



Unlocking Revelation

If the plagues were poured out before the trumpets sounded, God's character might come into question. But by allowing evil to run its course, it becomes self-evident that the Lord must step in to execute judgment on those who persist in sin. In the midst of the plagues, an angel proclaims, "You are righteous, O Lord, the One who is and who was and who is to be, because You have judged these things. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due.' And I heard another from the altar saying, 'Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments'" (Revelation 16:5-7, NKJV).

The Reign of God and the Reward of the Saints

The events that transpire under the first six trumpets play a major role in transferring the kingdom of this world to God the Father and His Son. Notice carefully what happens as the seventh trumpet is sounded:

"Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!'

"And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: 'We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth'" (Revelation 11:15-18, NKJV).

Under the seventh trumpet loud voices in heaven and the twenty-four elders announce some significant developments in the great controversy between good and evil:

1. The kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of the Lord and His Christ; their eternal reign is secured.
2. The saints can now be rewarded.
3. The destroyers of the earth can now be destroyed.

But why now, and why not before this point in earth's history? Why is it that the kingdom of this world does not become our Lord's until this point?

It will come as a surprise to some Bible students that there ever was a time when God did not possess the kingdom. But the Bible is clear: Not until after the events depicted under the first six trumpets have occurred does God become the possessor of the kingdom of this world. And only after the first six trumpets sound is God able to bestow eternal reward on the saints and execute the full measure of justice by destroying the rebellious. Apparently there are deeper issues involved in the warfare between good and evil that are not readily apparent to human understanding.

Before this world was created a conflict of serious magnitude arose in the kingdom of God. One named "Lucifer"—a name that likely served to distinguish him as the very first and most exalted of all God's creatures—instigated a rebellion. He was the apex of perfection, wisdom and beauty (see Ezekiel 28:12). So exalted was he, in fact, that he began to blur the distinction between himself and the One who had made him. Eventually he began to express some very dangerous thoughts: "I am a God, I sit in the seat of God" (Ezekiel 28:2).

The mighty angel, superior to all the others of his order, aspired to an even higher place than had been conferred upon him. He sought to seize the very throne of God, to usurp the kingdom from the Creator's hands, to establish himself as the center of adoration and worship (see Isaiah 14:12-14).

Scripture does not tell us how long the rebel was permitted to campaign

his cause in the heavenly courts. But it does inform us that he successfully deceived fully one "third" of his fellow angels (see Revelation 12:4). How masterfully cunning must have been his insinuations against the Creator! Undoubtedly his lies to the angels were very much the same as those he told Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden:

"If you venture away from God's will and become independent, you will be exalted to equality with Him. He has said you will die if you do, but it's an idle threat intended to frighten you and keep you under His control. He knows that the day you become independent of Him you will become His equal. He is withholding from you the higher state of being that I am trying to bring to you. He doesn't really love you. He's selfish. He's unjust." (A between-the-lines paraphrase of Genesis 3:1-5.)

Two-thirds of the angels remained loyal to their Maker. But, oh, how trying and painful it must have been to witness the banishment of their companions from heaven! And how many questions must have been raised!

Was there any truth to what Lucifer was saying about the Lord?

And how would God handle His enemies?

So began the war of the ages. The kingdom is divided. The throne is challenged. The Creator is accused. His government is misrepresented. One vital question looms: Who is God?

Is He who He claims to be? Is He a God of love and justice? Is He a God of liberty while yet a God of law? Does He withhold anything that would cause our happiness to soar higher? Is He selfish?

Who is God?

Is He worthy to occupy the throne? Is His character above reproach? Is He One to whom we can yield our loyalty with safety? Is His will such that we may find peace and joy in submission to its boundaries?

Who is God?

The seventh trumpet brings into sharp focus the climactic answer to the question, the sweet resolve to the conflict:

"Loud voices in heaven," the un fallen angels who have watched the battle from the beginning, exclaim, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Revelation 11:15, NKJV).

All of heaven is persuaded of God's goodness and love. In their estimation, He is worthy to occupy the throne forever. What they have witnessed of Lucifer's kingdom through human history, and especially in the events of the trumpets, has convinced them beyond any shadow of a doubt that God should reign and Lucifer should perish.

There is only one reason why God allows evil to continue to exert its influence any longer. The inhabitants of the un fallen universe are persuaded of God's love, but countless men and women remain under the delusive spell of the father of falsehood. There is hope for them in a knowledge of God's love manifested in Christ. And so, strange though it may seem, the great conflict between good and evil continues *because* of God's great mercy. Not because He takes pleasure in our pain; not because He doesn't care; not because He is powerless; but because He is "longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9, NKJV).

We may help hasten the demise of evil and the reign of Christ by using our influence and talents to share the truth about God with the world. And when "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, . . . then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14).

And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets. And another Angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto Him much incense, that He should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne" (Revelation 8:2-3).

There is only one place in the Bible other than Revelation where we find the use of seven trumpets. That occasion was when Israel, under the leadership of Joshua, destroyed the city of Jericho, preparatory to their entrance into the Promised Land. The Lord's instructions were very specific. The victory was to be unique. Jericho would not be conquered by the military strength or genius of Israel, but rather the Lord would manifest His own mighty power on this occasion.

The "men of war" were to compass the city once each day for "six days" (Joshua 6:3). On the seventh day "seven priests" blowing "seven trumpets" were to march before the ark of God around the city seven times (Joshua 6:4). At the sound of the trumpets all the people were to shout and watch the wall of the city "fall down flat" (Joshua 6:5). Joshua and the people did as the Lord said and Jericho was "utterly destroyed" (Joshua 6:21). The blowing of the seven trumpets on this occasion indicated the judgment of God against the enemies of His people.

The seven trumpeters who heralded the judgment of God against Jericho were likely the allusion the Lord had in mind when He showed John seven angels blowing seven trumpets.

Note these similarities:

1. Seven trumpets were employed at Jericho. Seven trumpets are used in Revelation.

- Seven priests sounded the trumpets at Jericho. Seven angels who proceed from the temple blow the trumpets in Revelation.
- The trumpeters were to march ahead of the ark of the testimony at Jericho. After the blowing of the trumpets in Revelation, the same ark is revealed (see Revelation 11:19).
- Destruction followed the blowing of the trumpets at Jericho. Destruction occurs in Revelation as the trumpets are blown.

With this comparison we can conclude that the seven trumpets in Revelation represent judgments of God. Many other Scriptures support this interpretation of the trumpets.

With the words, "Blow ye the trumpet in the land," Jeremiah warned Israel of the coming Babylonian invasion. He attributed Israel's destruction at the hands of their enemies to "the fierce anger of the Lord," His judgment against His rebellious people (see Jeremiah 4:5-8; 1:16).

Zephaniah, like Jeremiah, equates the day of God's "wrath" with war and calls for the sounding of the "trumpet" to create "alarm" (see Zephaniah 1:14-17).

Hosea does the same with the Assyrian invasion. "Blow the trumpet," says Hosea, "to warn of the warfare of Assyria, like a fierce eagle, against Israel." The reason for the coming judgment is stated as rebellion against God's law. Therefore, God will abandon Israel to her enemy. He calls this action "My anger," and then explains that they are actually reaping what they have sown (see Hosea 8:1-3, 5, 7).

From these few Scriptural examples, we can summarize with these three simple points:

- The blowing of a trumpet announces war.
- God executes judgment by withdrawing His protection and allowing one nation to destroy another.
- Such judgments are not arbitrarily inflicted by God, nor do they constitute His first will, but are the inevitable harvest of evil, which God permits in mercy to awaken repentance in the hearts of those who suffer.

Trumpets Announce the Day of Atonement

There is another Old Testament account of trumpet blowing that bears a significant likeness to the trumpets of Revelation.

In Numbers 10:1-10, God commanded Israel to make two silver trumpets. The primary purpose of these trumpets was to assemble the people for solemn meetings. The most important of Israel's meetings was the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. Leviticus 23:23-32 explains that for ten days prior to Yom Kippur the trumpets were blown to announce its speedy arrival. The sound of the trumpets carried a clear and serious message: "Afflict your souls," that is, enter into repentance before the Lord. All sin was to be confessed and cast off. Any who refused to enter into the spirit of the occasion were to be excommunicated or executed. Once the most solemn day of Israel's symbolic year had been announced by the trumpets, on the tenth day of the seventh month the high priest entered into the Most Holy apartment of the temple to make final and full atonement for sin before the ark containing the broken law.

The imagery of Revelation's trumpets is very similar to this account. Before the trumpets are sounded, the seven angels who are to blow them stand before God in His heavenly temple. Another Angel stands before the golden altar of incense in the Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. This Angel is undoubtedly Christ, for He holds the golden censer and ministers at the golden altar, a task only performed by the high priest on the Day of Atonement. Since Jesus is the High Priest of the heavenly sanctuary, it follows that He is the Angel here described. The High Priest is given much incense, which

He puts into the golden censer with fire and then throws it to the earth. As He does so there follows the sound of voices, and thunder, and lightning and an earthquake. Obviously something stupendous is about to occur. It is then that the trumpets are sounded.

After the last trumpet is blown we read these words: "And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunders, and an earthquake, and great hail" (Revelation 11:19).

The sequence is identical in both instances: (1) trumpets are sounded, and (2) the Most Holy Place is opened for its final atonement service. We conclude then that the trumpets of Revelation represent judgment-type events that announce the time of final judgment for the world.

Military Action in the Trumpets

When we take an overview survey of the seven trumpets of Revelation, it becomes clear that they are intended to represent judgments of God in the form of military conflict.

Under the second trumpet we read that "ships were destroyed" (Revelation 8:9). Under the fifth trumpet we see "horses prepared unto battle" (Revelation 9:7), and "horses running to battle" (Revelation 9:9). Under the sixth trumpet we are shown "the number of the army of horsemen" (Revelation 9:16). Under the seventh trumpet we are told that "the nations were angry" and that God will now "destroy them which destroy the earth" (Revelation 11:18).

Not only do we find these direct references to war, but we also find various Old Testament symbols of war in the seven trumpets.

Under the first trumpet we see hail and fire mingled with blood burning one third of the earth's green vegetation (see Revelation 8:7). Isaiah likened the Assyrian attacks on Israel to a raging fire burning vegetation (see Isaiah 10:16-19). Obadiah 18 likens the military attack of Israel against Edom to "a fire" and "a flame" to burn them up as "stubble." Under the second trumpet we see "a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea." In Jeremiah 51:25, 42, Babylon is called a "destroying mountain," and is immersed in the sea because she destroyed other kingdoms. Under the fourth trumpet we hear a fierce "eagle" (RSV) proclaim, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabiters of the earth" (Revelation 8:13). In Hosea 8:1 the attack of Assyria on Israel was likened to an eagle. Under the fifth trumpet we encounter "locust" that have power to torment like "scorpions" (Revelation 9:3). Joel compared warring armies to locust (see Joel 1:4-7; 2:2-11).

Clearly, the trumpets are to be viewed as judgments of God on ungodly nations in the form of military conquests against them. When a nation abandons itself to evil, the Lord abandons that nation to war. But His intent is not to punish arbitrarily.

The Trumpets Call to Repentance

Under the sixth trumpet we are given an insight into God's purpose in sending judgments on the world. After much pain and bloodshed the sad statement is made: "And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk. Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts" (Revelation 9:20-21).

The trumpet judgments are intended to bring forth repentance for the evils in the land. Tragically, those who suffer under the trumpets do not repent. Nevertheless, it is God's intent that they would turn from their sins to Him (see 2 Peter 3:9; Ezekiel 33:11).

The Trumpets Compared to the Plagues

There are many similarities between the seven trumpets and the seven last plagues of Revelation 16.

- Both the first trumpet and the first plague affect the "earth."
- Both the second trumpet and the second plague affect the seas.
- Both the third trumpet and the third plague affect the fresh waters.
- Both the fourth trumpet and the fourth plague affect the sun.
- Both the sixth trumpet and the sixth plague have to do with the river Euphrates.
- Both the seventh trumpet and the seventh plague involve an earthquake.

So are the trumpets and the plagues the same events? No. While there are similarities, there are also three vital differences.

1. The judgments described in the trumpets are said to come upon only *one-third* of the earth, *one-third* of the sea, *one-third* of the fresh waters, *one-third* of the sun. The *one-third* is clearly symbolic. It represents restraint, limitation, that is, judgments mixed with mercy. In contrast, there is no such limitation mentioned for the plagues. The plagues accomplish unlimited destruction, without mercy.

2. The trumpets are blown while the angels are in the temple of God, indicating that probation is still open, intercession has not ceased. When the plagues are poured out the angels have vacated the temple, and none are allowed to enter, indicating that probation has closed; intercession has ceased. The trumpets represent judgments that occur before probation is closed, tempered with mercy in order to warn, awaken and call to repentance. On the other hand, the plagues occur after probation is closed, unmixed with mercy, intended to punish rather than call to repentance.

3. The trumpets demonstrate the exceeding wickedness of sin. The plagues bring a halt to sin. Together, the trumpets and the plagues insure that sin and all the suffering it inflicts will never rise again. All will see how absolutely wrong sin is. And all will confess God's goodness in eradicating it from the universe. Peace and harmony will forever reign under the sovereign charge of the One who always was, who is, and who will soon come.

As we have already seen, the trumpets are highly symbolic descriptions of human warfare. They are judgments of God only in the sense that He is the Sovereign Ruler of the universe and nothing occurs without His allowance.

"He removeth kings, and setteth up kings" (Daniel 2:21).

"The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will" (Daniel 4:25).

These Scriptures demonstrate that God possesses ultimate authority over the affairs of human beings. The rise and fall of nations is under His control. That is not to say that He desires war or in any sense takes delight in the pain that attends war. What it does mean is that the Lord determines when to allow and when to restrain the evil pursuits of men. In His perfect wisdom He knows when it is best to withdraw His restraining mercy and let people suffer the natural results of their evil ways.

The Lord has at least three positive purposes to accomplish by allowing the world to experience the devastating effects of their own departure from His law. (1) Sinners are given an opportunity to realize the terrible nature of their sin. (2) The unfallen universe and all honest humans may witness the true character of sin and become settled in their loyalty to the principles of truth and righteousness. (3) God will be viewed as just when He finally destroys all sin and unrepentant sinners along with Satan, the originator of rebellion.