

The Seventh Seal and the Seven Trumpets

Rev. 8:1-11:19

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Tonight we move into the next major portion of the book of Revelation, which begins in chapter 8:1 and extends all the way to chapter 11:19 - and in this portion of the Revelation we are introduced to the final seal (8:1), to seven angels who blow seven trumpets (8:2, 6 - 11:15); and in the midst of the blowing of these trumpets we learn of seven thunders (10:3-4) and three woes (introduced in 8:13 and explained in 9:1-12; 9:13-11:14; 11:15ff). Question is, what is all of this about?

Do these seven trumpets constitute seven judgements which follow the seven seals chronologically?

OR, do the visions of 8:1 to 11:19 give us the same picture as that given by the seven seals using different figures and with more detail?

OR, does 8:1 to 11:19 bring into focus in much more detail what has already been given to us in brief by one of the seven seals of chapters six and seven?

These are questions which we need to answer before we jump into chapters 8 to 11 of the Revelation - and one's interpretive approach to the Revelation will in large part determine how one sees these chapters. Over the course of time, anyone who has attempted to understand the message of the Revelation has answered the question of the timing of the Revelation in connection with their interpretive method - and all interpreters fall into one of four camps when it comes to understanding this book. Interpretive method, then, determines how the Revelation is seen, in relation to time. Here is what I mean. One interpretive method is that of:

A) The Preterist: The word 'preterist' refers to the past; and so a Preterist sees the Revelation as already fulfilled in the past. The preterist believes that Revelation was a prophecy about the destruction and fall of Jerusalem and the judgement of the Jewish people, as well as of the ancient Roman empire - which took place from 70 A.D. up until the 5th century (while some would hold that the events of judgement on Rome were completed in the 15th century with the final collapse of Byzantium). Thus, everything in the Revelation has already happened. According to this view:

If a person is a preterist, what is the time frame in focus for the Revelation? The PAST.

II. The Historicist View: A second interpretive approach. This understanding of the Revelation sees the seals, the trumpets and the bowls of chapters 6 to 16 as reflecting the successive ages of the church along with events that take place during each of those ages.

According to this understanding, for example, the symbolism of the Revelation would refer to specific historic events which would take place last the time the interpreter lived. And so during the 5th or the 15th centuries one might see in Rome's collapse the events of Revelation; or if one lived during the time of the Reformation one would see the Papacy and the RCC's corruption as events on the pages of the Revelation; or during the 20th century an historicist might interpret the rise of the modern age along with WW1 and WW2 as being fulfillments of Revelation. For those who hold this understanding, Christ's return is *always imminent* - that is, it can take place at any moment.

If a person is an historicist, what time frame is in focus for the Revelation? The time that is PRESENT to the interpreter.

III. The Futurist View is a third approach to understanding the Revelation; and the futurist sees the entire book, from chapter 4 to chapter 21 as explaining future events. And specifically, these future events are those events that will take place in relation to the second coming of Jesus Christ. There are two variations of this understanding:

1) Classic Dispensationalism sees these visions as referring to a seven year period at the end of time and during these seven years, all the events of Revelation 4 to 19 take place - either during or right at the end of the seven years. This approach sees the visions very literally; and it also sees the visions as being in chronological order once they begin to take place. So a Futurist of this camp will understand the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls as referring to 21 separate judgements by God on the evil world empire that will come, one after the other, over a seven year period at the end of time - and to be honest, there will most likely be 28 separate judgements, all in a row, because in chapter 10, John also writes of seven thunders - but he was forbidden to write what the seven thunders were about - so we have seven thunders which are complete mysteries.

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In this scheme, the order of events, once the visions are being fulfilled, will be 1) the church is raptured and is in heaven; 2) the seven year tribulation begins; 3) anti-christ arises and reigns; 4) the nations gather together to war on Israel and Jerusalem; 5) Christ returns and defeats the world empire; 6) Satan is bound; 7) Christ rules for 1,000 years on the present earth; 8) Satan is released and incites one final rebellion against God; 9) Christ defeats him again; 10) there is then a New Heaven and Earth and those who belong to Christ are with Him for eternity.

2) Progressive Dispensationalism follows a similar scheme - but the progressive dispensationalist adopts an approach that is a bit looser. For example, some deny that there will be a rapture before the tribulation and that the church will pass through the tribulation; and others would see the church as the Israel of God. Still others see Revelation 4:1 to 8:1 as covering the period from Christ's resurrection up to the end of history.

A big problem with this approach is that some interpreters try and see modern events as lining up with the prophecies of Revelation, thus signaling that the rapture is soon to come and the tribulation is soon to begin - so as historical events change so do the interpretations. For example:

a) As the twentieth century passed and the twenty first century opened, various individuals - such as Hitler, JF Kennedy, Saddam Hussein, Barak Obama, various popes or other political figures had been suspected of being the anti-christ; but all these people passed off the scene and the rapture and rise of anti-christ didn't take place as expected;

b) Also, specific events or alliances have been identified as signaling the soon coming rapture and the start of the tribulation period - such as WW2, the birth of national Israel, the rise of the EU, the first Gulf War, Y2K, Saddam Hussein's alleged rebuilding of Babylon, and now, Russia's presence in the ME; and as yet, the rapture hasn't taken place. Further, some of these people or alliances have passed off the scene. WW2 came and went. The EU may or may not continue. Saddam Hussein is dead and Babylon was never rebuilt, and so forth.

Another problem with this understanding of Revelation, as I have said in the past, is that it makes the book of Revelation irrelevant to the whole church, from the first century until 1948 because according to this view Revelation deals with the last years of earth's life and is primarily for Israel. What is so significant about 1948? In 1948 the UN recognized Israel as a nation once again - and for Dispensational futurism to work, there has to be a national Israel; and this means Revelation was irrelevant to the church for most of the church's life.

If a person is a futurist, what time frame is in focus in the book of Revelation? The FUTURE.

IV. The Redemptive-Historical (or *Idealist, a.k.a. Eclectic Redemptive Historical*) View: is the fourth approach to understanding the Revelation. If this is one's approach, then one sees the whole book as showing symbolically the battle between good and evil - between the evil world power and the kingdom of Christ - and Christ's ultimate and final victory over the evil world power. In this view, the seals, trumpets, and bowls reveal the events of human history in every age in relation to Christ's kingdom and the people of God; and the book gives encouragement to believers and to the church to remain faithful through suffering - until Christ wins the final victory.

According to this understanding, the war between evil and the evil world power and Christ is revealed to every generation of the church. And this battle will come **to a climax toward the end of history, with the rise of anti-christ, a great time of tribulation, and the ultimate a final return of Christ bodily and in power**, at which time all who are Christ's will live and reign with him forever.

Some name this the Eclectic Redemptive-Historic View - eclectic because aspects of all perspectives are incorporated, and redemptive-historic because the battle between the evil world power and Christ and God's kingdom are played out on the stage of history.

If a person is Redemptive-Historical, what time frame is in focus in the book of Revelation? The present age as a whole, beginning with the establishment of the church (c. 33 A.D.) and closing with the return of Christ and final victory!

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All interpreters fall into one of these four camps. And the interpretive approach one takes determines how one sees the detail in Revelation - and this is particularly relevant to the meaning of the Revelation once we arrive at chapter 8:1 to 11:19.

Which is most likely the right understanding of the book of Revelation? It depends on two factors. First, if the visions are to be taken in a hard literal sort of way and second, if the visions present events in a chronological order, then the futurist's have the strongest position.

BUT, if the visions are symbolic and if they are not chronological but are, rather, parallel visions, showing, like the visions in the book of Daniel the same events from different perspectives, then the Preterists or the Redemptive-Historicists (Idealists) have the strongest position.

Interestingly, someone has said that the various interpretive methods for the Revelation are like four sport coats one may have hanging in their closet. When we take each out of the closet and put the coat on, each fits us in a different way but none fit perfectly. The better part of wisdom is to try all four coats on, and then determine which one fits the very best out of the four. But, this has been a long digression - let's jump back to chapter 8:1 to 11:19. IN regards to these chapters:

1) Those who adapt a futurist approach to the Revelation will tend to see these chapters as revealing the next set of seven judgements *chronologically* - and if one is a dispensationalist then it is understood that these seven trumpets take place after the seven seals are opened but before the seven bowls of later chapters are poured out, during earth's final seven years - a period known as the great tribulation (which is referenced in Rev. 7:14).

2) If, on the other hand, one adapts either the preterist or the idealist approach, then the seven trumpets either depict the same set of events as was seen in the seven seals, or the seven trumpets bring into focus with much more detail what has already been given to us in brief by one of the seals.

I am convinced, personally, that the seven trumpets, at minimum, parallel the seals; but it is highly possible that the trumpets bring into sharper focus what *one of the seals* presents in brief - and the seal I refer to is the sixth seal - which as we saw when we were together last time, was the seal that indicated the beginning of the final judgement on the evil world powers and upon those who reject Christ Jesus, the rightful king, and His good news.

What we have in the seven seals is an outline of events that would characterize the whole church age until the end comes, and they follow a set pattern. **Seals one through five** focus on events that take place in every century of this present age of grace, with the **sixth seal** signaling the final judgement of God in wrath upon the unbelieving world and the evil world systems, **in parallel** with the completion of God's plan of redemption.

Following this, we have the seven trumpets - and the seven trumpets, along with the three woes - then reveal to us much more detail about either the meaning of the seals, or of the final judgement of God upon the earth and the evil world empire along with the completion of redemption. **This follow a similar scheme to the prophecy of Daniel** - where the prophecy begins with a general vision, of a great statue representing the four major Gentile world empires in relation to God's people Israel; and then the visions following give much more detail about those empires and events that would take place from Daniels time forward to the time of Christ.

For next week, read chapter eight, and when we meet we will jump into that chapter and cover it is some of it's detail.