

# Trumpet Judgments

## Revelation 8

The title of the message this afternoon is “Trumpet Judgments.” The Trumpet Judgments take up a long section of the book of Revelation, encompassing four chapters—8, 9, 10 and 11.

As a musician I have a special interest in trumpets. As a boy I used to listen to an old 33 $\frac{1}{3}$  RPM LP record with a performance of Vivaldi’s Concerto for Two Trumpets and orchestra. If played skillfully, the music sparkles.

This past week our son sent a video of our two grandsons performing in a beautiful recital hall not far from where they live. Stephen Paul played trumpet, accompanied by his brother Sebastian on a nine-foot Steinway grand piano. It was a beautiful song—a welcome relief to the stress the boys endure every day in a nation at war. As a grandfather and father I could not help but reminisce about the years the boys’ father played the trumpet as a youth. Stephen Paul has far surpassed his father in trumpet technique, and I’m sure his father doesn’t mind.

Trumpet-like instruments have historically been used as signaling devices in battle or hunting, with examples dating back to the 2nd Millennium BC. They began to be used as musical instruments only in the late 14th or early 15th century.<sup>1</sup>

The first time we encounter a trumpet in the Bible is in Exodus 19, when Israel gathers at Mount Sinai. The people were instructed that “When the *trumpet* sounds long, they shall come near the mountain.” There are a variety of words for trumpet in the Bible, but the word in Exodus 19 is literally *ram*, short for *ram’s horn* (יִבְלָהּ for קֶרֶן יִבְלָהּ), an early type of trumpet. The ram’s horn has an attention-getting, mournful, non-metallic sound, producing only a few distinct notes. The blast of a ram’s horn was intended to get people’s attention.

Before we get into our three points this afternoon, let’s take a few moments to consider the symbolic significance of trumpets in the Old Testament. First, they were used for *ceremonial processions*, particularly as an escort for the Ark of the Covenant. Consider Joshua 6, where God had told Joshua that he was going to make the city of Jericho fall before the Israelites. Israel’s men of war were to march around the city once a day for six days. Seven priests were to bear *seven trumpets of rams’ horns* before the ark. But on the seventh day Israel’s men of war were to march around the city seven times, and the priests would *blow the trumpets*. The Lord instructed that “*when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people were to shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat*”—a clear miracle.

Note what was to happen: the priests of the LORD would blow their trumpets, and the city walls (defenses) would come down. The trumpet blasts would

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<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trumpet> accessed 3-15-25

announce impending judgment. The trumpet sounds, and God destroys the city. This is what happened to Jericho, and as we read now in our Revelation text, this is what would shortly happen to Jerusalem as well.

Is there not a parallel to our present text? The irony here is that at the time of the destruction of Jericho, the judgment was directed at Israel's enemy, but now, the judgment falls on Israel itself. By refusing the Messiah when he came, Israel has become God's enemy! Before, Israel enjoyed God's protection; but now, Israel would not have God's protection. God was removing his hand of protection upon his covenant-breaking people.

So in Old Testament times trumpets were used in ceremonial processions.

Second, trumpets were blown to proclaim the rule of a new king. This is seen in 1 Kings 1 at the coronation of Solomon, where we read that "Zadok the priest took a horn of oil from the tabernacle and anointed Solomon. And they blew the horn (קָרָן), and all the people said, 'Long live King Solomon!'" Here is the coronation of the great King Solomon, king of Israel. There is great rejoicing, for this is the first time in Israel's history where the king's son sits as king to take the place of his father (succession). Israel's first king, Saul, was not succeeded by his son Jonathan. There was a divinely-ordered change of dynasty, and David reigned as king.

There is something deep in the human heart that desires stability, that desires a peaceful transfer of power. This will ultimately be accomplished when at the last day the Lord Jesus will be universally acclaimed as King.

Third, the trumpet sounded an alarm, warning Israel of approaching judgment and urging national repentance. The prophet Joel cries out: "Blow the trumpet (שׁוֹפָר) in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the LORD is coming, for it is at hand" (2:1).

Fourth, Moses was instructed to use two silver trumpets both "for summoning the congregation" to worship and "for having the camps set out" in battle against the enemy (Num. 10:1-9). Chilton notes that it is significant that these two purposes, *warfare* and *worship*, are mentioned in the same breath. The irony in Revelation . . . is that God is now ordering the trumpets of holy war blown against Israel herself.

Fifth, trumpets were also blown at the feasts and on the first day of every month. In Numbers 10:10 God directs, "Also in the day of your gladness, in your appointed feasts, and at the beginning of your months, you shall blow the trumpets (קְצָצֹרוֹת) over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be a memorial for you before your God: I am the LORD your God."

Our text this afternoon begins by saying, "When He [that is, the Lamb] opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven *trumpets*." The

silence here is the calm before the storm. John doesn't interrupt but waits patiently. He expects the trumpets to sound, but waits for God's perfect timing.

Waiting is so hard! How we want everything to happen according to our own timetable. Oftentimes in a movie, a long-expected breakthrough happens right on time, and everyone is happy. But in real life there is often a lot of waiting. We might pray for the conversion of a lost soul, and we pray and pray, and the person we are praying for keeps resisting the gospel. How we need to constantly remind ourselves that the God of heaven is in charge, and will accomplish his purpose according to his perfect timetable. Remember the closing words of Psalm 27, "Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!" We are tempted to say, "Lord, why can't this happen faster?" But at the final day we will understand that the Lord's timing is perfect.

The trumpets announce God's judgments on a covenant-breaking people. These trumpet judgments didn't happen out of the blue. As we saw last Sunday afternoon, the judgments against covenant-breaking Israel took place in answer to the church's fervent prayers. The church had experienced persecution from the Jews, and as the church prays, God determines to send relief. The covenant-breakers will be judged. The things that they trust in—the city, surrounded by thick stone walls; the temple, which had been built at God's command; the priestly service, appointed by God himself. Moreover, even though the Jews resented the Roman occupation, they had nonetheless enjoyed a certain amount of favor, as they helped to keep the peace.

Nevertheless, when the long-promised Messiah came, he was rejected by the Jews. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." Betrayed by Judas Iscariot, Jesus was arrested by the Jews, who delivered him to the Romans. Pilate asked, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They said, "Barabbas!" Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said to him, "Let Him be crucified!" Then the governor said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified! . . . His blood be on us and on our children" (Matt. 27:21ff.).

In the years immediately following the crucifixion, the Jews had begun persecuting Christians. The church prayed for relief, and God answered in a dramatic way with the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

The prayers of the saints went up from the golden censer, along with smoke and incense. God is a prayer-answering God, and he answers prayer that is in accordance with his will. In speaking of the Jerusalem temple Jesus had said, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Matt. 24:2). He had told the twelve, "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place" (Matt. 24:34). His disciples were not under the mistaken

impression that the fulfillment of these prophecies was going to be some 2,000 or more years in the future. “This generation” had the same meaning that it had had when the Israelites refused to go into Canaan to take possession of the land—*forty years*—when the majority of spies had said that the people of the land were men of great stature: “there we saw the giants . . . and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight” (Num. 13:32). The Israelites had responded, “if only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness!” The covenant people did not believe the promise of God. As a result, the Lord made them to wander in the wilderness for *forty years*, until the older, unbelieving generation had died off. So it was in the case of the Great Tribulation. In A.D. 30 Jesus had said, “this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place,” and *exactly forty years later*—A.D. 70—the temple and the city of Jerusalem were destroyed, in fulfillment of our Lord’s prophecy: “. . . that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.” (Matt. 23:35–36).

“The LORD will bless his people with peace” (Ps. 29:11), but the wicked, on the other hand, have only wrath and anguish, tribulation and distress ahead of them (Rom. 2:8–9).

### **1. The land burned up**

As we read Revelation 8 a few moments ago we heard the words, “So the seven angels who had the seven *trumpets* prepared themselves to sound. 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” (Rev. 8:6–7). The words for *to sound* and *sounded* are explicit, meaning *to sound the trumpet, to trumpet*.

In the words of Chilton, “Literally, the vegetation of Judea, and especially of Jerusalem, would be destroyed in the Roman scorched-earth methods of warfare.” Chilton cites Josephus’s contemporary account. When the Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans,

“The countryside, like the city, was a pitiful sight, for where once there had been a multitude of trees and parks, there was now an utter wilderness stripped bare of timber; and no stranger who had seen the old Judea and the glorious suburbs of her capital, and now beheld utter desolation, could refrain from tears or suppress a groan at so terrible a change. The war had blotted out every trace of beauty, and no one who had known it in the past and came upon it suddenly would

have recognized the place, for though he was already there, he would still have been looking for the city.”<sup>2</sup>

As John speaks of this devastation, it was still future. John was warning the covenant breakers of what would soon come to pass. If they would repent and receive the Lord’s Messiah, the judgment might be averted. But they did not repent, and they lost their city and their temple. They also lost their favored status as God’s covenant people. Many of them also lost their lives. This is what happens when men refuse to repent. Our God is a merciful God. His Word teaches, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Prov. 28:13).

The land was burned up; furthermore,

## **2. The faithless kingdom overthrown**

“Then the second angel sounded: And something like a great mountain burning with fire 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” (vv. 8–9).

Mountains in the Bible represent *kingdoms*. In Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had a dream—a dream which he could not interpret. Daniel was called in before him. Daniel told him what he had seen: a great image, a statue that represented the kingdoms of men. Then, while he watched, a stone, cut out without hands, struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. “Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth” (Dan. 2:35).

In Micah 4, the kingdom of Christ is again represented by a mountain. “But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the *mountain* of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

The kingdoms of man will one day be overthrown, but the kingdom of Christ will endure forever. By grace we have been delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the *kingdom* of God’s dear Son (Col. 1:13).

Is Jesus Christ your king? When he speaks, do you say, “Yes, sir!” He is Lord!

## **3. The covenant breakers destroyed**

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<sup>2</sup> Josephus, *The Jewish War*, vi.i.1, cited in Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, 236

“Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. 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. 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. And I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, 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!’” (Rev. 8:10–13).

At the end of history, covenant breakers will be destroyed and go into everlasting perdition, but those who love the Lord will go to be with him forever.

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. . . . [The wicked] “will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt. 25:31 ff.)

We began our worship this afternoon with the reading of Psalm 47. This is a joyful Psalm that celebrates the enthronement of Christ at the last day. We used it as a call to worship this afternoon. Consider the second part which mentions a trumpet:

“God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet (שׁוֹפָר). Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with understanding.” When God *goes up*, it is a time of rejoicing, just as it was at the coronation of an ancient king. When, in chapter 11:15, the seventh angel finally sounds his trumpet (σαλπίζω), the words are heard: “there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’”

Yes, there can be no doubt but that Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, will reign eternally in the midst of his people. Those who are born again love his appearing and look forward to that final day when he shall reign eternally. But those who broke covenant with him will be excluded from his blessed presence forevermore.

There is only one way to be in the company of the blessed, and that is to look to him in faith, receiving him as your Savior and Lord. If you come to him in faith, he will never cast you out. Amen!