

Revelation 8

WHEN THE TRUMPETS SOUND

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Student Guide

In the Bible seven is a symbolic number representing completeness. The number “7” therefore may suggest total chaos was coming to completion (cp. Ruth 4:15; 1 Sam. 2:5). With the opening of the seventh seal, unprecedented judgments are going to fall on planet earth. God’s wrath would be complete. However, before the trumpets sounded marking the opening of the seventh seal, perhaps the most unusual event in heaven takes place—total silence. The heavenly choirs are speechless while harps remain silent. No voices, no music, and no motion exist. Even the voice of the Almighty is still. Why? John explains in chapter eight.

1. The Solemn Preparation (vv. 1-2; cp. also vv. 6-7)

John opens the chapter and reveals the position of heavenly angels responsible for doing the Almighty’s bidding. Their sole duty was to perfectly carry out the will of the Father. John portrays them as standing ready and willing for perfect obedience. And, in this particular case, the angels would be assigned the most awful judgment the world had ever experienced. However, they would not blink nor would they hesitate.

After revealing their position, John focuses on the angels’ preparation. They were given trumpets. Scripture often mentions trumpets as key instruments of God’s people. For example, trumpets were sounded when the Israelites prepared to meet God in worship. Trumpets were used to prepare for battle. It remains no surprise, therefore, that preparation for judgment upon the world would be marked by the sounding of seven trumpets.

Question: *Do you think it was an act of mercy to sound trumpets before God poured out wrath upon the earth? Does God usually forewarn people before His judgment falls? Explain.*

2. The Saints’ Prayers (vv. 3-5)

Another angel besides the angels who were given the trumpets to sound as the seventh seal is opened enters John’s vision. While the text does not explicitly identify the angel as Christ, the description John uses surely reminds us of Christ’s priestly work on behalf of His people. First, John describes the *intercession* offered. According to Scripture, we have an advocate with the Father Who makes a defensive case on our behalf. Jesus acts as a heavenly Advocate for each of us personally. We are never without Christ’s prayers for us. And, we may be sure the Father hears the prayers of His Son, the Lord Jesus.

John’s vision, however, reveals a new dimension to heavenly intercession. Not only does Jesus intercede for His people, God’s heavenly saints also intercede for His people. The prayers of God’s people compliment the finished work of Jesus Christ (cp. Eph. 5:2). Hence, if heavenly intercession is significant for God’s people to perform, how much more should we intercede for one another now! Do we have that same sense of joy in praying for fellow believers?

Not only does John describe the *intercession* he hears, but he also describes the *retribution* he sees. The same fire which bears prayer to God kindles the fires of judgment thrown upon an unbelieving world. Judgment is nothing more or less than the flip side of rejected love. When grace is rejected, judgment is deserved. In fact, when grace is rejected, judgment is *demand*ed.

The result of the fiery judgment John described included “voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.” These will be but the birth-pangs as it were of the unimaginable wrath of God poured out on a rebellious planet. Heaven’s fire and earth’s sin meet and make contact. The result is nothing short of a cataclysmic catastrophe. Indeed, the earth will shake on its very axis when God’s judgment falls.

3. The Sinners’ Punishment (vv. 6-13)

The scene of judgment is portrayed in no uncertain terms as punishment upon the sins of rebellious, depraved human beings. The angels John introduced at the chapter’s beginning raised their trumpets to mark the pouring out of God’s wrath. The time has come for wicked men and women to reap what they sowed. As the first angel blew the trumpet, a mixture of hail and fire mixed with blood fell swiftly upon the earth. Consequently, a full third of earth’s vegetation perished marking an ecological disaster without parallel. The loss obviously throws the world into panic because of the scarcity of food. We often imagine the starving third-world countries and the starvation evident in them. However, the richest countries—including the United States—will be thrust into third-world circumstances with a shortage of food.

Next, a second trumpet sounded, and upon the sound, “a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea”. While we cannot be certain precisely what John is describing, perhaps he saw a gigantic flaming meteor resembling the size of a mountain on fire falling into the sea. Again, while John’s words are not explicit as to what set off the destruction, the sea was filled with the blood of dead water creatures and floating debris from destroyed ships. Nothing less than nuclear meltdown fits the destruction our modern imagination can muster.

John records the third trumpet sounding. John saw a huge star the name of which is revealed—“wormwood.” The term translated “wormwood” literally means “bitterness.” The vision solicits from our memory the fresh water supply being contaminated at Marah (Ex. 15:23). Whether or not John saw in his vision a radioactive fallout is debatable. Nonetheless, such a scenario easily presents itself to us. The Gospel offers us now living waters from which we may draw buckets of eternal life.

Finally, John records the fourth trumpet sounding. Darkness falls on the earth indicative of its incurable spiritual darkness. Christ indicated men loved darkness rather than light. God will give them the desires of their heart.

Question: *When you think of the coming judgment, what goes through your mind? Do you think you will escape the judgment to come? If so, how? If you do not know if you are prepared to meet God, talk to your Bible study leader or Pastor immediately. He will assist you in knowing how you may be fully prepared to meet God.*

Wrap Up

John ends the chapter beholding another angel flying through the air with a disheartening message: “...Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!” (v. 13). Though planet earth is completely rattled with the judgment already fallen, the angel voices more devastating news—God’s wrath is not complete. More destruction remains on the heavenly agenda. It simply cannot be overly emphasized: we must be prepared now for it will be too late then. Jesus calls out to every person, “Come unto me...and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). And, those who come to Jesus receive His undeniable promise, “...him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). Christ calls you today. Christ promises to receive you today.