

# The Book of Revelation

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## THE SEVEN TRUMPETS

*Revelation 8-9*

### The Silence in Heaven

*Revelation 8:1*

*Why this silence? Was it in order that the prayers of God's persecuted children on earth might be heard in heaven? We rather incline to the view that here as always we must look for the interpretation in Old Testament symbolism. Now, in the prophets the going forth of the Almighty in judgment is again and again introduced by a reference to silence, e.g., Habakkuk 2:20... Here in Revelation, in similar vein, the silence is introduced to prepare us for the terrible character of the judgments that are about to be related. This silence makes the manifestations of the wrath of God all the more impressive. (Hendriksen, page 117.)*

*Habakkuk 2:20, Zephaniah 1:7*

### Prelude to the Trumpets (8:2-6)

*Revelation 8:2-6*

- The prayers of the saints would most likely be referring to appeal of the persecuted saints revealed in the 5<sup>th</sup> seal. *Revelation 6:9-11*
- *That we read now of "the prayers of all the saints" confirms our earlier contention that the picture of martyrs under the altar in 6:9 is not a narrow reference to a group of literal martyrs but a figurative representation of all saints who suffer to whatever degree (this likewise confirms the same conclusion concerning the "overcomers" in the letters). (Beale, page 455.)*
- The pouring out of the judgments seems to have been a response to the prayers of the saints.

### Sinai Allusions

*The Sinai theophany of Exod. 19:16-18 is partly in mind in 8:5, since it was part of the allusion, if not the primary one, in 4:5 (besides Exod. 19:18, "quaking" is also viewed as a part of the Sinai phenomena even more emphatically in Ps. 68:8; 77:17ff.; Habakkuk 3)... When the Sinai or exodus earthquake is explicitly alluded to as an eschatological event, it is always a sign of the climatic destruction of the world. The same is true when an earthquake is mentioned as the sole eschatological sign. (Beale, page 458.)*

*Not only are the virtually identical phrases in 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; and 16:18-21 all Sinai allusions, as generally acknowledged, but they are linked together by the theme of final judgment. Furthermore, Bauckham has observed that these phrases form a progressive sequence of allusions to Exodus 19, which are systematically built on one another:*

*4:5 "lightening, rumblings and peals of thunder"*

*8:5 "peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightening and an earthquake"*

*11:19 "flashes of lightening, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm".*

*16:18-21 "flashes of lightening, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake...plague of hail"*

*The progressive expansion of the formula accords with the increasing severity of each series of judgments, as the visions focus more closely on the End itself and the limited warning judgments of the trumpets give place to the seven last plagues of God's wrath on the finally unrepentant. (Beale, page 459.)*

### Ezekiel Allusion

*8:3-5 is modeled to great extent on Ezek. 10:1-7. There also an angelic figure stands in the heavenly temple (cf. Ezek. 1:1ff.) and "fills his hands with coals of fire from between the cherubim [presumably from the altar] and scatters them all over the city" of Jerusalem (10:2; cf. 10:6-7). As the book of Ezekiel reveals, the judgment is actually to be carried out by the invading Babylonians, (Beale, pages 459-460.)*

### **Understanding the Trumpets**

*The first six woes precede the last punishment, represented by the seventh seal and the seventh trumpet. Therefore, the trumpets do not follow the seventh seal chronologically but only literarily. The trumpets recapitulate the seals. But, whereas the first five seals focused on the trials through which believers must pass, now the focus in the first six trumpets is on judgments that unbelievers, both inside and outside the visible church, must endure. The trumpets resemble some of the trials pictured in the seals, but now the primary purpose of the trials is to punish. (Beale, pages 472-473.)*

*The trumpet judgments are sometimes understood as intended primarily to warn unbelievers that they will suffer the final judgment if they do not repent. The key to understanding the nature of these as “warning judgments” is the formative OT background. The first five trumpets are patterned after five of the plagues inflicted upon Egypt immediately preceding Israel’s exodus. (Beale, page 465.)*

*The exodus plagues are probably understood by John as typological foreshadowings of punishments on the ungodly during the eschatological church age, which precedes the final exodus of God’s people from this world to the new creation...(Beale, page 467.) See also Matthew 2:15, and Hosea 11:1.*

### **Trumpets in the Old Testament**

*In the OT, trumpets also announced an alarm that holy battle was to be engaged against Israel’s enemy or against Israel as God’s enemy...The primary background here is the story of the Fall of Jericho, where trumpets announced the impending victory in a holy war. That this is at work in Revelation is evident from the parallel of seven trumpets blown by seven priests (Joshua 6) or seven angels (Revelation 8-9), who are priestly figures (15:6-7). The priests represent God’s authority, which is symbolized by the ark with which they are formally associated (the presence of the ark in Rev. 8:3-5 is implied by the explicit reference in 11:19). And in both Joshua and Revelation “silence” precedes the trumpet judgment. (Beale, page 468.)*

*This background clarifies two important ideas necessary for understanding the trumpet woes in Revelation. First, the emphasis with the trumpets is on judgment more than warnings to repent. In fact, the Jericho account confirms what we have seen from the theological background of the exodus plagues. The trumpets blown by the priests, like the plagues on Egypt, are not warnings at all, but indicate ultimately only judgment, which God has already decided to bring on his enemies and those of his people. (Beale, pages 468-469.)*

*The presence of the Exodus background is clear from the fact that the theophanic description of Exod. 19:16, 18 (“sounds and lightning flashes...quaking”) has been formative for the similar descriptions that both introduce (Rev. 8:5) and conclude (11:19) the trumpet series...(Beale, pages 470-471.)*

### **The First Trumpet**

*Revelation 8:7*

#### **Exodus Reference**

*Exodus 9:22-25*

- *In both Exodus 9 and Rev. 8:7 hail and fire are sent from heaven against three parts of creation: earth/land..., trees, and grass. (Beale, page 473.)*
- *The Exodus plague destroyed only part of the food supply (Exod. 9:31-32: “flax and barley were smitten...but wheat and rye were not”). This is strikingly similar to the description in Rev. 6:6, where there is famine, and wheat and barley are scarce but still available. (Beale, page 474.)*

## The Second Trumpet

Revelation 8:8-9

### Exodus Reference

Exodus 7:20-24

- *Revelation 18:21* refers to the fall of Babylon as “a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea,”
- *Jeremiah 51:25* refers to Babylon as a “destroying mountain.”
- *Jeremiah 51:27-29* speaks of God blowing the trumpet and preparing the nations to do battle against Babylon.
- *Therefore, the picture in Rev. 8:8 did not originate from an attempt to depict a literal volcano eruption or some other natural phenomenon occurring in the first century or predicted for later. A literal reading is rendered unlikely here and throughout the visionary section by the simple observation that the catastrophes are inspired by the OT literary models that contain figures of speech. This does not mean that such models could not have been used to describe literal disasters, but the burden of proof is on those who hold a literal understanding in addition to a figurative perspective.* (Beale, page 476.)

## The Third Trumpet

Revelation 8:10-11

### Exodus Reference

Exodus 7:15-24

- *Rev. 8:10 appears, then, to portray judgment that people and their representative angel(s) endure throughout history and that precedes their final condemnation at the end of history. The burning star could, on the other hand, represent merely an agent of divine judgment. However, the observation that the descent of the burning mountain in v 10 is parallel to the descent of the burning star in v 8 also indicates that the star should be identified as an angelic representative of an evil kingdom undergoing judgment. Here the judgment of Babylon’s angel is in view, since v 8 concerns the judgment of Babylon the Great.* (Beale, page 479.)
- *The identification of the star as Babylon’s representative angel becomes more convincing if v 10 is understood as alluding to Isa. 14:12-15, There the judgment of the king of Babylon and his nation is said to occur because its guardian angel, “the star of the morning,” has “fallen from heaven,...thrust sown to Sheol...to the recesses of the pit.* (Beale, page 479.)
- *Jeremiah 9:13-16 and Jeremiah 23:15 describe the judgment that Israel will undergo as a result of their idolatry. This judgment is described as “See, I make this people eat bitter food and drink poisoned water.”*
- *“Wormwood” is a bitter herb, and water contaminated by it can be poisonous if drunk over a long period. The occurrences of the word in Jeremiah are metaphors for the bitterness of suffering resulting from judgment.* (Beale, page 479.)

## The Fourth Trumpet

Revelation 8:12

### Exodus Reference

Exodus 10:21-23

- *The fourth trumpet continues the theme of woe from the preceding trumpets, but it does not refer to famine. Now, the sun, moon, and stars are under attack, but again only a third of each heavenly body and of light during the day and night are affected. The seemingly awkward statement that a third of the day and the night should not shine must a figurative expression of a diminishment of light usually given off by the sun during the day and the moon and stars during the night. Consequently, this is not yet the final judgment but a trial affecting part of the earth and preceding the final judgment.* (Beale, page 481.)

- *Most of the Exodus plagues were designed to be judgments on the false Egyptian gods (cf. Exod. 12:12) This was true with the plague of darkness, which was partly a polemic against the sun god Ra, of whom Pharaoh was considered an incarnation. This lends further force to the idea that the partial darkness of the fourth trumpet is sent against idolaters. (Beale, page 481.)*
- *In 22:18 πληγηται is used of a curse that can strike anyone **within the church** in the late first century and throughout the church age who does not faithfully heed the message of the Apocalypse... This must include the trumpet woes. This strongly suggests that some, if not most, of the trumpet judgments happen during the entire period between Christ's first and second comings, not merely at a tribulation period immediately preceding and including the second coming... (Beale, page 486.)*

### **The Announcement**

*Revelation 8:13*

*The eagle here announces the coming destruction of the sinful prey. The eagle could be one of the living beings of 4:7, the one that is "like a flying eagle"... That earlier creature would, in fact, be a suitable messenger of judgment, since it was first introduced as part of a heavenly judgment scene, directly following the "lightnings and sounds and thunders" (Beale, page 490.)*

### **The Fifth Trumpet**

*Revelation 9:1-11*

#### **Exodus Reference**

*Exodus 10:12-15*

- *As the visions beginning in ch. 9 are unveiled the readers are given an ever-expanding definition of the extent of God and the Lamb's sovereignty. God and the Lamb are in ultimate control of Satan's realm. And the saints are to remember this when the forces of evil direct their wrath against them or self-destructively against their own allies, the followers of Antichrist. (Beale, page 493.)*
- *The book of Joel uses locusts as an instrument of judgment on the southern kingdom of Judah.*
- *Consequently, the picture in v 2 indicates that the judgment formerly limited to the demonic realm is being extended to the earthly realm. As a result of Christ's death and resurrection, the devil and his legions have begun to be judged, and now the effect of their judgment is about to be unleashed on unbelieving humanity, who give their ultimate allegiance to the devil. (Beale, page 494.)*

### **Transitional Verse**

*Revelation 9:12*

*This transitional verse summarizes the preceding trumpet and introduces the next two. Does it indicate that what is portrayed in the last three trumpets follow one another chronologically, or is the order just in the sequence of the visions? One hint that the second meaning is intended is found in the opening statement, "The first woe has passed." This means not that the events have already transpired in history but only that the vision containing them is now past. (Beale, page 505.)*

### **The Sixth Trumpet**

*Revelation 9:13-21*

- *In Genesis 19:23-29 the historical account of the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah we find the use of burning sulfur.*
- *Judgment on Israel came from the north. That is by way of the Euphrates river.*
- *Therefore, the sixth trumpet intensifies and develops further the woe of the fifth. The intensification is signified... by smoke together with fire from which it comes. (Beale, page 513.)*