

The Meaning of Trumpets

Trumpets are used in many contexts in the Old and New Testaments—worship, sanctuary, judgment. In the case of Revelation's seven trumpets it is clear that the trumpets are related to the theme of judgment. We will find that the blowing of each of the seven trumpets brings a judgment against those who have oppressed God's people.

Numbers 10:8-10 is a key verse. In this verse, we find that: Trumpets were blown so that the Lord would remember His covenant with Israel and save them from their enemies. The trumpets answer the pleas of God's people in the seals. When God's people are oppressed, their pleas go before God and God remembers His covenant and sends judgments on their oppressors. The trumpets are God's response to the powers that have oppressed and persecuted His people—their pleas are heard and answered. The pleas of God's people in the trumpets can be better understood in the context of the imprecatory Psalms where God's people cry out for God to be faithful to His covenant and to deliver them from their enemies. In parallel fashion, the seven last plagues will have the same moral reason. Each of the plagues will be a punishment of God upon Babylon for some particular sin that Babylon has committed against God and His people. Frequently God's voice is depicted as the sound of the trumpet (Hebrews 12:19) In I Corinthians 15:51, 52, I Thessalonians 4:16, 17 the dead are raised when the trumpet sounds but in John 5:28, 29 it is the voice of Jesus that resurrects the dead. This is why Revelation 1:10 describes the voice of Jesus as the sound of the trumpet.

Revelation 8:2-5 seems to refer to two separate altars. The first is the altar of sacrifice where the blood of God's people has been poured out. That is, the pleas of God's people at the altar of sacrifice ascend to heaven and are now answered by Jesus who stands interceding for His people. This is the context within which we should comprehend the imprecatory Psalms (see Psalm 34:4- 9 as an example). Examples of this can be found in the relationship between the head and the body, the husband and the wife, the sovereign and his subject and the shepherd and his sheep.

An example of this can be found in the exodus pattern. Israel was captive to the Egyptians and they cried out for God to be faithful to His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exodus 2:23- 25). We are told that God remembered His covenant with His people and answered their pleas by pouring out plagues upon the Egyptians but the Egyptians did not repent. There is a similar pattern to this in the seven trumpets. God's people cry out to God from the altar of sacrifice on the earth, God listens to them at the altar of incense in heaven and pours out the preliminary judgments against those who are oppressing His people. There is mercy while these judgments are being poured out but when probation closes greater scourges (the seven last plagues) will be sent upon the earth with no opportunity for repentance.

Timeline of the Trumpets

Note: In the historical half of Revelation, the sixth item in the series deals with the beginning of the investigative judgment in 1844. This is true of the churches (Philadelphia is # 6), the seals (the signs in the heavens announce the sealing of Revelation 7), and the trumpets (the little book episode and the measuring of the temple between the sixth and the seventh trumpets).

There is also a very important connection between Revelation 9:14, 16 (sixth trumpet) and Revelation 7:1-3 (parenthesis in the sixth seal). In both you have binding and loosing relating to four angels, in both groups of people are being numbered. In Revelation 7:1-3 God's people are being numbered while in Revelation 9 their evil counterparts are being numbered. These are the only two places in Revelation where the expression "I heard their number is used." If probation remains open through the sixth trumpet and then closes with the sounding of the seventh, the sixth trumpet is the exact historical counterpart of Revelation 7:1-8.

The seventh trumpet is when Jesus takes over the kingdoms of the world (11:15) but when that trumpet is about to sound probation closes (10:7). This means that the blowing of the previous six trumpets took place during probationary time. Earlier in Revelation God was spoken of as the one who was, is and is to come (Revelation 1:8), but in Revelation 11:17 (at the seventh trumpet) He is spoken of as the one who is and who was and has taken His great power and begun to reign. Thus, there is a period of time between when the mystery of God is finished when the seventh trumpet is about to sound and the time when Jesus takes over the kingdoms of the world when the trumpet sound ends. The finishing of the mystery of God has to do with the gospel proclamation (Eph. 3:4; 6:19; Col. 4:3; Rom. 16:25, 26). The mention of the golden altar in the sixth trumpet indicates that intercession is still going on during the sixth trumpet (9:13). The interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpet reveals that the gospel is still being proclaimed so probation must still be open. If the church is to prophesy again (Revelation 10:11) means that probation must still be open. In the interlude, people can still repent and give glory to God (11:13, cf. 16:9). 11:13: The remnant feared God and gave glory to him. This connects with the message of the first angel in Revelation 14:6, 7.

Prelude: Introductory Vision

Revelation 8:2-5 gives the starting point and ending point of the trumpets series. The starting point is when the intercessory work of Jesus begins. The ending point is when the censer is cast to the ground, probation closes, and the temple is filled with smoke (Revelation 15:5-8). After this the plagues are poured out culminating with the earthquake, lightning and thunder (Revelation 16:17-21). The phenomena that occur in the seventh plague are very similar to the phenomena in the introduction to the trumpets.

The Meaning of the Incense and the Censer

Only Holy Fire was offered on the golden altar. The fire is a symbol of the Holy Spirit and the incense represents the prayers of the saints mingled the merits of Jesus. The embroidered on the veil represented the fact that the angels bear our prayers to God and bring God's answers back. This is what Revelation 5:8 seems to indicate. Only the high priest was to burn incense on the Golden Altar (Exodus 30:7, 8)

Psalms 141:2 "The prayer and praise and confession of God's people ascend as sacrifices to the heavenly sanctuary. But they ascend not in spotless purity. Passing through the corrupt channels of humanity, they are so defiled that unless purified by the righteousness of the great High Priest, they are not acceptable by God. Christ gathers into the censer the [1] prayers, the praise, and the sacrifices of his people, and [2] with these he puts the merits of his spotless righteousness. Then, perfumed with the incense of Christ's propitiation, our prayers, wholly and entirely acceptable, rise before God, and gracious answers are returned." YI April 16, 1903

The golden altar was nearest to the throne. In fact, it focused upon the most holy place (Exodus 30:6) because we are told that it was to be placed before the mercy seat. This is where God met with His people. Luke 1:10 has the symbol and its meaning. The incense made the odor sweet.

"The incense, ascending with the prayers of Israel, represents the merits and intercession of Christ, His perfect righteousness, which through faith is imputed to His people, and which can alone make the worship of sinful beings acceptable to God. Before the veil of the most holy place was an altar of perpetual intercession, before the holy, an altar of continual atonement. By blood and by incense God was to be approached--symbols pointing to the great Mediator, through whom sinners may approach Jehovah, and through whom alone mercy and salvation can be granted to the repentant, believing soul." PP p. 353

"Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him." SC p. 93

It was continual: "The fire upon this altar was kindled by God Himself and was sacredly cherished. Day and night the holy incense diffused its fragrance throughout the sacred apartments, and without, far around the tabernacle." PP p. 348 I
Thessalonians 5:17: Pray without ceasing. We are to pray continually as Jesus continually intercedes for His people (Hebrews 7:25)

The Interlude: Bittersweet Experience of Revelation 10

The Time Period between the Fifth and Sixth Trumpets: "In the year 1840 another remarkable fulfillment of prophecy excited widespread interest. Two years before, Josiah Litch, one of the leading ministers preaching the Second Advent, published an exposition of Revelation 9, predicting the fall of the Ottoman Empire. According to his calculations, this power was to be overthrown "in A.D. 1840, sometime in the month of August;" and only a few days previous to its

accomplishment he wrote: "Allowing the first period, 150 years, to have been exactly fulfilled before Deacozes ascended the throne by permission of the Turks, and that the 391 years, fifteen days, commenced at the close of the first period, it will end on the 11th of August, 1840, when the Ottoman power in Constantinople may be expected to be broken. And this, I believe, will be found to be the case."--Josiah Litch, in Signs of the Times, and Expositor of Prophecy, Aug. 1, 1840.

"At the very time specified, Turkey, through her ambassadors, accepted the protection of the allied powers of Europe, and thus placed herself under the control of Christian nations. The event exactly fulfilled the prediction. (See Appendix.) When it became known, multitudes were convinced of the correctness of the principles of prophetic interpretation adopted by Miller and his associates, and a wonderful impetus was given to the advent movement. Men of learning and position united with Miller, both in preaching and in publishing his views, and from 1840 to 1844 the work rapidly extended." GC p. 334, 335