



# river west church

Divine Early Warning System

Revelation 8 & 9

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## **Sounding the Alarm**

In biblical times, they used a trumpet to sound the alarm. It was the early warning system of the ancient world. Today we have elaborate systems of sirens wired to a central emergency command center. Back then they just pulled out the trumpets and blew as loud as they could.

Go to the Book of Joel for a great example: “Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near” (Joel 2:1).

In Revelation 8:1, the seventh seal on the scroll of history is finally broken. First, there is a period of absolute silence. Then, seven trumpets are given to seven angels. Each trumpet blast ushers in cataclysmic events on the earth. These events are radical; they are “alarming” in the extreme sense of the word.

To understand these chapters we must keep two things in mind. First, the events portrayed are future events. Secondly, while the Book of Revelation is designed to point us to the future, its purpose is to impact and empower our lives in the present. That means these chapters can function like a divine early warning system for our lives and for our world.

## **Catastrophic Events in Nature**

The first four trumpet judgments involve catastrophic events in nature. These appear in chapter 8. The original readers of the Book of Revelation must have thought these events unimaginable. But we know better. We now know that the impact of a large asteroid on our planet could accomplish much of what is described in chapter 8. We also know about the dangers of nuclear power, nuclear weapons, engineered biological agents, as well as radical earthquakes and tsunamis, just to give a partial list of threats to our planet.

We are consistently shocked when natural disasters occur and lives are lost. But there is another way of looking at it. Consider the fragile nature of human life. Think about all the conditions that must be just right to sustain life on this planet. When you look at it that way, it seems like a miracle that we are alive at all! Indeed the Bible makes it clear that it is by God’s providence that our lives are sustained in this fragile world. If God were to let go of His restraining hand and let nature run wild, things would change instantly. And according to Revelation, that is exactly what is going to happen at God’s appointed time. Sound the alarm!

## **Evil Unmasked and Unrestrained**

Chapter 9 introduces a different kind of terror. Demonic powers are unleashed upon the world. People are first tormented and then, after a time, they are killed. The images are over-the-top and terrifying. Note carefully, these are powers of evil that were formerly restrained by the providence of God. But there is a day coming when God will no longer restrain them. In that day the full fury of evil will be unmasked and unrestrained.

The purpose of the chapter is to sound the alarm. The final verses give us the key. It says that people “still refused to repent of the works of their hands, nor give up worshipping demons and idols” (9:20). Demonic power is behind the idolatry, that’s the incredible truth. But that demonic power is veiled, it is alluring. The power of Revelation 9 is that it unmasks the evil of idolatry for what it is. It reminds us that the goal of Satan

has always been the same: to torment and destroy men and women, because they have been made in the image of God.

### **Who is Safe?**

The pressing question in chapters 8 and 9 is much the same as at the end of chapter 6: “Who can stand?” The answer is given in chapter 7: those who are sealed by God through faith in Christ. Remember, a seal is a sign of ownership. Those who belong to God through Christ are safe. That’s why only those who do not have the seal of God may be harmed by the demonic powers in chapter 9 (9:4).

It’s all so unbelievably intense! It is alarming. But it compels us to turn fully to Christ for our hope. That’s the point. The truth is, life is fragile, even in a world that is sustained by the providential restraining hand of God. The truth is, there is incredible evil in this world, even if that evil is currently “masked” and restrained. But the Book of Revelation shows us the big picture. It points us to the future, but as it does, it impacts our lives right here and right now. God cares for us. The Lamb of God has given everything for us. God’s justice and His redemptive love walk side by side in the Book of Revelation. May we hear the voice of His Spirit speaking through the message of Revelation and give our lives completely to Christ in faith!