

**“Sound The Trumpets”***Revelation 8***Contemporary Contact** – **SLIDE1**

On August 6, 1945, at 8:15 a.m. local time, the world’s first atomic bomb exploded over Hiroshima, Japan. As a war correspondent for NBC radio, Guthrie Janssen was eager to be able to broadcast the story to the U.S. from halfway around the world.

But the horror of nuclear destruction didn’t hit him until he visited Hiroshima a few weeks later. With a team of 27 journalists, he was among the first Americans to view ground zero, and those few hours changed his life forever.

That night, in a live national broadcast, he told the American people, *“I have just returned from looking at the most terrible scene of destruction ever made by man.”* For a man who had eloquently mastered the English language, words seemed inadequate to describe what he had seen. Without television cameras to enhance his report, he presented listeners this picture:

*“Think of a field 2 miles square. Cover it with the greatest assortment of rubble you can possibly imagine: smashed tiles, twisted steel beds, broken bricks, distorted shapes of corrugated iron and smashed-up, burned-out cars and buses—as bad as the worst wreck you ever saw. Do this, but be sure that every piece is completely broken, impossible to use again or even repair. Then you have some slight idea of Hiroshima.”*

**Biblical Contact** **BLANK2**

When the apostle John recorded his visionary scenes of judgement in Revelation he was trying to convey realities for which words must have seemed terribly inadequate. Yet the word pictures he paints are vivid enough to grab the attention of even the most insensitive reader. Perhaps one of the key functions of Revelation is to recapture our imagination for God and his purposes.

**Structural Contact** – *(Have people open their Bibles...)*

Last Sunday we walked through Revelation 6 & 7 and we saw that while the evils of war, famine and plague often appear to dominate the news and world history, evil does not have the last word: God does. As chapter 7

illustrated, God knows and cares for his people amidst the evils unleashed by humans bent on conquest. God has sealed his followers with his Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14) not that we might be *safe from* all harm but that we might be *secure through* whatever happens, depending on God's presence & power to keep us.

- E.g. the tsunami like power of grief or guilt and the sustaining power & presence of God<sup>Ps.46</sup> (e.g. Jonah; Naomi; David; Paul)

We come then, in chapter 8 to the breaking of the seventh seal and final seal. **Read Rev. 8** A great and sustained silence settles over the worshipping hosts of heaven (imagine a giant stadium full of people pausing for a moment of silence). The kick—off event everyone is waiting for begins as the scroll containing God's plan for the world is opened. But rather unexpectedly there is silence...for half an hour! Most often silence in our day is considered *dead space*, and waiting is seen as a waste of time, but this is **golden silence**. We live in a noisy world in which we are shouted at, called on, or messaged 24/7. We are surrounded with the noise of telephones, television, radios, and elevator music. Eugene Peterson describes our world as *“a mob in which everyone is talking at once and no one is willing or able to listen. But God listens. He not only speaks to us, he listens to us. His listening to us is an even greater marvel than his speaking to us.”*

Here, even all the heavenly hosts previously engaged in the sacred work of worship, are called to wait in silence for heaven to hear “the prayers of all God's people” as they ascend from the earth to the very court of heaven and into the listening ears of the one who sits on the throne.

Out of that time of golden silence, tremendous action develops. Once again John sees things others miss. What everyone saw and heard across the Roman Empire were the kings, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, stealing the headlines and making their mark. The persecuted church had neither power nor weapons, most were poor with no prestige. So they did what they could, they prayed. And the prayers which ascended, unheralded by the journalists of the day, return with immense force re-entering history with cosmic

sized special effects. Here John and we see that earth itself is shaken daily by the prayers of God's people. We do well to remember and recall this scene the next time we are tempted to think we're too busy to pray.

What happens in response to the prayers of all God's people is seen as the seven angels begin to sound each trumpet. In the Bible, a trumpet was not primarily a musical instrument but an attention getter, used for calling people to a sacred assembly, or sounding an alarm alerting people to impending danger (Ezek. 33<sup>1-5</sup>; Zeph. 1<sup>14-16</sup>; cf. tsunami warning system). What follows each of the first four trumpet blasts is big, I mean *really* BIG. Notice the magnitude of these divine attention getters **SLIDE4**

- v.7 *"a third of the earth...a third of the trees...and all the green grass..."*
- v.8 *"A third of the seas...a third of the living creatures in the sea... a third of the ships..."*
- v.10 *"a third of the rivers..."*
- v.12 *"a third of the sun...moon...[and] stars..."* That's **BIG**.

A good deal of these central chapters in Revelation will be taken up with judgment to show & tell us that human wickedness does not go unnoticed in heaven. God has his own way and time for dealing with it. Whereas the breaking of the seven seals drew attention to God's judgments embedded within human sin (was given,<sup>6:2,4</sup> were given<sup>v.8</sup> = passive verbs), the trumpets emphasize God's more direct activity ("was hurled<sup>v.7</sup>...was thrown<sup>v.8</sup>...was struck<sup>v.12</sup>" = active verbs). **SLIDE5**

God actively opposes sin and calls sinners to account. Often God is patient with sinners (KJV calls him "longsuffering"<sup>Ex.34:6</sup>), and he allows evil more leash than we may want him to give. But he does not minimize or ignore it. His judgments are not *all* reserved for the future, but they are also not yet complete.

As big as God's trumpet judgements are they are not full blown. Though the destruction of a 1/3 of the earth and sky is catastrophic the grace of God can be seen in the fact that 2/3rds still remain. For according to chapters 15-16 a time is coming God will pour out his wrath on the earth in the form of seven plagues or bowls and the destruction will be complete, 100%.

So what John sees here in Revelation 8 is foretaste and a foreshadowing of the final judgment coming upon those who will not let go of their rebellious ways. That I believe is the main point of these trumpet judgements. They are big enough to show us the consequences of ignoring, resisting & rebelling against God, yet limited enough to give us the opportunity to change. Do you remember Pharaoh and the 10 plagues in Egypt? Good, because John expects us to. Pop quiz: pair up to see how many of the plagues you can remember **SLIDE6**

**SLIDE7** “There is no one-to-one correspondence between the plagues of Egypt and those in Revelation, but the parallels are unmistakable.”<sup>1</sup> **SLIDE8**

- Hail & Lightning: in Egypt (Exodus 9<sup>23-35</sup>) and in Revelation (8<sup>7</sup>)
  - Major economic impacts and food shortages.<sup>2</sup>
- Blood: in Egypt (Ex. 7<sup>20-21</sup>) and in Revelation (8<sup>8-9</sup>)
  - Rome, which profited from its sea trade with other peoples, would suffer likewise (cf. [Rev. 13:1](#); [17:1](#); [18:17 – 18](#)) and since most people ate more fish than meat, this plague would be more devastating to the food supply.
- Great star like a torch (meteorite?) = heavenly sign and similar in effect to the Exodus plague that affected the fresh water.
  - Wormwood<sup>3</sup> = a non-poisonous bitter plant but the point is that whatever happens makes the water undrinkable (cf. Ex. 15<sup>23</sup>; e.g. Walkerton, Flint Michigan, Oil spill in the gulf of Mexico—all give us a glimpse of the impact).
- Turning Out the Celestial Lights: plague of darkness (Ex.10<sup>21-23</sup>; Rev. 8<sup>12</sup>)

In both Exodus and Revelation we also find plagues of locusts (Rev. 9<sup>3</sup>; Ex. 10<sup>4</sup>), sores (Rev. 16<sup>2</sup>; Ex. 9<sup>9</sup>), and frogs (Rev. 16<sup>13</sup>; Ex. 8<sup>2</sup>). These similarities are a clear interpretive guide, telling us we should interpret what we read in Revelation through the lens of the Exodus story. Just as the plagues in the book of Exodus were done to save rather than to destroy, so the sufferings in Revelation are designed to turn people’s heart to the one true God and savior (not the imposters making these claims in Rome then and in the media today). **Read Exodus 9<sup>13-21, 27-35</sup>**

- What we often set our hearts on = wrong things; or good things allowed to become ultimate things (job, stuff)

<sup>1</sup> Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance*, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> “The destruction of one-third of the trees (8:7) means shortages of fruit, including essential staples like olives, figs, and presumably grapes for wine. The destruction of all the green grass means the impending death of sheep, goats, and cattle — hence the end of the world’s supply of meat, milk and cheese.” Keener, p.

<sup>3</sup> “Wormwood” was known for its bitterness ([Prov. 5:4](#); [Lam. 3:15,19](#)) and sometimes was thought to be poisonous ([Deut. 29:18](#); [Jer. 9:15](#); [23:15](#)); it also appears as a metaphor for sin ([Deut. 29:18](#); [Amos 5:7](#); [6:12](#)).

**BLANK** With each plague Moses invited Pharaoh to repent and save the people of Egypt from further suffering. And with each failed repentance Pharaoh's heart grew harder. We see the same hard heartedness happening in the sounding of the trumpets (**read Rev. 9:20-21**). As Nelson Kraybill says,

*In the first century the cycle of violence and destruction was evident for all to see.... Emperor after emperor in that century met untimely death by suicide or assassination, demonstrating repeatedly that corrupt power often begins to self-destruct.*<sup>4</sup>

*“No one living in Rome at the time of this writing could have missed...what happened when the second angel sounded his trumpet, since it is a rather precise description of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius on the coast of the Bay of Naples, which a few years earlier had destroyed the towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum.”*<sup>5</sup>

Secular and purely naturalistic explanations abound in our day, but God has his ways of getting our attention through them. As on recent earthquake survivor noted: *“Everything’s solid in life until the earth moves. It’s a terrifying feeling.”*

John saw and heard God's trumpets sounding already in his day and God is sounding them in our own day as well. But are we listening? I mean, are we *really* listening? Could the flood or earthquake of the century, the depletion in salmon and cod stocks, the change in global climate or the atrocities of ethnic cleansing be God's way of trying to tell us something?

Guthrie Janssen, the NBC war correspondent in my opening illustration later turned his life over to the Lord at a Billy Graham crusade in New York. In that process he began to review his wartime experiences and he kept returning to Hiroshima, as if it contained a special message for him. He later wrote,

*“There are likely to be many more—and perhaps worse—Hiroshimas, in spite of men’s exhaustive political efforts for peace. It all boils down to who is sovereign. If man is sovereign, man acts and gets results like Hiroshima....I believe that God permitted Hiroshima in order to show us what we are really like and to humble us for our repentance.”*

*“There is a way that seems right to a person, but in the end it leads to death.”*<sup>Pr.16:25</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance*, p. 121.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon Fee, *Revelation*, p. 124.

The trumpet blasts and the warning signs that John heard and saw in his day are also at work in our day at a universal and at a personal level and many people, like Pharaoh of old, are deaf and blind to them. How many sexually transmitted diseases, how many failed marriages, how many family feuds, how many civil wars, how many physical & relational earthquakes and bombs and volcanic eruptions will it take for human beings to turn from our way to God's?

➤ Are we listening? Are we *really* listening?

## **Applications**

1) Make (and keep) prayer a priority **SLIDE11**

- *“Blessed are the ears that catch the pulses of the divine whisper and give no heed to the whisperings of this world.”* (Thomas a Kempis in Imitation of Christ)
- *“[Prayer] is the most practical thing anyone can do. It is not mystical escape, it is historical engagement. Prayer participates in God’s action. God gathers our cries and our praises, our petitions and intercessions, and uses them...in his work.”*<sup>6</sup>

2) Heed the (public *and personal*) warning sounds and signs **SLIDE12**

- *“When we become complacent in ‘Egyptian’ routines, God intervenes.”*<sup>7</sup>
- Recalling 911 and people suddenly flocking to church...for a while...
- God’s alarm bells in my life = (a) burnout from “approval addiction”, (b) time for everyone else but my wife & kids, (c) released from my job & feeling like a failure—my identity was too tied to it.

Reminder of the purpose of Revelation: nurturing the radical faith we need...

<sup>6</sup> Eugene Peterson, Reversed Thunder, p. 95.

<sup>7</sup> Eugene Peterson, Reversed Thunder, p. 99.