

Article of the Month

June, 2019

***The Seven
Churches, Seals, & Trumpets
of Revelation***
(Part 1)

The first part (the first nineteen chapters) of the book of Revelation is about the history (written in advance) of the development of the Church of Christ. The period begins at Jesus' first advent and covers approximately 2000 years during which Jesus selects and develops those who will reign with him during the 1000 years of his kingdom (Revelation 20:6) — a period set aside for the restoration of all humanity to a perfected relationship with God.

In this first section of Revelation there are numerous prophetic perspectives for our learning. The same period of time is shown over and over in differing settings in order that we who are the Lord's may gain understanding and insight. Among these perspectives are three series of seven parts each. This seven-part perspective is because the Lord chose to divide the Gospel or Christian Age into seven distinctive eras — periods during which different circumstances would prevail. These three series of prophetic delineations are known as the Seven Churches, the Seven Seals, and the Seven Trumpets. In this month's article we will generalize about how they differ and about what their purposes might be. In three subsequent articles, we will look at each of the three separately in order to gain better detail.

APPROXIMATE DATINGS

This article will not attempt to give the detail involved in determining the inclusive dates of the various Churches, Seals, and Trumpets. It is quite possible to determine these dates with a great deal of accuracy once the various symbolisms and historic references are compared. But that is a complex study — too great for our purposes here. Nevertheless, we will list suggested dates so that the histories of the periods can better be appreciated.

We will also state initially that it is seemingly the testimony of Revelation that the Churches, Seals, and Trumpets are concurrent. In other words, *during* the first Church, the events listed under the first Seal and the first Trumpet are also happening. With that in mind, here is the likely chronology of the seven periods:

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The FIRST period: From Pentecost (A.D. 33) until the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) — the period during which the Apostles are alive and the Gospel is spread.

The SECOND period: From the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) to the end of the terrible anti-Christian persecutions under Diocletian (A.D. 313) — the period of the most severe of persecutions for the new and rising religion of Christianity.

The THIRD period: From the end of the persecutions (A.D. 313) to the excommunication of Peter Waldo and his followers known as the Waldenses (A.D. 1160) — the period of the rise of the apostate church to great power — the period of the extreme growth of the “tares” of Jesus’ parable in Matthew 13.

The FOURTH period: From the excommunication of Waldo (1160) to the excommunication of John Wycliffe (1371) — the period of “The Dark Ages” during which the Roman church actively had free-reign to suppress truth and to severely persecute true Christians.

The FIFTH period: From the excommunication of John Wycliffe (1371) to the excommunication of Martin Luther (1521) — the short period when light began to shine more brightly, but resistance to it was powerful.

The SIXTH period: From the excommunication of Luther (1521) to the 7th Millennium since Adam’s fall (1874) — the period of “The Reformation” and the great profusion of new Protestant denominations ending in a flurry of Bible distribution and study.

The SEVENTH period: From the beginning of the 7th Millennium (1874) until the UNKNOWN date when the current corrupt order of things gives way to the Peaceable Kingdom — when God steps in and says, “Be Still! And know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10). This is the period Jesus called “The Harvest” of the Age (Matthew 13), a time when the true content of Scripture is revealed and the Church is completed.

HOW DO CHURCHES, SEALS, AND TRUMPETS DIFFER?

God’s Biblical symbolisms are quite rational. There is nothing arbitrary about them. For instance, a “trumpet” is a very loud (and, therefore, distantly-heard) sound. And the instrument has traditionally been used before important announcements and battles — all in order to grab attention. God’s use of the symbol will be similar.

Seals are placed on documents so that no one discloses the contents until the proper recipients are present or the proper time has arrived. In other words, a sealed document implies strongly that its message is strictly for approved readers only. God uses the symbol similarly.

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Since God has taken the effort to list the Church's historical experiences under Church, Seal, and Trumpet, it is incumbent upon us to differentiate among the three symbols.

It might be helpful to note that each of the series (Churches, Seals, Trumpets) has an introduction to it in the book of Revelation. We will not deal with these "introductions;" but the understanding of each series is greatly enhanced by studying its introductory material first.

The Seven Churches appear in Revelation Chapters 2 and 3. "Church" comes from the Greek word (*ekklesia*) which means "called out." True Christians are a group "called out" by God from the rest of humanity. This "calling" is for special purposes. Among these is that God is making from these humans a new, personal, intimate, spiritual family for Himself with a Divine nature like His. This was God's intent "from before the foundation of the world." We must never think that God intends to save ONLY this class. To the contrary, He intends to use this class during the Millennial Age to "bless all the families of the earth." The Scriptures clearly teach TWO SALVATIONS — one now for this special called-out class (Church or Ekklesia), and one later for the other billions of mankind that have ever lived. One class will be spirit beings with a heavenly resurrection; the other will be human beings with an earthly resurrection. The "Seven Churches" of Revelation form a history of the calling, experiences, and development of this "called out" class.

The Seven Churches each have an "angel" — a human messenger. (Angel *means* messenger, and the word can refer to humans, spirit beings, or anything else carrying a message.) Each of the Seven Churches' descriptions shows what the Lord had to say to these messengers so that their teachings could help the Church to overcome its then-current tests.

The Seven Churches also usually clearly list TWO CLASSES of people in the Church — the "WE" and the "THEY" classes. This is true because Jesus and the Apostles made it clear that there would be true Christians ("wheat") and false Christians ("tares") during the history of Christianity. This is a great mystery among Christians. Most think that there is Christianity and "other religions." But God has indicated that it is to His advantage to allow a false church to grow along with a true Church. The messages describing the Seven Churches make it clear that these two forces are antagonistic, but that their antagonism will result "to him that overcometh" in a great victory for the true saints of God.

The Seven Seals are detailed in Chapter 6 through Chapter 8:1 of Revelation. If we reason on the symbolic meaning of seals and on the contents of these messages, we can better understand the passage.

Most of us realize that we rarely understand an experience until after we have gone through it. Its meaning for us is "sealed" until after the experience has passed and until we have had the time to evaluate what has just happened — or until the Lord eventually

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explains it to us. This is the point of the Revelation “Seals” — except that these Revelation “seals” are not about our personal experiences, but about how the collective experiences of the saints of each period should be interpreted.

We who can now look back upon the history of the Gospel Age can discern what the experiences and lessons were for the six Churches which are now in the past. We can understand what the experiences meant for those who “overcame.” In other words, the seals for those past Churches are now opened. Only the Seventh Seal has yet to be removed — and that, logically, will not be until the Seventh Church is complete or nearly complete. In all of the seals, God is saying something like, “THIS is why I permitted for you to go through what you went through. I want you to see how YOUR particular period of development contributed to the PROGRESS of My plan for the entire Church and for the ultimate blessing of the world.”

With the above understood, we should expect that as we attempt to interpret Revelation, the openings of the Seven Seals should apply TO THE END of each Church period. Thus, while, for instance, the 5th Seal should be found IN the time allowed for the 5th Church, it should focus primarily AT THE END of that period.

The Seven Trumpets have their details beginning in Chapter 8 and extending through Chapter 11 of Revelation. Again, God’s use of symbols helps us in our interpretation of the meaning of these passages. A trumpet cannot be kept secret! It is loud and imposing. It is meant to be heard by all in the vicinity. There is no question when it sounds that the intention is that the hearers should be ready to listen to something important. THAT is the point of the Seven Trumpets.

We have seen that the Seven Church messages were spoken TO the individual who was given the responsibility of feeding that particular stage of the Church with the information then due. But the message was directed ONLY to the Church — not to everybody. It was for a select class, not for general public consumption. But the fact is, the truths that were due at any given time quite naturally had an effect on the surrounding world. When, for instance, the Apostles spread the Gospel, the Jewish religion and polity were severely threatened by it. It actually became the downfall of the nation of Israel. The message to the first Church was FOR the first Church; but its results outside of the Church were considerable.

That is where the Seven Trumpet symbolisms come in. God creates a secondary effect from the spread of His truths to the Church. The messages proclaimed to and through Christianity had a profound effect on the social and political world also. The world HEARD a VERY LOUD proclamation in each period — a TRUMPET. We will see that the world generally IGNORED those messages — even fought against them. But the symbolic fact (shown by the Seven Trumpets) is that the “world” was exposed to certain truths that would affect it. The messages we find in the passages about the Seven Trumpets tell us what those effects were.

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We have briefly explained the symbolisms of Church, Seal, and Trumpet. Understanding their basic symbolic meanings is imperative in understanding the symbolic details shown in them. We will spend the next three articles examining a little of the prophetic details shown under the descriptions given in each of these categories.
