

## **Revelation 8:2-9:21**

### **The Seven Trumpets**

1. The groups of sevens in the book of Revelation are in a pattern. The first six in each series are presented, and then there is a break between the sixth and the seventh item. During the break, someone is given a certain task or series of tasks to perform followed by a promise from God for the welfare of those who are obedient to Him.
2. In **Revelation 2 and 3**, the seven churches are described. The focus is on the development of the Christian church down through the centuries. In **Revelation 5:1-8:1**, we studied the seven seals. Those seven seals focused on the western civilized nations and how they have been impacted by the Christian church. In comparing the seven seals with the seven trumpets, we notice that each group is divided into groups of four and then three. The seven seals began with the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*; while with the seven trumpets, the last three are identified as *The Great Woes*. Between the sixth and the seventh seals, we read about four angels holding the winds of strife; under the sixth trumpet we find four angels bound near the river Euphrates. (Revelation 7:1-2; 9:14,15)
3. There are also interesting **contrasts between the seals and the trumpets**. As we have noted, the angels between the sixth and seventh seals are holding back the winds of strife in order to delay judgment. By contrast, under the sixth trumpet, four bound angels are released in order to bring about judgment.
4. Under **the seventh seal**, there was silence in heaven. Under **the seventh trumpet**, there were loud voices proclaiming the second coming of Christ. (Revelation 11:15)
5. There are also many interesting **parallels between the seven trumpets and the seven plagues** or “bowls” of God’s anger that we will discuss in Revelation 16. However, the trumpets are given as warning judgments while the plagues are final judgments. God is trying to tell us through these trumpet messages to be aware of what is coming. Watch out!
6. As we mentioned earlier, each of these groups of sevens begins in the sanctuary in heaven. It is the universal control center surrounding God’s throne.
7. So, in our sequence so far, we have the seven churches dealing with the development of the Christian church; then the seven seals dealing with western civilization and its Christianization. **But with the trumpets, we find that God dealt with His Jewish friends (Judaism) and His Middle Eastern friends (Islam). The trumpets deal with issues involving the Eastern Orthodox Church as well as the Roman Catholic Church.** The seventh trumpet involves all of humanity. So, we will now turn back and cover the history of mankind from a different perspective.
8. How does God discipline or punish His children? What happens when God exercises His anger or wrath in judgment? There are many examples throughout the Old Testament and some in the New Testament. (Judges 2 & 3; Romans 1:18-26; Hosea 11:1-8) There are two common ways in which God brings judgments upon His children. One way is simply to remove His restraint and allow us to reap the natural consequences of our sinful behavior. Another way is to remove His protection and allow our enemies to punish us or even conquer us. At the third coming when the New Jerusalem descends to this earth, God will present His case in review as a grand panorama of the history of the great controversy. God will weep as His sinful children perish. He will then clean up the mess using divine fire

to cleanse this earth from disease, sickness, sin, and anything that might pollute in order to remake it like the Garden of Eden. (Isaiah 66:23,24)

9. One interesting feature of God's punishment is mentioned in Ezekiel 9:6 and Jeremiah 25:17-26. **God's judgments often have begun with His own people.** Why is that? Through several parables Jesus made it very clear that "to whom much is given, much is expected." (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27) So, if the judgments represented by those trumpets are to be poured out on the earth, we might expect God to begin with punishing/disciplining His own children, especially those who have been particularly favored by Him down through the generations.
10. Professor Edwin Thiele outlined the seven trumpets in Revelation as follows:
  - (1) The first trumpet symbolizes the Divine judgments that came upon Jerusalem and the Jewish nation when it set itself against Christ and His followers;
  - (2) The second symbolizes judgments upon the western Roman world;
  - (3) The third fell upon the professed church of Christ when it allowed itself to become defiled and sent forth streams of death rather than life;
  - (4) The fourth was the ensuing darkness of the Middle Ages;
  - (5) The fifth constituted the Mohammedan scourges that swept over the Middle East and into Europe;
  - (6) The sixth consisted of the scourges that continued under Turkish control of large sections of Asia, Africa, and Europe; and
  - (7) The seventh constitutes the final terrifying outbreaks of human passion and hate that characterize the final period of earth's history prior to the second coming of Christ. Edwin R. Thiele, *Outline Studies in Revelation* (Angwin, California.: the author, N. D.), p. 162.
11. We have already noted that the book of Revelation is full of descriptions of unusual animals and people doing strange things. **Are those supposed to be literal? Or, are they poetic expressions by prophets attempting to describe what they saw in vision?** This should not surprise us as we have seen such things in the Old Testament. (Daniel 7,8) Revelation uses many symbols from the Old Testament. Compare for example Joel 1:4-7; 2:2-11 where a locust plague in Joel's day is used to describe the day of the Lord. Under the fifth trumpet, we will find locusts which have teeth like lion's teeth and act like herds of horses. These are not intended to be taken literally. Rather, they are symbols of what is coming.
12. **The first trumpet:** In the first trumpet, we find hail and fire mixed with blood falling on the earth. Has such a thing ever happened before? See Genesis 19 for a description of what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah. (Compare Jeremiah 17:27; Lamentations 2:4; Ezekiel 15:6-8; Obadiah 18) One general principle that we should notice is that trumpets are often associated with calls to war and actual battle scenes in the Bible.
13. As we turn to consider the first trumpet, we will recognize that **hail, fire, and blood are taken to characterize warfare and destruction.**
14. Repeatedly in these verses, we find "**one-third**" mentioned. This is to signify a significant portion of a city or a country but not the whole. First of all, we can confidently conclude that

the terrible judgment of God falling on His own people was in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. In trying to identify the exact context of this first judgment, we note the following:

- 1) Judgments usually fall on God's professed people first.
- 2) Both the seven churches and the seven seals appear to cover the time period beginning from the time of John himself in the 1<sup>st</sup> century all the way to the second coming of Christ. It is reasonable to conclude that this warfare and destruction which we have identified as the destruction of Jerusalem would also happen in the 1<sup>st</sup> century—in the days of John.
- 3) Grass was used in the Old Testament to represent people flourishing in righteousness, (Isaiah 44:3,4) and trees are often used to represent groups of people flourishing. (Psalms 1:3; 52:8; 92:12) Even Jesus compared the children of Israel to grape vines and olive trees. (Matthew 21:18,19)
- 4) These trumpet judgments seem to involve large groups of people who have had access to the Scriptures and should have understood how to act in Christian ways.

15. **The second trumpet.** Read Revelation 8:8,9. In Revelation 17:1,15, we are told specifically that: "The waters you saw, on which the prostitute is sitting, are nations, peoples, races, and languages." (GNB) The living creatures in the sea and their ships would likely represent a significant group of human beings along with their governments and their possessions. A mountain which plunged into the sea would represent a hostile tribe with its peoples attacking other groups of people. This could easily represent the decline and fall of the Roman Empire with its multiple invasions from the 10 kings (horns) of Daniel 7:24. The Visigoths wiped out an entire Roman army including Valens, the Roman emperor at the time. Some 30 years later, the Visigoths ravaged Rome itself. Some 45 years later, the Vandals from northern Africa ransacked Rome for a second time. They "vandalized" the city for two weeks, taking everything they thought would be of any value to them. They carried all of that material back to Carthage in North Africa. One of the items that they took with them was the solid-gold, seven-branched lampstand—the very one, made under Moses' directions, that in A.D. 70 Titus took to Rome from the Temple in Jerusalem. (See Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chap. 36.)
16. For many years the Vandals behaved like pirates, sailing out from Carthage to capture ships or even attack seaports conquering them and taking whatever they wanted. During this time in the Christian church, there were huge groups of Christians arguing over the question of whether or not Christ existed and was fully God even before His birth on this earth. The Ostrogoths, the Visigoths, and the Vandals were Aryan nations which did not believe in Christ's pre-existence and divinity while most of the rest of the 10 nations represented in prophecy were Trinitarian nations who believed in Christ's divinity and pre-existence.
17. Thus, some of the wars involved religious issues. We need to note that during this time, virtually all of these nations and armies fighting each other claimed to be Christian.
18. **The third trumpet.** Read Revelation 8:10,11. Who is the wormwood or "bitter" star? In Job 38:7, the angels are described as stars. Wormwood is a bitter and poisonous plant. Jesus Himself described Satan as having fallen from heaven. (Luke 10:18) The war in heaven that led to this fall is described in Revelation 12:7-12. **Therefore, It is very likely that the star fallen from heaven is a reference to Satan himself.** We would like to suggest that

the third trumpet represents the confusion and corruption of Christianity by ideas introduced by Satan himself. This occurred largely after Rome became a Christian empire and occurred largely under the direction of the pope.

19. **The fourth trumpet.** Read Revelation 8:12. In looking over the first four trumpets, we notice that they, in fact, form two pairs. The first trumpet describes Rome's conquest of Jerusalem. The second trumpet describes the devastation that invading nations caused to the Roman Empire itself. Similarly, the third and fourth trumpets are paired. **Under the third trumpet, error polluted Christ's church on earth; and in the fourth, errors came into the church to confuse us regarding Christ's work in heaven.**
20. Western civilization fell into decay, and education became almost unknown. During this time, the Bishop of Rome trying to exercise his power over all of Christianity angrily "excommunicated" the entire Greek Orthodox Church including its millions of members for several reasons including the fact that they continued to observe the seventh-day Sabbath!
21. **The fifth trumpet:** Read Revelation 8:13-9:12. This is the biblical description of Islam and its conquests. The last three trumpets are described also as "woes" or "horrors." In the fifth trumpet, the fallen star or angel from heaven—probably Satan—received the key to "the shaft of the bottomless pit." As the bottomless pit was opened, clouds like the smoke of a great furnace billowed out, and the sun and the air grew dark. From those clouds a swarm of flying locusts emerged. Those were not ordinary, literal locusts; they had human faces and wore crowns of gold and had woman's hair. They were arrayed like horses ready for battle. Their tails were like scorpion's tails. They were allowed to torture the people of God except for those who had the seal of God. And strangely enough, despite the fact that they are described as having lion's teeth, they were forbidden to eat anything for five months. And the one in charge of them was a king called "the angel of the bottomless pit" otherwise known as "Abaddon" in Hebrew or "Apollyon" in Greek meaning the "destroyer." (Revelation 9:1-11)
22. **The sixth trumpet.** Read Revelation 9:12-21. As soon as the fifth trumpet was completed, a second woe under the sixth trumpet followed. A voice from the golden altar in the heavenly sanctuary commanded the release of the four angels that were bound at "the great river Euphrates." Those angels had been held for a considerable period of time represented by, "An hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men." (KJV) Or, "The hour, and day, and month, and year." (*Young's Literal Translation*)
23. Then suddenly, John saw an immense army of 200 million riding on horseback. They were wearing red, blue, and yellow breastplates—the color of fire, sapphire, and sulfur. And they went forth to massacre a third of mankind.
24. While some would like to interpret this in terms of events that happened long ago (preterists) and others believe that they have not yet happened (futurists), Seventh-day Adventists have followed the lead of great biblical scholars like Martin Luther; Joseph Mede, a Cambridge University professor; and Isaac Newton, the scientist and biblical scholar, in believing that these two woes represent the rise and progress of Islam.
25. It is interesting to notice that in the fifth and sixth trumpets, large numbers of creatures with specific characteristics such as poisonous tails operated in specific time slots and from definite locations.
26. There are also some **contrasts between the fifth trumpet and the six trumpet.** Whereas the fifth trumpet represents the torturing of God's people, the sixth trumpet actually has

them being killed.

27. We have already mentioned that “a third” of something represents a specific entity in each case. Let us look at some examples: 1) The Jewish nation and its capital, Jerusalem; 2) The Western Roman Empire and its capital city, Rome; 3) Western Christianity as headed up by the Roman Catholic Church; 4) The Kingdom of God centered in the heavenly sanctuary; and 5) The Greek Orthodox Church (Eastern Roman Empire) and its religious and political capital, Constantinople. Thus, the Islamic invasion began in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century, and it eventually grew powerful enough to conquer the headquarters of the Eastern Orthodox Church in Constantinople in A.D. 1453.
28. Islam certainly played a major role in the events of the Middle East during the time period covered by these trumpets. Let us very briefly consider some of the teachings of Islam. In A.D. 612, Mohammed began to believe that God was giving him visions. At the time, he was living in Mecca and working as a merchant. His primary conviction was that there is only one God whom he called “Allah” which is the Arabic form of one of the names for God in the Hebrew Bible. He believed that the polytheism of the people around him was completely wrong. He also believe that Noah, Abraham, and Jesus were prophets of God, but that he was the final and most important prophet of all. Five times every day, faithful Muslims are expected to pray bowing toward Mecca. Their usual prayers begin and end with, “There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is His prophet.”
29. The Qur’an, sometimes transliterated as the Koran, is a book of readings which are meant to be recited in Arabic and from memory. The word *Islam* means to be “fully surrendered” to the will of “Allah” as taught in the Qur’an. The Qur’an is full of many prophecies about the end of time. Finally, Allah will consign the wicked to hell to drink blood and boiling water in burning agony forever. But, Allah will be very kind and generous to the “righteous.” They will be invited into heaven to live with Him and to dine on sumptuous banquets with gazelle-eyed virgins.
30. The Qur’an also speaks of holy war or “Jihad.” It suggests that those who are willing to fight holy wars on behalf of Islam will receive special blessings when they get to heaven.
31. Mohammed himself honored Christians and Jews because of their belief in the Book. In fact, he called them “people of the Book.” The extreme hatred between Arab and Jew is a relatively recent development arising partially out of Nazi anti-Semitism and Israeli militarism and, in fact, is in strong contrast with traditional Islamic behavior.
32. Mohammed started a series of holy wars which were carried on by his followers for hundreds of years. When they conquered a foreign nation, they intended for everyone to become Muslim. One could, however, continue with one’s former beliefs but only as a second-class citizen. At times, that person would be forbidden even to ride a horse or own a weapon and he was expected to pay extra taxes and sometimes to wear a distinctive identifying badge suggesting he was not a Muslim. And as you might expect, such other religious groups were forbidden from seeking converts from among Muslims. Muslims themselves were forbidden to change their religion. And the Qur’an specifically requires Muslims to execute any of their own people who convert to Christianity.
33. In the year A.D. 711, 7000 Muslims crossed from North Africa to Spain under their general, Tariq. (The name Gibraltar means “Mount [‘Jabal’ in Arabic] of Tariq.”) Twenty-one years later after overrunning much of Spain and advancing into France, the Muslims met Charles Martel, the Hammer, a Christian general who drove the Muslims back at the Battle of

Tours. The two armies were so closely matched in size and power that they were each afraid to start the battle. The European Christians had developed stirrups, a new feature for their saddles. That gave them some advantages when riding horses in battle, and they finally managed to rout and turned back the Muslim invaders.

34. In later years and farther east, Muslims made repeated attacks against Constantinople. At one point they attacked the city with 1800 ships. The Greek Christians fought back with what was known as "Greek fire" shot from bows. Many Muslim ships were burned up.
35. Around A.D. 1000, a new force entered the fray. The Seljuk Turks advanced westward out of the southern Russian prairies. They adopted the Muslim religion and forced their way south toward the river Euphrates. But, the military forces stationed along the mountain passes in Persia prevented them from reaching Constantinople. Unfortunately, just at that time, the Byzantine emperor died leaving his son, a young boy, in charge. The Empress, the boy's mother, quickly married one of the generals of the army, Romanus, who set off with a military force to fight the Seljuk Turks. He was decisively beaten in 1071 at the Battle of Manzikert near the headwaters of the Euphrates River. That opened the way for the Turks to flood through the passes in the mountains, and they quickly they took control of most of Asia Minor.
36. Might they have been represented by the 200 million horsemen mentioned in Revelation 9:16? The Muslims had been trying to conquer Constantinople for hundreds of years. Sometime later, the Ottoman Turks developed huge bronze cannons that fired stone bullets. Those cannons were so large that they were almost impossible to move. But they could be set up some distance away from a city to fire repeatedly at the fortified walls of cities such as Constantinople. Eventually, they broke through and conquered Constantinople on May 29, 1453.
37. Over the next several hundred years as Protestantism became a major force in Western Europe, Charles V one of the Catholic emperors who wanted to crush Protestantism was prevented from doing so by the Muslims attacking Vienna. That required so much of his time and attention that he never really had time to effectively fight the Protestants. Without that added challenge from the east, Charles V might have waged a much larger and much bloodier battle against the rise of Protestantism in Europe. By the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, however, the Ottoman Empire which had terrified Christianity for hundreds of years ceased to be an aggressive power.

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