

Trumpets Announcing the Judgment

Revelation 8

Revelation 8:10-11 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.

What is Wormwood?

Our curiosities and imaginations and fears all mix fueling all sorts of possibilities as to its meaning.

If you lived in the 430's, you would have believed that Wormwood was Attila the Hun. Only a few decades prior to this, you would have believed that the heretic Pelagius was Wormwood.

Less than a century before this, many thought that the Emperor Constantine was this star producing bitterness as the Roman Empire split into thirds.

In the seventh Century AD, you would very likely have associated Wormwood with the rise of Islam across the Middle East.

Many today associate Wormwood with a meteor that will strike the earth.

But as recently as the 1980's, the Star called Wormwood was declared to be Chernobyl. In the wake of the disaster at the nuclear power plant in Chernobyl, at least one "expert on Revelation" proclaimed that the Third Trumpet had been fulfilled. What was his reasoning? That Chernobyl is the Ukrainian word for "Wormwood", if you fudge the letters a bit. And, of course, nuclear waste contaminates the water.

There is even a "Wormwood" memorial in the center of town at Chernobyl.

We quickly forget these previous assertions and look forward to grab on to the next possibility.

I do not think that this was God's intention for us when He gave us Revelation 8.

There is a better way.

The sixth seal gave us a description of the Final Judgment.

Revelation 7 was an interlude in which we were given two pictures of the Redeemed Church.

Now, we return to the seventh seal and the Final Judgment.

Read Rev. 8:1

When the Lamb opened the seventh seal,
there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

That's seems a bit anti-climactic!
A half hour of silence? That's it?
The truth is that this silence is more important than we might, at first, think.
Silence is an indication of acceptance.

All will be silent in the presence of God's righteous judgment.
What happens in our courtrooms when a verdict is given that either the prosecutor or defendant does not agree?
An appeal is made.
In God's declaration of guilt in the Final Judgment, there is no appeal. All will know that God has judged rightly. All will be silent before His verdict.

Psalm 31:17 ¹⁷ O LORD, let me not be put to shame, for I call upon you; let the wicked be put to shame; let them go silently to Sheol.

There will be no appeals, no objections, no complaints at the Final Judgment.
All who are judged will go silently down to Sheol.

Last week we saw the great multitude who God sealed and who endured the Great Tribulation, praising God and the Lamb.
This week we are met with silence.

We cannot miss the contrast between the bliss of the saints in heaven and the silence of unbelievers when confronted with the Final Justice of the Lamb.

We may not understand the complexity and perfection of God's wrath in this life. We may even think in this life that God is being unjust (like Job), but on that Day all will be silent before him as he displays his perfect justice for all to see.

Read Rev. 8:2-5.

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.

The transition from verse 1 to verse 2 is smooth and subtle. This transition is logical and theological, not chronological.

The seventh seal symbolizes the Final Judgment.
The first Trumpet is the logical response to the truth of this Final Judgment.
The first Trumpet does not follow the Seventh Seal in time. But it is the logical outworking of the reality of the Final Judgment.

The Trumpets flow out of the truth of the Final Judgment.
But before John describes the trumpets, he makes another logical/theological connection: The trumpets also flow out of the prayers of the saints.

John sees seven angels coming from “before the throne of God”. These seven are executing the sentence of the guilty verdict declared upon all men. But they are also acting in response to the prayers of the saints.

Before the angels can begin blowing their trumpets, another angel appears.

This angel stands upon the altar.
We should probably see this as the altar of incense that stood in front of the curtain dividing the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place where the priest carried out his duties.
But it is possible that John mixes the imagery to combine this altar with the large, bronze altar of sacrifice.

Incense is given to the angel.

We are told that incense here symbolizes the prayers of the saints.

God’s people are praying for God to avenge their persecutions.
And God’s people have been praying for the Kingdom of God to come.

We do this every week in the Lord’s Prayer – “Thy kingdom come...”
The prayers of God’s people reach the throne of God in the form of incense.

Next, the angel takes the censor and mixes it with the coals of fire from the altar.
And then, he casts this fire down to the earth.
This fire symbolizes God’s judgment.

From the fire are “thunders, voices, lightnings, and an earthquake”.

Jesus uses the prayers of Christians to bring about the judgments of the trumpets.
And with these trumpets, God declares to all that His kingdom is coming.

We rarely pray for God's wrath to fall. We usually pray that God would be merciful to save. But either way, God is using our prayers. He is using them to redeem His people. And He is using them to bring judgments upon the unbelieving world.

This picture of God using the prayers of the saints to pour out His judgments, both throughout history and in the Final Judgment is a mystery to me. I don't really understand it. But it helps me to see that there is far more going on in my prayers than I realize.

I want my prayers to be used to save people.
It is humbling to think that those same prayers will also be used in judging unbelievers.

Read Rev. 8:6-12.

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.

The seals represented locks that communicated to us as believers that Jesus alone controls history: both the redemption of the Church and the Tribulations of this world.

The trumpets announce God's Judgment upon all unbelievers.

The images of the Trumpets draw heavily from OT examples where God's judgment fell on unbelievers.

Do you remember when God's people were on the verge of entering the Promised Land?

In order to enter the Promised Land, they had to conquer the fortified city of Jericho. But instead of building siege engines to batter down the immense walls, God told His people to march around the city for seven days. Each day they would begin their march with a trumpet blast. On the seventh day, they were to march around the city seven times. And at the end of this last time, they were to blow the trumpets and shout to the LORD.

Joshua 6:16 ¹⁶ And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, "Shout, for the LORD has given you the city.

And the walls came tumbling down.
And Jericho was destroyed. (with one exception: Rahab)

Each time the trumpets were blown they announced God's Judgment. And that is precisely how they function here in Revelation. Only in Revelation, the trumpet blasts are not literal blasts from instruments, at least not that we can see.

They are all sorts of death and destruction that fall upon people in this life.
They are the pains and bitterness that result from the actions of evil men.
And they are the pains and bitterness that fall upon those same evil men.

Often, when people want to study Revelation, they want to know if the present trials specifically match up with those of Revelation so that they can predict if the end is near.

The truth is that the end has been "near" biblically speaking ever since the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost and the Gospel going to the Gentiles.

It is not only when really bad things happen that we should fear the coming of God's judgment. It is the randomness of the scattering of death and destruction that should remind all men to flee to Jesus Christ.

These first four trumpets fall upon the land, the sea, the sky, and the rivers. The entirety of this creation is under the judgment of God. Paul tells us in Romans 8 that the whole creation groans.

John uses a second image in the Trumpets, that of the Plagues of Egypt when He was rescuing His people out of the hands of Pharaoh. Only a few of the plagues are mentioned and they are not in the same order. But the connection is clear.

The plagues of Egypt had a similar purpose as the trumpets here in Revelation. They announced God's coming judgment upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians who had enslaved God's people.

In one sense the plagues were intended to warn, but in another they are themselves judgments.

The same is true about the judgments of the trumpets.

It is difficult to know how much of the language of the trumpets should be taken literally and how much should be taken figuratively.

Are the trees being burned up, a description of forest fires. Or does the image of the forest fire depict many sorts of destruction, especially the destruction of the land that was intended to bear fruit to bless God's people.

And the mountain that is thrown into the sea... should we take this as something like a volcano, or does it point to the destruction of the kingdoms of this world. We know from other prophecies of Scripture that mountains are often used to symbolize kingdoms. And a burning mountain being thrown into the sea is very likely making use of figurative language describing the downfall of the evil unbelieving kingdoms of this world.

God has already judged every kingdom that stands opposed to Christ. Kingdoms like Attila the Hun and Hitler's Nazi Germany may rise and inflict terrible destruction, but they will not endure forever. The burning mountain will be cast into the sea.

The star that fell from heaven is called "Wormwood". This is very likely a description of the casting of Satan out of heaven. We should not so much look for the contamination of fresh water sources, as concerning as this might be, but rather of God's condemnation of Satan and his lies, with which he leads men astray.

Drinking the bitter water leads many to die. How many have been led to death by the deceptions of Satan and this world? How many feel the bitterness of evil in this world?

At the same time, the fall of Satan from heaven is foreshadowed in Isaiah when he describes the downfall of the kingdom of Babylon.

Isaiah 14:12-14 ¹² "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! ¹³ You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; ¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'

The LORD has announced His judgment upon the entire “world system” that sets itself up against Him and against His Anointed.

Revelation often mixes and merges OT passages and images together in its description of God’s judgment of mankind.

The division of the destruction into thirds, also inclines us to think figuratively. Physically speaking, if 1/3 of the Sun were destroyed, life would end on planet earth. That the sources of light are being darkened is a way of showing the growing spiritual darkness that occurs throughout this present world.

Is it not in times of increasing evil, that we most think about the need for God’s Judgment to come? When times are good, we tend to want life to continue as it is. When darkness looms, we cry out to God to come and make things right again.

The use of thirds is designed to remind us that these judgments are not themselves the Final Judgment. They are partial, even though we get the feeling of increasing intensity.

The fourth trumpet of darkness provides an appropriate transition to the demonic judgments of the final three Trumpets. We will look at these final three Trumpets next week. In verse 13, we are prepared for their greater severity. They are called “woes”.

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!"

The pains of hell are not only physical and emotional, but they are also spiritual, and inflicted by spiritual forces of evil. Spiritual torment is the worst sort of torment.

Summary conclusions and applications:

1. The content of the trumpets describe events that occur throughout history, not just during the final seven years before the return of Christ.
2. The Trumpets proclaim that there are no “Natural” Disasters.
 - a. Richard Phillips writes, “They are inflicted not by “nature” but by God, and mankind is completely unable to manage them. This is precisely what a sober view of history shows, with vast portions of the human race suffering

and dying at any one time because of tragedies originating from every part of creation.” Phillips 281.

- b. Every sign of death around you is an announcement that a Final Judgment awaits – a Trumpet blast from God.
3. The Trumpets announce the futility of human attempts at security.
 - a. There is no security that the world can offer you, that will help you in the Final Judgment.
 - b. Egypt was the wealthiest and most powerful nation of the world at the time of Moses. God brought that nation to its knees.
 - c. Jericho had the strongest walls known to man at that time. They did them no good.
 - d. 1867 flood of Chattanooga – Tennessee River rose 58 feet above its normal height. After that flood, what did those with the means do? They built their homes up on the top of Lookout Mountain. Not a bad idea. But did they also realize that the flood was God’s trumpet call that His Final Judgment is coming?
 - e. A good job, a healthy retirement, good insurance, lots of friends, none of these will provide any security on the Day of Judgment.
4. Trumpets declare the Final Judgment is Immanent
 - a. When John the Baptist warned the people of his day, he said, “the axe is already at the root of the tree.” This is certainly true today. The Final Judgment could occur at this very moment.
 - b. The only thing holding Him back is the redemption of the elect. God is continuing to redeem people out of darkness. But who is to know when the time of redemption will end?

Do you believe that the Final Judgment is coming?

Do you believe that it is immanent?

The Lord may tarry another thousand years. Or He might burst through the sky before this service ends.

You do not need to make a connection between Wormwood and Chernobyl, or for that matter with some comet that will hit the earth to begin to take seriously the reality of a coming Judgment.

Trumpets are blasting all around us every day.

Quit watching the news looking for an inside tip as to when Jesus will return.

Attila the Hun was a trumpet call.

And so was the heretic Pelagius.

And so are tsunamis and earthquakes.

And so was Chernobyl.

And so are droughts and famines.

And so is the prevalence of evil.

And so are pandemics, real or imagined.

And so is the sudden car crash that takes the lives of loved ones before their time. Walk into a nursing home where you can smell death, and hear the trumpet that God is judging this world.

The signs are everywhere if you are looking. And the seeming randomness of the Trumpet Judgments helps us to see that no one is exempt from God's judgment.

Because the judgments only fall on a fraction of the earth, it is easy to comfort ourselves with the idea that only those who are worse than ourselves will be affected.

Do you remember in 2005 when hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans?

Almost 2,000 people were killed. Unfortunately, I heard some Christians conclude that this was God's judgment upon that town for its wickedness. On one level, they may have been right. But ultimately, they were very wrong. The assumption was that God's judgment would only come on the worst cities. And since they were not as bad as New Orleans, then they were exempt from worry for themselves.

The religious people of Jesus' day had a similar attitude. And Jesus rebuked them for it.

Luke 13:1-5 There were some present at that very time who told him (Jesus) about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

There were some Galileans who were engaging in pagan sacrifices. For some reason, Pilate had these men killed. The common assumption was that these men got what they deserved for their wicked idolatry. Instead of recognizing this as an announcement that a Final Judgment will come upon all men, people used it to convince themselves that they were not bad enough to experience such an evil.

What does Jesus say to them?

² And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? ³ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

God may have judged these men for their wickedness, but you should not conclude that you are somehow exempt. You should see this as a trumpet call for you to repent, because the Final Judgment will fall upon all men.

Jesus reinforces His point with another example:

⁴ Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? ⁵ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

The second example exposes the same distorted attitude. There was a “natural” tragedy that occurred. A tower fell and killed 18 men. The common belief was that this only happened because these men were worse than most men. After all, a just God would not bring such calamity on good men.

Jesus tells them that they were distorting God’s announcement: A judgment is coming, and you must repent, or you too will perish.

Have you ever felt the corruption of your heart in such a way that you knew that if God judged you to an eternal hell, He would be right in doing so?

This is the message of the Trumpets.

Without the certainty of this Final Judgment, the rest of Christianity makes little sense.

But for the Christian who must endure many of the lesser judgments upon this world, God gives the most incredible of promises. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

In explaining this, I want to direct your thoughts to the book of Lamentations in closing. Please turn with me to Lamentations 3.

The book of Lamentations is a description of a man suffering under the torment of God’s Judgment. Historically, he writes sometime after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Chapter 3 is the center of the book. Listen with your heart to his heartfelt cry.

Lamentations 3:1-17 I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath; ² he has driven and brought me into darkness without any light; ³ surely against me he turns his hand again and again the whole day long. ⁴ He has made my flesh and my skin waste away; he has broken my bones; ⁵ he has besieged and enveloped me with bitterness and tribulation; ⁶ he has made me dwell in darkness like the dead of long ago. ⁷ He has walled me about so that I cannot escape; he has made my chains heavy; ⁸ though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer; ⁹ he has blocked my ways with blocks of stones; he has made my paths crooked. ¹⁰ He is a bear lying in wait for me, a lion in hiding; ¹¹ he turned aside my steps and tore me to pieces; he has made me desolate; ¹² he bent his bow and set me as a target for his arrow. ¹³ He drove into my kidneys the arrows of his quiver; ¹⁴ I have become the laughingstock of all peoples, the object of their taunts all day long. ¹⁵ He has filled me with bitterness; he has sated me with wormwood. ¹⁶ He has made my teeth grind on gravel, and made me cower in ashes; ¹⁷ my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is;

This man is languishing under the rod of God’s wrath. He is completely helpless to oppose God. He has forgotten what happiness is...

We all should identify with the anguish of this man. He is living under God’s wrath and the result is bitterness – Wormwood.

This man is a man of faith and so he cries out.

¹⁹ Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall!
²⁰ My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me.
²¹ But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:
²² The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;
²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
²⁴ "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

Where does the man languishing under God's Judgment turn?
There is only one place: The steadfast love of the LORD.
That is God's covenant love, God's New Covenant Love established by the blood of Christ alone.

The steadfast love of the LORD has its fountain in the blood of Christ alone.
It was on the cross that the suffering of this Lamentations 3 man finds its ultimate fulfillment.

Lamentations three is the cry of each one of us who must stand silently under God's just verdict.
But it is also a foreshadow of our Lord and Savior as He hung on the cross, bearing the weight of our sins.

It was Jesus Christ alone who drank down to its dregs the cup of the wormwood and the gall.

It is not coincidental that Jesus was offered "gall" a variant of "wormwood" as he hung on the cross.

ESV **Matthew 27:34** they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.

This mixture was designed to dull Jesus' senses so that He would feel the pain as deeply. But He would not drink it because it was His purpose to drink the cup of bitterness to its last drop.

Lamentations 3:31-33 ³¹ For the Lord will not cast off forever, ³² but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; ³³ for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men.

Jesus is no longer suffering. He is no longer drinking the wormwood and the gall.

You may in this life drink some portion of the wormwood and the gall, but it will only be for a moment.

It is because of Christ drinking cup of bitterness that you can drink of the cup of life, the cup of the New Covenant in His blood.

Be thankful that there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

The Final Judgment will not be the moment of your destruction, it will be the moment of your exaltation in Christ.

Do not fear the judgments of this life. They cannot touch you eternally. You have been sealed by the blood of the Lamb.

But remember... those who do not place their trust in Jesus Christ do not have this great joy ahead of them.

Even if they mock you, point them to their need of Jesus Christ. Amen.