

The Trumpet Judgements

Revelation 8:1-13

Pastor John Miller

In Matthew 24, known as the Olivet Discourse, one of the great prophetic passages of the Bible, as Jesus' disciples were coming out of the Temple in Jerusalem they asked Jesus three questions. They asked, "When will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" They asked Jesus the questions we want answers to. What signs will precede Your Second Coming—not the rapture, but the Second Coming? That's all they knew about. And what will be the signs of the end of the world?

Jesus' response gave them many points, but I want to mention one. In Matthew 24:21, Jesus said, "For then..."—that is, just before His Second Coming—"...there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be."

So it's clear that just before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, there will be a period of time called "great tribulation." He said that it has never been and never will be again. One of the greatest times of tribulation on earth—which I happen to believe from the clear teaching of Scripture—will come from the throne of God. His wrath will be poured out on a Christ-rejecting world. It will last for seven years, leading up to the Second Coming, or Second Advent of Jesus Christ. At that time He will sit on the throne of David, fulfilling the Davidic covenant of the Old Testament. Jesus will reign for 1,000 years, and then there will be a new heaven and a new earth, the eternal state. We will then be in eternity forever. That is a synopsis of the book of Revelation.

Right now in our study we are at the tribulation period. Just before the Second Coming, the world will pass through the time of "great tribulation."

Backing up to chapter 5, we saw Jesus, the Lamb, taking the scroll out of the right hand of God the Father, who is sitting on the throne. Then in Revelation 6, we began to see the unleashing of the seven seals on the scroll. The scroll represents the title deed to the earth. God will redeem back to Himself the earth that has fallen and is separated from God. So these seven seals are being unleashed. We saw the first six seals in chapter 6; now we will see the seventh seal in chapter 8. And out of the seventh seal will come seven trumpet judgments. Then out of the seventh trumpet will come seven bowl judgments or the wrath of God being poured out on planet earth.

Interspersed throughout the book of Revelation, we will see some parenthetical chapters. Chapter 7 was parenthetical. We saw the sealing of the 144,000 during the tribulation, and we saw the multitude that will be saved, the souls in heaven that will be martyred for their faith during the tribulation.

Now in chapter 8, I want you to specifically see three things. Number one, we will look at the preparation in heaven, verses 1-6. "When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in

heaven for about half an hour.” And John said, “And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel’s hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake. So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.”

There are four things in these six verses I want you to note. The first is the seventh seal, in verse 1. “When He opened the seventh seal....” The “He” in this verse is a reference to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, the Worthy One, the only one worthy to take the scroll and to loose the seals thereof, has now come to the time when He is going to open the seventh seal. This seventh seal is very significant, because out of this seventh seal will come seven trumpet judgments. Then out of the seventh trumpet will come the seven bowls, or “vials” in the King James translation, of God’s wrath poured out on the earth. This seventh seal is now opened by Jesus in verse 1. The seventh seal is the opening to the seven trumpets.

In the first seal, we saw the white-horse rider of deception, the Antichrist. We saw the second seal of the red horse of war that followed the Antichrist. We saw the third seal of the black horse of famine. We saw the fourth seal of the pale horse of Death. The fifth seal was the martyred souls. Then the sixth seal was the terror of cataclysmic events that came upon the earth.

So now we come to the seventh seal, in Revelation 8:1. And out of that seal come seven trumpets. Notice first that “there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.” This is so amazing. We have the seal and we have the silence.

Up to this point in the book of Revelation, every time we have seen where it says “in heaven,” there has always been loud noise. There is either a loud voice, worship and praise, or celebration. When we get to heaven, we’re going to see and hear things that are going to be amazing; the sights and sounds will be amazing. Now for the first time in the book of Revelation, we come to the point where it is silent in heaven. Not a word is spoken for the space of about half an hour, as John says.

It’s interesting because in heaven, there is no time. “There should be time no longer.” But John is still on the earth; he’s on the island of Patmos. So he was looking at his watch thinking that it was about a half hour of silence in heaven.

Silence can be creepy. If I were to stop right now and not say anything for 30 minutes but just look at you, it would be weird. But sometimes there is that pause for effect. Most preachers know that if you want to get most people’s attention, just be quiet for a minute. It’s a pause that says, “Listen to me,” or “Look at what’s going to happen.”

It's a pause of ominous expectation or foreboding of the intense wrath of God that will be poured out upon the earth. I believe that it could be called "the calm before the storm."

This past Thursday was a beautiful day. But what happened on Friday was that a storm came. It's like an old sailor's proverb that says there is always a calm before a storm.

So before God's wrath, a storm of His judgment and vengeance on earth, there will be this calm of expectation. It's kind of like a holy hush. The angels are silent and the saints are silent as they realize that the seal is going to open up these trumpet judgments, and God's wrath is going to be poured out on planet earth. It's heaven's proper response to God's coming judgments.

In Zephaniah 1:7, the prophet Zephaniah said, "Be silent in the presence of the Lord God; for the day of the Lord is at hand." Another term for the tribulation is "the day of the Lord." You'll find that in both the Old and the New Testament. In Habakkuk 2:20, it says, "The Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him."

So we see that the seal is about to be broken, we read of the silence in heaven, then notice, thirdly in verse 2, the solemn preparation. John says, "And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets."

The definite article "the" before "seven angels" gets our attention. They aren't just seven angels; they're "the seven angels." There is a very good possibility that what we have here is a reference to what we call "high-ranking archangels." Angels are ranked in principalities and powers, cherubim and seraphim and others. So it's possible that these seven angels are uniquely set apart from other angels, that they stand in the presence of God.

When the angel Gabriel, in Luke 1, visited Zacharias, the old priest and the father of John the Baptist who was doing his priestly duty of burning the incense in the Temple in the holy place and people were waiting outside for him, Gabriel pronounced to Zacharias that his wife was going to have a child. Zacharias freaked out and said, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years." Then Gabriel said, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God." In other words, he knows what he's talking about; he just came from God.

So in Gabriel's case, he used the same expression as is used in Revelation 8:2. "The seven angels who stand before God" could be used for a special class of angels that were very powerful and high ranking. Some Bible scholars call them "the presence angels."

In verse 2, it also says that these angels were given "seven trumpets." Trumpets are the most frequently referred to and used instruments in the Bible; more so than the flute or the harp. In the book of Revelation alone, there are many trumpets.

Notice also how many times the number "seven" is referred to in Revelation. There are seven years of tribulation, seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowls. Seven is the number of God's completion.

Why trumpets? In Israel, trumpets were used to call people together. They would blow the shofar and people would congregate. They would blow the shofar and they would go into battle. So there were various ways the shofar or the trumpet was used in Israel. A good example is when they conquered the city of Jericho. The people marched around the city, then they blew the trumpets, the people shouted and the walls came down. So the trumpet is a reminder that something powerful is happening and that no doubt war is going to follow the blowing of these trumpets.

Now these seven trumpets have nothing to do with the trumpet of God that sounds at the rapture of the church. Some who like to place the church during the tribulation period like to parallel one of the seven trumpets with the trump of God in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17—"The dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." I don't think you can parallel the two. The trumpet of the rapture calls the church up "to meet the Lord in the air." The seven trumpets given to these angels will be God's wrath upon nonbelievers on the earth. So there is no parallel here between those trumpets. Don't make that mistake.

Fourthly, we have the saints' supplication. So we have the seal, the silence, the solemn preparation and the saints' supplication, verses 3-6. Notice in verse 3 that "another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne."

Who is this other angel? He's just "another angel." He's not one of the seven. Some say he is a reference to Jesus. I don't believe that. Jesus is the one loosening the seals, and out comes the seven trumpets. He's the Lamb of God. He's not called "an" angel. In the Old Testament, He's called "the angel of the Lord," and that's a very distinct title given to Him there. So I believe this is just a normal angel. And this angel "came and stood at the altar." He had "a golden censer."

What we have in these verses is a picture or description of heaven. When God gave the children of Israel instructions on how to build the tabernacle in the Old Testament, and He gave them instructions on how to build the Temple, that tabernacle or Temple was actually a picture or pattern of the one in heaven. So God gave them specific instructions on building both the tabernacle and the Temple. He told them how to build the outer court, the holy place and the Holy of Holies. This tabernacle and Temple were mirrors of the heavenly scene. Now we have that imagery for us in our text.

Some say, in verse 2, that we have "the presence angels," and, in verse 3, we have "the priest angel." This angel in verse 3 is thus functioning in the role of a priest in that he goes to the altar.

The tabernacle had an outer court with a brazen altar where animals would be sacrificed. Then you would enter into the holy place where there would be the candlestick, the menorah and the showbread. At the end of this room, there would be a veil. On the other side of that veil was

the Holy of Holies. In the holy place there was another altar of gold. It was the altar of incense. The priest would put the incense on that altar, and the fragrance from that altar would rise up to God. It was symbolic of the prayers of God's people.

When Zacharias was in the Temple, this is what he was doing. He was offering the incense, the people were waiting outside and it would be done every morning and every evening at the hour of prayer. He would have a golden censer, which is a pot with coals and incense, he would walk into the Temple swinging the censer, he would offer them on the altar and they would come together and rise as smoke before the Lord. So this incense symbolizes the prayers of God's people in the Temple in the heavenly scene.

Verse 4, "And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand." So notice the reference to "the prayers of the saints." This doesn't refer to people in heaven who obtained sainthood and are praying for us. These are representative prayers in heaven of the saints on earth from all generations who have been praying, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." These are those prayers. If you've ever prayed, "Lord, Your kingdom come. Lord, come in righteousness and reign. Lord, judge the wicked. Lord, come back and set up Your kingdom," then your prayers are represented here.

This really touches me and moves me to the power of prayer and the realization that our prayers matter before God. The Bible says, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." So God is answering the prayers. It's actually in verse 6, where it says, "The seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound." God is answering their prayers of "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done."

One of the purposes of prayer is not to get our will done in heaven but to get heaven's will done on earth. The purpose of prayer is not to align God with what I want Him to do but for me to be aligned with what God wants to do. Prayer not only changes things; prayer changes us. I like to think of prayer as time exposure to God in that God actually makes us more like Him, the more we spend time in prayer.

So this angel priest is offering up incense in the temple, which is symbolic of the prayers of God's people.

Now notice, in verse 3, a reference to "the altar" and a reference to "the throne." It's interesting that the throne and the altar are often coupled together in the Bible. As we pray, our prayers go directly to God. We don't pray to the saints, we don't pray through the saints but we go directly to God the Father through the merits of God the Son in the power of God the Holy Spirit. We don't go through saints to get to God. The Bible says, "There is...one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus." So we go directly to God, and our prayers have power and weight.

Then in verses 5-6, "The angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to

the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake. So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.”

Now the second division of this chapter is in verses 7-12. It's the desolation on the earth. So we first had the preparation in heaven, and now we move to the desolation on the earth. Verse 7, “The first angel sounded. And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.”

Now what happens, which goes into chapter 9 and not until chapter 16 do we find that the seven trumpet is blown, is this desolation upon earth. So in verse 7, we have desolation on earth after the first trumpet is blown.

What is this “hail and fire...mingled with blood”? It's hail and fire mingled with blood. A lot of modern commentators like to talk about intercontinental ballistic missiles, Apache helicopters and things like that. Those are possible. But I think it's best, when interpreting Scripture, to take the historical, literal, theological approach. All of Scripture should be approached and interpreted literally, unless that it's obviously a simile, metaphor, parable, allegory or figure of speech. Those things are obvious in the Bible. Then you look at the genre, the type of literature you're reading. Here we're studying prophecy. There's also history and poetry. There is different literature in the Bible. You interpret the text in light of what kind of genre you're in. It's very important.

So as we study these seven trumpets, I want to point out that all of them are to be taken literally. Now there are some expressions used that make it clear that John's using an analogy: examples are “as it were a great mountain,” in verse 8, and “as it were a lamp,” in verse 10 in the King James version. It means that this wasn't “a great mountain” or “a lamp”; they just looked like that to John. But the approach we want to take is literal.

What we see in these seven trumpets—we'll discuss the first four here—is a parallel between them and the plagues—I think there were nine of them—that were brought upon the Egyptians when the people of Israel came out in the exodus. So there are many parallels between the plagues of God's judgment in Egypt and the desolation of the tribulation period.

So you have “hail and fire...mingled with blood.” Some people ask, “How do you have ‘hail and fire...mingled with blood’”? I don't know but God does. Maybe it's hail and lightning that happens at the same time because of the storm. But in Exodus 9:18, we see that God rained hail down upon the land of Egypt. Then there was fire and blood.

Then you'll find this phrase repeated: “a third of the trees were burned up” on planet earth. It's interesting that in Israel they've been planting trees for years. In my first trip to Israel in 1977, I planted a tree, and we've been planting trees in Israel for many years. But I believe a third of all the trees on planet earth are going to burn up. It could affect the climate. You talk about climate change; God's going to do that. Then “all green grass was burned up.”

The word “trees,” translated in the Greek, is used frequently, and some believe exclusively, as “fruit trees.” I find that interesting. So it could be that this is actually fruit trees that have burned, reducing the food supply on the earth. Then all the “green grass” could be crops, as well. In Joel 2:30, the Lord is speaking through the prophet Joel and says, “I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke.” So there would be climate change and a lack of food.

Now all the seven trumpets and the seven bowls intensify progressively through the tribulation period. Next time we'll see, in chapter nine, that as the fifth and sixth trumpets are blown, demons are let out of the “abyssos” to torment men on earth. And the demons that are held back at the Euphrates River are released so it will dry up and the armies of the east can come across and start a war. So the plagues and destruction will intensify.

Now we have the second trumpet, in verses 8-9. It brings desolation to the sea. So the desolation first starts with the earth. “Then the second angel sounded: and something like...”—that's the expression you should look for—“...a great mountain burning with fire...”—which might have been a star falling from heaven or a meteorite—“...was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.”

There's not a lot you can say about this, but it's clear in the Bible that there will be the judgment of the sea turning to blood. Some feel the reference to “the” sea might mean it was restricted just to the Mediterranean Sea, which was called “the Sea” in Bible language. But it could also be a universal reference to all the seas.

It's also interesting that in Egypt, in Exodus 7, in the first plague, that the Nile River turned to blood. That was literal. So why wouldn't verse 8 be literal, as well?

Can you imagine going down to the beach, you dip your toes in the water and there is the stench of blood and dead fish floating in the ocean?

Then a third of the ships were destroyed. What a disaster that is.

Then the third trumpet is blown, in verses 10-11, which is the desolation of the rivers. “Then the third angel sounded: and a great star fell from heaven, burning like...”—here's that phrase again —“...a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water.”

So the first trumpet brings desolation of the earth, verse 7; the second trumpet brings desolation of the sea, verses 8-9; and now the third trumpet brings desolation of the rivers or fresh waters and the streams and wells, which would be the “springs of water,” verses 10-11.

Verse 11, “The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter.” So there was a desolation of the fresh-water systems. There is no direct parallel between this and the plagues of Egypt, but there will be a great plague of polluting and poisoning of fresh-water systems on earth.

It's interesting that God created the stars, and the Bible says that "He calls them all by name." In this verse, He calls this particular star "Wormwood." It indicates that the water is poisoned, and it cannot be drunk.

In verse 12, we have the third division or the fourth trumpet. "Then the fourth angel sounded: and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night."

I want you to see the progression: first the earth, then the sea and the rivers and then the heavens or the sun, the moon and the stars. This is creepy.

About this time, I believe that even non-Christians living on the earth are beginning to freak out. At this point, I think they realize that this is a divine intervention or divine judgment. This isn't just freaky weather patterns. This isn't just your so called "global warming." This is the wrath of God.

Have you ever been in a thunder storm or in an earthquake and your first thought is, God's trying to say something? It's almost as if God rends the heavens and sticks His face down and says, "Repent!" He's calling people to turn back to Him. But we're going to see at the end of chapter 9 that men still harden their hearts and refuse to repent; they actually blaspheme the God of heaven.

But the darkness that comes is palatable; you can feel the desolation. In Exodus 10, in the ninth plague, there was darkness. Day after day there was no sun. It was pitch black; you couldn't even see your hand in front of your face. Complete darkness. So verse 12 is a picture of God's judgment.

Jesus spoke of this in the Olivet Discourse in Luke 21:25-26. He said, "There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity." That phrase means that there's no way out. There are no solutions to the problems. Continuing, "...the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken." So Jesus specifically mentions that the sun and the moon and the stars will be darkened.

I want to remind you that the church, the body of Christ, true believers, are already in heaven at this point; we're not on earth. So if you're looking for this now, we're not going through the tribulation. I've gotten more people ask me if we're in the tribulation now—especially since our last election. "Is this the end of time?" I think it's getting close. I think the stage is being set. Globalism is certainly on the rise. Men are crying out for a one-world government. The only solution to the problems we face in this pandemic is all connected to that; it's the one-world government unifying the world. We see that set. We see that a cashless society is set. Israel is back in the land, and the stage is set. The Lord is coming soon.

But the church will have already been "caught up." In Revelation 4:1—I'm going to keep

reminding you of that—John heard a voice in heaven saying, “Come up here” after the church age. So I believe the rapture comes before this time of darkness in the tribulation.

In Amos 5:18, Amos the prophet said, “Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light.” Then again in Joel 2:1-2, “For the day of the Lord is coming...a day of darkness and gloominess.”

Think about when the sun stops shining during the day what is going to happen to solar energy. Everyone is putting these solar panels on their houses. So everyone's going to be in big trouble, because the sun won't shine. We're so dependent on the sun.

Then what happens when it's dark, at night? The thieves, robbers and criminals come out. “Men loved darkness rather than light.” They commit their crimes during the night rather than during the day. So it will be a time of darkness.

But the church is the light of the world. So when the church is removed from the earth, the darkness will come. And the church is the salt of the earth. When the salt is removed from the earth, corruption ensues.

So it will be a very dark, difficult, dangerous time. It's going to be a time of divine judgment. And as I said, men will know that judgment has come.

But in closing, I want you to notice my third main point, in verse 13, the proclamation from heaven. So we have the preparation in heaven, the desolation on earth and we now have the proclamation of an angel. “And I looked, and I heard...”—so John saw and heard—“...an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice...” I believe the word “heaven” here refers to the atmosphere above the earth. It's not talking about the dwelling place of God. Rather this angel is flying above the earth.

This will really freak people out. They're going to see all these things happening. They're going to say, “What's that?!” They're going to see an angel with a megaphone flying around the earth.

Then notice what the angel says. “...saying with a loud voice, ‘Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!’”

This is a key verse. “Woe, woe, woe” are the fifth, sixth and seventh trumpets; they are synonymous with the three woes. So when the fifth trumpet blows, “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth.” When the sixth trumpet blows, “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth.” When the seventh trumpet blows, “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth.” So this angel is actually warning the earth of the judgment that is yet to come.

I want you to note who he warns: “the inhabitants of the earth.” This phrase is often used in the book of Revelation. It actually is used 12 times. Sometimes it appears as “them that dwell on the earth.” Who are they? It's not those who physically live on planet earth. It's those who live

for the earth, those who are unsaved and earthly minded and those who are rebelling against God. So it's a reference to the unbelieving world, the non-Christian world.

Why is that phrase used? Because it is in contrast to God's people. Those Christians who may be on earth, they are living for heaven. This is where we see the contrast. What God said about Abraham was that "he waited for the city...whose builder and maker is God." Abraham owned a lot of land, but he lived in a tent. Everywhere he went he pitched his tent and built an altar. He was a stranger and a pilgrim on earth and worshipped God.

That is what we are to be. Our lives should be marked by a tent and an altar. Let your contact with the world be as light as possible. Don't be one of those who dwell upon the earth.

This is described in 1 John 2:15-17 where he says, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever." The lust of the flesh is your passions, the lust of the eyes is your possessions and the pride of life is your position. What a lot of proud people strutting the earth today. The word "world" is the evil world's system apart from God.

These are in contrast to the people of God who look "for the city...whose builder and maker is God." They don't live for the world.

So, in conclusion, let's live for heaven and not the earth. Let's live on the earth but for heaven. Let's have an eternal perspective. Let's not love the world and the things that are in the world. Jesus said, "You cannot serve God and mammon" or "money." Don't be controlled by your passions or your possessions or your pride.

The Bible tells us very clearly that life is short and death is certain. It teaches the brevity of life. Have you old folks ever noticed how quickly life passes by? The Bible says it's like "a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." It says it's like a flower that springs up fresh in the morning, and then when the noon heat comes, it withers away and dies. Therefore, "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life."

What are you living for? What is your passion? Are you motivated by the world, for the world's acceptance and love? Or are you living for the Lord?

I pray that God would teach us that the world is passing away and judgment is coming. This whole process of these judgments is actually God preparing to redeem and restore the earth that is under the curse.

It started in perfection with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when heaven and earth were wed together, but sin broke it apart. But when Jesus comes back, heaven and earth will once again be together. Jesus will reign as "King of kings and Lord of lords."

Let's not live for this world and live for this earth; it's all passing away.