

When the Trumpet of the Lord Shall Sound (Revelation 8:6-11:19)

Introduction:-

In the previous section on the opening of the scroll and the seven seals (Revelation 6:1-8:5), we finally discovered that just as the seals could not be broken until the Lamb had won the right to break them open by His own obedience on earth, so now the trumpets cannot sound forth their message, until the prayers of all of God's people have reached the altar of Heaven. This is how the previous section ends, as an introduction to this new section on the Seven Trumpets. For it is also the prayers of God's people, for justice and vindication upon the earth, that will enable God's judgments to continue. And so this now leads us to the introduction of the seven trumpets and their message of judgment within this longer section. In the Old Testament, trumpets had many different associations and usages, but four usages in particular may explain their use here. (a) The taking of Jericho at Joshua 6, where Israel marched around Jericho for seven days, led by seven priests blowing seven trumpets in front of the Ark. On the seventh day the walls fell down flat! (b) A trumpet was blown to proclaim the accession of a king especially as this also related the kingship of God (Psalm 47:5). (c) There are passages in the Old testament where the Trumpet is an alarm signal, summoning Israel to national repentance in the face of imminent divine judgment or announcing the Day of the Lord (Jeremiah 4:5-6; Joel 2:1). (d) The Festival of Trumpets at Leviticus 23:23-25 introduced the seventh month of Israel's religious calendar, and as such, introduced the Feast of Atonement which was a national cleansing of sin, followed by the Festival of Tabernacles, which had associations with the exodus of old, and God's dwelling with His people. Finally, what will the message of the Seven Trumpets add to the message of the Seven Seals? We will now trace this under three headings.

1. First we are introduced to the Seven Trumpets (8:6-9:21).

The passage begins with seven angels who had seven trumpets to sound. And what we may begin to observe, is that the judgments announced by the Trumpets also fall into two groups of four and three, as with the Seven Seals. Then after the sixth Trumpet, an Interlude follows at 10:1-11:14, followed by the Seventh Trumpet at 11:15-19, thus following the same pattern as the presentation of the Seven Seals. Further, the Seven Trumpets are now more intense in nature than the Seven Seals, as though the furnace of judgment is now beginning to heat up, with the first four Trumpet blasts ushering in a series of natural disasters, affecting earth, salt water, fresh water, and sky, reflecting

the plagues visited upon Egypt, of hail, blood, and darkness. Thus, John likens the disasters of his own time to the plagues of Egypt, which he will develop in great detail in subsequent chapters. Therefore for him, the church is the new Israel of God (1:6), and its redemption the new exodus (15:2-3). Further, Rome is about to be called "Egypt" at 11:8. And so his Egyptian typology is an emphatic way of saying that present disasters are but a prelude to God's great deliverance. In each of the Heavenly Trumpet blasts God is saying to the Pharaoh of the new Egypt, Rome, "Let my people go!" And at the same time, he is saying to the Christians, "When all these things begin to happen, breathe again, and hold your heads high, because your rescue is at hand" (Luke 21:28). Finally, in each case the devastation is restricted to one third, as God's judgment on human sin, but not His final judgment. These are intended to lead people to repentance. The same applies today. But when the seventh angel trumpeter proclaims that God has assumed his sovereign power and has begun his reign from which all things unclean must forever be excluded, then and only then will the door of repentance be closed. That will be the time for "destroying the destroyers of the earth" (11:18), when it will be too late for any further change of character, as 22:11, 15, puts it, "let the wrong-doer still do wrong and the filthy remain in his filth; let the upright person still do right, and the holy continue in their holiness." But until then, the Heavenly Trumpets will not cease to sound the alarm. In this sense, the Trumpets may be seen as sounds of God's grace, as well as sounds of God's judgment. Finally in this section, 8:13 reveals an eagle or vulture (maybe reflecting Hosea 8:1) in mid-air, in order that the whole world may hear his cry, with the loud cry of a threefold "Woe", as an introduction to the final three Trumpet blasts, which will bring imminent, and even more intensified judgment; but this time, not directed toward the elements of creation, but against the rebelliousness of unrepentant humanity. Chapter nine describes the first two of these woes, but when we finally arrive at the third woe at 11:15-19, it is not described as such, but only its consequence, in the revelation of the kingdom of God. Well, what do trumpets five and six hold for us? The fifth trumpet introduces a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth, possibly a fallen angel or even Satan himself, on the basis of 12:9 and Luke 10:18. At this point, Caird (*Revelation*, p. 117) rightly distinguishes this angel from the angel of Revelation 20:1, for here this evil agent acting by divine permission, releases the destroyers upon earth, whereas the other good agent at 20:1 locks them up. The Abyss represents the chaos of deep waters, which came to represent the abode of demonic agencies. And so here the key that is "given" to this evil agent by God, indicates that both he, and all the inhabitants of the Abyss, are under divine control. Never let us forget the fact that even though evil may at times seem to gain the upper hand in our world and in our lives, that Satan only operates on a long chain, that only gets shorter as time goes by. The locusts that were released are not only a reminder of the plagues of Egypt, but also resemble the army-like

feature of the locusts spoken by Joel 2:1-10. They also had tails with stingers like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. Further, they had a king over them, known as the angel of the Abyss. His Hebrew name Abaddon, and Greek name Apollyon, means Destroyer. In John's time, the emperor Domitian considered himself as Apollo incarnate, and so this may be a further presentation of Emperor worship as being demonic. When the sixth trumpet is sounded at 9:13-14, a voice comes from the four horns of the golden altar that is before God. It is thus linked with the cries of the martyrs beneath the altar in Heaven (6:9-10), and the prayers of the Saints for deliverance (8:4-5), which may suggest that this destructive judgment comes in response to these collective prayers, though here with the image of the altar, the emphasis is placed upon God, who answers the prayers of God's people. Then the four angels or winds which were bound at the great river Euphrates, at the north-east border of the Promised Land, from which Israel's enemies were often known to come, were released to kill a third of humankind. This was an escalation of the fifth trumpet from that of torture (9:5), to death itself (9:15). The number of mounted troops was some 200 million, 1,000 times the size of Rome's formidable army. A third of humankind was killed through the three plagues of fire, smoke, and sulphur, reflecting the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24-28), which came out of the mouths of the horses, whilst their tails were like snakes, inflicting further injury, reflecting the imagery of the judgment against Israel in the wilderness (Numbers 21:6-7). With respect to these judgments, John was heir to an apocalyptic tradition which we can trace to its source in Ezekiel's prophecy of the invasion of Gog from the land of Magog in Ezekiel chapters 38-39. John will make fuller use of the Gog tradition at 19:11-21, and 20:7-9. But for the present, the part of Gog is played by the demonic forces from beyond the Euphrates. Their invasion is necessary, precisely because the Roman world has tried to find security in that which is not God. All people must worship either the God who made them, or the gods of their own making, and John reluctantly concludes chapter 9 by recording that, in spite of all God's efforts to batter his way through the defences of humankind's self-sufficiency and pride, they did not renounce their made-made gods, of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood, which Deuteronomy also calls demons (Deuteronomy 32:16-17), of which the moral evils of murder, magic arts, sexual immorality, and thefts, are only the symptoms of humankind's idolatry, and refusal to worship and depend upon the Creator who made them (*cf.* Romans 1:18-32). How then are we to interpret these extraordinary depictions of the first woes? G.B.Caird (*Revelation* 1966, p. 123) suggests that in them lies the most important theological affirmation: that the powers of evil have an immense reserve army, from which they can be steadily reinforced, so that no earthly order can find security from attacks beyond the frontier, except in the final victory of God. In a world in which evil is virulent and tenacious, the

program of the Gospel must not be expected to produce a steady whittling away of Satan's power, until he is reduced to impotence, but rather a steady hardening of resistance, leading inexorably to a last great battle" (end of quote). But let us never forget, that in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus won the first great victory over Satan, which will be for us, a foretaste of things to come. Paul says at Colossians 2:15: "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the Cross." And so Satan is now reduced to a rear-guard action and assault on the world and the church, which will one day end in his final defeat.

2. Secondly we are presented with an Interlude, involving a Mighty Angel and a Little Opened Scroll (Revelation 10:1-11:14).

With this interlude between the sixth and seventh Trumpets, we are presented with a pattern that was present with the previous Seven Seals. Whereas, however, the purpose of the earlier interlude within the Seals was to convey assurance of the protecting hand of God over His people during the Messianic judgments, through the sealing of God's people, that motif is but briefly alluded to here in verses 1-2. Here the appearance of a mighty angel with features reflecting that of Daniel 10:5-6 and Daniel 12:7, as well as that of exodus imagery with the pillars of fire and cloud that guided and protected Israel through their Wilderness wandering, appeared holding a little opened scroll which may reflect the remaining visions of Revelation. The fact that his feet were planted on both sea and land may indicate the dominion of God the Creator over all creation, whose voice and Word about to be heard, were of world-wide authority and importance. In verse 4, the voice of the seven thunders or the voice of God which followed, which was to be sealed up, and not written down, in context, may relate to the final revelation of the seventh Trumpet when the mystery first revealed to the prophets, will be finally revealed. And so the primary purpose of this interlude is quite different. First, in verses 1-7 a solemn declaration is made of the certainty and nearness of the end (verse 6 = "there will be no more delay"), when the seventh trumpet is finally sounded. At that point, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as He announced this to His servants the prophets. The mystery is not a mysterious revelation, but God's secret purpose hidden from the unbelieving world. Its content is revealed and celebrated in 11:15-18, where the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah, and He will reign forever and ever. Secondly, John's commission to prophesy is freshly affirmed in verses 8-11, and is even extended to include many peoples, nations, languages, and kings. And as a symbolic part of this process, John was to take the little scroll from the hand of the mighty angel, and then eat it, following in the steps of the prophet Ezekiel at Ezekiel 2:8-3:3. At this point, we may ask the question of ourselves – Are we fully digesting

God's plan and Word so that we too might become effective and fruitful servants of God's Word? Its sweetness may refer to its message of salvation and light for those who believe, whereas its bitterness may refer to its word of mourning and of judgment to those who reject its message, which also brought mourning, hardship, alienation, and persecution for the prophets themselves who imparted this word (11:3). Finally in this interlude section, at 11:1-13, John begins by symbolically describing how God spiritually protects his suffering people in the time of trial by His measuring the Temple of God and the altar, together with its worshippers (11:1-2). This has the same meaning as the sealing of the 144,000 earlier. We are therefore both sealed, measured, and kept, by God's grace! Nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:38-39). But the outer court of the Temple is excluded, which may reflect Rome's destruction of the temple in 70 AD, or Jesus' word about this at Luke 21:24. However, the reference to the 42 months, or the three and a half years of persecution, may symbolically reflect the period from the desecration of the temple under Antiochus IV in 168 BC, to its restoration three and a half years later, which for the Jews would become a symbol of end-time trouble, which they believed would precede the End of all things. This figure John has now adopted for his own purpose in speaking of the final tribulation and end-time of the church. But here John could also be using the 70th week of Daniel's prophecy at Daniel 9:27, where in the middle of this 70th week, or final seven year period, Jesus makes a covenant with many through His death upon the Cross, followed by the desecration and final destruction of the Temple by Titus in 70 AD, leaving the remaining three and a half years of this final week as a symbol of the period of the church until Christ's Second Coming. According to 12:14, this will also be the period of the anti-Christ's rule. And now in this final period, the two witnesses, representing the church, will carry on the task given earlier to John at 10:11, by prophesying unto many people, nations and kings. This witness will be modelled after the powerful witness of the two prophets Moses and Elijah, as well as modelled after the two witnesses of Zechariah 4:1-14, where a golden lampstand, standing at the centre, and separating two olive trees, representing Joshua and Zerubbabel, will rebuild the Temple and God's people, enabled by God's Spirit (Zechariah 4:6). Earlier at Revelation 1:20, Jesus spoke of the seven churches as seven lampstands, and now the two prophetic witnesses of the church, as the "two lampstands", will represent the church's witness to the world (*cf.* Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Mark 6:7; Acts 13:1-3). Finally, the task of the church in the time of tribulation is made plain; namely to bear witness to Christ before the opponents of the gospel. Also, here for the first time, the figure of the Beast or Anti-Christ appears in 11:7, where the dual nature of the last tribulation also becomes apparent, where on the one hand, the Beast will make warfare on the church, killing many, where Christ was also crucified, or by following Christ in the way of the Cross. But on the other hand, the worlds'

celebration of this event will be short-lived, for after a brief period of time, symbolized by three and a half days, recalling the cryptic half week of Daniel 9:27, the church will be vindicated by their resurrection from the dead, whilst God's judgment will come upon those who oppose him and follow the anti-Christ in making war on the church. No promise of escape from the latter is given, but the end of the story is the vindication of the church and the conversion of many.

3. Finally, we hear the Sound of the Seventh Trumpet!! (Revelation 11:15-19).

We have waited some time for this, and so what can we expect? Well, when the seventh trumpet finally sounds, we are surprised that no judgments are announced! In fact, the seventh trumpet is expected to bring about the third woe announced earlier at 11:14, but instead of a description of calamity, a proclamation is made of the advent of the kingdom of God!! The coming of God's kingdom through the reign of the Lord and His Messiah has finally arrived, for no longer is it said of God's name in verse 17 that He "is to come" as back at 1:4, for He has now come! And this coming in wrath and power has begun to subdue the anger and rebellion of the nations against His sovereign rule, which has existed through all ages, reflecting Psalm 2. And this song in verses 17-18 also marks an ordered progression of thought which is expounded later at Revelation 20-22, beginning with the Millennial reign. It will also be a time for judging the dead, and for rewarding God's servants the prophets, including God's people who revere His name, both great and small, as well as a time for destroying those who destroy the earth (v. 18), which will also be revealed in detail in the chapters which will follow. And finally, in order to confirm that God's covenant word of promise about the kingdom was coming to pass, God's Temple in Heaven was now opened, revealing the Ark of the Covenant or Testimony within the Holy of Holies, supported by the signs of God's presence, through flashes of lightening, rumblings, peals of thunder, as well as earthquake and a severe hailstorm, recalling the judgment of the very first trumpet (8:7).

Conclusion:-

The message of the Seven Trumpets ends on a high note, reminding us about who is really in control of this world, and of the evil that surrounds us, and who will finally reign on earth, in the triumphant words of 11:15: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah, and He will reign forever and ever." No wonder that when the angel sounded these words with the seventh trumpet, there were also loud voices in Heaven, which joined in the chorus as well. In these words, one is reminded of that triumphant note sounded in Handel's Hallelujah chorus, "The kingdom of our God ... And He will

reign forever and ever.” Perhaps this is why John has placed this highest of all notes as a conclusion to the message of the Seventh and final Trumpet! It is worth sounding out to all the world, with the loudest of trumpet blasts! And He will reign forever and ever! How can we use these thoughts to quicken our own sense of God’s victory and presence with us today? Amen.