

“THE FIRST FOUR TRUMPETS.”

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Scripture Texts: Revelation 8:6-13

Introduction

In the beginning of the book of Exodus we read:

Exodus 2:23-25 During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. 24 And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. 25 God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.

God heard the prayers of His people and He responded with a great judgment on Egypt in the form of ten plagues. When we were last in Revelation 8 on Palm Sunday evening we read:

Revelation 8:3-5 And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, 4 and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. 5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

So also here in Revelation there is the cry of the martyrs and saints and God responds with the trumpets of judgment. And the trumpet judgements parallel the plagues as I will point out.

Those who believe Revelation is a prophecy about things yet in the future and that the seven trumpets all take place in a literal way in the last three and a half years before Christ comes have to say God delays His response to the prayers of the saints way to the very end of history and just before the second coming. But God does hear and answer and He does so all through history as we will see.

As God judged unbelieving Egypt and now He judges the unbelieving world. God will deliver His people once again.

John's revelation is pastoral encouragement for Christians reading this. This letter is meant to strengthen them in the face of great trials and tribulations. The troubles in our world, like in Egypt, are only a prelude to a greater deliverance. God is present, God is in control, God will deliver His people.

In the words of Jesus recorded in Luke's Gospel:

Luke 21:28 Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.

After John saw the seven seals, he heard seven trumpets. We move now from scene 2 to scene 3 in John's vision and the vision intensifies.

The First Four Trumpets: God's Wrath on the World.

I can sugar coat this, this part of Revelation is about judgment. The positive is God always announces Himself, He always sends warnings, He leaves everyone without any excuse.

These judgments are cast or thrown upon the earth, meaning they are from the hand of God.

Isaiah 45:7 I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord, who does all these things.

Amos 3:6-7 Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid?

Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?

7 "For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.

These judgments or calamities are partial, they are a partial judgment. These are not the final and complete judgment. These are initial judgments on sin, not the final judgment.

As such they are calls to repentance, they still hold out hope and mercy.

Trumpets are different from bowls. Trumpets sound a warning, bowls are poured out. What is yet to come is worse.

Calamities have two purposes, to warn and to punish. We are to learn from them and respond appropriately.

These judgments show God leveling the pride of man, removing all of man's control and ability to manipulate nature and culture to his benefit. This reduces man to utter dependence and forces him to acknowledge God.

The first trumpet: The earth stricken (8:7)

The first trumpet matches the seventh plague in Egypt.

Exodus 9:23-26 Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt. 24 There was hail and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. 25 The hail struck down everything that was in the field in all the land of Egypt, both man and beast. And the hail struck down every plant of the field and broke every tree of the field. 26 Only in the land of Goshen, where the people of Israel were, was there no hail.

There are Bible prophecy teachers and interpreters today who believe this hail and fire or hail that burns points to nuclear fallout. So they say that after nearly two thousand years of nothing Revelation is now relevant, now about to be fulfilled. No, the people of the first century understood this letter, the imagery is OT imagery, it can't mean now what it never meant then.

But overzealous interpreters of Revelation in every age have thought such things. Every momentous event in every age was pointed to as the beginning of the end.

First it was the barbarian invasions of Rome in the fifth century; then the coming of the year 1000, Y1K; then the turmoil of the Reformation; then the great Lisbon earthquake of 1745, then WWI. Every event was declared as the coming of the Day of Judgment, the end is near.

The nuclear argument fails because it means that God has done nothing to answer the prayers of the saints for twenty centuries, the wicked have been unscathed for all this time until now.

Rather as we saw in the seals, these trumpet calls represent any number of world events that involve death and destruction to mankind on earth. We know that our earth has sustained great calamities that have greatly impacted the earth and its vegetation. Droughts, fires, earthquakes, volcanos, hurricanes and tornados and great storms.

Clearly this is not normal or natural hail. Hail with fire and blood is a symbol of God's wrath and judgment against man's pride and sinful rebellion. This judgment is visited upon the earth every time God shows His power and authority over the earth, over the natural elements to strike fear and repentance into the hard hearts of mankind.

The second trumpet: The sea stricken (8:8-9)

This trumpet parallels the first of the plagues of Egypt when the Nile turned to blood and killed all the fish.

There were some particularly great volcanic eruptions during the first centuries such as Mt. Vesuvius on at least two occasions. There were certainly burning mountains around the Mediterranean and lava flowing into the sea.

But again this is not meant literally, but figuratively for a great judgment. Again we see how impotent and vulnerable are all human efforts and striving against God.

We set up our business and economic plans, we seek to use the resources of earth to our own end oblivious to the God of all those resources, and it is all doomed on the day of His judgment.

The land and the sea are instruments in God's hands, tools He uses for His purposes. Mountains in Scripture are sometimes a symbol for a nation or kingdom, which God raises up and God casts down.

Jeremiah 51:25 Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain, declares the Lord, which destroys the whole earth; I will stretch out my hand against you, and roll you down from the crags, and make you a burnt mountain.

But God's children have this promise in Psalm 46:

Psalm 46:1-3 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

2 Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
3 though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

The third trumpet: The rivers stricken (8:10-11)

Again this is like the first plague in the Nile and all the rivers and canals.

This image is harder to visualize and interpret. How could one star fall and effect so great a change on one third of the rivers? The star is symbolic of divine judgment coming down from heaven.

It reminds us there are things that happen in our world that are completely beyond our control and have a divine origin. Terrible things happen in our world that tragically impact the lives of countless thousands.

One intent here is to make clear that this is not just from natural causes, but is directly from the hand of God. This is an act of God.

The fresh waters symbolize natural resources that ought to sustain human life. This represents what makes our planet habitable and fertile, life-giving and life-sustaining. This represents what gives us energy and success in this life.

We saw tangible evidence on Catalina Island of how devastating and far reaching the drought in California is and how it is affecting human existence there.

Every year there are great floods across our world, when life-giving fresh water becomes destructive and death producing. Our newspapers and news shows announce the disasters with great detail, but never mention a word of warning or a call to repentance.

But there are other sources of life that can turn bitter and become life-threatening and life-destroying.

Marriage is meant to be life-giving, both physically and spiritually, but it is being turned into something life-denying and life-destroying.

Pregnancy is life-giving and has turned into something life-denying and life-destroying.

Biblical doctrine is meant to be life-sustaining and life-giving, but compromise and political correctness and liberalism and heresy turn doctrine into life-destroying ends.

All of God's good gifts when turned against His good purposes become forms of judgment that bring man down rather than lift him up.

God doesn't just use the obvious judgment such as famine, war, and pestilence. He allows these other means throughout history to be His judgment.

Abortion and sexual immorality and liberalism aren't just things that deserve God's judgment, they are the actual judgment of God. They are the opposite of truth and grace. They are God's punishment on unbelief and God's means of testing and purifying His Church.

Jeremiah 2:12-13 Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the Lord, 13 for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

They have rejected God's ways, and they have come up with their own ways that are fruitless, lifeless, dead. The water has become wormwood.

The fourth trumpet: The sky stricken (8:12)

What does this mean? Partial eclipses, volcanic cloud cover, sandstorms? Or something far more radical that effects the earth's movement or climate?

Notice no external object is mentioned as causing the darkness, no created object blocks the light. This isn't an eclipse. They are stuck dark by God. The reality is God made the sun, moon and stars and God can take them away. He made them shine and He can make them go dark.

This trumpet matches the ninth plague when Egypt was plunged into darkness for three days. In Egypt the darkness was real or natural. It actually got dark. In Revelation it is spiritual. That which should give light and give guidance now fails.

Politics, education, religion should all give light, and point to what is true and good and helpful.

This is the darkness of unbelief and apostasy. This is the withdrawing of the light of the Gospel.

Amos 8:11-12 "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord God, "when I will send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.

12 They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it.

Romans 11:7-8 Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, 8 as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day."

Galatians 6:7-8 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Beware the remaining trumpets (8:13)

Another one of several brief intermissions.

The eagle announces that the woes to come are worse than those already past. Woes are mercy because woes are warnings. When the woes end the mercy ends.

The next three woes will be different in that they will explicitly afflict the wicked and not the righteous, just as the later Egyptian plagues did. The first three effect the physical realm, the last three effect the spiritual realm, the heart and soul.

Application and conclusion.

Trumpet calls are calls to wake up, calls to arms, calls to assemble, calls to prayer. Trumpet calls are calls to action, calls to connect earth and heaven, to connect what is done here and what is done there.

This is God's judgment being visited on all the earth.

Judgment is always about God's glory. God is very serious about His glory.

God made all humanity to know Him and to glorify Him. How serious is it when God's own creations reject Him and deny Him and rebel against Him? They have turned to idolatry and sin. This is worthy of God's righteous and holy wrath and judgment.

Do you think God is overreacting? Do you think God should not be so easily offended or take so great an offense? Then your view of God is way too small. The scope of the destruction and the nature of the reaction is meant to show us just how great God is and how great the offense really is.

People are shocked at the idea of God wiping out such large numbers to make a point. But let's be clear. Everyone is going to die. The end is certain whether in large numbers or one at a time, whether soon or later, whether violently or in bed. What matters is our final destiny, and if God takes drastic measures to wake us up to that reality, it is a good thing and a mercy in the end.

God created us and then gave us every possible good and perfect gift. He thought of everything and provided everything. When we rebel against Him and use His good gifts against Him and for evil purposes, and don't so much as thank Him or think of Him, it is a great offense deserving a great judgment.

This is about God answering the prayers of His people to hallow His name, to make His name great and exalted. This is about God bringing about His kingdom and His will in a world that is denying and resisting His kingdom and His will.

God is serious and He will be taken seriously. Our lack of attention will be arrested, He will get our attention and we will be without excuse. There will be no avoiding of consequences.

"As Christians, who view these matters through the eyes of faith, we should not be alarmed when such events occur, in fact, we should expect them. These things remind us that creation has been corrupted by sin and that the world groans under our feet until the day of redemption. But one day, Christ will return to remove the curse and renew the heavens and the earth" (Kim Riddlebarger sermon).

The message of every trumpet blast is repent or be lost.

And to the Christian the message is rejoice, the Lord has heard and answered. He is sovereign over all the earth, over all life and death. He is present, He is in control, He will judge and He will deliver His own.