

Charts: The Tribulation: Chart #11 (The Trumpets)

PREFACE

Before we turn to an examination of the first trumpet, I would like to address something which some of you may have seen as an omission on my part.

Our focus thus far during our study of the Tribulation period has been on the three series of seven judgments, or plagues, delivered by heaven upon earth: the Seals, the Trumpets, the Bowls of Wrath. Prior to this, in Session Seven ([The Tribulation “Fork”](#)), we looked at what *the church* would be experiencing in heaven during the seven-year Tribulation on earth.

With that focus on the three series of judgments we have *not* discussed what *else* will be going on on earth leading up to and during the Tribulation period—such things as the Daniel 2 prophecy about the four kingdoms, the four beasts and the ten horns of Daniel 7, the various passages in Ezekiel, etc.

There are many components to the Last Things, and one cannot address them all at once—nor can one simply address them in logical, sequential order, for none of the prophecies or narratives do that. One must skip around through God’s word to establish a sequence.

Much of these prophecies and others will be addressed when we reach the par-
enthetical visions at the beginning of the seventh Trumpet, found in Revelation Chapters Twelve to Fifteen. At that time we will look back at the earlier prophecies that laid the groundwork for these judgments.

[Look at CHART #11.](#)

As I stated last week, the Trumpet icons in Chart #11 reveal that, just as with the Seals, the first four are different from the others. The judgments of the first four trumpets are directed toward *natural* objects—vegetation, the sea and its creatures, rivers and springs, celestial objects—whereas the fifth and sixth trumpet judgments are directed toward *mankind*; yet, of course, in all of them, mankind suffers greatly and some die. The first four Trumpets do not crescendo in intensity or effect (as did the first four Seals), but are instead directed at different portions of the natural world.

In our session this week we will not make much forward progress; we are not going to go beyond the first trumpet. The reason is that I am going to take this opportunity to illustrate what I believe our approach should be to the increasingly fantastical imagery we will be encountering in Revelation.

To do this I will detail and discuss—even more than usual—the methods and facts behind my conclusions, and why this is important to our study of this most complicated, challenging study.

THE FIRST TRUMPET (REVELATION 8:7—VEGETATION)

The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

We have a parallel to this judgment in one of the plagues in Egypt.

Read Exodus 9:23-25.

The first sounded...

Some of our versions leave out the word “trumpet” (e.g., NASB, KJVs), some include it (e.g., ESV, NIV, CSB). The Greek is *salpizo*. *Salpinx* is the noun for trumpet, and *salpizo* is the verb which means not just to “sound” or blow *anything*, but to explicitly sound a trumpet. Thus all are correct, but some versions make it more explicit for those reading in English.

and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood...thrown to the earth

There are many interpreters and expositors who favor a non-literal understanding of the judgments, either pointing back to some historic event, political situation—and, for the purposes of this discussion, I include under this term “political,” governmental, cultural, even religious situations—or understanding it as symbolic, metaphorical, or figurative. As to a consideration of the first four trumpets, although they may disagree on precisely *how* they came about, most everyone accepts the plagues of Egypt as literal, physical events. That being the case, there is no good reason to turn around and declare that *these* judgments and plagues in Revelation are merely fanciful descriptions of political turmoil or warfare between nation states. (One commentator I read claimed that the bloodshed under the trumpets spoke of the bloodshed in World War One!) No, unless a strong and explicit *textual* reason—or at least *contextual* reason—can be put forth, we take these to describe events just as they are described in God’s word.

I love the response offered by J. A. Seiss, D.D., in his series of lectures on The Apocalypse, to those who would politicize or otherwise see them as simply metaphorical.

Seiss: I take the language as it stands. **This book does not give things veiled, but unveiled. It is the Apocalypse, the uncovering.** The results here described are heralded by the sound of a trumpet; what is published by a trumpet is no longer a secret. **The phenomena are of a very stupendous sort; but the actors are Archangels, the occasion is the day of judgment, and the business is the closing up of the history of a doomed world. In such a case we may well look for wonders.**

God has also declared His purpose to renew the miracles of Egypt, and to do “marvellous things” like unto what He did in the days of Israel’s deliverance. (See Micah 7:15; Jer. 23:7, 8.) The plagues of Egypt were literal realities. They were miracles of judgment, such as have never been since on earth. And if it is the design of God to repeat them on a larger scale, or to do again what at all corresponds to that which He then did, the world has yet to witness just such scenes as are literally described under these trumpets. (J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse: A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ with Revised Text*, Eighth Edition., vol. 2 (New York: Charles C. Cook, 1901), 42–43; emphasis added.)

The position with which I approach the passages in Revelation—especially those describing the fantastical or supernatural—is to consider a *literal* interpretation to be the default. That is where I begin. Yet I also know that we cannot always take at face-value the English translation of any one version: no single version of Scripture is 100% correct, and even if not technically incorrect in a given passage, there very well may be subtleties in the Greek that are missed in English. Not to mention there may indeed be occasions when a non-literal interpretation is not just feasible, but even correct. Each must be evaluated in-place.

Mix or Mingle

For example, take the word “mixed” in the first portion of the sentence: “mixed with blood.” Well, the KJVs use the word “mingle” instead. My first impression was that the word “mixed” in the more recent versions is simply a slightly more modern word, so no big deal. Not so.

This third element of blood is the portion of this phrase that has the most varied interpretation by commentators—very few of which see it as literal blood falling out of the sky. Some say that what John describes is just red-colored hail; some, such as Walvoord, based on the passage in Exodus where cattle and men caught out by the hail are bloodily bludgeoned to death by the hail, consider the possibility that *this* is the blood that mixes with the hail and fire: human blood lying on the ground.

All right, let’s go to the text. The Greek word translated either mixed or mingled is *memigmena*, from the root *mignymi*. There is another Greek word that can be translated by the same two words (mixed or mingled): *kerannymi* (care-AH-numee).

The venerable W.E. Vine gives us some help with the difference between the two—and, by extension, help with our interpretation of “blood” in our passage. He writes, “[*Kerannymi* means] a mixing of two things, so that they are blended and form a compound, as in wine and water, whereas *mignymi* implies a mixing without such composition, as in two sorts of grain.”

Since the word in our text is the latter, *mignymi*, we thus conclude that the “blood” is not something that has *mixed* with the ice of the hail to create a new compound, but is something—John calls it blood, so we will go with that—that is *mingling* with the other two elements (perhaps in free-fall from the sky?) without becoming part of them.

Fire or Lightning

Let’s quickly look at just one more word from this phrase before you are utterly bored to tears. (I won’t be narrating all these details for every trumpet judgment; this is just to illustrate the process for you.) Let’s look at the word “fire.”

Many commentators just cannot wrap their heads around God sending down literal fire from heaven. Quite a few interpret the word “fire” in “there came hail and fire, mixed with blood,” as lightning. For example, Albert Barnes, without explanation, states flat out, “And fire – Lightning.” Period. Full stop.

All right, let’s consider that. The Greek word translated “fire” is, not surprisingly, *pyre*, pronounced “poor.” We get the words pyrotechnic, funeral pyre, pyromaniac from it. I performed a search for this Greek word in both the NASB and KJV and found not one instance of it being translated “lightning.” But John in the Revelation *does* use the Greek word for lightning; look at v5: “Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.”

Now, this tells us that John knew the Greek for lightning and the Greek for fire. In v5 he describes lightning (*astrape*), in v7 he describes fire (*pyre*). If by writing *pyre* in v7 what he *really* meant was lightning, why didn’t he just write *astrape*, as he did in v5?

I have included these two overly detailed examples to illustrate one aspect to my approach to determining how to interpret these challenging events in the Eschaton. Notwithstanding the Spirit’s counsel, we must begin with the text itself, employing, first, common sense and logic, layering onto that the time frame in which it was written—all the while never forgetting that we are talking about *God* here, not human capabilities, and not limited by the physics of a fallen universe. The Lord God and His Christ are sovereign over all. [Now back to the first trumpet.](#)

Let us be brave and take the supernatural event of the first trumpet just as it reads:

There came hail and fire,
[mingled] with blood,
and they were thrown to the earth;

Now we consider what happened as a result of this phenomenon.

...and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

As is common with just about all these judgments inflicted on the earth—beginning with the early seals—some argue that these consequences are localized in the Mediterranean or Middle East region, or even restricted to Judea, perhaps based on the notion that it is unbelieving Judaism, as a nation that, has the focus during the Tribulation judgments. Yet even with that, one cannot imagine that all Jews will be then dwelling in the land of Israel, but will be scattered around the globe, as they are today.

And the word translated “earth” (*ge*; *yee*) offers us no specificity. In ancient secular Greek, *ge* stood for the land in contrast to water or sky; In the NT it can refer to the soil where seed is sown, to the globe or to a country as part of that globe—and it is often not obvious which is meant.

I incline toward interpreting this to mean the entire earth or globe—not because of the word itself, but for the following reasons:

- Some scholars like to use the phrase “the known world,” meaning the area roughly surrounding the Mediterranean. But that is *man’s* perspective. These judgments are coming from God, who knew full well at the time of the Revelation prophecy that the globe was “known” and inhabited far beyond the Middle East.
- By the end of the Revelation the entire globe will be either consumed and replaced, or dramatically renovated. His judgment will be universal. So why inflict so many incremental and crescendoing judgments only in one minuscule region?
- The Tribulation and the return of Christ is all about God inflicting His wrath against all those who have rejected His Messiah, beginning with the Jews but including “the nations” ([Revelation 19:15](#)). Sin and rebellion and evil are not a localized phenomenon, but universal. They dwell on every square mile of this fallen earth.

For these reason I take “earth” here, and most everywhere else in the Revelation, to refer to the globe. It is a global phenomenon, unless otherwise stated explicitly.

Thus in most of our newer versions the first result of the trumpet judgment is that “a third of the earth was burned up”—essentially a summation of the whole.

Sidebar: There are occasions, such as here, where this rank amateur can only bow to the superior scholarship of others. There are times when no one offers a detailed explanation, but everyone seems to agree, so all I can do is go along. This is one. As M. R. Vincent puts it succinctly, “This [[“a third of the earth was burned up”](#)] is added by the best texts.” The KJVs lack this portion, for, I take it, the superior textual discoveries that include the phrase post-date the publication of the KJV, which was based on earlier manuscripts. So in this instance, since virtually everyone says the same, I can only take their word for it.

We see a similar situation regarding this business of “a third”; without offering any background details, almost all commentators and expositors I have consulted state that “a third” is not meant to be taken literally. No one I can find wants to tell me *why, on what basis* do they conclude this, which is, admittedly, frustrating. My instinct is to do just that; if the text says one third, it means just that (as Walvoord). Yet perhaps we can find common ground in agreeing that when it comes to the destruction of nature, one can hardly insist on slide-rule exactitude.

If we are so bold as to take “earth” (*ge*) to mean the entire globe, the *planet* earth, then the resulting destruction from the first trumpet is that

- one third of the trees on the planet are burned up,
- *all* the green grass is burned up, and thus,
- one third of the entire earth is burned up.

As Walvoord writes, “This judgment, great as it is, is only the introduction. Six more trumpets are to sound.”

THE TRIBULATION

The Trumpets

Revelation 8

Revelation 9-11

Revelation 11-16

God employs evil to punish those who reject Christ



Footnotes

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| 1
Revelation 8:7
Exodus 9:18-26
Ezekiel 38:22 | 2
Revelation 8:8-9
Exodus 7:20-21 | 3
Revelation 8:10-11
Exodus 15:23-25
Jeremiah 9:15
Jeremiah 23:15 | 4
Revelation 8:12-13
Exodus 10:21-23
Jeremiah 31:35-36
Matthew 27:45 | 5
Revelation 9:1-11
Revelation 12:7-17
Joel 1:4-7
Joel 2:1-11 | 6
Revelation 9:13-21
Genesis 15:18
Hebrews 10:26-31 |
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