If the plagues were poured out before the trumpets sounded, God’s character might come into question. But by allowing evil to run its course, it becomes self-evident that the Lord must step in to execute judgment on those who persist in sin. In the midst of the plagues, an angel proclaims, “‘You are righteous, O Lord, and it is just for You to judge these men, for I have come to do Your will. And now, arise” (Hebrews 10:36-37). And a third angel appeared, warning, “And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he shall be cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15). The fact that God had to act in judgment on sin is revealed by the seventh trumpet, which sounds the final warning to the nations: “And he called loudly with a great voice, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’” (Revelation 11:15, NKJV).

The Reign of God and the Reward of the Saints

The events that transpire under the first six trumpets play a major role in transferring the kingdom of this world to God the Father and His Son. Notice carefully what happens as the seventh trumpet is sounded: “And the seventy angels sounded, saying, ‘Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?’” (Revelation 5:2, NKJV).

Under the seventh trumpet loud voices in heaven announce some significant developments in the great controversy between good and evil:

1. The kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of the Lord and His Christ; their eternal reign is secured.
2. The saints can now be rewarded.
3. The destroyers of the earth can now be destroyed.
4. The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!

Two-thirds of the angels remained loyal to their Maker. But, oh, how trying and painful it must have been to witness the rebellion of the third of the angels who were cast into the lake of fire! In the last days, the Lord’s people will be called to help hasten the demise of evil and the reign of Christ by using our influence and talents to share the truth about God with the world. And how many questions must have been raised!

And how would God handle His enemies?

“Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’” (Revelation 11:15, NKJV).

Unlocking Revelation

“A

And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets. And another Angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto Him much incense, that He should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne” (Revelation 8:2-3).

There is only one place in the Bible other than Revelation where we find the use of seven trumpets. That occasion was when Israel, under the leadership of Joshua, destroyed the city of Jericho, preparatory to their entrance into the Promised Land. The Lord’s instructions were very specific. The victory was to be unique. Jericho would not be conquered by the military strength or genius of Israel, but rather the Lord would manifest His own mighty power on this occasion.

The “men of war” were to compass the city once each day for “six days” (Joshua 6:3). On the seventh day “seven priests blowing seven trumpets” were to march before the ark of God around the city seven times (Joshua 6:4). At the sound of a trumpet, “the people were to shout and watch the wall of the city “fall down flat” (Joshua 6:5). Joshua and the people did as the Lord said and Jericho was “utterly destroyed” (Joshua 6:21). The blowing of the seven trumpets on this occasion indicated the judgment of God against the enemies of His people.

The seven trumpets who heralded the judgment of God against Jericho were likely the allusion the Lord had in mind when He showed John the seven angels of this world. And how many questions must have been raised!

Note these similarities:

1. Seven trumpets were employed at Jericho. Seven trumpets are used in Revelation.
He puts into the golden censer with fire and then throws it to the earth. As He does so there follows the sound of voices, and lightning and an earthquake. Obviously something stupendous is about to occur. It is then that the trumpets are sounded.

(see Revelation 11:15). After the last trumpet is blown we read these words: “And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunders, and an earthquake, and great hail” (Revelation 11:19).

The sequence is identical in both instances: (1) trumpets are sounded, and (2) the Most Holy Place is opened for its final atonement service. We conclude then that the trumpets of Revelation represent judgment-type events that announce the time of final judgment for the world.

Military Action in the Trumpets

When we take an overview survey of the seven trumpets of Revelation, it becomes clear that they are intended to represent judgments of God in the form of military conflict.

Under the second trumpet we read that “ships were destroyed” (Revelation 8:9). Under the fifth trumpet we see “horses prepared unto battle” (Revelation 6:4) and “horses running” (Revelation 6:8). Both these trumpets also are shown “the number of the army of horsemen” (Revelation 9:16). Under the seventh trumpet we are told that “the nations were angry” and that God will now “destroy them which destroy the earth” (Revelation 11:18).

Not only do we find these direct references to war, but we also find various Old Testament symbols of war in the seven trumpets.

Under the first trumpet we see hail and fire mingled with blood burning one third of the earth’s green vegetation (see Revelation 8:7). Isaiah likened the Assyrian attacks on Israel to a raging fire burning vegetation (see Isaiah 10:16-19). Obadiah likens the military attack of Israel against Edom to “a fire” and “a flame” to burn them up as “stubble.” Under the second trumpet we see “a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea.” In Jeremiah 51:25, 42, Babylon is called a “destroying mountain,” and is immersed in the sea because she destroyed other kingdoms. Under the fourth trumpet we hear a fierce “eagle” (RSV) proclaim, “Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth” (Revelation 8:13). In Hosea 8:1-2 we are told that the “swords of Assyria are laid together.” Under the fifth trumpet we encounter “locusts” that have power to torment like “scorpions” (Revelation 9:3). Joel compared warring armies to locusts (see Joel 1:4-7; 2:2-11).

Clearly, the trumpets are to be viewed as judgments of God on ungodly nations in the form of military conquests against them. When a nation abandons itself to evil, the Lord abandons that nation to war. But His intent is not to punish arbitrarily.

Trumps Announce the Day of Atonement

There is another Old Testament account of trumpet blowing that bears a significant likeness to the trumpets of Revelation.

In Numbers 10:1-10, God commanded Israel to make two silver trumpets. The primary purpose of these trumpets was to assemble the people for solemn events. The trumpets were used at the dedication of the Tabernacle, for the passage through the wilderness, the entry into Canaan, and to announce the time of final judgment for the world.

The imagery of Revelation’s trumpets is very similar to this account. Before the trumpets are sounded, the seven angels who are to blow them stand before God in His heavenly temple. Another angel stands before the golden altar, a task only performed by the high priest on the Day of Atonement. Since Jesus is the High Priest of the heavenly sanctuary, it follows that He is the Angel here described. The High Priest is given much incense, which signifies the work of the altar of incense. The incense in the golden censer is an offering of prayer, and the prayers of the saints are presented before God in heaven. As the priests receive the incense, they pray and intercede for their brethren. The incense is sprinkled upon the altar of incense and is burned in the presence of the Lord, signifying the purchase of their sins.

With the words, “Blow ye the trumpet in the land,” Jeremiah warned Israel of the coming Babylonian invasion. He attributed Israel’s destruction at the hands of their enemies to “the fierce anger of the Lord,” His judgment against His rebellious people (see Jeremiah 4:5-9; 1:16).

Zephaniah, like Jeremiah, equates the day of God’s “wrath” with war and calls for the sounding of the “trumpet” to create “alarm” (see Zephaniah 1:14-17).

Hosea does the same with the Assyrian invasion. “Blow the trumpet,” says Hosea, “to warn of the warfare of Assyria, like a fierce eagle, against Is- rael.” The reason for the coming judgment is stated as rebellion against God’s law. Therefore, God will execute judgment against the nation. Hosea calls for the sounding of the “trumpet” to create “alarm” (see Zephaniah 1:14-17). Under the sixth trumpet we are told that “the nations were angry” and that God will now “destroy them which destroy the earth” (Revelation 11:18).

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The Trumpets Compared to the Plagues

There are many similarities between the seven trumpets and the seven last plagues of Revelation 16.

• Both the first trumpet and the first plague affect the “earth.”
• Both the second trumpet and the second plague affect the seas.
• Both the third trumpet and the third plague affect the fresh waters.
• Both the fourth trumpet and the fourth plague affect the sun.
• Both the sixth trumpet and the sixth plague have to do with the river Euphrates.
• Both the seventh trumpet and the seventh plague involve an earthquake.

So are the trumpets and the plagues the same events? No. While there are similarities, there are also three vital differences:

1. The judgments described in the trumpets are said to come upon only one-third of the earth, one-third of the sea, one-third of the fresh waters, one-third of the sun.

2. The trumpets are blown while the angels are in the temple of God, indicating that probation is still open, intercession has not ceased. When the plagues are poured out the angels have vacated the temple, and none are allowed to enter, indicating that probation has closed; intercession has ceased. The trumpets represent judgments that occur before probation is closed, tempered with mercy in order to warn, awaken and call to repentance. On the other hand, the plagues occur after probation is closed, unmixed with mercy, intended rather than called to repentance.

3. The trumpets demonstrate the exceeding wickedness of sin. The plagues bring a halt to sin. Together, the trumpets and the plagues insure that sin and all the suffering it inflicts will never rise again. All will see how absolutely wrong sin is. And all will confess God’s goodness in eradicating evil from the universe. Peace and harmony will forever reign under the sovereign charge of the One who always was, who is, and who will soon come.

As we have already seen, the trumpets are highly symbolic descriptions of human warfare. They are judgments of God only in the sense that He is the Sovereign Ruler of the universe and nothing occurs without His allowance. “He removeth kings, and setteth up kings” (Daniel 2:21).

“The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will” (Daniel 4:25).

These Scriptures demonstrate that God possesses ultimate authority over the affairs of human beings. The rise and fall of nations is under His control. That is not to say that He desires war or in any sense takes delight in the pain that attends war. What it does mean is that the Lord determines when to allow and when to restrain the evil pursuits of men. In His perfect wisdom He knows when it is best to withdraw His restraining mercy and let people suffer the natural results of their evil ways. The Lord has at least three positive purposes to accomplish by allowing the world to experience the devastating effects of their own departure from His law. (1) Sinners are given an opportunity to realize the terrible nature of their sin. (2) The fallen universe and all honest humans may witness the true character of sin and the penalty due to the sinners for their long history of rebellion. (3) God will be viewed as just when He finally destroys all sin and unrepentant sinners along with Satan, the originator of rebellion.

3. Such judgments are not arbitrarily inflicted by God, nor do they constitute God's first will, but are the inevitable harvest of evil, which God permits in mercy to awaken repentance in the hearts of those who suffer.

The Trumpets Call to Repentance

Under the sixth trumpet we are given an insight into God’s purpose in sending judgments on the world. After much pain and bloodshed the sad statement is made: “And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk. Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their fornications, nor of their slayings” (Revelation 9:20). The trumpet judgments are intended to bring forth repentance for the evils of the land. Tragically, those who suffer under the trumpets do not repent. Nevertheless, it is God’s intent that they would turn from their sins to Him (see 2 Peter 3:9; Ezekiel 33:11).