

Session 4 – Chapter 8:1-11:19 – The trumpets are sounded

Silence in heaven

The OT often associates silence with people's response to being judged by God. Ps 31:17; 115:17; Lam 2:10-11; Amos 8:2b-3; Hab 2:20; Zeph 1:7. The 7th seal is now God's final judgement - so terrible it silences the created order in awe and dread. Contrast that with the worship in ch 7 of those made clean by the Lamb and promised a glorious future.

Jewish writings between the OT & NT associate silence with what preceded creation & with the exodus from Egypt (Ex 14:13-14), speaking of that exodus as a new creation. Rev 8:1 anticipates the moment between judgment of the ungodly & deliverance of God's people at the dawn of new creation (Rev 21).

For 'peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning & an earthquake' see 11:19; 16:18 & Ezk 10:1-7.

The seven trumpets

The first 6 trumpet judgments, like the first 5 seals, may describe events preceding the final judgement. Partial destruction of the sun, moon and stars (trumpets 1&4), even if metaphorical, must come before their total destruction following the opening of the sixth seal (6:12-17). The trumpets give greater detail and strength to the seal judgments and, like them, refer to judgments that have been taking place in the world ever since Christ returned to heaven in triumph following his resurrection.

Like the seals, the trumpets can be divided into a group of four followed by a group of two, a parenthetical section, and then the final trumpet. The group of four all affect a third of the created order. The other three are a series of woes (8:13). The parenthesis between the 6th & 7th trumpets comes at the start of ch10 and lasts until 11:13.

In the OT trumpets are associated with

- God appearing among his people after victory over his enemies (Ex 19:16-19)
- God's covenant to atone for sin (Lev 23:23-32, 25:8-9; 2 Chron 29:20-28)
- Celebration (1 Chron 13:8; 2 Chron 5:13)
- Warning of danger or judgment (immediate or at the end of time), and to call God's people to arms in anticipation of victory (**Josh 6:4-20**; Jer 4:5-6; 6:16-19; Ezk 33:1-6; Hos 8:1-5; Joel 2:1-2, 15, Zeph 1:14-16)
- Enthronement of the king (2 Sam 15:10; 1 Kgs 1:34)
- Salvation, either immediate or at the end of time (Zech 9:9-16)
- Gathering of God's people (Num 10:1-10) sometimes for battle (1 Sam 13:2-4; Neh 4:18-20) or at the end of time (Isa 27:12-13)

In the NT they indicate Jesus' return & gathering of his people Mt 24:30-31; 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16.

The end of the Great City

Note the parallels between Rev 8&9 and Josh 6 - the judgement and fall of Jericho. Seven priests and seven trumpets That city's demise foreshadows the fall of the Great City described in Rev 11.

Rev 8:8, the mountain thrown into the sea, conveys a similar picture, also in ch11-18 regarding the fall of "Babylon", "the great city", "being thrown down" (18:21). This is a kingdom judged for oppressing God's people. Not a literal collapse into the sea due to a natural disaster, but rather the end to its influence and power. If Rev 8:10 alludes to the star cast down from the heavens in Isa 14:12-15 regarding God's judgment on Babylon, this is another reference to a wicked kingdom, also refer to as Sodom & Gomorrah, Jerusalem and, by implication, Rome (to explicitly name Rome could have led to the destruction of any copies of Revelation). For Christians in late 1st century, Jerusalem represented those of the Jewish faith who'd rejected Jesus as the Messiah and who sought to make life hard for anyone who persisted in following him.

Today we might similarly think of capital cities of nations that have oppressed Christian faith.

Trumpets and plagues

The trumpets correspond to some of the plagues in the lead up to the exodus of the Israelites.

1 st trumpet	Rev 8:7	hail & fire	Ex 9:13-25 (7 th plague)
2 nd & 3 rd trumpets	Rev 8:8-11	1/3 rd sea became blood 1/3 rd rivers made bitter	Ex 7:14-25 (1 st plague)
The 4 th trumpet	Rev 8:12	1/3 rd sun moon & stars darkened	Ex 10:21-23 (9 th plague)
The 5 th trumpet	Rev 9:1-11	locusts	Ex 10:1-15 (8 th plague)

The Exodus plagues were not expected to lead to the Egyptians' repentance, but served to emphasise Pharaoh's hardness of heart and demonstrate Yahweh's power over everything Ex 9:15-16. Similarly, the trumpet judgments are to be seen as punishment for people's hardness heart towards God and to demonstrate God is the Lord of all the earth, not just of Christians.

The limitation of the trumpet judgments to a third of the earth, sea, rivers and sky does seem to allow for repentance from the two thirds that survive. But 9:20 says no such repentance was forthcoming.

'Wormwood' (8:11) is a bitter herb. In water it can be poisonous if drunk over a long period. See Deut 29:18; Prov 5:4; Jer 9:15, 23:15; Lam 3:15, 19; Amos 5:7, 6:12. In Jeremiah wormwood is a metaphor for the bitterness of suffering resulting from God's judgment – particularly on idolatry.

In v12 a third of the sun, moon and stars being struck and a third of the day and night being without light must be figurative, not literal descriptions (a reminder not to take these scenes too literally). The impression of cosmic disorder symbolises the real disruption of the moral order of creation and that God will not allow that to govern forever what happens on the earth.

Darkness speaks figuratively of moral darkness and the separation between human beings and God. That picture continues with the 5th trumpet in ch9.

The falling star, the Abyss and the plague of locusts (ch 9)

9:1 repeats the image of a star falling from heaven, referring to a corrupt angel being cast out of heaven - confirmed in 9:11 as the angel of the Abyss, called Abaddon (Hebrew), Apollyon (Greek).

The Abyss (9:1-2, 11) is the place of the dead (cf Rev 11:7, 17:8, 20:1,3; Lk 8:31; Rom 10:7). So too is *Abaddon* (9:11, Hebrew word in Job 26:6, 28:22, 31:2; Ps 88:11; Prov 15:11, 27:20). In Prov & Job 26 used alongside Sheol (OT name for resting place of the dead) - more negative meaning than Sheol. *Abaddon* means 'perishing', 'going to ruin', 'destruction'. *Apollyon*, the Greek equivalent = 'destroyer'.

Abaddon is personified in Prov 27 (described as insatiable) and in Job 28 (where it has a voice). Revelation uses it for 'the angel of the bottomless pit' – central figure in a picture of destructive evil forces arising from an underworld of spirits. We may see in *Abaddon* a reference to Satan or a representative of the Devil.

The locusts (9:3) hark back to the plague of locusts at the exodus. Back then they were actual insects that devoured crops. In Revelation they are more like an army that attack people. That imagery is also found in Joel 1-2. They symbolically represent a great army of demon-like beings.

Unlike the locusts in Egypt that devoured crops, these are told (v4) not to '*harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.*' This mirrors what happened at the exodus when the Israelites (identified by the blood mark on their door lintels) were protected when God pass over the land and killed every firstborn Egyptian son.

God uses yet limits evil forces

While the first 4 seals and trumpets affected believers and unbelievers alike, the focus of the last 3 trumpet judgments seems to be only on those who are not followers of Jesus. We are moving towards the final judgment when all rebellion against God will be dealt with – but we are not quite there yet.

The star or angel of the abyss is 'given' the key to the abyss (9:1). Given by Christ, who holds the key to Death and Hades (1:18 - see v3 locusts 'given' power; v4 'told' not to harm the grass & trees, v5 'not allowed' to kill). God determines the extent of what they can do. He is in total control.

But how is that evil forces can apparently be used by God to carry out his judgments?

The OT has already revealed this. God used ungodly nations many times to carry out his judgment on the people of Israel. Think of the days of the Judges, or the Assyrians overwhelming Israel, or the Babylonians overcoming Judah. God chooses to use both good and evil forces to warn, to call to repentance, to refine faith, to punish and to reveal his authority and sovereignty over all other gods.

Nothing that happens does so outside the purposes of God. What evil forces intend for ill, God can use to punish evil and to refine and strengthen faith. That is a reason for us to rejoice and to have hope.

Are we just pawns, then in God's hands?

Emphatically not. We still have a choice in responding to what happens to us. But beware of worshipping choice for its own sake - we all make bad choices as well as good ones.

We can respond in penitence and faith, or we can turn our back on God or choose not to listen to him.

Pharaoh (Ex 1-11) had the chance to let God's people go. He chose to resist God's will and purpose. He hardened his own heart (Ex 1:8-22; 3:19; 5:1-18; 7:13,22-23; 8:15,19,32). Later, as he persisted in that resistance, God further hardened Pharaoh's heart (Ex 9:12; 10:1-2).

Just as God strengthens faith in those who obey, he will harden resistance in those who disobey. He hardens rebellious hearts to show the world they cannot frustrate his purposes – that he alone is God.

That is the picture in Rev 9:20-21, which if written today might say – *the rest of the people of the world who were not killed still did not repent of their attitude to life; they did not stop worshipping the autonomy of the self, freedom of choice and the right to determine what is good and evil. Nor did they repent of their pursuit of power, sex and money.*

How then should we view the crises that beset our world?

We most often respond by praying for the victims and for a quick resolution and a return to 'normality'. But should we also recognise these are God-sent reminders that we have failed to rule over this world according to his purposes and character? Should we respond in repentance for our own failures to live his way? Should we pray that others might repent and turn to him? Should we acknowledge God's right to judge the nations in these ways, whilst praying that even now he would show mercy?

The sixth trumpet (9:13-21)

The angels constrained at the Euphrates evoke OT prophecies about an army coming from the north as God's judgment on Israel for its abandonment of the covenant and worship of other gods. See Isa 5:26-29, 7:20, 8:7-8, 14:29-31; Jer 1:14-15, 4:6-13, 6:1,22, 10:22, 13:20; Ezk 38:6,15, 39:2; Joel 2:1-11,20-25. Also on ungodly nations around Israel (Isa 14:31; Jer 25:9,26, Rev 9:ch **46-47**, 50:41-42; Ezk 26:7-11. Note the correlation between the 6th trumpet and the 6th bowl in ch16.

Reference to 'fire, smoke & sulphur' lifted from the destruction of Sodom & Gomorrah (Gen 19:24-28). It comes from the locusts' mouths, suggesting spiritual harm from their words rather than physical harm. Maybe through deception, leading people to become hardened towards God and so to their spiritual and physical death. Or through enticing people into idolatry and immorality. The idea of deception is emphasised by references to serpents and scorpions (Gen 3; Ps 58:1-5; Mt 23:13-33).

Parenthesis – John's recommissioning & the call of the Church to witness to Jesus (ch10-11)

Description & words of the angel (10:2-6) are from vision in Dan 10-12 of the Angel of the Lord (found elsewhere in OT & identified with Christ). Standing on sea & land points to his sovereignty over both.

Little scroll most likely contains what is described in ch11-16(22). Same as scroll in ch5 now 'open'.

Instruction not to write down but to seal up what John sees is like command in Dan 12:4. Could mean

- temporary delay to the fulfilment of what is in the scroll
- not to reveal how it will be fulfilled
- not to describe the 7 thunders as they repeat the 7 seals & 7 trumpets. Time for describing the content of judgments is over, the focus from now on is to be on the reason for them.

'There will be no more delay!' (v6) means the limited judgments in ch6-9 are now finished with. They have not led to repentance by those not sealed by God; the time has come for that to be punished.

The sounding of the 7th trumpet will bring an end to the 'little time longer' (6:11) during which God held back final judgment and the vindication of those who died for their faith.

'Mystery of God' in v6-7 is probably that evil is being undone not by force of arms, but by the sacrifice of those who suffer for the sake of Christ. Just as the unrepentant world appears to win the physical battle and overcome the Christians, so it becomes clear that Christ and those who hold to him have won the more important spiritual battle.

The command to John to 'eat the scroll' alludes to Ezk 2:8-3:3. Ezekiel was told to warn Israel of God's judgment on their idolatry and that 'Israel will not listen to you'. His message was therefore primarily one of announcing God's judgment. So also in Rev 10. For John & Ezekiel, the scroll tasted sweet as honey signifying the positive effect God's words have on those who obey them (cf Ps 19:7-11; 119:97-104). But the later bitterness speaks of the pain at people's unwillingness to listen (cf Ezk 2:10; 3:14).

The final verse of ch10 introduces the focus of ch11 – that John (and by implication the Church) is being commissioned to prophesy 'against' peoples, nations, languages and kings.

Two witnesses because Jewish law required the testimony of at least two witnesses to agree for it to be valid (Num 35:30; Deut 19:15; Mt 18:15-16; Lk 10:1-24; 1 Tim 5:19).

Measuring is OT metaphor for God ensuring the protection of his people (Jer 31:38-40; Zech 1:16) or for administration of his judgment (2 Sam 8:2; 2 Kgs 21:13; Lam 2:8). Measuring the temple parallels Ezekiel 40-48, where it represents ensuring the security of the city of Jerusalem and the promise of God's end-time presence among his people (cf sealing God's people in ch7). In later Jewish writings Ezekiel's end-time temple was spiritualised to refer to God's holy and faithful people (cf the NT picture of Christ's resurrection body and those who are in Christ as the new temple). Instruction not to include the outer court, consistent with the key messages in Rev ch2-9, is saying that, while God protects the faith of his people, they do not necessarily escape being harmed at the hands of others.

The 42 months are figurative; cf. references in Daniel to 'time, times & half a time' (understood as a year, two years & half a year), i.e. 3½ years of tribulation for God's people (Dan 7:25; 12:7, 11-12). See Rev 11&12 for 1260 days & 'time, times & half a time' in 12:14. Recalls the period of Elijah's ministry of judgment on Israel (Lk 4:25; Jas 5:17) - confirmed by witnesses having 'power to shut up the heavens so it will not rain during the time they are prophesying' (11:6). The 'power to turn the waters to blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague' recalls Moses' ministry of judgment on Egypt.

The two witnesses probably represent all those who bear witness to Jesus - confirmed by reference to them as 'lampstands' and 'olive trees' (see 1:20 & Zech 4) - context of Zech 4 is rebuilding the temple after the exile, in the face of opposition from other nations under the instigation of Satan (Zech 3:1-2). There is a parallel with Rev 11 and Christ's body, the Church, being built as a temple in the face of opposition and persecution led by evil forces.

The language of 11:4-6 overlaps with that used to describe the first 6 trumpet judgments. That again suggests we are to understand this section as describing the situation in the age of the Church.

With v7 the time focus shifts from the period of the Church to what will happen at the end of history. The beast coming up from the Abyss and overpowering the two witnesses is a figurative way of saying it will appear to the world at that point that the Church has been defeated..

'Sodom and Egypt' (v8) - Sodom known for the way it enticed visitors into rampant immorality; Egypt known as the place where God's people were persecuted. Both ways in which the Church is attacked by the world around it. But Sodom was destroyed by God's judgment, and Egypt brought low by the plagues and its army overwhelmed by God's actions at the Red Sea.

The 3½ days the Church seems defeated (v9) contrasts with 3½ years of its testimony to Christ. Their resurrection & call to 'come up here' (v12) are confirmation & vindication of the truth of their witness.

While the parenthesis in ch7 revealed the sealing protection of believers against spiritually destructive harm from the first 6 trumpet judgments, the parenthesis in ch11 reveals the sealed are not to sit back and revel in their protection but to be enduring and loyal witnesses to the gospel. By doing so they are laying the basis for the final judgment of those who reject their testimony.