

# Church History - Session 7 (The Book of Revelation)

by Edgar F. Parkyns

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*This sermon explores the Book of Revelation's messages to the early church and its historical implications for Christianity's struggles and triumphs through the ages.*

**Duration:** 47:48

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Revelation 1:1, Revelation 5:9, Revelation 6:2, Revelation 7:9, Revelation 7:17, Revelation 21:4

**Topics:** "Eschatology", "Revelation"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the divine intervention on the human scene in judgment, specifically focusing on the seven angels with the seven trumpets. The first four trumpets are described, with each one causing destruction and devastation on the earth, sea, and rivers. The preacher suggests that these trumpets symbolically represent the actual historical events of the breakup of the Roman Empire. The sermon concludes with a warning of three more trumpets to come and the introduction of the next set of visions, the seven seals.

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## Transcript

We might as well have a look at the notes of last week, in case you've forgotten what we were talking about. That's one advantage of having the notes a week late, it's my fault, nobody else's, and that is that you can at least review what we were looking at in the previous week. So we looked at the book of Revelation as it would have appeared to those who first received it and who were reading it during the early centuries of the Christian era.

We have already seen that it was from the Lord Jesus, that it was to the church, for the church, concerning the church, that the visions were to begin very soon after the book was written and were to continue right down through the ages until at least the second coming of Christ. So much is plainly stated in the book. We saw too that the language of the book was symbolic.

That is, it's not normally literal, but symbolic. And he says so in chapter 1, verse 1, these things he sent and signified or showed by signs. So we put ourselves in the position of the early churches who are receiving this message and I might as well just read it off for you, that won't save me a lot of trouble.

If you had been a member of one of the churches of Revelation, what would you have thought as you listened to the prophecy? You would have rejoiced and have been awed at the opening vision, accepted the encouragements and warnings of chapters 2 and 3, worshipped with those who praise him that sit upon the throne and the Lamb. But what would you have thought of the rider with the bow on the white horse? Would it have been an actual horse and bow? No, a symbol. Good or bad? They thought it was good.

A picture of Christ or the gospel of Christ going out to country. But one of the next three riders, they thought they symbolized trouble. Warfare against the gospel, the sword of the state against the Christians, restriction, even famine for the poor but not for the rich, death, an attempt to destroy Christianity with sword, hunger and wild beasts of the arena.

But the gates of Hades could not prevail against that church. Later commentators have noted the similarity with the official seals of the empire at this time. You, that is all these riders on their various horses, appeared as official seals of the Roman empire at the same time.

You may note the horsemen of peace in Zechariah chapter 1 and 6. They were the angelic watchers who were watching over the affairs of Israel in the time of Zechariah. As for the fifth seal, the souls under the altar, they saw these as martyrs under pagan Rome. And you remember they were looking for another company of martyrs to be adjoined to them.

But what of the sixth seal? That looked like the end of the world to them. And many expected that, but it didn't happen. And there were difficulties.

There was another company of martyrs to come and they hadn't appeared as yet. There was also the reign of Antichrist. Where was it? They were puzzled.

What actually happened was that the pagan heavens collapsed. Saturn, Jove, Mars, Jupiter fell before advancing Christendom. And the great leaders of paganism were terrified not only at Constantine's victories but at the anticipated wrath of the Lamb.

It was the collapse of the old order. See also language of the Old Testament prophets in Ezekiel 32 and Isaiah 13 concerning Babylon. After this was shown the sealing of the elect of Israel during this age and the great multitude out of great tribulation.

No period is mentioned. Notice that it doesn't say a three and a half year period of tribulation. It mentions no period.

But as the multitude is innumerable and from all nations while the theme is evangelical it probably includes all who suffer for Christ from the early ages until his coming. And remember there has been no age without those who are suffering great tribulation for his name's sake. There still are those who are suffering such great tribulation that if you told them the great tribulation hadn't come yet they would look at you in bewilderment.

This passage has been used to comfort Christ's people in many bitter persecutions. It belongs to the suffering church. Yea the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

Then back to church history, turning away from Revelation to church history we see some of the witnesses to Christ during the Middle Ages. We have already seen the Polychaeans who were persecuted in Asia Minor and Thrace, it should be in Asia, T-H-I-C-E. Also the Albigenses of Southern France.

I make lots of mistakes when I'm talking. Also the Albigenses of Southern France who were almost exterminated by a crusade. You know, gentlemen with crosses on their shields to show that they were holy.

They exterminated the Bible-believing Christians of Southern France. Also the Bogomils of Bosnia, Bogomils friends of God and the Cathari, the people who were pure. And then the Waldenses of Piedmont in the Southern Alps.

They claimed very early origin, but about 1300 developed around the work of Peter Waldo of Lyons, Lima. They followed the Bible in purity of life, character and gospel preaching. They are called Bronturs, carried the gospel secretly to many parts of Europe.

Persecuted, they withdrew into inaccessible valleys of the Cotian Alps. Oh, I haven't got my friend Guinness with me, have I? Forgotten. Then in England, Wycliffe.

After teaching at Oxford, especially on the authority of Scripture, he became Rector of Lutterworth in England in 1374. He had powerful influence with the king and government. He protested at the encroachments of the papacy.

It was taking one third of the national revenue. Protested at corruptions of regular and secular clergy. Declared the Pope to be Antichrist.

Protected by the British people, he translated the Bible into English, published handwritten copies, organized Lollard Preachers, prepared England for the Reformation. File on the earth page, nothing, nothing. That's probably 100.

His writings reached Bohemia. They say that in England at that time, every third man was a Lollard. Quite interesting.

While the rest of Europe was in darkness, in England there were many people who were influenced by Wycliffe and his preachers, and were beginning to read portions of the Bible, and get some little understanding of the way of salvation. Lollards probably because of their singing. Jan Hus, a parish priest of Bohemia, was converted to Christ, and a revival broke out.

He, seeing the Pope not as Christ's vicar, but as Antichrist, spoke the gospel boldly and denounced the ungodly lies of the clergy. He was burned at the Council of Constance after great suffering. This council canonized St. Bridget, deposed three rival popes, and set up Pope Martin, who failed to execute anything the council had suggested.

Jerome of Prague, friend of Hus, was captured and burned at Constance the same year, 1416. The Bohemian princes began the Hussite wars against the emperor to obtain freedom of religion. The dying Hus, whose name means goose, prophesied of a swan to come 100 years later whom they would not be able to silence.

That swan was Luther. The Lollards in Britain were proscribed in prisons, tortured, killed, but maintained a testimony for 150 years prior to the Reformation. The Lollards' prison, showing instruments of torture in London, may be visited.

If you're ever over there, go to Lambeth Palace and inquire about the Lollards' prison, and you can see some of the rack on which they used to stretch them, the iron boots on which they used to dislocate their feet, the thumb screws with which they broke their thumbs, and several other devices are still there. A list of some books at the bottom. All right.

Let's move on. We'll look, first of all, at the Book of Revelation, and then at history. If we were on sound lines in interpreting the seals as having reference to the early church, the spread of the gospel, and the sufferings that followed, until the overthrow of the pagan heavens at the time of Constantine, we may regard the multitude of the Great Tribulation as belonging to the whole Christian age.

And I would like to recommend to you, in your actual leisure, a study of the Old Testament prophets, and the kind of symbolic language they used to describe events that would soon be history. All sorts of wonderful symbols are used by the Old Testament prophets to describe events which happened in perfectly normal history, but the prophetic delineation was in the strong language of symbolism. The more you understand the Old Testament prophets, the more easy it is to understand Revelation.

The seventh seal appears to open into the trumpet visions. Chapter Eight And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour, and I saw the seven angels which stood before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. You see how the seals, one, two, three, four, that's the first group, the four horsemen.

Then you get the two very violent ones, fifth and sixth, the martyrs and the collapse of the heavens. And then you can still come across the seventh seal, but this time it opens up into the seven trumpets, and later on you'll find that the seventh trumpet opens up into the seven violins. So it's almost like a railway train, as one carriage hooks on to the next one.

I'm sure to use the wrong terms, but never mind, that's the idea. As one set of visions bounces off the screen, so the last coach pulls in the next lot. You see, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven violins.

And they move forward across the prophetic stage in that order. Now, the seventh seal, seven seals were all attached to the roll. Can you imagine that this is the roll? It's only a little bit of paper, but it's intended to represent the roll.

And as he breaks the seal, so a portion of the roll opens. Thus, he breaks the seal, and there turns up horseman number one. He breaks another seal, and there turns up horseman number two.

Breaks another seal, there turns up horseman number three. Breaks another seal, horseman number four. But when all the seals are open, then the real substance of the book begins.

Don't you see that? You don't really get to the heart of the matter until you've broken all the seals. The symbolism is very simple there. And all this matter about pagan Rome and the early church martyrs was only introductory, the breaking of the seals.

The heart of the matter was to come after that. For persecution under pagan Rome was an obvious thing. The church didn't need very subtle warnings about it.

It was the mystery of iniquity that would follow that would be so deceptive that it would require additional revelation. And so, when the seventh seal is broken, we're going to have a look at the confused state of the Christian scene after the passing away of the dominion of paganism. And Europe is rapidly becoming Christian, in quotation marks.

Thousands and thousands of conversions, but very little truth. The Roman Empire is breaking up. And it's a Christianized Roman Empire, and it falls to pieces.

And it breaks up in two stages, first the West and then the East. It is probable that the trumpets of war and alarm, compare Joel 3 verse 1, show the judgments of God external upon the decadent Christianized Roman Empire. Just as in the Old Testament you have Philistia, Syria, Babylon, Assyria, all in turn viewed by the prophets as God's external judgments against backsliding Israel.

So now you're getting a parallel picture of his testimony in this age with another group of external judgments symbolized by the trumpets of war, just like Joel did. And here they come, one after another, in this chapter. First of all, there's a pause.

Silence in heaven about the space of half an hour, probably indicating that there is a time of comparative quiet after the disastrous overthrow of the old pagan system and the arising of these new fearful judgments. The Lord's people are praying, verse 3. They're praying, no doubt, because of the apostasy that's all around them. And their prayers are mighty.

And God is preparing to move in judgment in response to the prayers of his saints. The smoke of the incense which came from the prayers of the saints ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. And the angel took the censer and filled it with fire of the altar and cast it into the earth.

There were voices, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake. Divine intervention on the human scene in judgment. The seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

All this suggests a little bit of a pause between the violent scenes of the seals and the introduction of the trumpets. Let me read quickly the first four. The first angel sounded and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood and they were cast upon the earth.

The third part of trees was burnt up and all green grass was burned up. The second angel sounded and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea. The third part of the sea became blood and the third part of the creatures in the sea and had life died.

The third part of ships were destroyed. The third angel sounded and there fell a great star from heaven burning as it were a lamp and it fell upon the third part of the rivers and upon the fountain of waters. 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. 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. So as the third part of them was darkened in the day shone not for a third part of it and the night likewise.

And I beheld and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpets of the three angels which are yet to sound. So you will see that there is once again a grouping of four and three. Four that come in

fairly quick sequence and then a warning about the last three which are called woes.

That is they are going to be worse than the earlier lot. Well now, I can't dogmatize. What I can do is to show you that there is a parallel between history and prophecy.

Because the scripture here doesn't give us an interpretation. It leaves it open for us that an intelligent study of history matched with this account of the judgments of God against that decaying system shows some amazing parallels. We have already been talking a little about the horns of heathen Germanic tribes that broke over the northern borders of Christendom during the break up of the Roman Empire.

And I suggest to you that there is a correspondence between those four great invasions. The first from the Goths, who came down over the Rhine, penetrated into Europe, extracted tribute from Rome, described perhaps here, the first angel shouted and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood and they were cast upon the earth and a third part of trees was burnt up, all green grass was burnt up. This mention of the third part is an interesting one.

It means that at any rate two thirds of the place was escaping, wasn't it? If a third is under this judgment it means it's not total and universal. Also, it does appear that the Roman Empire in its break up might be divided into three parts, that is the West, the East and the Mediterranean. Three parts.

Let me read to you from Harry. Harry, page 715. If they refer to the Roman Empire, halfway down, then here again, as in previous visions, the imagery seems to be a very good symbolic predictive portrayal of actual history.

The parallel with the fact that the break up of the Roman Empire fits so exactly, it seems it must have been envisioned in these four trumpets. Missing a few lines. In the 4th century AD, a colossal government upheaval, Christianity was accepted and made a state religion of empire.

In the same century, Eastern Roman Empire and Western were divided. For 800 years, no foreign enemy had set foot on Italian soil. But in the 5th century AD, barbarians from the north began to pour in.

Hail, fire and blood of the first trumpet burned the earth. The Goths, AD 409, see that's less than a hundred years after the break up of the old pagan system, descended upon Italy in savage fury, and left behind burning cities, scorched, bloody, desolated lands. Great burning mountain, a second trumpet cast into the sea.

The vandals, a short while later, swept across Gaul and Spain into Africa. They built a navy, they'd never done such a thing before. They built a navy, and for 30 years fought the Roman navy, which for 600 years had controlled the Mediterranean and drove it from the sea.

Tremendous revolution in history. The great burning star, a third trumpet, fell upon the rivers. That's the northern borders of the empire.

Attila the Hun, from the depths of Central Asia, appeared AD 440 on the banks of the Danube at the head of 800,000 fighting men. Pushing westward, he met the Roman armies, defeated them with awful slaughter on the River Marne, the River Rhone, and the River Pole, so that these rivers actually ran with blood. Loaded with swine, he returned to the Danube.

When he died, the river was turned aside and his body buried beneath its bed. The waters still flow over his grave. He was indeed the scourge of the rivers.

Fourth trumpet, sun, moon, and stars darkened. Another horde of barbarians from the Rhine country, headed by Odoacer, that should be Odoacer, besieged and took the city of Rome. So there were these four successive blows, the Gothic invasion of Italy, the vandals' destruction of the Roman navy, Attila's awful slaughter on the river systems, Odoacer's seizure of Rome.

Under these appalling disasters, the mighty Roman Empire, which for more than half a millennium had ruled the world, went down. The light of Roman civilization went out, and the dark ages of the world began. Well, you've learned a bit of history from Revelation now, haven't you? And if you remember that the Old Testament prophets spoke of the coming events of history affecting Israel in very similar terms to these, and foretold the hundreds of years that lay ahead in the same kind of language, you will see how very much this is the likely interpretation of this section of Revelation.

But these woes were only small ones. It's the last three that were to be the terrors. Three woes are left.

Woe number one, the fifth trumpet. Let's read it from Revelation. Let's read the closing warning in chapter eight.

I beheld and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, by reason of the other voices of the trumpets of the three angels, which are yet to sound. And here they come. The fifth angel.

I saw a star fall from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key of the bottomless pit. There arose a smoke as of a great furnace.

The sun and the air were darkened. A locust came out of the earth, and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. It was commanded them, unlike their predecessors, that they should not hurt the grass, neither any green thing, neither any tree, but those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.

So you see, the sealing of God was not only for the twelve tribes of Israel, but had a wider significance. It was given that they should not kill, but that they should be tormented five months. And their torment was as the torment of a scorpion when he strikes a man.

In those days... Have you ever been stung by a scorpion? I have. In those days there shall men seek death and shall not find it, and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them. Heaven the shapes.

They were like horses prepared to battle. Have you ever seen locusts in tropical territory? They were really like beautifully dressed horses. Uh... Martial creatures.

You can hear all the foliage around crackling as it eats it up. And they looked just like a medieval little horse. You can just imagine little knights stuck on the top of it.

Some of the grasshopper family were quite brightly colored. They had, as it were, crowns like gold. Not gold, but something like it.

And their faces were the faces of men. They had hair as the hair of women. Their teeth as of lions.

Breastplates of iron. The sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. Tails like scorpions, slings in their tails.

Their power was to hurt men five months. And they had a king over them from a bottomless pit. For five months, or if the year-day scale applies, for 150 years, they were to be a scourge to apostate Christendom.

In 622, Mohammed received his amazing vision. In the following 150 years, the scourge of Islam swept across the areas that had been Christianized. And were only stopped in France.

And 150 years after that fearsome era began, it was a terrible era, the... Let's read from Harry. In the 7th century, Mohammedanism swept the eastern world like a tidal wave and blotted out Christianity in southwest Asia and North Africa, the Euphrates and Nile valleys, the eastern and southern borders of the Mediterranean, lands of the Bible story, lands in which the Bible originated and grew, lands in which God's revelation of himself was nurtured and brought to completion, lands in which God formed and trained the nation Israel for 2,000 years to pave the way for the coming of Christ, lands hallowed forever as the scene of Christ's life and death and resurrection and his redemptive work for mankind, lands which were the cradle of Christianity and which were for 600 years Christian. The original Christian world in these lands by one fell blow out of the Mohammedan sword, Christianity was blotted out and Mohammedanism was established.

They have been Mohammedan ever since. 600 years Christian, now the 1,300 years Mohammedan. There are more Mohammedans now in the world than Protestant Christians.

Further details about the Mohammedan advance. Mohammed in Mecca declared himself to be the prophet of God and sat out at the head of an army to propagate his religion by the sword. Soon the whole of Arabia was conquered.

His armies under successive leaders swept on in their conquest Syria, Jerusalem, Egypt, Persia, North Africa by 689. They moved into Europe. Spain fell AD 711.

They headed on into France where at Tours the Mohammedan army was met and defeated by Charles Martel the Hammer, AD 732. Except for that victory Christianity might have been entirely exterminated from the earth. Here are some of the things that made it look like this fifth trumpet might refer to Mohammedanism.

Locusts. Arabia pre-eminently was a land of locusts. It was in Arabia that Mohammedanism originated.

Like war horses with scorpion-like tails, crowns like gold, faces like men, hair like women's, teeth like lions, breast rates of lions, wing that sounded like cherry. This is indeed a good description of Mohammedan armies composed of fierce relentless horsemen famous for their beards, with long hair like women's hair, yellow turbans on their heads that looked like gold, iron coats of armour. Smoke from the abyss.

It was out of this smoke that the locusts came. The smoke had darkened the sun and the air. This may refer to the false priesthood which corrupted the church of Mohammed today and its worship images, relics and symbols.

The turf of the grass and Mohammedan's spare trees, grass and vegetation torment men five months a normal stay of locusts about 150 days, which would be 150 years. That is approximately the period in

which Mohammedanism continued its effort at world conquest. When it began to cultivate peaceful relations with other nations, they went eastward into Asia.

The sixth woe. Verse 12. One woe is past, and behold, the sixth trumpet.

There come two woes more hereafter. The sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar, which is before God, that is where the prayers occur, saying to the sixth angel, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. The four angels were loose, which were prepared for an hour, a day, a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men.

Vast numbers of horsemen, breastplates of fire, and jacinth, and brimstone, heads of horses like lions, out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone. By these three, that is fire and smoke and brimstone, was the third part of men killed, by the fire, the smoke, and the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths for their power is in their mouth and in their tails, for their tails were like unto serpents and had heads. With them they do hurt." Well, that's a scary enough description, isn't it? And if we're right, on the lines of interpreting this divine cartoon into history, the Turks, a tribe from Mongolia, somewhere over in Asia, reached the Euphrates, and there they met the teachings of Muhammad, and they were all converted from sort of wild animism or something to Muhammad's teaching.

And with their religious conversion, they took on an entirely different nature, and they became infinitely more violent than they had ever been known to be before in their westward trip. The Turks were more cruel and intolerant than the Arabians. Their barbarous treatment of Christians in Palestine led to the Crusades, almost 300 years of intermittent war in which European Christians tried to regain the Holy Land.

Out of the horses proceeded fire, smoke, and brimstone. What an odd combination. It was at this time that warfare took on that new and sinister form which it had retained until this day.

Explosives began to be used. And there was a German inventor who had an idea about producing huge cannons, colossal things, and he had an interview with the Pope. The Pope wasn't very interested, and he sold his invention to the Turkish leaders.

And when they advanced westward toward Constantinople, which had already been half-destroyed by the Christians, you remember, who had a quarrel among themselves and attacked the city, when they advanced toward Constantinople, these huge guns were cast on the spot, and pulled into position by teams of horses. They were like the tail of the horse. And then when they got into position, they'd swing around until the tail became the head.

They actually had heads on them like lions cast by the manufacturers. And they stuffed in the gunpowder and the huge cannonballs. Some were stone, some were iron.

And they pounded the walls of invincible Constantinople until that great bastion of civilization fell in the 14th century. What were the most significant events in history? One, it was the beginning of modern warfare. After that time, bows, arrows, spears, and stones and flints.

But from that time on, guns, explosions, fire, smoke, brimstone. This was the peculiar feature of this new form of warfare. It was at the Battle of Constantinople, says Haswim, that artillery with gunpowder was first used, which gave victory to the Turks.

And they marched on towards Central Europe. Their defeat, 200 years later, in Poland, or Vienna, at the hand of the Turkish army. So here again, the invasion from the east was struck.

Our must stay here, on the yearday scale, it is 306 years, from A.D. 1057, when the Turks crossed the Euphrates, to the fall of Constantinople, for the Egyptian freedom. So five men filled the hole in the east of northern Egypt. Well, that's a very quick view of the first six trumpets.

And now comes a call. Well, no, the second, the second effect of the fall of Constantinople was that this had been the center of scholarship. When Constantinople lost its noble power, or actually, was in danger of falling, the scholarship which had been comfortably cultivated there, fled westward, to Rome and Vienna.

Bringing with them Arabic, mathematics, chemistry, physics, bringing with them new concepts of the world. Bringing with them also the discovery of printing, which had had its origins way over in China, and with all this westward trek, printing had come across the great trade route, which was just beginning to be developed in Constantinople, when Constantinople was smashed, and the printers, with their crude machinery, fled westward with it, to change once again the face of Europe, and leave the old, dark ages behind, and bring in the center of civilization anew, and all the world would be shaken up with a new power. Change the world, and disappear it, and then the Bible begins to be released again.

The European land had one good point to say that maybe this crisis had endured, and it was about to come to an end.

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