

Sermon – 17/06/2007 pm

Trumpet Judgments

Study Text: Revelation 8:6-13

For seven days Joshua and the army of Israel marched around the city of Jericho. Seven priests with trumpets led the march each day. On the seventh day they marched around Jericho seven times. And it happened on the seventh time around that when the people heard the sound of the trumpets they shouted a great shout and the walls of the city fell down (Joshua 6:20). The wicked inhabitants of the city were utterly destroyed.

In the Old Testament the sound of the trumpet was a call for the people to assemble, sometimes for worship (Leviticus 25:8-9) and sometimes for battle and holy war. In the New Testament Jesus said his second coming would be announced with the great sound of a trumpet. *He will send his angels with the great sound of a trumpet and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other* (Matthew 24:31).

Seven angels with seven trumpets stood ready to signal divine judgments on the earth, the sea and the sky. These judgments in many ways parallel those that followed the opening of the seven seals – only this time the saints have been sealed as we saw in chapter seven and so are protected from these judgments (9:4).

The first four trumpet judgments affect one third of the earth, sea and sky, so may be seen as more intense than the seal judgments which were limited to one fourth of the earth (6:8). However, both the seal and trumpet judgments end with the full and final outpouring of the wrath of the Lamb (6:17, 11:18).

The churches to which John sent this letter of Revelation would have been very familiar with the story of the Exodus. They would have noticed a similarity between these trumpet judgments and the plagues which the Lord sent upon Egypt through Moses. These plagues were sent because the Pharaoh, an idolater, exalted himself against the Lord. The Lord not only demonstrated his power over idols and man-made gods through the plagues, but finally destroyed Pharaoh whose heart he had hardened. We will also remind ourselves of this Old Testament background as we seek to understand divine judgment, and salvation, inherent in this vision.

First Trumpet

The seventh plague the Lord sent upon Egypt was a terrible hail storm which destroyed the crops and led to a famine. The land of Goshen escaped this hail (Exodus 9:22f). When the first trumpet sounded, hail and fire mixed with blood were hurled upon the earth. This might seem a strange mix but the effect on the earth is the same. Hail decimates tree crops as well as grain crops. At great cost many orchardists today erect hail netting over their fields. Fire which may come from lightening in the midst of a storm can also destroy the vegetation.

Only one third of the vegetation was destroyed by the hail and fire. Similarly in Egypt the barley was destroyed but the later wheat crop was okay. Was this a sign of God's mercy? Was this a case of severe mercy, the Lord warning inhabitants of the earth to repent of their

idolatry and worship the only true God? If this was the case it did not have that effect for the 'earth dwellers' did not repent (9:20). The plague of hail in Egypt led to Pharaoh confessing his sin, but only outwardly. When the hail stopped he went back to his sin and his heart was hardened – he *and his servants*.

People want signs from heaven that God exists, that God is alive, and that he is able to save. Jesus was not prepared to give such signs for he knew the evil and adulterous hearts that ask for such signs (Matthew 12:39). God has revealed his majesty and power in the creation, and continues to do so, but what do men say. They may pray to God in the midst of a disaster but then return to their idols – their hearts undergoing no change.

There will be famines and earthquakes in the last days – *the beginning of sorrows* said Jesus (Matthew 24:8). Natural disasters will continue and will intensify as the end of this world gets nearer; not because of human activity, as foolish as that may be, but because the Lord has so ordained. The earth will be affected, as will the sea and the sky. But you who by faith belong to Jesus need not fear for you are safe for eternity in him.

Second and Third Trumpet

John saw something like a great mountain burning with fire thrown into the sea when the second trumpet sounded, and a third of the sea became blood. One third of the fish died and one third of the ships were destroyed (8:8-9). When the third trumpet sounded the water in the rivers became wormwood/bitter and many people died from drinking it (8:11). In the first plague to strike Egypt all the water was turned to blood and the fish died (Exodus 7:20). In desperation the people began to dig holes to find water to drink.

It is sometimes said that the future wars will be fought over water. In many countries the water situation has already become desperate. We are concerned about the water supply for our own city. We are vulnerable not only to water scarcity, but to water pollution. Some years ago there was an outbreak of Giardia and many got sick. I was reading the just one gram of the isotope polonium in the water supply could kill a million people.

When will such chaos occur? Will it be only at the end of the world? How would the first readers have understood this vision? Would they not have reflected on the plagues of Egypt as suggested, and also been looking at natural disasters in the light of this divine revelation. The city of Laodicea had water supply problem (3:16).

Would not these first readers have been saying 'the end is near' each time they witnessed such disasters? Should we not humble ourselves before the mighty God whom we serve, and warn idolaters of the imminent coming of Jesus to judge the world?

In the days of Noah, God judged the wicked through the devastation of a flood. He has done it in the past and he will do it again, not through a flood but by total destruction of this world many call home. The disasters which John saw were but a foretaste of the total destruction coming from the throne of God in heaven.

What about the great mountain thrown into the sea, and the great burning star falling from heaven upon the rivers? Are we to understand these literally? Note that John says *like a great mountain* (8:8). Is the great star a meteorite that will plunge to earth? Such a thing could

happen but let us remember this is a vision open to symbolic interpretation. After all, these disasters have theological significance.

Jeremiah speaks of Babylon as a destroying mountain that will be hurled down and burnt (Jeremiah 51:25). Other evil kingdoms are also spoken of as mountains. These evil kingdoms were judged by God and destroyed. Jericho was razed by the army of God. The end of evil regimes in Eastern Europe are symbolised in the fall of the Berlin wall. New Orleans, a city full of evil practices, could not stand against the mighty Creator of the sea.

Isaiah depicts the fall of Satan as the morning star being cast down to the earth (Isaiah 14:12-15). Jesus *saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven* (Luke 10:18). John gives the name of the star, 'Wormwood'. It brings bitterness to the waters and death to those who drink the water. Is this not a fitting description of the work of Satan?

What is so dangerous about 'bitter' water is that the pollution cannot be seen. Whether it is Giardia or polonium or some other poison, people will drink it without knowing. Just so is the deceptive work of Satan who paints himself as an angel of light. And just so is the deception of many so called stars in this world; movies stars, sports stars and other self-styled stars.

Fourth Trumpet

The sun, moon and stars were struck as the angel sounded the fourth trumpet. One third of each was darkened so that they gave no light for a third of the day and a third of the night. The penultimate plague in Egypt was a plague of darkness (Exodus 10:21f). The idolaters groped about the dark for three days. This was ironic because one of the gods of Egypt was 'Ra' the sun god. Pharaoh's heart was again hardened as he threatened Moses with death. But it was Pharaoh who died under the mighty hand of God.

It is hard for us to imagine three days of darkness. We complain if the electricity goes out briefly. Some like the darkness, for their deeds are evil, but they will not like it all the time. Yet this is what they will get when the end comes.

The prophet Joel spoke of the sun and moon growing dark (Joel 2:10). Jesus also spoke of total darkness in the end. *Immediately after the tribulation the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light* (Matthew 24:29). With the opening of the sixth seal the sun became black. With the fifth bowl the kingdom of the beast became full of darkness (16:10).

In the beginning the earth was without form and void, and darkness covered the face of the deep. The first thing the Lord God said was 'let there be light' and there was light. God is the God of light. God is light. Darkness symbolises separation from God. One day God will 'un-create' this world. Darkness will return to all who do not know the light of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said *I am the light of the world* (John 9:5).

Are you walking in this true light, the light that will never fade or fail? If so you have nothing to fear when the sun is darkened fully and finally. The new heaven and new earth need no sun or moon for the Lamb is its light (Revelation 21:23).

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