

Revelation 8:6-9:21 “The Seven Trumpets: Woe to the Earth-Dwellers” September 1, 2019
Exodus 7:1-6; 9:13-26; 10:12-29
Psalm 105

The first five trumpets are patterned after the plagues of Egypt.

“God’s overall intention in the plagues was
to harden Pharaoh’s heart so that he would not release Israel (Exodus 4:21)
and to give himself the opportunity to perform his plague signs (7:3; 10:1-2).
These signs were not intended to coerce Pharaoh into releasing Israel
but functioned primarily to demonstrate
Yahweh’s incomparable omnipotence to the Egyptians” (Beale, 465)

People sometimes object that if God *hardened* Pharaoh’s heart,
then somehow it wasn’t fair for God to bring these judgments on Pharaoh.
But Pharaoh *deserved* this.

Remember that Pharaoh had murdered all of the Hebrew boys that he could find!
Pharaoh had enslaved Israel.
Pharaoh had cursed the seed of Abraham.

And God had promised Abraham –
“those who bless you I will bless,
and those who curse you, I will curse.”

So the purpose of the plagues was not so much to call Egypt to repentance,
but to bring judgment against those who were already opposed to God.

Yes, there were some Egyptians who repented! – thanks be to God! –
but the chief purpose of the plagues was to show that they were being judged
for their rebellion and opposition to God.

Our Psalm of response retells that story.

Psalm 105 recounts the story of God’s dealing with his people
from Abraham through Moses...

Sing Psalm 105

Read Revelation 8:6-9:21

Introduction: The Coming of Christ

The Seven Trumpets are clearly sounded in response to the prayers of the saints.

In chapter 6, verse 10, we heard the souls under the altar cry out for vindication –
asking how long until God takes vengeance on the ‘earth dwellers.’

In chapter 8, verse 13, we are told that the three woes that conclude the 7 trumpets
are sent upon these same ‘earth dwellers.’

In verse 7, hail and fire mixed with blood are “thrown upon the earth” –

this is almost an identical phrase to what we heard two verses ago in verse 5 –
when the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar
“and threw it on the earth.”

Fire from heaven came in response to the prayers of the saints in verse 5.
In the same way, the prayers of the saints are the means that Jesus uses
to bring about his kingdom.

So the Seven Trumpets need to be seen as a response to the prayers of the saints.
At the same time, the Seven Trumpets appear to be covering the same *time period*
as the Seven Seals.
The Seven Seals are oriented around the afflictions of the martyrs –
around the theme of suffering with Christ.
The Seven Trumpets are oriented around the afflictions of the wicked –
around the theme of suffering for sin and rebellion.

The Seven Seals remind us that God will protect his people
even as they bear the cross with Jesus –
the Seven Trumpets remind us that God will vindicate his people
by bringing judgment upon the ‘earth dwellers.’

Throughout the OT, the sounding of trumpets was done either to call people to worship,
or to call people to battle.
In the wilderness camp (Numbers 10) the trumpets would be sounded
as a signal to begin their march –
as the war camp of the LORD.
Think about the blowing of trumpets at Jericho –
where the sound of the trumpet signals the fall of the city;
or when Gideon and his handful of men blew the trumpets as a sign of the fall of Midian.

As Greg Beale has put it,
“World disturbance and the apparently evil occurrences of history
are not a sign that events are out of God’s control,
but are an expression of holy war,
coming as a result of the church’s prayers
and God’s sovereign response to those prayers.
As at Jericho, the saints do not directly fight,
but wait on God to fight for them from heaven.” (Beale, 470)

[Even as the stars of heaven fought for Israel (Song of Deborah)]

In the seven seals – the focus was on how Jesus brings about judgment on the earth.
In the seven trumpets – the focus turns to how Jesus *protects you* in the midst of trouble.

In the seven seals – the brunt of this destructive power falls upon the church
(as the souls under the altar testify).

In the seven trumpets – the people of God are *protected* from the destructive power.

You can understand, then, why some people think
that the seven seals and the seven trumpets are talking about two different time periods!

But if you look for the ‘time stamps’ in these two “sevens”
the seven seals plainly begin with the ascension of Jesus
(the Lamb standing as though slain)
and end with the final judgment;
and the seven trumpets also cover the same time period –
but now describing these judgments as being focused on the wicked –
or more precisely, on “earth-dwellers” –
those who do 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.

Again, we see the *sevens* as the proclamation of the purpose of God for history.
This is the word of the LORD as it goes forth to all the earth.
(And, as with the seven seals, we will hear the response of the people of God
at the end of the seven trumpets).

First, we need to see how:

The First Four Trumpets Turn the Plagues of Egypt Against Earth, Seas, and Heavens (8:6-12)

The Plagues of Egypt serve as the backdrop for the plagues of the Seven Trumpets.
What Moses saw in Egypt was a typological foreshadowing of the final judgment.
Egypt got to experience a foretaste of the Last Days wrath of God.
And – it is important to say – *Jesus* also experienced the Last Days wrath of God.
The end of the world has happened *to Jesus*.
That’s why – at the cross – the sun was darkened, there was an earthquake –
the signs of the final judgment happened –
because at the cross, the final judgment was carried out against Jesus!

With each trumpet there is an immediate action –
followed by a result – affecting a *third* of each part of creation.

1. Hail, Fire, and Blood – Earth, Trees, and Green Grass (Ex. 9:24/Dt 20:19-20)

⁶Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.

⁷ *The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.*

In the first trumpet, there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood,
and these were thrown on the earth.

This reminds us of the plague of hail and fire which came upon Egypt (Ex 9:22-25).
But here it is not localized to a single nation – it extends throughout the earth.
Rather, it is *limited* to a third of the earth – a third of the trees –
and since grass is a more resilient plant – all the grass.

So even as these plagues are more limited in their effects,
they are universalized in their scope.

Why is there a judgment on the earth, the trees, and the grass?
Deuteronomy 20:19-20 speaks to Israel and warns them
that when they are besieging an enemy, they are *not* to destroy trees –
except that they may use some trees for siegeworks.
In other words, people are supposed to take *good care* of the earth
and not engage in wanton destruction of creation!
Humanity is supposed to be God’s stewards in the rule and management of the earth.
But when Adam sinned – the LORD God declared,
“cursed is the ground because of you.”
Even as God’s blessing comes to all creation through man –
so also God’s curse comes upon all creation through man.

Why a third?

In Ezekiel 5:2, God said that he was bringing judgment against Jerusalem,
by fire, by sword, and by exile.
Then in 5:12, God interprets “fire” to mean *famine* – as he says
that a third would die of famine and pestilence, a third by the sword,
and a third would be scattered.

So it is likely that “fire and hail, mixed with blood” has a similar meaning –
after all, if you destroy plants by fire and hail –
the result will be that there is less food!!
(That was certainly the case in the fire and hail that fell upon Egypt!)

2. The Great Mountain Turns the Sea to Blood – Destroying Sea Creatures and Ships (Ex. 7:20-21; Jeremiah 51:25, 42)

⁸ *The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. ⁹ A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.*

In Egypt, the waters of the Nile were turned to blood – causing the fish to die.
In Revelation there is always *something more* to the plague –
something to show that God is not simply doing the *same thing* –
there is something *more* going on here.

And here, the something more is that
“something like a great mountain, burning with fire”
is thing that is thrown into the sea.
Mountains are often used in Revelation to refer to kingdoms (14:1; 17:9; 21:10).
In Revelation 18, a stone like a great millstone will be thrown into the sea –
and John hears that this stone is “Babylon, the great city.”

In Jeremiah 51:25, God speaks of the judgment against Babylon,
“I am against you, O destroying mountain...”

So a great burning mountain is thrown into the sea –
resulting in the death of a third of the sea creatures –
and the destruction of a third of the ships.

Fishing is curtailed – and the economy spirals downward –
because of this maritime disaster.

(We’ll hear more about economic disaster later in Revelation.)

3. A Great Star (Wormwood) Falls from Heaven – Turning Waters to Wormwood (Ex 7:24; Jer. 9:15; Amos 5:7)

¹⁰ The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. ¹¹ The name of the star is Wormwood.^[b] A third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter.

The Egyptian plague of the waters turned to blood continues to take center stage.
This time, it is not a mountain – but a great star – that falls from heaven.
And here it falls not on the seas – but on the rivers and springs (the fresh water) –
bringing drought and death to many people.

What is this “star”?

Think back to the ‘seven stars’ that were the angels of the seven churches! (ch 1).
Here we have a ‘star’ falling from heaven!
Can you think of any angel who falls from heaven?!!

Isaiah 14:12-15 spoke of the fall of the king of Babylon as the fall of the Day Star!

The fall of earthly rulers prefigured the casting down of Satan.
Indeed, to this day, the fall of wicked rulers continues to remind us
that their rule cannot continue!
The pride of earthly rulers is their downfall!

Jeremiah 9:15 says that because Jerusalem has forsaken the LORD,
therefore he will feed them with wormwood and give them poisonous water to drink.
Indeed, Jeremiah 23:15 goes a step further,
comparing Jerusalem to Sodom and Gomorrah.

And Amos 5:7 speaks of how the LORD is about to break out like fire in the house of Joseph –
“O you who turn justice to wormwood, and cast down righteousness to the earth!”

As if that were not enough,
the fourth angel blows his trumpet...

4. Sun, Moon, and Stars Are Darkened – Day and Night (Ex. 10:21-23; Ezek. 32:7-8; Jer. 31, 33)

¹² *The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.*

The Egyptian plague of darkness now falls upon all the earth.
There is a curious phenomenon here –
that a *third* of the sun, moon, and stars were struck –
so that a third of their light was darkened...
Does that mean that the sun is one-third less bright?
Or does that mean that a third of the day was turned to darkness?

Of course, either way you go, you also have the same problem for the night!
What does it mean for a third of the *night* to be “likewise”?!!

But, of course, this only causes problems for us if we take the imagery too literally.
This language is often used by the prophets to speak of God’s judgment on the nations.
Ezekiel 32:7-8 says to Pharaoh, king of Egypt:
“When I blot you out, I will cover the heavens and make their stars dark;
I will cover the sun with a cloud,
and the moon shall not give its light.
All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over you,
and put darkness on your land, declares the Lord GOD.”

Jeremiah had spoken of God covenant with the day and with the night (Jer 33:20).
“If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night,
so that day and night will not come at their appointed time,

then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken,
so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne,
and my covenant with the Levitical priests my ministers.”

The disruption of day and night is compared to the disruption of the Davidic covenant!

The basic idea is that “If Israel would not fulfill its purpose by accepting and keeping the Torah when it was given at Sinai, then God would reduce the world to its original chaos and darken its luminaries.” (B 483)

The failure of Israel has catastrophic consequences for the nations!

And what is more –

if the nations had wiped out Israel,

they would effectively have wiped out the cosmos –

thereby eliminating their own hope for salvation!

In the same way, if the world eradicates Christianity,
they destroy themselves.

The Three Woes of the Last Three Trumpets (8:13-11:19)

¹³ *Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, “Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!”*

So the first four trumpets signal judgments against the various realms of creation.

The last three trumpets are particularly focused against the ‘earth-dwellers’ –
against those who oppose the kingdom of Jesus.

5. The Angel of the Bottomless Pit – Tormenting Those Who Do Not Have the Seal of God (Ex. 10:14-15; Joel 2:31)

9 And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit.

The verb in verse 1 suggests that the star had already fallen from heaven to earth.

This may well be the fallen star of chapter 8, verse 10.

It certainly echoes the language of Jesus, when he said,

“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” (Luke 10:18)

I mention that passage because it is in the very next verse where Jesus says to the 12,

“Behold, I give to you power to tread on serpents and scorpions,
and over all the power of the enemy;
and nothing shall by any means hurt you”

When it says that this fallen star is given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit,
that suggests that Satan has been given ‘control’ of the bottomless pit.
But, of course, that means that God and the Lamb

are the ones who have *given* him this control.
(We'll see in chapter 12 that Satan has been cast down from heaven)

² He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft.

The darkening of the sun and the air reminds us of the darkening of the heavens –
but of course, Satan cannot reach the heavens!
He can only darken the sun and the air!

And then you see coming from the smoke:

³ Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. ⁴ They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

These are not your typical locusts!

In Exodus 10, the locusts devoured the vegetation and all the fruit of the trees...
and there was no green thing left on the trees.

But here, they are told *not* to harm the grass or green plants or trees –
but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

If you belong to Jesus – if you have the seal of God on your head –
then the devil and his minions *cannot* harm you.

⁵ They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone. ⁶ And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them.

You may have heard of the view that sees these locusts as helicopters.

Of course, military helicopters that only torment people – not kill them –
would make no sense.

It would be better to think about what the picture would communicate to John's hearers!

In the context of the plagues of Egypt,

locusts obviously remind us of the locust plague of Exodus 10.

But God had told Israel in Deuteronomy 28 that if they rebelled against him,
he would bring the plagues of Egypt upon them...

and in the prophet Joel, we hear about a locust plague that came upon the land!

The portrayal here in the fifth Trumpet is based on Joel 1-2

which speaks of the locust plague as an invading army that destroys everything.

Just as the locusts came upon Egypt to judge Pharaoh for his hardened heart,
and just as the locusts came upon Israel to judge Israel for their hardness of heart,
so now the locusts of Revelation have come against humanity
because of their hardness of heart.

Verse 6 makes it clear that the people are *not* repenting!
They do not respond to these judgments by turning to God –
they respond by longing for death.

Verses 7-10 then describe the locusts:

⁷ In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, ⁸ their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; ⁹ they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. ¹⁰ They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails.

Where does this description come from?

Well, think about the cherubim –

they have the faces of a lion, ox, eagle, man – and wings...

Here we have locusts like horses, with human faces, women's hair, lions' teeth,
and tails like scorpions.

But the prophet Joel spoke of locusts with lions' teeth (1:6),

Joel also spoke of the sound of locusts as the sound of chariots (2:4-5)

Jeremiah 51 starts with “sound the trumpet” –

and then speaks of troops swarming like locust.

¹¹ They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.

This “angel of the bottomless pit” appears to be the same figure as the “fallen star.”

His name in Hebrew is Abaddon (Destruction) and in Greek Apollyon (Destroyer)

¹² The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.

6. The Four Angels and Their Two Million Lion-Serpent-Horses Who Kill a Third of Mankind (Gen 3:15; Ps 91; Is. 5:28-29)

¹³ Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, ¹⁴ saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.” ¹⁵ So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind. ¹⁶ The number of

mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number.

After the fifth seal, the souls under the altar cried out for vindication.
After the fifth trumpet, the wicked long for death.

And in the sixth seal, God answered the plea of the innocent.
And in the sixth trumpet, God answers the plea of the wicked.
They long for death?
So God sends the judgment they deserve.

The voice from the four horns of the altar is the voice of the Lamb.
Jesus tells the sixth angel to ‘release the four angels.’
They were bound at the Euphrates –
 which is the place from which God brought judgment many times before.
Assyria, Babylon, Persia – the great powers of the ancient world –
 had their base of power on the Euphrates.

You actually cannot calculate the number of them.
It is twice ten thousand times ten thousands [plural] –
 how many ten thousands?
It doesn’t say!

The point is that there are a *whole lot of them!!!*
(a point also made in Jeremiah 46)

And their appointed task is to kill a third of mankind.

¹⁷ And this is how I saw the horses in my vision and those who rode them: they wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire^[e] and of sulfur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. ¹⁸ By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. ¹⁹ For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails are like serpents with heads, and by means of them they wound.

The horses have heads like lion’s heads – and their tails are like serpents with heads!
“Here again the piling up of monstrous metaphors underscores
 that the demons are ferocious and dreadful beings
 that afflict people in a fierce, appalling, and devastating manner.” (B 510)

But notice how they kill people.
By the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths.
Their tails wound and afflict.
Their mouths kill.

We will see this over and over as we keep going through Revelation:
it is from the *mouth* of the enemy that destruction comes.

To say it another way, this monstrous cavalry kills by *words*.
Words that seek to immunize you to the gospel of Jesus.
Words that try to persuade you to deny Christ.

But those who belong to Jesus cannot be harmed by this monstrous cavalry.
They have only been sent against those whose hearts are hardened.

Notice the response to these plagues:

²⁰ 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, ²¹ nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

In other words, the plagues have the same effect that they had in Egypt.
They harden hearts – and they confirm the delusions of the wicked.

Indeed, the chief purpose for the Seven Trumpets is *not* really about the wicked at all!
The chief purpose for the Sermon of the Seven Trumpets is really for *you*!
Don't be like the rest of mankind!

Don't be like those who refuse to repent –
those who become hardened in their sin,
until they prefer their sin – even in the face of God's wrath!

[Interlude: the Scroll and the Two Witnesses (10:1-11:14)]
7. The Triumph of Jesus and the Response of His People (11:15-19)