

The Seven Trumpets of Revelation - Part 1

Author: Larry W. Wilson

One of the most compelling prophecies in Revelation is the seven trumpets. This important subject has serious ramifications on two levels. First, a correct interpretation of the seven trumpets is pivotal to understanding how the tightly unified end-time story of Revelation flows.

Therefore, a flawed view of the seven trumpets prevents one from seeing the highly relevant picture that Revelation's prophetic elements produce. Second, the coming fulfillment of the seven trumpets will be catastrophically overwhelming on a global scale. With the exception of Noah's flood, there is no parallel in world history.

Concerning timing, two general views are proposed by most Bible students regarding the seven trumpets. Some Christians place them in the past, while other Christians place them in the future. Regardless of when the timing falls, few people realize the importance of the seven trumpets.

When the topic is brought up, the subject is often deflected as "one of those Bible mysteries that will have to be solved after we all get to Heaven." If this claim is true, then why did God include the seven trumpets in Revelation? I do not believe it was done to merely tease Bible readers with an unsolvable prophetic mystery.

Rather, history proves that God shrouds highly important matters in mystery until the time is right. (Roman's 16:25,26) Then, when *that* information is needed – the truth about it unfolds and it becomes "present truth." History proves over and over again that on or about the time of prophetic fulfillment, understanding arrives.

Watch a Video About The Seven Trumpets

Click the video above to watch the first video in a three part series about the seven trumpets. If you wish to watch the other videos in the series, you can click the "YouTube" option in the lower right corner of the screen. That will take you to YouTube where you can select the video you wish to watch.

Charts Accompanying Video
[Chart 1](#) | [Chart 2](#) | [Chart 3](#) | [Chart 4](#)

Not Necessary for Salvation? Think Again.

Because most Christians think the meaning of the seven trumpets is hopelessly veiled in mysterious prophetic language, they casually assume this topic has little or nothing to do with salvation. Many people have told me that an understanding of the seven trumpets is not necessary for a person's salvation.

On a superficial level, this statement could appear to be true. Certainly, the topic of the seven trumpets does not affect my need for a personal Savior *right now, this very day*. However,

consider this profound point: During the months prior to the time Noah entered the ark, no one *needed* the ark or the message of a coming flood in order to be saved – but the ark was there, finished and ready to go *when the appointed time arrived*. When the appointed time came, however, the ark and the message *became essential* to one's salvation.

The same parallel and conclusion are true concerning the seven trumpets of Revelation. At the appointed time, a correct understanding of the seven trumpets will become an essential part of one's salvation.

Everyone Will Know

Everyone living on Earth will be affected in some way by the seven trumpet-events as they follow one after another. Unfortunately, most people will learn the hard, painful way *why* God sends these warning judgments. Two reasons can be given supporting the need to understand this subject now.

First, it is better to know about Jesus' forthcoming plans, so we can be better prepared to loyally stand on the side of truth during the seven trumpets (Revelation 14:12). Second, it is certainly better to understand *why* Jesus must do what He is going to do. I can assure you that everything we know and understand about God will be severely tested in days to come.

Many people will abandon their faith in God when they observe His actions. Tragically, this could be avoided if people would only open their hearts to understand His Word *now!* We need to understand the seven trumpets *now*. By beholding the big picture of God's salvation before the Great Tribulation begins, we will be better prepared to stand firm in our faith until the bitter, but a victorious end.

A Word of Encouragement

Before I present my conclusions about the seven trumpets, I need to offer some words of encouragement and hope since I believe the seven trumpets produce a time of global distress that has no parallel in past history. (Matthew 24:21) One of the last things Jesus said to His disciples before returning to Heaven was this, ". . . **And surely I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.**" (Matthew 28:20)

Jesus made this promise for you and me and we can count on Him to keep His promise. Jesus will not forsake us in the dark days ahead. Jesus' words actually mean that He will grant us the strength and courage we need when we need it!

So, do not look at tomorrow as though it were today. Understand that God will sustain and enable His children as needs arise. Perhaps Jesus was looking into the future when He said, "**Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.**" (Matthew 6:34)

Of course, these words of Jesus do not mean that we should "eat, drink and be merry, for

tomorrow we die" (fatalism). Rather, He means we can look forward with complete faith to God's sustaining grace, even in the valley of the shadow of death. It is important that we maintain a healthy perspective about coming events. Think about Noah for a moment. He was preaching an "end of the world" message – the total destruction of everything by water. Yet, God provided a way to save all who lived by faith (the ark).

Now consider this: The ark did not actually save the eight souls in Noah's day, instead it was their faith in God. What I mean is that God will make a way for everyone who lives by faith. If God needs a martyr, He will give a martyr faith. If God needs an articulate witness to stand before governors and kings, He will enable His children to speak. (Luke 12:11,12)

My point is that God provides whatever is needed. So, as you consider an imminent fulfillment of the seven trumpets, do not let the severity of what God must do overcome your confidence in all that God can do! Have faith in God!

The Conclusions First

People learn and absorb ideas in different ways. Since my favorite learning style is that of a generalist (I like to see the big picture before I concern myself with too many details), I will present the conclusions first. This will give you a conceptual starting point on this subject and it may also help to establish the importance of various details as the study unfolds.

With this said, here are some of my conclusions about the events associated with the seven trumpets. I believe the following:

1. The seven trumpets are imminently forthcoming and cover a maximum time-period of 1,260 days.
2. The first four trumpet events are warning/punitive events sent from God. These coming judgments will forever change life as we know it. Every infrastructure created by man worldwide (banking, economics, communications, manufacturing, travel, shipping, etc.) will be fatally wounded.
3. A global earthquake marks the commencement of the seven trumpets. This awesome earthquake will get the attention of the whole world. There is no parallel in history for an earthquake of this magnitude. (The greatest of three global earthquakes occurs at the Second Coming. Revelation 16:18)
4. After the earthquake, the first trumpet-event will be global showers of burning hail (flaming meteorites) burning up one-third of the trees and destroying most crops around the world. Millions of animals and people will be burned alive.
5. The second trumpet-event will be a great asteroid impact in one of Earth's oceans. Millions of people along the coasts of affected nations will be drowned by the resulting tsunami as it radiates away from the impact.
6. The third trumpet-event will be a great asteroid impacting one of Earth's continents. Enormous ground waves will destroy the current geological state of the Earth in that region and large underground aquifers will become contaminated. Millions of people will die of drinking water from toxic aquifers.

7. The fourth trumpet-event is described as great darkness caused perhaps by a rapid-fire sequence of volcano eruptions in the ring of fire. Darkness and the pall of death will literally cover the Earth. Millions will die of respiratory failure. Without sunlight, crops will not be able to grow in the darkness.
8. It is my understanding that the first four trumpets occur during a period of 30 to 60 days. Then, an interval of time passes, perhaps as long as two years before the next trumpet-event occurs.
9. The last three trumpets are curses that fall upon a specific group of people.
10. The fifth trumpet-event marks the physical release of the devil. God will grant him authority to physically appear in glorious attire before the inhabitants of Earth. With mighty signs, wonders and miracles he will deceive billions of people into thinking that he is God. The devil is granted five months to complete his deception. He will torture many who have refused the seal of God.
11. The sixth trumpet-event is a global war. (This war is not Armageddon for Armageddon occurs later during the seventh plague.) The devil and his enormous legions of supporters will establish a one-world government that excludes all who refuse to receive the mark of the devil (the beast). Those people refusing the mark are to be killed.
12. The seventh trumpet-event marks the end of God's patience with man. The seven last plagues will then begin and those who joined with the devil to receive his mark will be punished by the seven last events of wrath. (For a separate study on the seven last plagues, please see *Day Star* May 1998.)

Thoughts on Both Theories

As I said earlier, some Christians believe the trumpets occurred in the past and others believe they will occur in the future. Many Christians in the United States place the seven trumpets in the future, right after what they call a pre-tribulation rapture.

The net effect of both views is that the seven trumpets are not important. Historicists claim the trumpets were fulfilled long ago, and pre-tribulation advocates claim the seven trumpets will not affect the saints anyway. So both views, even though opposing, produce the same detrimental effect. Although I believe the seven trumpets are in the imminent future, I do not find a pre-tribulation or mid-tribulation rapture of the saints in the Bible.

On the contrary, I believe all of the people alive after the global earthquake will have to endure at least one of the seven trumpet-events. In fact, the seven trumpet-events are designed by God to test every person to see who can live by faith and receive the crown of eternal life. (Revelation 3:10,11)

Since I can endorse neither the historicist view nor the pre-tribulation or mid-tribulation view, I suspect this particular newsletter series will not win many friends. Nevertheless, I must present the biblical evidence and ask the reader to prayerfully consider this matter. I am sure the Holy Spirit will bless and enable every searching soul who sincerely desires to know truth! (John 16:13)

The Historical View

I believe the historical view of the seven trumpets is fatally flawed for a number of reasons. I submit the following evidence to the reader to substantiate that claim.

The people who assert that the trumpets have been fulfilled are faced with an insurmountable task. In order to make that claim, those who support this view must show a jury of neutral peers (laymen and scholars alike) that certain historical events conform to the specifications found in the text of Revelation.

For more than 200 years historicists have not been able to do this. This point is also underscored by the fact that even among historicists, there is no consensus view on the exact meaning, timing, purpose and fulfillment of each trumpet-event. *If, as they claim, trumpet two has been fulfilled, why is its fulfillment so obscure? What prevents historicists from widely agreeing on a historical event that satisfies the text?*

The answer is simple. There is an absence of convincing evidence. In order to make their position logical or believable, historicists often impose an eschatological framework or intellectual overhead on the text and often resort to "original" language nuances to make the Bible seem like it is saying something other than what is plainly stated.

This type of manipulation never ends and consequently, the historicist position is unsettled, ever changing and constantly debated.

(Note: From my perspective, the inconsistencies found in the historicist view doom it from the start. There is a better interpretation. When the time for fulfillment of the seven trumpets arrive, the whole world (laymen and scholar alike) will be able to confirm the fulfillment of each trumpet-event by observing the events and comparing them with the text.

In that day, the truth about the seven trumpets will not be obscure or vague. On the contrary, the events will be easily understood by everyone – the fulfillment of each trumpet event will be plain, in total conformity with the Word of God and shine brighter than the noonday sun!)

Two Trumpets Examined

Let us closely examine the second and third trumpets and note how the historicists' conclusions differ from the text. (We could examine all seven trumpets and marvel even more, but this is not a book.) A recent, widely published book presenting the historical view of the seven trumpets was written by C. Mervyn Maxwell.

In his book, *God Cares*, Volume II, (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1985) Maxwell endorses ideas proposed by Dr. Edwin Thiele who proposed a historical fulfillment of the seven trumpets. (See pages' 232-261.) Their findings are as follows:

Trumpet 1 – Fall of Jerusalem A.D. 70

Trumpet 2 – Fall of pagan Rome A.D. 378-476

Trumpet 3 – Corruption of the professed church of Christ 476 - 538

Trumpet 4 – Darkness of the middle ages A.D. 538 - 1299

Trumpet 5 – Mohammedan scourge A.D. 1299 - 1449

Trumpet 6 – Scourges under Turkish control A.D. 1449 - 1840

Trumpet 7 – Terrifying outbreaks of human passion and hate (End-time)

Especially consider the second trumpet conclusion presented by Maxwell above as you read the Bible text. **"And the second angel sounded [his trumpet], and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed."** (Revelation 8:8,9 – KJV)

Does these texts describe the fall of pagan Rome in A.D. 476? Is John talking about the ancient fall of Rome or the coming impact of a great asteroid? Taking the Bible "just as it reads," the second trumpet-event describes "a great mountain burning with fire that was cast into the sea." Consider the harmony that exists in this passage between a literal cause and a literal effect: a third of the sea became blood, a third of the sea creatures died and a third of the ships were destroyed.

Could a mile-wide asteroid traveling 40,000 m.p.h. slamming into one of Earth's oceans accomplish the specifications required to fulfill this prophecy? Yes, it certainly could and numerous scientific models have recently confirmed it. A white-hot asteroid impacting the sea would immediately bring the water to a boil, evaporating all the oxygen out of the water.

Red algae (having the appearance of blood) would quickly form since it thrives in anoxic water. Consequently, sea creatures would die in the anoxic water and the resulting tsunami would sink all ships in a radius of hundreds of miles.

Historicists like Maxwell insist the trumpets are symbolic and the second trumpet represents the fall of pagan Rome. How does he arrive at this conclusion? First, let's review the elements in the text:

1. A mountain burning with fire
2. Cast into the sea
3. One-third of the sea turns to blood
4. One-third of the sea creatures die
5. One-third of the ships are destroyed

Maxwell offers this interpretation on pages 238,239:

1. The mountain burning with fire represents the invading tribal nations and the rampage that brought about the fall of Rome. These conclusions are drawn from Jeremiah 51:24,25 where ancient Babylon is regarded as a destroying mountain and Daniel 2:35,44,45 where the coming kingdom of God is compared to a mountain. (Why this particular trumpet exclusively applies to Rome is not mentioned.)
2. The sea represents peoples, languages, multitudes and nations. (He uses Revelation 17:1,15 to support this interpretation.)
3. Without offering further biblical support, the living creatures in the sea and the ships are purported to represent people and their material possessions. Since no textual support for this conclusion is given, the supposition remains a mystery.
4. There is no explanation which specifically addresses one-third of the sea turning to blood. In fact, no mention is made regarding the repetition of twelve "one-thirds" throughout the entire explanation of the seven trumpets.

Historicists Do Not Agree with Each Other

One of the reasons historicists cannot agree on the location and meaning of the trumpets is this: The Bible does not explicitly say anything about the timing of each trumpet or its purpose. In other words, there is nothing in the second trumpet text that specifically mandates that it has to be associated with the fall of Rome.

Thiele and Maxwell simply apply the second trumpet-event to the fall of Rome because they have the predisposition that the trumpets are in the past! However, to limit the second trumpet to the fall of Rome is to impose an interpretation upon the text that is unwarranted. Other historicists clearly understand this fact which is why there is no universal agreement.

Let us assume for a moment that Maxwell shares his view with another historicist. The historicist reads the second trumpet and notes Maxwell's interpretation. Let us suppose the second historicist agrees with Maxwell saying, "Yes, the mountain represents an invading nation, and yes, the sea represents a host of multinational people.

Nevertheless, I believe this trumpet-event is concerned with another war at another time – not the fall of the Roman empire." I offer this illustration to make a point. Even if historicists agree on the use of certain "impressionistic language" from Scripture, the timing of the second trumpet is still subject to a host of other questions. So much so, that the subject goes beyond widely held agreement.

A parallel can be drawn between correctly understanding prophecy and building a house. If the foundation of the new house is out of square from the beginning, the entire house will be out of square at the end. In other words, if we approach Revelation with flawed assumptions, there will be no end to adjustments and puzzles that cannot be solved.

On the other hand, if we treat the text as God intended, intelligent and forthright answers will appear without any manipulation.

Consider the third trumpet and observe how Maxwell interprets this passage. Notice what the Bible says, **"The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water— the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter."** (Revelation 8:10,11)

Keep in mind these two verses are adjacent to the two preceding verses of the second trumpet. In other words, Scriptural context is unchanged. Notice in these two verses that people are literally identified as people! Why would God literally identify people in the third trumpet and not in the second?

In other words, why should we assume that the sea and the sea creatures in the second trumpet are symbolic of people when in the same context God literally identifies people in the third trumpet? Even more, should we consider the bitter waters, the rivers and springs as literal or symbolic?

If you cannot trust your own ability to read and understand this text, then whom will you trust to tell you what they are?

Maxwell treats the trumpets as though they were written with "impressionistic language." The use of impressionistic language is necessary when defending the historical position on the trumpets because everyone can see there is no record of literal fulfillment *in the past*.

Historicists often look around in the Bible to find parallel passages that complement the larger picture they are trying to support – namely, significant events or trends that can be found in ages past. On the surface, this appears to be a good principle: Let the Bible interpret the Bible.

However, this good principle will go awry if the primary principles of interpretation are violated. I've seen a number of historicists approach the same text with "good principles" of interpretation and arrive at very different conclusions. Are Bible prophecies made of a nose of wax that can be easily manipulated?

No. When the right rules are followed, the prophecies will produce the same "big picture" for everyone regardless of religious bias. (This too, will be confirmed during the Great Tribulation.)

Note: The use of parallel language can be both a big help and a big obstacle toward understanding Bible prophecies. The use of parallel language is the process of finding other passages that say similar things and substituting the easier idea within the more difficult prophetic passages. For example, "Babylon makes all nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries." (Revelation 14:8) This phrase in Revelation can be better understood after studying a parallel passage in Jeremiah 25:15-18 and elsewhere.

The problem with parallel passages is knowing how, when, and when not to use them! For example, in the first trumpet one-third of the trees are burned up. (Revelation 8:7) Does this text refer to literal trees or does this text refer to righteous people? Psalm 1:2,3 and Jeremiah 17:7,8 compares righteous people to trees.

Notice also, in Revelation 7:1-4 the trees are not hurt until the 144,000 are sealed. Are the trees in Revelation 7 to be interpreted as literal trees or should the trees be interpreted as righteous people? Can trees sometimes be literal and sometimes symbolic? I do not think so.

A good exegesis does not take a comparative or analogous statement and make it a symbolic definition. In other words, just because David and Jeremiah compare a righteous man to a tree, this does not mean that trees in Revelation represent righteous men. What about the stars mentioned in this text?

In Revelation 1:20 the seven stars in the right hand of Jesus represent the seven angels of the seven churches. The Bible clearly defines and interprets the symbol. In Revelation 6:13, the sun turns black, the moon turns red and the stars fall to the Earth. Should we regard the stars (as in meteorites) as literal or symbolic as angels?

The Greek word for stars is identical in both places. Obviously, we have to use a bit of common sense. Let me remind you again that truth radiates with clarity when the time comes to understand it.

Personally, I have found the best way to approach the prophecies is to treat the matter primarily as literal. If I cannot make sense of it, then I try to grasp the literal overall transaction being described. Then, if it is still unclear, I treat the passage as if it were analogous or a statement requiring comparative language from other places in Scripture. If that approach does not clarify the passage, then I treat it as symbolic and look for a *relevant* passage that bluntly defines the symbol.

I say "bluntly defines" because declaring something symbolic when it should be treated otherwise will only produce a wrong conclusion. For example, I do not believe the trees in Revelation 7 and 8 are symbolic even though Psalms and Jeremiah compare righteous people to trees.

For me, the passages in Psalms and Jeremiah are analogous. These writers compare righteous people to trees so the reader will appreciate the idea that righteous people are steadfast, generous and a delight – like a beautiful tree planted beside a river. However, in Revelation 7 and 8 there is no reason to treat the trees as though they were symbolic. Maxwell's insistence that in the first trumpet the "one-third of the trees" which are burned up represent the people of God makes no sense. (Page 237)

To carry this logic further only illustrates how far one must go to support erroneous conclusions. For example, why would God harm symbolic land, a symbolic sea and symbolic trees after the 144,000 are sealed? If one insists on an improper use of symbolism, the subject will hopelessly spin out of control and other Bible students will never be able to reproduce your conclusions. In fact, the end result is nothing more than a private interpretation. (A private interpretation is a conclusion that others cannot reproduce.)

The only way a private interpretation can be avoided is to follow clearly defined valid rules. Even if 100 million people accept a particular interpretation, it is still a private interpretation unless it

conforms to a clearly defined valid set of rules.)

Back to the Third Trumpet

Notice the prophetic elements of the third trumpet:

1. A great star, blazing like a torch fell from the sky
2. The star fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water
3. The name of the star is Wormwood
4. A third of the waters turn bitter and many people die from [drinking] the water

On pages 240 and 241 of his book, Maxwell states that the great star that fell to Earth is Lucifer. (Angels are referred to as stars in Job 38:7) "The Wormwood angel is [therefore] a bitter or poisonous angel." According to Maxwell's view, the springs of water or fountains represents the truth of God as promoted by Christian teachers – as in springs of living water. He derives this from Jeremiah 2:13 where God rebukes Israel for forsaking Him, "**the fountain of living waters, and hewing out for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.**" So, from this one text Maxwell concludes that "the third trumpet foreshadowed a polluting of Christian truth in God's church on Earth by poisonous Satanic errors taught by Christian teachers [from A.D. 476 - 538]."

I believe the third trumpet literally describes a great star, an asteroid blazing like a torch, falling from the sky. The impact from this asteroid affects one-third of the rivers (diverting their paths and causing destructive flooding) and one-third of the springs or fountains of water from which people drink (underground aquifers) become contaminated.

The ground waves resulting from a great impact of a large asteroid would sheer septic lines and water wells and badly fracture the geological plates that make up any continent so that toxic waste and bacteria would leach into the underground reservoirs of drinking water.

Large underground aquifers would soon become contaminated as diverted rivers force debris through the fractured plates of the continent. Millions of people would die of cholera and other infectious waterborne diseases. The name applied to this star is Wormwood which literally means "poisonous water." (Jeremiah 9:15; 23:15 – KJV)

Even more, one must understand from parallel passages in the Old Testament that the name "Wormwood" is always used within the context of punishment for apostasy.

A Better Understanding

As stated earlier, I believe the second and third trumpets describe two literal asteroid impacts. The first asteroid impacts one of the Earth's oceans, and the second asteroid impacts one of Earth's continents. (In Revelation 10, Jesus is seen standing with one foot on the ocean and one foot on the land.)

His stance indicates His authority over both of these areas.) If a literal reading of these two trumpets is *the right reading*, then a Bible student should expect "the cause" and "the outcome" to be harmoniously described in Revelation. Indeed, it is. Science not only confirms the possibility that Earth will be impacted by asteroids again, but a number of geological studies and simulation test models have produced results that are fully harmonious with everything that Revelation says.

The cause and effect are accurately described in this prophecy. There is no need to obscure the two trumpets with claims of historical fulfillment when in fact, the historicists cannot even agree on what fulfilled these events.

Jesus adds in Luke 21:25 saying, "**There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea.**" If the signs in the sun, moon, stars and sea that Jesus mentioned are a literal description of end-time events, then why shouldn't the sea in the second trumpet be literal?

You can be sure that if a great asteroid did impact once of the oceans, nations (notice the plural) would be left in anguish resulting from the devastation caused by the "roaring and tossing of the sea." On the other hand, if the intended meaning of the second trumpet is hidden in symbolism, then the meaning becomes elusive (e.g., endlessly debatable) because *relevant* Scripture to clearly define these symbols seems to be lacking.

The historicist interpretation robs these passages of Scripture of their simplicity, power and end-time purpose.

In the next issue of the *Day Star*, I will address the question of the seven trumpets and a pre-tribulation rapture. As always, your comments are welcome. Even though I cannot personally respond to all the mail we receive at the office, I do try to read and consider it!

[Continue reading part 2 . . .](#)