

# ***The Book of Revelation***

## ***The Seven Trumpets***

Lesson #7 for February 16, 2019

Scriptures: Revelation 8:1-13; 10:1-11; 11:1-13; Numbers 10:8-10; Ezekiel 10:2; Daniel 12:6-7; Leviticus 16.

1. In this lesson we will study the seven trumpets described in Revelation 8-11. Scholars have recognized that these are some of the most difficult passages to interpret in all the Bible.
2. We have already noticed that the book of Revelation often deals with groups of seven. We have seen that the seven churches while representing churches in John's day also are symbolic of time periods from John's day until the second coming of Jesus.
3. We then suggested that the seven seals also cover that same time span. The cries of the souls under the altar in Revelation 6:9-11 turn out to be one of the key passages in Revelation. In those verses it seems like God is not giving an adequate response to the cries of those people. In Revelation 8-11, we will see some of God's responses to those cries.
4. Does God ever exercise His anger or wrath in judgment? Does He ever discipline and punish His children? Remember that all of us are His children. There are many examples throughout the Old Testament and some in the New Testament describing what God has done when He was "angry." (See Judges 2-3; **Romans 1:18-28; 4:25; Matthew 27:46**; Hosea 11:1-8.)
  - 1) One way is simply for God to remove His restraint and allow us to reap the natural consequences of our sinful behaviors. Sometimes, God seemed to do that.
  - 2) 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. (GC 666.2-671.2) God will weep as His sinful children perish. (Compare SR 26.1.) He will then clean up the mess using divine fire to cleanse this earth from disease, sin, sickness, and anything that might pollute in order to remake it like the Garden of Eden. (Isaiah 66:23-24)
5. There have been occasions in the past where God has exercised His discipline or punishment on various groups for very different reasons. In Genesis 6-8, God sent the flood on this earth to destroy all of humanity except one family because He was about to lose contact completely with the human race. At the end of the plagues on Egypt, the firstborn were killed as a final demonstration of the fact that the God of heaven is superior to all false gods. (Exodus 12:12) There have been other occasions where God's discipline has resulted in the death of disobedient humans primarily for the purpose of warning others not to follow their example. The 3000 that were slain at the foot of Mount Sinai for their idolatrous worship of the golden calf are one example. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 324.1-325.3) The slaying of Uzzah is another. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 705.3-706.0) It is important to remember that everyone who perished on any of these occasions has died only of the first death and will arise to face the same judgment that all the rest of us face at the end of this earth's history. Everyone who lived before the flood and all the firstborn who were slain in Egypt will have their cases come up for final review in the pre-advent judgment taking place during the time of the end.
6. One interesting feature of God's punishment is mentioned in Ezekiel 9:6 and Jeremiah 25:17-26. **God's judgments often begin 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 these 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.

7. 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; (Revelation 8:7)
  - (2) The second symbolizes judgments upon the western Roman world; (Revelation 8:8,9)
  - (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; (Revelation 8:10,11)
  - (4) The fourth was the ensuing darkness of the Middle Ages; (Revelation 8:12)
  - (5) The fifth constituted the Mohammedan scourges that swept over the Middle East and into Europe; (Revelation 8:13-9:12)
  - (6) The sixth consisted of the scourges that continued under Turkish control of large sections of Asia, Africa, and Europe; (Revelation 9:13-11:14) 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. (Revelation 11:15-19)—Edwin R. Thiele, *Outline Studies in Revelation* (Angwin, California.: the author, N. D.), 162.
8. Revelation 6:15-17 make it clear that there will be panic among God's enemies when His final response to sin is exhibited.
9. In previous lessons we have noted the fact that the cries of the righteous who have suffered at the hands of the wicked have been a feature of the great controversy from the days of Cain and Abel all the way to the second coming of Christ. (See Genesis 4:10; compare Revelation 6:9-11.) However, through these trumpets, God assures us that He has not lost control and that He is not indifferent to our suffering. Read Revelation 8:3-5. The fact that this angel came and stood at the altar and was given a lot of incense to add to the prayers of all God's people suggests a connection to the fifth seal in Revelation 6:9-11. Doesn't this suggest that the seven-trumpet judgments fall upon the inhabitants of the earth in answer to the prayers of God's people who have suffered and that God will indeed intervene on their behalf?
- Read Revelation 8:3, 4 along with the description of the daily services in the temple in Jerusalem given below: a Jewish commentary on the Bible explains that at the evening sacrifice the lamb was placed upon the altar of burnt offering, and the blood was poured out at the base of the altar. An appointed priest took the golden censer inside the temple and offered incense on the golden altar in the Holy Place. When the priest came out, he threw the censer down on the pavement, producing a loud noise. At that point, seven priests blew their trumpets, marking the end of the temple services for that day.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Sunday, February 10.
10. The fact that the angel throws down his censer—which the Jews would recognize as a sign of the end of the ceremonies for the day—is a warning to everyone that Christ's intercession will not last forever; the close of probation is coming.
11. What is the significance of using trumpets (*shophars* or rams' horns)? Trumpets were a very important part of the daily lives of ancient Israel. (See Numbers 10:8-10 and 2 Chronicles 13:14-15.) The blowing of trumpets went hand-in-hand with prayer. Also, trumpets were used to give instructions and warnings to God's people during times of war.
12. Read Revelation 8:13 and Revelation 9:4,20-21. Notice that these passages clearly suggest that

the trumpets apply to things on this earth.

13. We have already suggested that the trumpets—like the churches and the seals—cover the course of events from John’s time until the end of this earth’s history. (Revelation 11:15-18) It is important to notice that intercession is still going on in heaven, (Revelation 8:3-6) and the gospel is still being preached on earth. (Revelation 10:8-11:14)
14. In this section on the trumpets, there are many mentions of the figure *one-third*. What is the meaning of *one-third*? It clearly signifies an important portion but *not* the whole. In almost every case, it is also very closely related to the activities of Satan. Compare Revelation 12:4.
15. At the end of the trumpets in Revelation 11:15-18, it seems very clear that the great controversy is coming to an end. “The time has come to destroy those who destroy the earth!”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup> These trumpets seem to reach down to the time of the end of this world.
16. A slightly different way of describing the events of the first six trumpets is as follows:
  - (a) The first two trumpets herald judgments upon the nations that crucified Christ and persecuted the early church: rebellious Jerusalem and the Roman Empire.
  - (b) The third and fourth trumpets portray heaven’s judgment against the apostasy of the Christian church in the medieval period.
  - (c) The fifth and sixth trumpets describe the warring factions in the religious world during the late medieval and post-Reformation periods. These periods are characterized by increasing demonic activity that ultimately draws the world into the battle of Armageddon.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*<sup>\*</sup> for Monday, February 11.
17. As we have mentioned before, there is an interlude between number six and number seven of each of these groups of seven. See Revelation 10:1-10. Ellen White has some interesting words to say about this passage.

**The mighty angel who instructed John was no less a personage than Jesus Christ.** Setting His right foot on the sea, and His left upon the dry land, shows the part which He is acting in the closing scenes of the great controversy with Satan. This position denotes His supreme power and authority over the whole earth.... Satan, united with evil men, will deceive the whole world and the churches who receive not the love of the truth. **But the mighty angel demands attention. He cries with a loud voice. He is to show the power and authority of His voice to those who have united with Satan to oppose the truth. After these seven thunders uttered their voices, the injunction comes to John as to Daniel in regard to the little book: “Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered” (Revelation 10:4). These relate to future events which will be disclosed in their order.** Daniel shall stand in his lot at the end of the days. John sees the little book unsealed. Then Daniel’s prophecies have their proper place in the first, second, and third angels’ messages to be given to the world. **The unsealing of the little book was the message in relation to time.**—Ellen G. White Comments, *Manuscript 59*,<sup>\*</sup> 1900, 8-9, “Jots and Tittles, II,” August 16, 1900 (*1MR*<sup>\*</sup> 99.1); *The SDA Bible Commentary*,<sup>\*</sup> vol. 7, 971.3-4; *19MR*<sup>\*</sup> 319.3. Compare *CT*<sup>\*</sup> 344.2-3. [Bold type is added.]

18. The fact that Christ places His feet on the sea and on the land suggests that His rule is universal and that He proclaims a worldwide gospel.
19. For some reason which we do not fully understand, John was not allowed to write down what the thunders said. What they said probably represents events which will happen still in the future in our day, events which God has not chosen to reveal.

20. Read Daniel 12:6-7 and Revelation 10:5-7. Notice that Daniel suggests that there will be a period of three and one-half prophetic years or 1260 actual years after which John in Revelation said there will be no more delay. This period of time from A.D. 538-1798 outlines the time during which faithful Christianity was persecuted by the papacy. (Compare Daniel 7:25.)
21. We know that the longest period of any prophecy in the Bible is the 2300 years of Daniel 8:14. When the pope was arrested in 1798 (ending the three and one-half year prophecy) and soon thereafter died in prison, it signaled the end of a period of papal supremacy. A few years later, it was the ending of Christ's first-compartment ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and the beginning of the pre-advent judgment. It looked like events from the Bible were happening.
- This time, which the angel declares with a solemn oath, is ... prophetic time, which should precede the advent of our Lord. That is, the people will not have another message upon definite time. After this period of time, reaching from 1842 to 1844, there can be no definite tracing of the prophetic time. The longest reckoning reaches to the autumn of 1844.—Ellen G. White Comments, *Ms 59*,\* 1900, 8-9. ("Jots and Tittles, II," August 16, 1900.); *The SDA Bible Commentary*,\* vol. 7, 971.7; *CT*\* 344.5; *LDE*\* 36.2; *1MR*\* 100.1; *19MR*\* 320.4.
22. This should be sufficient warning for us not to try to set any future dates.
23. Read Revelation 10:8-11; compare Ezekiel 2:8-3:11 and Jeremiah 15:16. *Eating* in the Bible is often used to describe the acceptance of a message from God in order to proclaim it to His people. When received, the message always seems to be good news; but, when it is proclaimed, it sometimes results in bitterness and is often resisted and rejected by many of the recipients. So, to what does this sweet and then sour experience refer? Seventh-day Adventists are very convinced that the Millerite movement leading up to what was thought to be the second coming of Christ in 1844 was a very sweet time. But, it was very sour and bitter when the Great Disappointment came. John was told to prophesy again, and that is what we as Sabbathkeeping Adventists need to do.
24. Read Revelation 11:1-2. These verses are a continuation of the ideas of Revelation 10. John was told to measure the temple, the altar, and the worshipers. Measurements in the Bible are often figurative for judgments. There are many similarities between these measurements of the temple, the altar, and the worshipers to the events of the Day of Atonement. See Leviticus 16:16-19. Seventh-day Adventists believe that the experience of the Day of Atonement is a type of which the experience of God's people following 1844 is the antitype or the pre-advent judgment. See Daniel 7:9-13; Zechariah 3:1-5; and Revelation 4.
25. Read Revelation 11:3-6 and Zechariah 4:2-3, 11-14. In Revelation 11, we see two witnesses dressed in sackcloth; they are described as olive trees and lamps. They seem to have plenty of power and even the ability to destroy their enemies and strike the earth with every kind of plague. But, what happened to them? They were killed. But, then they were resurrected!
26. Zechariah described these two olive trees beside the lampstand in the heavenly sanctuary as pouring out oil to lighten the sanctuary. Who is it that comes out of the abyss (Satan's home)?
27. The idea of *two witnesses* comes from the Jewish legal system where two witnesses are necessary to establish the truth of something. (John 8:17)
28. It seems likely that these two witnesses (the Old Testament and the New Testament) are prophesying in sackcloth during the prophetic period of 1260 days/years (A.D. 538-1798). Sackcloth is a garment of mourning and applies to the very difficult time when the truths of the Bible were buried and covered over by human traditions.
29. Read Revelation 11:7-13. Here we find some symbols that we recognize. The beast that kills the two witnesses arises from the abyss, the very abode of Satan. Several ideas from this

passage strongly suggest that this refers to the atheistic attacks on the Bible and the abolition of religion in connection with the events of the French Revolution. The moral atmosphere was like that of Sodom, the atheistic arrogance like that of Egypt, and the rebelliousness like that of Jerusalem.

30. The exciting thing is that the two witnesses came back to life after the French Revolution (1789-1798). Early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bible societies were formed, and that started worldwide distribution of newly-translated Bibles and the spread of the gospel into new lands.
31. We know that there will be one final glorious proclamation of the gospel in connection with the latter rain as described in Revelation 18:1-4. Satan will not be sleeping. He and his hordes of evil angels will be spreading their deceptions like the unclean spirits described in Revelation 16:13-16. We will see that the different parts of the last half of Revelation relate to each other.
32. This will be a time when God's faithful people will be tried to the uttermost and when, if it were possible, the very elect would be deceived. See Revelation 14:12 and Matthew 24:24.
33. After all these terrible events portrayed in the seven trumpets, we come to a time when God again takes control of the events, even on planet earth. See Revelation 11:15-18. Although Satan has apparently ruled on this earth for thousands of years, his time is coming to an end; and he knows it. See Revelation 12:9-12. Satan knows that he has only a little time left.
34. It has been suggested that the seventh trumpet outlines the content of the remainder of the book of Revelation. (1) The nations are angry: See Revelation 12-14 and especially Revelation 12:17; Satan with his two allies—the sea beast and the land beast—prepare for an all-out final battle against God's people. (2) God's response results in the seven last plagues as He withdraws His restraining powers from this earth and allows Satan to take almost complete control of this earth. This time is referred to as *God's wrath*. (3) The time for the dead to be judged as described in Revelation 20:11-15 follows. Then, (4) The reward of God's people is finally shown in Revelation 21 and 22. (5) God destroys those who destroy the earth; Revelation 19:2 shows that end-time Babylon is judged because it destroyed the earth.
35. The final act in the great controversy will be when God at the third coming shows the panorama in the skies; everyone—both the wicked and the righteous—realizes that there is nothing more that God could have done to save anyone. The destruction of the wicked including Satan will be the result.
36. Revelation 19 spells out in some detail how the judgments will take place. Let us now try to conclude. Revelation 8:2-11:18: The seven trumpets talk about God's dealings with His children who belong to other religious movements. Between the sixth and the seventh trumpet is that interlude of events recorded in Revelation 10:1-11:14 that gives a brief description of the challenges God's faithful people will face. As we have suggested, the seven trumpets seems to be an answer to the prayers of the saints in the fifth seal. It will be judgments on those who have persecuted Christians and, thus, probably affects primarily the opponents of God's people throughout Christian history.
37. We have attempted to describe: (1) the meaning of the trumpets, (2) the time when they began, (3) the meaning of the imagery of the first six trumpets, (4) details about the interlude, and (5) the fact that these trumpets in some ways are an answer to the prophecies of Daniel 12. It seems clear that the trumpets are a response to the prayers of the souls under the altar noted in the fifth seal. Like the seven churches and the seven seals, it seems clear that the time span of the seven trumpets covers the time from the 1<sup>st</sup> century up to the second coming of Christ. The proclamation of the gospel clearly seems to come to an end with the seventh trumpet.
38. The meaning of the imagery in the first six trumpets is interesting.

1. The first trumpet uses the Old Testament language of God's judgments (hail, fire, and blood [*Exod. 9:23-26, Isa. 10:16-20, Ezek. 38:22*]) directed against

symbols of God's Old Testament people (vegetation and trees [*Ps. 1:1-3; Isa. 61:3; Jer. 11:16, 17*]). Hence comes the lesson's suggestion that the first trumpet represents God's judgment on the Jerusalem that had rejected Christ (*Matt. 23:37, 38; Luke 23:28-31*).—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 95. [Content in brackets and italic type are in the source.]

2. The second trumpet recalls, in general, God's judgments against those who persecuted His people in the early centuries of the Christian era.

3. The symbolism of the third trumpet parallels biblical imagery for the work of Satan (*Isa. 14:12-19, Luke 10:18, Rev. 12:9*). But the symbolism of lamp, springs, rivers, and water suggests spiritual life and growth (*Ps. 1:3; Ps. 84:6, 7; Ps. 119:105; Jer. 2:13*). **The falling of the stars and the embittering of the waters connect the two ideas, suggesting a perversion of truth and a rise of apostasy. The lesson, therefore, associates this trumpet with the condition of the church in the Middle Ages.**

4. In the fourth trumpet, the sources of light (sun, moon, and stars) are darkened, the symbols of truth are partially eclipsed. This darkening could represent the deepening of apostasy in the church (*Exod. 10:21-23, Job 38:2, Isa. 8:22, John 1:4-11, John 3:18-21*).

5. With the fifth trumpet, the partial darkness of the fourth becomes total and worldwide (*Rev. 9:1, 2*). This represents the triumph of religious apostasy and secularism in the modern age. With God and truth totally eclipsed, sinful humankind is left to the demonic torment of destructive desires (*Rev. 9:3-11, Luke 10:17-20*). The only safety is in a genuine relationship with God (*Rev. 9:4; Eph. 1:13, 14*).—*Ibid.*\* 95-96. [Bold type is added; italic type is in the source.]

39. But, what about the interlude? While the trumpets seem to be God's response to those who oppose His people, (Revelation 9:4,20-21) the interlude (Revelation 10:1-11:13) focuses on God's people. While the forces of evil are doing all they can to destroy God's people, (Revelation 9:16) God's faithful people are gathering to counter them. (Revelation 7:4, Revelation 10:1-11:13)

40. It is not easy to see how these comments about God's response to the enemies of His people might apply to our daily experiences. We might conclude that God has not lost control. We also recognize that He is doing all that He can within the limitations of the great controversy to protect and care for His people.

The judgments of the first two trumpets fall on those powers that combined to crucify Jesus (the religious authorities of Jerusalem under Caiaphas and Roman civil authority under Pilate). *What does this fact tell us about opposition to the gospel?* Opposition to the gospel tends to come in two distinct forms—opposition from inside the church and from outside the church. Jesus was crucified when the leaders of Israel (inside) combined forces with outside powers (Rome). The greatest opposition often comes from those who profess the same faith but are really wolves in sheep's clothing.—*Ibid.*\* 97. [Italic type is in the source.]

41. In this lesson we have covered a great amount of material. Much of it may be hard to follow in a brief period of time. Do we understand why God has included this section in the book of Revelation?

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