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The Meaning and Identification of God's Eschatological Trumpets

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God's eschatological trumpets¹ have probably sparked disproportionately more interest than their scant mention in Scripture might warrant. These trumpets frequently play a role in establishing one's chronology of the end-times, especially in the debate between pre- and posttribulation rapture proponents.² To elucidate this issue more fully we will examine the broad biblical usage of trumpets to ascertain their nature and function. In this way one can better approach the question of the meaning and identification of God's eschatological trumpets.

Trumpets, both human and divine, appear over 140 times in the Bible. The Old Testament contains slightly over 90 percent of these references,³

1. Matt. 24:31; 1 Cor. 15:52; and 1 Thess. 4:16.

2. Typical of the debate over these trumpets would be Thomas Ice and Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future? Two Evangelicals Debate the Question* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 61–65, 157–58; Marvin Rosenthal's *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 187–94, answered by Paul S. Karleen's *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church: Is It Biblical?* (Langhorne, Pa.: BF Press, 1991), 60–62; and earlier as expressed in Gleason L. Archer et al., *Three Views on the Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation?* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1984), 148–49, 179–81, 230–31; and even earlier by Robert H. Gundry's *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 148–51, with a rebuttal by John F. Walvoord's *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation: A Biblical and Historical Study of Posttribulationism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 130–32.

3. These are: 30 in Law; 29 in Joshua and Judges; 37 in the rest of the historical books; 7 in poetic, and 27 in prophetic books; totaling 130.

while 11 are in the New Testament.⁴ This paper will show how God used and will use trumpets concomitant with some of his divine undertakings. This varied usage argues against being able to couple certain trumpet blasts in the New Testament that might identify whether the rapture will be before, during, or after the great tribulation.

An Old Testament Biblical Theology of Trumpets

Old Testament Words for Trumpet

Four words are used to indicate trumpet in the Hebrew text: (1) *šōpār*; (2) *yōbēl*; (3) *qeren*; and (4) *ḥāšōšērâ*. *Šōpār*, the most common term, may be derived from the Akkadian *sapparu*, a wild sheep or ibex, and refers to the use of the horn of such animals.⁵ In the Septuagint it is rendered primarily by *salpinx*, and translated in the KJV as either trumpet or, on occasion, cornet.⁶

Yōbēl may be related to the Phoenician *ybl*, a ram. *Yōbēl* is a rare word,⁷ and only appears by itself in Exodus 19:13 (“when the trumpet sounds long,” NKJV). *Šōpār* and *yōbēl* are used in close proximity in the account of the giving of the law (Exod. 19:13, *yōbēl*; and 19:16 and 19, *šōpār*), and in the same verses of the conquest of Jericho account (Josh. 6:4, 5, 6, 8, and 13). The two words seem to carry about the same meaning.

Qeren is simply an animal horn.⁸ The only times *qeren* is used in the context of a sounding instrument are in Joshua 6:5 (“a long blast with the ram’s horn,” NKJV) and four times in the instrument list of Daniel 3.⁹

Ḥāšōšērâ is the term applied to the trumpet made by the Levitical priests. It first appears in Numbers 10:2, 8, 9, and 10, but is also seen largely in the temple ceremonies of the Chronicles.¹⁰ The word may be onomatopoeic, where the word’s sound

4. These are: 1 in the Gospels; 4 in the Epistles; and 6 in the Apocalypse, totaling 11 uses of *salpinx*. There are, however, 12 additional uses of the verb *salpizō*, to sound a trumpet.

5. Gerhard Friedrich, “σάλπιγξ et al.,” *TDNT*, ed. G. Kittel, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 7:76.

6. Trumpet in 68 places, and cornet only in 1-Chron. 15:28; 2 Chron. 15:14; Ps. 98:6 and Hos. 5:8. Regarding cornet, for example, Ps. 98:6 (97:6 in LXX) has *salpinxin* (trumpet) followed by *salpingos keratinēs* (trumpets of a smaller horn).

7. *Yōbēl* occurs twenty-six times in the OT, but is only translated as *trumpet* in Exod. 19:13 and Josh. 6:4, 5, 6, 8 and 13. In Lev. 25 *yōbēl* appears thirteen times, translated as “jubilee,” as also six times in Lev. 27 and once in Num. 36:4, because on the day of atonement in the fiftieth year the *trumpet* was to sound throughout the land, indicating a time of release.

8. *Qeren* occurs seventy-four times in the OT Hebrew text, and fourteen times in the OT Aramaic text in Dan. 3–7.

9. In Dan. 3:5, 7, 10 and 15, *qeren* is translated simply as “horn” in the RSV, NRSV, NIV, NKJV, NASB, Moffatt, and the Jewish Publication Society translation of 1917; as “cornet” in KJV, ASV, and Young’s; and as “trumpets” in TEV and CEV, although the TEV also has “oboes” in the list!

10. Besides in the initial Numbers references, *ḥāšōšērâ* appears in Num. 31:6; 2 Kings 11:14 (twice as trumpeter); 12:13; 1 Chron. 13:8; 15:24, 28; 16:6, 42; 2 Chron. 5:12–13; 13:12, 14; 15:14; 20:28; 23:13 (twice); 29:26, 27, 28; Ezra 3:10; Neh. 12:35, 41; Ps. 98:6; and Hos. 5:8.

hints at its meaning, and Josephus describes it as “from the quivering reverberation of its sound—the straight trumpet.”¹¹ Far from being a ram’s horn, this instrument was generally made of metal.¹² Josephus’s description is of a narrow tube, somewhat greater in diameter than a flute, with a bell on the end.¹³ The *ḥāšōšērâ* is pictured on both some Hasmonean coins and on the Arch of Titus in Rome, where mouthpieces were part of the instrument to aid in the act of blowing into the narrow end.¹⁴

None of these “instruments” would qualify under the modern connotation of trumpet. Very little variation in pitch could be achieved.¹⁵ They emitted a clear though high-pitched, shrill sound, and were also able to produce one or two harmonic sounds. Murray Harris frankly notes that “the instrument was ill-adapted for music.”¹⁶ For example, none of these “trumpets” could play even such simple tunes as “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” or “Mary Had a Little Lamb.” Instead, Werner categorically states that “all the various usages of the *šōpār* can be viewed under one category: that of a signaling instrument.”¹⁷ Werner concludes that “the function of the *šōpār* was to make noise—be it of earthly or of eschatological character—but not to make music.”¹⁸

The First Old Testament Usage of Trumpet

Since these ancient Hebrew horns were used to signal, what kinds of events or occasions did these instruments signal? Instructively, the very first *šōpār* we read of in Holy Writ was God’s trumpet, sounded at the inauguration of his covenant with Israel. Moses had received instruction on Sinai, and the people had been prepared for the occasion that was to take place on “the third day” (Exod. 19:11). God had told Moses, “And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people” (Exod. 19:11 NKJV). Boundary marks were set up so the people would touch the mountain only on the pain of death (vv. 12–15). The people were to wash their clothes and remain celibate for those three days. They were told that a trumpet would sound to indicate the time when they were to “come near the mountain” (v. 13).

11. Josephus *Antiq.* 3.12.6.

12. Num. 10:2 calls for silver, although Eric Werner, professor of liturgical music at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, notes that bronze, copper, gold, and even bones and shells were sometimes used (“Musical Instruments,” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1962], 3:472).

13. Josephus *Antiq.* 3.12.6.

14. Werner, “Instruments,” 3:472.

15. Harold M. Best and David K. Huttar note that “for either instrument [*šōpār* or *ḥāšōšērâ*] only a limited number of pitches (two or three) could be produced, so that they are far removed from the modern trumpet” (“Music; Musical Instruments,” *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill Tenney [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975], 4:320).

16. Murray J. Harris, “Trumpet,” *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. C. Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 3:873.

17. Werner, “Instruments,” 3:473. Speaking of the *yōbēl*, Werner similarly states that it “was strictly a signaling instrument” (3:472).

18. Werner, “Instruments,” 3:472.

The occasion was rather spectacular. The eyewitness, Moses, records, "Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled" (Exod. 19:16 NKJV). Upon that signal, obviously God's *šōpār* blast, not a human's, Moses "brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain" (Exod. 19:17 NKJV). Sinai was engulfed in flame and smoke, accompanied by an enormous earthquake. Thus the first biblical reference to trumpet is God's terrifying blast to signal his approach to meet his people at Sinai.

Old Testament Categories of Trumpet Usage

Nearly all other Old Testament uses of the trumpet were also for the purpose of signaling, namely, to give notice of something. (1) Some signaled the beginning of something, such as Israel's days of gladness, solemn feast days, and the new moon, when they were to sacrifice peace offerings (Num. 10:10).¹⁹ The feast of trumpets (Lev. 23:24)²⁰ and the year of jubilee were begun with trumpet blasts throughout the land (Lev. 25:9).

(2) Trumpets also signified announcements of a military victory, as when Jonathan had defeated the Philistine garrison at Geba (1 Sam. 13:3-4); Sheba's bitter renunciation of David's kingship (2 Sam. 20:1); or the coronation of a new king such as Absalom intended in Hebron (2 Sam. 15:10); or of Solomon at Jerusalem's Gihon spring (1 Kings 1:33-41).

(3) Many trumpet blasts were actually a summons of one sort or another. Moses was to use the trumpet to call Israel to gather at the tabernacle in the wilderness (Num. 10:2-3, 7), to summon Israel's princes and leaders of thousands (Num. 10:4), and even to summon God's aid against their enemies (Num. 10:9). In Joel's day a fast of repentance, a solemn assembly, was to be convened by sounding the *šōpār* in Zion (Joel 2:15). It might be argued that the purpose of Joshua's trumpet blasts at Jericho was to summon God's mighty power in Israel's behalf, for that was the result (Josh. 6:5, 20). During the Judges era, Ehud summoned Ephraim with trumpets to battle against Moab (Judg. 3:27-28), and that is how Gideon called his father's house into action in his defense (Judg. 6:34). Later, Nehemiah used a trumpet to call for his wall builders to switch swords for trowels (Neh. 4:16-20).

(4) Because of their value as signaling instruments, trumpets were also natural concomitants of war. Troops could be advanced, halted, and retreated by the signal of the *šōpār*: King David's general, Joab, stopped his army's advances on three separate occasions by the trumpet's signal (2 Sam. 2:28; 18:16; 20:22). Gideon and his brave three hundred used *šōpār*s to frighten the Midianites and start a rout of those greedy foes (Judg. 7:16, 18). God himself points out the

19. The use of a trumpet in connection with the new moon festivities is also seen in Ps. 81:3 (v. 4 in the Heb. text).

20. Literally "of blowing," where *tērūt'ā* is used. This word appears thirty-eight times in the OT mostly in connection with trumpets, signaling, alarms, and joyful shouting.

bravery of the horse, one of his most spectacular creations, in his speech in Job 39:24-25, saying the horse disregards the enemies' trumpets during the battle.

(5) Old Testament trumpets also accompanied the joyful festivities of Israel, as when David returned the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:15), and in some of the worship denoted in the Psalms.²¹ Many of the historical references to temple ceremonies incorporate this worship usage as well.²²

(6) There is also a figurative use of the trumpet. God told Isaiah, "lift up thy voice like a trumpet" (Isa. 58:1 KJV). Similarly, in the New Testament Christ's voice is likened to a trumpet in Revelation 1:10, and John likewise hears a voice designated by trumpet sounds in Revelation 4:1. Jesus' reference to those who "sound a trumpet" before their almsgiving (Matt. 6:2) is most likely figurative as well.

(7) Much as the air-raid siren is used today, the *šōpār* was used in Bible times to signal an alarm. Trumpets alerted people to the danger of an enemy attack as from Israel's perennial northern rivals (Joel 2:1),²³ and as seen in Ezekiel's watchman (Ezek. 33:3-6). Several of Israel's prophets used *šōpār* in this way (Jer. 4:5, 19, 21; 6:1, 17; 42:14; Hos. 5:8; 8:1; Amos 2:2; 3:6; Zeph. 1:16).²⁴

(8) Finally, there are several Old Testament uses of trumpet that are clearly eschatological in meaning. God will lift up the banner, the ensign, and blow the trumpet in Isaiah 18:3 in recovering Israel. Again, Isaiah prophesies the regathering and return of Israel to its land after the apocalyptic destruction pictured in Isaiah 24-27. The final two verses of that section, Isaiah 27:12-13, conclude, "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the LORD shall beat off²⁵ . . . and ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and [Israel] shall come . . . and shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem."

It is interesting, and likely significant, that God will signal the regathering of his people Israel by the use of a great trumpet.²⁶ Whether it will be heard by everyone on earth or not, the image used in this eschatological setting is the trumpet.

Jeremiah's notable prophecy of the future doom of Babylon says, "Set up a standard in the land, blow the trumpet [*šōpār*] among the nations, prepare the

21. For example, Ps. 47:5 (v. 6 in Heb. text); 81:3 (v. 4 in Heb. text); 98:6; and 150:3. The horns blown in Dan. 3:5, 7, 10, and 15 might be similarly classified because of their grouping with other instruments, but this could also be seen as a rousing call or announcement to commence worship of Nebuchadnezzar's golden image.

22. See for instance, 1 Chron. 13:8; 15:24, 28; 16:6, 42; 2 Chron. 5:12, 13; 13:12; 15:14; 20:28; 23:13; 29:26, 27, 28. In all these cases the *hāšōšērā* was used and the priests were the "musicians."

23. This alert may have been for an expected temporal attack, but with eschatological import as picturing "the day of the LORD."

24. The day of the Lord often signifies both that which is near at hand as a temporal judgment, and what is always approaching in the eschatological sense.

25. NIV, NKJV, and NRSV have "thresh"; ASV has "beat out his grain," and RSV has "thresh out the grain."

26. HB *šōpār gādōl*; LXX, *tē salpingi tē megalē*. Of the nearly six hundred uses of this adjective in the OT this is the only time *great* modifies trumpet. The NT likewise has but a single reference to a *great* trumpet, Matt. 24:31, where Jesus uses the phrase to indicate the signal that will accompany the regathering of God's elect after the great tribulation—*salpingos megalēs*.

nations against her, call together against her the kingdoms . . ." (Jer. 51:27). The eschatological trumpet will be God's signal to the nations to attack, destroy, and plunder Babylon.

The Final Old Testament Usage of Trumpet

Perhaps instructively, both the first and the last Old Testament references to a trumpet are to one that belongs to the Lord himself. God's final recovery of and defense of Israel is pictured in conjunction with another divine blast. Zechariah says, "And the LORD shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth like the lightning; and the Lord GOD shall blow the trumpet . . . and the LORD of hosts shall defend them . . . And the LORD their God shall save them in that day as the flock of his people . . ." (Zech. 9:14–16 KJV). It could not be more clear that another of God's *šōpār* blasts is again in view. God uses the trumpet again to signal his divine presence in behalf of Israel.

In summary, the Old Testament *šōpār* was used as a signaling instrument in various aspects of the civilian, military, and religious life of the people. God used the trumpet too, initially at Sinai to gather Israel to his covenant ceremony. God promises to use the trumpet again eschatologically in his recovery and defense of his covenant people Israel.

A New Testament Theology of Trumpets

Of the twenty-three possible New Testament references to trumpet (see note 4), all but five are eschatological.²⁷ However, of these eighteen eschatological occurrences, all except three verses are speaking of the seven angels who sound the trumpet judgments in Revelation 8–11. Because of the significance of these three verses, we will direct our attention to them. One is from the lips of Jesus, and two are in Paul's writings.

Matthew 24:31

Jesus began his Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24–25) by asserting the future complete destruction of Israel's temple after he walked by it with his disciples (24:1–2). The disciples in turn asked him when this would occur and for a sign of his coming and of the end of the age (24:3). Jesus then prophesied a future landscape of religious deception, betrayal and persecution, wars and natural disasters, yet a spreading of the gospel "in all the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come" (24:14 NKJV).

In the very next verse, Matthew 24:15, Christ predicted the coming of the abomination of desolation²⁸ coupled with "great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be"

27. Matt. 6:2 is probably figurative; 1 Cor. 14:8 is temporal; Heb. 12:19 references the Sinai experience; and Rev. 1:10 and 4:1 speak of voices that were like trumpets.

28. Many believe this one is called "the prince that shall come . . . [who] shall confirm the covenant with many for one week" (Dan. 9:26–27 KJV); "the man of sin . . . the son of perdition, who . . . exalteth himself above all that is called God" (2 Thess. 2:3–4 KJV); the beast that rises out of the sea (Rev. 13:1); and the little horn of Daniel's fourth beast (Dan. 7:8, 20–21).

(Matt. 24:21). Because in Matthew 24:29–30 Christ states that his return in "power and great glory" will be "immediately after the tribulation of those days" (NKJV), this becomes a key chronological reference. Then in 24:31 Jesus says he will "send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (NKJV).

We should notice several things about Matthew 24:31. It is clearly eschatological, occurring immediately after the great tribulation. There is the use of a great trumpet sound,²⁹ and Christ's angels effect the gathering of his elect from all over the world.

Notice also what is missing in Matthew 24:31 that may be crucial to arguments seeking to equate this verse with rapture verses that also mention a trumpet. First, there is no mention of resurrection.³⁰ There is also no mention of transformation of living believers. Indeed, an instantaneous transformation and a split second meeting with Christ in the air would counter the stated gathering work of Christ's angels.

1 Thessalonians 4:16

Writing some twenty years after Jesus expressed the prophecy recorded in Matthew, Paul tells the Thessalonians that Jesus' return from heaven would coincide with a shout,³¹ the voice of an archangel, and "with the trump of God." Coupled with this return would be the resurrection of "the dead in Christ," followed almost instantaneously by the

29. The UBS has *salpingos megalēs*, supported by Aleph, five other uncials, a few cursives, most of the Syriac versions, and a handful of church fathers. It is given a "B" reading, indicating some doubt as to the choice. The TR has *phōnēs* between "trumpet" and "great," indicating "sound of a great trumpet." This reading is supported by Vaticanus and three other uncials, by a host of cursive MSS and lectionaries, but no fathers or versions. Henry Alford favors a third reading, that of D, the OL, Vg, Hilary, Jerome and Augustine, which has a *kai* ("and") between "trumpet" and "sound." That would separate the trumpet and the great voice, possibly making the "great sound" an explanation of the trumpet even as 1 Thess. 4:16 does. But none of these readings is crucial to one's understanding of this passage. Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, ed. E. F. Harrison (reprint, Chicago: Moody, 1958), 1:243–44.

30. However, Daniel explicitly teaches that "at the time of the end" (Dan. 11:40), when Israel is being overrun by the Antichrist in the final stage of the great tribulation period, "at that time shall Michael stand up" (Dan. 12:1) to defend Israel. This is immediately coupled with resurrection language in Dan. 12:2. I believe this indicates the resurrection of OT saints at the conclusion of the tribulation. The context is entirely Jewish and contains no hint of a rapture.

31. *En keleusmati* indicates a loud command, a command shout, a battle shout, or any voice signal, even that of a captian to his rowers—essentially the command of one who has authority. That shout may be explained exegetically by the two phrases that follow it (Alford, *Greek Testament*, 3:275). Thomas Constable ("1 Thessalonians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck [Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1983–85], 2:704), however says, "These three phenomena may all refer to the same thing, but probably they are three separate almost simultaneous announcements heralding Christ's return." C. F. Hogg and W. E. Vine (*The Epistles to the Thessalonians* [Fincastle, Va.: Scripture Truth, n.d.], 143) paraphrase an exegetical understanding of the three phrases as "with a shout in the archangel's voice, even with the voice of the trump of God."

“rapture”³² of those believers who would still be living on earth at that point.³³ Paul hoped to include himself in that latter grouping (“then *we* [emphasis Paul’s] who are living and remaining”), although in other passages he indicated he could die before Christ would return (Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:1, 8).

Two key ideas to understand about this text are that (1) it definitely and without question speaks of the rapture³⁴ of believers who are termed “in Christ,”³⁵ and (2) a trumpet is used to signal this event.³⁶

1 Corinthians 15:52

Paul founded both the church at Thessalonica and the church at Corinth on his second missionary journey about A.D. 50–51. In fact, 1 Thessalonians was penned on that journey. About three years later, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus. In 1 Corinthians 15:52, Paul obviously had in mind the same event of which he spoke in 1 Thessalonians 4:16.³⁷ Several ideas are constant: (1) dead believers will be raised;³⁸ (2) living saints will be transformed; and (3) a trumpet will sound. However, several new concepts emerge as well: (1) There is more elucidation on the rapid nature of the en-

32. Rapture comes from the Latin *raptus*, derived from *rapere*, the verb used to translate the Greek *harpagēsometha*, which means to snatch away, whether violently or otherwise. It is used of Philip being caught away from the eunuch by the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:39), of one being caught up to the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2, 4), and of the woman’s child (Jesus), being snatched away to heaven (Rev. 12:5) and in nine other NT texts.

33. The best treatment of this passage I have seen is Robert L. Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. F. E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 11:278–80.

34. There are only a few NT verses that with any certainty can be said to indicate the rapture. This is one of them. Others are probably John 14:3; 1 Cor. 15:51–52; Phil. 3:20–21; Col. 3:4; and 1 John 3:2. Only those that indicate an instantaneous transformation from mortal to immortal or a sudden appearance in the air with Christ qualify. Just as OT texts must be distinguished between the first and second comings of Christ because they often predict “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that would follow” (1 Peter 1:11), even so, not all verses about Christ’s second coming can be declared dogmatically to refer to the rapture.

35. I will spare the reader an extended discussion of the distinctions that could be listed between Israel and the church, only to note that the term “Israel” always refers to either Jacob or his descendants in the seventy-three times it occurs in the NT, and that the phrase “in Christ” is a significant Pauline expression to refer to those who have uniquely been placed into the spiritual body of Christ during the church age.

36. Some discussion of the purpose of God using a trumpet in conjunction with this event will conclude this paper.

37. The Bishop of Derry (*The Bible Commentary*, ed. F. C. Cook [New York: Scribner’s, 1881], 9:724), notes that this verse points to 1 Cor. 15:52, but that it “is perhaps not exactly parallel” with Matt. 24:31.

38. Those who are raised must be believers because Paul uses the phrase, “*we* shall not all sleep” (emphasis mine).

tire transaction—“in the twinkling of an eye.”³⁹ (2) The trumpet is called “the last trump.”

This latter phrase has been the occasion of much discussion. Charles Hodge held that this trumpet will be “the last that is ever to sound.”⁴⁰ Many identify the last trump with the seventh angelic trumpet sounding in Revelation 11:15.⁴¹ However, *eschatē* need not mean (as Hodge insisted) the very last trumpet that is ever to sound, though it could mean that. With regard to time, *eschatos* often indicates last in relation to something preceding it.⁴² Thus, the vineyard workers hired at the eleventh hour were last that day (Matt. 20:8, 12, 14), but obviously other workers would be hired the next day. Likewise, the vineyard owner in Mark 12 who rented out his land sent servants to collect the rent, then sent his own son last (v. 6). The son was the last of that series of sent ones, but the parable indicates that the owner would next visit the tenants himself. Jesus also said of a man whom a demon had repossessed that “the last state of that man is worse than the first” (Matt. 12:45 KJV), but this does not imply that such had to be his final state.

Henry Alford interprets *eschatos* in this way also, warning that the word must not be “pressed too closely as if there were necessarily no trump after it,—but is *the trump* at the *time of the end*, the last trump, in a wide and popular sense.”⁴³ In this view, the last trump could be the last of *this* age, with other possible trumpet sounds to follow, such as any that might be scheduled during the tribulation as seen in Revelation 8–11.⁴⁴

39. In an effort to express this rapid change, the NLT translates *rhipe* as “blinking”; the NIV has “twinkling,” but translates *atomō* as “in a flash”; the TEV, “in an instant” and “blinking”; the JB, “it will be instantaneous”; the CEV, “suddenly, quicker than the blink of an eye”; while the ASV, NASB, RSV, NRSV, KJV, NKJV, Moffatt, Weymouth, Williams, and Young all use the standard “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” It is literally “in an atom,” and as William Biederwolf nicely puts it, “a little indivisible point of time” (*The Millennium Bible* [1924; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1964], 442). Charles Hodge explains it as “a portion of time so short as to be incapable of further division” (*An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* [reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965], 356).

40. Hodge, *1 Corinthians*, 356.

41. This would include midtribs, posttribs, and pre-wrath rapture proponents. Their identification is the same; their timing is what distinguishes them. Midtribs place the seventh and final trump near the middle of the tribulation; posttribs place it at the end; and pre-wrath rapturists argue it is near the end, but before God’s wrath is poured out. See, for example, Marvin J. Rosenthal, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville: Nelson, 1990), 193.

42. BAGD 314.

43. Alford, *Greek New Testament*, 2:620, emphasis his. Hans Conzelmann (*1 Corinthians*, trans. J. W. Leitch [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975]), 291, agrees: “The ‘last’ trumpet means not the last in a series of trumpet blasts, but ‘the eschatological one.’” So does Gordon D. Fee (*First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 802), who says it simply “signals the End.” Gerhard Friedrich says it “is not the last in a series of trumpets” (*TDNT* 7:87).

44. Gordon H. Clark (*First Corinthians: A Contemporary Commentary* [Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1975], 312) says, “The 1st trumpet of I Corinthians is the last trumpet of *this* age,” and that it is not to be identified with the seventh trumpet of Rev. but with Paul’s in 1 Thess. 4:16.

Conclusion

Trumpets have been used as signals for many purposes: to signify the commencement of something; to announce something; to summon people; for military purposes; in festivals of worship; to alarm people of danger; and in eschatological settings.

God's own trumpet blast sounded at Sinai (Exod. 19:16; Heb. 12:19) and will do so again in connection with regathering Israel (Isa. 18:3; 27:12–13) and also in conjunction with a future defending and saving of Israel (Zech. 9:14–16). God's trumpet will sound at the rapture of the church (1 Thess. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:52), and also when Christ returns with his angels whom he then sends out to regather his elect from the ends of the earth (Matt. 24:31).

God loves trumpets and likes to use them as significant sound signals denoting his presence and marking certain of his divine workings. The use of God's divine trumpet blasts is rare, but extensive and varied enough to discourage speculation that couples different trumpet events together.

In no case should this be more clear than with an attempt to link Matthew 24:31 with 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 1 Corinthians 15:52. The former has no resurrection, no change from mortal to immortal, and no instantaneous divine transfer to meet Christ in the air. It pictures a coming of Christ and has a trumpet, but that is the extent of the similarities.⁴⁵ On the other hand, 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 1 Corinthians 15:52 are clearly rapture verses that speak of the immediate resurrection of New Testament believers who are in Christ. The Matthew 24:31 passage talks of Christ sending out angels to gather God's elect, and resembles Isaiah 18:3 and 27:12–13, where Israel is in view. Perhaps significant is the fact that Isaiah 27:13 and Matthew 24:31 are the only two texts in the entire Bible that call the trumpet a "great trumpet."

A second connection is sometimes sought between 1 Corinthians 15:52 and the seventh or "last" trumpet to sound in Revelation 11:15. Such an identification, however, is superficial and imaginary. It lacks any scriptural confirmation.⁴⁶ It could be the last trump of this age, meaning the church age, with more trumpets to follow in the next stage of human history, such as would be posited under a futuristic interpretation of the Book of Revelation.

A final suggested possibility for the meaning of the "last" trump is to take it as last in a series, but not in a series of eschatological trumpets. One can recall the series of *šōpār*s that had to be sounded in the wilderness to move Israel from one place to another. Numbers 10:5–6 mentions this procedure. An initial blast would signal, for example, to *pack up* their belongings. Later, there

45. These omissions could well be intentional on Jesus' part, so as *not* to cause confusion with the two incontrovertible rapture passages revealed through Paul.

46. James O. Buswell (*A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963], 2:459) says, "Frankly, I Corinthians 15:52 does not tell us of what series this particular trumpet is the 'last.' Paul does not say, 'the last trumpet which ever will sound in the history of the universe.' Nor does he explain 'last' of what series." Still, Buswell thinks Paul refers to the seventh trumpet in Revelation.

would be a *šōpār* to signal it was time for the twelve tribes to *line up*. The last trump of that series would signal that it was time to *move on out*. Paul's unique titling of this rapture trumpet as the "last" trump would match the process just described. It would also perhaps be familiar to Paul's readers in Corinth, since Paul had earlier detailed a number of events in Israel's wilderness journeying in 1 Corinthians 10:1–11.⁴⁷ Paul's conclusion in that section was that these things happened to Israel as examples for us and were written for our admonition (1 Cor. 10:11). Thus, the last trump could be a reference, as in Israel's wilderness wanderings, to the "move on out" *šōpār*. Not unlike Paul, this would be a unique literary way to refer to the divine *šōpār* blast at the rapture when millions of living saints will suddenly and miraculously be called to "move on out."

Just as a divine trumpet blast signaled God's presence at Sinai, so also God's trumpet will declare Christ's coming at the rapture. Even as human trumpets sounded in Leviticus 25 on the jubilee, so God's trumpet call will proclaim liberty for his saints as they are delivered from the restraints of death and sin in this world by being caught up "in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17 NKJV).

47. These include drinking water from the smitten rock (v. 4), lusting after Egyptian food (v. 6), the golden calf idolatry (v. 7), fornication with the Midianites (v. 8), and murmuring over the manna (v. 9).