

## Blow The Trumpets! Revelation 8—9

The seal judgments now over, the trumpet judgments are about to begin. These will be followed by the bowl (vial) judgments, culminating in the destruction of Babylon and Christ's return to earth. Note that from the seals to the trumpets to the bowls, the judgments increase in their intensity. Note also that the trumpet and bowl judgments touch on the same areas, as the following summary illustrates:

<i>The Trumpets</i>	<i>The Judgment</i>	<i>The Bowls</i>
1. 8:1-7	The earth	16:1-2
2. 8:8-9	The sea	16:3
3. 8:10-11	The rivers	16:4-7
4. 8:12-13	The heavens	16:8-9
5. 9:1-2	Mankind—torment	16:10-11
6. 9:13-21	An army	16:12-16
7. 11:15-19	Angry nations	16:17-21

The trumpet judgments are released during the first half of the tribulation, and the bowl judgments during the last half, which is also called “the wrath of God” (**Rev. 14:10, 15:7**). The trumpet judgments parallel the plagues that God sent on the land of Egypt. And why not? After all, the whole world will be saying, as did Pharaoh, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?” (**Ex. 5:2**).

The opening of the seventh seal, and the blowing of the first six trumpets, brought about three dramatic results.

### 1. Preparation (8:1-6)

This preparation involves two factors: silence (**Rev. 8:1**) and supplication (**Rev. 8:2-6**).

The hosts in heaven had just worshipped the Father and the Lamb with a tremendous volume of praise (**Rev. 7:10-12**). But when the Lamb opened the seventh seal, heaven was silent for about thirty minutes. John does not tell us what caused the silence, but several possibilities exist. The scroll had now been opened completely, and perhaps even turned over, and all of heaven could see God's glorious plan unfolding. Perhaps the heavenly hosts were simply awestruck at what they saw.

- a. Certainly, this silence was “the lull before the storm,” for God's intensified judgments were about to be hurled to the earth. “Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God: for the day of the Lord is at hand” (**Zeph. 1:7**; note also **vv. 14-18**, especially **v. 16**, “A day of the trumpet”).

- b. During this silence, the seven angels were given trumpets, significant to John, because he was a Jew and understood the place of trumpets in Israel's national life. According to **Numbers 10**, trumpets had three important uses:
  - 1) They called God's people together (**Num. 10:1-8**).
  - 2) They announced war (**Num. 10:9**).
  - 3) They announced special times (**Num. 10:10**).
- c. The trumpet sounded at Mount Sinai when the law was given (**Ex. 19:16-19**), and trumpets were blown when the king was anointed and enthroned (**1 Kings 1:34, 39**).
- d. The voice of the Lord Jesus Christ sounded to John like a trumpet (**Rev. 1:10**). The voice of a trumpet summoned John to heaven (**Rev. 4:1**), and some relate this to the promise of the rapture of the church given in **1 Thess. 4:13-18**. Sounding seven trumpets certainly would announce a declaration of war, as well as the fact that God's anointed King was enthroned in glory and about to judge His enemies (**Ps. 2:1-5**).

The awesome silence was followed by the actions of a special angel at the golden altar in heaven (see **Rev. 9:13, 14:18, 16:7**). In the tabernacle and temple, the golden altar stood before the veil and was used for burning incense (**Ex. 30:1-10**). This was the ministry Zacharias was performing when the angel told him that he and Elizabeth would have a son. Burning incense on this altar was a picture of prayer ascending to God (**Ps. 141:2**).

- e. The "prayer of the saints" (**Rev. 8:4**) are not the prayers of a special group of people in heaven who have arrived at "sainthood." To begin with all God's children are saints—set apart for God—through faith in Jesus Christ (**2 Cor. 1:1, 9:1, 12, 13:13**). And there is no definite teaching in the Scriptures that people in heaven pray for believers on earth, or that we can direct our prayers to God through them.
- f. We pray to the Father through the Son, for He alone is worthy (**Rev. 5:3**). For centuries, God's people have been praying, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done!" and now those prayers are about to be answered.
- g. On the great day of Atonement, the high priest would put incense on the coals in the censer and, with the blood of the sacrifice, he would enter the Holy of Holiness (**Lev. 16:11-14**). But in this scene, the angel put the incense on the altar (presented the prayers before God) and then cast the coals from the altar to the earth! A storm is about to begin (see **Rev. 4:5, 11:19, 16:18**)!

Like it or not, the prayers of God's people are involved in the judgments that He sends. The throne and the altar are related. The purpose of prayer, it has often been said, is not to get

Knowing the Bible Series, Stephen Witmer, Crossway; Life Application Study Bible, Tyndale; ESV Study Bible, Crossway; King James Open Study Bible, Nelson; Be Victorious, Warren W. Wiersbe, David Cook.

man's will done in heaven, but to get God's will done on earth—even if that will involves judgment. True prayer is serious business, so we had better not move the altar too far from the throne!

## 2. Desolation (8:7-13)

The first four judgments are “natural” in that they affect the land, the saltwater, the fresh water, and the heavenly bodies. The fifth and sixth judgments involve the release of demonic forces that first torment, and then kill. The last of the trumpet judgments (**Rev. 11:15-19**) creates a crisis among all the nations of the world.

- a. **Desolation on earth (v.7).** “Hail and fire mingled with blood reminds us of the seventh plague God sent against Egypt. (**Ex. 9:18-26**). The prophet Joel also promised “blood and fire” in the last days (**Joel 2:30**). Since this is a supernatural judgment, it is not necessary to try to explain how hail, fire, and blood become mingled. “Fire” could refer to the lightning of a severe electrical storm.

The target for this judgment is green vegetation, the trees and the grass, one third of which is burned up. One can well imagine how this would affect not only the balance of nature, but also the food supply. The Greek word for *trees* usually means “fruit trees.” And the destruction of pasture lands would devastate the meat and milk industries.

- b. **Desolation in the seas (vv. 8-9).** Turning water into blood reminds us of the first Egyptian plague (**Ex. 7:19-21**). Note that John did not say that an actual burning mountain was cast out of heaven, but that the fiery object was like a great mountain. A triple judgment resulted: A third part of the saltwater turned to blood, a third part of the marine life died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. This will be an ecological and an economic disaster of unprecedented proportions.

- Considering that the oceans occupy about three-fourths of the earth's surface, you can imagine the extent of this judgment. The pollution of the water and the death of so many creatures would greatly affect the balance of life in the oceans, and this would undoubtedly lead to further insoluble problems.
- As of January 1, 1981, there were 24,867 ocean-going merchant ships registered. Imagine the shock waves that would hit the shipping industry if 8,289 valuable ships were suddenly destroyed! And what about their cargoes!

Some interpreters take “the sea” to mean the Mediterranean Sea. However, this would make a relatively small impact on the world, since the Mediterranean covers only 969,100 square miles

and averages just 5,000 feet deep. It is likely that all the major bodies of water are included in this judgment.

- c. Desolation in the fresh water (vv. 10-11).** God's wrath next reaches inland and touches the rivers and fountains of water (wells and sources of the rivers), making the fresh water taste bitter like wormwood. The National Geographic Society lists about 100 principal rivers in the world, ranging in length from the Amazon (4,000 miles long) to the Rio de la Plata (150 miles long).
- 1) The U.S. Geological Survey reports thirty large rivers in the United States, beginning with the mighty Mississippi (3,710 miles long). One third of these rivers, and their sources, will become so bitterly polluted, that drinking their water could produce death.
  - 2) God has His stars numbered and named (**Job 9:9-10**). It is likely that this fallen star is molten and that, as it nears the earth, it begins to disintegrate and fall into the various bodies of water.
  - 3) The word translated "wormwood" gives us our English word *absinthe*, which is a popular liqueur in some countries of the world. The word means "undrinkable," and in the Old Testament was synonymous with sorrow and great calamity. Jeremiah, "the Weeping Prophet," often used it (**Jer. 9:15, 23:15; Lam. 3:15,19**), and so did Amos (**Amos 5:7**), "those who turn justice to wormwood" **NASB**).
  - 4) If the people who *drink from* these waters are in danger of dying, what must happen to the fish and other creatures that live in these waters? And what would happen to the vegetation near these rivers?
  - 5) There is no direct parallel here to any of the plagues of Egypt. However, after the Exodus, Israel encountered bitter waters at Marah (which means "bitter") and Moses had to purify the water supply (**Ex.15:23-27**). But no supernatural purification will be available during the tribulation.
- d. Desolation in the heavens (vv. 12-13).** The judgments from the first three trumpets affect only a third part of the land and waters, but this fourth judgment affects the entire world. Why? Because it gets to the very source of the earth's life and energy, the sun. With one third less sunlight on the earth, there will be one third less energy available to support the life systems of man and nature.
- 1) This judgement parallels the ninth plague in Egypt (**Ex. 10:21-23**), which lasted three days. "The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light" (**Amos 5:18**). Think about the vast changes in temperature that will occur and how these will affect human health and food growth.

- 2) It is possible that this particular judgment is temporary, for the fourth bowl judgment will reverse it, and the sun's power will be intensified (**Rev. 16:8-9**). Then at the close of the tribulation, the sun and moon will be darkened again to announce the Savior's return (**Matt. 24:29-30**; see also **Luke 21:25-28**).
- 3) "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion..." said the prophet Joel, "for the day of the Lord cometh...a day of darkness and of gloominess" (**Joel 2:1-2**).

At this point, a remarkable messenger will appear in the sky, proclaiming woe to the earth's inhabitants. Most manuscripts have "eagle" here instead of "angel," but either one would certainly get people's attention! Could this be the eagle-like living creature that John saw worshipping before the throne (**Rev. 4:7-8**)? Will God send it on a special mission? We cannot say for sure, but it is a possibility.

The three "woes" in **Revelation 8:13** refer to the judgments yet to come when the remaining three angels blow their trumpets. It is as though the messenger cried, "If you think this has been terrible, just wait! The worst is yet to come!"

The phrase "inhabiters of earth" (or "them that dwell on the earth") is found twelve times in **Revelation**. It means much more than "people who live on the earth," for that is where all living people reside. Instead, it refers to a kind of people: those who live for the earth and the things of the earth. These are just the opposite of people who have their citizenship in heaven (**Phil. 3:18-21**). John described this worldly sort well in his first epistle (**1 John 2:15-17**), and later in this prophecy, he again makes it clear that "earth-dwellers" are not born again (**Rev. 13:8**).

- At the beginning of human history, heaven and earth were united because our first parents honored God and obeyed His will. Satan tempted them to focus on the earth; they disobeyed God; and ever since, a great gulf has been fixed between heaven and earth. This chasm (a deep opening or crack) was bridged when the Son of God came to earth and died for the sins of the world.

### 3. Liberation (9:1-21)

The late Dr. Wilbur M. Smith, who made the book of Revelation his special study, once wrote: "It is probable that, apart from the exact identification of Babylon in **Revelation 17 and 18**, the meaning of the two judgments in this chapter represent the most difficult major problem in the Revelation" (Wycliffe Bible Commentary, 1509). **Revelation 9** describes two frightening armies that are liberated at just the right time and permitted to judge mankind.

- a. The army from the pit (**vv. 1-12**). The "bottomless pit" is literally "the pit of the abyss." Luke makes it clear that this "pit" is the abode of the demons (**Luke 8:31**),

Knowing the Bible Series, Stephen Witmer, Crossway; Life Application Study Bible, Tyndale; ESV Study Bible, Crossway; King James Open Study Bible, Nelson; Be Victorious, Warren W. Wiersbe, David Cook.

and John states that Satan will be temporarily “jailed” there during our Lord’s reign on the earth (**Rev. 20:1-3**). The Antichrist (i.e., “the beast”) will ascend out of this pit (**Rev. 11:7; 17:8**). It is not the lake of fire, for that is the final “prison” for Satan and all who follow him (**Rev. 20:10**), but part of that hidden underworld under the Lord’s authority. Today, the fearsome army described here is already incarcerated.

- 1) This fallen star is a person, the king over the beings in the pit (**Rev. 9:11**). He does not have *complete* authority, for the key to the pit had to be given to him before he could loose his army. This “star” is probably Satan and the army, his demons (**Eph. 6:10ff**).
- 2) One of the names for Satan is *Lucifer*, which means “brightness”; he is also compared to the “morning star” (**Isa. 14:12-14**). Jesus said to His disciples, “I beheld Satan as Lighting fall from heaven” (**Luke 10:18**).
- 3) When the pit was opened, smoke emerged as though the door of a furnace had been loosened. Jesus compared hell to a furnace of fire (**Matt. 13:42, 50**), an image that ought to make people stop and think before they jest about it. The smoke polluted the air and darkened the sun, which had already been darkened when the fourth trumpet sounded.
- 4) But it is what came out of the smoke that truly terrorized mankind: an army of demons, compared to locusts. The eighth plague in Egypt was a devastating swarm of locusts (**Ex. 10:1-20**). When God wanted to judge His people, He would sometimes send locusts to devour the harvests (**Deut. 28:38, 42; Joel 2**).
- 5) These are not literal locusts, because locust do not have scorpion-like stings in their tails. These creatures do not devour the green vegetation; in fact, they are prohibited from doing so. This demonic army is given the assignment of tormenting all who have not been protected by the seal of God. The 144,000 men from the tribes of Israel would therefore escape this painful judgment (**Rev. 7:1-8**).

#### *Remaining Facts about the locusts:*

- The normal lifespan of locusts is about five months (May to September), length of time for the judgment.
- These demons will sting people, create such a pain victims will want to die, but death will flee from them (**Jer. 8:3**).
- John is not writing about ordinary locusts, yet despite the obvious symbolism, it aptly portrays a powerful enemy armed for battle.
- Read (**Rev. 9:7-10**) for descriptions of the locust.

It is unnecessary to try to “spiritualize” these symbols, or to interpret them in light of modern means of warfare. John is heaping image upon image to force us to feel the horror of this judgment.

Real locusts do not have a king (**Prov. 30:27**), but this army follows the rule of Satan, the angel of the bottomless pit. His name is “destroyer.” The thief [Satan] cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy” (**John 10:10**). Real locusts are pervasive destroyers, but this army only tortures those who do not belong to the Lord.

As God’s people, we can be thankful that Jesus Christ holds the keys of hell and death (**Rev. 1:18**) and exercises divine authority even over Satan. God has His timetable for all these events, and nothing will happen too soon or too late (**2 Thess. 2:6**; note also **Rev. 9:14**).

- b. The army from the east (**vv. 13-21**). It was at the golden altar of incense that the angel offered the prayers of the saints (**Rev. 8:3-5**); now from this same altar a voice speaks, commanding that four angels be loosed. These angels are apparently wicked, because no holy angel would be bound. Each angel is in charge of part of the vast army that follows them at their liberation, an army of 200 million beings! The army is released at a precise time, for a special purpose: to kill (not just torment) a third of the world’s population.

Since a fourth of mankind has already been killed (**Rev. 6:8**), this means that *half of the world’s population will be dead* by the time the sixth trumpet judgment is completed.

Are we to identify this as a literal army of men, moving in conquest across the globe? Probably not. For one thing, the emphasis in this paragraph is not on the riders, but the horses. The description cannot fit war-horses as we know them or, for that matter, modern warfare equipment, such as tanks. To assert that this is a literal army, and to point to some nation (such as China) that claims to have 200 million soldiers, is to miss the message John is seeking to convey.

- 1) The deadly power of these horses is in their mouths and tails, not in their legs. Fire, smoke, and brimstones issue from their mouths, and their tails are like biting serpents. They can attack men from the front as well as from the rear.
- 2) Why they are bound at the Euphrates river is not explained, though that area is the cradle of civilization (**Gen. 2:14**), not to mention one of the boundaries for Israel (**Gen. 15:18**).

One would think that the combination of five months of torment and then death (from fire, smoke, and brimstone) would bring men and women to their knees in repentance, but such is not the case. These judgments are not remedial but retributive: God is upholding His holy law and vindicating His suffering people (see **Rev. 6:9-11**). Even a casual reading of **Rev. 9:20-21**

Knowing the Bible Series, Stephen Witmer, Crossway; Life Application Study Bible, Tyndale; ESV Study Bible, Crossway; King James Open Study Bible, Nelson; Be Victorious, Warren W. Wiersbe, David Cook.

reveals the awful wickedness of mankind, even in the midst of God's judgments. The most frightening thing about **Revelation 9** is not the judgments that God sends but the sins that men persist in committing *even while God is judging them*.

Consider the sins that men and women will be committing:

*Demon worship*, which goes hand-in-hand with *idolatry* (see **1 Cor. 10:19-21**), will be the leading sin. Satan will be at work (always under the permissive will of God), and Satan has always wanted to be worshipped (**Isa. 14:12-15; Matt. 4:8-10**). A great deal of religion will be practiced at this time, but it will be false religion. People will worship the works of their own hands—the buildings they construct, machines they make and the cities they build.

Here are dead sinners worshipping dead gods (see **Ps. 115**)! Their gods will not be able to protect or deliver them, yet these people will continue to reject the true God and worship Satan and idols!

*Murder and theft* will also be rife in those days. So will various kinds of *sexual immorality*. The word translated "sorcery" is the Greek word *pharmakia*, which means "the use of drugs." Drugs are often used in pagan religious rites and demon worship. As we see the expansion of today's "drug culture," we have no problem envisioning a whole society given over to these demonic practices.

- Mankind will be breaking the first two Mosaic commandments by making and worshipping idols. In murder, they will violate the sixth commandment, and in their thefts, the eighth. By fornication, they will break the seventh commandment. It will be an age of lawlessness with "every man doing that which is right in his own eyes" (see **Judg. 21:25**).
- But God is working out His plan, and neither the sins of mankind nor the schemes of Satan will hinder Him from accomplishing His will.
- We have come to the midpoint of the tribulation (**Rev. 10-14**), a time during which some important events must take place. Thus far, we have covered about three-and-a-half years of this seven-year period (**Dan. 9:27**). During this time, the Antichrist began his career as a peacemaker and a special friend to Israel, but know, his true character will be revealed. He will become a peace-breaker and a persecutor of the people of God.

Things will not look bright for God's people during this middle stage of the prophetic journey, but they will still be overcomers through the power of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

**Homework: A Time For Testimony. Read Revelation 10—11.**