

Do You Hear the Trumpets' Sound?

Revelation 8:1–9:21

Studies in Revelation #18

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As you know, in recent years our culture has experienced the rise of militant atheism. These are people not content to sit back; these are people who evangelize on the streets, these are people who saturate our media, and these are people that even have their own Sunday churches. This is all so new for the atheist movement.

But one thing they still do; there's one old argument they continue to use: "if God is both all-powerful and all-merciful, how can there be evil in the world?" And so child cancer, famine that affects children in Africa, terrorists who use children to blow themselves up in the name of God, and every other kind of disease, destruction, and death that cause suffering and pain are evil; and if they exist, God cannot. That's the argument. I'm going to come back to this at the end but for now, I want to ask you why all these things exist in the world? What does the Word of God say?

The Word of God says God made the world upright. God gave the first man, Adam, the freedom to continue in fellowship with God and to enter a heightened fellowship with God or to rebel against his Creator. Adam rebelled. We call this sin. His sin was against a holy and infinite God and thus deserved an infinite judgment. And because Adam represented all humanity to come, everything he did affects us down to this day. And so injustice in the world only exists because

there is perfect justice in God. Fallenness in disease and death only exists because there is uprightness in God.

As we return to Revelation this morning we've seen a panoramic view of human history in chapter 6 as the seven seals on the scroll of God's will were removed. All the tragedies that occur in the world are limited experiences of God's infinite justice on the world for its sin against God. At the end of that scene we saw the Second Coming of Jesus to judge the living and the dead. Then in chapter 7 we had a pause to see what was happening in heaven and how God was at work to save his people here on earth while judgments were falling down. And here in chapters 8–9 we come back to that scene of the Second Coming and then hear a series of seven trumpets. These trumpets are describing the same human history of chapter 6, only with more intensity, as trumpets are loud and announce something serious to come. So we see here, again, the justice of God poured out upon the world. And I want you to see that infinite justice of God from the vantage point of three actors in this scene:

1. *The Response of the Saints*
2. *The Retribution of God*
3. *The (Non-) Repentance of Humanity*

The Response of the Saints (8:1–5)

First, and very briefly, I want you to see in 8:1–5 that the justice of God comes to the world in this age in response to its injustice. So notice *the response of*

the saints. We read in verse 1: **When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about** (literally, “like”) **half an hour.** Silence in the Old Testament is the precursor to judgment: “Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD, for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling” (Zech. 2:13). The last time we saw heaven in the series of seals we were under the altar with the martyred saints, who were crying out to God, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth” (6:10). In response to that prayer God told them to rest for a little while longer (6:11). We’re back to those seals and now with the seventh, which seamlessly leads to the seven trumpets in the hands of seven angels in verse 2.

But there’s another angel at that heavenly altar where the saints are, and he has a **golden censer** or plate that he uses to offer incense and the prayers of the saints **before the throne** (8:3) and **the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God** (8:4). And as these acts of worship are lifted up to God, God sends down his answer: **Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake** (8:5). Do you remember what thunder, lightning, and earthquake signifies in Revelation and throughout the Bible? This is the coming of God to the earth as we saw at the end of chapter 6 and as we see throughout our Bibles, for example, in Exodus 19 at Mount Sinai.

What do we learn from this? Not only does God hear the cries of his people for justice against the injustice of the world, but also that our prayers “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done” are connected with God’s grand purposes against our enemies. We so quickly pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” asking for our colds to go away, but before we pray for that, pray for God’s just kingdom and will to come upon the earth!

The Retribution of God (8:6–9:19)

And this justice is described in the seven trumpets as *the retribution of God* from 8:6 through 9:19. Children, when I played basketball my coaches always had a way of punishing us. When we were goofing off, talking to each other while he was talking, or just being plain lazy, he would make us run lines. Lines are where you start on the baseline, run to the free throw line and back, then half court, then the other free throw line, and then the baseline and back. And we wouldn’t do it once, but over and over and over again! That’s retribution for disrespect. In the beginning Adam sinned and we have continued to sin, disrespecting God. And all the bad things that happen in the world are his retribution.

Notice in 8:6–13 that this retribution comes upon creation in the first four trumpets. In trumpet one, God strikes the earth with **hail and fire** (8:7); in trumpet two, God strikes the sea and turns it into **blood** (8:8); in trumpet three, God strikes the rivers with bitterness (8:11); and in trumpet four, God strikes the

heavens and turns the sun and moon dark (8:12). And how are these trumpets described? Like the plagues upon Egypt in the Old Testament. During the age between Jesus' first and second comings, God plagues the realms of creation—the heavens above, the earth beneath, and the waters under the earth both sea and fresh. Why else would insurance companies call natural disasters “acts of God?” God's judgment is comprehensive.

But also notice that God's judgment in this age is limited. Only one-third of the earth's grass and trees are burned (8:7), only one-third of the sea became blood killing only one-third of sea life and one-third of the ships (8:8–9), only one-third of the rivers became bitter (8:10), and only one-third of the sun, one-third of the moon, and one-third of the stars were darkened so that one-third of the day was dark and one-third of the night was dark (this is another reason why these are highly symbolic descriptions). In the midst of God's judgment we find his mercy. God's judgments on the earth today are meant to demonstrate his power over the unbelieving world but also to warn you of his eternal judgment. And being warned, to cause you to repent and believe in Jesus Christ!

Notice in 9:1–19 that this retribution comes upon humanity in trumpets five and six. And note that more space is spent on these two trumpets than on the previous four combined. Why? To impress upon us the righteous judgment of God and to show his care for the elect.

Trumpet five (9:1–11) describes the torment that those who are not sealed for eternal life suffer in this life. The locusts could harm **only those people who**

do not have the seal of God on their foreheads (9:4). But once again, the pain and suffering of this life is limited as it is only for five months (9:5). And it is not death itself, but like the sting of a scorpion (9:5). Then we read those fearful words: **And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them** (9:6). And these locusts (9:3, 7–11) are not apache helicopters! The image of the locust was a fearful one in the Old Testament. In the plague of locusts in Exodus 10 and in the prophet Joel's description of the coming Day of the Lord we see the utter devastation these God-ordained creatures sent and plague men with.

Trumpet six shows us that war and killing is a judgment of God, but again, it is limited to just one-third of the world (9:15, 18). **The great river Euphrates** (9:14) pictures the Assyrian and Babylonian armies, the wicked world outside of the covenant, destroying all in their path. Also for Romans it was eastern boundary, outside of which was the Parthian Empire with their hordes of **mounted troops** (9:16, 17). Death, then, is a curse. For the wages of sin is death and the result of Adam's sin was death upon mankind that God created to have eternal fellowship with him.

The (Non-) Repentance of Humanity (9:20–21)

How does the world response to all this retribution of God? Note well in verses 20–21 *the (non-) repentance of humanity*:

The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Yet the world of the Richard Dawkins', the Bill Maher's, the Stephen Fry's continue to find ways to mock God, to reject him, and to go their merry way. But in their reason they show themselves unreasonable. In their rationality they show themselves irrational. As Paul says, "Claiming to be wise, they became fools" (Rom. 1:22). How so? In an atheist world, there is only matter. All logic, all morality, all talk of good versus evil is a fiction. Yet they steal from God's worldview because theirs makes no sense. They do this to justify their sin and their rebellion against God. The fact that there is evil in the world proves there is a God, because there can be nothing called "evil" unless you assume God, who determines what is good and what is evil.

The final judgment is coming, my friends. And everything you fear in this life is a drop of the entire outpouring of that judgment. Death, suffering, famine, a world that is at times upside down are all plagues sent by God to show us all that Jesus Christ is Lord. Can you hear the trumpets' sound?