

*A young boy entered a grocery store and asked the grocer for a box of laundry soap. The grocer was curious and asked the boy why he wanted a box of laundry soap and the boy said that he was going to wash his cat. The grocer responded, “Young man, you shouldn’t wash your cat with this kind of soap;” but, the boy insisted that it would be okay and purchased the soap anyway.*

*A few days later, the boy returned to the store, and the grocer asked about the cat. “Oh, he died,” answered the boy, to which the grocer said, “Well son, I warned you not to wash your cat with that soap.” But the boy replied, “Oh, the soap didn’t kill him – it was the spin cycle that got him.”*

I used this little story this morning because we have come to a series of judgments during the last portion of the Tribulation period where it appears that God, in a last-ditch effort, has tossed an unrepentant world into the spin cycle to get its attention. God has tried everything to draw people unto Himself and to set things right, but tragically, there are many stubborn people who still reject God’s mercy and grace, and so unfortunately, they will experience God’s judgment and wrath.

Now, if you recall, after the Apostle John witnessed Jesus breaking the first six seals fixed to the scroll, there was a pause in the action, and John caught a backstage glimpse of the work of the 144,000 divinely protected Jews who seek to evangelize the lost during the Tribulation period, and if you remember, John also saw the fruit of their labor – a numberless multitude of all kinds of people would be saved and killed for identifying with Jesus during this terrible time. It had to be bittersweet for John to see these martyred people standing safely in heaven in light of the destruction and the devastation he has already witnessed on the earth so far. But now the pause is over with the breaking of the last seal – the seventh seal.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Revelation 8** and we will begin with **verse 1**. Here the Apostle John tells us what he is witnessing in heaven. He says,

**When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.**

I don’t know about you, but this silence sounds somewhat ominous, because it does not seem that heaven is typically a quiet place. So far, for John, heaven has been filled with never ceasing praise and worship, but now there is this eerie silence in heaven – like a pin drop silence – maybe for the very first time. We are not told exactly why there is silence in heaven, but it’s safe to assume that something breath-taking and jaw-dropping is about to happen. We might say it is the silent calm before the shock of the terrible storm that is coming.

John continues to describe what he witnesses and in **verse 2** he says,

**And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.**

So, the seventh seal is broken, there is silence, and then John introduces us to **seven angels**, apparently high-ranking angels like Gabriel because they **stand before God**, and these angels are given **trumpets** by which they will carry out God's will.

Now before we venture on, I want to remind you of the relationship between the seventh seal, the seven trumpets, and later the seven bowl judgments we will see in **Chapter 16**. Using that pirate's telescope illustration that we saw some time ago; the seventh seal contains all the final remaining judgments. The seven trumpets are included within the seventh seal and the seven bowls are included within the seventh trumpet, so in effect, we have a single series of three moments similar to extending a pirate's telescope.

**What do we know about these trumpets?** Well, they are not trumpets used for playing music like our modern trumpets, instead these are the kind used for very special events. For example, in the Old Testament, they were used for such things as to introduce kings, they were used to declare war, they were used to assemble people, and they were used to announce special celebrations, but in context here, these trumpets are used to signal divine judgment.

So, there are seven angels with trumpets ready to signal judgment, but another angel shows up and beginning with **verse 3**, we are told that he's holding something else.

**<sup>3</sup> Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. <sup>4</sup> And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. <sup>5</sup> Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.**

We are told by John that this eighth angel does something reminiscent of what priests did in Israel's temples where they burned incense on the altar that was symbolic of the prayers of people rising to God. John tells us this eighth angel is "**holding a golden censer.**" A censer is a bowl or fire pan designed for holding

live coals and incense, and John says this angel is standing before the **golden altar** in heaven and he is given **much incense ...so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints.**

**What are these prayers that John is referring to?** I think the prayers that John is referring to are those prayers of the martyred saints he saw under the altar back in **Revelation 6**. If you recall, the saints who were killed during the Tribulation period cried out – they prayed **“How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”** They prayed for justice and vengeance, but they were told to wait a little longer – but now, it appears the wait is over.

So, the censer, in effect, has become a symbolic instrument of judgment and wrath in response to prayer of these Tribulation saints, and we are told the censer is filled with fire from the altar and it's hurled with such force to the earth, that it caused thunder, and lightning, and earthquakes – all Old Testament symbols of God's mighty power – and it sets the stage for the trumpet judgments.

Now before we look at the trumpet judgments, I want to say a couple of things about them, and the first is this – they are God's doing. As we look at these judgments, as mind boggling as they may be, there might be the urge to try to reason them out or to explain them naturally, but what occurs is not “nature” taking its course. This is supernatural – it's God's doing, and He can do whatever He wants to do, and what He wants is to let people know these events are from Him.

Secondly, some have taken these judgments and interpreted them symbolically rather than literally; however, if you consider any of God's judgments in the Old Testament, especially the ten plagues in the book of **Exodus**, there is no reason to interpret these judgments in any other way than in their literal and obvious sense. In other words, it would be very inconsistent of us to understand these trumpet judgments symbolically and yet interpret the plagues in Egypt literally, and I bring up the plagues in Egypt because these judgments from the trumpets appear very similar in nature to the plagues in Egypt, but on a much grander scale. Even Jesus said in **Matthew 24:21** when speaking about the end, He said,

**“For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.”**

These trumpet judgments at the end of the Tribulation period are unbelievable – something never seen before, and something beyond our reason or comparisons we might try to make.

So, with that in mind, let's look at the first trumpet judgment beginning with **verse 6**.

**<sup>6</sup> And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them. <sup>7</sup> The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.**

This is an example of what I was just talking about. John tells us the blast of the first trumpet results in **hail and fire, mixed with blood**, and a **third of the earth was burned up** – including **trees and green grass**. When looking at this, there might be a tendency to question this description of hail and fire, mixed with blood. We might have the urge to reason it out, to explain it naturally and scientifically some way, or we can just call it symbolic – but if fire does not mean fire, and blood does not mean blood, **then does the earth mean the earth, are trees really trees and is grass actually grass?** I ask because if we start down that road, we end up with endless speculation and symbolism, and we won't know what is what.

I believe this is a literal judgment against the land where a third of all vegetation and crops are destroyed with fire, and although it's not directly targeted at the inhabitants of the earth, it will indirectly strike the food supplies and the global economy, it will affect health on a massive scale just from the smoke and the ash alone, and maybe it will even impact the world's oxygen supply.

So, here's a question. **Why would God judge the earth – His creation?** I think, in a roundabout way, the Apostle Paul gives us an answer. He tells us in **Romans 1**, beginning with **verse 18**,

**<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, <sup>19</sup> because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup> For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. <sup>22</sup> Professing to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. <sup>24</sup> Therefore**

**God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. <sup>25</sup> For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.**

That's it. Man worshiped the *creature* – they worshiped the *created* rather than the **Creator**. People have made a false god out of creation, they have put their hope in “Mother Nature” so to speak, and their god will be judged and their hope will be dashed.

Okay, let's move on to the second trumpet judgment beginning with **verse 8**.

**<sup>8</sup>The second angel sounded, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood, <sup>9</sup>and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed.**

The second angel sounds his trumpet and John describes judgment on salt water, and we need to be careful to note exactly what this says and what it does not say. If you noticed, it does not say *that a great mountain, burning with fire, was cast into the sea*. It does not say that. Rather, it says, “**Something like a great mountain . . .**” There's that word “*like*” again from John – and understandably, that creates all kinds of speculation on our part.

Some suggest this describes a group of nuclear missiles coming down upon the earth and I guess it could, but I don't believe this is the case at all. Remember, this is God's doing and He wants people to know it is His doing, and I think as well as many others think, that this is a perfect picture of a massive asteroid, the size of a mountain, entering the atmosphere engulfed in flames and crashing into the sea. The impact would be devastating beyond our comprehension, causing a third of everything in the sea to die, and it will likely cause waves so great, that a third of the ships will be tossed about and destroyed.

John tells us that a third of the sea “**became blood.**” This could be caused supernaturally just as God did with the plague in the Nile River by turning it to blood, or perhaps it could be caused by the tremendous amount of death resulting in blood poured into the sea when this thing strikes. Whatever the case may be, with all the death, a third of the salt water will become a stinking, rotten, and polluted mess, and those who depend on the sea for food and transportation will suffer on a catastrophic scale.

But God's not done. Let's continue with **verse 10**. John says,

**<sup>10</sup> The third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters. <sup>11</sup> The name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter.**

Salt water has been judged – now it's time for judgment on the fresh water. We are told that a **great star fell from heaven** – it too was on fire burning *like* a **torch**, so maybe John is describing a comet which can look like a torch, and apparently as it comes through the atmosphere, it breaks up and spreads all over the earth and falls on the fresh water **rivers** and **springs**.

John tells us this star has a name – and it's called **“Wormwood”** which means *“bitter.”* These waters that once provided nourishment to one third of the world's population will still be running, but they will become contaminated with something, maybe radiation, and deadly to those who drink it – and I only toss out radiation because, interestingly enough, the Ukrainian word for the wormwood plant is *Chernobyl*. I found that interesting.

Next, we come to the fourth trumpet, and we are told in **verse 12**,

**The fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way.**

Here the attention moves away from the earth. Since God dealt with the land, the salt water, and the fresh water, people might put their hope in the skies, in the stars, but God has something for them as well, and John describes an event that occurs way above the earth. Again, this is God's doing and somehow, supernaturally, He is going to block out **one third** of the **sun**, one third of the **moon**, one third of the **stars**. I can't even imagine what this will do with the rhythm of our days – I mean, I struggle with the daylight savings time.

In the Old Testament, darkness was a common symbol of judgment, and there is some similarity between this fourth trumpet and the ninth plague that God brought upon Egypt which caused supernatural darkness for three days. So, God will cut off light from the sun, and the moon, and the stars by one-third perhaps by some sort of a partial eclipse, and as we might imagine, this reduction in light will cause total chaos and likely impact the temperature on the earth.

Now we might ask, **“Could anything be worse than what we have seen thus far?”** and the answer is *“Oh yes.”* In **verse 13**, John says,

**Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!”**

So, unbelievably – the worse is still yet to come, for John sees an **eagle** – in some translations it is an *angel* and in others it is *messenger*, flying through the sky and warning those living on the earth to beware of the last three trumpet judgments – in other words, *“You think this is bad, wait till the next three. You haven’t seen anything yet.”*

In the first four trumpet judgments, God attacks all the ordinary means of subsistence, such as food and water; and He attacks all the ordinary means of comfort and knowledge, such as light and the regular rhythm of days. In the first four trumpets, nature was directly attacked and people were targeted indirectly, but in the next trumpets – people are attacked directly. People will be the targets.

I will admit this was not a comfortable passage to preach, but there are some things we can take away from it, and I like what Charles Swindoll had to say.

He pointed out – and maybe you have noticed, that when disasters like fires and tornados or earthquakes strike, people seem to be much more open to God and to talk about spiritual matters. The truth is, that even today – just as it will be in the future – as difficult as it may be, God often uses suffering to get our attention and to draw our attention to Himself, and for some people, that’s what it takes.

Secondly, God’s harsh judgments have a holy purpose. Nobody denies that the first four trumpet judgments result in unimaginable devastation, and hardship, and death – and people may be tempted to shake their fists at God in anger, but God has a divine purpose for doing what He does and we should never doubt God’s wisdom, His love, or His goodness as He carries out His perfect plan.

And lastly, like it or not, we need to remember that God won’t stop until His plan is accomplished. This is a hard lesson to accept, and an even harder lesson to live through. The sad reality of the first four trumpet judgments is that they are only the beginning because many people will not heed God’s warnings and they will not surrender to Him. Instead, they will resist and rebel and harden their hearts toward God, and it will only prolong the inevitable as God works out His plan. So, don’t be that stubborn person, because in the end, like it or not, God will have His way.

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