

THE FATHERS ON THE FUTURE

A 2nd-Century Eschatology for the
21st-Century Church

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Go Deeper Excursus 24

The Last Trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52 vs. the Seventh Trumpet in Revelation 11:15

On very rare occasions, some commentators have attempted to identify the “last trumpet” of 1 Corinthians 15:52 with the sounding of the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15.¹ It is difficult to find support for this identification in published works on eschatology, 1 Corinthians, or the Book of Revelation, as its weaknesses, discussed briefly in this excursus, are so many. The connection is usually made by popular-level end-times enthusiasts and rarely among commentators and scholars. More in keeping with the question are the words of G. K. Barrett: “It would be wrong to take the *last trumpet* here to mean the last of a series (such as the seven in Revelation); it means the trumpet-call that accompanies the End.”²

Several considerations make association of the seventh trumpet in Revelation and the “last trumpet” of 1 Corinthians 15:52 untenable. First, in chapter 10 of *The Fathers on the Future*, I warned against confusing the symbolic events John saw and heard within the apocalyptic visions with the actual fulfillment of those events that will take place in the future. The sounding of the trumpet by the seventh angel in 11:15 belongs to the vision that John experienced at the end of the first century. John was witnessing symbols of future things, not the future things themselves. In keeping with this principle, the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15 was sounded during John’s vision; it will not be literally sounded in the future.

Second, even supposing the seventh angel’s sounding of the trumpet in Revelation was pointing to a more literal trumpet blast of the future, this does not imply that the “last trumpet” in 1 Corinthians 15:52 is the same as the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15. Paul makes no indication

¹ E.g., Norman B. Harrison, *The End: Re-Thinking the Revelation* (Minneapolis: Harrison Service, 1941), 75. More common, though, is the identification of the “last trumpet” with that of Matthew 24:31 (G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentary [London: Black, 1966], 107). However, we have already demonstrated that the “trumpet” in Matt 24:31 is the trumpet that sounds at the gathering of Israel from exile (see chapter 7 of *The Fathers on the Future*).

² C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1968), 381.

that ἔσχατος is the last of a series; and in any case, because Revelation was likely written some forty years later, and some thirty years after Paul's death, it was impossible that Paul intended ἔσχατος to bear the weight of "last in a series of seven trumpets that will be blown in the book of Revelation." Even if we were to accept the Neronian dating of Revelation (c. AD 68),³ this would be over ten years after 1 Corinthians and still after Paul's death. I suppose one could posit that Paul wrote better than he knew and that ἔσχατος refers prophetically to the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15, but Paul and his readers would not have been aware of the referent until many years later. Paul's use of "last trumpet" in 1 Corinthians 15:52, though, had to have meant something to both himself and his audience.

This leaves us with the possibility that John (or the Spirit working through John) arranged the trumpet visions of Revelation with the intention that the seventh angel sounding the trumpet would correspond with Paul's "last trumpet" in 1 Corinthians 15:52. However, Revelation made no effort at drawing attention to such a connection. Had the vision been dependent on Paul's solitary reference to the trumpet as the "last," it seems likely he would have designated the seventh trumpet with that adjective to make the allusion obvious. Rather, Revelation 11:15 simply says, "Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet (καὶ ὁ ἕβδομος ἄγγελος ἐσάλπισεν)." If an allusion to 1 Corinthians 15:52 were intended, then John, a master at intertextuality, failed in this instance to make the connection. Also, since Paul associates the "last trumpet" exclusively with the resurrection and transformation of the righteous in 1 Corinthians 15:52 (and in 1 Thess 4:16), we would expect to see at least a passing acknowledgment of this ultimate salvation and defeat of death through resurrection in Revelation 11. Instead, we have an announcement of the establishment of the kingdom of the Messiah and his eternal reign (11:15–18). In light of these considerations, it seems artificial and forced—and perhaps even desperate—to equate the "last trumpet" of 1 Corinthians 15:52 with "the seventh angel sounding" in Revelation 11:15.

To avoid eisegetical anachronism, it is best to link Paul's eschatological trumpet announcing the resurrection and transformation of the saints in 1 Corinthians 15:52 with the "trumpet of God" in 1 Thessalonians 4:15, which itself associates the trumpet with the announcement of the coming final Day of the Lord associated with the coming of Christ as mediator of God's theophanic visitation in judgment.⁴

³ Cf. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th rev. ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990), 957–61.

⁴ See further discussion in Michael J. Svigel, "The Apocalypse of John and the Rapture of the Church: A Reevaluation," *TrinJ* NS 22.1 (2001): 39–45.