

Trumpets of Judgment

Revelation 8

John saw the Lamb open the first six seals in chapter 6. The seventh seal isn't opened until chapter 8. That is because chapter 7 interrupts the sequence of the seals to answer a question that is raised in connection with the sixth seal. That question is: "Who shall be able to stand in the judgment?" We saw the answer to that question in our study of chapter 7. Now chapter 8 picks back up with the seventh seal, and it also begins a new sequence—the series of seven trumpets. Let's see what Jesus is telling us in this chapter.

The Seventh Seal—Silence in Heaven

John sees the Lamb open the seventh seal.

When He [the Lamb] opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour (Revelation 8:1).

That's it. That is all that John has to say about the seventh seal. When each of the first six seals were opened, he described horses and horsemen and the souls of the martyrs in heaven under an altar. He described persecution and conquering the world for the gospel. He described earthquakes and the stars falling from the sky. You might think that the seventh seal would be the climax of the series and that it would have the most details of all. But John says only, "There was silence in heaven for about half an hour."

What does this mean?

Since so much of Revelation is couched in symbolic language, it is likely that this is symbolic time. We've seen throughout Daniel and Revelation that in Bible prophecy one prophetic day equals one literal year of actual time. So how long would a symbolic half hour be in literal time? Let's do the math. There are 24 hours in a day, so a prophetic half hour is 1/48th of a prophetic day. In biblical times a month was usually considered to be 30 days, so the year had 360 days—not 365. If we divide 360 days by 48 (the number of

half hours in a day) we get an answer of 7 ½. So a prophetic half hour would equal 7 ½ days of actual, literal time.

Why would there be silence in heaven for 7 ½ days? Heaven is a busy place. There are ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands and thousands of angels. Although heaven is a place of peace, I'm sure it isn't silent! The only way heaven could be silent is if there were no one there. And that is just what Matthew tells us is going to happen when Jesus returns to earth. Matthew says, "The Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father *with His angels*" (Matthew 16:27). How many angels is Jesus going to bring with Him when He comes? All of them! Heaven empties itself when Jesus leaves to return to earth! All the angels want to come with Him. None want to be left behind. They are all coming, because the graves are going to be opened. They are all coming, because they are going to take us home. It will be silent in heaven, because it will be empty for 7 ½ days while Jesus returns to earth. Heaven is even more eager for the Second Coming to take place than we are! But if our interpretation of Revelation 8:1 is correct, the journey from heaven to earth and back again will take 7 ½ days. Heaven stands empty and silent during that time, but it won't be silent when we all get there—Jesus, the Father, the Holy Spirit, the angels, and the redeemed. What a homecoming that will be!

The Seven Trumpets

John's vision moves immediately from the series of seven seals to a series of seven trumpets.

I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake. So the seven

angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound
(Revelation 8:2-6).

Before the trumpets sound, bringing judgments on the earth, we have this beautiful picture of our prayers ascending to heaven as incense where they are received at the very throne of God! Sometimes it seems to us that our prayers go no higher than the ceiling. Sometimes we don't really know what we should be praying for. We don't know how to express the desires of our hearts. But here John sees our prayers ascending from the angel's hand to the presence of God Himself like sweet-smelling incense. That should encourage us as we pray. Our prayers do reach heaven; God does listen. Our prayers are important to Him.

Then John sees the angel throw the censer of incense to the earth causing thunder and lightning and an earthquake. This is the language of judgment. The seven trumpets are God's sevenfold judgment down the seven major ages of history. In Bible times trumpets heralded two things. They heralded great political or religious gatherings. And they heralded the approach of war or disaster. Trumpets in the Bible are often associated with judgment.

These trumpets follow much the same outline as we have seen with the seven churches and the seven seals. They have some different details, but the sequence is similar. The seven churches depict the internal spiritual life of the church in every age from the beginning of Christianity to the end of time. There were seven literal churches, but those seven churches represented seven periods of time. The seven seals describe how Christianity made an impact on society and the world during these same time periods. The focus of the seven trumpets is to show God's judgments down through the centuries on those who rejected Him and who were caught up in apostasy. As we study these trumpets, we will see the following sequence:

First Trumpet—Judgment on Jerusalem.

Second Trumpet—Judgment on the Western Roman Empire.

Third Trumpet—Judgment on Apostate Christianity.

Fourth Trumpet—Judgment on Apostate Christianity Intensifies.

Fifth Trumpet—Judgment on the Eastern Roman Empire.

Sixth Trumpet—Judgment on the Eastern Roman Empire Intensifies.

Seventh Trumpet—Judgment on All Humanity.

Chapter 8 deals with the first four of these trumpets. Trumpets 5 and 6 are found in chapter 9. And the seventh trumpet doesn't appear until chapter 11.

The First Trumpet—Judgment on Jerusalem

The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up (verse 7).

Immediately, we realize that these trumpets are about destruction. Hail and fire, mingled with blood, are rained down upon the earth. Trees and grass are destroyed. But what does this mean? What is being destroyed? When does this take place? Can we determine when this first trumpet in the series begins?

Remember a principle we first discovered in the book of Daniel. Time prophecies in the Bible always begin at the time of the prophet receiving the prophecy. This is a basic principle of understanding the interpretation of the Bible's sequential time prophecies.

The Bible gives us another interesting clue about when this first trumpet begins. We find it in Luke's gospel. As Luke is describing Jesus being led to Calvary where He would die on the cross, he writes:

A great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him. But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!' . . . For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?" (Luke 23:27-31).

What is Jesus talking about? What was going to come upon Jerusalem? The whole city was going to be destroyed. The Romans were going to burn up Jerusalem and not leave one green tree. Blood would run in the streets. They were going to destroy that city! “Weep for yourselves,” Jesus told them. “Don’t weep for Me. If they crucify Me, the tree of righteousness, a green and living tree, what will they do when the trees are dry? The Romans will come and destroy you and your city.” That happened in A.D. 70.

Jesus uses the symbolism of the trees, and the first trumpet in Revelation burns up a third of the trees and the grass. The first trumpet sounds, and the nation and its religious leaders who have rejected Jesus are destroyed in the destruction of Jerusalem.

Who destroyed Jerusalem and persecuted Christians in those early centuries? Rome. So, Rome, too, faces judgment from God.

The Second Trumpet—Judgment on the Western Roman Empire

Then the second angel sounded: And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and third of the ships were destroyed (Revelation 8:8).

Often in the Bible a mountain represents a kingdom. So, the kingdom, or mountain, that overthrew Jerusalem would itself be destroyed in this period of the second trumpet. The judgments of God would fall on the Western Roman Empire that persecuted Christians so cruelly in those early centuries of the church. Barbarian tribes attacked Rome from around A.D.300 until the empire was broken up about A.D.500 into the ten divisions predicted in Daniel 2. Judgment’s fell on the Western Empire of Rome for its persecution of God’s people and its rejection of Him.

The Third Trumpet—Judgment on Apostate Christianity

Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of

this star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter (verses 10, 11).

The trumpets are following parallels to the sequence of the seven churches and seven seals. After the destruction of the Roman Empire, the Dark Ages followed.

When the third trumpet sounds, a great star falls from heaven. What does a star represent? In Revelation 1 John saw Jesus holding seven stars in His hand. Jesus told him that the stars represented the angels of the seven churches. So a star represents an angel. What great angel fell from heaven?

Jesus said, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). Satan was one of the stars of heaven, a mighty angel. Revelation 12 tells us that there was war in heaven and Satan was cast out of heaven along with the angels who followed him in rebellion against God. The great star that falls from heaven when the third trumpet sounds is Satan being cast out of heaven. Now Satan was cast out long before the Dark Ages. But during the time of the third trumpet, he attacked Bible believing followers of Christ with great intensity and success. Satan caused the Christian church itself to fall into apostasy and turn away from God's truth. Christianity itself became corrupt.

The star fell on the rivers and springs of water. What do these represent?

Isaiah says, "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" (Isaiah 12:3). Proverbs 3:14 says, "The law of the wise is a fountain of life to turn one away from the snares of death." God says in Jeremiah, "My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13). The springs of water represent God's salvation—His truth, His law and His Word. During the Dark Ages, the time of the third trumpet, Satan falls upon the earth introducing poison—wormwood—into God's fountain of life.

What does "wormwood" mean? The name of the angel that falls from heaven is Wormwood, and he introduces wormwood into the streams of water—the fountain of God's Word. "Wormwood" means *punishment for apostasy*. That is the root of the word. Satan came into the church itself and poisoned the pure teachings of the gospel. He introduced false doctrines and apostasy into the church.

“And many men died from the water, because it was made bitter” (Revelation 8:11). During the Dark Ages, the time of the third trumpet, many men and women did indeed die. They died spiritually, because of the apostasy in the church. And they died resisting that apostasy as the church put to death those who disagreed with its authority and false doctrines. God’s judgments fall upon apostate Christianity—the church itself—under the third trumpet. Yet that apostasy only grew greater as the church united with the state to exert its authority more and more. Truth was compromised even further.

The Fourth Trumpet—Judgment On Apostate Christianity Intensifies

Then the fourth angel sounded: and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night. (Revelation 8:12).

In the Bible darkness is contrasted with the light that comes from God. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12). The apostle John wrote of Jesus that He is “the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world” (John 1:9). God’s Word is a light to illuminate our path (Psalm 119:105). In contrast, Isaiah says, “Behold, the darkness shall come upon the earth, and deep darkness the people” (Isaiah 60:2). Under the fourth trumpet the sun, moon, and stars are struck so that their light is greatly diminished. As Isaiah predicted, darkness increases on the earth—deep spiritual darkness covers the people. As the church consolidated its power—both religious and secular—over the people the darkness of apostasy grew ever greater. It was as if the sun, moon, and stars were going out!

What is the message of the first four trumpets in Revelation 8? The message that the natural consequence of rejecting the teachings of God’s Word is experiencing the judgments of God as He withdraws His protective hand. He is a God of mercy, but also a God of justice. God reaches out to sinners in love, but He cannot compromise with sin. Justice is an essential aspect of His character as is love and mercy.

A Trumpet of Salvation and a Trumpet of Judgment

Revelation 8 tells us that the trumpets are sounding. Trumpets in the Bible do two things. They announce a gathering, and they announce judgment. In these days just before Jesus returns, the trumpets of God are gathering His people from the north to the south and from the east to the west. He is calling His people to come to Him and be ready for the Second Coming of Jesus. The Bible says that a trumpet will sound when Jesus returns. That trumpet blast will raise the righteous dead to life! That trumpet is God's trumpet of salvation.

But in these days before the return of Jesus, the trumpets of judgment are sounding as well. God's judgments fall on those who insist on rejecting Him, who resist Him and embrace error in the place of truth. His grace and mercy appeal to us to accept His love and obey His commands.