

The Facebook Commentary on Revelation

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Revelation Chapter 8

Rev 8 (Introduction)—As mentioned at the close of chapter seven, chapter eight opens with the seventh seal, which one would have expected at the end of chapter six or chapter seven. So it is unfortunate that the chapter divisions were made the way they were (later human error—not part of the originals). Additionally, an interlude is placed between the sixth and seventh seals to answer the question asked at the end of chapter six, “Who will be able to stand” in the last day? The question is, of course, answered in the 144,000 and the Great Multitude. Only when the reader is assured that the people of God will be kept safe in the final events, are the seals brought to completion and the seven trumpets brought into view (Rev 8:2). So chapter eight begins with a look at the seventh seal, essentially one brief verse (Rev 8:1), and then moves on to the major section of the seven trumpets. They are preceded by a sanctuary introduction (Rev 8:2-6) which sets the stage for the judgments that follow when the seven trumpets are sounded.

Rev 8:1-- " And when he opened the seventh seal there was silence in heaven for about a half hour." The seventh seal is minimal in the extreme, a very brief verse. There was simply silence in heaven for about a half an hour. This is quite surprising as the sixth seal ended with such overwhelming catastrophe (6:15-17), that one would expect the final events to be ushered in catastrophically and rapidly. But instead there is simply a half-hour's silence. This is so minimal that many commentators have assumed that the seventh seal includes the verses that follow (8:2-6) or even the entire four chapters that are impacted by the seven trumpets (Rev 8-11). But this inclusion of the seven trumpets in the seventh seal is unlikely, as I will show when we get to the introduction to the trumpets shortly. There is a clean break between verses one and two of chapter eight. So our exploration of the seventh seal will be limited to the data in verse one of this chapter.

“When he opened” echoes the earlier seal openings (Rev 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12) with one small difference. “When” (Greek: *hotan*) translates a different Greek word than the one used in the first six seals (Greek: *hote*), although the text behind the *King James Version* also has *hote* here. Both Greek words are temporal particles. *Hotan* with an indicative means “when, whenever, at the time that.” *Hote* with the indicative can express the same but also duration, “as long as.” The use of *hotan* may actually be more appropriate for the context. But the manuscript evidence is divided between *hotan* and *hote*. *Hotan* is more likely because scribes tend to “correct” manuscripts to the reading they are used to, so they would correct the opener to the seventh seal to conform to the way their manuscript had opened the first six seals.

The implied subject of the sentence, “he,” harks back all the way to Revelation 6:1, where it tells us plainly that it is the Lamb of chapter five that is opening each seal.

The “silence in heaven” (Greek: *sigê en tô ouranô*) fits naturally with the scene of Revelation 7:9-17. The last sound to be heard there is the voice of the elder (7:13-14). But the reference to heaven also harks back to the earlier part of the vision, where the Lamb is breaking the seals one by one in order to open the book he has received in the fifth chapter (5:7). After the Lamb takes the book there is the sound of massive rejoicing in heaven (5:8-14), so that is another likely antecedent of the silence here.

To some degree the silence in this verse is like the calm after a storm. Or perhaps it is the silence of expectation. The scroll cannot be opened until all seven of the seals have been broken. With the breaking of the seventh, there is anticipation of the unrolling of the scroll and the revelation of its contents. But no mention of a scroll happens again until chapter ten (10:2, 8-10). One would expect the final catastrophe here, but the seven trumpets are only partial and limited compared with the seven bowls. So the silence here probably anticipates the rest of the book of Revelation, particularly its end-time parts (chapters 12-20).

Is the seventh seal limited to this verse or not? The answer is yes and no. The conclusion of major visionary sequences in Revelation tends to be duodirectional, both climaxing a previous series and anticipating in some way what follows. See comments on Rev 3:21. Also, the silence in heaven fits with the sanctuary’s daily service (*Tamid*, see further later on) alluded to in 8:2-6.

All the earlier seals are broken in heaven, but the events that follow are on earth. The puzzle with the seventh seal is that no events on earth follow, unless one includes Revelation 8:7 and following, which is problematic, as we well see. Since the seven trumpets are mostly prior to the Second Coming, they do not follow the opening of the seventh seal chronologically. But duodirectionality would suggest some relationship. Perhaps this is another way of connecting the trumpets with the seals and the prayers of those under the altar (Rev 6:9-11).

This is the only place in the New Testament where the word translated “half hour” (Greek: *hêmiôrion*) appears. Some have sought to understand the “half hour” in creative ways. One obvious reference would be the period of silence in the temple when, in the *tamid* (“daily”) service, the priest is ministering incense at the Altar of Incense in the Holy Place. The half hour, in that case, would be taken literally. This supports the larger idea of a structural allusion to the daily service in chapters 1-8 of Revelation. Since that allusion climaxes in 8:3-5, the location is supportive of such an allusion here.

Along the lines of the so-called “year-day principle” the half hour would be a forty-eighth of a day, so the half hour would represent a period of a little more than a week. Some suggest that this time is what it will take for the redeemed to travel to heaven at the Second Coming (which was alluded to in 6:15-17—see Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, 16). On the analogy of “a day with the Lord is like a thousand years” (Psa 90:4; 2 Pet 3:8), the period would be a forty-eighth of a thousand years, or a period of a little more than twenty years. But the evidence of the text itself is a bit sparse to support either of the latter two calculations with conviction here.

If the “silence” is the sum total of the seventh seal, as I believe, what meaning could it possibly have? A number of explanations have been offered.

1) The silence in heaven signals that justice has fully and finally been done for God's people. Isaiah 62 (NIV) may be pertinent here: "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch" (see also Isa 62:6-7). In Isaiah it is not clear exactly who the speaker is, but it presumably is the prophet himself (Isa 62:2). He declares that when God is silent, it means Jerusalem has fully and finally been delivered. Her suffering is over. The silence would be the silence of God's satisfaction in the deliverance of His people. The seventh seal would be like an eschatological Sabbath-rest, celebrating the completion of God's work of redemption, which, as the Psalmist says, is well-worth waiting for (Psa 62:1-2).

2) Another possibility for the silence in heaven is that it corresponds to the silence at the beginning, before God's work of creation in Genesis 1. At the beginning the earth was dark and there was silence until God's voice breaks in to begin the creation (Gen 1:2-3). If such an allusion was in John's mind it would suggest a new beginning, a new creation, perhaps the New Earth of Revelation 21 and 22.

3) A third idea is that the silence is that of a stunned universe watching the destruction of the wicked. This would parallel Revelation 20:7-15. The challenge I see with this idea is that the redeemed watching in horror as relatives and friends are tormented in the flames (Rev 14:10-11) would be inclined to serve God from fear rather than love in eternity, which would not secure the universe. The thousand years of Revelation 20:1-6 must, among other things, help the righteous understand how the wicked in fact are destroyed, that it is not the arbitrary smiting of an angry God, but the sadness of a God who turns away (Rom 1:24-28; Hos 11:8) and allows the wicked to reap the consequences of their own rebellious choices, an inability to survive in His presence.

4) A fourth idea is that the silence of this verse is the silence of the courtroom when the book is opened. Nothing is more silent than a family waiting to hear the reading of a will. The opening of the scroll is somehow vital to resolving the cosmic conflict and its contents will help secure the universe forever. Sin will not rise a second time.

Given the shortage of evidence, I am not sure how to read the seventh seal, but if one wants to place the seventh seal at a particular point in history, it is clearly at or after the Second Coming, which appears to be in view in 6:15-17. The silence would then represent either the millennium itself or the universe at peace at the end of the millennium. With that in mind, I would favor a combination of interpretations 1 (the silence as justice is done for God's people—Isa 62:1-7) and 2 (echo of primeval silence, so here would be the silence preceding the new creation). Either way, it is the eschatological Sabbath which celebrates the approaching end of the conflict and the inauguration of the New Earth.

We noted in the comments on Revelation five that the best interpretation of the scroll is the validation of kingship (Deut 17:14-20). As the Jewish Messiah, Christ took the throne of David from Satan and began his reign over the earth (Acts 2:33-34; Eph 1:20; Heb 8:1-2) in chapter five (5:6-7). But his reign is still of the "now and not yet" variety. While Christ is the ultimate ruler of earth, Satan still has a fairly free hand to create havoc (Rev 9:1-11) with some restraint for the time being (Rev 7:1-3). He is bound and made captive at the Second Coming of Christ (Rev 20:1-3—the beginning of the millennium). But until he has been allowed a final

demonstration of his character and government at the end of the millennium (Rev 20:7-9), the reign of Christ is not full, final and complete. I would see the seventh seal as an anticipation of that day when the reign of Christ is, in fact, full, final and complete.

Rev 8:2 (The Role of the Trumpets in Revelation)-- The seven trumpets are the most difficult material to interpret in all of Revelation (and perhaps all of the Bible). They contain some of the wildest, most perplexing imagery that you will find in all of literature. What is their purpose and what role do they play in the book of Revelation?

It may come as a surprise to many, but with a careful reading the role of the seven trumpets in Revelation is marked out quite clearly. To understand it properly it is helpful to begin back at the fifth seal. "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, 'How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?'" Revelation 6:9-10, NIV. The basic question of this passage is: How long will it be until the judgment against "the inhabitants of the earth" (Greek: *tôn katoikountôn epi tēn gēn*). There is a significant parallel to this passage in the middle of the seven trumpets.

In the fifth seal (Rev 6:9-11), the souls under the altar cry out for vengeance against "those who live on the earth" (Greek: *tôn katoikountôn epi tēn gēn*). This cry is echoed between the fourth and fifth trumpets: "As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: 'Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!'" Revelation 8:13. This verse is an apt summary of the seven trumpets. The three woes represent the fifth, sixth and seven trumpets. The purpose of those "woes" (Greek: *ouai*) is judgment on "those who live on the earth" (Greek: *tois katoikountas epi tēs gēs*). What, then, is the object of the trumpets? Judgments on "those who live on the earth," a direct response to the cry for justice of the souls under the altar.

In addition to the connection between the fifth seal and Revelation 8:13, there is an additional connection between the fifth seal and the trumpets. This connection can be observed in the introductory scene, Revelation 8:3-5, NIV: "Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayer of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake." This is the introductory vision to the seven trumpets. It underscores that the seven trumpets are a response to the persecution of God's people. In symbol, the martyred saints call out for justice, their cries reach heaven mingled with incense, and judgments are hurled down to the earth as a result.

The connection between the trumpets and the fifth seal carries a very significant theological message. The martyrs of the fifth seal cried out to God in the face of His seeming silence and inactivity regarding their suffering (Rev 6:9-10). God's immediate response was to offer them white robes representing the assurance of salvation while encouraging them to "wait" for the ultimate righting of the wrongs they have suffered.

But the connection of this passage to the seven trumpets suggests an additional response to the cries of the martyrs. The message seems to be that God is already dealing with those who oppressed and martyred the saints. While this was not observable to them, the trumpets show God dealing with powers, groups, and movements that have persecuted His people. And if the trumpets are a series of judgments from John's day to the end (which I plan to demonstrate shortly), the trumpets tell us that God is already judging the persecutors of God's people *within* history. So the message to the martyred saints is; though you can't see it now, history is already bringing about the downfall of the powers that have hurt you. And God's hand is behind that.

Rev 8:2 (Introduction—Spiritual Lessons)-- Are there some spiritual lessons in this brief overview of the trumpets? First of all, the connection with the fifth seal develops the basic theology of the trumpets. As is expressed in the fifth seal: God may seem absent from human history, or even indifferent, when you look at the suffering of God's people through the ages. But the trumpets offer a different message. They suggest that God does not wait until the judgment at The End to set everything right, but is already acting within history to deal with those who have hurt His people. God's interventions are not always visible to the natural eye, they may not even be active interventions, but in the midst of confusion, violence and terror, Jesus Christ sits in ultimate control on the throne. Though the outcome of God's control is not always clear to those experiencing history, God's care for His suffering people is real and will be fully known one day. The trumpets pull back the curtain to see a larger picture in human affairs. Rightly understood, the trumpets offer comfort to the oppressed people of God. Even in their oppression, He is dealing with those that are oppressing them. They can wait for His justice because it surely will be carried out and is already being carried out.

The trumpets imply that one's decision for or against the gospel is the most decisive action anyone can take in this life. The trumpets portray in the most fearful terms the type of consequences that come to those in rebellion against God. While they exercise their wrath against the people of God, all is observed and taken into account. At the end, God will set all things right. Those who have suffered unjustly will receive justice. Those who have acted unjustly, will receive the appropriate consequences of their actions. The message to God's faithful people is that no matter how out of control history may seem, God is still in control and everything will turn out all right in the end.

There is a further dimension when one looks at the seven trumpets in light of the whole Bible. God does not want anyone to be lost, but all to come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9). When people rebel against Him persistently, he does not strike back in anger, His wrath is expressed by sadly letting them go (Rom 1:18-28). While God sometimes acts in judgment, the natural consequences of rebellion are so severe as to need God's restraint, even for His enemies to survive. When He lets them go, terrible consequences result.

When God does act in judgment, there are two purposes. 1) To deliver His people. The connection with the fifth seal indicates that the Trumpets are, in part, actions to deliver those who are suffering unjustly. 2) To get the attention of those who are either neglecting their walk with God or are in rebellion. Through judgments God hopes to get them to consider the

ultimate consequences of their actions and return to Him (see Hosea 11:8 for a look at how God feels about the rebellious). Since the worst judgments of the trumpets are before the close of probation (Rev 10:7), the trumpets are preliminary and partial (thirds of the earth), intended to stimulate a change of heart. They should be seen, therefore, not only as justice for the martyrs, but also as a demonstration of God's care for their oppressors. Until their opposition is final and irretrievable, God acts in judgment that is mixed with mercy.

Rev 8:2 (The Time When the Trumpets End)—The evidence of the text of Revelation is that the seven trumpets end with the end of history at the Second Coming of Christ. The crucial text is Revelation 10:7, NIV: "But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets." See comments on Rev 10:7. In the New Testament, "the mystery of God" is the gospel (Romans 16:25-27; Ephesians 3:3-7). The word translated "announced" is the Greek verb for gospel (*euangelisen*). The gospel that has been announced by the prophets (both Old and New Testament prophets) will be concluded just before the sounding of the seventh trumpet. So the opening of the seventh trumpet brings us to that point in history when everyone has made a decision for or against the gospel and the final events can come in rapid succession. So the closing of the sixth trumpet is parallel to the situation described in Revelation 7:1-3. When the gospel proclamation is no longer being heeded, the winds are released and the final dramatic events occur. So the sounding of the seventh trumpet brings us to the second coming, the end of history.

That the trumpets end with the close of history at the Second Coming is confirmed by the content of the seventh trumpet itself (Rev 11:15-18). Note verse 17, NIV: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign." In one sense, the reign of God began with the enthronement of the Lamb in AD 31 (Rev 5:6-7). But while the Lamb's kingly role is recognized in heaven, events on earth (the seals and trumpets) make it clear that His reign is still disputed on earth itself. The seventh trumpet announces the full assumption of regal power over the earth. But notice the title of God in this verse. He is the one "who is and who was." There is no reference to the future as was the case in the earlier three-fold title given to God (Rev 1:4; 4:8—"who is, and who was, **and who is to come**") because the future has already arrived with the sounding of the seventh trumpet. Since He has already come, He is no longer the one "to come." So the trumpets, like the seals, move all the way to the end of time.

The end-time location of the seventh trumpet is further confirmed by verses 15 and 18: "The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever'" (Rev 11:15). The forever reign of God and Christ on earth (and presumably the universe as well) is announced at the time when the seventh trumpet is blown. Whatever the beginning point of the trumpets, they end with The End. See also verse 18: "The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great--and for destroying those who destroy the earth." See comments on Rev

11:18. The five realities described here all connect with end-time events in Revelation, chapters 12-22. Verse 18 can be seen as a summary in advance of those parts of Revelation that focus primarily on The End. So it is safe to conclude that the seven trumpets of Revelation end with the final events of earth's history and climax with the assumption of God's reign in connection with the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Rev 8:2 (Background to the Seven Trumpets in the Bible)— To understand the seven trumpets of Revelation, it is important to understand the meaning and purpose of trumpets throughout the Bible, beginning with the Old Testament. There are nine different Hebrew words that relate to trumpets in some way; six refer to the instrument itself (Hebrew: *chatsôtserâh, yôbêl, qeren, shôphâr, taqôa', terû'âh*) and three to the act of blowing a trumpet (Hebrew: *chatsôtsêr, rûa', taqa'*). But the Greek Bible (both LXX and NT) used only one Greek root structure to translate all of these terms for trumpeting (LXX: *salpigx* [noun—"trumpet"], *salpizein* [verb—"blow the trumpet"]). *Salpigx* was used to translate all six Hebrew nouns above. *Salpizein* was used to translate all three Hebrew verbs above. There are minor instances of other Hebrew words that can refer to trumpeting but were not so translated in the LXX (examples include Exodus 19:13; Leviticus 25:9; Joshua 6:5; 1 Chronicles 16:42). There are also places where the LXX translators failed to see trumpeting in the nine words listed above (Jdg 7:8; 2 Sam 15:10; 1 Kings 1:41; and Hosea 8:1). So in examining the Old Testament background for the seven trumpets, we will look at how the language of trumpeting is used in the Greek Old Testament (LXX- the Septuagint).

The trumpet word group is found 134 times in the Septuagint (Greek OT). In my examination of these passages I found 54 are in the context of liturgy and worship. Another 22 are in the context of battle, but it is the priests who are blowing the trumpets, so there is a sense of liturgy and worship in these texts, even in battle. Some scholars call that "holy war." There are 28 other references to the use of trumpets in battle. There are also 10 contexts in which trumpets are blown to warn people of danger, 9 times they are used at coronations, 5 times they refer specifically to signaling (battle usages may include that concept as well, and 6 times they are mentioned in the context of a theophany (appearance of God). So in the Old Testament, trumpets are used primarily in two contexts, worship and battle. The various meanings of trumpeting above are not fixed, more than one category often applies in many instances and I had to make a decision as to which one was primary.

Liturgy and worship in the OT involved the use of the trumpet in temple rituals, hymns and related activities of corporate worship. In addition the trumpet also had a liturgical significance in battle. The battle trumpets of Israel were to be handled only by the priests, so this explains the 22 references combining battle and worship. Then there are general references to battle trumpets, including incidents where it was clearly someone other than a priest who used the trumpet (impulsive people like Jephthah, Gideon, Saul, Joab and Absalom). The category of Warning arises primarily from Ezekiel 33, although it may well play a subsidiary role in some of the other usages as well. The category of Signaling has primary reference to Numbers 10, which contains marching orders for the Israelite camp. Trumpets were prominent also in the coronations of ancient Israel and in the enthronement Psalms (such as Psalm 47) which looked forward to the time when God's kingdom would be established over the whole

earth. Trumpets were also associated with theophanies (appearances of God) in Exodus 19 and Zechariah 9:14. While this association is rare in the Old Testament, it becomes a predominant emphasis in the New Testament. But the predominant usage of trumpets in the Old Testament is worship oriented.

When it comes to the use of trumpets in the Old Testament, there is a key key theological passage which combines the liturgical and battle uses of the trumpet, Numbers 10:8-10, NIV: "The sons of Aaron, the priests, are to blow the trumpets. This is to be a lasting ordinance for you and the generations to come. When you go into battle in your own land against an enemy who is oppressing you, sound a blast on the trumpets. Then you will be remembered by the Lord your God and rescued from your enemies. Also at your times of rejoicing--your appointed feasts and New Moon festivals--you are to sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, and they will be a memorial for you before your God. I am the Lord your God." This passage clearly indicates that the priests were the custodians and performers of trumpets in Old Testament times, so there was a liturgical significance to the blowing of the trumpet regardless of the context. The use of the trumpet was confined to the priests. And this was to be a lasting ordinance for all generations to come. So whenever someone in the Old Testament who is not a priest blew a trumpet for battle or for worship (impulsive people like Jephthah, Gideon, Saul, Joab and Absalom), it was a direct violation of the mosaic law.

According to Numbers 10:8-10, the use of trumpets, whether in battle or in worship, would result in remembrance (Hebrew of verse 9: *nizkartem*; Hebrew of verse 10: *lezikkârôn*; both derivatives of the root word *zkr*) on God's part. In battle this remembrance took the form of deliverance from their enemies (v. 9). In worship this remembrance took the form of forgiveness and acceptance within the parameters of the covenant (v. 10--"I am the Lord your God."). Thus, theologically, Israel did not distinguish between battle and worship as far as the trumpet was concerned. The sounding of the trumpet became a symbol of covenant prayer. When the priests blew the trumpet they were reminding God of His covenant with His people. If they were faithful to Him, He would protect and defend them in battle (v.9). They are to be a memorial before God when the priests blow them in worship or in battle (v.10).

Thus, the predominant usage of the trumpet in the Greek Old Testament (76 times out of a total of 134 or 57%) is in a liturgical context and its primary theological significance is as a symbol of covenant prayer. When in battle, God remembers and delivers them; when in the temple seeking forgiveness of sins, God remembers and delivers them. So the meaning is clear that trumpets are a symbol of covenant prayer--prayer of God's faithful people that He will respond to His covenant and deliver them from their enemies.

This fits perfectly with the data of Revelation, where the trumpets are God's response to the prayers of the saints (Rev 6:9-10) for judgment and deliverance (Rev 8:3-5; 8:13). As saints cry out to God for vengeance, judgment, fairness, and justice, it is like the trumpets of Israel in the Old Testament and God responds when He hears the trumpet tones.

A surface reading of the Seven Trumpets might lead readers to think they represent war, disaster, and/or warning. But the trumpets actually portray a spiritual concept throughout Scripture--a symbol of God's people crying out for Him to make right that which has gone

wrong on this earth. When the trumpet is blown, God responds by subduing the oppressors and delivering His people.

In addition to the above, the seven trumpets point back to such OT events as creation, the Exodus and the fall of Jericho. The trumpets portray the disastrous effects on creation of the Fall (Gen 3). To some extent each trumpet corresponds to a day of creation; 1) earth (Gen 1:1), 2) sea (Gen 1:6,7), 3) rivers and springs (1:9), 4) sun, moon and stars (1:16), 5) locusts (1:21), 6) humanity (1:26-29), 7) kingdom of God (2:1-3). The trumpets obscure light (9:2), foul the air (9:2), destroy vegetation (8:7), darken sun, moon and stars (8:12), kill the creatures of the sea (8:9), kill human beings (8:11; 9:18) and undo the Sabbath rest (9:5-6,20-21). While the specific order of creation is not followed, the acts of the creation account are reversed in an overwhelming "de-creation." This actually parallels the account in Genesis, where the Flood story is described as a dismantling of creation piece by piece. So one could argue that the seven trumpets are also a reminder of the Flood, and there is at least one direct allusion to the Flood (the five months of the fifth trumpet—Rev 9:5, 10).

The seven trumpets also parallel the plagues of the Exodus structurally. The first trumpet is reminiscent of the hail plague (Exod 9:22ff.). The second and third trumpets recall when Moses turned the waters of Egypt to blood (Exod 7:14ff.). The third trumpet also recalls the bitter waters of Marah (Exod 15:23). The fourth and fifth recall the plague of darkness (10:21ff.). The fifth trumpet also contains reminiscences of the plague of locusts (10:12ff.). The seventh trumpet recalls the events related to the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15. Only the sixth trumpet is not clearly based on the Exodus and even here it is possible that the author intended the death of a third of mankind to be reminiscent of the plague on the first-born of Egypt (Exod 11; 12:29ff.). Scholars are even more convinced about a structural allusion to the plagues of the Exodus than they are of the allusion to creation. The fact that the bowl-plagues of Revelation 16 closely parallel both the seven trumpets and the plagues of the Exodus is further support for this background here.

There is also a strong structural parallel to the Fall of Jericho narrative in the seven trumpets. In Joshua 6 the account begins with the marching orders (6:3-5). Accompanied by the signals of the trumpet priests and the Ark of the Covenant, the people march around Jericho once a day for six days and then seven times on the seventh day. They were to march in absolute silence (6:10) until the time when the signal was given. At the sound of the trumpets all the people shouted and the walls fell down (6:20).

By comparison, the seven trumpets begin with silence in heaven (8:1) and end with a great shout (11:15). Each trumpet blast results in a plague until the seventh which includes within itself the full seven last plagues of the bowls (Rev 11:18). In Revelation 11:19 the ark of the covenant appears for the only time in the book of Revelation. Like the battle for Jericho, the trumpets climax with God's rulership over a specific place. Thus the account of the siege of Jericho should be seen as a structural parallel running behind the whole seven trumpets passage.

The seven trumpets also make frequent reference to the book of Joel. Joel contains references to locusts (Joel 1:4; 2:5-7, 25; Rev 9:1-11), calls for repentance (Joel 1:5, 13-14; 2:12-17; Rev 9:20-21), ruined vegetation (Joel 1:7, 10-12; 2:13; Rev 8:7), Day of the Lord imagery (frequent in both), devouring fire (Joel 1:19-20; 2:3, 5, 30; Rev 8:7-8), trumpet calls (Joel 2:1, 15; Rev repeatedly), references to darkness (Joel 2:2, 10, 31; 3:15; Rev 8:12; 9:1-11), locusts described as horses (Joel 2:4-5, 7; Rev 9:7-11, 16-19?), a burning mountain (Joel 2:5; Rev 8:8), anguish (Joel 2:6; Rev 9:5-6), a sanctuary/temple altar (Joel 2:17; Rev 8:3-5; 9:13-14), heavenly signs (Joel 2:30-31; 3:15 Rev 8:12), blood and fire (Joel 2:30-31; Rev 8:7-9), and references to God's kingdom (Joel 3:18-21; Rev 11:15-18). The book of Joel and the concept of "thirds" (Ezek 5:1-4, 12; Zech 13:8-9) are closely related to the themes of exile and return in the prophets. We have seen, therefore, that the seven trumpets point to aspects of the three major events of Old Testament history; the Creation/Fall/Flood, the Exodus, and the Exile/Return.

In a subtle manner the author of Revelation combines the plagues on Egypt with Joshua's attack on Jericho. As at Jericho, the trumpets precede the fall of a great city (cf. Rev 11 and 18), and the entrance of God's people into the promised land (cf. Rev 21 and 22). The trumpets, however, are also part of what Kenneth Strand has called the "Exodus from Egypt / Fall of Babylon" motif. While most of the plagues are based directly on the Exodus motif, we really have a blending of the Exodus with the Exile. The extent of this blending can be seen in the fact that in Revelation Jericho has become Babylon. It is Babylon which falls after the blowing of the trumpets. As with the Exodus and the Return from Babylonian exile, the trumpets are a covenant execution on the part of God. He judges the wicked for their opposition to Him and His people, in the process delivering the righteous and preparing the way for their inheritance of the kingdom (cf. the shout of Rev 11:15).

If the seven trumpets are based on the plagues of Egypt why didn't the author portray ten plagues instead of just seven? The answer probably lies in the fact that the first three of the plagues on Egypt fell on the land of Goshen (where the Israelites lived), the last seven did not. Thus seven of the Egyptian plagues fell solely on the Egyptians just as the seven plagues of the trumpets fall only on those who oppose Christ and His followers. There are also three plagues mentioned within the sixth trumpet, making a total of ten, three of which are outside the numbered sequence of seven.

Between the writing of the last book of the Old Testament canon and the arrival of Jesus and the apostles (roughly 425 B.C. to 30 A.D.) there is a clear trend in regard to the spiritual meaning of trumpets. During the Intertestamental Period trumpets were increasingly associated with judgment. This can be seen in a number of early paraphrases of the Hebrew text (the so-called Aramaic Targums), in Philo (a Jewish philosopher in Egypt), the Mishnah (traditions of the rabbis), and the non-canonical Jewish apocalypses and hymns. Trumpets were also associated during this period with signaling in battle and prayer, but these themes play a minor role in the literature we have available to us, with the exception of the War Scroll among the Dead Sea Scrolls (the War Scroll 3:1-11), which has overtones of liturgical war, like the

predominant emphasis in the Old Testament. But the association of trumpets with judgment and the eschaton is the predominant emphasis during this period.

An excellent example of trumpets representing judgment in general and the final judgment in particular can be found in Fourth Ezra (First Century A.D., so contemporary with Revelation): “Behold the days come and it shall be, when I am about to draw nigh to visit the dwellers upon the earth, and when I require from the doers of iniquity (the penalty of) their iniquity: and when the humiliation of Sion shall be complete, and when the Age which is about to pass away shall be sealed, then (will I show these signs): the books shall be opened before the face of the firmament, and all see together. . . . And the trumpet shall sound aloud at which all men, when they hear it, shall be struck with sudden fear” (4 Ezra 6:18-23). A good source for non-biblical apocalyptic literature is the two-volume set edited by James Charlesworth (*Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*), but most of these books can be found online.

In the New Testament context, the trumpet word group (Greek: *salpigx/salpizein*) has taken over the Greek and Hebrew meanings of trumpet which the New Testament writers considered pertinent to their writings. These two words appear in the New Testament a total of 23 times. Two of these references are common references to trumpets and do not seem to have theological value (Matt 6:2; 1 Cor 14:8). Of the other 21 usages, 14 are found in Rev 8-11. Before we look at that passage, I will offer a few thoughts about the other seven usages, which appear to fall into two groups.

1) Trumpets are associated with theophany, the appearance of God. Hebrews 12:19 alludes to Exodus 19:13-19. Cloud, darkness, and storm are all theophanic phenomena and the blowing of the trumpet at Sinai is part of that (Exod 19:19). The author of Hebrews contrasts the security of the one who accepts Christ (Heb 12:22-24) with the terror and gloom experienced at Sinai. Another theophanic use of the trumpet can be found in Rev 1:10 and 4:1. The trumpet sound is associated with the voice of Jesus (John hears a trumpet behind him and when he looks he sees Jesus standing there on the island of Patmos (Rev 1:10-12). This is consistent with trumpet as theophany--of the appearance of God. But in Revelation theophany has become Christophany (appearance of Christ). The New Testament writers came to equate Jesus Christ with the Yahweh of the OT (compare Revelation 1:18 with Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12).

2) Trumpets appear four other times in the New Testament, all in passages dealing with the *Parousia* (Matt 24:31; 1 Cor 15:51-52; 1 Thess 4:16-17), the Second Coming of Jesus. The trumpets may have been understood as representing the voice of Christ that awakens the dead (cf. John 5:28-29). Combining this idea with the theophany texts mentioned earlier, the predominant usage of trumpets in the New Testament outside the Seven Trumpets is in relation to theophany, or, more accurately, Christophany.

In summary, the Old Testament use of trumpets points particularly to their association with covenant prayer (Num 10:8-10). During the Intertestamental Period there is a strong association with judgment. In the New Testament outside of the seven trumpets of Revelation, the predominant emphasis is on theophany or Christophany. All three of these themes is relevant to an understanding of the Seven Trumpets. They respond to the covenant prayers of the saints (Rev 6:9-11, cf. 8:2-6), they include the language of judgment (Rev 8:13—although

the actual Greek words for judgment do not appear in the trumpets until 11:18), and there is a sense of God's presence in the trumpets, even though God Himself is not a major actor in the drama (8:4; 9:4, 13; 11:16-17). So the seven trumpets should be seen in light of covenant prayer, judgment and theophany.

There is one curious absence in the use of trumpets in the New Testament. Since trumpets are so easily associated with theophany and the end of the world, why are they missing at the cross? The cosmic signs of the End (earthquake, rocks splitting, the veil of the temple torn, darkness over the earth terrorizing the people, resurrections) happened while Jesus was hanging on the cross, but there is no mention of a trumpet in the New Testament accounts.

But there actually was a blowing of the trumpet, seven trumpets in fact, at the moment of Jesus' death. Trumpets were blown each day (at 9 A.M. and 3 P.M.) as part of the *Tamid*, the daily sacrifice in the temple. Around the time when Jesus said, "It is finished," bowed His head and died, the sound of the trumpet was blasting out from the temple inside the walls of Jerusalem. So, even though it is not mentioned in the New Testament, the sound of trumpets was associated with the moment of Jesus' death.

Trumpets, then, are associated with the major events of human history where God does His mighty acts: at the cross, the second coming, Jesus' visit to John on Patmos; Mount Sinai, the battle of Jericho, and many others. Trumpets can represent major interventions in human history.

One reason many Christian readers of Revelation are not excited about the Seven Trumpets is the seeming absence of the gospel there. In the Prologue of Revelation (1:1-8-- before we get to the symbols), it is stated that the entire book is the Revelation of Jesus Christ; who loves us, freed us from our sins by His blood, and made us kings and priests before God. In relatively plain language it tells us that Revelation is about what Jesus did on the cross, His present rulership, and the gospel being worked out today in the lives of real people. That is the primary emphasis of the book of Revelation. But it is hard, on a surface reading at least, to reconcile the violence and the catastrophes of the Trumpets with the gospel. So we need to look under the surface.

The gospel is hidden in the first trumpet, for example, until you examine it in the light of the larger picture of the New Testament. "The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up" (Rev 8:7, NIV). The language here does not sound anything like the gospel. But compare the first trumpet with Luke 23:28-31, NIV: "Jesus turned and said to them, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, "Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!" Then "they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'" For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?" Luke 23:28-31.

God talks about a judgment on the trees and vegetation of the world in the first trumpet. In Luke, the symbols are tied together. The green tree is Jesus persecuted by the Romans. The dry tree is referring to the destruction of Jerusalem which, according to Jesus, was

the consequence of a significant group of religious people rejecting Jesus by putting Him on a cross. Knowing the gospel and the New Testament will shed light on the meaning of the wild and bizarre imagery of the trumpets.

The last place anyone would expect to find the gospel of Jesus Christ is in the fifth trumpet: "When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were not given power to kill them, but only torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a man. During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them" (Rev 9:3-6. NIV). This is a most bewildering passage of horrendous language! Once again there are surprising parallels elsewhere in the New Testament.

"The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.' He replied, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven'" (Luke 10:17-20).

The imagery of locusts like scorpions coming out of the Abyss (Rev 9:2) to attack and torment people but not to harm God's sealed (Rev 9:4), is the same as "authority to trample on snakes and scorpions" (Luke 10:17-20). Because of what Jesus has done on the cross, those who receive Him and the gospel are sheltered from the wrath of Satan. The trumpets tell us that the day is coming when the demons will be wild and free on the face of the earth but God's people will still be protected even in the midst of the demonic attack.

There is also a strong theme of darkness in Revelation 9, Compare it with John 3. "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God" (John 3:18-21).

Clearly, light is a symbol of the gospel, while darkness is a symbol of evil and absence of the gospel. The darkness of the fifth trumpet portrays a time when the gospel is obscured to those who have rejected the gospel and are tormented by evil as a result. Even in the midst of the trumpets, there is language recalling the gospel when we read the fifth trumpet in comparison with other New Testament passages. As bizarre as the trumpets are, they can only truly be understood by someone who understands the gospel.

Rev 8:2 (The Time When the Trumpets Begin)—Pretty much all scholars agree that the seven trumpets and seven seals end at the second coming. But do the trumpets, like the seals, begin with the cross? Or do they begin at another point in history? Or just before the end? Are they

events throughout Christian history or are they end-time events like the seven bowl-plagues of Revelation 16? We can begin to find an answer in the sanctuary introduction to the Seven Trumpets.

"And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the the angel's hand" (Rev 8:2-4, NIV).

There are seven angels with seven trumpets standing before God and one unspecified angel with a golden censer standing at an unspecified altar. He was given much incense with the prayers of the saints which were on the golden altar in front of the throne. This recalls the *Tamid*, or daily (continual) sacrifice in the sanctuary.

The scene in Revelation 8:2-5 reflects the *Tamid*, the daily service in the temple before its destruction in A. D. 70. A number of things were done by a designated priest during that daily sacrifice: he opened the temple door; trimmed the lamps inside; went out leaving the temple door open; offered a sacrifice at the altar of burnt offering; poured out the blood of the sacrifice at the base of the altar; was given incense in a censer at the altar of burnt offering; took the censer inside the temple to the altar of incense in the Holy Place; offered the incense on the Altar of Incense; and came out to bless the people. While the priest was offering incense in the Holy Place, there would be a period of silence outside. When the priest completed the offering of incense, seven trumpets were blown by the temple priests. The last aspect of this service was taking the censer and throwing it down on the floor of the courtyard. The clanging sound of the censer striking hard stone was the audible signal that the daily service (done twice a day) was complete.

Each of these aspects of the daily service is mentioned in one form or another in the first half of the book of Revelation. There is a period of silence for about a half hour (Revelation 8:1). Then, according to the background of the daily temple service, you have two altars in Revelation 8:3-4: 1) the altar where the angel gets the incense (the altar of burnt offering) and 2) the altar where the angel offers up the incense to God (the golden altar). According to Revelation 8:3-4, the angel with a golden censer comes and stands at THE altar. Usually, the definite article in Greek refers back to a previous mention of the word, either in the same book or in an earlier writing that the author is working from. Here the reference is to the scene of the souls under the altar (Revelation 6:9-10). The altar in that passage is the altar of burnt offering outside the temple. The angel of Revelation 8:3-4 presumably comes to the altar of burnt offering, receives incense there and ministers it inside the temple at the golden altar. Knowledge of temple practices in the First Century is relevant to the way the vision is described.

It seems that the intercessory daily service of the temple is depicted in Revelation 8:1-5. The incense of the daily service came from the same altar where the daily sacrifice had been made. So the incense is directly associated with the sacrifice. So while neither the cross nor a symbol of the cross is present in the introductory passage of the trumpets, the strong allusion to the daily service includes an allusion to the cross of Jesus Christ (represented in the temple

by the Altar of Burnt Offering). The incense being offered is available because of the sacrifice, it arises from the cross.

The central theme in Revelation 5 is the worthiness of the Lamb on account of being slain (Rev 5:9-12). The Lamb was worthy to take the book and open its seals because He was slain. So the foundation of Revelation's visions is the cross of Jesus Christ. throne scene when Jesus (the Lamb that was slain) worthily took up the book (Revelation 5), was the cross. The cross of Christ is the foundational act for all the events that take place in Revelation, including the seven trumpets.

What does all of this temple imagery have to do with the trumpets? And how do the trumpets relate to the gospel of Jesus Christ, since both the gospel and the trumpets are grounded in the cross? In terms of the New Testament gospel, it is intercession that flows from the cross. Because of what happened on the cross, Jesus can provide forgiveness and covering for sin. It is not that intercession is needed to change the Father's mind. In a perfect universe, no intercession at all would be needed (John 16:25-27). The Father is just as favorable to us as the Son is (John 14:9; 2 Cor 5:18-19). But intercession is needed in the context of the cosmic conflict. Satan is the "accuser of the brethren" (Rev 12:10), and by implication of God (Job 1 and 2). The heavenly court process clears God and His loyal followers of Satan's charges and assures the universe that God's people are safe to save. And all this occurs, not because of anything we have done, but because of what Christ has done in His life, death, resurrection and heavenly reign (Rev 1:5-6). The incense of the altar, applied to the prayers of the saints, is the assurance that God's people are accepted before God and before the universe. It assures their ultimate salvation.

The connection of the seven trumpets with the fifth seal provides surprising theological depth. Whatever the trumpets mean, they are connected to the foundational insights of the New Testament gospel. Revelation is a New Testament book and needs to be read with that in mind. Many of the bizarre readings of the Revelation or of the trumpets arise from reading Revelation out of the context of the New Testament gospel. For the Christian (John and his audience were, after all, Christians), the gospel is foundational. Christianity is not spelled "D-O," Christian life is not grounded on what Christians themselves DO. Christian faith is spelled "D-O-N-E." The foundation for our lives is what God in Christ has done. Because of the gospel, we are acceptable to God, even when we stumble or fall short of His glory (according to Romans 3:23, everyone does). The introduction to the trumpets provides a stage backdrop of intercession in light of the cross of Christ. That is foundational for understanding the trumpets.

What do the cross and intercession have to do with the time when the trumpets begin? We noticed that the seals begin with the ascension of the Lamb and His enthronement. These events occurred in the context of Pentecost, probably A.D. 31. The corresponding anchor point in the trumpets is the intercession seen in 8:3-4. Just as Revelation 5 is the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary, the daily intercession flows immediately from that. So a stage backdrop of intercession puts the beginning of the Seven Trumpets at the same point as the Seven Seals, A.D. 31 or thereabouts. But things are not entirely so simple. There are objections to such a viewpoint, based on verse five and other considerations, which we will examine shortly.

The Old Testament daily service (*Tamid*) imagery involved incense constantly hovering over the camp, sheltering the people with the reality of God's favor upon them. In the New Testament context, the incense represents the righteousness of Christ, which makes up for any defects God's loyal people may have. While we all fall short of God's glory (Rom 3:23), the incense of the righteousness of the cross hovers over our lives. This is the basic imagery that comes at the beginning of the trumpets.

Objections to seeing the trumpets as covering the whole of Christian history often center in Revelation 8:5: "Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake" (NIV). This is a sudden change! From the peaceful ministration of incense to images of violence and threat. What is going on here? There are two possible ways to understand the throwing down of the censer.

First, the last act of the *Tamid* service in the temple was for the priest to throw the censer down onto the floor of the outer court. This would occur as the seven trumpets were blowing. Jewish tradition says that the noise of the censer clanging on the stone floor was so loud it could be heard outside the walls of Jerusalem. If this is what John had in mind, it would signify that the intercession of Jesus is complete and is put into play. In that case, everything that goes on in the Seven Trumpets relates back to the scene of daily intercession at the beginning. If the throwing down of the censer is a part of the daily service, then intercession is the whole point of the introductory sanctuary scene.

We have noted one possibility for Revelation 8:5, it depicts the climax of the daily service in the temple. But there is another possibility. The throwing down of the censer could represent the close of intercession and the close of probation. The service of intercession is brought to an end by throwing down the censer and blowing seven trumpets. Let's look at a key text in the Old Testament. It follows the frightful slaughter scene of Ezekiel 9 (1-7) which lies behind the opening verses of Revelation 7.

"The LORD said to the man clothed in linen, 'Go in among the wheels beneath the cherubim. Fill your hands with burning coals from among the cherubim and scatter them over the city.' And as I watched, he went in" (Ezek 10:2, NIV).

The scattering of the coals is a further act of judgment signifying that the city's probation had closed. After this, God leaves the city in His glorious throne-chariot, crosses over the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives and, from there, ascends to heaven. In Ezekiel's context, God abandons the Holy City of Jerusalem, so neither the city nor the temple are holy any more, and Israel is doomed to captivity. The act that demonstrated God's forsaking of Israel is the scattering of the coals over Jerusalem.

If Ezekiel 10 is the key background to the throwing down of the censer, it would indicate that the intercession depicted in verses three and four has come to an end, probation has closed. Taking the scene as a whole, it would signify a close of intercession as much as a beginning of intercession. What is clear is that the introductory sanctuary scene of the trumpets involves both intercession and close of probation imagery, both intercession and judgment.

Those who argue that all the trumpets are end-time rather than historical would see verse five as concluded before the trumpets begin. They believe that verses five and six

together demonstrate that. "Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake. Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them" (Revelation 8:5-6, NIV).

Notice that, in the order of the text, the trumpets are not blown until the censer is thrown down. That could suggest that the trumpets are blown after the intercession is over. In that case, all seven trumpets would be future from our perspective, located in time after the close of probation. But while that reading builds on the order of verses five and six, there are still some problems with such a reading.

There are, therefore, a couple of issues with the reading of Revelation 8:5. First, is the throwing down of the censer an act of intercession (part of the daily service) or is it an act of judgment or cessation (based on Ezekiel 2)? And if it is the latter, does it refer to the close of probation at the end of human history or is it referring to the concept of judgment in a broader fashion, ongoing judgment throughout history?

Here it is helpful to remind ourselves of another element in Revelation's visionary introductions. The earlier introductions proved to be like stage backdrops, which formed the setting on which the entire vision that follows is built. In a play, there is a backdrop for every scene that affects everything in that scene. If the backdrop is of the city of Paris, everything in that scene takes place in Paris and in relation to the city life that is there. If the scene is changed to a rural one, then everything there takes place in the rural setting and is also in relation to the location. If Revelation 8:2-6 serves as a stage backdrop, the throwing down of the censer alone would not govern everything that happens, but also the intercession. Both intercession and the close of intercession lie behind everything that is happening throughout the seven trumpets.

Which of these two options is correct? If the introductory scene is complete before the trumpets are blown, the trumpets are entirely future. If the scene is like a stage backdrop to the trumpets as a whole, then the trumpets would go back to the cross of Christ, the basis for the intercession that began shortly after.

Since the author of Revelation does not directly address the point of HOW the introductory visions are to function, we need a quick review of the literary relationship between introductory scenes and the main visions in the rest of the book. This kind of study helped us settle the relationship of the 144,000 to the Great Multitude in Revelation 7. John had a literary pattern of hearing one thing and then seeing another. What he heard and saw would appear to be opposites, yet were clearly the same thing. That pattern was instructive for Revelation 7. Are there similar literary patterns that could help us understand the relationship between the introductory scenes and the visions as a whole? What is John's pattern for introductory visions?

The introductory vision to the Revelation's seven churches (Revelation 1:9-20) precedes the messages to the churches in a literary sense (chapter 1 precedes chapters 2-3). Does the introductory scene of the glorified Son of Man also precede the seven churches in point of time or is it a stage backdrop that is central to the seven messages that the churches receive? We have seen that it is clearly a stage backdrop. See Rev 1:12-20 (Excursus on the Introduction and

the Seven Churches) for more detail on how the messages to the seven churches build on the introductory vision. The letter to every single church refers back to the introductory vision. Jesus is standing among the candlesticks--which represent the seven churches--and ministering to them. Each of the letters is His ministry to that church, so all of Revelation 2-3 is governed by the introductory scene (Revelation 1). As Christ ministers to them, these letters come forth for our benefit. It is clear that the foundational introductory vision continues and remains in view throughout the following material. The messages to the seven churches build on the introductory vision, they do not follow it in point of time.

The introductory vision for the seals is the heavenly throne room scene, where the Lamb approaches the throne of God. He receives a book with seven seals and is assured that He is worthy to break the seals and open the book. The breaking of the seals takes place one by one as you move through chapters 6 and 7 to 8:1. The taking of the book in the introductory scene (Revelation 5), in one sense, precedes the breaking of the seals. But the scenes of the seven seals refer back to the introductory scene as the Lamb breaks each of the seven seals. So the introductory vision remains as a stage backdrop to each of the seven seals. The Lamb opening the book is the foundational setting for all the events that follow.

Something similar happens with the seven bowl-plagues. The emptying of the temple is the first event of the seven last plagues, but the temple remains empty throughout the pouring out of the seven bowls (Rev 15:8) and each of the seven angels acts one by one on the commission received in the introductory vision (Rev 16:1). So the introductory vision (Rev 15:5 – 16:1) is the stage backdrop to all the events that occur in the context of the seven angels pouring out their bowls.

There are four seven-fold, numbered visions in the book of Revelation: The Seven Churches, the Seven Seals, the Seven Trumpets, and the Seven Bowl-Plagues. Our examination of the Churches, the Seals and the Bowl-plagues indicates that the introductory scenes, in a literary sense, precede the vision that follows, but that all of the introductory scene remains in view and affects every part of the following vision. This pattern is instructive for the Seven Trumpets. Acts of intercession precede, and are the foundation for, the trumpets that follow; but the entire scene, including the throwing down of the censer, is a stage backdrop to the trumpets as a whole. The introductory scene precedes the trumpets in a literary sense, but it remains in view throughout the trumpets as a whole. Both the intercession of Christ and the throwing down of the censer are backdrops to the trumpets as a whole. The introduction sets a foundation for what follows and remains in view throughout the vision.

Let's review the introductory scenes to the seven-fold visions of Revelation briefly. In the first sanctuary introduction (Rev 1:12-20), the glorified Son of Man (Jesus Christ) is present to communicate one by one with the seven churches of Asia and with all the churches of human history. In the second sanctuary introduction (Rev 4:1 – 5:14), the cross sets the tone for the whole of Christian history that follows. In the third sanctuary introduction (Rev 8:2-6), the intercession of Christ yields both blessing and judgment throughout the Christian era. The seven trumpets are wake-up calls to the indifferent and the rebellious, inviting them to take hold of the gospel (the interlude [Rev 10:1 – 11:14] in general and 10:7 in particular), repent of their violence and oppression, and return to God.

The introductory scene (Rev 8:2-6) fits in well with the Biblical concept of judgment. Judgments in the Bible tend to be both positive and negative. The courtroom can go both ways and so does God's judgment. In court, you can be either blessed (awarded damages or freed from jail) or cursed (assessed damages or sent to jail). God's judgments can have two outcomes; 1) people can be brought closer to God and fitted for eternal life, or 2) they reap the consequences of breaking the covenant.

There is one more question about the relation of the introductory scene to the trumpets as a whole. How does this dual-themed introduction relate to the following vision? We have ruled out the idea that intercession precedes and ends before any of the trumpets are blown. Intercession is part of the stage backdrop for all the trumpets. So how does the intercession/close of probation material affect the trumpets? Are the seven trumpets seven consecutive scenes of both intercession and judgment? Or is intercession the main theme at the start and judgment toward the end? Which is right?

We can rule out the idea that probation is closed with Revelation 8:5-6 and that the trumpets are all final judgments like the seven bowl-plagues. There is abundant evidence in the sixth trumpet that probation is still open and that intercession is still in view. Notice Revelation 8:13: "The sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God." The golden altar is the Altar of Incense. Its mention here indicates that intercession is still in view when the sixth angel blows his trumpet. This is further underlined by passages in the interlude (Rev 10:1 – 11:14), which is part of the sixth trumpet (9:12; 11:14). "Then I was told, 'You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings'" (Rev 10:11). This makes clear that preaching of the gospel is still going on during the sixth trumpet. Repentance is still possible: "At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven" (Rev 11:13). In the great final proclamation of the gospel, the remnant are to fear God and give Him glory (Rev 14:7). In Revelation 11:13 the "remnant" of the Great City are doing exactly that. So just before the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, intercession is still present, the gospel is still being preached and people are still repenting and receiving Christ.

The impact of the introductory vision (Rev 8:2-6) on all seven trumpets has a literary basis. The Greek of Revelation 8 sheds some light on this. "Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled *it* on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake" (Rev 8:5). What is the "it" that is thrown to the earth? Is it the censer or is it the fire? In the Greek of the text, the censer is masculine and the fire is neuter. The problem is that in the Greek there is no pronoun given for "it." The text says simply "threw into the earth" (Greek: *ebalen eis tēn gēn*). It does not indicate what was thrown into the earth. So what was thrown to the earth in this verse? Was it the censer or the fire? Grammatically it could be either one, although there is preference in Greek to the nearer antecedent, which in this case would be the fire rather than the censer.

So did the angel hurl the whole censer to the earth or did he use it like a slingshot, to hurl the coals of fire to the earth? The latter may also be preferred on account of the earlier

text of an angel throwing coals of fire to the earth (Ezekiel 10:2). It was the fire, not the censer, which was thrown on Jerusalem, signaling the close of its probation.

It is significant, therefore, that fire appears repeatedly throughout the seven trumpets. In the first trumpet fire is mixed with hail and blood (Rev 8:7). In the second trumpet there is a burning mountain which is thrown down into the sea (Rev 8:8-9). In the third trumpet is a star that is burning like an ancient lamp (8:10-11). While this is more of a stretch in terms of the original meaning, we know today that the stars are balls of fiery gas (8:12). In the fifth trumpet smoke comes rising out of the Abyss. The sixth trumpet has horsemen with fiery breastplates that spewed fire out of their mouths (9:17-18).

Nearly all of the seven trumpets make some reference to fire, they are the consequences of the opening scene, where fire is thrown down to the earth (Revelation 8:5). As is the case with the churches and the seals, each of the trumpets is connected to the introductory scene with its intercession and judgment.

Is there a great and final close of probation to be seen in the seven trumpets, the time when the gospel is no longer available to the world? And if so, where in the trumpets can it be clearly seen? That close of probation text is in Revelation 10.

"And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, 'There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets'" (Rev 10:6-7).

The blowing of the seventh trumpet tells us that the "mystery of God" (the "gospel" elsewhere in the NT—Eph 3:2-7; Rom 16:25-27) is finished and the gospel is no longer being announced to the earth. The close of gospel work for humanity is signaled when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet. It closes at the very end of the sixth trumpet, where the gospel is still clearly open—Rev 9:13; 10:11; 11:13). So the first six trumpets, unlike the seven bowl-plagues, occur at a time in history when probation is still open. Only the seventh trumpet occurs after the close of probation.

Rev 8:2 (Summary of Trumpets)—Putting everything together, I have drawn the conclusion that the sounding of the seven trumpets themselves represent covenant prayers building on the fifth seal (Rev 6:9-10). The events in the trumpets are, therefore, judgments of God in seven major phases on those who have oppressed and persecuted His people. These seven trumpet-judgments cover the whole span of Christian history. They begin with the intercession of Christ following the cross and the ascension. They end with the visible establishment of God's kingdom in the context of the Second Coming. With the exception of the last trumpet, the seven all signal judgments intended to lead to repentance. So there is an element of salvation as well as negative judgment in each of the first six. With the close of probation at the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Rev 10:7), the final events of earth's history are ushered in. While the seven seals focus more on the people of God and the trumpets on their opponents, both series, as I understand them, cover the whole Christian era.

This summary overview is based, as we have seen, on a great deal of textual observation in the context of the New Testament world. But not everyone will be happy with these conclusions. Many people prefer that the trumpets all fit into an end-time scenario. And there are two major textual observations that are felt to undermine the conclusions I have reached. We will take up these two objections next.

The first objection to the view that the seven trumpets cover the whole Christian era has to do with a supposed progression of ideas running from Revelation 7 through Revelation 9. In Revelation 7, the four angels were told not to hurt the grass, plants, or trees until the people of God were sealed (Rev 7:1-3). Then in the first trumpet, the grass and trees are being hurt (Rev 8:7), which might seem to be later. And in Revelation 9 the locust/scorpions were specifically "told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads" (Rev 9:4). So on the basis of this single image, it is asserted that the trumpets are later than the seals in point of time. In chapter 7 the whole earth is under God's protection until the people of God are sealed. Then in chapter 9, the servants of God are sealed and the wicked are being harmed (Rev 9:4).

In my view, Revelation 9 is before Revelation 7 in point of time. The above progression is, therefore, challenging to the perspective I have taken in this commentary. But as important as this observation is, I don't think that it is decisive. The objection is based on the assumption that the sealing mentioned in chapters 7 and 9 are the same. But there are actually multiple meanings for sealing in the New Testament and I believe chapters 7 and 9 reflect different meanings for the word group. See comments on Rev 7:3 for more detail on sealing in the Bible.

There are multiple meanings for sealing in the New Testament. First of all, you can seal a document, a tomb, or another place of confinement. And if you do, you conceal something or someone: Jesus in Joseph's tomb (Matt 27:66), the sealed scroll of Revelation 5, the dragon in his prison (Rev 20:3). Secondly, you can certify that something or someone is reliable: certified letters today have a seal guaranteeing that the information inside is reliable. In the New Testament, see John 3:33 and 6:27; Romans 15:28; and 1 Corinthians 9:2.

The predominant meaning of "sealing" in the New Testament is in relation to God's people--that a person has been accepted by God. God knows those that are His and He bestows the Holy Spirit on them (2 Tim 2:19; 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13 and 4:30). The idea of sealing in this sense became associated with circumcision in Judaism (Abraham was sealed when he was circumcised--Rom 4:11) and with baptism in early Christianity. If the fifth trumpet is prior to the close of probation (Rev 10:7), this is the most likely meaning of sealing then. The seal means that during the trumpets God knows those who are His and is watching out for them as He supervises judgments on their oppressors.

The use of language in any biblical text must be compatible with the perspective of John rather than what you or I might bring to it today. In the larger New Testament context, whenever people are sealed it has to do with their relationship to God. But the meaning of sealing in Revelation 7 is related but different. The context in Revelation 7 is explicitly end-time. The mention of sealing is in the context of the Second Coming (Rev 6:15-17). The sealing of Revelation 7 does not refer to the conversion of new Christians. It is the "servants of God" who are sealed on their foreheads (Rev 7:3). So the sealing there has an added meaning to the basic

one of being known and approved by God. In Revelation 7 the sealing builds on Ezekiel 9 as a mark of protection against the destructions of the four winds in the end-time. This sealing is uniquely appropriate to the end time setting, where Satan is unrestrained and begins to run the world the way he wants to. In that fearful time, God's people will need extra protection. Without an explicit end-time context in the fifth trumpet, the sealing reflects the more natural meaning of the term in the New Testament.

The second objection to seeing the seven trumpets as a historical sequence beginning with New Testament times would be the natural flow between Revelation 7-8. That is, the angel was told to not hurt the earth, sea, trees (Revelation 7) but now they are being hurt (Revelation 8:7), which seems to be later. The key question is whether the seven trumpets (beginning with Rev 8:2-6) flow out of the seventh seal (Rev 8:1—later than chapter 7) or are a new series of visions distinct from the seventh seal.

Just because the seventh seal (Rev 8:1) and the first four trumpets are all in chapter 8 does not require the trumpets to be an extended part of the seventh seal. There is evidence that the sanctuary introduction to the trumpets is a distinct vision rather than a continuation of the seals. The author of Revelation often makes use of "recapitulation," where he goes over ground covered before and looks at it from another angle or perspective. Evidence follows that Rev 8:2 and following begin such a recapitulation.

The doctoral dissertation of Ekkehardt Mueller studied the relationship of the seventh seal to the trumpets vision in detail. The introductory vision (Rev 8:2-6) separates the trumpets from the material that came before and is packaged inside a literary "envelope." The seven angels holding the seven trumpets are introduced in verse 2. They are seen again in verse 6, walling off the introductory vision from what precedes (the seventh seal—8:1) and what follows (the trumpets—8:7-13). That is, the first trumpet should not be seen as in sequence following the seventh seal. It has its own unique starting point, signaled by the incense and the prayers of 8:3-4. This is further evident in verse 2, which opens with "and I saw" (Greek: *kai eidon*). This phrase comes at critical turning points in Revelation, almost always introducing a new vision (5:1; 6:1; 7:1; 8:2; 10:1; 14:6; 15:1). So while there are some connections between the seventh seal and the trumpets, the time frame of the trumpets should not be determined by the time frame of the seventh seal.

The closest parallel to the sealing of Revelation 7 is not the fifth trumpet but the sixth: In both passages there are four angels (Rev 7:1; 9:14), a time of restraint (7:1-3; 9:14), the specific phrase found nowhere else in Revelation, "I heard the number" (7:4; 9:16), and a large host that then comes into view (7:9; 9:17-19). The sixth trumpet is at the same historical point in time as the time of sealing in Revelation 7:1-4. If the close of probation is at the end of the sixth trumpet (Rev 10:7), the sealing in the fifth trumpet (Rev 9:4) must be of the more general kind (2 Tim 2:19), it is not the end-time seal.

The objections to beginning the seven trumpets in New Testament times arise from natural ambiguities in the text and need to be taken seriously, but the overwhelming evidence is there that probation is open through the first six trumpets and fully and finally closed in the seventh.

Rev 8:2 (The Nature of the Trumpets)—I have one more set of general remarks before we go verse by verse through the trumpets themselves, beginning with Revelation 8:2.

Do the trumpets affect the righteous or the wicked? Is the focus of the trumpets the people who believe in Christ, the people who disbelieve, or the people who don't even know the gospel? When we looked at the seals, we noted that they affect those who know, or at least, profess to believe the gospel. They are concerned with the gospel's progress in the world and with those who accept or reject it. Are the trumpets a replay of the seals? I believe not. Instead, they affect the opponents and persecutors of God's people. The object of the trumpets in the New Testament sense is those who have rejected the gospel, those whose actions have no conscious relation to Christ. This focus of the seven trumpets is demonstrated by a number of texts.

As we have noted before, the trumpets are a response to the fifth seal. "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, 'How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge **the inhabitants of the earth** and avenge our blood?'" Rev 6:9-10, NIV. In Revelation opponents of God are described as "the inhabitants of the earth." This text is echoed in Revelation 8:13. "As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: 'Woe! Woe! Woe to **the inhabitants of the earth**, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!'" Rev 8:13, NIV. The focus of the trumpets, particularly the last three, is on "the inhabitants of the earth." These are the ones the souls under the altar identified as the source of their suffering and their cry for judgment. The trumpets portray the judgments of God on those who have persecuted His people throughout the Christian era. They are focused solely on those who have rejected the gospel.

There is further evidence that the seven trumpets focus on the opponents of God and His people. "They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads" (Rev 9:4). The plague of the fifth trumpet does not harm vegetation, but only **people** who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. Those who belong to God are not affected by these plagues.

"The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood--idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts" (Rev 9:20-21).

These texts clearly show that the trumpets are different than the seals. They do not affect the church but those who oppose Christ, the gospel and the people of God.

A further evidence that the seven trumpets are focused on the opponents of God and His people are the strong parallels to the seven bowls which fall fully and totally on the opponents of God at the very end of time (Revelation 16).

- 1—The first trumpet and bowl fall on the earth.
- 2—The second trumpet and bowl fall on the sea.
- 3—The third trumpet and bowl fall on the rivers and springs.
- 4—The fourth trumpet and bowl affect the heavenly bodies.

5—The fifth trumpet and bowl involved deep darkness.

6—The sixth trumpet and bowl fall on the Euphrates.

7—The seventh trumpet and bowl portray final world disasters.

The bowls fall on the opponents of God only and so do the trumpets. They two visions are parallel in their nature.

Further evidence that the seven trumpets are focused on the opponents of God and His people is the fact that the seven trumpets affect thirds of the earth. Notice the first trumpet: "The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up" (Rev 8:7). The second and third trumpets also explicitly affect thirds of the earth (Rev 8:8-10).

In the book of Revelation, Satan's kingdom is divided into three parts (Rev 16:13 and 19). Since the trumpets affect thirds of the earth, and Satan's kingdom has three parts, I would suggest that the trumpets affect portions of Satan's kingdom, a third followed by another third, etc. The trumpets portray God's judgments on those who have rebelled against God and persecuted His faithful ones throughout Christian history.

While the seven trumpets affect thirds of the earth, the seven seals affected fourths of the earth. The fourth horseman is particularly described as having authority over a quarter of the earth. The parallel with the four winds in Revelation 7:1-3 confirms that each of the four horses has authority over a quarter of the earth. One of those fourths belongs to God (the white horse represents Christ and the gospel). The other three parts belong to Satan's kingdom. This is appropriate to the idea that the seals focus primarily on those who profess to be followers of God. The trumpets and bowls fall on Satan's kingdom exclusively.

The seals' strongest background is the covenant woes of the Old Testament (Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 32, Ezekiel 14; Zechariah 1 and 6). The seals affect the entire world but the trumpets are limited to those who oppose God and His people. The seals describe the consequences of breaking the covenant (rejecting the gospel in New Testament terms). The consequences of rejecting God affect everyone, whether Israelite or not. Those who break the covenant suffer the consequences (Israelite or not). So the seals affect the whole world, including God's faithful people.

The Old Testament background to the trumpets is different. Instead of a special focus on the covenant and the people of God, the backgrounds to the trumpets are the plagues that fall on the Egyptians during the Exodus, the fall of Babylon, and the fall of Jericho. Egypt, Babylon, and Jericho housed the heathen enemies of God and of His people.

The evidence is clear that the trumpets are judgments of God on those who have been persecuting (martyring) the "saints" (Rev 6:9-10; 8:13). The martyrs in the fifth seal cry out, "How long until you judge and avenge the inhabitants of the earth?" (Rev 6:9-10) and at least one answer to that question comes in the trumpets: "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth" (Rev 8:13). So as we go verse-by-verse through the trumpets, we will expect to see judgments of God on segments of Satan's kingdom. But what kind of judgments do they portray? Are they symbolic judgments that could take place at any time or place? Or are they

prophecies of specific events at specific times in history? We will need to look a little further into the text of the trumpets themselves to answer these questions.

The trumpets, unlike the seals, cover successive chronological periods. The seals looked at the general realities of the whole Christian age--the preaching and rejecting of the gospel and the general consequences of rejecting the gospel. But the trumpets seem to cover a series of decisive events that come one after the other through history. The reasons for drawing this conclusion are these.

First, there is more sense of the passage of time in the trumpets than in the seals. For example, in the trumpets you will find five months (Revelation 9:5 and 10); forty-two months (Revelation 11:3); three-and-a-half days (Revelation 11:7-12); and the three woes paralleling the fifth, sixth, and seventh trumpets (Revelation 8:13). The two following texts show that the three woes are successive. "The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come" (Rev 9:12). "The second woe has passed, the third woe is coming soon" (Rev 11:14). It is clear that when one trumpet is blown, events take place that come to a conclusion. Then a new phase begins. These kinds of indicators do not take place in the seven seals and the sense of a passage of time is not there to the same degree.

The Old Testament backgrounds of the seals and the trumpets are also quite different. The seals point back to the covenant woes of the Old Testament, which occur any time or any place, but the major background themes in the trumpets all show chronological movement; they cover periods of time or successive events that take place one after another.

One of those backgrounds is the Jericho story (Joshua 6). In the fall of Jericho, the people silently marched around the city once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day. Throughout this marching there was a blowing of exactly seven trumpets. The seventh trumpet contains within itself all the seven bowl plagues (Rev 11:18). They are like a seven-fold blowing of the trumpets. The Jericho story is a chronological series of seven days with a climax on the seventh. The seven trumpets are a series of consecutive events with a climax on the seventh.

A second major Old Testament background to the trumpets is the Feast of Trumpets, or Rosh Hashanah, the first day of the seventh month. In the Jewish liturgy, there is a blowing of the trumpets the first day of every month. In the Old Testament, the Jewish liturgical year is seven months long. It runs from the Passover (first month) to the Feast of Tabernacles (seventh month). The Feast of Trumpets, then, is the climax of a series of New Moon trumpet celebrations that take place throughout those seven months. This background concept also underlines the chronological nature of the seven trumpets of Revelation.

Another Old Testament background to the trumpets is the Jubilee. Once every fifty years, trumpets are blown throughout the land, signaling the Jubilee. On that occasion all slaves were to be freed and all debts forgiven. People could go back to the land they had sold and be restored to their family inheritance. The Jubilee came as the climax to seven periods of seven years. During each agricultural cycle the Israelites would work the land for six years and then let it rest for the seventh. After seven agricultural cycles, the Jubilee trumpet was blown. This background underlines a strong sense of chronological movement in the trumpets.

Two of the strongest Old Testament backgrounds to the seven trumpets are the Exodus and Creation. In the Exodus there were ten plagues that appeared one after the other. There were also seven successive days in the account of creation in Genesis 1. Creation was a series of seven days with the climax on the seventh day. We will have more to say about the Exodus and Creation backgrounds shortly. But for the moment, we observe that both the Exodus and Creation backgrounds to the seven trumpets are sequential and chronological. What are we to make of this?

Numerous Old Testament backgrounds point to a series of chronological events far too systematic to be an accident. The author of Revelation is giving us a clue: In the seven trumpets we are seeing a series of events that take place in the course of history, one after another, running from the cross to the second coming of Jesus. As you study the concept of judgment throughout the Bible, it seems that God's great acts of judgment have always been historical, they have always affected events in the real world, they are not simply spiritual.

While God's judgments are historical, that does not mean that they are visible to the secular eye or obvious to the historian. Historians looking at Christian history with the tools of historical science don't necessarily see the hand of God moving here or there. The tools of historical science are limited to cause and effect within history, they don't have the capacity to examine what God or the Holy Spirit might be doing in that history. What the trumpets are doing is giving us a perspective from beyond history, a cosmic view from the cross to the second coming that shows God acting in the midst of events that we might know from history. Prophecy draws back the curtain on human history and gives clues as to God's agenda and operations within history. Prophecy and history must be looked at together in order to make sense of human events. That's what we will try to do with the trumpets here.

Let me share a couple of examples of the limits of secular history. A secular historian reporting on the Exodus might report: "A rag-tag bunch of slaves managed a great escape from Egypt, taking advantage of a series of natural calamities that struck at just the right time to frustrate the Egyptian government's attempts to prevent it and then to get them back." Were the events of the Exodus guided by the hand of God? That would not be obvious to a secular historian.

Some historians today talk about the "white tornados" in the Sinai desert that could have been what the Pentateuch describes as the pillar of cloud. Perhaps an earthquake or a powerful windstorm emptied the Red Sea. The historian's craft does not have the tools to consider or assess where God's hand was at work or where ordinary natural events were involved. The Bible has left us a record telling us that the Exodus was an act of God. When believers in the Bible look at history, we see God's hand because He has given us information that helps us to see it.

Another example of the limits of secular history is the cross. For the Christian, the cross is the most important event in all of human history. A secular reporter might describe the cross as "the execution of a messianic pretender alleged by the religious authorities to have made divine claims, vandalized the temple and caused spontaneous riots throughout the country." Later on the same reporter might have noted a strange revival of interest in Jesus as His disciples claimed He was risen (the claim was denied by both the Sanhedrin and the Roman

authorities). But if it were not for the Scriptures, we would not have access to sufficient historical evidence that God was working within the historical event of the cross in our behalf.

Similarly, Revelation gives us clues into how God is intervening in history and that helps us understand how God is intervening in our lives as well. The fundamental nature of the trumpets is 1) that they fall on the wicked and 2) they offer a series of interventions of God in the history of the world from the cross to the second coming. As the trumpets are studied along with history, we should be able to gain a clearer understanding of how God is involved in human history.

As mentioned earlier, there are strong parallels between the trumpets and the creation story (Genesis 1-2). The details of these parallels follow:

- 1- The first trumpet and creation day affect the earth (light shines out over the earth).
- 2- The second trumpet and creation day affect the sea (separation of waters below from waters above).
- 3- The third trumpet and creation day focus on the rivers, the springs and life that takes place on dry ground (a third of the trumpet falls on this).
- 4- The fourth trumpet and creation day have to do with the sun, moon, and stars.
- 5- The fifth trumpet and creation day has flying and swimming creatures (and an Abyss creature).
- 6- The sixth trumpet and creation day emphasize the creatures that move on the dry ground (man, serpent, horse, etc.).
- 7- The seventh trumpet and creation day focus on the Sabbath rest after creation (or after de-creation in the case of the trumpets).

As noted previously, the trumpets seem to be portraying an undoing of creation. Just as with the Flood story in Genesis, God is taking apart the creation piece by piece in order to prepare the way for a new creation. It was a common theme in Jewish apocalyptic of the time that the old creation had to be destroyed before the new creation could come. The New Testament understanding was a little different, the old creation is still here but the new creation has already come in Christ (John 5:24; 2 Cor 5:17, etc.). A New Testament perspective on the trumpets would be a God who is undoing the old age piece by piece to prepare the way for His second coming. God is dismantling the old earth so He can prepare the way for a new one.

In the context of the great controversy over the character and government of God, God is at work in every nation and in every religion. Satan is also at work in every nation and in every religion. In the trumpets God is dismantling Satan's kingdom (a key part of the old creation) piece by piece in the course of Christian history. The trumpets encourage us that God is at work within history to begin setting things right and undoing injustice. But things in general will probably not get better between now and the End.

In concluding our survey on the nature of the seven trumpets of Revelation, we return to the theme of the Exodus. There are multiple images in the trumpets that recall the plagues of the Exodus, hail, fire, water turning into blood, bitter springs, darkness, locusts, etc. These are mingled with images drawn from the fall of ancient Babylon at the time of Daniel and Cyrus. These allusions to Babylon are found particularly in the second and sixth trumpets: The burning

mountain, the Euphrates River, idols of gold and silver, sorceries, etc. This mingling led Kenneth Strand to describe the trumpets as containing a New Exodus/Fall of Babylon motif. The trumpets are built not only on Jericho, the Jubilees and the dissolution of creation, they are also built on the historical recollections of the great Old Testament enemies of God's people, Egypt and Babylon.

These backgrounds in the Old Testament underscore the nature of the seven trumpets. They are focused on the enemies of God and His people in a series of historical judgments, running from the cross to the Second Coming of Jesus. But the trumpets are not only messages of judgment to opponents of God, they are also messages of comfort to the people of God. The abuses they have suffered (Rev 6:9-11) are not going to last forever (Rev 8:13). As God dealt with Egypt and Babylon in Old Testament times, He is now dealing with the oppressive powers presently on the earth. God's New Testament people are being cared for and being led to God's new kingdom by Him.

Rev 8:2 (Spiritual Lessons)—Your mind may be somewhat bewildered by the all the arguments back and forth regarding the seven trumpets. These illustrate the difficulty of making sense of this passage. Even more could be said, but I don't want to overly tax your patience. We live in an age of relevance and sound bites and most people have little patience with a Bible study that has no immediate payoff on Monday morning. But there are consequences that come with that lack of patience. Superficial knowledge of the Bible may be sufficient to guide us in the good times. But we are warned that a time of trouble is coming like no other in the history of the world (Matt 24:21-22). When that time comes we will need all the spiritual depth we can muster. That kind of depth only comes when believers are willing to do heavy, detailed investigations of Scripture with no immediate payoff.

While there is great difficulty in making sense of the seven trumpets, there is great joy in the investigation. If believers want to understand the deep things of God, there are times you have to do detailed investigation without immediate payoff. If you are following these comments you probably don't mind going to the depths of an issue like the seven trumpets--solving puzzles and mysteries--until there is eventually a payoff. The payoff is gaining a broader understanding of the big picture enhancing everything else that you read in Scripture.

The study of the trumpets requires the most vexing and detailed study in the entire book of Revelation. Hang in there, the payoff will be a deeper, more fulfilling understanding of the whole book of Revelation and an enhanced capacity to make sense of every part of the Bible. And coming with that, is deeper spiritual maturity that can handle whatever comes at the end of time.

The trumpets underline the point that probation, the opportunity to hear and embrace the gospel, remains open until the entire world has made a decision either for or against God and the gospel. God will arrange events in such a way that in the final crisis the whole world will be brought to a decision for or against God. The good news is that the delay of the Second Coming is not some mistake, it is because God is not anxious for anyone to be lost, but is patient, giving all time to see things for themselves and come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9, see also Romans 2:4). God is not going to end history until every living person has been confronted

with the gospel in some form. I invite you not to wait for that last minute, but be ready now and every day for that great event.

I want to sharpen a point we have mentioned along the way: The trumpets are a response to persecution. To those who are suffering the message is: If you only knew, God is already judging the people or the powers that are hurting you. It's tough, when you are suffering pain, rejection, and hardship, to think that YOU are on the winning side and that God is still in control. The trumpets are just that message to God's people--no matter how bad things get on this earth, God is still in control, He is well aware of the injustices that you have suffered in the world, and will fully and finally deal with it. God is not just waiting for an end out there somewhere--He is actively intervening in history now. God holds the key to the abyss and is in control even when the demons pour out over the earth. Sometimes, as with the cross, God does not act or show His presence as often as you would like, but He is well able to deal with the your situations when the time is right.

Another spiritual lesson. The trumpets seem designed to show history in advance. God knows that history is not aimless but has a purpose and is moving toward a goal, and He is enough in control of history to outline its basic movements in advance. The better we can understand God's purpose in history and understand how God is moving in history, the more we can cooperate with Him in achieving His goals. These are reasons that the study of the trumpets is valuable today.

Rev 8:2-6—These verses form the sanctuary introduction to the seven trumpets vision that follows (Rev 8:7 – 11:18). The focus of this sanctuary introduction is an angel's activity at the incense altar in the heavenly sanctuary. At the center of that activity is the prayers of the saints (building on Rev 6:9-11). The cries of the souls under the altar come before God, are affirmed by the intercessory incense, and ascend before God (8:4), presumably before the throne seen in Revelation 5. The apparent result of those prayers is the throwing down of the censer or of the fire in the censer to the earth (8:5), with the result that thunder, noises, flashes of lightning and an earthquake occur. The overall theme of this introductory vision is a combination of intercession and judgment, God's work in behalf of people and his holding accountable those who have rejected Him and persecuted His people (see Rev 6:9-11).

As we have seen, this introductory scene is not a continuation of the seventh seal, it is introducing a new and complete vision centered on the blowing of seven trumpets. The trumpets are a response to the prayers of the saints for justice (Rev 6:9-11). They cry out to God because they believe that He is ignoring their suffering. The trumpets assure them that, though they may not be able to see it in this life, God is already acting in judgment on those who have persecuted them.

Rev 8:2—“And I saw the seven angels who have stood before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.” This verse opens with “and I saw” (Greek: *kai eidon*). This phrase comes at crucial points in the book of Revelation, almost always introducing a new scene or a new vision. In other words, the seven trumpets begin here. See Rev 8:2 (Summary of Trumpets) for the details. The word translated “have stood” (Greek: *estêkasin*) is a perfect indicative, which could

be translated “have been standing” before God. Since the perfect expresses the continuing result of a past action, most versions (ESV; NASB; NIV; RSV; NRSV) simply translate “stand.” They did not arrive for this particular moment but stand always ready to serve God.

While the trumpet angels are introduced here, they remain at ready but do not actually take up blowing the trumpets until verse 6. They are simply given the trumpets, but nothing more happens at this point. The use of the passive “were given” (Greek: *edothêsan*) means we do not know who gave the trumpets to the seven angels. It is presumably the one sitting on the throne in Revelation 4 and 5.

Verses 2 and 6 serve as an “envelope structure” that separates the introductory visions from what precedes (Rev 8:1) and what follows (Rev 8:7 and on). It is the events between verses 2 and 6 (Rev 8:3-5—intercession and judgment) that set in motion the blowing of the trumpets. See Rev 8:2 (Summary of Trumpets) for the significance of these structural details.

In the Judaism of the time, the concept of seven angels that stand before God is a common one (Tobit 12:15—the angel name mentioned there is Raphael). In Luke 1:19 one of the angels who stand before God is named Gabriel (see also 1 Kings 22:21). These seven angels were thought of as “archangels,” superior in authority to all the other angels. The fact that there were seven designated “trumpet priests” in relation to the ark and the sanctuary services, and at the destruction of Jericho (Joshua 6:4-13), also lies behind this. But in Judaism there is also the concept of four archangels, which may lie behind the four living creatures of Revelation 4 and the restraining angels of Revelation 7:1. See the comments on this in the discussion of Rev 4:6, where the four living creatures are introduced (Rev 4:6).

Rev 8:3-4 (Introduction)-- “Another angel came and stood upon the altar. . .” This is generally translated “stood AT the altar,” rather than “UPON the altar, probably because most interpreters assume that the two altars in this passage are the same. But that assumption misses two important insights. First of all, the altar of the fifth seal is not the Altar of Incense, it is the Altar of Burnt Offering. See comments on Rev 6:9. Revelation does not limit itself to the incense altar, which is clearly portrayed in the latter part of verse three. Second, the scene in Revelation 8:2-6 is grounded in the daily service. The daily service makes use of both altars in the sanctuary/temple. The use of the Greek article for altar (Greek: *tou thusiasteriou*) signals a previous reference and the first reference to any altar in Revelation is the Altar of Burnt Offering in the fifth seal. So this passage describes the transfer of incense from the Altar of Burnt Offering in the outer court, to the Altar of Incense in the Holy Place.

Rev 8:3—“Another angel came and stood upon the altar, having a golden censer. And much incense was given to him in order that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the throne.” As noted earlier, this verse contains an allusion to the daily (*Tamid*) service of the earthly sanctuary. In the daily service, a priest gathered coals of fire sprinkled with incense from the Altar of Burnt Offering in a censer or fire pan. He carried the censer into the Holy Place of the tabernacle or temple and ministered the incense on the Altar of Incense. In this verse there is reference to both altars, the censer, and the incense. The first

part of the verse recalls the priest's visit to the Altar of Burnt Offering to receive the incense, the second part recalls his subsequent visit to the Altar of Incense.

"Another angel. . ." A subject of much discussion among Revelation scholars is the identity of the angel at the altar in this passage. The designation is the same as that given in Revelation 7:2, and the identity of that angel is also not clear from the text. The angel at the altar is not one of the seven, but his actions and their outcomes in the passage suggest he might be the superior of the seven. So the most natural reading of the passage would indicate that the angel at the altar is Christ Himself, an echo of the striking figure in 1:12-20. This is what Bible scholars call "angelomorphic Christology," in other words, Christ appearing in the form of an angel (see 1 Thess 4:16). Since he also appeared on earth in the form of a human being, this is not hard to imagine. Although Michael is one of the seven archangels in Jewish tradition, that is one of the names for Christ in Revelation (see comments on Rev 12:7). If this reasoning is correct, this verse depicts the intercession of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. Even if the angel here is not Christ, he is simply acting as an agent of Christ. If the New Testament writers consider Jesus the God of the Old Testament (see Paul's use of Isaiah 45:23 in Phil 2:9-11, for example, see also Rev 1:18 in comparison with Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12), then He is to be identified with "angel of the covenant" in the Old Testament (Gen 48:16; Mal 3:1).

"Another angel came and stood upon the altar. . ." This is generally translated "stood AT the altar," rather than "UPON the altar, probably because most interpreters assume that the two altars in this text are the same. You could not stand "upon" the Altar of Incense, it was not large enough. You could only stand beside it (2 Chr 6:19; Luke 1:11) or in front of it (Lev 4:7; 16:12; Rev 8:3). But the most natural meaning of the Greek for "at" (Greek: *epi*) is "upon." The same expression is used in the LXX of 1 Kings 13:1-2, but the unspecified altar of that passage is likely the northern Israelite equivalent of the Altar of Burnt Offering. The most common Greek words to express "at" are *pros* or *para* (Lev 1:15; 3:2; 4:7, 18). But if the Altar of Burnt Offering in the temple at Jerusalem is in view here, "upon" (Greek: *epi*) is not out of place. The Altar of Burnt Offering in the temple was large enough to stand on and had stairs for that purpose. This helps to confirm that the first altar in this verse is not the same as the second ("the golden altar which is before God"), it is a reference to the Altar of Burnt Offering in the outer courtyard of the temple (Rev 6:9).

"A golden censer. . ." The Greek word for censer here (*libanôton*) is actually a form of the word for "incense," but the adjective "golden" makes it clear that incense alone is not in view, the word here is intended as a short form for "incense holder," or censer. The censer was like a frying pan with a very long handle, for the purpose of carrying fire without the priest being burned. A priest would approach the Altar of Burnt Offering with a censer, fill it with coals from the continually burning fire there, and add incense to the coals as he entered the Holy Place to approach the Altar of Incense. Both golden censers (1 Maccabees 1:22) and golden bowls (1 Esdras 2:13) were part of the furnishings for the temple in New Testament times. Since the High Priest's censer in New Testament times was made of brass, the use of the golden censer here further supports the greatness of the "angel" ministering the incense in this passage, presumably Christ. The adding of incense to the prayers of the saints assures that

whatever deficiencies may reside in the prayers will not prevent them being heard by God, nor prevent them being answered.

“Another angel came and stood upon **the altar**, having a golden censer. And much incense was given to him in order that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints upon **the golden altar before the throne.**” If the two altars in this verse were the same, the phrase “the golden altar before the throne” would have been attached to the first reference, not the second. The fact that the second altar is clearly the Altar of Incense supports the idea that the first altar in this verse is a different altar, the Altar of Burnt Offering. The incense is here associated with the prayers of the saints and represents them before the throne. There is a reference back to the “saints” in the fifth seal (Rev 6:9-10), who cried out for judgment, and also to the twenty-four elders of Revelation 5:8, who minister the prayers of the saints before the throne in the heavenly sanctuary/throne room. One example of prayers coming up before the throne of God is found in the Cornelius story, where the centurion’s prayers and deeds were acknowledged before God (Acts 10:4).

Rev 8:4— “And the smoke of the altar went up, along with the prayers of the saints, out of the hand of the angel before God.” Little is added to the previous verse, except to assure the reader that the incense and the prayers of the saints were truly rising up before the throne of God in the heavenly sanctuary. One point we haven’t addressed is the relationship between the incense and the prayers. The incense went up “in”, “with,” “to,” or “by” the prayers of the saints (Greek: *tais proseuchais tôn hagiôn*). The *tais proseuchais* is a Greek dative, which expresses indirect object, location or agency (association). Is the dative here a simple direct object? Probably not, as it is related to the subject (“smoke”) more than the verb (“went up”). Location can be ruled out, as the prayers are not the location of the smoke or the going up. Agency doesn’t make sense either. The prayers are not the means by which the smoke goes up. So association seems the best answer here. The smoke is accompanied by the prayers of the saints as it goes up, hence my translation of the dative as “along with.” The prayers of the saints are accompanied by the smoke of the incense, rendering them acceptable to God.

Rev 8:5— “And the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar and threw it to the earth. And there were thunders and noises and lightnings and an earthquake.” Here we come to the outcome of the prayers. The angel of the incense altar (presumably Christ), after completing the incense ceremony, fills the censer once more with some of the coals of fire now on the incense altar and throws either the censer or the contents of the censer to the earth. The Greek does not have an object for “threw” (Greek: *ebalen eis tên gēn*—literally “he threw (?) into the earth”). For a detailed discussion of this issue see excurses on Rev 8:2. Since fire is mentioned in nearly all the seven trumpets, it is likely that what was thrown to the earth here is fire rather than the censer, although it cannot be ruled out that both are thrown together. Throwing down the censer would complete the reference to the daily service in the temple. Throwing down fire would connect this action with the outcomes of the various trumpets on earth. The latter would allude to Ezekiel 10:2 where coals of fire are thrown down in judgment on Jerusalem.

“And there were thunders and noises and lightnings and an earthquake.” The consequences of throwing the fire of the censer to earth are summed up in four words, thunders (Greek: *brontai*) and noises (Greek: *phonai*) and lightnings (Greek: *astrapai*) and an earthquake (Greek: *seismos*). The order of the words is not consistent in the manuscript tradition, neither is the order consistent in the four places of Revelation where these kinds of words are grouped together. Some manuscripts place lightnings before noises.

The word for “thunder” (Greek: *brontai*) is fairly straightforward. It means the deep and loud sound that follows lightning in a thunderstorm. The Greek word finds its way into English in “Brontosaurus” or “thunder lizard,” so-called because of its great size and the noise presumably made by its feet striking the ground when it walks or runs. The word for “noises” (Greek: *phonai*) could also be translated “voices.” The Greek word has made its way into the English language in the words “phonics” and “telephone.” The word for “lightning” (Greek: *astrapai*) refers to the bolts of lightning in a thunderstorm, but also to rays of sunshine (Luke 11:36). The word for “earthquake” (Greek: *seismos*) also finds its way into English in “seismic” or “seismograph.”

Their basic meaning in everyday life is plain, but their association here most likely has a spiritual intent, which we will explore next.

The first three of these are associated with the throne of God in Revelation 4:5. But the order there is lightnings (Greek: *astrapai*) first, then noises (Greek: *phonai*) and thunder (Greek: *brontai*), a more natural combination than that in 8:5. The combination of the three is associated with thunderstorms in the natural world. But these manifestations are also often associated in the Old Testament with theophanies or appearances of God. See comments on Revelation 4:5 for the details. In our verse there is the addition “earthquake” to the other three. While the focus may still be on theophany, the addition of earthquake suggests the imagery of judgment. The four-fold combination of these words occurs again in Revelation 11:19 and 16:18, with 16:18 clearly in the context of judgment, while 11:19 is associated with the heavenly sanctuary, as is the case with 4:5. In sum, this combination of Greek words signals God’s presence and/or His judgments.

In Psalm 18 these and many other manifestations are listed in a poetic description of God’s judgments. According to the title of Psalm 18 (18:1), David wrote this song on the occasion of God delivering him from the hand of Saul. Specific events in David’s life are seen as exhibiting God’s judgment on David’s enemy, a judgment that resulted in David’s deliverance from death or capture (18:2-3). It is Yahweh who delivers David from death (18:4-5). The source of the deliverance comes from God’s temple (18:6). Since this was before David was in a position to construct a temple in Jerusalem, this would be a reference to the temple in heaven (cf. Rev 11:19; 16:17-18). The deliverance is poetically described in terms of earthquake and fire (Psa 18:7-8). When Yahweh speaks, it is with a voice like thunder (Psa 18:13) and in the context of lightnings (18:14). To sum up, in Psalm 18, God’s deliverance of David is poetically described in the language of thunders, lightnings, voices and earthquakes.

This fits very well with the context of the seven trumpets, in which God’s uses His great power to respond with deliverance to the prayers of the saints (Rev 6:9-10, 8:3-5, 13). It affirms

that the judgments of God, as expressed in the trumpets, are not so much punishment as deliverance for His people.

Rev 8:6—“And the seven angels who have the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.” This is the other end of the “envelope” which surrounds the intercession/judgment scene of 8:3-5. The blowing of the seven trumpets is in response to both the prayers of the saints (Rev 6:9-10; 8:3-4) and the throwing down of the censer/fire (Rev 8:5). The motifs of covenant prayer and divine deliverance are central to the meaning of each of the seven trumpets. The ministering of incense and the throwing down of the censer/fire are correlated with each of the seven trumpets.

To prepare to sound a trumpet one must grasp it in the proper way and bring it to one’s lips. This is what is happening in this verse. But unlike Jericho or the trumpet priests in the daily (Tamid) service, the seven angels do not all sound their trumpets at the same time, they blow them one by one. So the picture is seven angels grasping their trumpets and raising them to mouth level, but then blowing one at a time, triggering the judgment events that follow this verse.

Rev 8:7— “And the first (angel) blew his trumpet, and it was that hail and fire mixed with blood were thrown to the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up and all the green grass was burned up.” The word “angel” is supplied here, it does not appear in the Greek. That it is an angel is understood in relation to 8:6 and the inclusion of “angel” (Greek: *angelos*) in the trumpets that follow (Rev 8:8, 10, etc.).

In much of the Bible the struggle of scholarship is to understand exactly what the biblical author is trying to say. In texts like this one, it is very clear what the author is trying to say. The scene is described in plain language. The crucial question becomes, what does this mean? Is this a “movie of the future” in which events that look exactly like this are to take place on the earth, or is there a deeper, figurative meaning? What is going on in this verse is clear but what John means by what is going on is not clear.

The first four trumpets all focus primarily on the natural world, the fifth and sixth fall primarily upon human beings. The first four are connected closely together, the last three are detached from each other.

“Hail and fire mixed with blood . . .” While the exegesis of this verse is reasonably clear, a comment or two is warranted. It is not clear whether both the hail and fire are mixed with blood or the fire only (hail thrown down, also fire mixed with blood). Both readings are possible grammatically. One could even read that the hail and fire are mingled together—in or with blood. My translation, “with blood” (Greek: *en haimati*) is interpretive. The Greek itself states “in blood” with the dative form. This allows for a locative reading (location of the first item). The hail and the fire were “in” the blood, so that the blood is the visible substance thrown to the earth, with hail and fire sparkling out of it. I have chosen an associative reading, where the hail and fire are accompanied by blood, “with blood.” In a normal thunderstorm, hail and fire are mixed with watery rain, but here they are mixed with a rain of blood. This heightens the horror of the scene.

“A third of the earth . . . a third of the trees . . . and all the green grass was burned up.” This verse is the first place in the seven trumpets that speaks of thirds of the earth (see also Revelation 8:7-12; 9:15, 18). Grammatically, it is not clear whether the third of the trees and all the green grass are burned up in the third of the earth struck by the hail, fire and blood or in the whole earth. In the latter case, in addition to the burning of up a third of the earth, all the grass of the whole earth is burned up. Since the focus of the first trumpet is on the third of the earth where the hail, fire and blood fell, I would lean to the idea that the plague is limited to that third of the earth. In other words, a third portion of the earth suffered the loss of a third of its trees and all of its green grass. The rest of the earth is unaffected by this trumpet in that case. In either case, while the trumpets are very similar to the bowl-plagues, they are preliminary and partial in comparison to the world-wide effect of the bowl-plagues.

The concept of thirds is found also in Ezekiel 5:2 and Zechariah 13:8-9. In Ezekiel the whole city is destroyed but in three different ways (thirds). In Zechariah the results are reversed, a third are preserved and two-thirds destroyed. Both passages are in the context of judgment. In the seventh plague of Egypt the flax and barley were destroyed but the wheat and the rice were not destroyed (Exod 9:31-32). God, in His mercy, did not remove all nourishment from Egypt, but a specific portion that signaled direct divine intervention.

There is no part of Revelation where the Old Testament background is more important to understanding than the seven trumpets. It is critical to understand where the various terms and/or symbols came from and how they were used in John’s past. There are two types of allusions to the Old Testament in Revelation: direct allusions, where the author is pointing to a specific Old Testament passage and its context, and echoes, where the author brings out concepts found in earlier literature but without conscious reference to any text in particular. The distinction between the two is important. If the author is pointing to a specific context, we need to apply that context to our interpretation of the Revelation text before us. If we are dealing with an echo, applying the supposed context of an echo might actually distort the meaning, if that was not what the author intended. For a deeper understanding of this methodology, see my book *The Deep Things of God*, chapter 7. As we examine the text of the first trumpet, we will start with direct allusions, then look at the echos of Old Testament language in the passage and what the Old Testament and the ancient context teaches us about them.

In the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek version of the Old Testament probably familiar to John, the following passage is even closer to the first trumpet imagery than the English translations:

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that **hail** will fall all over Egypt--on men and animals and on everything growing in the fields of Egypt.' When Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, the LORD sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to the ground. So, the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt, hail fell and lightning flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation. Throughout Egypt hail struck everything in the fields--both men and animals; it beat down everything growing in the fields and stripped every tree. The only place it did not hail was

the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were." Exodus 9:22-26, NIV, see also Psalm 78:48 and 105:32.

The first trumpet substitutes fire for lightning, yet it is very clear that the seventh plague of the Exodus is in view in the first trumpet. Even more so, in the Septuagint the lightning sets fire to the crops of Egypt and they are burned to the ground. In the original context, the hail of God was His judgment on the Egyptians for refusing to let the Israelites go.

Another major allusion to the first trumpet is to Ezekiel:

"I will execute judgment upon him with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, **hailstones, and burning sulfur** on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him. And so I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD." Ezekiel 38:22-23, NIV. A similar description can be found in Joel 2:30, which is echoed in Acts 2:16-17, where it has a spiritual meaning.

In the prophecy of Ezekiel 38, a future nation, Gog, comes down from the north and attacks Israel after the return from Babylonian exile. God assures the Israelites that they would not have to fight in that battle, God would defeat Gog and Magog by raining hail and fire down upon them. The combination of themes and images suggests John probably had Ezekiel 38 in mind when he wrote the first trumpet.

Both Exodus 9 and Ezekiel 38 have hail, fire, and blood (in Ezekiel only) being rained on the enemies of God and of His people. God intervenes in judgment to deliver His people from bondage by Egypt and by God and Magog. So the imagery of hail and fire in the first trumpet recalls God's execution of judgment on His enemies and His deliverance of His people (Isa 29:6; 30:30). Similar language in the Old Testament includes a judgment of hail on Ephraim (Isa 28:2-3), of fire on Assyria (Isa 10:16-20), and of hail on the false prophets of Israel (Ezek 13:1-13). Hail and fire are images of judgment upon the enemies of God and His people.

But there is a problem with the parallels between the first trumpet and the hail and fire judgments of the Old Testament. In the first trumpet, the hail and fire do not fall on symbols of enmity to God but rather on symbols of His people--trees, green grass. You have on one hand, symbols of God's judgment and, on the other, symbols of God's people. In the Old Testament, vegetation consistently represents the people of God--a tree (Psalm 1:3); an olive tree planted in the house of God (Psalm 52:8); grass (Isaiah 40:6-8), etc. How can these two concepts be reconciled?

For one thing, in the later prophets the hail and fire is increasingly applied to Judah and Israel. They had forsaken the covenant. So while generally hail and fire fell on the enemies of God's people, (Exodus 9, Ezekiel 38), in the prophets they can also be poured out on God's own people--against Jerusalem (Jer 21:12-14; Ezek 15:6-7); or against Israel as a whole (Psa 80:8-16). So it would be incorrect to say that God's judgments never fall on His own people in the Old Testament.

It is also true in the Old Testament that God's vegetation can be destroyed. Look at Jeremiah 11:15-17, NIV:

"What is my beloved doing in my temple as she works out her evil schemes with many? Can consecrated meat avert your punishment? When you engage in your wickedness, then you

rejoice. The LORD called you a thriving olive tree with fruit beautiful in form. But with the roar of a mighty storm he will set it on fire and its branches will be broken. The LORD Almighty, who planted you, has decreed disaster for you, because the house of Israel and the house of Judah have done evil and provoked me to anger by burning incense to Baal."

In this text, God's own people have forsaken Him. They have forsaken the covenant and burned incense to the Baals. As a result of those actions, God poured out judgments to try to awaken and redirect them. The imagery is of an olive tree with beautiful fruit that God planted Himself, but if it went contrary to His plans for it, He could set it on fire. So, fire can be used as a symbol of judgment by God on His own people as they move away from the covenant.

One of the better-known texts in the Old Testament also tells a story of God's judgments on His own people:

"I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.

"Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?"

"Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it."

"The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness but heard cries of distress." Isaiah 5:1-7, NIV.

Israel and Judah are likened to a vineyard that God has planted. It has not done as well as intended--the fruit is sour. God reserves the right to let go of that vineyard and start over. Vegetation is a symbol of the people of God, but it can come under the judgment of hail and fire.

A third aspect of the Old Testament picture of judgment is the distinction between green (faithful) and dry (unfaithful) trees:

"The word of the LORD came to me: 'Son of man, set your face toward the south; preach against the south and prophesy against the forest of the southland. Say to the southern forest: "Hear the word of the LORD. This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am about to set fire to you, and it will consume all your trees, both green and dry. The blazing flame will not be quenched, and every face from south to north will be scorched by it. Everyone will see that I the LORD have kindled it; it will not be quenched.'" Ezekiel 20:45-48, NIV.

The reference in Ezekiel 20 is to the exile to Babylon. When the Babylonians conquer Jerusalem, the judgment falls on both the “green and the dry trees.” They suffer together for the sins of the dry trees. So when, in the first trumpet, we see hail and fire used against imagery representing God's people, that imagery is entirely compatible with the Old Testament picture.

The Old Testament is very important to our understanding of Revelation. But is there a New Testament background to the first trumpet as well? There are at least two relevant texts. Matthew 3:10 picks up on the Old Testament imagery we have explored in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In this text John the Baptist says: "The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." Matthew 3:10, NIV.

Even more directly related to the first trumpet is Luke 23:28-31:

"Jesus turned and said to them, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, "Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!"'

"Then they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"

"For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when the tree is dry?'" Luke 23:28-31, NIV.

In Luke 23 Jesus is the green tree while the religious leaders who are rejecting Him are represented by the dry trees. Scholars see this as referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. What Jesus is saying is “If the Romans can treat an innocent man (green tree) like they are treating me, what will they do to a guilty nation (dry trees)?” Forty years after the time when Jesus was crucified, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. The dry trees are those whose words and actions take themselves out from under God's protection and they suffer the consequences of God’s judgment.

The judgment of the first trumpet is a judgment on those who, for religious reasons, participated in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Jesus grew up and ministered in a religious community. He was received by many people including many priests. But the majority of the people and their leadership rejected Him. So, the judgment fell on those who rejected Jesus in Jerusalem, Judea, and the surrounding areas. The first trumpet represents the first decisive event of judgment in Christian history--the Romans came and sacked the city of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Because Jerusalem as a whole had rejected Jesus, the “trees” became dry. Judgment begins at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17; Ezekiel 9:1-7; and Jeremiah 25:15-29).

A couple of final thoughts on the first trumpet, to avoid misunderstanding. First, the New Testament sometimes speaks harshly of “the Jews” or of the religious leadership of Jerusalem. The Jewish religious leaders of Jesus’ day are given as a concrete example of placing institutional religion ahead of the mission of God. We are given such examples because we are all prone to similar mistakes. The warnings of Scripture are placed there so the reader will not make similar mistakes. We are not given that example so that we will treat Jews today as if they, as a people, are somehow worse than all others. Such a misuse of Scripture contributed to the pogroms of the Middle Ages and the Holocaust. Discrimination against Jews today places God in a very bad light. Scripture does not encourage prejudice against Jews any more than the actions of the Romans against Christ should lead us to discriminate against Italians.

Second, God’s judgments in Scripture are often portrayed in very active language as punishment for wicked deeds, as manifestations of God’s “wrath.” But such punishments are

often qualified as God “giving people up” (see Romans 1:24, 26, 28 as an example) to the consequences of their own decisions and actions. This raises the question as to whether the qualifier applies to judgment texts that don’t state the qualifier. That would appear to be the case with the first trumpet. In actual fact, God did not destroy Jerusalem with hail and fire. In the case of A.D. 70, God’s direct hand is not experienced. God removed His protection from Judea and the Romans came and destroyed the city along with great loss of life. From the New Testament perspective, God sent His son as a revelation of what God is like. The leadership of His own people explicitly rejected God’s intervention, and God respected that rejection and left them alone to face the consequences of their own decisions and actions. So the first trumpet is a passive judgment in history even though the language of active judgment is used. While God is consistent, the way He chooses to fulfill prophecy is often unpredictable in advance (John 13:19; 14:29).

Rev 8:8-9 (Introduction)—“And the second angel blew his trumpet and, as it were, a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood, and a third of the creatures in the sea (those having souls) died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.” The imagery here is quite different from that of the first trumpet with one or two exceptions. The blowing of the second trumpet has powerful effects on the natural world (In fact the surface reading of the first four trumpets all concern the natural world). But while the first trumpet appears, at a glance, to be purely concerned with the plant kingdom (earth, grass and trees), the second trumpet has direct impact as well on the animal kingdom and on people who sail the sea.

While the first trumpet affects the earth, the second trumpet impacts the sea. Volcanos in the Mediterranean are the kind that sometimes throw off “fire bombs” that can reach the sea. So some scholars have sought to associate this trumpet with ancient volcanic eruptions, such as that which occurred in Pompeii in 79 AD, but the analogy with the text is not a strong one. As with the first trumpet, we are again dealing with thirds, a third of the sea, sea creatures and ships on the sea.

Rev 8:8— “As it were, a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood.” This phrase (“as it were”) is my translation of how the Greek word “*hôs*” functions in the second trumpet. The prophet is not certain if a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea, there is a certain tentativeness in his use of “as it were” to describe the vision here. Whatever you might want to do with the imagery of the other trumpets, this portion of the vision is clearly symbolic. Jameison, Fausset and Brown suggest that John does not see a literal mountain, but a mountain-like burning mass.

The concept of “great mountain” (Greek: *horos mega*) represents Babylon here, but it can also represent the eschatological kingdom of God in Daniel 2:35 (LXX: *horos mega*). The Greek word *eblēthê* (English: “was thrown”) anticipates Revelation 12:10, where the accuser of the brothers is “thrown down” (Greek: *eblēthê*). The figure of Satan lurks behind the symbolic description of earthy power in this trumpet. Here a third of the sea becomes blood, in the second bowl-plague the entire sea becomes blood.

Rev 8:9—“A third of the creatures in the sea (those having souls) died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.” The reference to sea creatures having souls recalls the creation story, where the sea creatures that God created were called “every living soul” (Gen 1:21, LXX: *pasan psuchên zôôn*.)” The death of fish in the second trumpet recalls the first plague of the Exodus, where the water turning to blood also resulted in the death of the fish in the same waters (Exod 7:20-24). The difference is that the fish in the Nile were called “fish” (Exod 7:21, LXX: *ichthues*) rather than “souls.” It is not clear from the text of the second trumpet whether the ships were destroyed by contact with the burning mountain or by the agitation of the waves as a result of the mountain’s plunge into the sea. The word for “ships” here (Greek: *ploiôn*) is the Greek word commonly used for the fishing boats on the Sea of Galilee in the gospels (Matt 4:21-22; 9:1; Mark 1:19-20; 6:51, 54; John 6:19, 21-22; 21:3). The word translated “destroyed” (Greek: *diephtharêsan*) is used for “depraved” or “corrupted” minds in 1 Tim 6:5, which may suggest a figurative meaning for the ships.

Rev 8:8-9—There are two major allusions to the Old Testament in the second trumpet. There is an allusion to the first Egyptian plague where water was turned into blood and the fish died as a result (Exodus 7:19-21). Egypt generally is a place where it hardly ever rains. There are crops along the banks of the Nile and considerably more so in the Nile delta, but a few miles away from the river is some of the driest, most barren soil you can find, fine as flour and very dusty. The lifeblood of Egypt was and is the water from the River Nile. So when the Nile River was turned to blood, the judgment was very serious and threatened Egypt’s very existence. So the second trumpet contains strong parallels with the first plague on Egypt. There are also differences. Turning water to blood was effected by the rod of Moses in the first plague of Egypt and the falling of the burning mountain into the sea is the means by which judgment occurs in the second trumpet.

A second strong allusion is a judgment on ancient Babylon in the book of Jeremiah. “‘I am against you, O destroying mountain, you who destroy the whole earth,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will stretch out my hand against you, roll you off the cliffs, and make you a burned-out mountain.’” Jeremiah 51:25, NIV. In this passage the great mountain is a symbol of the power and institutions that undergird Babylon. Babylon’s supporting structures are also symbolized by the Euphrates River in Jeremiah 50:33-38. Babylon had been oppressing the people of God, in part by God’s own intentions but, in part by their own desires to control and destroy. So when they overdid the judgment on Israel, God pronounced judgment on Babylon, using the symbol of a great mountain that would be destroyed—it would become a burned-out mountain. In the second trumpet, a great mountain is destroyed—cast burning into the sea. We will explore what these and other allusions and echos imply for our understanding of the second trumpet.

There are multiple parallels between the second trumpet and Jeremiah 51. “How Sheshach will be captured, the boast of the whole earth seized! What a horror Babylon will be among the nations! The sea will rise over Babylon; its roaring waves will cover her. Her towns will be desolate, a dry and desert land, a land where no one lives, through which no man travels.” Jeremiah 51:41-43, NIV. “Sheshach” is a code word for Babylon. Each consonant of “Babel” is reversed with its corresponding letter in the Hebrew alphabet. For example, “b” is the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet and “sh” is next to last, etc. So “Babel” becomes “Sheshach.” Babylon, the burnt mountain, falls into the sea and is destroyed by the waters of

her own sea. "When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates. Then say, 'So will Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring upon her. And her people will fall.'" Jeremiah 51:63-64. The Babylonian judgment was the burning of the mountain and its sinking into the sea (Jeremiah 51).

In the book of Daniel, God's kingdom is described in terms of a great mountain that will fill the whole earth. Babylon is the great counterfeit of God's kingdom and so can also be symbolized by a mountain. In texts like Jeremiah 51, God acts in rejection of Babylon and destroys her in the waters of her own "sea." Since Babylon, like Egypt, lived in a dry plain watered by a great river, Babylon's "sea" would be the Euphrates River (see comments on Rev 17:1). The waters of Babylon as a source of its destruction are a consistent image in both the Old Testament and in the book of Revelation. Studying the passages about the fall of Babylon in the Old Testament are very helpful in understanding the book of Revelation (see Jeremiah 50-51, Isaiah 44-47 and Daniel 5, among others). So we have "fall of Babylon" imagery in the second trumpet.

There is one more Old Testament passage that has images of God's judgments against the gentile nations. "They stoop and bow down together; unable to rescue the burden, they themselves go off into captivity. 'Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all you who remain of the house of Israel, you whom I have upheld since you were conceived, and have carried since your birth. Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.'" Isaiah 46:2-4.

In this passage God is acting in judgment against the Gentile nations in order to save His people. The imagery of the second trumpet is different than the first trumpet (where the imagery is turned on His own people). In the second trumpet, the imagery falls explicitly on the enemies of God's people and His people escape the judgments that fall on Babylon.

In addition to direct allusions to Old Testament texts by John, let's look at some Old Testament echoes, apocalyptic language that John takes up without consciously pointing to specific texts. In the Old Testament, "fish" is a symbol of people (Habakkuk 1:14). The destruction of fish, therefore, can be used as a symbol of God's acts of judgment against people who have disobeyed Him (Zephaniah 1:3). The "sea" can represent the nations in opposition to Israel (Isaiah 17:12-13). "Ships" are often symbols of human pride (Isaiah 2:16).

In the second trumpet, the "sea" of Babylon would be the Euphrates River--it passes right through the center of the city of Babylon and was known by some as the "Sea of Babylon." The Euphrates River played a similar role in Babylon to that of the Nile that ran right through Egypt. There is a parallel in the Old Testament of Egypt and Babylon receiving judgments as enemies of God's people.

Rev 8:8-9 (Conclusion)—What is the overall meaning of this passage? At what point between the cross and the second coming would it seem relevant? I would suggest that it represents God's judgments on the Roman Empire that resulted ultimately in its collapse and disintegration.

The Roman Empire was the primary instigator of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and now receives its own destruction. Although the destruction of Jerusalem (referenced in the first trumpet, in my view) was a judgment of God, it was God's permission that allowed the Romans to do what they did. Had the Judean nation remained faithful to God, they would have

been under His protection, but with the crucifixion of the Jewish Messiah, consequences would inevitably follow (Luke 23:28-31).

The ultimate fall of Rome was also a consequence of forsaking the covenant. Rome's violence, greed and oppression removed them from God's protection as well. Oppressors sow the seeds of their own destruction. If we are reading this passage correctly, there were also consequences for the nations that conquered Rome—in the symbolic language of the text, the sea turned to blood.

This all follows a clear Old Testament pattern, God uses other nations to judge His own people, and when God's people repent and seek deliverance, He uses other nations to judge the nations that oppressed His people. The first and second trumpets fit into that pattern.

The Roman Empire was involved in the death of Christ. In the first two trumpets, God is dealing with the powers that crucified Jesus. In ancient times and in Jewish apocalyptic, Rome was often associated with the imagery of Babylon and this seems to be the case with the New Testament as well (1 Peter 5:13; Revelation 17:18).

The second trumpet projected that in John's future, Rome would fall beneath the waves of a great sea of "barbarians." These barbarians, some coming in from the sea, took the empire apart piece-by-piece over several hundred years and led the world into what some have called the Dark Ages. The result of Rome's fall was the devastation of the whole social and economic order. In the lands covered by the Empire, settled organization for society was diminished, trade suffered, and few prospered.

The fall of ancient Babylon was the model in this text for the future fall of ancient Rome. It was also a foretaste of the end-time realities of Revelation 17 and 18 where the final destruction of end-time Babylon is predicted. Just as the Empire ruled much of the civilized world in its time, there will be a world-wide Babylonian confederacy in opposition to God that will fall at the End. See comments on Revelation 17 and 18.

Rev 8:7-9 (Summary)—In the first two trumpets, judgment falls on the two powers that crucified Christ--the Jewish nation (in the person of its religious and political leaders) and the Roman Empire (with its secular, this-worldly mission). It seems to be Satan's goal to unite his various forces against whatever God is doing in the world. In order to crucify Christ, he united forces that never worked together well--the Romans under Pilate, who had a deep disdain for the Jewish leadership, and the Jews, who hated the Romans and would do almost anything to get rid of them. The two came into agreement to destroy Jesus.

Something similar will happen at the end of history. Satan will use a counterfeit trinity (religious institutions) to send "frogs" out to the world to gather the secular powers of the world in support of Babylon for the battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:13-14, 19).

So it seems to be Satan's consistent strategy to unite disparate forces to carry out his destructive missions. During the trial of Jesus, two very disparate powers were working together--one religious (Jews) and one secular (Romans). In the first two trumpets, God is acting in judgment on the two disparate powers that oppressed Jesus.

Like the seals, the trumpets fall into three natural groups, Like the four horsemen, the first four trumpets, on the surface, concern natural aspects of the earth; then, like the fifth and sixth seals that lean toward the end, the next two trumpets deal with people and demonic

forces on this earth; and then both the seventh seal and the seventh trumpet appear after a very long interlude.

The structural patterns of both the seals and the trumpets, therefore, is 4-2-1. If the first two trumpets are dealing with the opposition that arose to Jesus in the first century, then perhaps the next two trumpets (third and fourth) will introduce two new enemies of God and His people--replacements for Jerusalem and Rome in the adversary's plans. I'd like to suggest that the activities of the two new powers--one religious and one secular--would then be depicted in the next two trumpets (fifth and sixth).

Rev 8:7-9 (Spiritual Lessons)—The judgments of the first two trumpets are closely related to the Christ event. The judgments fall on the two powers that made an alliance in order to crucify Jesus. In the book of Revelation Jesus' experience is the model for His followers. We suffer just as He suffered. He was raised from the dead and one day we too will be raised. His death and resurrection are the model for our own and His resurrection is the assurance that those who believe in Him will also be raised at His Second Coming. Not only that, the power of the resurrection becomes a living spiritual experience when we embrace Jesus' death and resurrection. At the End, the resurrection is also a living experience, both physically and literally.

An additional benefit of the death and resurrection of Jesus is that we can trust Him because He knows and understands what we go through in this life on account of His own experience on earth.

Followers of Jesus are familiar with the idea of judgment at the end of human history. But the seven trumpets expand the end-time judgment back in time. Those who trouble and persecute God's people in this life will not only be judged in the end, God is already acting within history to deal with those who have persecuted His own. The beginning of that active judgment falls on the entities that led out in the crucifixion of Jesus. We are encouraged that even in times of trouble and persecution, God is still in control and is already dealing with those who have hurt us. We don't need to deal in revenge because we know that God is well able to set things right.

Rev 8:10-11 (Introduction)— “And the third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star, burning like a lamp, fell out of heaven. And it fell upon a third of the rivers and upon the springs of water. And the name of the star is called Wormwood. And a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the waters because they had been made bitter.” While the second trumpet fell on the open sea, the third trumpet falls on the rivers and springs that water the land. The fall of a torch-like star out of heaven results in the poisoning of a third of the earth's rivers and springs and that results in the death of many people. The damage to the fresh waters parallels the damage to the sea in the second trumpet. But whereas the damage in the second trumpet is to the fish and the ships of the sea, the damage here is primarily to the humans who drink the poisoned waters.

Our primary "tools" for understanding any of the trumpets are to 1) investigate the direct Old Testament allusions and then 2) examine the echoes of Old Testament language in this trumpet. In this case, the direct allusions don't help a great deal. Turning water into blood was also alluded to in the previous trumpet (Exodus 7:20), but much more is happening here.

So we need to take a careful look at the echoes of Old Testament language and observe whatever patterns we can discern there. We will take up the key terms of this passage one at a time and examine them in the light of Scripture.

Rev 8:10—“A great star, burning like a lamp, fell out of heaven.” In Revelation stars represent angels (Rev 9:1; 12:4, see also Isaiah 14:12) and possibly even spiritual leaders of the church (Rev 1:20). See comments on Rev 1:20. They can also represent earthly rulers (Num 24:17). Just as a torch lightens the night, a wise and caring ruler improves the lives of the people being served. If the star here represents an angel, the adjective “great” implies a character superior to the average angel.

A better translation than “lamp” (Greek: *lampas*) might be “torch” (see John 18:3). In Greek this is not a small household lamp, but an outdoor type of light of some size. When falling it would be seen as leaving a trail of fire. It is bright and intense like a falling meteor. In Matthew 24:29 and Revelation 6:13, the falling of stars is part of the general picture of events associated with Jesus return at the end of history. The darkening of stars (Ezek 32:7; Joel 2:10) is associated with judgment in the Old Testament. A star falling from heaven would be a natural symbol of anyone whose rank or stature is being lowered, whether an angel, a political figure, or a church leader.

In a religious sense the falling of a star could represent spiritual decline, a fall from spiritual faithfulness to idolatry or apostasy (Rev 2:5; Heb 4:11). Satan’s fall from heaven could be depicted similarly (Luke 10:18, see Rev 9:1, 11). A torch, or a lamp, is often connected with the Word of God (Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 6:23) A falling torch, then, could represent a counterfeit of the truth (Revelation 2:5; Hebrews 4:11). It looks like the word of God but actually leads away from the truth. Understanding exactly how these images are used in this trumpet will depend on intersecting lines to evidence we will explore in what follows.

The star “fell upon a third of the rivers and upon the springs of water.” Rivers and springs represent fresh waters on the surface of the land in contrast to the salty water of the open sea in the previous trumpet. Springs, as well as rain, are the sources of the world’s rivers. In this verse the rivers and springs receive what the falling star brings to earth. Whereas the waters of the second trumpet are turned into blood, the waters in this trumpet are poisoned with bitter herbs.

As a symbol in Revelation, water could be applied in three different ways; destructive as in flooding, too much abundance destroys (Rev 12:15-16); cleansing as in washing, to make people clean (Rev 7:15); and nourishing, as in a drink (Rev 22:17). While the waters of the second trumpet are destructive, it is the nourishing side of water that is in view here.

The star “fell upon a third of the rivers and upon the springs of water.” Springs in the Old Testament represent spiritual nourishment (Psa 1:3; Prov 13:14; Isa 12:3; Jer 2:13). This concept is echoed in John 7:37-39 and Revelation 21:6. These waters are essential for life, both literally and by analogy spiritually. When they dry up (Rev 16:12) scarcity results. When they are poisoned, they become damaging to life. The star falls on a third of the rivers of the earth.

The “and” in the middle of the above clause is ambiguous. Does it carry the concept of “third” over to the springs of water or does it separate the two concepts? To put it another way, are a third of the springs of water in the world (along with a third of the rivers) are also involved. or are all the springs of water in the world impacted by the star?

The language is quite reminiscent of Isaiah 14: “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! ¹³ You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; ¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' ¹⁵ But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.” Isa 14:12-15, ESV. Isaiah refers here to the “far reaches of the north.” In ancient times, people would think of the north as being overhead and the south as underfoot. So, in relation to the night sky, the north is the “zenith” or center point of the night sky. This would also represent God's throne. The third trumpet also brings to mind the little horn, who sought to bring down the hosts of heaven but was himself cast out (Daniel 8:10).

Isaiah 14:12-15 is a reference to Lucifer who stood in the garden of God before the earth's creation and then was cast down to the earth. Lucifer, claiming to be like God, is the object of judgment and is cast out of heaven like the star falling from the sky in Revelation 8:10. This passage is a reference both to Babylon and to God's throne. While Babylon was northeast of Israel, Israelites thought of Babylon as “in the far reaches of the north.” The forbidding Arabian desert lay to the east. In ancient times people wanted to avoid crossing it whenever possible, so the preferred route was to head north out of Israel, then circle east around the fertile crescent, and down the Euphrates valley to Babylon. So even though Babylon was actually to the east of Israel, Israelites would think of Babylon as being to the north.

Rev 8:11— “And the name of the star is called Wormwood. . .” Wormwood (Greek: *ho absinthos*) is an old English word for the absinthe plant (*artemisia absinthium*), native to Europe and North Africa. By itself it has a bitter taste and in large quantities can cause convulsions or even death. The early Anglo-Saxons believed it protected against mental illness, hence “wer-mod” or “mind preserver.” Among the ancients it was more associated with bitterness and sorrow (Jer 9:15; 23:15; Lam 3:15, 19). Varieties of the plant are common in the Bible lands. The bitterness of the waters at Marah led to a serious crisis for Israel during the early portion of the Exodus (Exod 15:23-24). Wormwood in the Old Testament is a symbol of the negative consequences of apostasy, as well as suffering and sorrow.

“And a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the waters because they had been made bitter.” While Wormwood in small quantities would affect the taste of water but would not lead to death, if it were drunk straight without mixture it would be fatal, as is the case here. The waters of the rivers and springs are not laced with wormwood, they are turned into wormwood. The drink itself is pure poison. But those who drank the water were not aware of the change or they would not have drunk it. In a spiritual context the symbolism of wormwood replacing water could represent the alteration or distortion of the gospel. That which was intended to bring life is altered to the point that it has the opposite effect. “Many men died” means that the consequences of this plague are not universal, only those who drank the poisoned water died.

Rev 8:10-11-- In the first trumpet the trees and the green grass are affected (Rev 8:7), in the second the sea and the ships (Rev 8:9). Here the rivers and springs bear the consequences of

the falling star, but are not the ultimate object of judgment. In this trumpet that would be the people who drink the poisoned water (Rev 8:11).

Rivers and springs of water are symbols of the spiritual nourishment that comes when the Holy Spirit arrives in a person's life. "On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified." John 7:37-39, NIV.

A similar image can be found in the Old Testament. "He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." Psalm 1:3, NIV. So nourishing water represents the Scriptures and sound teaching. But the image is reversed in this trumpet. The falling of the star and the blazing of the torch as it strikes the rivers and springs makes the water bitter. As a result, people are poisoned by the bitter waters instead of finding the nourishment they were seeking.

In the Old Testament, wormwood and bitterness are both symbols of apostasy and its consequences. When people have known God, studied and believed His Word, and fallen away from that understanding, it is described in terms of "bitter herbs" or "bitter water." "You saw among them their detestable images and idols of wood and stone, of silver and gold. Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison." Deut 29:17-18.

Bitterness is a symbol of apostasy and its consequences. People drink water to sustain and nourish their systems. But, when the water has been poisoned, that which promised life becomes the source of death. In some Old Testament references the word "wormwood" itself is used (Jeremiah 9:15 and 23:15) and these texts seem to be in the background of the third trumpet. Bitter water cannot sustain life (Lamentations 3:15, 19; Exodus 15:23).

Between the falling of the star, the burning of the torch and the poisoning of the waters, images of apostasy, false doctrine, and distorted gospel teaching seem to be intersecting in the third trumpet. False doctrine affects people by pointing them in the wrong direction and stealing their assurance in God. To illustrate, imagine if a software manual or its help site offered confusing or wrong information. You would follow the instructions, hoping to make good use of the software, but the confusion and wrong information results in a program that doesn't work for you. In a spiritual sense, then, unbiblical or false doctrine steers people in the wrong direction and their spiritual software begins to malfunction. The consequences of spiritual confusion are great and this trumpet seems to be warning that such confusion and deception will be a part of the church's future from John's perspective.

Rev 8:10-11 (Summary)—In the third trumpet there are three objects of judgment: 1) the star, 2) the earth's rivers and springs, and 3) and the people who drink. First, the star symbolizes the leaders of the church who fall away from a clear understanding of truth and begin to distort the gospel and the Scriptures. Stars are consistent symbols in biblical apocalyptic (Daniel 12:3; Jude 13; Revelation 12:1; and especially Revelation 1:20). "The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels

of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." Revelation 1:20, NIV. The seven stars of Revelation 1 are the leaders of those seven churches.

Since water is a symbol of spiritual nourishment, the rivers and springs point to spiritual life and growth. But, the symbols of truth are here distorted and bring death instead of life. The symbolism seems to point to a church that had accepted Jesus as the light of the world and the water of life allowing its own life-giving teaching to be perverted. The falling of the star and defiling of the waters are symbols of apostasy and falling away from the gospel of Jesus Christ--truth mingled with error. An excellent summary of the meaning of this trumpet is found in the words of Edwin R. Thiele, "The pure church is a clear stream and a life-giving fountain. When the enemy enters that church it becomes corrupt. Henceforth it is a scourge rather than a blessing to men."

The consequences of that apostasy are the death of those who drink the defiled waters. But, the long-range consequences of this spiritual decline may be in the trumpets yet to come. The over-all concept of the third trumpet seems to be a falling away of the church from the truth. We will see how this fits into the overall picture of the seven trumpets as we move along.

In the New Testament times, the concept of a coming apostasy is fairly widespread. For example, in Jewish apocalyptic it was so prominent that Paul spoke as if everyone knew what he meant by "the" apostasy (2 Thess 2:3-4). He also said to the elders of Ephesus, "some of you will become deceptive shepherds and lead the flock astray" (Acts 20:26-31). "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths." 2 Tim 4:2-4, NIV. In a similar text, Paul prophesied doctrinal decline coming into the church (1 Tim 4:1-2).

Jesus spoke of false prophets who would deceive the disciples with their teachings. This concept is echoed in 2 Peter: "But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them--bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute." 2 Peter 2:1-2, see also 1 John 4, Jude 3-4 and the letters to the seven churches of Revelation (Rev 2-3).

The common theme of a coming apostasy is outlined in the third trumpet. It represents a time when the mainstream body of the church is no longer following the plain teaching of the New Testament or serving God as He intended.

As I understand them, the first two trumpets portray the destruction of Jerusalem and the fall of the Roman Empire. Leaders of God's Jewish nation and their secular/political opponents joined together to crucify Jesus, with historical consequences to themselves as entities. The third trumpet, however, indicates a time when the greatest danger to the followers of Jesus would be from "inside the house." The theme of the third trumpet fits well with the kind of compromised Christianity that came in with the church's popularity after the fall of Rome. In the centuries leading into the Dark Ages, some of the finest Roman Catholic figures, such as Eberhard of Salzburg, Bernard of Clairvaux and Francis of Assisi, recognized that something had gone terribly wrong with the church. So the third trumpet depicts a new

spiritual and religious reality. The greatest danger to the church was inside the house rather than outside of it.

Rev 8:12—“And the fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars were smitten, in order that a third of them might be darkened, and that a third of the day might not shine, nor a third of the night likewise.” The wording of the fourth trumpet is the most limited of the seven. There is essentially no action in this trumpet. The simple consequence of blowing the fourth trumpet is the darkening of a third of the sun, moon and stars. Since the imagery here is quite different from that of the third trumpet (there are a number of similarities with the fifth), it is not immediately evident what the meaning of this trumpet would be.

Since the stars have already fallen from the sky in Revelation 6:13, either this plague is earlier than the sixth seal in point of time or it is to be taken in a symbolic sense (which is the direction we have been taking in this commentary on the seven trumpets).

“A third of the sun, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars were smitten. . .” As is the case with the first three trumpets, the natural world is at the center of this judgment. This is not total darkness, as in the sixth seal, the fifth trumpet and the fifth bowl-plague. It is partial darkness, limited and localized. The sun becomes a symbol of the Word of God (Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 6:23). It can symbolize the blessings of God in the spiritual realm: just as the sun enables crops to grow, the Son helps us to grow (Psalm 84:11; Isaiah 30:2 and 60:20).

The moon and stars have no separate significance. They show the orderliness of creation and might symbolize the laws of God--His guidance in everyday life. The stars used to be one of the major ways people navigated at night. Sailing at night was easier than sailing on a cloudy day because of the many reference points in the sky.

“A third of the sun, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars were smitten. . .” The sun and moon are given in the Bible as examples of stability in the order of the universe (Psa 72:5, 17; 89:36). In that case this vision describes a destabilization of that which should be solid and dependable. When people lose that which was a stable foundation for their lives, they often turn to God.

An exegetical issue in the text is whether the darkness that comes upon the sun, moon and stars is the “smiting” (Greek: *eplēgê*, from *plêssô*) itself or if it is the result of the smiting. In the latter case, what does it mean to “smite” the sun, moon and stars? Alford suggests that in Revelation it is the judgment effect that is important, not the means by which that judgment is described to have occurred. In that case, the key to understanding this text is what happens to the sun, moon and stars rather than how it happens. In the Bible, darkening of the heavenly bodies is frequently associated with trouble and distress on earth (Isa 13:10; 24:23; Jer 15:9; Ezek 32:7; Amos 8:9; Matt 24:29; Rev 6:12-17).

“In order that a third of them might be darkened . . .” Stefanovic writes at some length on the concept of darkness (see his commentary, 2nd edition, pages 301-302). The symbolic meaning of darkness is rooted in creation. The sun, moon and stars provide literal light to the earth (Gen 1:14-18). They represent His favor and blessing to the earth and His people (Isa 30:26). Darkening of these bodies would represent a reversal of creation and the absence of blessing, which is judgment (Ezek 32:7-8, cf. Isa 13:10; Amos 5:18; Joel 2:2, 10; 3:15; Mic 3:6; Matt 24:29; Mark 13:24-25). Darkness is the consequence of failing to give glory to God (Jer

13:15-17). So darkness can symbolize the absence of God while light can symbolize His presence (Genesis 1:2-3).

In the New Testament, light and darkness symbolize the two sides of the battle between good and evil. Darkness is often linked with supernatural powers (2 Cor 6:14-15; Eph 6:12; Col 1:13; 1 Pet 2:9; Rev 16:10). Light, on the other hand, is associated with Christ and the gospel (Matt 4:16; Luke 1:79; John 1:9; 8:12; 12:46; 2 Cor 4:4-6). It is through the gospel that people are rescued from the domain of darkness and brought into God's marvelous light (Col 1:13-14; 1 Pet 2:9). To reject the light of the gospel is to remain in darkness and bring the judgment of God upon oneself (John 3:18-21).

I would conclude from this biblical context that the fourth trumpet is using these terms (sun, moon, stars, light, darkness) in a spiritual way. The fourth trumpet represents a time in history when the gospel is, in some sense, shut out from human view. It is not so much distorted as eclipsed from human consciousness. This is a period in history when there is a lack of spiritual understanding resulting from the absence of the gospel. And the partial darkness of this trumpet deepens in the fifth, as we will see.

"That a third of the day might not shine, nor a third of the night likewise . . ." While the book of Revelation is essentially a symbolic book, the terms "day" and "night" do not seem to have symbolic connotation here. They are to be taken literally. This choice of language would suggest that the daylight hours were reduced by a third and a third of the night time was even darker than usual.

There is an apparent contradiction in this verse. In the first part it is implied that the light from the sun, moon and stars is dimmed by a third. But in the latter part of the text it is a third of the day and night that are darkened. Does this plague dim all light by a third or does it describe total darkness for a third of the time? The text itself does not clarify this dilemma.

Two things are clear in either case. 1) The difference between day and night is diminished, as is the case in Zechariah 14:6-7. 2) The darkness is not total, this is a partial plague, portending worse things to come (fifth trumpet).

There appear to be a couple of direct allusions to the Old Testament in this verse. First, there is an allusion to the fourth day of creation, in which you find the parallel language of stars, day, night, light and darkness. While there is no mention of sun and moon in the creation story (Gen 1:14-18), they are clearly implied in the phrases "the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night." The spiritual use that both Old and New Testaments make of the creation story supports the idea of a figurative and spiritual use in the fourth trumpet as well.

Second, there is a reminiscence of the ninth plague of the Exodus from Egypt, the plague of darkness. That darkness was God's judgment on Egypt for ignoring His request that they let Israel go. "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness will spread over Egypt--darkness that can be felt.' So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived." Exodus 10:21-23, NIV. Note that the darkness was over the Egyptians while there was light in the part of Egypt where the Israelites were living. That would be like a total eclipse over one part of Egypt but not the other.

In the Old Testament prophets the Exodus is a model for God's later intervention during the exile to Babylon. In the prophets, the language of the Exodus is more and more used in a spiritual sense (see Micah 7:15-20, for example). In the New Testament the language of the Exodus is consistently used in relation to Christian experience in Christ (for example, 1 Cor 5:7 and 10:1-13) rather than literally.

So while the language of Creation and the Exodus is literal in the original sense, these mighty acts of God in Scripture were more and more used as models of God's spiritual interventions at the return from the Exile and later after the cross of Christ. Allusions in the seven trumpets must be read not just in the light of their original contexts, but in light of the whole development of these contexts throughout the rest of the Bible. See chapter 2 in *The Deep Things of God* for a detailed analysis of the language of prophetic fulfillment.

Rev 8:10-12 (Analysis)—While both the third and fourth trumpets seem to represent attacks on symbols of God's word and the gospel, there are some interesting contrasts between the two. In the third trumpet, the water remains but is transformed into spiritual poison (bitterness/Wormwood). This represents a distortion of the gospel, with grave spiritual consequences. But in the fourth trumpet, the symbols of God's Word and the gospel (the sun, moon, and stars) are not distorted, they are obscured (eclipsed or darkened). There is an absence, rather than a perversion, of the gospel.

Whereas the enemy of the gospel in the third trumpet comes from within the church (it is religious in nature, like the opponent in the first trumpet), the opposition in the fourth trumpet comes from without (it is secular and political in nature, just as with the second trumpet). With the fall of the religious and secular powers that crucified Christ comes the rise of new religious and secular opponents of the gospel. The third trumpet portrays the rise of internal opposition to the true gospel within the church itself. The medieval church compromised with the world to pursue power and wealth instead of the self-sacrificing spirit of Jesus. But in the late Middle Ages history saw the rise of opposition to the gospel from outside the church, in the secular and political concerns of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. The rise of secularism was a very different threat to the gospel, but a real threat indeed.

There is no way that John could have fully understood future developments that had no direct context in his time and place. But in the cryptic symbols of the third and fourth trumpets, God provided a glimpse of what was to come. The model for the future rise of secularism was Egypt's Pharaoh, who denied the very existence and relevance of Yahweh (Exod 5:1-2; Ezek 32:1-8). In contrast with Pharaoh, Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar believed in the existence of the God of Israel (he used terms like "God of gods," "the Most High God," and the "King of heaven"—Dan 2:47; 3:26: 4:37). But Pharaoh apparently denied Him completely. In the Bible, therefore, Egypt becomes a symbol of bold defiance against God, the ancient equivalent of modern secularism and atheism.

The relationship to the apostasy of the third trumpet is the onset of darkness. When the church falls away from the truth and the light of the gospel no longer shines, secularism and atheism become attractive options. Today, if you talk to people who reject Christian faith, you will find that their encounters with it have been negative--that the ideas are strange, they don't work, and they are irrelevant to life as we know it today. So, the church's own apostasy

encourages secularism and atheism. This is the natural connection between the imagery of the third and the fourth trumpets.

Rev 8:10-12 (Summary)—In the initial sense one should read each trumpet in terms of how its symbolism would have been understood by John and the original readers. The third trumpet represents apostasy in the church and distortion of the gospel leading to spiritual death (see John 5:24 for the concept of spiritual resurrection). The fourth trumpet also represents an attack on God's Word and the gospel, but of a different kind. The knowledge of the truth is obscured or eclipsed. Understood in terms of an apocalyptic sequence of history, these two trumpets would represent the rise of two great Anti-Christ philosophies that will affect the end-time, false religion and anti-religion. The power play between these two intensifies in the final crisis (Revelation 13 and 18).

In saying this we need to keep in mind that the spiritual fall of an organization (as in institutional Christianity) doesn't mean the hopelessness of those that are in it or live by its teachings. Just because Judaism fell in the first century as a national entity does not mean that individual Jews were rejected by God or cannot now be saved. But it is a reality of history that there are both spiritual and secular organizations who steer people away from the truth. We need to understand the role in history of an organization before we align ourselves with it.

If the fourth trumpet is referring to the rise of secularism during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, it is that significant for how we understand the world today. And this development is not all bad, from a biblical perspective. Secularism has a number of positive qualities. 1) The American Revolution, with its values of freedom, equality and power deriving from the will of the people, was primarily the result of this secular trend. While the founding fathers of America were Christian in a formal sense, most did not believe that God is active in the world (Deism) and this perspective was no barrier to secularization.

2) Religious liberty is a positive result of secularism. In history, there is no nation founded on a religious basis that did not at some time persecute people of a different faith. Genuine religious liberty tends to function in the more secular societies. There are negative implications about putting church and state together. There are abundant examples of this in history. When religion and the state combine freedom of conscience is usually trampled upon.

3) Universal public education is widely encouraged in secular societies so that people have the freedom to reason and determine what is best for their own communities. This also encourages people of faith not to trust in what religions or religious teachers believe, but to search the Word of God for themselves.

4) The various Bible Societies flourished in light of religious freedom and universal education. As Western political control spread around the world a couple hundred years ago, availability of the Bible in many languages increased interest in its study.

5) Scientific progress is another outgrowth of secularization. Historically, it is in relatively free societies that people make the kinds of discoveries that are changing the world. This has had interesting implications for Christian faith. For example, a fairly recent scientific discipline, archeology, has provided a tremendous amount of information that helps us understand the Bible. In the area of linguistics, resources like Kittell's Theological Dictionary, a massive 10-volume set, covers the background and history of every major New Testament word and is extremely helpful for studying the Bible.

The secularization of the Western World, therefore, has helped enable widespread study of the Bible, which has had a positive influence on the true faith.

There is one other “positive” in today’s secular culture that we might prefer not talking about. There was a great revival of Protestantism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This motivated the church to carry the gospel to the whole world. It resulted in the greatest expansion of Christianity since the time of Pentecost. This was made possible by the worldwide expansion of European power and democratic values during the colonial era.

But there was also a dark side to this expansion. Being closely associated with the West’s colonial expansion in the economic and political realms, secular people and many non-Christian peoples today see Christianity as a self-serving tool of Western imperialism rather than a humble, self-effacing movement that seeks to improve the lives of others and prepare them for eternity. Christianity as a whole is on the defensive today and it must accept much of the blame for that reality.

But there is a positive side even to this. In the context of recent hostility to Christian faith around the world, the gospel message can no longer rely on political and economic support for its success. Christians are forced back to Jesus’ original plan of “power made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9). While secularism is an outcome of a failing Christendom, God can use it for good as well.

While secularization has had some positive influences on the human condition, it has also had negative influences and outcomes.

1) One of the outcomes of the Enlightenment is Communism. While the core principles of Communism were well intended, the French and Russian Revolutions quickly became very oppressive and negative toward faith of any kind.

2) Another outcome of the Enlightenment is ecumenism. While people of faith have much in common with each other and can benefit from interaction, ecumenism tends to promote the unification of religious institutions to enhance their power and wealth in this world. Such an ecumenism waters down faith, minimizing religious certainty and implying that it doesn't really matter what you believe.

3) Secularism and the loss of faith often leads to materialism, seeking life in the accumulation of things. The more time that one spend on the things of this world, the less time one invests in faith.

4) As people become bored or tired of secular living, they become hungry for spiritual experience at any price. They often turn to demons (spiritualism) to fulfill their spiritual longings. The Soviet Union claimed to be atheistic yet was more interested in the para-normal (spiritualistic experiences) than any other society. Under the surface people were experimenting with extra-sensory perception, para-psychology, and the occult.

Secularism is an interesting phenomenon that has both positive and negative implications. It was and is a judgment on the ineffectiveness of institutional Christianity. I see the rise of secularism imaged in the fourth trumpet. This is not the only possible interpretation, but seems to fit the textual evidence the best. In the fourth trumpet, there is a partial darkness which will get even deeper in the fifth trumpet. People’s assurance of God is increasingly stolen away and there is less and less knowledge of the Scriptures. Never in history have there been more Bibles available and less knowledge of God.

Historically, secularization can be traced to the time of the Renaissance (14th-16th centuries) and began to really flourish around the time of the French Revolution (18th century). Since that time there is increasing skepticism toward faith because so much of what claimed to be faith has proven false. With the 19th and 20th Centuries has been an increasingly dominant factor, first in the West and now more and more globally. I see the dominance of secularism in the fifth trumpet.

It just occurred to me that even though the seven trumpets highlight God's judgments on the opponents of God and the gospel I have shared some of the positive aspects of secularism. Similarly, one could say many positive things about Judaism and the Roman Empire, which seem implicated in the judgments of the first and second trumpets. It raised the question in my mind, to be fair, are there positives in the rise of the Papacy and the institutional dominance of Christendom in the Middle Ages of Europe? After all, Christianity could have taken a number of different forms in the centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire. There were five or six branches of Christianity in the earliest centuries, all but one of these was eliminated by Constantine and those that followed him. Given the options, why did God allow the Papacy to win the battle for control of the Christian movement for so long?

One positive that comes out of the institutionalization of Christianity after Constantine is the New Testament canon. The other branches of early Christianity (like Marcionism, Gnosticism and Montanism) would all have produced a radically different New Testament. The formation of the New Testament was the single most important issue in the earliest centuries. And the institutional church, with much help from the Holy Spirit, got this one right. With the New Testament in its present form, the Reformation becomes possible. Perhaps getting the canon right was more important than any other issue in the early centuries.

While the history surrounding the doctrines of God and Jesus Christ is quite sordid and questionable (see Philip Jenkins' book *Jesus Wars*), the institutional church got those issues sorted out in a way that reasonably conforms with Scripture.

And for all of its flaws, the very worldwide existence of the Roman Catholic Church calls attention to Jesus and the New Testament all around the world. If ultimately all publicity is good and God is never without witness (Acts 14:14-17), God has been able to use institutional Christianity to further His cause in remarkable ways. But we ignore the dark side of Christendom at our peril. See my comments on Rev 13:1-7 (The Identity of the Sea Beast) and Rev 13 (Excursus on the Papacy) for detail on the dark side and how we should approach that topic in today's world.

There is a solid, Adventist basis for seeking the positives in other faiths, as we have just done, and that is in the Great Controversy motif. Seventh-day Adventists believe that there is a cosmic conflict over the character and government of God, a war between good and evil, Christ and Satan. That means that God is at work in every religion and Satan is at work in every religion. The Bible often warns us about the dark side of religion, particularly when that religion is mixed up with politics and the pursuit of worldly wealth for its own sake. But we should not assume that the line between good and evil is between us and "them." That battle line runs through the middle of each of our hearts. So while not all religions bear equal witness to the character and government of God, we can all learn something about God from His witness in other contexts. And we should all beware the actions of the Adversary on our side of the religious line. The trumpets warn us about the dark side of religion. But God is doing more than

just judging human religious failure. As long as the believers in a faith are open to God, He continues to work with them and for them. After all, every human being is a member of God's family and precious to Him. He will not abandon anyone who seeks Him.

Rev 8:13-- The fourth trumpet closes with a transition passage, introducing the three trumpets to come. "And I saw and I heard a vulture flying in mid-heaven saying with a loud voice, 'Woe, woe, woe, to those who live on the earth because of the rest of the sounds of the three angels who are about to blow their trumpets.'" Revelation 8:13. The "and I saw" (Greek: *kai eidon*) often introduces a new vision in the book of Revelation (Rev 5:1; 6:1; 8:2; 10:1; 13:1, 11; 14:1, etc.)

The Greek word for vulture (*aetou*) can be translated either eagle (Rev 4:6; 12:14) or vulture (Matt 24:28; Luke 17:37; Rev 19:17-18) depending on the context. In this verse it is probably a vulture, a bird which circles the scene whenever death and destruction are about to take place. In the Old Testament, a vulture is consistently a symbol of God's covenant judgment attacking the spiritually dead—in various places a vulture appears against Israel (Hosea 8:1); against Egypt (Ezekiel 32:4); and against Judah (Habakkuk 1:8). In Deuteronomy 28:49 the eagle/vulture represents an enemy nation that carries out the curse of the covenant against Israel. Some manuscripts have "angel" instead of eagle/vulture, but this reading does not appear to be original.

"Mid-heaven" (Greek: *mesouranêmati*) is a Greek way of describing the zenith in the sky, the position of the sun at noon. Being at the zenith means that the vulture can be seen all the way to the horizon and its words can be heard by all to whom its message pertains. The term "mid-heaven" occurs three times in the book of Revelation. The first angel bearing the everlasting gospel also flies in "mid-heaven" (Rev 14:6). And in Revelation 19:17, the angel standing in the sun calls out to the birds that fly in "mid-heaven." Revelation 14:6 also speaks of a "loud voice" proclaiming to "those who live on the earth" so there may be an intentional parallel between the three woes and the first angel of Revelation 14.

The Hebrew language does not have the superlative (such as "greatest," "best"). But the superlative idea can be expressed through a triple repetition of the concept, as we find here. The three trumpets to come are the most dreadful. These three woes, however, in connection with Revelation 9:12 and 11:14, must be understood as distinct from each other, one for each of the last three trumpets. That means the three woes are described in Revelation 9:1-11, 9:13-21 and 11:15-18. Beginning here, the concept of "woe" (Greek: *ouai*) appears in seven different locations of Revelation (Rev 8:13; 9:12; 11:14; 12:12; 18:10, 16, 19).

"Those who live on the earth" (Greek: *tous katiokountas epi tês gês*) is a common expression for unbelievers, the opponents of God and His people in Revelation. See comments on Rev 13:7.

The image of the vulture indicates that, in the trumpets to come, the spiritually dead reap the consequences of their apostasy and rebellion against God. The judgments of the first four trumpets are very severe, but the judgments to come are even more dreadful. The trumpets move from divine warnings to demonic woes. The worst is yet to come! Beginning in the fifth trumpet, the full powers of darkness begin to be unleashed and things go downhill from then on.

Satan has always wished to be in charge of this earth. As things move toward the End, the Holy Spirit increasingly withdraws from the earth and the restraints on Satan are removed. He is given (Rev 9:1, 3, 5, etc.) the opportunity to demonstrate his character and the result is a demonstration of what the universe would be like if he were in control. The climax of this demonstration is in the seven last plagues (Rev 15:1). God's wrath is completed in giving this world up to the consequences of its own choices.

Rev 8:7-13 (Spiritual Lesson)—Ignorance of the Bible not only weakens our own spiritual experience, it has consequences for those we might share our faith with. When we misrepresent what the Bible teaches (whether intentionally or not) it can be damaging to others spiritually. To misunderstand or misinterpret the Scriptures is as harmful to spiritual life as not understanding them at all. It is important to let the Scriptures mold what we think and teach rather than seek to spin the biblical message to fit our own preconceived ideas about things. It is also wise to remember that every Christian church or organization has its own way of reading the Bible and there may be pressure to see what the organization wants you to see there. Human beings created in the image of God have the power to think and do. God expects us to exercise that power as we prayerfully examine the Scriptures. The third trumpet, in particular, warns us that there is no guarantee that what goes on in church from week-to-week is in accordance with God's Word. It is our personal responsibility to know the Word of God for ourselves.