

Revelation: Because the Time Is Near

Study #13: “Trumpets of Judgment” (Rev. 8:1—9:21)

1988 was the year *Time* magazine marked as the beginning of the end. Every year up until then, the magazine celebrated the New Year by naming a man or woman as their person of the year and featuring their picture on its cover. However, in 1988 they departed from that tradition and designated “Endangered Earth” as the Planet of the Year.

They then invited thirty-three scientists and political leaders from 10 different countries to a 3-day conference in Boulder, Colorado, asking them to come up with a plan to save Planet Earth. Pointing to the destruction of the world’s rain forests, the depletion of the ozone layer, droughts in our own Southwest, and killer hurricanes in the Caribbean, *Time* concluded: “For decades, scientists have warned of the consequences of all this profligacy. No one paid attention. This year the earth spoke, like God warning Noah” of the Flood to come.

Worldwatch president, Lester Brown, warned, “We do not have generations, only years, to turn things around.” John Eddy of the Corporation for Atmospheric Research agreed, “We’ve got to get the earth into intensive care, to monitor the vital signs of our planet.”

Of course, since then, fears have skyrocketed. Now there’s the concern about global warming, the melting of the polar ice caps, mammoth earthquakes, and dozens of other tell-tale signs that the end is near—all of which are promoted by Hollywood on both the big and small with post-apocalyptic adventures like “Oblivion,” “The Fifth Wave” and “The Last Ship.”

Our question for this evening is not what do scientists and politicians think about the matter, but what does God say in His Holy Inspired Word? Are we, as Barry McGuire sang back in the 60’s, are we on “The Eve of Destruction?” And the answer is Yes. Not because of man’s abuse of the planet, but because of his rebellion against his Creator. In Revelation 8 and 9, God Himself describes the future of our planet. In so doing, the environmentalists’ worst fears are realized. Earth is devastated by plague after plague, leaving it virtually uninhabitable.

But the cause is not global warming, as some predict; it’s Jesus Christ, our Creator, who has reserved the right to judge this world in righteousness, reminding us that more important than our environmental efforts is the need to prepare ourselves body, soul, and spirit for His Return. To explain why that’s important, let me emphasize three facts about His judgment.

1. HOW JUDGMENT IS INTRODUCED IN HEAVEN

In a previous study, we learned that the opening of the seventh seal marks the midpoint of the Tribulation and releases the seven trumpets of judgment. That will now become clear. As Jesus breaks the final seal, seven trumpets are handed to seven angels who are about to blow destruction on the earth. And yet, before they do, three key events take place in heaven.

First, there is silence in heaven for about half an hour. Revelation 8:1 says, “When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.” What is the

significance of this silence? John doesn't say for sure, but I believe it's the "calm before the storm." In fact, what's ominous about it is that it's preceded by billions of saints and angels singing God's praises around His throne. But when the final seal is opened, heaven immediately falls silent, realizing the terrible judgment that is about to strike the earth. It is a moment of reverential silence for God's majesty and sorrow for those who are about to die.

Second, incense is offered on the altar, indicating that we the Church are praying again. Verse 3 continues, "Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God's people, on the golden altar in front of the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God's people, went up before God from the angel's hand." You see, for centuries the church has been praying, "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." But sometimes we wonder, "Are my prayers doing any good? After all, the world doesn't seem to be getting any better!" But here we see that, yes, our prayers make a difference! In fact, not one prayer prayed for the coming of God's kingdom has ever been forgotten by God. He has stored up every prayer in heaven and will suddenly answer them when Christ opens the seventh seal.

Warren Wiersbe warns, "Like or not, the prayers of God's people are involved in the judgments He sends. The throne and altar are related. The purpose of prayer, as is said, is not to get man's will done in heaven, but God's will done on earth—even if it involves judgment. True prayer is serious business. So we had better not move the altar too far from the throne!"

Finally, the third thing that happens before the seventh seal is unleashed is that thunderings and lightnings pour forth from God's throne. Verse 5 says, "Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake. Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them." These final phenomena are not intended to injure anyone, since they do not proceed from the trumpets. Instead, they serve as a final warning to repent before judgment falls. As Peter points out, "God is not willing for any to perish, but that all should come to repentance." Ezekiel 33:11 adds, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die?" says the Lord. The truth is, judgment is coming and sinners will be punished. But we can be pardoned of our wrongdoing, if we'll recognize our sinfulness and turn to Christ in faith. That's how judgment is introduced in heaven. Now notice —

2. HOW JUDGMENT IS ENACTED ON EARTH

a. Trumpet #1: 33% of Earth's Vegetation Destroyed

Verse 7 describes the blast of the first trumpet. John says, "The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down on the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up." This judgment is reminiscent of the seventh plague in Egypt. When Pharaoh refused to let God's people go, hail and fire rained down from heaven and destroyed every man and beast left outdoors. But this plague will be immeasurably worse, for it will fall not on one nation, but on the whole earth, consuming one-third of the trees and all the green grass.

This Greek word for **trees** refers to “fruit trees,” which means that the world’s fruit production will immediately be cut by 33%. The destruction of all green grass will also bring an end to the world’s dairy industry, cripple the world’s meat industry, and destroy the wheats and grains that give us our daily bread. Add to that the fact that 25% of the pharmaceuticals in use today contain ingredients derived from wild plants, and it means the new diseases that are unleashed at this time will have very little chance of being cured. Even now environmentalists worry about the medical repercussions of the world’s tropical rain forests being destroyed. Biologist Daniel Jantzen of the University of Pennsylvania warned, “I know of three plants with the potential of treating AIDS. One grows in an Australian rain forest, one in Panama, and one in Costa Rica.” Fast forward to the first trumpet, and it means that this plague will lead to famine, starvation, and suffering of unprecedented proportions.

b. Trumpet #2: 33% of Marine Life Destroyed

Verse 8 continues, “The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.” Exactly what this mountain is, John doesn’t explain. It could be a comet, an underwater volcano, or something the world has never before seen. But it brings with it three disasters. 1) A third of the saltwater is turned to blood. This reminds us of the first plague in Egypt, which turned the Nile River to blood and caused all of the fish in the river to die. 2) A third of the creatures in the sea die. Whether this is due to a great explosion or the pollution of the waters with blood, the fishing industry will find itself on the edge of collapse, especially when—

3) A third of all ships are destroyed. According to the most recent statistics, there are 24,867 ocean-going merchant ships on earth. Imagine the economic shock waves if 8,289 of them were suddenly sunk! And what about their cargoes? Some of you may remember December 22, 1988 when a tug ran into a barge it was towing off Grays Harbor. The result? 231,000 gallons of oil spilled affecting 300 miles of coastline, from Vancouver Island to Newport, Oregon. 5,845 oil-soaked birds died. Another 2,500 sick birds had to be hand-washed by volunteers. Several fisheries along the coast were also closed. That was the result of one minor oil spill. Try to imagine the environmental impact if 1/3 of the world’s oil tankers were ripped apart at the seams!

c. Trumpet #3: 33% of Freshwater Destroyed

Verse 10 goes on, “The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water— the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter.” Job chapter 9 tells us that God has named and numbered His stars. One of which is called “Wormwood.” Its mission? To fall to earth at the sounding of the third trumpet and poison the freshwaters of the world. The National Geographic lists 100 principal rivers of the world, ranging in length from the Amazon (4,000 miles long) to the Rio de la Plata (150 miles long). Combined with the countless streams, lakes, and springs, these comprise the lifeline of humanity. But at the falling of “Wormwood,” 1/3 of them will suddenly become undrinkable. In fact, that’s what “wormwood” means. It means “undrinkable,” but many people

will die from trying because there are no other sources of freshwater available.

You wonder, “How can Wormwood be a literal star? If a literal star struck the earth, wouldn’t that be the end of it?” But this isn’t as farfetched as it seems. Evolutionary scientists have postulated for years that what killed off the dinosaurs was a giant meteor that struck the earth 70 million years ago, ending the reign of these giant lizards. Besides, if a meteor were to enter earth’s atmosphere, chances are that it would split into countless pieces, raining down its poison on all the rivers and lakes of the world. But given that this is a supernatural judgment, we don’t have to understand how He will do it, for “with God nothing shall be impossible!”

d. Trumpet #4: 33% of Light Darkened

John continues in verse 12, “The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night.”

This is similar to the ninth plague of Egypt, when darkness fell upon the land, except that in this case darkness covers the entire earth and lasts not three days, but until the fourth bowl judgment in Revelation 16, when the sun’s power is intensified scorching everyone who continues to reject Jesus Christ. Nor can this darkness be attributed to an eclipse, because it also affects both the moon and the stars. Instead, it’s the cosmic phenomenon of which both the prophets and the Lord Jesus spoke. Joel wrote, “I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”

If their light will be diminished by one-third, it means that the daylight will be just two-thirds as bright as it is now—like reading by the light of a 60-watt instead of a 100-watt bulb. Try that in an otherwise dark room. You’ll quickly see the difference. Furthermore, the night will be a third darker than it’s ever been before, throwing the world into a panic and literally scaring people to death. It will also create an energy crisis as the demand for electricity and other light sources increase. And it will lead to an unprecedented crime wave. Jesus warned, “Men loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.” The truth is most major crimes are committed under the cloak of darkness. So, if it remains dark all day long, imagine the immediate rise in robberies, vandalism, rape, murder, and other violent crimes!

That, then, is how judgment is introduced in heaven and enacted on earth. Now let’s spend our last few minutes noticing how the suffering is exacerbated by hell.

3. HOW JUDGMENT IS EXACERBATED BY HELL

In verse 13 we find yet another evidence of Christ’s mercy. Before He allows the final blasts of the last three trumpets, He sends an angel to warn the world of greater judgment to come. Some versions translate the word “eagle” instead of “angel.” Warren Wiersbe says this may be the living creature before God’s throne with the face of an eagle who is now sent on a final mission of mercy. John says, “As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: “Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!”

The word “woe” is a strong word in Greek—a loud verbal warning that something terrible is about to happen. The fact that it’s repeated three times indicates emphasis, that the last three trumpets will bring on the most terrible suffering mankind has ever known. And yet, how many listen and repent? Not many. Why? John explains using the phrase, “inhabitants of the earth.” This means more than “people who live on the earth.” The phrase is used 12 times in Revelation, each time describing **a kind of people**—those who are in love with this world and never given any thought to heaven to come. They will therefore die in their sins. Now let’s look at the judgments themselves. In this study, we’ll look at the first two “woe” judgments, because the seventh trumpet and third “woe” judgment do not come until Revelation chapter 11.

a. Trumpet #5: Demonic Locusts

Revelation 9:1 begins, “Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him.” Who is this “star” who falls from heaven? Verse 11 is clear. He’s an angel—“the angel of the bottomless pit,” indicating that hell is where he belongs. Have we met this angel before? I believe we have. He is the evil one Jesus referred to when He said, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” (Luke 10:18) At his initial rebellion, Lucifer lost his place in heaven as a covering cherub (Ezek. 28:14) who guarded the holiness of God. But according to Job 1 and Revelation 12, he still has access to heaven. He is the accuser of the brethren who accuses us “before our God day and night.” But at the midpoint of the Tribulation, that will end. Lucifer will be permanently cast out of heaven and confined to earth, leading him to torment mankind in ways that defy description.

The torment begins when he is given the key to the bottomless pit. This is a key point, because contrary to popular belief, the devil is not the king of hell. Nor does he enjoy unlimited power even in that evil place. For before he can release the occupants of the “bottomless pit,” what must happen? Jesus must hand him the key. (See Revelation 1:8.) What then comes out of this pit? Two things: 1) Smoke “like the smoke of a great furnace.” This is a sober reminder to those who scoff at the idea of a literal hell, for both Jesus and John describe it as a “furnace of fire.” In fact, the smoke of this furnace is so severe that it pollutes the air and further darkens the sun, which was already darkened by one-third at the blowing of the fourth trumpet.

2) Locusts sent to torment mankind. Joel warned in his prophecy, “Blow the trumpet in Zion . . . Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is coming . . . a day of darkness and gloom . . . a people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been; nor will there ever be any such after them . . . surely nothing shall escape them. Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; and like swift steeds, so they run. With a noise like chariots over mountaintops they leap, like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble, like a strong people set in battle array. Before them the people writhe in pain; all faces are drained of color.”

Revelation 9:7 continues the description, “The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads appeared to be crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. They had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions.” They had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle. They have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months.”

So who or what are these locusts? The descriptions make it clear that they are not typical locusts. First, they have a king, something Proverbs 30:27 says is untrue of ordinary locusts. Second, they have stingers in their tails, something else that normal locusts do not have. Third, they do not devour vegetation. In fact, verse 4 commands them not to “harm the grace of the earth or any green thing.” Instead, the purpose for their existence is to torment those who have rejected the Lordship of Christ. What, then, could these locusts be? They are demons. That is evident not only from the identity of their king. The Bible often calls demons “the devil’s angels.” But it is also clear from their origin. They come up out of the “bottomless pit.” What is the bottomless pit? It’s not only the temporary prison where Satan will be “jailed” for a thousand years during Christ’s millennial kingdom on earth (Rev. 20:3), it is also the place where right now millions of fallen angels, who have never been allowed to roam the earth, are being kept until this period of judgment. The Apostle Peter explains, “God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness . . . reserved for the judgment of the great day.” (2 Pet. 2:4)

It's frightening to think about it, but right now, hidden somewhere in the depths of the earth, are millions of vile and vicious demons who are about to be unleashed on this earth like a massive plague of locusts, tormenting all who reject the love of Christ.

Finally, notice their power. Verse 3 continues, “And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months. And their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them.”

Satan is the master con artist who tells us that sin leads to happiness. But here is one more example of how his temptations lead only to sorrow. He and his demons are forbidden to kill those on earth (a reminder that Satan can only do what Jesus allows), but they are allowed to torment men five months. This is the normal lifespan of a locust (May to September). How are they able to do this? With scorpion-like stingers in their tails, that inflict such unbearable pain that the victims will try to commit suicide, but John adds, “Death will flee from them.”

Hal Lindsey makes this insightful comment about it. He writes, “The sting will be so painful that men will wish they could die. History records that ancient Roman soldiers were famous for their ability to take pain without flickering an eye. But when several of them were stung by scorpions in the desert of Egypt, they screamed and writhed in pain. Scorpion stings are among the most painful wounds a person can endure.”

Finally, notice with me the sixth trumpet judgment and the suffering it brings.

b. Trumpet #6: Demonic Horsemen

Verse 13: “Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar that is before God, one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, ‘Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.’ And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so they would kill a third

of mankind. The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone. A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm.”

The sixth trumpet releases four angels who have been bound at the Euphrates River. They cannot be good angels, since there would be no good reason for a holy angel to be bound. Instead, they are four super-demons who will lead an army of death across the earth! Why are they bound at the Euphrates River? Historically, the Euphrates is the natural boundary between Asia and the Middle East—a barrier that any conquering army would have to cross. But more important than that, it has an age-old spiritual significance. This was the sight of the Tower of Babel and Babylon, the “mother” of idolatry and false religion. Indeed, Revelation 18:2 says that during the Tribulation, Babylon will again become “a habitation of demons, a prison for every foul spirit.” The point is, somewhere right now near the ancient city of Babylon, there is a group of demons waiting to be released, so they can lead an army which shall destroy mankind.

What army will they lead? Some say this is a symbolic reference to Russia’s invasion of Israel in Ezekiel 38-39. Others say they are “the kings of the east”—200 million Asian soldiers who cross the Euphrates to fight in the final battle of Armageddon. But I believe when the plain sense of Scripture makes good sense, we should seek no other sense. Therefore, since nothing in the context suggests a human army (the description sounds demonic), I believe that like the first trumpet judgment, this is another attack by an army of demons who have been bound up until this point. How many in their army? John is precise. The Greek literally says, “10,000 times 10,000 times 2” or 200 million demonic horsemen. And then, to make sure we don’t spiritualize it, he adds, “I heard the number of them,” indicating that the number is to be taken literally.

Imagine the destruction that would result if 200 million additional demons were allowed to join forces with the powers of evil at work in the world! John describes their impact in verse 18 to 19. He says it will lead to three more deadly plagues—fire, smoke, and brimstone—the results of which will be the death of another third of mankind. In Revelation 6:8, John said that one-fourth of mankind would die from the first four seals. In Revelation 8:11, he said “many” more would die. And now, as a result of these plagues, a third of the remaining population will lose their lives. This means that at least half the world’s population, or using today’s statistics, 3.5 billion of the 7 billion people on earth will be dead by the end of the sixth trumpet.

But the saddest fact is how the survivors respond to these judgments. You would think that five months of torment would drive unbelieving sinners to their knees in repentance. But such is not the case. Verse 20 says, “The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.”

Their sins explain their lack of repentance. “Magic arts” is the Greek word *pharmakia* from which we get our word “pharmaceuticals.” In other words, the war on drugs will be lost.

Those who remain alive will give themselves wholeheartedly to their addictions, seeking escape from the reality of God's judgment. And in doing so, they will open themselves up to demonic possession becoming slaves to the millions of demons that have been let loose on the earth.

Now think back on the judgments you've just read about. It may seem fantastic, but every word is true and about to take place. Will you be prepared for it? Have you bowed your heart in repentance and receive Christ's gracious gift of salvation?

The story is told of a prince traveling through France who visited the prison at Toulon where the most hardened criminals were kept. Because of his nobility, he was permitted to release one of the condemned men. So he went from prisoner to prisoner, inquiring why they were there. All claimed to be innocent insisting they were there by mistake. Only one man admitted his crime. "My lord, as much as I long to be free, I am guilty. I have committed many crimes and have nothing to say except that I deserve to be here." The prince listened carefully. Then, in a voice that all could hear, declared, "You miserable wretch! You should not be here among these 'honest' men. You are bad enough to corrupt them all." Then, turning to the officer in charge, he commanded him, "This is the man I've chosen. Release him at once!"

The same is true of you and me. We deserve judgment. But God in His mercy is willing to pardon us, if we admit our sin and turn to Jesus in repentance and faith. So, if you haven't done so before, turn to Christ today. Why face God's judgment, when you can be forgiven and free!