

6. The Seven Trumpets

Revelation 8:6–11:19

The Seven Trumpets do not follow chronologically after the Seven Seals, but tell the same story using alternative images. The variation on the theme is that these judgments are God's response to the saints' cry, "How long?"

I. Structure

The trumpets have a similar structure to the seals:

1. Initial sight of seven trumpets (8:2)
2. Interlude (8:3-5)
3. Trumpets 1-6 (8:6-9:21)
 - a. Trumpets 1-4 (8:7-13)
 - b. Trumpets 5-6 (9:1-21)
4. Interlude (10:1-11:14)
 - a. The call to prophesy (10:1-11)
 - b. The two witnesses (11:1-14)
5. Trumpet 7 (11:15-19)

II. The Trumpets

A. Trumpets in the OT

1. Seven priests with seven trumpets (שופָּר *shofar*) of rams' horns (יֹבֵל *yobel*) led the ark and the armed men in a seven-day march around Jericho, with seven circuits on the seventh day (Josh 6:1-5). This accomplished the fall of Jericho, the city which blocked Israel's entrance into the Promised Land.
2. Trumpets blown at all liturgical feasts, on first of each month, at daily sacrifice (Num 10:1-10); esp. 1st Tishri (in Rabbinic times this came to be Rosh Hashana, civil New Year), start of the High Holy Days climaxing in Yom Kippur on 10th Tishri. Blast of shofar on Day of Atonement in 50th year proclaimed Jubilee Year (יֹבֵל *Yōbēl* = trumpet) (Lev 25:10-15).
3. Trumpet blast proclaimed coronation of Solomon (1 Kgs 1:34, 39); Jehu (2 Kgs 9:13). Represented God's kingship (Ps 47:5; 98:6; Zech 9:14).
4. Trumpet blast is alarm call, warning sinful nation of God's impending judgment, and calling her to repentance (Jer 4:5; 6:1, 17; Ezek 33:3-6; Isa 58:1; Joel 2:1, 15).

B. Trumpets 1–6 (8:6–9:21)

1. Trumpets 1–4

Trumpets 1-4 are a set, just as Seals 1-4 are a set. They target one-third of the four realms of the world: earth, sea, fresh water, heavenly bodies (cf. seals 1-4). The fourth seal led to the death of a quarter; the trumpets target a third (τὸ τρίτον 14× in 8:7-9:18); the bowls will target all.

General OT models:

1. Plagues of Egypt: Plagues 7 (hail), 1 (Nile turned to blood), 9 (sun darkened) in Egypt. These plagues

in Egypt were a challenge to Pharaoh to let God's people go; they presaged God's deliverance of his people from Egypt. So, the trumpets are a challenge to the current counterpart of Egypt, Babylon (Rome); they presage a new and greater deliverance.

2. The trumpets affect a third of the earth (τὸ τρίτον 12× for trumpets 1-4; 2× for trumpet 6): cf. Ezekiel's action with his shaved hair: 1/3 burnt, 1/3 struck with sword, 1/3 scattered to wind, as prophetic parable of God's judgment against his people (Ezek 5:2, 12). Contrast the horseman of Seal 4 who killed a quarter of the earth.
1. Trumpet 1: hail cf. 7th plague God rained hail and lightning (LXX πῦρ *fire*) upon the land; the hail struck all field vegetation and trees (Exod 9:23-25).
2. Trumpet 2: blazing mountain thrown into the sea cf. an angel announces fall of Babylon by throwing a boulder into the sea (Rev 18:21, based on Jer 51:63-64). Sea turned to blood, cf. 1st plague turned Nile to blood so that fish died (Exod 7:20).
3. Trumpet 3: blazing star falling from heaven. Elsewhere in Rev stars are equated with angels. Allusion to Isa 14:12-15 suggests this star is Babylon's representative angel. Isa 14:4-20 is a taunt (לְמַלְאָכֵי תְרוֹמָה θροῆνος) against the king of Babylon:

How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star (הַיְלֵל הַלְלוֹ Heylel, Vg *Lucifer*), son of the dawn! (Isa 14:12 NIV)

Star named Wormwood, cf. God would make his people eat wormwood and drink poisoned water (Jer 9:15; 23:15). Wormwood (הַלְעָנָה Ἄψιθος; *Artemisia absinthium*) is a bitter herb. Fallen star turned waters into blood (cf. 1st plague turned Nile to blood), and poisoned the waters (cf. Jer 9:15; 23:15).

4. Trumpet 4: sun, moon, stars struck dark, cf. 9th plague darkened Egypt (Exod 10:22). Darkening of sun, moon and stars became prophetic image of eschatological judgment (Isa 13:10; Joel 2:30-31; Amos 8:9; Matt 24:29; Mark 13:24).

2. Trumpets 5-6

Intensified judgments: Trumpets 5-7 are identified as Three Woes (8:13). A Woe (וֵאָוָה, οὐαί) is a lament for judgment. These target the earth-dwellers, those who live in autonomy from God.

Fifth Trumpet:

- Fallen star given key to Abyss to release evil forces against those who do not have seal of God.
- Any power which fallen star and locusts wield is given them (ἐδόθη 9:3, 5) by God.
- Locusts based on Joel 1-2, where they were God's army of judgment against Israel.
- King over locusts is angel of Abyss, Abaddon (Heb. אַבְדּוֹן), Apollyon (Gk. Ἀπολλύων), both meaning "Destruction."

Sixth Trumpet:

unleashes invasion from beyond Euphrates: Parthians from the East (Roman view), Assyrians and Babylonians from the North (Israelite view). The invading army is huge: two myriad myriad (not 200 million, i.e. not China!).

Purpose: Trumpets 1-6 are OT-style call to repentance, but unsuccessful (9:20-21).

III. Interlude (10:1–11:14)

Trumpets 1-6 have proclaimed nothing that is not out of the OT. The interlude of 10:1–11:13 introduces NT theology—the martyrdom of the faithful witnesses. It is in two related parts.

A. The Call to Prophecy (10:1-11)

1. Descent of the strong angel (10:1-3a). One of three mighty angels in the book (the others ask who is worthy to break the seals, 5:2; and hurl a boulder into the sea, 18:21). Portrayed in OT language of God, but still “only” an angel.
 - a. little scroll (βιβλαρίδιον 10:2,9,10; but also “scroll” βιβλίον 10:8). Is this the same as the scroll (βιβλίον) of ch. 5? Yes: Bauckham, Peterson, Johnson, Koester, Michaels (qualified). No: Aune, Caird, Metzger.
 - b. roared like a lion (cf Amos).
2. The seven thunders (10:3b-4). Probably modeled on the 7-fold “voice of the Lord” קוֹל יְהוָה in Ps 29, where God thunders (רעם) over the waters. But John is told to seal what they said and not write it down (cf. Daniel told to seal his vision because it concerned time in the distant future, Dan 8:26; 12:4, 9). These perhaps would have been further judgments affecting half the world, but further partial judgments would be useless for they don’t bring repentance.
3. The angel’s oath (10:5-8): cf. Deut 32:40; Dan 12:7.
 - a. Dan 12: in response to the question, “How long shall it be till the end of these wonders?” a man swore it would be “for a time, times and half a time” (לְמוֹעֵד מוֹעֲדִים וְחֶזֶק) εἰς καιρὸν καὶ καιροὺς καὶ ἥμισυ καιροῦ 12:7).
 - b. Rev 10: “There will be no more delay! (χρόνος οὐκέτι ἔσται)”The oath in Dan 12:7 Daniel saw a delay of a time, times and a half-time. But now there will be no more delay. Instead, the mystery of God is about to be completed (τελέω). A mystery “often indicates elsewhere in the NT apparent unexpected (from the OT vantage point) inaugurated fulfillment.”¹
4. The commission to prophesy (10:8-11): cf. Ezekiel told to eat a scroll, written on both sides with words of lament, mourning and woe (2:8-3:3). It was sweet as honey in his mouth, but left him “in bitterness in the heat of my spirit” and “overwhelmed” (3:14-15).

The Little Scroll: unlike the sealed scroll, this one is open. The scroll is bitter-sweet, but its content is never identified.

Seven Thunders: presumably would have brought destruction to half the earth, sea, sky. But sealed because time for incremental judgment (the delay) is over.

Proclamation: “There will be no more delay!” God’s response to saints’ cry, “How long?”

B. The Two Witnesses (11:1-14)

Measuring the temple; proposed interpretations:

- prior to rebuilding
- prior to full or partial judgment

1. G. K. Beale and Sean M. McDonough, “Revelation,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

- spiritual protection for the saints gathered in the temple

Two witnesses

3½ years = 1260 days = 42 months: period of persecution seen by Daniel. At John's time of writing this had already commenced.

IV. The Seventh Trumpet (11:15-19)

Trumpets 1-6 were to allow time for repentance. Trumpet 7 proclaims another message:

1. the heavenly choir proclaims God as king (11:15).
2. worship in heaven by the twenty-four elders (11:16).
3. the ark is seen in God's temple in heaven (11:19). In OT, the ark was center-stage at overthrow of Jericho; in Rev it is center-stage at overthrow of Babylon. Jericho blocked Israel's entrance into Promised Land; Babylon blocks saints' entrance into New Jerusalem; both must be destroyed.²

2. Caird, "The Revelation of St John the Divine," 108..