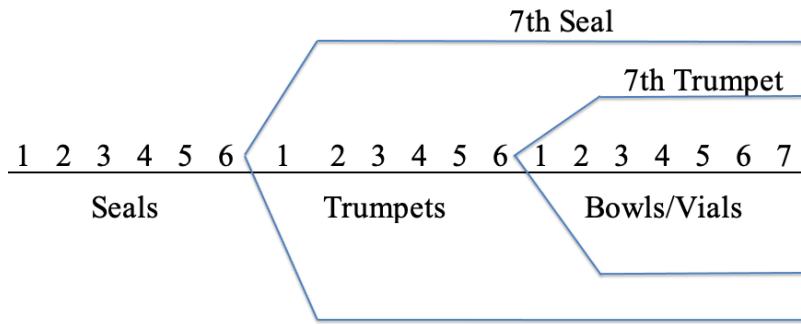


Lecture 19 “The Trumpets Blow”
Revelation 8:1-9:21
Dan Leppo

Greetings! Before we get into today’s reading, let’s do a brief recap of how we got to where we are in the Book of Revelation. We are in the third segment of the outline John gave us back in chapter 1 – what the Lord described to John as “*what will take place later.*” This began with the heavenly scene in chapters 4 and 5 with what, in my opinion, is the church raptured and in the presence of Jesus witnessing Him being given the title deed to the earth that is sealed with seven seals. These seals are the commencement of progressive judgments on a Christ-rejecting world. Jeff Swaney gave a great presentation on the opening of the *first* six seals. Dellenia walked us through the interlude between the sixth and seventh seal last week with the sealing of the 144,000 Jewish remnant and a vision of the saints who came out of the Great Tribulation.

Because I’m a guy, and I like things simple – it’s a gender thing, I like pictures. To help visualize the progression of the judgments, please look at the below diagram:



The 7th Seal introduces the Trumpet judgments
The 7th Trumpet introduces the Bowl/Vial judgments

With today’s reading, we see the Lord opening the 7th seal, which is going to include the seven trumpet judgments. In other words, the 7th seal is going to contain the seven trumpet judgments, and the 7th trumpet judgment will contain the seven bowl/vial judgments. We’ve seen in the opening of the first six seals the release of the Antichrist, what sounds like a world war, a world-wide famine, $\frac{1}{4}$ of the planet’s population exterminated, and the combination of a great earthquake and a celestial shower of meteors hitting the planet. And that was just phase *one* of three phases of judgment.

At the beginning of chapter 8, we see the Lord opening the 7th seal, but as opposed to the immediate action that took place with the first six seals, something different happens – there is total silence in heaven for about 30 minutes. While there are differing opinions as to the purpose of this period of quiet, there is no doubt in my mind it has been demanded by Jesus. This is a very intentional moment to the Lord – it's as if he held up His finger to His mouth and said, “*Shhh.*” In heaven, *everyone* obeys Him, and there is complete silence.

The next few verses appear to indicate the purpose of the silence is for Him to listen to all the prayers directed to Him regarding this moment in human history. How many times have we recited that portion of the Lord’s prayer, “*Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done?*” From chapter 6, we heard from the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and the testimony they had maintained, “*How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?*” How many times did King David cry out for vengeance on his enemies? His cries were more for a righteous judgment than they were for personal vindication.

What does this Christ-commanded moment of silence mean to *you*? I would hope you will take from this moment that the Lord listens to your prayers. I don’t know about you, but I need to hear this truth that the Lord hears my prayers. I confess that many a time the prayers I have submitted I have wondered if the Lord is listening. What drives that doubt? Firstly, Satan is hissing in my ear, “*He’s not going to listen to you, you’re a sinner and a mess – especially you because you know and teach His Word.*” I have no defense for the truth of what Satan is accusing me – I *am* a sinner and a mess. However, my relationship with God isn’t about *my failures* – it’s about my faith in *Jesus’ victory* at the cross. If I choose to recite that truth, that shuts down Satan pretty quickly.

The other thing that makes me wonder if God is listening to my prayers are the ones that have gone unanswered or the answer is either “*Not now*” or “*No.*” There have been things I’ve been petitioning the Lord for many years, and given the fact that I have not seen the results I was looking for, I conclude the answer is either “*Not now*” or “*No.*” I’m not the most patient person, so when I see something that is so obviously wrong, I get quickly frustrated at the lack of results. This is especially true when my petitions are directed at the suffering of loved ones. I’ve often said that when it comes to suffering, sometimes I think it is harder to be a Christian because we believe in a God who, with one utterance, can bring relief to that suffering.

If we're all brutally honest with ourselves, we've done things in our lives that deserve some kind of adverse consequences. Not so, with Jesus. He lived a perfect and sinless life, so His torture and assassination were *totally* undeserving. Yet, He willingly went to the cross. The only way to reconcile Him doing this was there must have been *tremendous purpose* in Christ's suffering. For those of us who have confessed Jesus as Lord and Savior – *we* are that purpose – *we* are the “fruit” of His suffering. I know the idea of purpose in suffering is a tough one – especially when it's your loved ones doing the suffering.

This concept is Scriptural. Philippians 3:10 says, “*that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.*” Peter said in his first epistle, “*but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.*” (1 Peter 3:14)

Back to our reading. We see seven angels being handed seven trumpets. As they are given their trumpets, another angel came to the altar of God with a golden censor. Some Bible commentators believe this angel is Jesus – acting in His role as the mediator before the throne of God. The censor contains much incense to offer along with prayers of all God's people – again proof of God hearing our prayers. The smoke of the incense and prayers go up before God. He fills the censor with fire from the alter and hurls it to earth – causing thundering, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake. What do all these earthly signs mean? Phase 2 of God's judgment is about to begin.

Before we get into the specifics of the judgments, we should spend some time on the significance of trumpets in Scripture. J. Vernon McGee makes a great point that the Book of Revelation really should be the last book that a new Christian reads. There is so much context that, without a knowledge of the Old Testament prophecies and practices, much of what Revelation reveals to us would have far less meaning. The significance of the trumpet is a great example of this.

Seven trumpets probably struck a chord with John as he watched this. As a Jew, he would likely recall that in the Book of Numbers, trumpets were used to:

1. Call people together (Numbers 10:1-8)
2. To announce war (Numbers 10:9)
3. To announce special times (Numbers 10:10)

For those of you who were in last year's study, you may recall that when the God-led cloud-by-day or the pillar-of-fire-by-night began to move, the 12-tribe nation of Israel was encamped around the tabernacle in four groups of three. So, one trumpet would blow for each set of three – that makes four trumpets. You also may recall that there were three families of Levi who carried the articles of the tabernacle – Kohath, Gershon, and Merari. A trumpet would move each of them, so that would be seven trumpets blowing for the purpose of moving Israel to where it would ultimately come to rest in the Promised Land. Remember, one of the purposes of the Tribulation is for God to re-engage with the Nation of Israel, and there will be more and more Jews returning to Israel during this period.

There is also another trumpet that we, as followers of Jesus, should be preparing for. In speaking to the Rapture, Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, "*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.*" Evidently, when Jesus takes us home, His voice to call us will resemble that of a trumpet. John also likened the Lord's voice to a trumpet in Revelation 4:1. In today's reading, though, the trumpets are being blown for a different movement – they are declarations of war/judgment on a Christ-rejecting world.

In verse seven, we begin the blowing of the first of four trumpets – these four judgments are targeted at *nature* – the land, the saltwater, the fresh water, and the heavenly bodies. The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down on the earth. This judgment – along with several others are going to sound similar to the plagues God unleashed on Egypt. If you read the 7th judgment on Egypt back in Exodus 9:18-26, you will see the similarity. The prophet Joel also spoke of "blood and fire" in the last days. (Joel 2:30)

The target of this judgment is the greenery on the planet - a third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. It is believed that 1/3 of the earth's oxygen is generated by rain forests, so a calamity of this proportion is going to have a huge impact on the balance of nature. Additionally, this judgment will have a significant impact on the food supply.

The target of the second trumpet judgment is the salt water seas. The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships

were destroyed. As to what this something like a huge mountain all ablaze could be, I can imagine this could be a meteor striking the earth. Having the waters turn to blood should ring a bell and remind us this was what happened in the first plague of Egypt in Exodus 7:19-21. Approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of the planet is covered by water, so to have $\frac{1}{3}$ of the waters polluted means $\frac{1}{4}$ of the planet will be devastated by this judgment.

I just mentioned $\frac{1}{3}$ of the earth's oxygen is generated by rain forests. Where does the remaining $\frac{2}{3}$ of the earth's oxygen come from? – Oceans. The majority of this oxygen comes from oceanic plankton. With the destruction of so much of the plankton, whale populations, small fish, and crustaceans will be devastated. Also, as with the first judgment on the greenery, the food supply will be severely impacted.

In September of last year, according to the International Chamber of Shipping, there were more than 50,000 merchant ships operating in the oceans. This judgment is going to wipe out $\frac{1}{3}$ of them, or roughly 17,000 ships. We've been experiencing supply shortages this last year or so, but this is nothing compared to the devastation to the supply chain that will be caused by the second trumpet judgment.

In verse ten, we read the third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water - the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter. According to Job 9:9-10, God has His stars numbered and named. If this is a star, then as this one is falling from the skies, it is likely breaking up in the atmosphere and targeting the sources of fresh water. Other commentators note the possibility this is a nuclear exchange that is causing the devastation. Fun fact – the Russian word for “Wormwood” is “Chernobyl.” The water will become so bitter and toxic, it will become the opposite of its purpose, which is to give life. With this judgment, it will take life. This taking of life won't just be human – the fish population in the fresh waters will be severely damaged.

According to Warren Wiersbe, “Wormwood” means undrinkable, and this term is typically used in the Old Testament as a symbol of sorrow and great calamity. Moses, Solomon, Jeremiah, and Amos all used this term in the negative to emphasize the seriousness of a problem. There is no real connection to one of the Egyptian plagues in this judgment. However, you may remember the bitter waters at Marah. In this case, though, there will be no supernatural piece of wood to heal the waters.

Moving to the fourth trumpet, we see a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night. Try wrapping your minds around that! How much of our life source comes from the sun, but with this judgment 1/3 of its life-giving capability will be eliminated. Some speculate this is the effect of a “nuclear winter,” which is what the conditions are believed to be like in a post nuclear exchange. Jesus, in Matthew 24:29 confirms this future environment, *“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”*

In verse 13, we’re provided a dire warning before we get to the final 3 trumpet judgments. John says, *“As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: “Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!”* In other words, if you thought the first four trumpet judgments were bad, brace yourself as things are about to get much worse. With the final three “woe” trumpets, there’s a shift from the judgments being on nature, to the release of demonic destruction.

I think now is a good time to remind you that for those of you who place your trust and faith in the finished work of Christ crucified and His resurrection, I believe you do not need to worry about being around for these events. While the Bible doesn’t spell it out as neatly as we would like, I am with the crowd that supports the pre-Tribulation Rapture scenario. In other words, anything that happens in Revelation chapters 6-19 will not affect the church as it will be safely and joyfully in the loving and protective presence of Jesus Christ in heaven. Yes, there are plenty who believe that the church will have to go through part, or all of the Tribulation. However, I can assure you there is clear unity amongst all the differing opinions on whether or not the church is here during these seven years – they all prefer the truth be that the pre-Tribulation Rapture be the right one. *No one* wants to be around during these seven years.

As we step into Chapter 9, some commentators think this may be the mid-point in the Tribulation. This seven-year period we are going through is really divided into two halves with the mid-point being marked by an event known as the abomination of desolation. The Antichrist has arranged for the nation of Israel to construct its new temple. Upon its completion, the Antichrist enters the temple and demands to be worshipped as God. This is the proverbial “straw that broke the camel’s back” with God. The final 3 ½ years are known as the Great Tribulation,

and based upon the severity of these next three trumpet judgments, it is understandable to see how commentators believe we've just entered the final 3 ½ years.

We read the fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and John saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. Who is this star? The KJV of verse one gives a human description of this star, “*and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.*” Therefore, a safe bet is this star is Satan himself. Some believe this star is the Antichrist, but in speaking of Satan, Jesus offers this description in Luke 10:18, “*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.*” Did you pick up on the key to the abyss was given to him? Remember what Jesus said in verse 18 of chapter 1, “*And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.*” Jesus is in complete control of what's going on, so what Satan is about to unleash is the permissive will of God.

What is the abyss? It is not hell. Jesus mentioned in Matthew 12:40, “*For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*” If you take this verse and combine it with the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31, you can arrive at the possibility that this is the abyss, and it is separated into two departments – one for those who went into Abraham's bosom – people of faith who will ultimately be with God in heaven. These are likely the people who Jesus led to heaven after His victory and preached their redemption. The second department was one for those who rejected God and will be tormented. Apparently, though, they were not the only inhabitants. With the one department “closed for business” – praise the Lord, what Satan is about to unlock are demons that have been held back by God in the abyss. Also, the abyss is where Satan will be sealed up for 1,000 years – what we know as the Millennium.

Verse 2 tells us when Satan opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. And out of the smoke locusts came down on the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. Hopefully, for you Bible students, a judgment of locusts should kindle a memory of the 8th plague in Exodus. However, these are not your typical locusts. The description provided in verses 8-11 suggest these are never-seen-before beings – thank God. Among their descriptives:

- They looked like horses prepared for battle
- Their faces resembled human faces
- Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth.
- They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle.
- They had tails with stingers, like scorpions

Talk about a botched plastic surgery!

It is noteworthy that these things are given very specific instructions:

- They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree – proof that these are not normal locusts as it is greenery that is the sole target of locusts’ appetite. They don’t feed on grass – they feed on terror.
- They are only to harm those people who did *not* have the seal of God on their foreheads. God, as He did with the Nation of Israel during the Egyptian plagues, is beginning to separate out those who come to faith in Him from those who don’t – sparing them from the misery these horrible beings are going to inflict. This is just another sign of the mercy of God upon His children – even in the midst of awesome judgment.
- They were not allowed to kill them but only to torture them for five months.

Apparently, the agony they suffer from the stings of these beings will be so severe, people will seek death. However, death will take a holiday for these 5 months as people will long to die, but death will elude them. Verse 11 offers further proof that the locusts described in this judgment are a different thing, “*They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer).*” According to Proverbs 30:27, the natural locusts have no king. Abaddon means “destruction” and Apollyon means “destroyer.” This is the nature of Satan brothers and sisters. Make no mistake about his nature – he has *one* objective – to cause destruction and destroy anything that God loves. Praise God for His greater strength to protect us and preserve us.

We get to the sixth angel sounding his trumpet, and John heard a voice coming from the four horns of the golden altar that is before God. Who is this voice that John is hearing? I believe it is Jesus, and He tells the sixth angel to “*Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.*” These four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. These are satanic angels, and God has, thankfully, kept them incarcerated up to this point in history. Their sole object is to eliminate 1/3 of humanity. We’ve already seen 1/4 of Earth’s population wiped out back in Chapter 6 with the pale horse judgment in the 4th seal. Therefore, if my math is correct, the combination of these two judgments will mean over 50% of the planet’s population will be extinguished during the Tribulation. To put a number to that, it is believed there we are just short of 8 billion people in the world, so that means some four *billion* people are going to lose their lives during this seven-year period. I cannot wrap my head around that kind of devastation.

The demonic army accompanying these 4 demons will amount to 200 million. John does his best to describe the army. Who knows what these beings look like – it could be using the equipment and weapons of the time, or it may be something we've never seen before. Verse 18 speaks of a three-part plague that will cause the slaughter of 1/3 of mankind – they will be of fire, smoke, and sulfur. That should ring a bell – sounds like the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah.

In today's reading, we have seen staggering suffering and loss of human life – clear demonstrations of God's power and judgment. Yet, the final two verses of chapter 9 tell us the remainder of humanity still did not believe – they did not repent of all their idolatry, their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality, or their theft. Notably, the word for magic arts is *Pharmacia*, which means drugs. Drug use will be rampant in the Great Tribulation.

Perhaps after hearing of all this unprecedented devastation, you are taken aback by the judgment of God. On the other hand, I know there are some who want to hear more judgment from the pulpit these days – perhaps we can scare them into heaven. Given the seeker-friendly, watered-down teaching that is happening in most churches, I can understand the sentiment. But what do these last two verses of chapter 9 tell us about the true motivation to repent? God's judgment is not what brings people to repentance. What does the Bible say about what brings people to repentance? The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans 2:4 that it is "*the goodness of God leads you to repentance.*"

So, what are our takeaways from today's reading?

1. We need to remember God is listening to our prayers. 1 Peter 3:12a confirms this, "*For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers;*"
2. We need to praise God for the blessed hope of being delivered from this terrible time of judgment.
3. We need to pick up our crosses daily, and ask the Holy Spirit to give us the power of God's goodness to live it in such a manner that people will recognize Christ in us, repent, and join us in the Kingdom of God.

God bless you for your diligence in studying God's life-giving Word. Let's pray.