

The 7th Seal and the Seven Trumpets
(Sermon 16 – Rev. 8-9)
2.2.25

Please turn in your Bibles to the Book of Revelation, chapter 8.

In our journey so far in this Book of the Bible, I hope you've been encouraged and edified. Even though Revelation can sometimes be difficult to understand, we know that all Scripture is breathed out by God, and given to us for our good, for our teaching and correction and training, that we may know God and live lives pleasing to Him. That includes Revelation. It is given to us for our good.

Review of our "tools"

And to help us in interpreting and understanding, there are certain reminders that we carry with us along the way: Things like:

-Remembering who the book was written to. Revelation was written by the Apostle John to 7 churches of Asia Minor. It is a series of visions that John received by Jesus to write down and encourage the church.

-Remembering what kind of letter Revelation is: It is "apocalyptic" literature, full of symbols.

-Remembering why was Revelation written: Not to give us a timeline of end-time events, but to give us a clear vision of Jesus and His triumph and total reign over all things. Jesus is the focus of this Book.

-And finally, remembering how we approach Revelation. We do so with humility, knowing Christians can disagree on certain interpretations and events, but still be unified around the glorious truths that Jesus sovereign over everything, and that He is coming again.

Our context

Recently we've been in the section of Revelation that depicts the final judgment of God upon the wicked of the earth in the last days. In these chapters, God's final judgment is illustrated and described in three ways: seals on a scroll, trumpets being blown, and bowls being poured out.

We saw back in ch. 6, Jesus began opening seals on the scroll of God's judgment. We've made it through 6 of the 7 seals. Then, ch. 7 gave us an intermission, showing us two visions – one of God's people being sealed as they entered into the Great Tribulation, and another vision of all of

God's people coming out of great tribulation and gathering around God's throne in heaven.

My approach today

Today, we begin a section concerning these specific judgments that begin in ch. 8 and goes all the way through ch. 16. Rest easy - we won't cover all those chapters today. But those chapters all go together.

If you've read through the Book of Revelation, you may have noticed that these chapters, covering the 7 seals, 7 trumpets and 7 bowls seem to get repetitive. I believe that's intentional, because these are not three separate judgments, but three different perspectives of the same final judgment of God upon the earth.

I would encourage you from the beginning, leave your Bibles open, because we're going to be covering more text than usual. Today, we will look at chapters 8 and 9 together. Don't worry, I don't plan on preaching any longer than usual. It just means we won't dive into every detail in these chapters. Instead, we will be looking at the main themes and what each view of God's judgment is meant to highlight.

And that's ok. After all, in the very beginning of Revelation, it says "blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written..." (1:3). So even if we only read these chapters aloud, it would still be a blessing to our souls.

To set the stage for our text today, the intermission of ch. 7 is over, and chapter 8 marks the opening of the final seal that Jesus is breaking on the scroll of God's judgment. We'll start by reading Rev. 8:1-5, and then we'll pray and ask for God's help...

Rev. 8:1-5

[1] When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. [2] Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. [3] 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.

(Pray)

PROP: The knowledge of God's judgment to come should humble us to repentance and sober us to action.

I. The 7th Seal

As each of these seals has been opened, there has been an increase of intensity in God's judgment. So, as Jesus is getting ready to break the 7th and final seal, one would expect the most intense judgment yet, and for it to come immediately.

Instead, the first thing that happens when Jesus breaks the final seal is something unexpected. What happens is complete silence. A holy hush. Even the singing and rejoicing in heaven stops cold. And the silence, John says, lasts for about half an hour.

Now 30 *seconds* of silence in any group of people can feel awkward. But 30 *minutes* of silence must have felt like forever! And in heaven, this was extremely rare. God has angels in heaven crying "Holy, holy, holy" day and night. The praise of God goes on day and night. But now, it all stops. There is silence in heaven. Everyone is watching, waiting to see what would happen as a result of Jesus breaking the final seal of God's judgment.

It's as if this silence is the calm before the storm. Because, it's during this silence or just after it, there is movement. John describes seeing 7 angels being given trumpets. Then he sees another angel take a golden censer, which was a small container, usually held by a long chain, that would be used by the OT priest to burn incense in the Tabernacle. The incense was a symbol of the prayers of God's people rising to the Lord. In fact, we see that link in verses 3 and 4...

[3] 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.

So, here we have a visual of our prayers, and the prayers of all the saints who have gone before us. In particular, prayers for God's judgment, for His justice to be done on the earth. Verse 5 shows us that connection...

[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, the 7th seal is opened, there is silence in heaven, the prayers for God's justice are heard by God. And in response, He unleashes judgment upon the earth in the form of storms and a great earthquake. More destruction and devastation. And with that, the 7 seals come to an abrupt end.

All of the seals are meant to remind us that this world will not last forever. God's judgment is coming. And it's coming in part because of the prayers of God's people who have suffered greatly – justice is coming.

(Transition): Now our attention turns to a different perspective of God's judgment. We go from 7 seals on a scroll, to those angels each given 7 trumpets to blow.

II. The Seven Trumpets

In biblical times, trumpets had different purposes. They were used to announce the arrival of the king. They were used to call an army to battle. And, in several places in the OT, trumpets were even used as an unlikely weapon in battle.

- *Gideon and his 300* men supernaturally defeated the enemies of God by blowing trumpets and making noise. The enemy became so frightened, they turned on one another.
- *Joshua and the battle of Jericho* – God commanded them on the 7th day to march around Jericho 7 times, then they were to blow trumpets and shout to God, and the walls of Jericho crumbled.

So, trumpets not only *announce* judgment – God even used them as weapons to *enact* judgment. Just as seals on a scroll would illustrate God's judgment being unfolded and proclaimed, the picture of trumpets depicts God's judgment being announced and enacted. With that in mind, let's go back to our text and look at these 7 trumpets. (Chapter 8:6-12)...

[8:6] Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them. [7] The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

[8] The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. [9] A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

[10] The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. [11] The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter.

[12] The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.

A few things to take note of from these first 4 trumpets:

A. The symbolism of “one-third” which is repeated often. (A third of the earth, a third of the sea, a third of people are affected.) Remember, numbers in apocalyptic literature are symbolic. The one-third here is not meant to reflect an exact amount, but it is meant to show us that God is limiting His judgment. He would be justified in destroying everything and everyone, but He does not. And one reason He limits His judgment here is because of His mercy, and to give opportunity for sinners to repent.

B. Specific kinds of destruction. Each trumpet announces, then unleashes, a different category of destruction on the earth:

- 1st trumpet – earth, trees, grass
- 2nd trumpet – the sea and everything in it, including sea life and even boats. (In this case, probably a military’s navy)
- 3rd trumpet – rivers and springs
- 4th trumpet – the heavenly bodies – the sun, moon and stars

This shows us that eventually, all of the created order is affected by God’s judgment.

C. Connection to the 7 seals. The seals in chapters 6-8, and the trumpets in chapters 8-11 are almost identical in their structure. For instance:

- The 1st 4 *seals* are grouped together.
- The 1st 4 *trumpets* are grouped together.

- The 5th *seal* turns our perspective from earth to heaven (6:9-11).
- The 5th *trumpet* turns from earth to heaven (9:1-11).

- Opening of the 6th *seal* is followed by devastating judgment (6:12-16).
- Blowing of the 6th *trumpet* is followed by devastating judgment (9:13-21).

- Before the 7th *seal* is opened, there is an intermission (7:1-17).
- Before the 7th *trumpet* is blown, there is an intermission (10:1 – 11:14).

And not only are the seals and trumpets connected in structure, but there is also an overlapping of what is destroyed in each judgment. For instance, back when the 6th *seal* was opened, the sun became black, the moon became red like blood, and the stars fell from the sky. We see the same thing when the 4th *trumpet* is blown – the sun, moon and stars are affected. If these were in chronological order, that would make no sense, with the sun already being blackened.

All that to say, these similarities (I think) tell us that these symbols - seals and trumpets - are just different ways of pointing to the same event - two separate perspectives describing the same final judgment of God.

One more interesting connection is how similar these judgments are to the plagues of Egypt back in the Book of Exodus...

D. Similarities to the plagues of Egypt.

- 1st trumpet – burning hail consuming crops
- 7th plague – burning hail fell from the sky consuming their crops

- 2nd trumpet – a third of the sea becomes blood
- 1st plague – the Nile is turned to blood

- 4th trumpet – sun, moon, stars, affecting sources of light
- 9th plague – complete darkness for 3 days

These connections between the trumpets and the plagues of Egypt would most likely have been obvious to John's original audience. They would have seen these clues and been reminded of God's faithfulness. *"The God of Moses is our God. The God who delivered Israel from slavery is the same God who has delivered His people from the bondage of our sin, and will one day deliver us from His judgment to come."*

It underscores the comforting theme we see over and over in Revelation: **God never forgets His promises, and He never forgets His people.** What God promises in the OT, He fulfills in the NT. What God says, He will do. Showing mercy to those who trust in Christ, and pouring out judgment on those who don't.

Now, after the first 4 trumpets are blown, John sees something else:

[13] Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!"

This talking eagle, this heavenly messenger declares the next three trumpet blasts will be worse than the ones before. The first four judgments affected nature. But the last three trumpets affect the people of the earth. Now we're about to see the 5th and 6th trumpets blown. (Chapter 9:1-11)...

[9:1] And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. [2] He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft.

[3] Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. [4] They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

[5] They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone. [6] And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them.

[7] In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, [8] their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; [9] they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle.

[10] They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails. [11] They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon. (which means "Destroyer")

This description of “locusts” is another reminder of Egypt. In the 8th plague of Egypt, God sent millions of locusts to destroy their crops.

But there is a big difference as well. What John is describing are not actual locusts. They are much worse. What is being described here is Hell itself being opened up, and demons being unleashed on the earth. The heavenly vision of the prayers of the saints and the smoke from the altar of incense in Heaven we saw before, is now contrasted with the smoke from the fires of Hell, rising from the bottomless pit, with horrific demonic creatures swarming out upon the earth.

Now, we can look around at our world today and see great wickedness and increased evil. Demonic forces are already at work.

But these verses describe a time that is to come when demonic forces will be given more liberty than ever before to bring destruction on the earth and torment the people of the earth – but only to those who do not have God’s seal upon them (v.4), meaning those who have rejected Christ as Lord.

Let me say it again: Christians will not be harmed by these demonic forces, but for every person living in this time being described who is not a Christian, they will be open targets for the devil.

And notice, even in this horrifying judgment, God is still sovereign and still in control. This is not a picture of some spiritual tug-of-war, with God winning sometimes and the devil winning sometimes. No! All of this judgment, all of these events are directly controlled by our Sovereign God.

And one evidence of that is God putting limits on the destruction. These demonic forces were not given unlimited access and authority. At this point:

- They cannot kill people, but only torment them.
- They can only torment unbelievers, not God’s people.
- This demonic activity is not forever, but is limited to 5 months.

God gives these limits because His is merciful, and to reminds us He alone is the one in control.

That’s the fifth trumpet, a time of fearful demonic torture, but not mass death. Not yet. But that’s about to change with the sixth trumpet...

***[9:12] The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.
[13] Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from***

the four horns of the golden altar before God, [14] saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.”

[15] So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind. [16] The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number. [17] And this is how I saw the horses in my vision and those who rode them:

...they wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. [18] By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths.

[19] For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails are like serpents with heads, and by means of them they wound.

The sixth trumpet is worse than the last because it includes mass death upon the earth. And this mass death is, in part, depicted as a conquering army coming from the East.

Again, we cannot take all these symbols in literal terms. Burning mountains are not necessarily meteors falling from the sky. Locusts with tails that sting do not have to be interpreted as military helicopters going to war.

The larger message John is conveying is this: War, pestilence, plague, and death – these final judgments of God are coming to pass.

But even these judgements are building toward that final judgment that is to come, when every person will stand before a Holy God and give an account.

“The purpose of the trumpet cycles is to sound alarms, warning the complacent and calling them to repentance, and to summon the church to holy spiritual warfare.” ~ Dennis Johnson

That’s what these trumpets point to – a warning of judgment to come.

For the one who is not a Christian, it is a warning and a call to repentance. And for the Christian, these trumpets remind us of a call to spiritual warfare, a call to fight on our knees in prayer, contending for the souls of our children and our families and our neighbors and our co-workers.

Praying for the lost to be saved, for them to turn and repent. And also praying for the courage and the strength to put legs to our prayers, for us to not only pray for the lost, but to go out and evangelize, to tell others the good news of salvation in Christ.

Right now – today - God is withholding His judgment, because of His mercy, to give sinners time to repent. That's what's going on in these chapters as well. God limits His judgment, even in the last days, to give time for people to repent.

But after all that, after all those judgments on display, how do the ungodly respond?

[9:20] The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshipping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, [21] nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

This is one of the most tragic accounts of all of these judgments. Even after the destruction of nature, and even after the torment and destruction of human life, the most tragic part of all of this is that no one repented. No one turned from their sin. They just kept right on living in open rebellion against God.

That's an important reminder for us today. Sin is blinding. Sin is deceptive. But God is kind to us and merciful and longsuffering.

Conclusion

Remember: *In light of God's judgment to come, we should be humbled to repentance and sobered to action.*

God has placed these verses in His Holy Word so that all would know that His judgment is sure. It is coming. With that in mind, it should cause us all to humble ourselves before Him.

For those who have not yet surrendered your life to Christ, He is calling you today. Don't wait to face the judgment to come. It will be too late. Repent now. Turn to Him now. Pray and ask Jesus to forgive you of your sins and place all your hope and trust in Him alone.

And for those who are following Jesus and longing for His appearing, let these reminders of His judgment to come deepen our gratitude for what

Jesus did for us on the cross. May we live in the good of His grace, knowing that Jesus took God's judgment for us, so that we would never face God's wrath – but we will only receive God's grace.

And may that gratitude for God's grace not end with us, but may it fan into flame an urgency, and provoke us to action, that we would share the good news of God's grace with others. That we would share the gospel with that neighbor, that co-worker, that family member who needs Jesus.

In it all, my friends, let these verses remind us to:

- Live everyday as if it were your last.
- Pray as if someone's life depended on it.
- Love others like Jesus loves you.
- Give like you've got nothing to lose.
- Evangelize as if Jesus were coming back tomorrow.

So that when He does return, He will find us faithful.

(Let's Pray)