

# The Conquering Christ

Message 5

## *Seven Trumpets*

Revelation 8:1-9:21

### *The Real Jesus*

Revelation is about Jesus, but we do not really understand Jesus very well. We have some ideas about Him, which are more or less correct. But our image of Jesus is a patchwork of truth, half-truth, and falsehood. This will always be somewhat the case. Since we are finite creatures, we are incapable of understanding completely an infinite being. In this life sin also clouds our understanding. So we have this picture of Jesus as a stern master, a happy buddy, a dying savior, etc. All these images have some truth in them, but none are the real Jesus. The real Jesus is the best of all qualities. He is good master and best friend and self-sacrificing savior – all simultaneously. He rules with an iron rod without compromising His gentleness. He tenderly comforts the hurting without infringing on His iron rule. He died a miserable death, yet rejoices in the people He saved.

Revelation corrects our flawed understanding of Jesus. So far we have seen that Jesus is the Terminator. He is a mighty warrior who comes to kill His enemies. He patrols the churches and protects them from Satan's threats. Jesus is the Lion of Judah – the magnificent King of the Earth – yet also the dying Lamb who offered Himself for our sins. He silently gave Himself up for His people, but brings destruction on anyone who would hurt us. Even the shocking events revealed by the seven seals were unleashed by the Lamb, angry that His people are being hurt. This is the real, true Jesus as He reveals Himself in this book. As we study Revelation, ask Jesus to speak to you and improve your view of who He is.

### *Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls*

Do you remember the three keys to understanding this complex and confusing book? Here is a quick review. First, Revelation is a picture book – a series of images. Take in the pictures. Do not look for a plot line or a logical argument. They are not there. The message is conveyed in these word pictures. Second, the symbols have biblical meanings. We are not free to make up any meanings of our own or import meaning from other sources. We must look to the Bible for the meanings. Third, it presents a heavenly perspective. Revelation is not about social or political or military developments. It shows the spiritual reality behind earthly events. These three interpretive principles are essential to getting the message of this book.

Last week we had our first look at the predictions. Revelation contains three sets of seven events. There are seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls. These provide the structural backbone of the book. The other visions add detail to the outline provided by the three sevens. Since there are strong similarities among the seals, trumpets, and bowls, some people see them as restatements of the same events. Our view is that the scroll the Lamb is holding contains the plan for completing our salvation. The seals open the scroll, the trumpets announce its contents, and the bowls execute the plan. So the seals are like an expanded table of contents. Have you seen those textbooks which have two tables of contents? One will list the chapters by name, with the page where they begin. Following is an expanded table of contents which includes under each chapter title all the sub-sections. This is what the seals do. As the Lamb opens the seals one by one, we see the plan of salvation unfold before us. The first seal shows King Jesus riding a white horse and conquering with the gospel. The second seal shows the hostility that the gospel provokes. Then there material hardships, followed by outright persecution. Many saints die and go to heaven, where they call for justice to be brought on the earth. God answers their prayers and breaks down the existing religious and socio-political order. Before this gets very far, God interrupts to place His mark of ownership and protection on His people. Thus the seals begin with Pentecost and span the time until the coming of Jesus in A.D. 70.

Tonight we will look at the vision of the trumpets. These visions announce the coming judgement. These warnings were delivered on earth by the apostles and prophets between Pentecost and the fall of Jerusalem. After spring break we will see the bowls, which are the execution of the wrath of the Lamb. The bowls are mainly the sixth and seventh seal events, which happened in the catastrophes of the late 60s A.D.

Chapter eight opens with the breaking of the seventh seal. This prompts perhaps the strangest thing in a book of bizarre events – a half-hour of silence. Notice that all the other visions in Revelation are of visual pictures. What follows now is a series of audible events – seven trumpet blasts. Remember also that all this time the heavenly choir has been singing. Some of their songs are recorded in chapters four, five, and seven. So now the cherubim and the angels stop singing for a while so the trumpets can sound. When the trumpets finish, at the end of chapter 11, the singing in heaven resumes.

Then the prayers of the saints were gathered and presented to God. BOOM! Fire, thunder, lightning, and earthquakes hit the earth! This is the end, when the wrath of the Lamb destroys the enemies of Jesus and His followers. This is how God appeared when He met with the Israelites on Mount Sinai when they had left Egypt. Then they were so terrified, they begged God not to speak with them any more. Only Moses went up into the smoke, fire, and lightning of the quaking mountain. But this time the last Moses is already on the mountain, and Jesus is the one hurling destruction on the earth. There is no escape for those who refuse the gospel. If you will not trust the blood of the Lamb, you will perish in His fury.

#### ***Four Trumpets***

When we look to the scripture for trumpets we discover four common uses.<sup>1</sup> One scholar says:

A trumpet was blown to proclaim the accession of a king (1 Kings 1:34, 39; 2 Kings 9:13), and came in Jewish worship to be associated particularly with the kingship of God (Psalms 47:5; 98:6; Numbers 23:21; Zechariah 9:14). John's seventh trumpet is the signal for the heavenly choir to sing their coronation anthem, praising God because He has assumed the sovereignty and begun to reign (11:15).<sup>2</sup>

Second, a trumpet is used as an "alarm signal" to call Israel to repentance (Jeremiah 4:5; 6:1, 17; Ezekiel 33:3 ff.; Isaiah 58:1; Joel 2:1, 15). Third, "in the Jewish liturgy trumpets were blown at all feasts, on the first day of each month, and at the daily sacrifice...(Numbers 10:10)"<sup>3</sup> Their purpose was to remind God to keep His promise to care for His people. Fourth, trumpets were used in worship processions (Joshua 6; 1 Chronicles 15:24; Nehemiah 12:41) The most significant Old Testament precursor to these chapters in Revelation is the battle of Jericho. Israel conquered this impregnable city by marching around it for seven days. Every day the army would march, preceded by the priests blowing trumpets. On the seventh day the city fell at the blast of the trumpets. As we shall see, the trumpets are the means by which the New Israel defeats the corrupt city and enters the promised land.

So trumpets are used to command attention and to introduce important events. But the most important common thread in all these examples is that the trumpet represents the voice of God. If this were not evident in these Old Testament passages, it is indisputable in the New. For back in chapter one of Revelation we are told that the voice of Jesus sounded like a trumpet. These seven trumpets are the complete

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<sup>1</sup> G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1966), pp. 107-110.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

message of Jesus for the first century church. Jesus is proclaiming Himself King, calling all men to repentance, and defeating His enemies by His voice.

Every scholar mentions the similarity of the some of the trumpets to the plagues of Egypt. In fact all the trumpet images are connected to Exodus imagery. You can read the Exodus account yourself, and the parallels will be easy to see. This is no coincidence. John is presenting us with a new exodus. This theme will be developed more fully throughout the book. We shall see that the church is caught in an oppressive Egypt. Jesus is the greater Moses/Joshua who will lead His people out of Egypt into the promised land. Revelation also shows the church exiled in Babylon. Jesus is the greater Ezra/Nehemiah who will lead His people out of Babylon and build the New Jerusalem.

Now let us look at the first four trumpets. Did you notice that each one announces disaster to a different part of creation? The first trumpet brings destruction to the land, the second to the sea, the third to the rivers and springs, and the fourth to the celestial bodies. The picture here is of judgment over all the created order. There is nowhere you can go to escape the wrath of the Lamb. But only a third of the creation is hit. These are warning judgments. Men should take heed and repent. The problems of the first century – crop failures, fires, storms at sea, wars, and all other problems that plague mankind are not “natural disasters” – as if some impersonal forces of nature were at work. These were warnings from Jesus to repent and turn to Him. Turn to Jesus before the total disasters of the bowls.

But did you notice that we may have violated one of our interpretive principles? Revelation is not so much a book about future events as a spiritual commentary on earthly events. We would be more in tune with the language of Revelation if we asked, “What spiritual situation is symbolized by the land, sea, rivers, and heavens?” And when we look carefully at the rest of scripture, we find that these are used as symbols for spiritual realities.

The word translated “earth” is the Greek word  $\gamma\eta$ . It means earth, ground, land, or country. Which of these it means is found only by its use in context. In the Septuagint, the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament, you find this word used in all these ways. It is used for the planet earth, for specific geographic areas, and for specific countries. Particularly it is the word used to denote the land promised to Israel. When  $\gamma\eta$  is used for the planet, English translations usually employ the word “earth”. When it is used for the place promised to Israel, English translations use the word “land”. But those choices simply reflect the translators’ interpretations. You find the same patterns of use and translation in the New Testament. When we read Revelation, we might ask when we encounter this word, does it mean the whole planet, or only the land of Israel? Either is possible.

Israel was not a maritime nation, so the sea is largely absent from the historical books. It is mentioned mainly as a border of Israel. The prophetic books contain more discussion of the sea, partly in reference to sea-faring nations such as Phoenicia. But the prophets also use the sea as a symbol for the nations, the gentiles – those people far off geographically, and far off from God. Turn to Isaiah 17:12-13.

Ah, the thunder of many peoples;  
they thunder like the thundering of the sea!  
Ah, the roar of nations;  
they roar like the roaring of mighty waters!  
The nations roar like the roaring of many waters,  
but he will rebuke them,  
and they will flee far away,  
chased like chaff on the mountains before the wind and whirling dust before the storm.

Now if you are looking for a verse that says, “Look out! From now on sea = gentiles,” you will be disappointed. Poetry does not communicate that way. Hebrew poetry uses parallel lines to make its point. Isaiah is using the sea and its waves as a symbol for the peoples of the earth. Turn now to chapter 60:1-5.

Arise, shine, for your light has come,  
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.  
For behold, darkness shall cover the earth,  
and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the LORD will arise upon you,  
and his glory will be seen upon you.  
And nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your rising.  
Lift up your eyes all around, and see;  
they all gather together, they come to you;  
your sons shall come from afar,  
and your daughters shall be carried on the hip.  
Then you shall see and be radiant;  
your heart shall thrill and exult,  
because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you,  
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.

This is a prophecy of the restoration of Israel after her exile in Babylon. Isaiah foresees that nations and kings shall come to Israel, and she shall be glorious again. The next to the last line uses the sea as a symbol for the gentile nations. There are many other Old Testament references to the gentiles as the sea (Isaiah; 21:1 ff; 42:10; Jeremiah 6:22-23; Ezekiel 26:15-18; Daniel 7:1-3; Habakkuk 1:14; 3:1-16; Zechariah 10:9-11). Now perhaps you are wondering about the role of the sea in the New Testament. Did you ever think it strange that so much of Jesus ministry centered on the sea? Or that He called fishermen to be His apostles? Or that He said they would be fishers of men? To Jewish ears this would have been a strange and unusual title. Unless Jesus planned from the beginning to minister to the nations. Then these would have been powerful symbols.

Rivers play a more prominent role in the Old Testament. There was the original river which watered the Garden of Eden. The Euphrates and Jordan rivers were significant in Israel’s history. But when you turn to Ezekiel you see the river developed fully into a symbol. Turn to Ezekiel 47:1-3.

Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar.<sup>2</sup> Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and behold, the water was trickling out on the south side.<sup>3</sup> Going on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water, and it was ankle-deep.

This comes at the end of Ezekiel’s vision of the temple. It is a symbolic temple. The measurements are impossible to construct. It is symbolic of God’s return to Israel after her exile in Babylon. After Ezekiel tours the temple he sees this stream of water running from the door of the temple. As it flows, the stream becomes deeper and deeper. Eventually it empties into the sea and the sea becomes fresh. It is a symbol of the spirit of God flowing out over all the earth and converting the nations (the sea). (This is the river we sing about in “Shine, Jesus, Shine”.) John uses this fresh water symbol extensively in his gospel, most famously in Jesus’ discussion with the woman at the well in chapter four. Reading verses 13-14,

Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Like Ezekiel’s river that grows deeper by the mile, the spirit wells up in a believer and flows out to all around him. So fresh water – springs, rivers, and streams – are symbols for the spirit of God.

We discussed the heavens last week. (Refer to that message for a full discussion.) The sun, moon, and stars are symbols of governing authorities, and the collapsing universe is a symbol for the collapse of the socio-political-religious order.

Now coming back to Revelation, the first four trumpets herald woes upon the Jews, the gentiles, the temple, and the rulers. In other words, all facets of the Roman Empire will be hit by Jesus as a warning to believe in Him. These are not so much natural disasters as socio-religious disasters. In particular, they strike at the distinctions between Jew and gentile set up by the Old Covenant. This might seem like a stretch to some of you, but do not give up! We will discover that these symbols are key to understanding the rest of this book.

### ***Two Woes***

The last three trumpets come as three woes, heralded by bird flying through the sky. It is either an eagle or a vulture – representing the supremacy of Jesus’ power, or the certain death of men who refuse to heed his warning. The fifth trumpet called forth a star which falls from heaven to earth. We will encounter this star again in chapter 12, but we already know that stars are symbols for ruling powers. He has no power of his own. This is critical to notice. But someone gives him the ability to open the bottomless pit, the abyss. This is where the demons are housed. In the gospels you find the demons begging Jesus not to send them back to the abyss. Here Jesus gives this angel permission to release them upon the earth. Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth. The demons swarmed out like smoke, interfering with the other ruling powers on the earth. Notice carefully whom they torment. They are not allowed to touch the saints who are sealed with the mark of God. God protects His people from these demonic hordes, but everyone else suffers terribly from them. Revelation 9:5-6 says, “They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone. And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them.” A scorpion sting is extremely painful. It can kill you. But in this case the pain is as great as a deadly wound, but without the relief of death. This was the fate of those who refused to follow the Lamb.

Who is this terrible angel who unleashes such a vicious army? His name is Abaddon and Apollyon – destruction and destroyer. He is the king of the demons – the star who fell from heaven. But we already saw the star fallen from heaven – back in chapter 8:10-11. There his name was Wormwood. Wormwood is a bitter plant. It pollutes water making it undrinkable. Old Israel encountered bitter water when they left Egypt, and God purified it when Moses threw a tree into the spring. (Exodus 15:23-25). Wormwood torments man by reversing the exodus miracle. The formerly sweet water became bitter. Now if you remember that the springs and rivers of fresh water are symbols of the temple, and the Spirit of God who lived there, you can see that the third trumpet announces the corruption of the temple. Wormwood/Abaddon/Apollyon has invaded the temple and taken over. Jesus has given him permission to release his horde of demons to torment people by corrupting the Old Covenant worship. When Jesus was on earth He said, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” (Luke 10:18) To the Jews He said, “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.” (John 8:44) Now Jesus shows us why He said that. The devil has taken over the temple, and polluted those who worship there.

What is the one thing that brings comfort even in the most trying circumstances? It is the hope that

God knows, cares, and will somehow deliver you. By this time temple religion was so perverted, it actually made life more miserable for the Jews who refused to follow Jesus. Jesus said, “ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.” (Matthew 23:15) The religion of the Jews who rejected Jesus had become demonic.

***Fear the Lamb***

The sixth trumpet announces war by an unbelievably massive and powerful army. We will have more to say about this in future weeks. For now, much of the importance of tonight’s message is laying the symbolic foundation for the rest of the book. The themes of Jew and gentile, temple and palace, energized by Satan and united against the Lamb forms the drama of Revelation. This book was sent to people who have been persecuted and killed by evil Jews who reject Jesus. They will soon be set upon by gentile rulers who reject Jesus. Jesus wants them to know that Satan is the power behind these forces. But the Lamb rules! Satan can do only what Jesus permits him to, and eventually Satan will be defeated and destroyed. And so will all his followers.

Chapter nine ends saying, “The rest of mankind...did not repent...” Have you repented of worshipping other gods? Are you following Jesus? Whether you think this book is for the first century or the last, the message is the same – beware the wrath of the Lamb. Jesus is no one to mess with. He is as tender as a lamb to those who repent of their sins – no matter how horrible they may be. But He will destroy all who reject the trumpet of His voice. You follow Him, and be a trumpet to call your friends to follow Jesus too.

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