

TRUMPET  
AFTER  
TRUMPET





# TRUMPET AFTER TRUMPET

ERWIN R. GANE



Pacific Press® Publishing Association

Nampa, Idaho

Oshawa, Ontario, Canada

[www.pacificpress.com](http://www.pacificpress.com)

Cover design resources from iStockphoto.com

Inside design by Aaron Troia

Copyright © 2012 by Pacific Press® Publishing Association

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved

The author assumes full responsibility for the accuracy of all facts and quotations as cited in this book.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1952 [2nd edition, 1971] by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture references marked LXX are taken from *The Septuagint With Apocrypha*, translated by Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton, first published by Samuel Bagster, London, 1851, made available online by Ernest C. Marsh at <http://ecmarsh.com/lxx/index.htm>.

Scripture references marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture references marked KJV are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

Scripture references marked NASB are taken from *The New American Standard Bible*®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture reference marked NJPS are taken from the New Jewish Publication Society translation (Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures), copyright © 1985 by the Jewish Publication Society. All rights reserved.

Scripture references marked ERV are taken from the English Revised Version, Oxford University Press, 1885.

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Gane, Erwin R.

Trumpet after trumpet : will Revelation's seven trumpets sound again? / Erwin R. Gane.  
p. cm.

ISBN 13: 978-0-8163-2622-8 (pbk.)

ISBN 10: 0-8163-2622-3 (pbk.)

1. Bible. N.T. Revelation—Criticism, interpretation, etc. 2. Seventh-day Adventists—Doctrines. I. Title.

BS2825.52.G36 2012

228'. 06—dc23

2011050395

You can obtain additional copies of this book by calling toll-free 1-800-765-6955 or by visiting [www.adventistbookcenter.com](http://www.adventistbookcenter.com).

# DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to my beloved wife, Winsome, who for long years has patiently and lovingly encouraged me to speak and write the truths of God's Word. She has studied with me and offered helpful suggestions. But more importantly, her life has consistently demonstrated the love and tender concern of the Lord Jesus Christ for every individual within the orbit of her influence.



# CONTENTS

PREFACE .....	9
1 THE THEME AND STRUCTURE OF REVELATION .....	11
2 THE CLOSE OF PROBATION .....	35
3 THE FIRST TRUMPET .....	63
4 THE SECOND TRUMPET .....	89
5 THE THIRD TRUMPET .....	105
6 THE FOURTH TRUMPET .....	123
7 THE FIFTH TRUMPET .....	135
8 THE SIXTH TRUMPET .....	161
9 THE SIXTH PLAGUE .....	175
10 TIME NO LONGER .....	193
11 THE MEASURING OF THE TEMPLE AND THE PEOPLE .....	221
12 GOD'S TWO WITNESSES .....	237
13 THE END-TIME EXALTATION OF GOD'S TWO WITNESSES .....	271
14 THE SEVENTH TRUMPET .....	281
15 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS .....	295
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	313

## CHARTS

BREAKDOWN OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION .....	31
TENTATIVE CHIASTIC STRUCTURE OF REVELATION .....	32
PARALLELS BETWEEN THE TRUMPETS AND THE PLAGUES .....	33
THE DUAL INTERPRETATION OF THE TRUMPETS .....	293
THE HISTORICAL AND END-TIME INTERPRETATIONS OF THE TRUMPETS .....	312





# PREFACE

My study of Revelation's trumpets began, in earnest, years ago when I was asked to teach the upper division Daniel and Revelation course at Pacific Union College. I was surprised that there was so little consensus among scholars on this section of Scripture. So much of what has been written is confusing, even contradictory. In this book I have tried to explain, as simply as possible, the meaning of the trumpets without attempting to relate my interpretation to the many and various interpretations that have already been offered.

My method allows the Bible to be its own expositor. We can grasp the symbolism of the trumpets only when we compare it with similar symbolism throughout Scripture. By tracing the symbols through both Old and New Testaments, the student can arrive at solid conclusions as to the meaning of Revelation's symbols.

I have also made considerable use of Ellen G. White's writings, not because I have departed from the Protestant principle that the Bible and the Bible only is the rule of our faith and practice, but because I am thoroughly convinced that God gave Ellen White insights into future events that are remarkably consistent with scriptural forecasts. My purpose is to establish interpretations from the Bible and then to use Ellen White's writings as corroboration.

The interpretive method that I favor is the philosophy of history approach. As I will explain in the first chapter, this method is an expansion of the continuous-historical recapitulationist interpretation, which regards the sections of Revelation as providing parallel coverage of Christian history from the time of Christ to the Second Advent.

## TRUMPET AFTER TRUMPET

The philosophy of history interpretation adds to this approach by recognizing history as cyclical and repetitive. Thus a historical application of an apocalyptic prophecy can reveal the type or kind of events that will occur in the end time.

This approach is opposed by those who think that apocalyptic prophecy can have only one application. Yet Jesus said the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem would typify events in the Middle Ages and events surrounding His second advent (see Matt. 24). Moreover, many interpreters have recognized a dual application of the little horn power of Daniel 8, regarding it as referring to both pagan and papal Rome. Furthermore, the prophecy of the seven churches (Rev. 2; 3) is generally recognized as having three applications: to the churches in Asia Minor in John's day; to the universal Christian church at any single stage of history; and to seven periods of church history.

By applying the philosophy of history approach to the trumpets, I have identified a dual interpretation of the prophecy. Without ignoring the validity of the historical application, I have recognized that the historical events often typify end-time events. I am convinced that the time prophecies were given to establish our confidence in historical interpretations. But these time prophecies are not intended to enable us to set times for end-time events. Rather, the type or kind of historical events enables us to foresee similar events in the end time. Such end-time applications must be entirely consistent with the specifications of each prophecy; they should not be the product of the interpreter's imagination.

I pray that readers will prayerfully consider the contents of this book, but more important, that they will commit themselves to seeking the Lord earnestly in preparation for the challenging events about to burst upon our world.

# CHAPTER 1

## THE THEME AND STRUCTURE OF REVELATION

The book of Revelation shows Christ, our heavenly High Priest, caring for the spiritual interests of His church throughout the Christian era. The theme of the book is simply stated in Revelation 1:1: “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John.”

Revelation depicts Christ as fostering the spiritual life of His church during the period extending from His ascension until the Second Advent. He sends messages at every stage of Christian history—messages designed to encourage His beleaguered people, who are being attacked by Satan, the great adversary. These attacks come in the form of temptations to veer away from Christ by conforming to the mores of ungodly societies, and they come in the form of physical attacks upon Christ’s faithful ones by those who wish to eliminate the influence of their testimony.

Christ’s revelation of Himself necessarily involves His attempts to counteract Satan’s destructive work. Hence the book of Revelation dwells, to a considerable degree, on the great controversy between Christ and Satan throughout the Christian era. Christ’s revelation to

## TRUMPET AFTER TRUMPET

John, which is John's testimony to the church, involves an outline of Satan's work through religious and political powers designed to destroy Christ's church. It also involves Christ's counteracting influence by which He deals with those who cooperate with Satan, withdrawing His guiding and protecting influence from them and punishing them for their unfaithfulness.

The book of Revelation provides the encouraging assurance that Christ functions as our heavenly Mediator until the time shortly before His second advent that is often called "the close of probation." Revelation also encourages us by depicting Christ as our heavenly Judge and Advocate, who, prior to His second advent, investigates whether His professed people have received and are continually appropriating the power of His grace by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Revelation indicates that this pre-Advent judgment ends at the close of probation, shortly before the Second Advent. Then events occur that, inspired and spurred on by Satan, are designed to destroy the faithful people of God. But Christ is ever at hand to control the furnace of affliction lest it consume them.

Revelation guides our minds to the time at which Jesus will return in glory, raining retribution on those who have declared themselves His enemies and the enemies of His people. Then follows a graphic account of the triumph of His people in the heavenly kingdom, followed by the raising of the wicked at the end of one thousand years, the descent to this earth of the saved of all ages within the New Jerusalem, the final destruction of the wicked, the re-creation of the earth, and the eternal rejoicing of the people of God, who associate joyfully with Him and with one another forever.

The book of Revelation is meant to be understood; it was never a closed book. Much of the book of Daniel was closed until "the time of the end" (Dan. 12:9), when its vital messages would be revealed.

## THE THEME AND STRUCTURE OF REVELATION

But Revelation has always been an open book, written for the edification and consolation of Christ's people. There's no question, however, that parts of Revelation have been understood only since the end-time unfolding of Daniel's prophecies.

The fact that Revelation is to be understood by Christ's followers is underlined by the blessing pronounced upon those who read it and who practice its teachings: "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near" (Rev. 1:3, NKJV).

Ellen White urged Christian believers to give special attention to the book of Revelation.

The solemn messages that have been given in their order in the Revelation are to occupy the first place in the minds of God's people. Nothing else is to be allowed to engross our attention.

Precious time is rapidly passing, and there is danger that many will be robbed of the time which should be given to the proclamation of the messages that God has sent to a fallen world. Satan is pleased to see the diversion of minds that should be engaged in a study of the truths which have to do with eternal realities.

The testimony of Christ, a testimony of the most solemn character, is to be borne to the world. All through the book of Revelation there are the most precious, elevating promises, and there are also warnings of the most fearfully solemn import. Will not those who profess to have a knowledge of the truth read the testimony given to John by Christ? Here is no guesswork, no scientific deception. Here are the truths that concern our present and future welfare. What is the chaff to the wheat?<sup>1</sup>

## TRUMPET AFTER TRUMPET

When the books of Daniel and Revelation are better understood, believers will have an entirely different religious experience. They will be given such glimpses of the open gates of heaven that heart and mind will be impressed with the character that all must develop in order to realize the blessedness which is to be the reward of the pure in heart.

The Lord will bless all who will seek humbly and meekly to understand that which is revealed in the Revelation. This book contains so much that is large with immortality and full of glory that all who read and search it earnestly receive the blessing to those “that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein.”<sup>2</sup>

As we near the close of this world’s history, the prophecies relating to the last days especially demand our study. The last book of the New Testament scriptures is full of truth that we need to understand. Satan has blinded the minds of many, so that they have been glad of any excuse for not making the Revelation their study. But Christ through His servant John has here declared what shall be in the last days, and He says, “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein.” Rev. 1:3.<sup>3</sup>

## INTERPRETATIONS OF REVELATION

Many commentaries on Revelation have been written over the centuries. (A list appears in the bibliography; see pages 313–320.) Few commentaries agree on major points of interpretation. The confusion is especially notable in the attempted interpretations of the seven trumpets. Such is the diversity of opinion that the average

## THE THEME AND STRUCTURE OF REVELATION

reader becomes immersed in a quagmire of confused detail and contradiction.

My purpose in writing this book is not to attempt to relate my understanding to the many different views of the trumpets, but simply to present the results of my own prayerful Bible study. Occasional endnotes will identify some points of agreement or disagreement. No approach to the book of Revelation will be productive unless the inquirer has constant recourse to the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' promise is paramount: "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come" (John 16:13). I certainly do not claim that I am the only one whose mind is guided by the Spirit in the study of the book of Revelation. Even so, I have sought His teaching ministry as I have studied and written.

Commentators have used five main approaches to Revelation: (1) the preterist interpretation; (2) the futurist interpretation; (3) the continuous-historical straight line interpretation; (4) the continuous-historical recapitulationist interpretation; and (5) the philosophy-of-history interpretation.

The preterist interpretation confines the fulfillment of Revelation's messages mostly to the past, especially to the era of the early Christian church. Interpreters who adopt this approach ignore Revelation's cosmic sweep of history and its special focus on the end time.

The futurist interpretation says that for the most part, Revelation's prophecies will be fulfilled in what, from our perspective, is still the

## TRUMPET AFTER TRUMPET

future. Dispensationalists and pre-Tribulationists employ this method of interpretation. They believe the events of Revelation 4 through 19 will occur within a seven-year period shortly before Christ's second advent, and they propound the idea of the secret rapture, the teaching that seven years before Christ's glorious appearing, faithful believers will be taken secretly to heaven.<sup>4</sup>

The continuous-historical straight line interpretation identifies the fulfillment of Revelation's prophecies in the period of history from Jesus' day to His second coming. Interpreters who follow this approach see the successive sections of Revelation as comprising a continuous line of events occurring in order throughout the Christian era.

The continuous-historical recapitulationist interpreters, Uriah Smith among them, see the sections of Revelation as paralleling each other, each of them reaching from the time of Christ to His second advent. In other words, they believe the seven churches, the seven seals, and the seven trumpets cover essentially the same periods of history from different perspectives.

Much can be said in favor of this view, but attempting to find too close a parallel between the churches, seals, and trumpets results in distortion. For example, the sixth *church* is Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7–13), regarded as representing the period of church history from 1798–1844, but the sixth *seal* is the Second Coming (Rev. 6:12–17). And while the seventh *church* is Laodicea, regarded as symbolizing the historical period of the church from 1844 to the second coming of Jesus, the seventh *seal* refers to events immediately *after* the Second Coming.

A more recent approach to Revelation is the philosophy-of-history interpretation. This view finds that Revelation portrays history as being cyclical. For example, the white horse of the first seal (Rev. 6:1, 2) is



## THE THEME AND STRUCTURE OF REVELATION

not seen as referring exclusively to the proclamation of righteousness by faith in the apostolic era; rather, it pictures the proclamation of this gospel truth in *every* era of Christian history—our era being portrayed as the time of the first angel’s message of Revelation 14:6, 7.

In the philosophy-of-history approach, the prophecies of Revelation are seen as having applications at various stages of history. But the applications are not left to the imagination of the interpreter; they grow out of the detailed specifications of the prophecy itself. For example, the initial events that occur when the sixth seal is opened (Rev. 6:12, 13)—the great earthquake, the darkening of the sun, and the falling of the stars—may refer to events in history that were types or examples of similar events that will take place immediately prior to the second coming of Jesus. Such events are presented in the Old Testament as occurring in connection with the “day of the Lord” at the end of the world (see Isa. 29:5, 6; 13:9–11; 34:1–4). That all the events of Revelation 6:12–17 occur immediately prior to and at the Second Advent is clear from the context.

Kenneth Strand wrote of the application of the philosophy-of-history method in interpreting Revelation:

Instead of treating the many variations, I would simply call attention here to one somewhat embrative approach which might loosely be called “philosophy of history.” The particular type of “philosophy of history” which I have in mind correlates in a certain sense with both preterist and continuous-historical interpretation, but it does so in a way that allows for repeated historical fulfillments beyond the writer’s own time or beyond any other specific time in history. From a certain viewpoint, this approach may be considered essentially a variation of the continuous-historical mode of

## TRUMPET AFTER TRUMPET

interpreting the book of Revelation. As a striking example of the approach I quote a few paragraphs from Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, Calif., 1911), pp. 585–589:

“The names of the seven churches are symbolic of the church in different periods of the Christian era. The number seven indicates completeness, and is symbolic of the fact that the messages extend to the end of time, while the symbols used reveal the condition of the church at different periods in the history of the world. . . .

“At the time when John was given this revelation, many had lost their first love of gospel truth. But in His mercy God did not leave the church to continue in a backslidden state. In a message of infinite tenderness He revealed His love for them, and His desire that they should make sure work for eternity. ‘Remember,’ He pleaded, ‘from whence thou are fallen, and repent, and do the first works.’

“The church was defective, and in need of stern reproof and chastisement; and John was inspired to record messages of warning and reproof and entreaty to those who, losing sight of the fundamental principles of the gospel, should imperil their hope of salvation. But always the words of rebuke that God finds it necessary to send are spoken in tender love, and with the promise of peace to every penitent believer. ‘Behold, I stand at the door, and knock,’ the Lord declares; ‘if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.’

“And for those who in the midst of conflict should maintain their faith in God, the prophet was given the words of commendation and promise: ‘I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it:

## THE THEME AND STRUCTURE OF REVELATION

for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name. . . . Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell on the earth.' The believers were admonished: 'Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die.' 'Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.'

"It was through one who declared himself to be a 'brother in tribulation,' that Christ revealed to His church the things that they must suffer for His sake. Looking down through long centuries of darkness and superstition, the aged exile saw multitudes suffering martyrdom because of their love for the truth. But he saw also that He who sustained His early witnesses would not forsake His faithful followers during the centuries of persecution that they must pass through before the close of time. 'Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer,' the Lord declared; 'behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried, and ye shall have tribulation: . . . be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.'

"And to all the faithful ones who were striving against evil, John heard the promises made: 'To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.' 'He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before My Father, and before his angels.' 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne.' ”<sup>5</sup>

## TRUMPET AFTER TRUMPET

Strand's discussion and his use of Ellen White illustrate the philosophy-of-history approach to the seven churches (Rev. 2; 3). This approach suggests that the prophecy of the seven churches has three fulfillments or applications:

1. The messages apply to the seven churches of Asia Minor in John's day that are named in the prophecy.
2. All of these messages apply to churches in every era of history since the time of Christ. For example, the message to Ephesus is relevant to the church at every stage of history, including the Christian church of the twenty-first century.
3. Each of the messages applies to a specific historical era of the church: the message addressed to Ephesus applies to the apostolic era; the message addressed to Smyrna applies to the immediate post-apostolic era, and so on. The message to Laodicea, then, applies to the period of the church shortly before the Second Coming.

The validity of this third application is confirmed by a comparison of the messages to the condition of the church and the world in each of the seven periods of history. John was told that his messages focused not only on the church of his day but also on the church of the future. His messages were a revelation of what "must soon take place" (Rev. 1:1); "the time is near" (verse 3). John was instructed to "write what you see, what is and *what is to take place hereafter*" (verse 19; italics added). So, the symbolism in each of the seven messages to the churches is relevant to seven periods of the church's and the world's history.

## THE THEME AND STRUCTURE OF REVELATION

### THE SEVEN SEALS

In my book *Heaven's Open Door*,<sup>6</sup> I have pointed out the validity of the philosophy-of-history interpretation for the seven seals. Church members in John's day who had read Revelation 4 and 5 would understand the symbolism of the Lamb (Christ) before the throne of the Father to be a depiction of Christ's intercessory ministry for believers. They would have interpreted John's symbolism in the light of the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapters 7–10.

But since the opening of the book of Daniel, with a new awareness of the significance of the pre-Advent judgment message of Daniel 7:9–14 and 8:14, many understood that the opening of the door between the two apartments of the sanctuary (Rev. 4:1) symbolizes the beginning of the antitypical day of atonement, the background to which was the opening of the door of the Most Holy Place of the earthly sanctuary on the tenth day of the seventh month of the Israelite religious year (Lev. 16). Thus, Revelation 4 and 5 may validly be regarded as the pre-Advent judgment scene portrayed by Daniel in chapters 7 and 8 of his book.<sup>7</sup>

This being the case, the seven seals (Rev. 6:1–8:1) symbolize God's messages not only to the church through Christian history but also to the church in the period of the pre-Advent judgment, that is, from 1844 to the coming of Jesus. As pointed out above, the message of the white horse (Rev. 6:2), the righteousness by faith message, applies to the church at every stage of history, not only in the apostolic era. This message in our era is the first angel's message of Revelation 14:6, 7, which is the "everlasting gospel."

The second seal, the red horse (Rev. 6:3, 4), symbolizes God's warnings and judgments for those who have rejected the message of the first seal, the righteousness by faith message. The third seal, the black horse (Rev. 6:5, 6), represents final warnings and judgments

## TRUMPET AFTER TRUMPET

for those who have rejected the first message. The second and third seals in our era parallel the warnings and judgments of the second and third angels' messages of Revelation 14:8–11.

The fourth seal (Rev. 6:7, 8) represents the retribution meted out upon those who have rejected the previous three messages. According to Scripture, God's punishment of evildoers is ongoing (see Rom. 1:18). In every era of history, including ours, peoples and nations that have rejected God's loving entreaties suffer the withdrawal of His protection and are obliged to endure the inevitable consequences of their wrongdoing. This retribution will be especially intense when the seven last plagues are poured out after the close of probation (Rev. 16).

The fifth seal symbolizes the vindication in the pre-Advent judgment of those who have accepted the first three messages, the "saints" of Revelation 14:12, those "who keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (KJV). Those among them who die before Jesus' coming are pronounced "blessed" (Rev. 14:13) because "they . . . rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them."

The sixth seal (Rev. 6:12–17) represents the coming of Christ, who executes the decisions of the pre-Advent judgment court. This passage is paralleled by Revelation 14:17–20, which describes the destruction of unbelievers at Christ's second advent.

The seventh seal (Rev. 8:1) portrays the final opening of the book of destiny at the Second Coming. This book (Rev. 5) cannot be opened until every seal is broken. The book is a scroll sealed with seven seals. The scroll cannot be unraveled and read until all the seals are broken, and they are not finally broken until the Second Coming.

So, the little book that appears in Revelation 5 doesn't outline the events described in the rest of Revelation. It is the verdict of the heavenly court condemning unbelievers to death and finally and irrevocably

## THE THEME AND STRUCTURE OF REVELATION

vindicating the people of God. The “silence in heaven” is a symbol of the peace and rejoicing of God’s people after the tumultuous events through which they have passed. This “silence” is spoken of in Isaiah 62:1–3:

For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, *until her vindication goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch.* The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God (*italics added*).<sup>8</sup>

In what follows in this book I shall apply the philosophy-of-history approach to the seven trumpets (Rev. 8:2–11:19). The continuous-historical recapitulationist interpreters suggest the only fulfillment of the prophecy of the trumpets is in a succession of historical events from Jesus’ day until His second coming.<sup>9</sup> However, Revelation 8:5 pictures the trumpets as sounding *after the close of probation*. But, as we shall demonstrate, there was a close of probation for Israel as the chosen nation, and there is a close of probation for the world a short time before the Second Coming. Therefore, the trumpets may be viewed as applying both historically and eschatologically. History repeats itself. The historical events depicted in the seven trumpets are types or examples of similar events that will occur shortly before Jesus’ appearing.

## THE NATURE OF APOCALYPTIC PROPHECY

The book of Revelation, like the book of Daniel, is apocalyptic literature, and as such, it has three major characteristics. First, it is

## TRUMPET AFTER TRUMPET

based on visions and dreams. Of course, general Bible prophecy is also based on visions and dreams that God gave to the prophets. The Lord Himself declared, “If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream” (Num. 12:6). But biblical apocalyptic prophecy refers to visions and dreams more frequently than does general prophecy. For instance, the prophecies in Daniel 2, 7, 8, 9, and 11 all came through visions and dreams that God gave Daniel. Like the book of Daniel, Revelation is the record of visions that God gave to John. Revelation 1:9, 10 says that when he was a prisoner on the island of Patmos, the Lord appeared to him. John writes, “I was in the Spirit [i.e., in vision] on the Lord’s day” (Rev. 1:10), and a description of his first vision follows. In fact, the entire book of Revelation is composed of visions Christ gave to John. He told the apostle: “Now write what you see, what is and what is to take place hereafter” (Rev. 1:19). John obeyed, and the result is the book of Revelation.

Second, apocalyptic literature makes a large use of symbolism. Consider the great image of Daniel 2 and the unusual beasts of Daniel 7 and 8, and note the extensive use of symbolism in the book of Revelation. We may cite the Lamb and the little book of Revelation 5, the four horses of chapter 6, the souls under the altar (Rev. 6:9–11), the difficult symbols of the first six trumpets, the dragon of chapter 12, and the two beasts of chapter 13.

The problem for the Bible student is to interpret these symbols in the manner intended by the Holy Spirit. It is possible to read into the symbolism all kinds of meanings that God didn’t intend. It is easy to find historical events that seem to fulfill the symbolism and thus to assign meanings to the symbolism that are quite foreign to Scripture.

The only valid approach to interpreting the symbolism in Revelation is to allow the Bible to be its own expositor. To discover what



## THE THEME AND STRUCTURE OF REVELATION

the Holy Spirit meant a symbol to represent, we must search Scripture for prior uses of that symbol. Of course, symbols may be used in a number of different ways, but we can find an application of the symbol that matches the manner in which John uses it. This rather arduous process results in an interpretation of the trumpets consistent with Scripture rather than one that grows out of our fertile imagination.

Some scholars point out that there is a similarity between the symbolism in Revelation and that employed in non-canonical apocalypses such as 1 Enoch. But Jon Paulien comments: "Although there are many parallels of language and imagery between Revelation and Jewish apocalypses such as 1 Enoch, the theological differences are very significant. Far more apocalyptic ideas and themes are missing in Revelation than are used."<sup>10</sup> That is to say, 1 Enoch contains a great deal of apocalyptic imagery, as does Revelation, but only a small portion of Revelation's apocalyptic imagery resembles that of 1 Enoch.

Because John's messages were originally sent to the seven churches in Asia Minor, it is possible that he used symbolism familiar to the Gentiles of that time. We must remember that John was a prisoner on Patmos, which likely had extremely limited library facilities, if any at all. We can only guess the extent of his knowledge of non-canonical apocalypses, and we don't know how familiar the Gentile Christians of Asia Minor were with non-canonical apocalyptic symbolism. So, our safest course is to look throughout Scripture for the meanings of Revelation's many symbols.

Third, apocalyptic literature focuses on the end of time. Though general prophecy often predicts the future, too, it usually is more concerned with current issues facing the prophet and his contemporaries. It doesn't give the cosmic sweep of history so apparent in biblical apocalyptic literature. In contrast, biblical apocalyptic literature characteristically

## TRUMPET AFTER TRUMPET

presents an outline of history from the prophet's day to the Second Advent. Consider, for example, the focus of Daniel's prophecies. In each one, the outline of history culminates in an eschatological climax. That focus on the end time is true of the prophecies of Revelation too—in every one, the cosmic sweep of history climaxes in the second coming of Jesus Christ. The obvious intent of the Divine Author is to convince us that the accurate prediction of historical events underlines the certainty of the Second Coming, when earthly evil powers will be subjugated by the dramatic intervention of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For the believer, Revelation's focus on the end time is enormously enlightening and encouraging. John assures us: "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' " And the believer responds as enthusiastically as did John, "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20, NKJV).

## LITERARY STRUCTURE OF REVELATION

The book of Revelation is constructed in a way unfamiliar to most of us today. Generally, our documents follow the simple literary structure of A-B-C-D-E, in which the content is presented progressively from beginning to end and the last section contains the conclusion—the main point of the document. However, many ancient documents, including the book of Revelation, had the distinctive literary structure called inverse parallelism, or chiasm. In this structure, the first section of the document parallels the last section, the second section parallels the next-to-the-last section, and so on, and the climactic message stands at the center of the document.

The following statement is an example of synonymous parallelism, the second line repeating in different wording the thought of the first line:

## THE THEME AND STRUCTURE OF REVELATION

John walked  
to the country;  
he hiked  
to the hills.

When that statement is expressed as a chiasm (or inverted parallelism), it becomes:

John walked  
to the country;  
to the hills  
he hiked.

There are two lines at the center of this chiasm. Sometimes there's just one line at the center of the chiasm, a single line that expresses the author's main thought—what he or she considered most important.

I've broken the book of Revelation into its individual parts (see the "Breakdown of the Book of Revelation," page 31) and then placed those parts in the chiastic form that I think John used as the structure of Revelation (see "Tentative Chiastic Structure of Revelation," page 32). This chiasm may be explained as follows.

**A and A':** The history of the Christian church (the church militant) culminates ultimately in God's saved people experiencing eternity with Christ (the church triumphant).

**B and B':** Christ's mediatorial and judgment ministries end shortly before His second advent, at which time He translates His redeemed people to heaven and conducts the millennial judgment of the lost. The parallel between Revelation 4:1–8:1 and 19:1–20:15 is dramatic. In Revelation 4 and 5 we can see the mediatorial and judgment ministries of Christ.

## TRUMPET AFTER TRUMPET

Judgment motifs emerge in the prophecy of the seals. For example, balances in the hand of the rider of the black horse suggest judgment (Rev. 6:5). The name of the rider of the fourth horse, “Death and Hades,” indicates the carrying out of judgment (Rev. 6:8). The cry of the righteous dead that is part of the fifth seal is a cry for judgment and vindication (Rev. 6:9, 10). The events of the sixth seal (Rev. 6:12–17) depict execution of judgment upon the wicked at Jesus’ second coming.

Parallel to these events are the events of Revelation 19:1–20:15. Revelation 19:1–9 tells us that the pre-Advent judgment has ended. The cry of the righteous dead in Revelation 6:10 was, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (NKJV). The answer to their cry is the announcement of the end of the judgment: “His judgments are true and just; he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants” (Rev. 19:2). The white robes given to the righteous dead (Rev. 6:11), symbolizing their final vindication in the pre-Advent judgment, are spoken of again in Revelation 19:7, 8. The marriage of the Lamb, the pre-Advent judgment, results in God’s faithful people being “clothed with fine linen, bright and pure”—the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Thus they are qualified to take part in the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9, 10).

The coming of Christ, depicted in Revelation 6:12–17, is paralleled by the symbolic representation of His appearing the second time riding a white horse and leading the armies of heaven (Rev. 19:11–21).

The triumphant picture of Christ’s sealed saints, who have suffered so intensely, enjoying the joys of heaven (Rev. 7:1–17) is paralleled by the scene of faithful believers in heaven conducting the mil-

## THE THEME AND STRUCTURE OF REVELATION

lennial judgment (Rev. 20:4–6), the result of which is the ultimate condemnation of the wicked (Rev. 20:11–14) and their final destruction along with Satan (Rev. 20:7–10).

**C(a) and C(a)’: The third section of Revelation (Rev. 8:2–11:19)** is the prophecy of the trumpets, which is the subject of this book. *The trumpets represent Satan’s destructive work, and the plagues are God’s counteracting work* (Rev. 15:1, 5–8; 16:1–21). The parallel between the seven trumpets and the seven last plagues has often been pointed out. The parallel may be outlined as shown on the chart titled “Parallels Between the Trumpets and the Plagues” (see page 33).

**C(b) and C(b)’: Revelation 12 and 13** portray Christ’s great controversy with Satan, beginning with Satan’s rebellion in heaven and climaxing in his use of antitypical Babylon to attempt to destroy God’s church and people. The focus of the controversy is on the last days, when Babylon passes a death decree against Christ’s faithful followers. But Revelation 17 and 18 teach that God deals with end-time Babylon, calling His people to come out of her and punishing those who are aligned with her.

Historically, Revelation 12 and 13 cover the same eras as does the prophecy of the trumpets, but those chapters focus on different events and culminate in the end-time conflict between Christ and Satan. Revelation 17 and 18 add to the scenario of the seven last plagues by describing God’s punishment of antitypical Babylon.

**D: Revelation 14:1–20 and 15:2–4** present the central message and climax of the book. The people who will be translated to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22), are those who have received God’s seal because, by His grace, they are spiritually spotless (Rev. 14:1–5). The spiritual qualifications of God’s redeemed people result from their acceptance of, and commitment to, the three angels’ messages. These are God’s final messages to the world, and those who

## TRUMPET AFTER TRUMPET

respond to them “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12). They are the ones referred to in verses 14–16 as being harvested from the earth. By contrast, those who don’t respond positively to the three angel’s messages are subject to the destruction described in verses 17–20. Revelation 15:2–4, then, describes the triumph of God’s people in heaven.

In the light of the chiastic structure of the Revelation, the book is thoroughly systematic and coherent. The central focus is on our loving Lord’s earnest appeal to the peoples of earth to repent of sin and apostasy and to accept the only means of victory and salvation. No wonder Jesus says, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near” (Rev. 1:3, NKJV)!

## THE THEME AND STRUCTURE OF REVELATION

### BREAKDOWN OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Rev. 1–3: Christ our High Priest cares for His church through the ages.

Rev. 4:1–8:1: Christ our Mediator and pre-Advent Judge sends messages to those who live on the earth.

Rev. 8:2–11:19: Christ allows Satan to work but imparts encouraging end-time messages.

Rev. 12:1–13:18: Christ's great controversy with Satan and antitypical Babylon throughout history culminates in the end-time conflict.

Rev. 14:1–20; 15:2–4: Christ translates His believing people to heaven in view of their acceptance of the three angels' messages.

Rev. 15:1, 5–8; 16:1–21: Christ counteracts Satan's destructive work by punishing the wicked.

Rev. 17:1–18:24: Christ punishes antitypical Babylon.

Rev. 19:1–20:15: Christ ends the pre-Advent judgment and comes to earth again; He conducts the millennial judgment.

Rev. 21:1–22:21: Christ lives with His people for eternity.

## TENTATIVE CHIASTIC STRUCTURE OF REVELATION<sup>11</sup>

**A** Rev. 1–3: Christ our High Priest cares for His church through the ages.

**B** Rev. 4:1–8:1: Christ our Mediator and pre-Advent Judge sends messages to those who live on the earth.

**C(a)** Rev. 8:2–11:19: Christ allows Satan to work but imparts encouraging end-time messages.

**C(b)** Rev. 12:1–13:18: Christ's great controversy with Satan and antitypical Babylon throughout history culminates in the end-time conflict.

**D** Rev. 14:1–20; 15:2–4: **Christ translates His believing people to heaven in view of their acceptance of the three angels' messages.**

**C(a)'** Rev. 15:1, 5–8; 16:1–21: Christ counteracts Satan's destructive work by punishing the wicked.

**C(b)'** Rev. 17:1–18:24: Christ punishes antitypical Babylon.

**B'** Rev. 19:1–20:15: Christ ends the pre-Advent judgment and comes to earth again; He conducts the millennial judgment.

**A'** Rev. 21:1–22:21: Christ lives with His people for eternity.



## THE THEME AND STRUCTURE OF REVELATION

### PARALLELS BETWEEN THE TRUMPETS AND THE PLAGUES

#### Trumpets

#### Plagues

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Rev. 8:7: Hail and fire on the earth.                             | 1. Rev. 16:2: Poured out on the earth.                                 |
| 2. Rev. 8:8, 9: A mountain into the sea.                             | 2. Rev. 16:3: The sea becomes blood.                                   |
| 3. Rev. 8:10, 11: A star falls on rivers and fountains of water.     | 3. Rev. 16:4–7: Rivers and fountains of water become blood.            |
| 4. Rev. 8:12, 13: Darkening of the sun, moon, and stars.             | 4. Rev. 16:8, 9: The sun scorches people with fire.                    |
| 5. Rev. 9:1–12: Locusts from the bottomless pit torture mankind.     | 5. Rev. 16:10, 11: Torture for those who give allegiance to the beast. |
| 6. Rev. 9:13–21: Four angels released at the river Euphrates.        | 6. Rev. 16:12–16: The great river Euphrates dried up.                  |
| 7. Rev. 11:15–19: The kingdoms of the world become Christ's kingdom. | 7. Rev. 16:17–21: A voice from heaven says, "It is done."              |

## TRUMPET AFTER TRUMPET

1. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1948), 8:302.
2. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press®, 1923), 114.
3. Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1900), 133.
4. In chapter 12 of my book, *You Ask, God Answers*, "Will the Rapture Be Secret or Public?" I have pointed out the error of this position; see Erwin R. Gane, *You Ask, God Answers* (Ukiah, CA: Orion Publishing, 1998), 218–233.
5. Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1976), 14–16.
6. Erwin R. Gane, *Heaven's Open Door* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press®, 1989).
7. Ranko Stefanovic regards Revelation 4 and 5 as "the coronation of the ascended and glorified Christ on the heavenly throne at the right hand of the Father after the incarnation and his death and resurrection." *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 209. Possibly Revelation 4 and 5 depict the beginning of Christ's period of intercession in the heavenly sanctuary (AD 31 on), which sets the stage for the pre-Advent judgment (1844 on).
8. All of this is spelled out in much greater detail in my book, *Heaven's Open Door*.
9. Compare Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 275–355; Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987), 307–420; C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press®, 1985), 2:223–265.
10. Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, 46.
11. Compare the tentative outline of the book of Revelation in Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 51, 52; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 35–45; Maxwell, *God Cares*, 2:54–62.