

• *New section*

We come to a new major section of the book of Revelation. So far we have had an introduction to the book<sup>☒1</sup> and then there have been two major visions of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

☒1 1:1-8

Christ Among His Churches: The Seven Churches<sup>☒1</sup>

Christ the Lord of History: The Seven Seals<sup>☒2</sup>

☒1 1:9-3:22

☒2 4:1-8:1

*Four ways to interpret Revelation*

This is a good point for us to consider the different ways in which the book of Revelation has been interpreted, and the different ways men and women have viewed its structure as it moves forward. There are many different ways in which the book of Revelation has been interpreted. We can put them into four groups.

*1. A long-time-ago approach*

1. Some have viewed these visions as mainly dealing with the first century of the church. It is what I call a **long-time-ago** approach.

*2. The sequential approach*

2. Others have thought we have here a visionary outline of church history. I can call this the **sequential** approach, because it holds to the idea that the various visions are telling a historical story in sequence, from the first coming to the second coming of Jesus.

*3. The futurist approach*

3. Another view is often called the **futurist** approach. It argues that the vast majority of the book is about the time very near to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

*4. The spiral approach*

4. There is another approach that I call the **spiral** approach. It is this approach to the book which seems to me to be right. The book of Revelation goes round and round in circles, but each circle gets higher and shows us more than the previous circle. Revelation 1:9–3:22 began with churches that were actually present in John's day, and yet at the same time it made reference to 'the second death' which would be at the end of the world.

• *Taken here – each cycle shows more*

*Overview: Chapters 1 - 12*

Revelation 4:1–8:1 begins (as I understand it) with the sending out of the gospel by our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet it ends with a vision of preparation for judgement day, and Revelation 8:1 seems to refer to judgement day itself.

• *Four cycles*

Revelation 8:2–11:18 goes over the same ground again. Once again it ends with a visionary description of judgement day.

Then Revelation 12 certainly includes mention of the birth of Jesus and his exaltation to a place of power. It too ends up with a vision of judgement day. And the next sections are the same, as we shall see.

• *Different angles, ending at the same point*

This surely all implies that Revelation is going round and round and round the same point. It is quite certain (to my mind) that Revelation 8 is not speaking of something that **follows** the events of chapters 1–7. **It is going back and considering them again from another angle.** The book of Revelation is not a history of the church in chronological order. It is not **entirely** about the future. It is not **entirely** about the past. It is about the **whole** of church history, and it goes round and round the entire period of the history of the church from the first to the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

*8:12 – 11:18 Seven trumpets*

Let us look at Revelation 8:2–11:18 as a whole. In Revelation 8:2–6, seven angels are given seven trumpets<sup>☒1</sup>. Trumpets are used to warn, to sound an alarm. Another angel offers incense upon the incense-altar<sup>☒2</sup>. Something is about to happen which is the result of the praying of God's people. Burning coals are thrown upon the earth<sup>☒3</sup>. This is a picture of the holiness of God acting in judgement. The angels get ready to blast a warning upon the trumpets<sup>☒4</sup>.

☒1 8:2

☒2 8:3-4

☒3 8:5

☒4 8:6

• *Warnings*

- *The sequence with an interlude before trumpet seven*

Then there come four trumpets of warning<sup>□1</sup>. The seven trumpets fall into a group of four and a group of three. This is emphasized in 8:13. In Revelation 9:1–21 there are two more trumpets<sup>□2</sup>. Then there comes an interlude in Revelation 10:1–11:14. At this point we read about the seven thunders<sup>□3</sup>, the little scroll<sup>□4</sup> and the two witnesses<sup>□5</sup>. Then in 11:15–19 we have the seventh trumpet.

□1	8:7, 8–9, 10–11, 12
□2	9:1–12, 13–21
□3	10:1–7
□4	10:8–11
□5	11:1–14

## A new phase in the vision

Look at Revelation 8:2. It is the beginning of a new phase in John's vision. *And I saw the seven angels that stand before God; and there were given unto them seven trumpets.* Trumpets are often used for warning, for sounding an alarm, and this is the point of the trumpets in Revelation 8–11.

- *Incense – the intercession of God's people*

Another angel is seen. This angel is offering incense upon the incense-altar. Heaven is like the tabernacle. It has incense, like the incense burned in the holy place of the ancient tabernacle of Israel. <sup>3</sup>*And another angel came and stood over the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should add it unto the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.* In the symbolism of the Old Testament incense was something that makes prayer acceptable. It is fulfilled in the intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ. His praying makes our praying acceptable. Our prayers go to heaven attached to his prayers. They are acceptable to God because they are mixed with the prayers of Jesus for us. Revelation 8:4 says: *And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand.* These trumpets of judgement that are about to come are the result of the praying of God's people. When God's people are in trouble, they pray. As a result of the praying of his people, God takes action and carries forward his purposes in this world. God's people pray. <sup>5</sup>*And the angel took the censer; and he filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it upon the earth: and there followed thunders, and voices, and lightnings, and an earthquake.* This pictures the various judgements that come upon the world as God's people pray. When the angels see God's plan to send judgements upon the world, they prepare to blow trumpets. The trumpets are blasts of noise to warn the world of the holy judgements of God. <sup>6</sup>*And the seven angels that had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.*

- *God's purposes carried forward*

- *Judgements on the world as God's people pray*

- *First: the land*

The vision of John records four kinds of judgement that come upon the earth. First there are judgements that come upon the land. <sup>7</sup>*And the first sounded, and there followed hail and fire, mingled with blood, and they were thrown upon the earth: and the third part of the earth was burnt up, and the third part of the trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.*

- *Second: the sea*

Then there are judgements that come upon the sea. <sup>8</sup>*And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; <sup>9</sup>and there died the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, even they that had life; and the third part of the ships was destroyed.*

- *Third: the waters*

The third trumpet speaks of judgements that come upon inland waters. <sup>10</sup>*And the third angel sounded, and there fell from heaven a great star, burning as a torch, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of the waters; <sup>11</sup>and the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.*

- *Fourth: the sky*

Then the fourth trumpet-blast speaks of judgements that take place in the sky. <sup>12</sup>*And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; that the third part of them should be darkened, and the day should not shine for the third part of it, and the night in like manner.*

## Some lessons

Let us learn some lessons from this highly symbolical picture of the many judgements of God that fall upon our world.

1. *God never allows this world to succeed in living without him*

• *Our world is never going to function properly while sin dominates the planet*

2. *The trumpets of God become louder*

3. *The need to preach the gospel is very great*

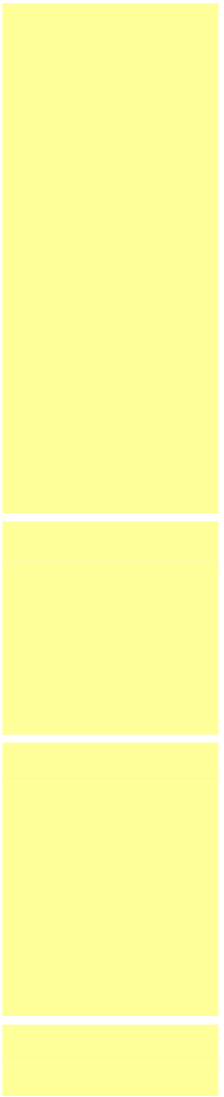
4. *Peace only in Jesus Christ*

1. **God never allows this world to succeed in living without him.** The history of the world is a constant succession of the judgements of God. The story of our world is a story of endless judgements. Embassies are destroyed by bomb attacks. Planes crash. Economies are ruined. These things are all signs of judgement. Agriculture is ruined. Deserts overtake green pastures. Animals get diseases. Mysterious diseases appear in the human race that have never been known before. Never is there a time when there is not some war being fought somewhere or other. Treaty organizations fail. Peace organizations fail. AIDS and global warming increase. Rivers and seas are polluted. Our book of Revelation gives us a picture of various kinds of judgement – on land, at sea, in rivers, in the sky. Each one comes as a trumpet blast of warning. These many **calamities are signs of the anger of God against sin.** Our world is never going to function properly while sin dominates the planet.

2. **The trumpets of God become louder.** There is no reason to think that these judgements are in chronological order. Judgements on land, at sea, in rivers and in the sky are taking place all the time. Yet the fact that the four trumpets get more severe suggests that the different kinds of judgement get worse as history goes forward. One thinks of the way in which AIDS was unknown a century ago.

3. **The need to preach the gospel is very great.** Will these judgements ever cease in our age? Who knows? But one thing is certain: the only hope of their ever being reversed even in small measure is in the preaching of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The judgements fall as God is ignored. They would cease to the extent that God is heeded. Countries have generally prospered and the judgements of God have been restrained where large numbers of people heed and apply to their lives the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

4. **We do not find peace in this world.** We find peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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