

The Seventh Seal and the First Four Trumpets

Call to Worship: Isaiah 45:5-7

Hymn #681- *I Will Sing of My Redeemer*

1st Scripture: Revelation 18

Hymn #58- *The Lord is King! Lift up thy Voice!*

2nd Scripture: Revelation 8

Hymn #696- *God Will Take Care of You*

Introduction:

Following the interlude that we have gone over last time, our Lord moves on to break the seventh and final seal. And as the scroll is now ready to be opened, all of the singing and praise comes to an abrupt stop, and it becomes completely silent in heaven for about half an hour. The smell of divine judgment is in the air, and every living thing looks on with eager anticipation, as the contents of the scroll are now to be revealed and enacted.

Then suddenly, John sees another angel carrying a golden censer. And the angel comes and stands at the golden altar, which rests before the throne of God. And he is given much incense, which is to be offered together with the prayers of all the saints as a sweet smelling aroma to God. And as the smoke of this incense, along with the prayers of the saints, ascends before the throne of God, God's divine will begins to unfold, in accordance with all that is written in the scroll. And that "will" begins with seven trumpet judgments; seven limited and yet devastating warning judgments, which are to be cast upon the enemies of God and His church. We are told that the angel, following the smoke ascending to the nostrils of God; following the offering of that incense mixed with the prayers of the saints, then fills the censer with fire from the altar and casts it to the earth, initiating noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake (all evident signs of God's judgment). Following this, seven angels prepare to sound their trumpets, each trumpet, calling forth various judgments upon the wicked, the godless and the unrepentant.

Now brethren, before we consider the first four trumpet judgments, given in the remainder of this chapter, let me briefly summarize what has just happened, leading into the trumpet judgments. What are we being told by these revelatory symbols?

Well, if you recall in chapter 6, when the fifth seal was broken, the souls of the martyrs were crying out from underneath the altar. And they were crying out for vindication, because they had been killed for their witness. Well here, as the scroll opens, their prayers are beginning to be answered, only, not their prayers alone. Here we are told that the prayers of *all the saints* are mixed with this incense, which is offered up to God, leading to the trumpet judgments that follow. And what is this *incense* that is mixed with the prayers of God's people? If it has any significant meaning, then I believe that from a biblical standpoint, we can only assume that it is made up of the intercessions of our Lord Jesus Christ. For it is by Christ's intercession, that our imperfect prayers are received by, and made a sweet smelling aroma to God. Suffice it to say, once again, brethren, that the prayers of God's people (of *all* His people) are precious and dear to Him. And they are so precious and dear to Him, that when offered in the Name of Christ, they are actually used to unfold and carry out His providential will. God's judgments upon the wicked, spring out of the prayers of His people. Enter the trumpet judgments.

Let us then survey the first four trumpet judgments before concluding with a few important principles that are meant to be taken from this chapter.

I. The First Trumpet: Vegetation Struck (read verse 7)

Similar to the third seal, this judgment is directed toward the vegetation of the earth, only with an increased and more focused intensity (1/3 or a significant portion of the land). You might recall in chapter 7:1, that the angels who were holding back the four winds from destroying the earth, were commanded to restrain from releasing the final judgment until the people of God were sealed and their faith solidified. And they were told not to allow the wind of judgment to blow upon the "earth, on the sea, or on any tree." Well here we begin to see the angels being permitted to harm the earth, sea and trees in some limited and partial respect, as a warning and foreshadowing of the final and complete judgment to come. The good news is that the true children of God would not be permitted to lose their faith when affected by even these partial devastations, because they are sealed and protected by God Himself. God would send famine upon specific ruling nations in the world at various times (here, Rome is the first nation specifically in view, as the present day persecutor of God's people). "Hail and fire, mingled with

blood” are symbols that are meant to bring to mind one of the terrible plagues that had come upon the Egyptians, when God had brought His people out of Egypt. Crops and trees and grass and cattle were killed, serving to help make the once prosperous land of Egypt, barren. In various ways, Rome, the first referent to which this judgment pointed, would and has suffered from famine, which has by chain reaction affected the plants, trees, vegetation and all of the animals and people that depend on such things. And the “blood” mixed with the fire and hail of this imagery, possibly represents the blood of the martyrs, as if to declare that this judgment was measured in accordance with the shed blood of God’s saints, which was poured out by this unruly, ungodly empire. The blood of God’s people would be upon the heads of their enemies. The blood of Abel brought a curse upon the earth, when Cain killed him. And likewise, the blood of Christ’s saints would be used to curse the ground of those prospering, persecuting empires which arise throughout history, beginning with Rome.

II. The Second Trumpet: Maritime Commerce Struck (read verses 8-9)

Whereas the first trumpet judgment affected the land and the vegetation, the second one affects the sea, and especially maritime commerce. For Rome especially, the Mediterranean Sea was a critical avenue for international commerce; for the importation and exportation of goods. This was a significant part of their economic growth. And so, the emphasis here is upon God sending a major blow upon those prosperous and yet, ungodly economies, which make great use of international commerce. Again, the third of the sea becoming blood is meant to bring to mind the first Egyptian plague, where God had turned the rivers, streams and ponds into blood, leading to the death of much of the marine life.

This speculation is greatly confirmed and solidified when we come to understand the meaning of the “great mountain” that was burning with fire and cast into the sea. You see, throughout Scripture, the word “mountain” is used as a metaphor for describing a great nation. Israel or Zion, representing God’s people, has often been called the “mountain of God.” And of greater interest to our current text, we find that God describes Babylon as a “Great mountain” in Jeremiah 51. Listen to the way in which God describes the judgment He had planned to bring upon Babylon in this Old Testament text:

In Jeremiah 51:25-26, we are told, "Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain, Who destroys all the earth," says the Lord. "And I will stretch out My hand against you, roll you down from the rocks, and make you a burnt mountain. They shall not take from you a stone for a corner nor a stone for a foundation, but you shall be desolate forever," says the Lord.

And in verse 42, we read, "The sea has come up over Babylon; She is covered with the multitude of its waves."

And then following the completed prophecy of judgment that Jeremiah was to speak toward Babylon, notice the action that the prophet was to take as a symbol of this judgment:

In verses 63-64, Jeremiah is commanded, "Now it shall be, when you have finished reading this book, that you shall tie a stone to it and throw it out into the Euphrates. Then you shall say, 'Thus Babylon shall sink and not rise from the catastrophe that I will bring upon her. And they shall be weary.'" Thus far are the words of Jeremiah."

Does this sound familiar? Let me add more weight to this argument before finalizing the completed identification of this judgment. In Revelation 18, we will hear of the judgment of Babylon again, only this time representing every idolatrous, God opposing empire, beginning with Rome. Let me just quote a few of the descriptions of that judgment (for the sake of time), and see how this will help clearly identify what this trumpet judgment in chapter 8 is all about:

In Revelation 18:2, we are told, "And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!'"

Continuing on in verses 8-13, we are told, "Therefore her plagues will come in one day-- death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her. 'The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come. And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore: merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object

of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men.

And then lastly, continuing on in verses 17-21, we are told, “For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.’ Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, ‘What is like this great city?’ They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.’ Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!” Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore.”

Looking back at the second trumpet judgment, we find that this burning mountain represents the falling and destruction of worldly empires, beginning with Rome and culminating with a final, great world empire, all of which are represented by Babylon of old. All worldly, idolatrous, empires, which oppose God and His church, will be destroyed and this will affect a significant portion of the world each time (1/3 in symbol). And in the end, the final and perhaps greatest manifestation of this whore of Babylon, will be utterly destroyed with no other ungodly empire to replace it. The whole world system with all of its sinful lusts and idolatries will be completely cast down, and the Kingdom of Christ will consummate and reign forever! Materialism and life as defined by this world will be forever destroyed, set ablaze and buried under the sea as it were, and Christ’s glorious Kingdom of righteousness alone will stand. Eventually, the “fractions” will become whole and universal. But until then, the second trumpet judgment warns, as each preceding empire falls, affecting a significant portion of international commerce and trade throughout a significant portion of the world, all throughout the history of the church age.

III. The Third Trumpet Judgment: Bitter Suffering (Read verses 10-11)

Again, we are reminded of the first plague that was cast upon the Egyptians, especially, as it had affected the drinking water. Only, we find here a few symbols that cue us in, regarding the specific nature of this trumpet judgment. In the beginning of chapter 9, we see that the symbol of a “star” is meant to represent a person (an angel there) in some respect. This “great star” is therefore meant to represent a person, as we will see in a few moments. But notice as well, secondly, that we are told that the name of this star is “Wormwood.” Wormwood is a bitter herb, which when mixed with drinking water, actually serves to contaminate the water. And so, in some way, the fall of a *person* leads to some manner of embittering of a significant number of other people (1/3 according to the symbol in the vision). Let’s consider a few Old Testament texts, which will help aid us in discovering what exactly this particular trumpet judgment entails:

In Isaiah 14:12-15, we are told, "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer [Lit. "Day Star], son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit."

Interestingly enough, this is a prophecy that is specifically spoken against the king of *Babylon* (vs. 4) and the demon who works in and through him. This would fit well within our context of Revelation 8. But consider a few other texts as well, that mention “Wormwood.”

Speaking now against the rebellious, idolatrous Israelites, in Jeremiah 9:13-15, the Lord states, "And the Lord said, "Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice, nor walked according to it, but they have walked according to the dictates of their own hearts and after the Baals, which their fathers taught them," therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: "Behold, I will feed them, this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink."

And again in Jeremiah 23:15, "Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets: 'Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall; for from the prophets of Jerusalem profaneness has gone out into all the land.' "

And then finally, Lamentations 3:15-19, “He has filled me with bitterness, He has made me drink wormwood. He has also broken my teeth with gravel, and covered me with ashes. You have moved my soul far from peace; I have forgotten prosperity. And I said, “My strength and my hope have perished from the Lord.” Remember my affliction and roaming, the wormwood and the gall.”

Bringing this all together, brethren, we find that this symbol of “Wormwood” poisoning the waters is not meant to indicate a *physical* poisoning brought about by a literal poisoning of drinking water. Rather, as we compare these symbols with their Old Testament counterparts, we find them to entail bitter suffering that will come upon those who have put their confidence and hope in earthly kings. In the most relative case for the first century Christian in Asia Minor, it would entail the bitterness of soul that would come upon a significant portion of the world (1/3) which has put its confidence in Caesar rather than in the Lord Jesus Christ. They chose idolatry and defilement, and therefore, they themselves would drink of that defilement (ex: Moses made the Israelites, who worshiped the golden calf, drink its dust mixed with water).

For Caesar (and especially the demon working through him), the then reigning king of spiritual Babylon, will himself fall off of his high horse and be destroyed along with the empire, as we have already seen in the previous trumpet judgment. The great “star” and ruler of Rome, and the great “stars” and rulers of every other great empire in history, will always fall, and when they and their kingdoms do indeed fall, it will greatly affect the surrounding world, which has secured their lives in the foundations built by these ungodly rulers. The prayers of the saints, joined by the intercessions of the Lord Jesus Christ will bring down every great empire and its ruler/s. And all who put their stock in the security provided by these empires and their rulers will be left devastated, with bitter suffering! Such is the guarantee given by these trumpet judgments, which continually blow throughout the duration of the church age, always warning and pointing to the ultimate “Day of Judgment” when Christ returns and these judgments (and more) will be universal in their scope of devastation.

IV. The Fourth Trumpet Judgment: Spiritual Darkness (Read verse 12)

Again, we ought not to expect a strict literal interpretation of this judgment, anymore than we have the others. And again, we are reminded of another Exodus plague here, when thick and total darkness was sent upon the Egyptians for a time. Only here, the darkness is spiritual in nature, indicating that there will be an ongoing significant severing of people from every ray of light that would reveal God and His grace, in anticipation of imminent final judgment. A significant portion of the church age (1/3 according to the symbol) would be mingled with darkness, so that many would be hardened and kept from beholding the true light of God and His grace. Even throughout the sufferings brought about by the Four Horsemen of the first four seals, along with these trumpet judgments, most would fail to repent and seek God for His grace. Darkness is indicative of ultimate judgment. It is likened to that which happens when God judges a rebellious nation by giving them over to grosser and grosser sins and idolatry in accordance with Romans 1. When a nation grows harder and harder, incurring a larger debt of sin (to be followed up by an increasing measure of anticipated wrath), this is a clear sign that such judgment has been enacted and will come to its completion in due time. Notice how a few of the Minor Prophets confirm the direct association of a “darkening of the illuminaries” with judgment:

Joel 2:1-2a- “Blow the trumpet 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: A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, like the morning clouds spread over the mountains.”

And again in verses 30&31- “And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.”

And in Amos 5:18-20, we are told, “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. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him! Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?”

And finally, Zephaniah 1:15 states, “The great day of the Lord is near; it is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers. "I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse." Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy, for He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land.

And again, these various local judgments point to the great and final judgment, where all people, universally, outside of Christ will ultimately be cast into *outer darkness* where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth forever! [Fear and dread over realized emptiness of false hope and security; Also, note the darkness at the cross]

And such is a general summary of the first four trumpet judgments that are directed toward the “inhabitants of the earth” or the “earth dwellers” or the “unsaved and ungodly.” And as we come to verse 13, we are given an introduction to the last three Trumpets, which are called “Woes,” because they are judgments of a greater intensity; judgments that are directed especially toward the people themselves as opposed to the land, the empire and commerce, the rulers...etc. These judgments bring about terrifying personal harm, directed at the individual persons themselves, and they bring them closer and closer to the final judgment. That is why an “Eagle” or a “Vulture” [a bird of prey] announces these woes, while circling above. We are meant to get a picture of a bird of prey circling above a dying people, waiting to swoop down and devour their carcasses, as their lives are drained from them. These last three trumpets bring the worst of the worst upon the unsaved world, throughout the history of the church age, and ultimately culminating in the return of Christ.

Conclusive Applications

1- Once again, we must recognize that all of these judgments originate with God. The Four Living Creatures called forth the Four Horsemen in the general seal judgments, and seven angels of God bring forth these trumpet judgments in accordance with the prayers of Christ's saints ("thrown down" vs. 7, 8 & 10).

2- God is ultimately the Author of all calamity (Isa. 45:6-7: "That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that there is none besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other; I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the Lord, do all these things."). And these calamities are meant to warn us, anticipating the Great Day of God's Wrath! Unbeliever, don't take the tornadoes, tsunamis, earthquakes, wars and devastations for granted! These are warnings, indicating a coming final judgment. They are not "by chance." The weather men seek to interpret the signs of their coming, but God stirs the winds, the waves and the nations...etc. Don't miss it! Don't wait till it hits us/you! [Recognize what "really is" in light of what "seems to be"]

3- These judgments anticipate the final judgment (the "trumpets" warn all who remain), but they also proclaim the coming, final redemption of God's people. Why the link to the Egyptian plagues, if not literal? Because it reminds us that the deliverance of God's people ultimately comes by the judgment of the world! Israel is redeemed through the judgment of Egypt. The church is redeemed by the judgment of the world. And the sign of our redemption is the blood of the Passover Lamb, which has been applied to our hearts by faith!

Are we weary; do we feel trapped by the world, the flesh and the devil, and the Red Sea? Here again the voice of Moses, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today! For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace" (Ex. 14:13-14). "And the Lord said to Moses, 'Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward! But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea'" (Ex. 14:15-16). And behold, the Red Sea parts and dries up, and our opposition is ultimately drowned in the sea.

There is much Exodus language in the Book of Revelation, granting us encouragement in these kinds of ways!

AMEN!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25