

We now begin to hear the trumpets blow one by one. God is answering the prayers of his saints, and he is sending judgment upon the earth for all of their evils.

But we might ask: why are they trumpets? What significance does that have? In the Old Testament, Christians, trumpets were used for all kinds of things. Trumpets were blown whenever it was time to come to worship. Trumpets were blown whenever it was time to move a camp. Trumpets were blown as a way to sound a warning. There were all kinds of reasons for trumpets to be used. But one of the most important reasons for using a trumpet was in war. A trumpet would be blown as a way of calling people to battle, and it would also be used as a way of saying that the battle was over, that victory had been won. I think the best example of this actually comes from the book of Joshua with the battle of Jericho. Because we're told in Joshua chapter 6 that the Lord said to Joshua: "Seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets." So God wanted the priests, then, to blow those trumpets on each of the seven days until Jericho would finally fall on the last day. And so the sound of the trumpets became a sound of victory for Israel. Whenever they heard those trumpets as they marched around the city, they knew that God was fighting on their side. But those same trumpets became a sound of doom for the people of Jericho. Whenever they heard those trumpets, they knew that their city was about to fall. Everything that they trusted in would soon come to an end. And so it also is here in the book of Revelation. These trumpets are sounding to show that judgment is coming upon the world. And everything that they trusted in, everything they put their hopes in, everything that they looked to for help would come to nothing. They would not be able to help them at all.

And so the first trumpet, then, begins to sound. Verse 7 says: "The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up." Now, something that we'll notice with each of these trumpets is how closely connected they are to the plagues of Egypt. And this one in particular is closely connected to the seventh plague of Egypt, which was a plague of hail. We are told in Exodus chapter 9 that: "Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt." God had sent this great plague of hail as a way of showing his power over Egypt. Because he wasn't just sending it to destroy the crops, the way that we might think of hail. God wanted to show that he was the Lord, that he had the power, that he was God over all, especially against the false gods of Egypt. In fact, in the same passage, Exodus chapter 9, God says to Pharaoh the reason why he's sending this hail in the first place. He says: "For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth." There is none like God. There is no one that can compare to him. All the false gods of Egypt are nothing. Even Pharaoh who thought of himself as a god is nothing compared to the Lord. God was going to show that he alone is the Lord, and there is no other!

Christians, it's the same way here in the book of Revelation. The trumpets are doing the same thing. God is showing his power over all the world. He is showing his power and his strength, especially against all the false gods of the world. The world trusts in these false gods, thinking that they would be able to help them, that they would be able to deliver them in the day of

trouble. They think that they can get anything that they want from them. But God strikes these false gods down to show that they are nothing, that he alone is the Lord, and there is no other.

But what exactly does the first trumpet symbolize, then, if this is a way of God showing his power? What is happening as this trumpet blows? I think the best way to understand this trumpet is to see it as a symbol of war, and I have a few reasons for doing that. First of all, because in Joshua chapter 10, God sends hail on the enemies of Israel as a way to help them win a battle. So hail in this case helps out in war. And in the book of Amos, Amos describes God sending fire upon all the different nations around Israel, which was a symbol of saying that he was going to send armies against them, that they would destroy their cities and wipe them away. And things like burning up the grass and the trees and the earth was a very common tactic in war in those days. Whenever you invaded someplace, you set fire to their fields and to their buildings and to their cities so that they would be broken and they wouldn't be able to fight back against you for a very long time. So all of these things together, then, show that this trumpet is a symbol of war.

And war would certainly be demoralizing to any nation. Because when all of these things come upon a nation and destroy everything that they held dear, they're going to ask, "Well, where are the gods that we trusted in? Why weren't they able to help us? Why has this happened to us?" It's because they are not gods at all. They are not able to help. God alone is the Lord, and there is no other!

The second trumpet begins to blow, starting in verse 8: "The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed." Just like with the first trumpet, this one also looks back to the plagues of Egypt. In this case, the first plague when the Nile was turned into blood. And John tells us that he sees something like a mountain being cast into the sea. Now, notice that he says something like a mountain. He does not say that it is a mountain, only that it looks like a mountain. He is just doing the best that he can to describe what he sees. But that word "mountain" is no accident, because in the Old Testament, a mountain was often used as a symbol for a kingdom. In Jeremiah 51, for example, we are told: "Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain, declares the Lord, which destroys the whole earth; I will stretch out my hand against you, and roll you down from the crags, and make you a burnt mountain." Now in that passage, Jeremiah is talking about Babylon. Babylon is the mountain, and God is going to bring judgment down upon Babylon like a mountain on fire because of all the evil that it had done. It was a way of showing the judgment that was to come. So a mountain being thrown into the sea, then, is a picture of judgment coming upon a nation, causing the sea to turn into blood, a third of the sea to turn into blood as a way of bringing judgment.

And the reason why goes into the sea is because it's hitting the nation where it hurts the most: in terms of its trade, in terms of its commerce, in terms of its business. Because the sea in those days was used for all kinds of business, Christians. Ships were the cheapest and the fastest and the most reliable way to send anything anywhere in the world. It was the best way to get whatever you needed. People relied on the sea to get all of their daily needs. So if the sea itself is being struck, if trade is being disrupted, you can imagine how difficult that would be. Just think back a couple years ago with COVID and all the disruptions that came with that. And you remember how for a while when everything was kind of in flux and we weren't able to get some

things? For a while there toilet paper was extremely scarce. People were rationing it. They were buying up as much as they could. The shelves were empty for weeks on end. It was very difficult to get the things that we needed. Now imagine if that was everything, all items, everything that you needed, anything that would come from the sea, and it's all gone. You can imagine how difficult that would be! But they trusted in these things. They thought that it would provide everything that they needed. They looked to it as if it was a god. But it can't help. It will ultimately fail. Because God is the Lord, and there is no other!

The third trumpet now begins to blow, starting in verse 10: "The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter." Now, this trumpet is just like the last one. It looks back towards the first plague of Egypt with the Nile being turned into blood. But the star here is important, because a star sometimes in the Old Testament was used as a symbol for kings. Isaiah chapter 14, for example, says: "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!" Isaiah there is talking about the king of Babylon. The king of Babylon is compared to that star falling from heaven, because God was bringing judgment down upon him for everything that he had done. And so a star falling from heaven is pretty much like a mountain being cast into the sea. It is a picture of judgment coming down upon a king, and in this case also coming down upon a nation, because kings and nations go together.

But this star falls upon the rivers and the springs, the only sources of water that they had. You couldn't drink seawater, for example. It's too salty. And it didn't rain often enough in that part of the world to make that a reliable source of water either. If you wanted to get the water you needed to survive, you had to get it from springs. You had to get it from the rivers. And so if your only source of water was made undrinkable, you can imagine how difficult that would be!

Wormwood, in this case, is a plant very common in that part of the world, but it's also extremely bitter to the taste. In fact, it's said to be so bitter that if you put just a little bit of it in a large amount of water, you can still taste it. It's that bitter indeed. But it's not poisonous. But in the Old Testament, wormwood was often used as a symbol of death and judgment, of the bitterness of death and judgment. For example, in Jeremiah 23 it says: "Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets: 'Behold, I will feed them with wormwood and give them poisoned water to drink, for from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has gone out into all the land.'" So this bitterness, then, their water being made bitter is like they were losing the most basic necessities of life. You might think of something like a famine or anything like that, where you're not even able to get the food that you need to survive or not able to get the water that you need to survive. They trusted in all of these things. They thought they were always going to be there, that they didn't have to worry about them at all. But they failed. They could not help them. Because God is the Lord, and there is no other!

The fourth and the last trumpet now begins to sound, verse 12: "The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night." And just like all the other trumpets, this again points back to the plagues of Egypt. In this case, the ninth plague when darkness was sent upon the land. But I

think the best way to understand this trumpet, Christians, is to remember that people have often worshiped the sun and the moon and the stars as if they were gods. They treated them as gods. They thought they could help them. They thought that they could pray to them and get all the things that they needed. It's kind of like today when somebody says that the universe is going to help them somehow. The universe will provide for me! The universe will give me an opportunity! Treating the creation as if it was God. But they are not gods. God strikes the sun and the moon and the stars to show that they are not gods. Because God is the Lord! He is the one who rules the day and the night. He is the one who gives life. He is the one who controls all things. And he darkens these things to show that worshiping them is foolish. They cannot help. They cannot save. Because God is the Lord, and there is no other!

Christians, in this passage, then, God shows the world the foolishness of trusting in false gods. Even though the world relies on them, even though the world looks to them for help, they will not last. Their false gods cannot save them in the end. There is no breath in their mouth. There is no voice in their throats. There is no life in them! And we also should not trust in idols. We should not look to anything in this world as if it's going to be able to help us, because it can't. It will fail us in the end. But God is the Lord! He is the living one. He is the one who sees. He is the one who hears. He is the one who can do all things. He is the one to whom all things belong. So trust in him, Christians! Turn away from all the false gods of this world, all the empty idols of this world. Leave them all behind. God is your stronghold in the day of trouble. God is your rock in the midst of your distress. God is your solid ground when everything else is sinking sand. God is your helper. God is your provider. And he is your mighty shield, because God is the Lord, and there is no one else!

Let us pray. Lord God, Creator of heaven and earth, who alone is God, turn us away from the idols of this world so that we may find help in you alone, because you are our fortress, the holy one of Israel, and the almighty and the living God. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.