

As with the Seals there is an interval between the sixth and the seventh element, 10:1-11:14. The Trumpets release judgements on “The inhabitants of the earth”, 8:13. This is a common way in Revelation to describe unbelievers, in contrast to “those who dwell in Heaven”, describing believers. The interval looks at the same period of the Trumpets from a different point of view, involving the people of God as they interact with the unbelieving and persecuting world.

The silence/pause of the seventh seal has ended the seal sequence (Judgement/the end of the age, 6:17) and prepares us for the next sequence – the seven Trumpets. These occupy the same time frame as the Seals but appear to have particular emphasis on the period towards the close of the age. Like the seals the purpose is as warning judgements, inviting repentance. They are still partial in their application but more intense than in the case of the Seals.

The visible events happen on earth but the first scene is in Heaven and is the key to understanding what will follow, 8:2-6.

Seven angels, probably the seven archangels of Jewish apocalyptic writings, stand before God, the One on the throne, v3. God initiates everything that will follow. The angels receive seven trumpets. Trumpets had various uses in Scripture – religious feasts, crowning kings, war, God’s descent on Mt. Sinai Ex. 19:16, 19, the final trumpet to close the age, 1Cor. 15:52, 1Thess.4:16. It was also used as warning of impending judgement/call to repentance, Joel 2:1, Zeph. 1:16, Isaiah 27:13, and this is the sense here.

Before the angels are released to blow their trumpets there is another event to explain the background to the judgements.

Another angel appears holding a golden censer. He is performing a priestly role. The golden censer contains fire. He stands at the golden altar. The symbolism is from the OT sacrifices – incense was offered at the morning and evening sacrifices, Exodus 30:7-9, and on the Day of Atonement. It was symbolic of prayer, Psalm 141:2, and also, when he drew back the curtain, protected the priest from the immediate presence of God, Lev. 16:13.

The angel is given much incense and as it comes in contact with the fire fragrant smoke ascends before God, carrying with it the prayers of the saints. It is a picture of prayer that is holy and acceptable to God, Who receives as a “sweet smelling aroma”, Eph. 5:2, Phil. 4:18. The prayers of all the saints include worship, Rev. 5:11-14. They also include those of a specific group – the martyrs crying out from under the altar, 6:9-11, and it is those prayers in particular that underlie the release of the trumpeters.

This sounds strange to us but we must hold to the paradox – we are to pray for our enemies etc. but the call for justice and vindication is also a strong theme in Scripture, as in some of the Psalms e.g. 120:4, the teaching of Jesus, Luke 18:1-8, Matt. 23:29-36, and Paul, Romans 12:19-20, and for Jesus Himself, 1Peter 2:21-23.

The same censer of prayer and the same fire that released the aroma to God become the vehicles of judgement on the earth, v5. The fire is hurled to the earth in the context of the awesome signs of God’s majesty and holiness – loud noises, thundering, lightnings, and an earthquake, c.f. 4:5, 11:19, 16:18, similar to the Sinai Theophany, Exodus 19:18-19, 20:18.

Ezekiel 10:2-7 is the OT background to the casting of the fire of judgement, closely following on the sealing of the righteous Ezek. 9\$

The Trumpets sound

The trumpets echo some of the plagues of Egypt. They were warnings as well as judgements and they affected the Egyptians via disturbances to the created world. The trumpets were a challenge to the people of the world to abandon their idolatry and associated practices and repent before their Creator, 9:20-21. The events described make it clear that to do otherwise is madness, but like Pharaoh they harden their hearts and cling to their wickedness to their own destruction. God is sovereign over the demons and can us their activity in the process of judgement, as in 9:1-19.

The first four seals were direct judgements against the people of the world.

The first four trumpets affect the same group of people but indirectly via the creation that sustains their health and life. Vivid symbolic language is used to convey the immensity of the disasters. We are probably not meant

to read too much into the detail –the effect on the environment and its ability to sustain human life is the crucial issue

Obviously the four angels of 7:1-3 have now been allowed to release the destructive winds of judgement.

- 1) **Destruction of Vegetation**, 8:7. The agents are hail and fire, mingled with blood. This connects with the 7th plague, Ex. 9:13-35(hail), Psalm 78:47-49, but is intensified by the other two elements, Ezek. 38:21-23. The original readers of the message could probably relate this to well known events such as a recent volcanic eruption in the Aegean Islands that caused localized devastation.

The effects of the first trumpet would be very much worse and more extensive, but still limited. Perhaps we should remember that we are only one harvest away from potential disaster – we tend to take things like this for granted, just because of the pattern of the seasons, but harvest is a gift from God not a human right. The effects are partial, reflecting the promise of Gen. 8:22.

- 2) **Damage to the Oceans**, 8:8-9. Again the agent is fire, in the form of something “like a great mountain” thrown into the sea – a moving mass of fire. God is the Lord of the mountains, Jer. 4:24, Ezek 38:20-21. The eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 AD may be the local background to the picture.

The effects of the second trumpet were severe disruption of the oceans– this would have been vivid to the nations surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, dependent on it for fish and commerce and trade and travel.

- 3) **Degradation of the rivers and springs of water**, 8:10-11. This connects with the first plague, Exodus 7:17-25. Drinking water was made bitter to taste and deadly to drink. Again fire is involved in the form of a great star that fell from heaven (the sky) burning like a torch. It sounds like a meteorite but it may simply be symbolic.

The effect is widespread pollution, threatening the survival of multitudes of people. God is the source of both physical and spiritual water, Psalm 104:10-13. He can withdraw the gift, Psalm 107:33-34, with horrendous effects. Man himself can be the agent of destruction of the water supply. Wormwood is a shrub with a bitter taste and, although not poisonous, is a symbol of sorrow, Prov. 5:4, and judgement Deut. 29:18, Jer.9:15, 23:15. God made bitter waters sweet, Ex. 15:23; He can make sweet waters bitter.

- 4) **Disorder in the sky**, 8:12. There is a connection to the ninth plague, Exodus 10:21-23. The sun, moon and stars are affected – the luminaries that were there for the benefit of mankind, Genesis 1:14-18.

The effect is partial darkness – the mechanism is unclear but, as for the Egyptians, the result would be very fearful. Darkness is a sign of evil and of judgement, Isaiah 13:9-11, Joel 2:2, 10, Amos 5:18, 8:9, Zeph. 1:14-15. God is sovereign over darkness and light, Isaiah 45:7, Psalm 104:19-20. Darkness will precede the coming of the Son of Man, Mark 13:24-27.

An angel (?in the form of an eagle) intervenes, proclaiming “Woe, woe, woe!”, 8:13, c.f. Isaiah 5:8-9, Amos 6:1-2, Hab. 2:9, Matt. 23:13-36, Luke 6:24-26.

This is dramatic and marks a change in the nature of the next three trumpets. The threefold repetition of “woe” indicates their extreme character – c.f. “Holy, holy, holy”.

Trumpets five and six are of a different order because of the agency of their execution – demonic. This seems strange, but it is clear that everything is under God’s control. He permits, even initiates the process, and controls the outcome. Humans have chosen to serve idols (demons) and this will backfire on them with a vengeance.

Men thought that could manipulate the supernatural to their own advantage but now discover that they are at the mercy of those powers and that they delight in torment and destruction, John 10:10. **They are not friends but fiends who delight to torment those made in the image of God, even as they use them for their own purposes**, Mark 5:2-5.

5) **Demons from the abyss** 9:1-12

An angel is sent to open a deep dark prison where demons are confined under judgement - Note "was given", v3 and 5. Their mission fits with their desire – to torment humans, but they are only permitted to attack those who do not have the protective seal of God, c.f. Israel in Egypt and Luke 10:18-19. The world is a dangerous place on your own! God allows people to experience the full consequences of the choices they have made, as the ultimate possibility of bringing about repentance.

The demons are restricted in their scope (5 months is symbolic - ? the period in Israel when locusts might come during the yearly cycle) and cannot inflict death but can cause extreme pain, like scorpions. They desire death but cannot escape in that way, as the martyrs have done.

Their basic appearance is that of locusts. This is a frequent judgement motif in Scripture`. The eighth plague was locusts, Ex. 10:1-20. Joel described a locust army, 1:1-6. In this case it is a human army marching to invade Israel, 2:1-11, one instance of "The day of the LORD", 2:11, c.f. Jer. 46:23, 51:14.

They also have features of scorpions, lions, horses, humans. The whole description is alarming and horrifying, terrifying in sound and sight. It contains features of the locust army in Joel that actually consisted of humans. **The description is symbolic, not physical, but is nevertheless portraying something hideously real.**

They have a king. "Abaddon" (Heb.) and Apollyon (Gk.) mean "Destroyer". Antichrist is "the son of destruction", 2Thess. 2:3. He will be destroyed, v8. Apollo, the god of plague and pestilence and was symbolized by a locust.

How do demons act to impose torment? We might think of addictions, depression, drugs, violence, plagues etc. but we cannot make an exhaustive list. The more important question is "How do we stay free?" The only safe place is under the protection of God as His obedient children, Rebellion and independence act as magnets for demons.

6) **The demon army** 9:13-19

The sixth trumpet returns us to the golden altar to remind us that the events, including this most extreme one, are the direct consequence of the prayers offered at that altar.

The slaughter about to be described is the work of these four angels of judgement. They operate by means of a huge army. This is no human army and is obviously a demonic host.

The Euphrates River was the location for invasions from the east, such as the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians, e.g. Joel 2:3-11, Hab.1:6-10, and thus acts as an appropriate symbol of a terrifying invasion. The description is intended to invoke horror and disgust.

The effect is widespread death and destruction on an unprecedented scale. We are not informed as to the physical equivalent of this massive invasion but it may be demonically inspired war on a global scale, beyond anything that the world has ever experienced, yet in a relatively short space of time.

The sad outcome 9:20-21.

Despite all that God has done in mercy and judgement there is no repentance. Men, like Pharaoh, have so hardened their hearts that they cling to their idolatry and sin. It is not necessarily the case that no one repents, but the world, taken as a whole, chooses the way of rebellion and disobedience. Have we not seen this on a smaller scale throughout history – the two world wars, the many catastrophes that have occurred since then. **The world is deaf to the voice of God even when he shouts.**

Jude describes the last time in similar language - there is hope for those who will hear, v23. This is our task.