

Seven Trumpets – What is God Doing?

Revelation 8 – 9; 11:14-19

Turn to Revelation 8, please, which begins the seven trumpet judgements. Marilyn and I often get the Saturday edition of the Wpg Free Press. Yesterday the paper had too many unpleasant stories. Bad news. Hard things happening. It is not always like it was yesterday. They work to have positive stories in there, too. But yesterday the paper was worse than usual.

What is God doing? Anything? What explains the world we live in? The world is messed up. It is hard to trust in God. What is he doing?

God gave Revelation to Christ, to give it to John, to answer questions like these for first century Christians. They had the same kind of questions, for the same kinds of reasons. The answers of Revelation are the same for us as for them.

What explains our troubled world? What is God doing? The seven trumpets will tell us quite a bit. God is doing three things: One, *prayer*, he's answering our *prayers*. Two, *plagues*, like Israel in Egypt, he's using *plagues* to rescue us. Three, *covenant*, he's the *covenant* God; by answering prayers and leading us into our promised land, he's keeping his *covenant* with us.

The Trumpet Judgements are Symbolic. This is about the first six trumpets particularly. Revelation, all the way through, gives us heavenly symbols to explain what is happening on earth. The symbol is not a code, rather it gives us the true spiritual meaning of something.

So the heavenly symbol of a church is a golden lampstand in the presence of Christ. A church is a bunch of people, they don't look like a golden lampstand, they look like a gathering of people, which they are. But from God's side of things, we are also a lampstand in his presence. In the case of lampstands, we are told which earthly reality the lampstand represents: churches.

But we are often not told. In Rev 13, John sees a beast come of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, the beast is a horrible mix of leopard, bear, and lion. That's the heavenly symbol. In the spiritual world, that's what the beast is, that's his true nature.

On earth, the beast is a man who rules a powerful empire that attacks believers. He's a man. He does not come out of the sea, and he does not look at all like that beast. He looks like a man who has a lot of power.

Often, Revelation does not give us the earthly reality. The trumpets are like this. We have the heavenly symbol, but not the earthly reality. This is *not* a way of telling us that we need to take the symbol as concretely true, any more than we would take the beast as leopard – bear walking around earth with too many heads and horns.

When we are *not* given the earthly reality, that means that the symbolic meaning is the most important thing for us to know. We don't need to know how this will actually look on earth. And we do not know. Rather, we need to know what *explains* what we see on earth. And if we look at the symbols that way, the trumpet judgements are not hard to figure out.

By the way, the seven trumpets, like the seals, describe the whole age between the two comings of Christ. The trumpets helped those first century church in the same way they help us.

The Trumpet Judgements are Answered Prayers for Justice: God judges the world because his people pray that God will make the world right.

Back in Rev 5, each of the 24 elders praise the Lamb, and each one of them holds a golden bowl *full* of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. Each bowl *full* of prayers.

In Rev 6, in the fifth seal, under the incense altar were the souls of those who had been killed because of Christ. They are at the incense altar, which is right beside God's Throne. They are calling out in a loud voice: *How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of earth and avenge our blood?*

That's the prayer that's coming up from the incense altar. "How long until you judge the people of earth and avenge our blood?" Now, let's read 8:2-6, which introduce the trumpets.

Rev 8:2-6 - *And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. ³ Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the [incense] altar. He was given much incense [**much** incense] to offer, with the prayers of **all** God's people [did you catch that? **all** God's people, those with the Lord and also with us on earth], on the golden [incense] altar in front of the throne. ⁴ The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God's people, went up before God from the angel's hand. ⁵ Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake. ⁶ Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them.*

The incense is burning, lots of fire on that altar, the bowls are full of incense, full of prayers. The air in God's Throne room is thick with all God's people praying like this. Remarkable picture.

The seven trumpets are announced just before this, in 8:2, and at the end, in 8:6. The seven trumpets are God answering this prayer. The first trumpet (8:7): hail **and fire** was hurled to the earth. Second trumpet (8:8): a huge mountain **burning with fire** was thrown into the sea.

(This is fire from the incense altar, incense and prayers mixed.) Third trumpet (8:9): a great star, **like a blazing torch**, fell from the sky. All prayers bring God's justice to earth.

When we ask God to make the world right, we often want our own lives right. “God, make *my* life right, make my *brother’s or sister’s* life right, I’m not worried about the whole world right now, I’m in my own trouble.”

God hears all that, and he is kind to us, but Revelation tells us that God has bigger plans. He wants the whole earth right, including us, but not only us. That’s his plan.

We’re taking all the trumpets as figurative, as symbolic. The angel is *not* actually throwing fire from heaven’s incense altar to earth. What is he doing? one, God is hearing prayers to make everything right, and answering them by sending judgments to earth as answers to our prayer. What else is he doing?

The Seven Trumpets: Plagues as on the Egyptians

God speaking to Moses at the burning bush: the Exodus also started with God hearing the people’s prayers: Ex 3:7,9 *I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers.... The cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them.* God saw the misery, and he heard the prayers.

What was God doing in Exodus, when he sent those ten plagues on the Egyptians? God was rescuing his people from their enemies, from slavery, he was leading people into the promised land. Did the Israelites fear the plagues? No.

In five of the ten Exodus plagues, we are told openly that Israel was protected. In the other five there is no comment. But the assumption is that Israel did not suffer any of them. They lived in Goshen, far enough away. The Nile turning to blood, for example, would not affect Goshen.

The second trumpet (8:8), a mountain burning with fire thrown into the sea, causes a third of the sea to be turned into blood. Water turned into blood catches our attention. It reminds us of Egypt, where God turns the Nile into blood, when Moses does that in Egypt, the first of the ten plagues.

So let’s see if there are any other Egyptian plagues in the seven trumpets. The **first** trumpet has hail and fire mixed with blood. Hail with terrible lightning was one of the plagues on Egypt, hail and lightning, hail and fire. The **second** trumpet has one third of the sea turned into blood. (There are thirds because God is restraining himself, hoping people will repent.)

The **third** trumpet has the rivers and springs spoiled from drinking. That was part of the first plague in Egypt, people could not drink from the rivers and streams.

The **fourth** trumpet brings darkness, also was one of the plagues on Egypt. The **fifth** trumpet brings these terrible demonic locusts. Locusts were one of the plagues on the Egyptians. Locusts normally eat everything green, and when they leave there’s famine, no food left for people or livestock.

These locusts don't touch plants, and don't touch God's people, the sealed people, all of us who have God's name and the Lamb's name written on our foreheads. But they torment all the rest, and only for five months. It's long, but not forever.

But get this: God rules these horrible demonic creatures. He decides when they get let out of the abyss, he decides who and what they may **not** touch, God decides who and what they may attack, what damage they may and may not do, and for how long. We need always to remember this.

The **sixth** trumpet brings death. Four angels killed a third of mankind. The last plague in Egypt was death, the death of every firstborn. Rev 9:20 says that "the rest of humanity, not *killed* by these *plagues* ..." The trumpets are plagues. Trumpets 1 - 6 each recall the plagues in Egypt.

Exodus plagues: hail and lightning, hail and fire, water turned to blood, rivers and springs spoiled, darkness, locusts, death: God is taking us out of a hard place, into his promised land.

What explains the world we live in? Is God doing anything? Yes, God is doing the same thing with his people as he was doing with Israel in Egypt. He's showing his power, giving his enemies lots of chance to turn, and he's bringing us to his promised land.

He's answering our prayers to make this world a better place, to judge evil and defend his people, and he's sending plagues as part of bring us to the promised land.

God Remembers his Covenant: the meaning of thunder, lightning, rumblings, earthquake.
(Exodus 19:16-18; 20:18; Rev 4:5; 8:5; 11:19)

This is another Exodus theme. Our God is the covenant God of Israel. Because we have trusted in Jesus the Lord, we are God's people, and he is our God, we are part of the new covenant. "Covenant" means we are bound to God, and he is bound to us. God is incredibly loyal.

In Exodus 19 and 20, when God was making the covenant with Israel, God came to the top of Mt Sinai, and there was thunder, lightning, loud sounds, and the mountain quaked. That's all mentioned at the beginning of the ten commandments, and again at the end.

God wasn't angry Israel, far from it, he was just showing up, showing his presence. He was a real God, not to be taken lightly, and this was all a part of God binding himself to Israel as their covenant God, and God binding them to himself as his covenant people.

In Rev 4:5, when John comes through the door in heaven and sees God's Throne, he says "*from the Throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder.*" That means that the God on the Throne is the covenant God, the same God who bound himself to his people in Exodus.

Rev 8:5, start of the 7 trumpets: *Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.* The angel, throwing fire to earth, is obeying the covenant God, the God who bound himself to us, through Jesus, and bound us to himself, and so he answers our prayers.

Rev 11:19. Now we go to the very end of the seventh trumpet, and we get the same covenant God again: *Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a severe hailstorm.* God opens his temple so we can see the ark of his covenant with us.

We have these covenant signs, lightning, rumbling, thunder, earthquake at the beginning of the seven trumpets, and again at the end of the seventh trumpet. In these trumpets, God is acting like the God who has bound himself to us, and bound us to him.

This is very good news. It was good news to those seven churches in the first century, whose world was as crazy as ours. We have trouble, and we need a lot of endurance, just like John who wrote Revelation, so we think God has left us. Revelation would like to encourage us.

So, what is God doing in this confused and unhappy world? In the seven trumpets:

- 1, He's answering our prayers to judge evil and defend his people.
- 2, He's sending plagues on the Egyptians to get us out of oppression and into the promised land.
- 3, He remembers that he's bound to us through the blood of the Lamb, and we are bound to him, and that's why he's doing these things. He's the loyal and faithful covenant God.

God Hopes for the Rest to Repent - 9:20-21 – These lines come at the end of the sixth trumpet. God was hoping humanity would turn to him, but humans do not.

The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

People do not repent, just as the Egyptians did not. God has tried both kindness and judgement to get people to repent. Lots of both. Romans 2: *Do you show contempt for the riches of God's kindness, tolerance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?*

God has done lots of both kindness and judgement, all along, and still is. For the most part, neither one is working. The trumpets are God's judgement, hoping for repentance.

These things have been happening this whole age. The trumpets were to help seven first century churches make sense of *their* crazy hostile world. Because *they* were asking: "what is God doing? What explains the world we see?" Revelation answers them, and also us.

Seventh Seal – God Arrives – 11:14-19 (see 10:6-7) *The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.* ¹⁵ *The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:*

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.” ¹⁶ *And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God,* ¹⁷ *saying: “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.”* ¹⁸ *The nations were angry, and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your people who revere your name, both great and small—and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”* ¹⁹ *Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a severe hailstorm.*

The seventh trumpet is called the third woe because it will be final judgment for the rest of humanity. *The nations were angry, and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, ... and for destroying those who destroy the earth.*

In v17, God is “*the One who is and who was.*” Three times earlier in Revelation we had God as “*the One who is and who was and who is coming.*” Why does Revelation drop “and who is coming”? Because he has already come. Vv15-17 show us worship after he comes to earth.

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What is God doing? He’s hearing all our prayers to judge the world and defend his people, and he is working on it. The prayers ring in his ears, the prayer-smoke of the incense is always in his face and nose. He’s in action, things are moving along.

What is God doing? He hears our prayers like he heard Israel’s prayers in their misery in Egypt, and he is using plagues now as he did then to bring us out this unkind place and into the promised land.

What is God doing? He’s the covenant God, he remembers well that through the blood of Christ, the slaughtered Lamb, we are bound to God, and he is bound to us.

So be encouraged. God wanted to encourage the faithful in John’s seven churches, and he’d like to encourage us in the same way. That’s why he gave us Revelation. The seven trumpets do not bring happiness to the world, but it is all good news for us. Amen.