A thick black L-shaped frame surrounds the text. It consists of a vertical line on the left, a horizontal line at the top, and another vertical line on the right. The horizontal line at the top is shorter than the vertical line on the left, and the vertical line on the right is shorter than the horizontal line at the bottom.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Chapters 9-10

Opening Prayer

Let us pray.

Direct, O Lord, we beseech you,
all our actions by your holy inspirations,
and carry them on by your gracious assistance,
that every prayer and work of ours
may begin always from you,
and by you be happily ended.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Source Material

- *Revelation*, Peter S. Williamson
- *Revelation, Sacra Pagina*, Wilfrid J. Harrington, OP
- *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Joseph Ratzinger
- *The Antichrist*, Vincent P. Miceli, SJ
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- *New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE)*
- *Douay-Rheims Bible*

Summary of chapter 8

- We saw the Lamb open the seventh seal of the scroll, which brought forth seven angels with seven trumpets.
 - *With each of these symbolic events, the coming of the Kingdom in its fullness draws ever nearer*
- We saw the gold censer, representing the prayers of the faithful upon the earth, hurled down from heaven. God was answering the prayers of his people, hastening the coming of the Kingdom
- As the first four angels blew their trumpets, they brought forth a series of natural disasters
 - *We saw how the intensity of the calamities was increasing*
 - *Whereas the first four seals (the four Horsemen) brought war and related tragedies to a quarter of the earth, the first four trumpets bring natural disasters affecting a third of the earth*

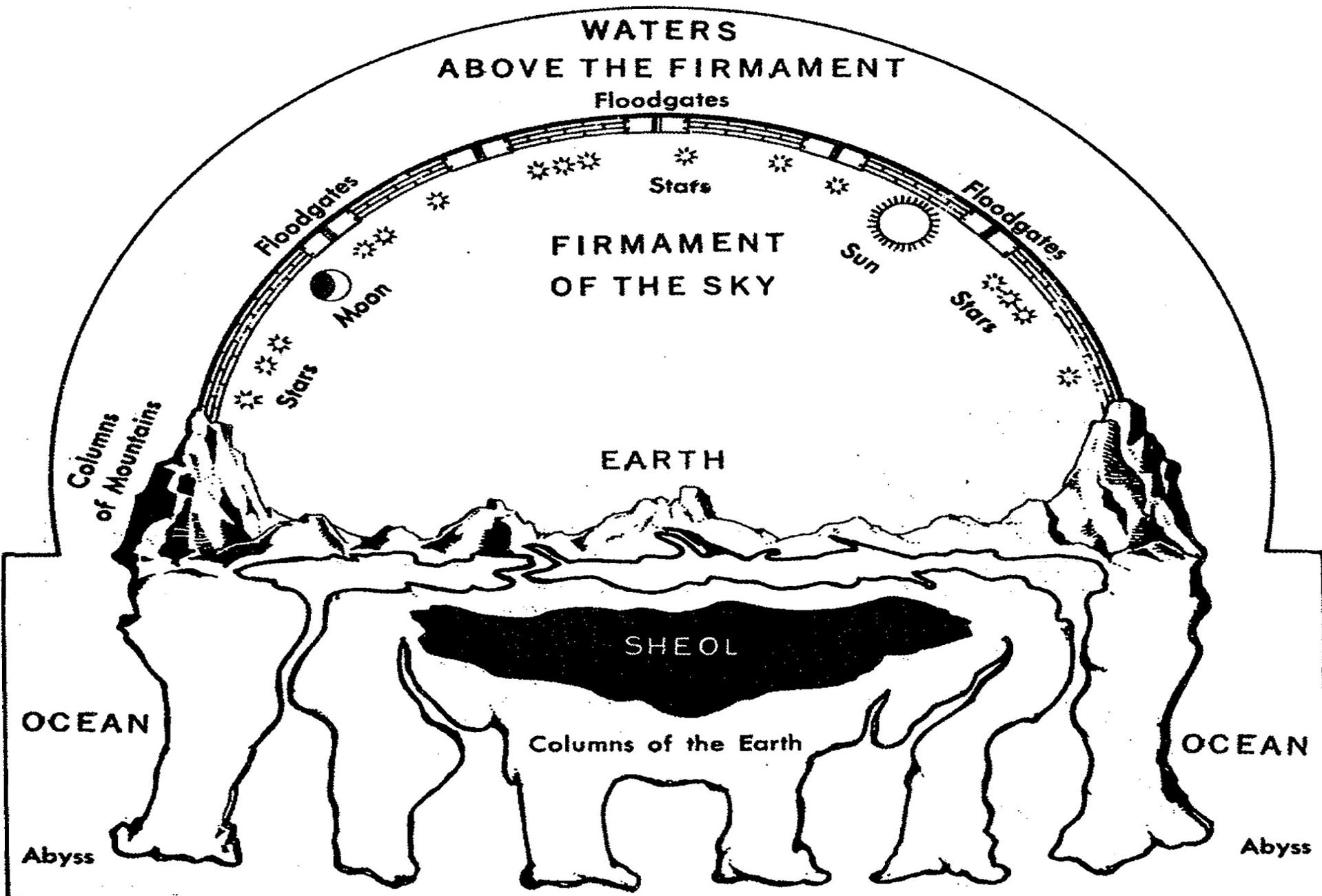
Summary of chapter 8

- At the end of chapter 8, we learn the true target of all these events – the “inhabitants of the earth,” those not among God’s people (not sealed) and who are working against the Kingdom
 - *We also hear of the coming three “woes” specifically targeting them*
 - *These events, especially the coming woes, are meant to call them to repentance*
- Chapter 9 will reveal the fifth and sixth trumpets, with the corresponding first and second “woes.”
 - *The events of this chapter represent some of the darkest calamities in Revelation and some of the strangest imagery in the entire book*
- Chapter 10 will see a “pause” in the action, the recommissioning of John and warning of bitter sufferings for the faithful ahead of the final battle

Excursus: The Abyss

- The deep waters of the sea, in the biblical mind, variously represent chaos and the abode of monsters and evil
- It was over these waters that the Spirit of God hovered (Gen 1:2), and in the creation narrative that follows, God separates the waters and forms dry land
 - *In other words, God brings order from chaos!*
- God created the earth (which was flat) and rested it on the pillars of the earth, which stretched deep into the abyss
- By NT times, the abyss came to represent the place of the dead, and more importantly, a place of evil and the 'provisional' abode of Satan and the fallen angels
- We will see the abyss mentioned seven times in Revelation, each time as a source or place of evil.

Heavenly Seat of the Divinity



The fifth trumpet (9:1-12)

“Star that had fallen”

- This is not a literal description of a star (or meteorite) falling from the sky, but is likely a reference to an angel falling to earth
 - probably Satan himself (Isa 14:12-14, Lk 10:18, Rev 12:7-9)
 - *We will learn at the end of the chapter that God allows this to happen in order to bring the “inhabitants of the earth” to repentance*
 - *It is a mystery, not fully knowable to us, that God allows evil to ‘run rampant’ for a time. But we see that their attacks are limited by God in terms of time and intensity. And we know the ultimate reason why God allows it.*
 - *From the “passage to the abyss” that is opened up, evil comes forth, in the image of a swarm of locusts*

The fifth trumpet (9:1-12)

Locusts

- A well-known pest in that part of the world, and a common biblical sign of God's judgment (Ex 10:15; Deut 28:38; 2 Chr 7:13; Jl 1:4-7, 2:25; Prov 30:27, Ps 78:46; 105:34; Na 3:15; Am 4:9; etc.)
- Often, as in the case here, a plague of locusts was not punitive but remedial – it was a call to repentance and change of heart
- But these are not locusts – rather an image for something else...
- Unlike earthly locusts, which harm vegetation, these locusts harm people – specifically those not having the seal (the 144,000 from chapter 7, representing those belonging to God.) In other words, the locusts were sent after the “inhabitants of the earth.”
 - *They are clearly the spawn of the evil abyss, and they are servants of the “angel of the abyss,” a point to which we will return*

The fifth trumpet (9:1-12)

God remains in control

- The swarm is limited in what it can do – it cannot kill, only torment, and is directed only at the ‘inhabitants of the earth’
- The torment is not endless but ‘only’ lasts five months (a typical lifespan of an earthly locust)
- Yet the inhabitants’ suffering is so intense that they long for death

Reference to Joel

- The book of Joel describes a similar swarm of locusts, which were likened to an army
- Here in Rev 9, a demonic army spewing from the abyss of evil is likened to a swarm of locusts
- We are witnessing evil being unleashed from the abyss, “biting the hand” of those who commit evil, allowed yet restrained by a merciful God in order to call evildoers to repentance.

The fifth trumpet (9:1-12)

Locusts' description

- Eight descriptors (seven is a number connoting wholeness and holiness, while eight refers to evil)
 - *“Horses ready for battle” – like a cavalry charge, a terrifying image*
 - *“Crowns of gold” – they seek to conquer and rule*
 - *“Human faces, women’s hair” – they resemble humanity, but their appearance is twisted. This is a good way to think about evil in general, as a “twisting” of the good.*
 - *“Lion’s teeth” – connoting a savage and fierce demeanor*
 - *“Chests like iron breastplates” – powerful and invulnerable*
 - *“Sound of many horse-drawn chariots” – a terrifying sound to people of the first century*
 - *“Tails like scorpions” – menacing and able to cause great pain*

The fifth trumpet (9:1-12)

Locusts' description

- Recall that these are not really locusts being described, but demons
 - *What John is conveying is the grotesque power of evil unbridled upon the 'inhabitants of the earth'*
 - *Their demonic origin is confirmed by their coming forth from the abyss and from the mention of their king*

"Angel of the abyss"

- The King of the demonic army unleashed
 - *"Abaddon" is a Hebrew word meaning "destruction"*
 - *"Apollyon" is Greek meaning "one who destroys"*
 - *Both refer to Satan or one of his subordinates*
- We conclude that the plague of locusts is a graphic representation of evil unleashed, ironically against the ungodly, in an effort to lead them to repentance.

The fifth trumpet – reflection (9:1-12)

- The pursuit of evil never bears good fruit in the end. (We'll certainly find this out at the end of Revelation) It is a central point of moral theology that one can never do evil so that good may come of it
- What we see here in chapter nine is perhaps a vision of evildoers being tormented – not physically so much as spiritually – by the very evil that they have pursued in life
- Common modern phrases
 - *'You reap what you sow'*
 - *Nietzsche – 'When you gaze long into the abyss, the abyss also gazes into you'*
 - *'Don't play with matches.' For some, this lesson is only learned after being burned*
 - *The fable of the frog and the scorpion*
- Again, God allows evildoers a taste of the fruits of their evil, that they might repent

The sixth trumpet (9:13-19)

■ Our timeframe

- *The events described here will take place right before the end, as the seventh trumpet coming next will herald the arrival of the Kingdom*
- *The calamities unleashed represent a final call to the “inhabitants of the earth” to repent and turn to God*
- *We will circle back to this same event and time period again later in the book from a different perspective, following the unusual pattern of John’s narrative*

■ Four angels

- *Likely fallen angels, since they were bound (i.e., held back from carrying out their deeds until the precise moment – “hour, day, month and year” – that God allowed)*
- *As we have seen, God remains absolutely in control, allowing these events only when and to the extent that he wills.*

The sixth trumpet (9:13-19)

■ Euphrates

- *Historically, the eastern limit of the original land promised to Israel, and the eastern limit of the Roman Empire during the first century*
- *The sense here is of a powerful threat from outside*

■ More severe

- *Whereas the locusts were not permitted to kill anyone, the fallen angels bring death to one-third of humanity*
- *The size of this army is overwhelming: 200 million. This is the largest number in the Greek language (10,000), multiplied by itself and then doubled.*
- *The army is likened to a great cavalry charge, a terrifying image to those in its path*

The sixth trumpet (9:13-19)

- Red, blue and yellow
 - *The colors of fire, smoke and sulfur – all images of divine judgment in Scripture*
 - *Fire and sulfur in particular, frequently mentioned together as “brimstone,” destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen 19*
 - *Three plagues here, plus seven more in chapter 15, equal 10 plagues total, like in Exodus*
 - *By means of these three, one-third of the human race is destroyed, an enormous number, yet still a minority*
- What is being described is an immense spiritual attack by demonic forces, with greater intensity than before
- Interesting mention of snakes and scorpions, as symbolic representations of this spiritual attack
 - *Recall what Jesus said: “Behold, I have given you power to tread upon serpents and scorpions and upon the full force of the enemy and nothing will harm you.” (Lk 10:19)*
 - *Through faith in Christ, spiritual attacks cannot harm us*

The sixth trumpet (9:13-19)

Reflection

- Let's recall that numbers in Revelation are typically symbolic, not literal – that is, they are qualitative, not quantitative
 - *The figures of the dead (from one-quarter in chapter 6 to one-third in chapter 9) represent an escalation, and while not a precise number, it appears that the death toll will be severe before the end*
- We also keep in mind a few things
 - *“the wages of sin is death.” (Rom 6:23) – human sinfulness, and not God's will, is the ultimate cause of death, both earthly and eternal.*

The sixth trumpet (9:13-19)

- Also, God has a different perspective of earthly death than we do
 - *Even someone living 100 years is just a blimp to God, a brief time in which we prepare for eternity with (or without) him*
 - *God knows that for some, long life will bring many good fruits, but for others may lead them astray.*
 - *God desires all to be saved – Christ came for everyone! – and infinitely more important than avoiding earthly death is avoiding eternal death (what Revelation will call the ‘second death.’)*
 - *Said another way, the most important thing is not earthly life but eternal life!*
 - *The tragedy of the earthly deaths prophesied before the end in Revelation 9 are meant to warn the ‘inhabitants of the earth’ (and all of us) of the greater tragedy to be avoided at all costs*
 - *For the faithful, “whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord,” (Rom 14:8), and “for to live is Christ and death is gain.” (Phil 1:21)*

The response (9:20-21)

- So how do the ‘inhabitants of the earth’ response to all these events?
 - *They do not repent. Wow.*
 - *Reminiscent of Pharaoh’s response to the plagues – he hardened his heart against the will of God (Ex 7-10)*
 - *They kept doing what they were doing – idolatry (worship of demons), murder, unchastity, robberies, etc.*
- Idolatry will be a big theme in the coming chapters
 - *“Latria” is the Greek word denoting the supreme worship due to God and allowed only to God*
 - *In its simplest definition, idolatry (“idol – latria”) is the worship of a false god (an idol) or worship of a creature (something or someone created by God)*
 - *In its broadest sense, idolatry refers to the preference or priority given to something other than God.*

Reflection

- The four “P’s” – power, pleasure, profit and prestige
 - *The disordered pursuit of any of these is a form of idolatry.*
 - *They are not evil in themselves, but when sought before God (i.e., when things are dis-ordered), they will ultimately bring about suffering and evil.*
 - *These are precisely the false promises of idolatry with which demonic forces seek to seduce us, at the cost of our souls (Faustian bargain)*
 - *The increased pursuit of these things, and the suffering they cause for so many, spurs us on to pray for those ensnared by them, and also to learn to recognize idolatry in all its forms and to avoid it*
- Keep in mind that as enormous and unstoppable as the evil army and its spiritual attack may seem in this chapter (and in the world today!), God is on his throne and in total control. Evil will reap its eternal recompense in the end, as will the faithful!

Chapter 10

- Just like we had a pause before the opening of the seventh seal, we also have a pause here before the sounding of the seventh trumpet
- Again, we are reminded that throughout everything that is happening, God reigns, and nothing can stand against his will
- There will be two visions recounted before the seventh trumpet
 - *The first here brings us back to the scroll, whose seven seals have been broken*
 - *Recall that the scroll represents God's plan to bring about the fullness of the Kingdom*
 - *We will not yet hear what it contains. John here will receive the opened scroll and also receive a new commission to prophesy its contents to the nations.*

The angel with the small scroll (10:1-7)

■ The angel's description

- *Several images describe his glorious appearance, all denoting the importance and divine source of his words*
- *Mighty, wrapped in a cloud, a halo around his head, his face like the sun, feet like pillars of fire – all reminiscent of God himself. (And how different from the demons' appearance!)*
- *If an angel looks like this, what must God himself look like!?*

■ Scroll

- *Described here as a 'small scroll,' but it is the same one we saw earlier in chapter five*

■ One foot on the land and one on the sea

- *The angel's message is to the whole world*

■ Loud voice, roar of a lion, seven thunders

- *All signs of God speaking, denoting the absolute authority of his words and will, as well as the totality of his power*

The angel with the small scroll (10:1-7)

- “Do not write”
 - *It appears that God is not revealing everything just yet*
- “No more delay”
 - *God’s judgment will be carried out. The definitive destruction of evil and the breaking forth of the Kingdom is about to happen*
 - *The seventh trumpet will signify its coming, when the “mysterious plan of God will be fulfilled,” the beginning of the final battle, and the salvation of his faithful ones.*

John's renewed commission (10:8-11)

- Eat the scroll
 - *Reminiscent of a similar passage in Ezekiel 2-3*
 - *Symbolic of a prophet receiving and incorporating the message of God into his very self, and thus being ready to proclaim it*
- “Sweet as honey” – referring to the words and will of God. This beautiful image is used several times in Scripture
 - *“When I found your words, I devoured them; your words were my joy, the happiness of my heart (Jer 15:16)*
 - *“Sweeter also than honey, or drippings from the comb” (Ps 19:11)*
 - *“How sweet are your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (Ps 119:103)*

John's renewed commission (10:8-11)

- “My stomach turned sour”
 - *Just as the scroll was sweet because it announced the coming of the Kingdom, it was sour because of the suffering of the faithful to come before the end*
 - *As the final battle approaches, the faithful will have much to endure in the form of temptations, spiritual attacks and physical persecution, yet they are to remember the sweetness of God's plan and trust in its fulfillment*
- “You must prophesy again”
 - *The message of the scroll is to be proclaimed to all “peoples, nations, tongues and kings”*
 - *No one is excluded from God's invitation to repentance and to salvation*

Next week...

- Class next Wednesday, February 3
- Coming up...
 - *The two witnesses*
 - *The seventh trumpet*
 - *The Woman and the Dragon*

- Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.