

Pastor's Point of View: The Trumpet at the End-Times

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When talking about the end times, I often get asked about the timing of the rapture and the second coming of Christ. I believe it is safe to say the majority of evangelical pastors and Christians believe the Lord will rapture the Church before the 7-year tribulation, after which He comes again. I grew up under that preaching and became convinced of that view as a teenager. At 20 years of age in Bible college, my theology professor challenged the class to read the Bible without any preconceived notions about the end times. "I'll prove him wrong," I thought, "I'll read the Bible and have even more proof for my view, the only view which is correct about the end times." Boy, was I wrong! When I took off the dispensational glasses about the end times, I walked away believing the Bible teaches something different about the end times.

How did I come to change my views? While a book by George Ladd on *The Blessed Hope* solidified my current views—his book argues the main terminology of the second coming is interchangeable—four main passages in the New Testament on the end-times trumpet caused me to reject my previous understanding.

So what does the New Testament teach about this trumpet in relationship to the return of Christ? The four passages mentioned below each use a slightly different expression, but I believe they are all speaking of the same thing. The phrases and their corresponding passages are as follows:

- "loud trumpet" (Matthew 24:31)
- "last trumpet" (1 Corinthians 15:52)
- "trumpet of God" (1 Thessalonians 4:16)
- "[seventh] trumpet" (Revelation 10:7; 11:15)

Let me add the context of each passage to help interpret it.

Matthew 24:31

First, Matthew 24 is Jesus' Olivet Discourse when He answered questions from His disciples about His coming and the end of the age (24:3). Now, some scholars get caught up with whether Jesus is talking to His disciples as members of Israel or as those who are simply His followers. Jesus tells them they will have to endure tribulation (24:9), even great tribulation (24:21). These scholars claim the Church will be raptured before the Great Tribulation. So Jesus must be talking to His disciples as Jews for unconverted Israel will not be raptured with the Church.

I happen to believe Jesus is talking to them as His followers and not as Jews, but I don't believe it ultimately matters when these four passages on the trumpet are taken together. Let's look closer at this passage and then compare it with the others.

Jesus teaches His coming will be "after the tribulation of those days" (24:29). Jesus adds that people on earth will see Him "coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send out His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds" (24:30-31). The "loud trumpet" precedes the gathering of God's elect. The gathering of these "elect from the four winds" must be the rapture and resurrection from north, south, east, and west. "But," many exclaim, "the rapture and resurrection are seven years apart, so it cannot be both at the same time!" Since this passage isn't crystal clear, let's look at the next passages.

1 Corinthians 15:52

The greatest teaching in the Bible on the future resurrection comes in 1 Corinthians 15. The Apostle Paul grounds the certainty of the future resurrection of believers in the past resurrection of Jesus Christ. As he concludes his discussion, he says, “Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed” (15:51-52). Clearly, this “last trumpet” will usher in the resurrection of the saints. Everyone agrees on this verse.

1 Thessalonians 4:16

But Paul also talked about the trumpet and the resurrection elsewhere. The main theme of Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians is Christ’s return. Seven of the eight chapters reference this theme. Paul sought to encourage the believers who had lost loved ones in the Lord. He wanted them to know they did not need to lose hope because of how the Lord cares for His people at death and in the future. Paul wrote, “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (4:14-17).

Paul teaches both the resurrection and rapture will occur at the Lord’s second coming after the “trumpet of God.” As a matter of fact, the resurrection will precede the rapture. And Paul isn’t talking to many Jews but the church of Thessalonica primarily consists of Gentile believers. So a dispensationalist cannot say Paul is speaking of Israel being taken at the second coming of Christ after the Church has been raptured seven years before. The resurrection and rapture occur at the “trumpet of God.” The rapture does not happen before the resurrection but vice versa. Furthermore, there are not multiple resurrections of believers in the future because believers are resurrected together at the “first resurrection” (see Revelation 20:5-6).

Revelation 11:15

Finally, let’s consider Revelation 11. The seventh angel sounds his trumpet. This trumpet is the seventh of seven trumpets or the last. When the seventh trumpet sounds, heavenly voices announce, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever” (11:15). While some authors debate whether these trumpets precede the bowl judgments of Revelation 15-16, some scholars believe the seals, trumpets, and bowls are different descriptions of the same kinds of judgments as they grow in intensification. That is to say, the seventh seal, the seventh trumpet and the seventh bowl describe the end, the last judgment before the Lord returns. I know this matter is up for debate, but any honest reading of Revelation 11 reveals the end—the world’s kingdom now belongs to Christ. If that isn’t the end, I don’t know what is. I’m taking an educated guess that the 7th trumpet is the same as the “loud trumpet” (Matthew 24:31), “last trumpet” (1 Corinthians 15:52) and “trumpet of God” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Tying It All Together

Now that we've looked at each passage briefly, let's summarize what we've discovered.

1. The "trumpet of God" leads to the resurrection of believers, which will precede the rapture (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).
2. The resurrection of believers will occur at the "last trumpet" (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:52).
3. Because Paul mentions a trumpet just before the resurrection in both passages, the "trumpet of God" (1 Thessalonians 4:16) and the "last trumpet" (1 Corinthians 15:52) are one-and-the-same.
4. Paul says the trumpet will sound and the resurrection and rapture will occur at the Lord's coming (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).
5. Matthew quotes Jesus as saying He will come again "after the tribulation" with a "loud trumpet" and "gather His elect." Since most scholars see this gathering as a reference to the resurrection and rapture, it is safe to assume Jesus and Paul are talking about the same event.
6. Thus, the trumpet sound which immediately precedes the resurrection and rapture of believers occurs "immediately after the tribulation" (Matthew 24:29).
7. Revelation 11 teaches the 7th/final trumpet happens at the end when Christ takes over this world (at His coming).

Based on these passages and deductions, I believe the Bible teaches Christians will go through the Great Tribulation. At the end of the time, Christ will come again with a loud trumpet call, raising the dead in Christ to life and rapturing those believers who are still alive. Christ will also establish His kingdom here on earth. What a glorious day that will be! May we be found faithful in our worship and service of Him even as we endure difficult days.