

• *Trumpet six – terrible judgements before the end of the world*

The sixth trumpet refers to a climax of troubles

• *The judgements get worse as the end of the world gets nearer*

• *God's people are praying for an end to the church's sufferings*

1. A period of immense conflict arises from the persecution of the church

• *The sixth seal refers to the time when God's people are violently attacked by a mighty evil power*

2. The world itself suffers when the church suffers

• *The ungodly world brings its own judgement upon itself*

The trumpets of judgement are God's warnings to the world. There are natural judgements, and there are supernatural judgements. The first four trumpets involved the judgements of God upon land, on the seas, on the rivers and in the sky^{□1}. Then the fifth trumpet involved the release of evil spirits, pictured as terrible locust-scorpions^{□2}. The seventh trumpet (which we shall discover in 11:15–18) clearly refers to the end of the world. So what is the sixth trumpet? It is worse than the first five and yet it is something that takes place before the end and is less than the final judgement.

This is a favourite passage for people who think they can tell us exactly what is going to happen in the future. But I think we cannot totally write the story of history before it happens! **I suggest that the sixth trumpet refers to a climax of troubles that come upon the world at some time before the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.** It will be a time of persecution for the church, but it will also be a great time of trouble for the world. The judgements get worse as the end of the world gets nearer. John has a sense of rising conflict. ¹²*The first 'Woe' is past. But look! There are two more 'Woes' that are yet to come.*

This judgement comes in answer to the prayers of God's people. John says: ¹³*Then the sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice from one of the horns of the golden altar before God. The golden altar or 'altar of incense' is the place in the temple where incense is offered, representing intercession. It is the place where (symbolically) the prayers of God's servants ascend to God. This does not mean that God's people are praying for judgement, but they are praying for the end of the sufferings of the church and the coming of God's kingdom, and the trumpet-blasts of judgement are God's way of answering their prayers.*

1. A period of immense conflict arises from the persecution of the church. ¹⁴*He was calling to the sixth angel who held the trumpet. The voice said, 'Release the four angels that are restrained at the great river Euphrates.'* ¹⁵*And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of all the people of earth.* The river Euphrates was the border of the ideal nation of Israel which was to stretch from the Nile to the Euphrates^{□1}. The Euphrates was a barrier between Babylon and Israel. The picture here is of wicked angels wishing to attack the people of God but being held back at the border and unable to fulfil their wishes until a certain time. Then (by God's permission) they are released and are given permission to attack the people of God. When the Babylonians invaded Israel they came from across the river Euphrates. The sixth seal refers to the time when God's people are violently attacked by a mighty evil power.

2. The world itself suffers when the church suffers. Although this event (whenever it may be) begins with the persecution of the church, it is also a judgement upon the world. Although the church is attacked, strangely it is an indirect answer to the very prayers the people of God are praying. The releasing of the four angels is the commencement of a period of violent and extreme ungodliness. But the ungodly world brings its own judgement upon itself. There is a mighty army of evil invaders, led into wickedness by the evil angels. ¹⁶*The number of the mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand. I heard their number.* ¹⁷*And so I saw the horses in the vision, and the riders that were seated on them. The riders wore breastplates that had the colour of fire and of sapphire and of sulphur. The horses had heads like the heads of lions, and out of*

□1 8:2-13
□2 9:1-12

□1 Genesis 15:18

their mouths came fire and smoke and sulphur. ¹⁸By these three plagues a third of the human race was killed, by the fire and the smoke and the sulphur which came out of their mouths. ¹⁹For the power of the horses is in their mouth, and in their tails. For their tails are like the tails of serpents, and they have heads; and with them they inflict harm.

- One third of the human race killed

3. Immense suffering does not bring about repentance

- The sins of the world are still followed eagerly

- Symbolic – not a photographic preview of modern warfare

- An immense conflict in the entire world with vast numbers perishing, yet it will not lead to repentance

- Then Jesus intervenes by the breath of His mouth and the brightness of His coming

The wicked angels have an army of 200 million fire-breathing, snake-tailed, lion-headed horses protected by blazingly bright breastplates as armour. They breathe fire and smoke and sulphur and by that means kill a third of the human race amidst extreme violence and pain.

3. Immense suffering does not bring about repentance. One might think that extreme suffering would bring about repentance but it is not so. ²⁰And the rest of the human race, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold, and of silver, and of brass, and of stone, and of wood, which can neither see, nor hear, nor walk. ²¹And they did not repent of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts. The sins of the world are still followed eagerly: (i) idolatry, (ii) witchcraft, (iii) violence, (iv) immorality and (v) theft. Throughout human history they have continued as popular sins, much loved by the world. No amount of suffering leads to their abandonment.

None of this is any kind of photographic preview of modern warfare (despite what some popular preachers might say). The entire picture is symbolic, not photographic. We are not to think of nuclear warfare, or of locust-shaped helicopters! Without being too dogmatic (for the ultimate interpretation of prophecy is the fulfilment!) we must say that there will be a latter-day Babylon which is allowed to cross Euphrates (symbolically) so as to attack the people of God. It will lead to immense conflict in the entire world with vast numbers perishing, yet it will not lead to repentance. No time is given. One can only say that it fits with the various passages of Scripture which predict an undated period of mighty conflict against the church, with awful judgements falling on the world as a result. It is a state of affairs that Satan is always **wanting** to bring about. For a short, sharp period of time he will be allowed to succeed, but then (as 2 Thessalonians 2 has it) the period will come to an end as Jesus intervenes by the breath of his mouth (first!) and then (next!) by the brightness of his coming.



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