

The Trumpets of Judgment
Revelation 8:1-13 (2.4)
Introduction

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The scene shifts back to heaven. Six seals have opened and there is one seal left. Remember the scroll is the title deed to the earth. God is judging the world. Contained within the seventh seal are seven trumpets (these are often used in scripture to "announce judgment". The seventh trumpet will contain seven bowls which contain the wrath of God. You will note that the "judgments" become more severe and intense.

The world has rejected God's man--Jesus--and now God will allow what mankind has longed for---Satan's man. Human beings long for freedom from God so they get what they want--slavery to sin. Human beings were created to be ruled, by God or by gods, little deities that take the place of the one true God. Remember, men were earlier calling for the rocks to fall on them and hide them, but now wars, judgments, more terrifying than anything in the past is descending upon the earth.

"During the trumpet judgments, Satan is cast out of heaven and produces his trump card on earth--a superman. Men no longer concerned about the Lamb, will be ready for the Beast" (John Phillip's p.117).

JUDGMENT

"Discernment or separation between good and evil. God judges among people and their actions according to the standards of His LAW. Judgment can refer either to this process of discernment or to the punishment meted out to those who fall under His wrath and condemnation <John 5:24>. (from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary)

A young boy lived with his grandfather on the top of a mountain in the Swiss Alps. Often, just to hear the sound of his own voice echoing back to him, he would go outside, cup his hands around his mouth, and shout, "Hello!" Up from the canyons the reply reverberated, "Hello ... hello ... hello ... hello" Then he would call out, "I love you ... I love you ... I love you ... I love you ... I love you"

One day the boy seriously misbehaved and his grandfather disciplined him severely. Reacting violently, the child shook his fist and screamed, "I hate you!" To his surprise, the rocks and boulders across the mountainside responded in kind: "I hate you ... I hate you ... I hate you ... I hate you ... I hate you" And so it is in life. Call it one of the immutable laws of human nature. We get in return exactly what we give. It all comes back. Incredible echoes mirror our actions to an emphatic degree, sometimes in greater measure than we give. The results are often embarrassing, or tragic.

Romans 12:19 "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord".

Silence in Heaven (vv.1-2)

The breaking of the final seal produces a deep silence in heaven. This is it. Judgment has come. Hab 2:20 "But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him."

Earl Palmer writes; "It is the silence of mystery and intense waiting. . .There is communicated in a very dramatic way in this quietness the full and awesome authority of God. Everything must wait for his kingly move."

The silence appears to have been caused by the prayers of the saints (both in heaven and on the earth). The prayers of the saints produce two interesting results: (1) Judgment is Postponed: (2) Judgment is Provoked:

1. God withholds judgment while He receives and weighs the prayers and the petitions of the saints.

2. God answers prayers which results in judgment on the earth. (vv.5-6)

"angels that stand before God" see Luke 1. "I am Gabriel, I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news" The same Gabriel who announces the birth of Jesus to Mary. These are probably archangels the highest order of angels (Michael is perhaps another). There is an ancient apocryphal book that contains a list of these seven angels-- Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Sarakiel, Gabriel, and Phanuel.

3. Verse 3: Some Bible scholars believe the angel that holds the golden censer is Jesus himself. The idea is based on the OT journeys of Israel in the wilderness, where they were led by a great angel called "the angel of Jehovah (YHWH). Some believe this is the pre-incarnate Christ leading them through the wilderness. In Revelation--Israel is once again God's concern.

What is the meaning of the golden censer? A censer is a container in which incense is burned, and is a symbol of the priestly function. Jesus is our High Priest. The picture here is one of the functions of prayer. Sometimes we walk around thinking that God does not hear our prayers, but it is in fact a fragrance in His nostrils. The image of the angel hurling it to the earth is an image of answered prayer. The lightnings, thunders and rumbles means it is time to act (see 4:5)

The First Trumpet (v.7) Judgment on the Land

"Give place to wrath" (Romans 2:9) Believe in judgment.

1. Chapters 8 and 9 introduce to a series of awesome judgments. Each will have a source of judgment (ultimately God) and an object of judgment. The first judgment is directed to the land or the earth. The source of the judgment is hail and fire mixed with blood. The object is the earth, trees and grass. The extent of the judgment is one third of the earth's resources. Are these literal? Symbolic?

Exod 19:13 "'Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow; whether man or beast, he shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain." (NKJ) The first mention of trumpet in the Bible announces both the presence and judgment of God. The trumpet often symbolizes God's intervention in the affairs of mankind. We live in a world where people want to forget God. Atheists deny his existence and say God was invented to explain the unexplainable. The Deist believes that God created the universe and set things in motion largely to run on its own. The New Ager believes in the intrinsic "godness" of all all things. We are gods and ignorance is our greatest problem, knowledge that we are gods the greatest

solution to that ignorance. This of course reminds us of the 7th plague that hit Egypt.

We believe God created the world and everything in it. God has the right to enter into his creation and judge it.

2. Could this be fulfilled in a thermonuclear exchange? One third of the earth's surface could easily be destroyed in just an initial exchange between two superpowers. The second and third trumpets could be fulfilled as a result of radiation fall out, and radiation poisoning. Fresh water supplies would be devastated. Nuclear explosions could easily reduce the light, and atmospheric conditions would create a nuclear winter. The fifth trumpet, the locusts out of the pit, could represent the effects of radiation poisoning. The same two statements that people make about radiation poisoning in Hiroshima and Nagasaki was that it was like the pain of a scorpion sting--the pain so intense that people thought they would die. (Bob Beltz p.140). The sixth trumpet represents the beginning of Armageddon. Angels release the forces from the east, and 200,000,000 soldiers move from east to west. This kind of literal view could easily be fulfilled in the time in which we live (ibid. p.140).

3. The symbolism is also suggestive. There is a definite link between the judgments of Egypt and the judgment on the planet earth. The book of Exodus records the judgments God allowed to fall on Egypt. The river Nile was struck with blood. Water is the element which allows life to continue on the earth. No water means death. One third could refer to the fact that the destruction is not total. Grass is sometimes symbolic of people and trees prominent leaders or rulers.

The Second Trumpet (vv.8-9) Judgment on the Sea

1. See Rev. 11:6. Is this literal or symbolic? The mountain mentioned here seems to be a burning volcano.

2. In Jeremiah 51:24-25 Babylon is described as a great mountain that destroys the whole earth. "And I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea for all the evil they have done in Zion in your sight," says the LORD. "Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain, who destroys all the earth," says the LORD. "And I will stretch out My hand against you, roll you down from the rocks, and make you a burnt mountain.

3. Babylon in the book of Revelation is symbolic of a world system that has rejected the God of the Bible and has replaced it with either a godless system, or an apostate system that embraces false gods (including selfism). The sea is the symbol of the Gentile nations. Some have suggested that the second trumpet is symbolic of the destructive influences of the world system in the last days.

The Third Trumpet (vv.10-11) Judgment on the Living Creatures

1. See Rev. 17:15. In the Bible, "stars" are often symbolic of angelic beings. A great fallen star might be suggestive of a demonic being, perhaps Satan himself. Wormwood means "bitterness" (Russian Chernoybel). In the OT mention of the word (it appears only here in the NT) it refers to the bitterness or poisonous nature of false religion and idolatry. Waters are sometimes suggestive of people's or religious systems or spiritual systems (for example drinking from wells, living waters, broken cisterns etc.). "In John 4, Jesus spoke of himself as living water. In John 7, Jesus said, "If any one is thirsty, let him come to me and drink." The waters of Revelation 8 might be

symbolic of spiritual systems and philosophies" (Bob Beltz p.140). Beltz's note on the bottom of page 142 is helpful:

"As you study the book of Revelation you must remember that there is a sense in which the tribulation is not just the last seven years of history. The tribulation is sometimes viewed as the entire period of time from the ascension of Jesus Christ to his second coming. The things that are spoken of in the book of Revelation are happening consistently, to some degree throughout history. They are simply intensified and reach their climax in the end times. When we talk about the whole idea of Satanic influence in the philosophies of men, we can see throughout history how false religions and secular philosophies have had a destructive influence on people's lives."

2. If this is literal, then we are talking about an ecological disaster. Perhaps the key to understanding the passage is found in Rev.12:12. It could be that Satan is banished to the earth which causes the final 3 "woe" trumpets. Revelation 13 makes a strong argument that this is Satan.

3. It may mean Satan's fall leads immediately to a third of the world's deception. "The people's of the earth take on the character of the evil one and become "wormwood" too. Satan is bitter because he has been cast out of heaven. Men become bitter and many die" (John Phillips p.121).

The Fourth Trumpet (vv.12-13) Judgment on the Heavens

1. If this is literal, it may be that one third of light has been blotted out because of a devastating holocaust.

2. Heavenly bodies are often symbolic of ruling authorities (the sun moon stars etc). Under this trumpet the old establishment is swept away and another is found in its place. "the true church is gone; restraints have been removed; and Satan is on the earth, black rage boiling in his heart. The final plunge into midnight darkness for mankind. All the traditional guiding lights are gone." (John Phillips p.122).

3. If there is a social, political and economic collapse, the world will be ripe for the antichrist. Satan's man will not appear as a beast, but as a fantastic superman who right the wrongs in the world. Daniel tells us the false messiah will arise in troubled times and present himself as the Savior. Forces are already at work in the world to bring about this global catastrophe.

Conclusion

We may never know to what extent the passage is literal, or symbolic until it happens. We do know that the trumpet judgments of God means that he will intervene personally in judgment to the earth. Judgment is about God having His way. Yet we should pay close attention to some important things: Judgment begins in response to the prayers of the saints. For reasons we do not completely understand, prayer matters to God. What you think and what you pray matters to God. Our prayers to God somehow facilitate (but neither cause or prevent ultimately) God's purposes.

We also know that the purpose of judgment in part is to bring people to repentance (see Rev. 9:20-21).

"So then, the war trumpets are blown, and from the turmoil they cause, a dazzling, charming, bewitching, splendid man emerges, a solver of earth's problems, a defender of its gods, a man hand in glove with every source of

political, religious and economic power, a man well masked; the man the world awaits" (John Phillips p.123).

Ray Stedman points out that judgment should

(1) Frighten us: We should stand up and take notice. Some people like horror movies. They like to be scared. There is nothing wrong with healthy fear. We should fear judgment.

(2) Sober us: Judgment should force us to rethink the way we have been living. It should change our priorities. C.S. Lewis has said. fear and pain and judgment are "God's megaphone for reaching a deaf world."

(3) Correct us: Judgment like a mirror should force us to examine ourselves. We need to face the harsh realities of who we are as individuals and a nation. Like a mirror, judgment "strips away our illusion and restores us to a realistic view of ourselves. It enables us to see clearly, to reason accurately, to plan carefully, to live thoughtfully, and to think the thoughts of God after Him" (Ray Stedman p.183).

(4) Humbles us: Judgment means in part we are not in control, God is in control. We may be the willing or unwilling partners of sin. Did you really think you were equipped to handle your own life? We live in the illusion that we are in control, in control of our fate, our destiny our future. We think we control our finances and our health. If we eat right, and do right then nothing bad can happen. Wrong! When we are stripped of the illusion that we are little gods, we are able at last to seek the guidance of God. We become willing to seek the wisdom of God instead of the broken cisterns of man.

(5) Reassures us: This is one of those strange paradoxes of scriptures. The first shall be last, the least shall be greatest, the servant shall lead. Judgment can actually comfort. It answers the great prayer of Habakuk, "Lord, in wrath remember mercy". God doesn't "dig" judgment. He is not an ogre that looks for the opportunity to destroy. The prophet Isaiah makes an interesting statement; "The Lord will rise up to do his work, his strange work, an "alien task".

Isa 28:21

21 For the LORD will rise up as at Mount Perazim, he will be angry as in the Valley of Gibeon-- that He may do His work, His awesome work, and bring to pass His act, His unusual act.

(NKJ)

Isa 28:21

21 The LORD will rise up as he did at Mount Perazim, he will rouse himself as in the Valley of Gibeon-- to do his work, his strange work, and perform his task, his alien task.

(NIV)

God gives warning. He sends reminders and attention getters, before he sends destruction. He is a loving God, slow to anger, quick with mercy. Just like Ninevah, he gives them ample opportunity to repent, to "smell the roses" and to turn.

People who have a limited understanding of the Bible say, "I believe that God is a God of love, he would never judge anyone!" Not so! The very fact that God is love means he must judge! God loves you and all his creation. He hates sin because it destroys people. It confronts his own holiness. God must judge

evil, he must confront it, and he must eliminate it. God is a God of love and judgment. But even in judgment he remembers mercy.

Will the people of the earth repent? Three more trumpets are yet to sound.