tender here, because some in the class may know this restlessness firsthand, in themselves or in someone they love. The point is not to gloat over the misery of the lost but to expose the false advertising of sin and to make the gospel attractive. Augustine’s old confession fits: our hearts are restless until they rest in God. The five months of torment is finally an invitation, a warning that the only road to rest runs back to the One we were made for.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues
- Life apart from God is restless and God-haunted, not free and comfortable (9:5–6; Proverbs 13:15).
- The culture’s lie says sin is the easy road and faith is missing out; Scripture says the reverse.
- The misery of the lost exposes the false advertising of sin and commends the gospel.
- The human heart finds rest only in the God who made it.

Discussion Prompts

- How does our culture sell life apart from God, and how does this vision answer it?
- Where have you seen the “hard way of the transgressor” play out?
- How can this sober picture make the gospel more, not less, attractive?

Question 9

Student Question:

After every trumpet, after fire and bitterness and darkness and torment, the sobering verdict falls: “The rest of mankind... did not repent of the works of their hands” (9:20), clinging still to idols “which cannot see or hear or walk” and to their murders, sorceries, immorality, and thefts (9:20–21). On the basis of this text, explain why these partial judgments are best understood as God’s merciful, age-long call to repentance (compare Romans 2:4–5; 2 Peter 3:9), and why we must reject reading the trumpets as a date-stamped countdown to a future seven-year tribulation or as a code for modern headlines (Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:7).

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here is the doctrinal heart of the lesson, and the verse the whole passage has been driving toward. After the burning, the bitter waters, the darkness, and the locust torment, John records the tragedy: “The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands” (9:20). They cling to idols “which cannot see or hear or walk,” and to their murders, sorceries, sexual immorality, and thefts (9:20–21). This single verse unlocks the meaning of the trumpets. Their whole purpose was to bring people to repentance, and the heartbreak is that a hardened world would not turn.

Establish the central truth plainly: the trumpets are God’s merciful, age-long call to repentance. This is exactly how the New Testament speaks of God’s judgments and delays. “God’s kindness

is meant to lead you to repentance,” Paul says, warning against “storing up wrath” through a hard, impenitent heart (Romans 2:4–5). “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise... but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). The partial judgments, the repeated “a third,” the warnings cast in Exodus shape, all of it is God shouting through trumpets so that sinners would hear and live. The judgments are severe precisely because the stakes are eternal and the love behind them is real.

Now state firmly what this passage is not, because this is where popular systems go wrong. The trumpets are not a date-stamped countdown to a future seven-year tribulation. Nothing in the text supports a literal calendar; the numbers are symbolic (a third, five months, two hundred million), the imagery is apocalyptic, and the structure is recapitulation, the same age-long warning replayed, not a straight-line schedule of the last seven years of world history. Premillennial and dispensational readings impose a timetable the text never gives and then try to read it off the morning news. Scripture forbids exactly this: “concerning that day and hour no one knows” (Matthew 24:36), and “it is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority” (Acts 1:7). To turn the trumpets into a code for current events is to set dates God has hidden and to miss the point He has revealed.

Press the point home against newspaper exegesis. Every generation that has tried to match these symbols to its own wars, rulers, and weapons has been wrong, and worse, has distracted the church from the trumpets’ actual summons. The trumpets are not about decoding the future; they are about repenting in the present. The question this text puts to every reader is not “when will this happen?” but “will I repent before it does?”

Let it land where John means it to land, on the heart. The most chilling thing in these chapters is not the locusts or the cavalry; it is a human heart so hardened that not even fire from heaven can move it. Warn the class with love that hardness is a real and present danger (Hebrews 3:12–13), and that the only safe response to a sounding trumpet is to turn, today, while it is still called today.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues
- The trumpets are God’s merciful, age-long call to repentance; 9:20–21 is the interpretive key.
- God’s judgments and delays are kindness meant to lead to repentance (Romans 2:4–5; 2 Peter 3:9).
- Reject reading the trumpets as a literal countdown to a future seven-year tribulation; the structure is recapitulation, not a timetable.
- Reject date-setting and matching symbols to modern headlines or technology (Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:7).
- The numbers (a third, five months, two hundred million) are symbolic of partial, limited, or overwhelming realities, not calendar data.

- Hardness of heart is the real danger; the only safe response to God's warning is present repentance (Hebrews 3:12–13).

Discussion Prompts

- How does 9:20–21 reveal the whole purpose of the trumpets?
- Why must we reject reading the trumpets as a literal seven-year-tribulation countdown or a code for current events?
- What does it expose about the human heart that even these warnings did not bring repentance?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across both chapters, the holy silence, the rising prayers, the trumpets of warning, the sealed who cannot be touched, and the tragic refusal to repent. Name one specific way the Lord is using this passage to form you, whether to pray with new confidence, to take His warnings seriously, or to soften a place in your own heart where you have quietly refused to turn.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers both chapters and asks for one specific way the Lord is forming the student through them. The passage has moved us through the holy silence, the rising prayers of the saints, the trumpets of warning, the sealed who cannot be touched, and the tragic refusal of a hardened world to repent. Each scene presses toward a response.

Help students name a concrete, personal movement rather than a vague resolve. For one it may be a new confidence in prayer, believing afresh that heaven gathers and hears our cries. For another it may be a sober resolve to take God's warnings seriously instead of explaining them away. For another, and this is the heart of the lesson, it may be the honest confession of a place where they have been like the rest of mankind, hearing the alarm and refusing to turn.

Close by setting before the class the two ways these chapters offer. There is the way of the unrepentant, who hear every trumpet and will not turn, and there is the way of the sealed, who belong to the Lamb and endure. We become, over time, one or the other. Remind them with hope that the trumpet is still sounding, which means the door of repentance is still open. The God who warns so patiently is the God who longs to welcome everyone who turns to Him (2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 22:17).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues
- The passage aims at transformation, not just information; warnings are meant to move the heart.
- Possible movements: bolder prayer, sober attention to God's warnings, honest repentance.
- The chapters set two ways before us, the unrepentant and the sealed, and we become one or the other.

- The sounding trumpet means the door of repentance still stands open (2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 22:17).

Discussion Prompts

- Which scene in these chapters most affected you, and why?
- What specific movement is the Lord working in you, in prayer, in attention to His warnings, or in repentance?
- Where in your own heart do you need to turn while the trumpet is still sounding?