

SUMMER 3 - Glimpses of Glory

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[0 : 00] Hallelujah, Lord, that you indeed reign. We pray that you'll reign tonight and govern all our thoughts and speaking and listening and all our behaviour tonight and in this week to come, that we may praise and worship you not only with our lips but in our lives for the glory of your Son. Amen.

Amen. As I was going to St. Ives, I met a man with seven wives. Each wife had seven sacks, each sack had seven cats, each cat had seven kits.

Kits, cats, sacks and wives, how many were going to St. Ives? You may have heard that rhyme before. And the answer's debatable.

It's meant to be a trick and the answer's one because the man was going to St. Ives and the others presumably were not going to St. Ives but going the other way. But indeed the rhyme actually applies to Revelation because all the sevens we find in Revelation, seven churches, seven spirits, seven lampstands, seven stars, seven seals, horns, eyes, angels, thunders, heads, crowns, plagues, bowls, hills, kings and trumpets.

And if you read a few books you'll find there's about 777 ways to understand it all. Thus far we've seen it's a bit like Christmas. All of heaven has watched the Lamb come to the throne of God to undo the scroll with seven seals.

[1 : 40] And it's a bit like Christmas watching somebody opening a present with eager anticipation. Each seal has come off one by one and each seal has brought about something happening.

First four were to do with horses of judgment upon the world. The four horses of the apocalypse bringing conquest and famine and an end to peace and death and so on.

And then we saw the martyrs and then the cosmic earthquake and so on upon the world. Very much it seems that this is the great day of God's wrath being described and yet maybe it's not quite so simple.

And chapter 6 we saw ended with a question, who can stand? And we found that in chapter 7 the answer to the question is that those who are sealed can stand.

Those who are God's chosen, sealed by him. The voice said 144,000. The eyes told John that it was a multitude that nobody could number.

[2 : 42] Those who are sealed can stand. We've seen a growing crescendo and a climax coming.

The first seal is ripped off. People are anticipating what's going to happen. The second and there's an escalation of the judgment and calamity and tyranny in this universe.

And the third and then the fourth. And gradually the fifth. And then eventually the sixth. And as I said last week, then there's a little interval. Hanging with suspense and tension. Waiting for the last seal to be ripped off.

We don't want to read chapter 7. We want to go to the seventh seal because we want to find out what's in the scroll. And you can imagine if there was some music accompaniment, it's gradually getting louder and louder.

A music full of tension. People waiting for the climax of all of this. With the seventh seal coming off the scroll. When you get to the end of chapter 6, it's sort of like a piece of music that's got the last note missing.

[3 : 44] And you want that last note. Have you ever sung a hymn or heard some music and for some reason the last note's missing? And it's incomplete. And you want it to be there. But it's not there. And you feel frustrated and full of anxiety because it's not complete.

That's how this has been for the end of Revelation 6. And into chapter 7. We want this interval to go because we want to see the last seal being taken off the scroll. And then when we get to chapter 8, the end of the interval, the climax of all that's been seen from chapter 5 all the way through to chapter 7, what do we find?

But there's silence in heaven for half an hour. Silence. You'd think there'd be a great crash of drums, great cracks of thunder, trumpets blaring, the orchestra going full bore.

But there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. Presumably John was so caught up in this that he didn't bother looking at his watch.

Where we expect this incredible climax, we find silence. It's a striking contrast.

[4 : 53] And when we go through these first verses of chapter 8, remember that it's done in silence. This is an old film without voices.

It's a silent movie. There's no piano accompaniment. It's all silent. And that adds to its tension and the drama because all that's been happening is full of noise.

silence. And now there's this, well we might say deafening silence. Can you imagine that being done in silence?

They don't play them. They're just given them. You imagine somebody coming and presenting each angel with a trumpet. All done in silence. All full of expectation of what's going to happen next.

Silence often comes before God's judgment in the Old Testament. A number of places in the prophets talk about the silence before God acts.

[6 : 06] Habakkuk 2. But the Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before him. Zephaniah 1.

Be silent before the Lord God. For the day of the Lord is at hand. The Lord has prepared a sacrifice. He's consecrated his guests.

And on the day of the Lord's sacrifice I'll punish the officials and so on. Silence in God's presence. And silence before his judgment.

And that's the silence here. Awaiting the judgment of God. We've had a series of seven seals being broken from the scroll.

And now we move into a new series. A series of seven trumpets. And in a sense the last of the previous series is the first of the next. The seventh seal is the trumpets being presented.

[7 : 08] And then we go into a series of the seven trumpets. Trumpets can be good or bad. They can announce a coronation, a festival, a celebration. Trumpets were played to bring down the walls of Jericho.

Trumpets announce the judgment of God. And here that's what's happening. It's the trumpets announcing the judgment of God. So verse three. Another angel who had a golden censer came and stood at the altar.

Again it's in silence. No noise yet. He was given much incense to offer. With the prayers of all the saints. Somehow physically symbolized.

It's still silent. And this was on the golden altar before the throne. The incense and prayer linked together. We already saw that two weeks ago in chapter five.

Incense is a symbol of prayer. The smoke of the incense together with the prayers of the saints. Went up before God from the angel's hand. You can see the smoke rising. And it's silent.

[8 : 11] Reminding us that prayer goes to God. Reminding us of what we saw two weeks ago. That prayer is effective. Or was it last week? It also reminds us that what's about to follow when the trumpets eventually play.

Is as a result of prayer. It's God who's in charge. And it's God who's answering the prayers of his faithful people. So all the judgment, the calamity and tyranny that's about to happen.

Is under the control of God. Again in silence. Then the angel took the censer. Filled it with fire from the altar. And hurled it on the earth.

And now comes the noise. The half hour silence is over. Now come the cracks of thunder. The rumblings. The flashes of lightning.

The earthquake. This is better than any cold change you get in Melbourne. The silence before the storm. And some storm this is. Signs of God's presence.

[9 : 07] Thunder, lightning and cracking and so on. Well what's going on? It's the first sound probably to break the silence. But remember all the prayers of the martyrs that were offered back in chapter 6. They're all being heard now.

It's the prayers that have instigated this catastrophe that's about to happen now. It's the same censer that was seen earlier on that's being used. Prayers are being answered.

Indeed it's the prayers that are setting the judgment of God into action. It reminds us that we are the ones who ought to be praying and the prayer is effective. We can pray to God in the midst of a world that doesn't seem as though God's actually here.

And it may seem to be a world full of calamity, persecution, tyranny. And yet it's the prayers of God's people that are bringing about the destiny of the world and the universe.

And bringing about the fulfillment of God's purposes. In some respects the book of Revelation looks as though everything is preordained. Almost fatalistic. This happens, then this happens, and then this happens.

[10 : 04] And yet it's important to remember that we have a part to play. Not just as pawns being shuffled around here or sealed. But rather as people who pray.

Because what happens is that God is answering the prayers of his faithful people. Yes, so often in our life prayer seems futile. It seems as though it's never answered.

It seems as though sometimes when we pray things get worse. But this is reassuring of people who can't see God so obviously in their world. Pray. Because prayer is effective.

We need, in a sense, the eyes of heaven to see the effectiveness of prayer. Sometimes people say, oh, you know, I believe in the power of prayer. I think really we've got to remember it's the power of God that makes prayer powerful.

It's not the power of prayer as though prayer is some independent entity that has power. Prayer is powerful because it's God's power and it's faithful people who pray.

[11 : 08] And this verse is a key to all the trumpets that follow. Keep things in context in Revelation. Remember that this is all coming about because the Lamb is opening the scroll. Remember it's all coming about because God is in charge.

It's all coming about because of the faithful prayers of God's people. Remember that all the calamity comes in that context of God's sovereignty exercised through the Lamb's death on the cross and through the prayers of the faithful people of God.

Before I move on, I just want to pick up a bit on this structure of Revelation because it's important. And I've got a little overhead here to illustrate this. We've seen in the last two weeks one series going on.

The second horizontal line. We started at chapter 4. And chapter 4 and 5, the first week, was the picture of heaven. The worship of God in heaven and the Lamb coming forward ready to open the scroll.

And then we began a series of seven things. The seven seals coming off the scroll. Then we found there was an interlude in chapter 7. The numbers that were sealed and so on.

[12 : 15] And now we're into a second series. But you see, the series are interconnected because the seventh of one series is in fact the opening up of the first of the next. That's why the diagram sort of got these lines to connect them.

But remember that I didn't start at the beginning of the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation begins with a series of seven letters to churches. Churches around modern day Turkey, around Ephesus and Ismir and so on.

Those seven letters are there in chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 1 is a sort of interval, if you like, or prologue before that series. And those letters then lead into the first vision. And in fact we find there are in fact seven visions in Revelation.

And so what we find throughout the book is this very careful structure. A series of seven, but six of them gathered together. Then usually, not always, but usually some sort of interval before the seventh.

But the seventh actually issues forth in the next series of seven. So we're into seven trumpets at the moment in chapters 8 and 9. But we're really only into six of them because then again there's an interval.

[13 : 19] And then in chapter 12 you get into the seventh. And that issues forth in another series. So hopefully that gives you a bit of a feel for the structure of the book. It's a carefully structured book. Seven is a sign of completion.

This is wanting to symbolically convey the fact that God is in control. He knows what he's on about. So we can trust him and pray to him. Thanks, Joanne. We should also bear in mind that the series of seven are not really chronological.

It's not a history lesson that's going on here. As though each of the seven seals has to be opened. And then what happens is a series of trumpets as though this is the next bit of history.

And then comes another series of seven and so on. Rather, I think what we get are pictures. And the pictures will overlap with each other. They'll describe similar things but from different angles.

They're not chronological. It's a bit like being in somebody's holiday snaps album where you see endless photos of some mountain or lake. But all taken from different angles.

[14 : 21] About three years ago, the three years I lived in England, each year I spent a week in Wales in the south end of Snowdonia Park in a friend's house. And a friend and I went each year and stayed there.

And we're right near a little beautiful lake, the Talaclin Lake. And it's absolutely superb little lake, especially when it's still. And the reflections of the mountains can be perfect in the lake.

Well, I have taken... No, I haven't taken any. I've been with my friend who has taken perhaps a hundred photos over three years of that lake. One year there was no film in the camera. And the next year the camera broke.

And then one year he used old film so we actually double exposed things and so on. We did end up with some good photos. But Revelation's a bit like a series of photos of the one thing taken from different angles.

And different things are emphasised. We would go early morning and late at night to get different light on the lake. Because it was so beautiful in different light and so on. And Revelation's a bit like that. Pictures of the same or similar things from different angles, different perspectives and so on.

- [15 : 28] Making slightly different points from time to time. But that's what it's meant to be. It's a series of pictures like a little art gallery, if you like, or a photo album. So we need to be careful not to see it as what it isn't.

It doesn't pretend to be a history book. But rather it's full of artistry and pictures. So what we find now in this series of trumpets are many of the things we've already seen before in the series of the seals being broken.

Different angles, different pictures. But same thing by and large. So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them. Verse 6.

Again, this tension. We're watching angels sort of perhaps pick up their trumpet. Maybe polish them. Maybe getting ready. All lining up. Getting a cue from each other.

Waiting for somebody to take control so they can all blow them together or something. The tension of waiting. Fall in Revelation. Well, the first four trumpets that come are all linked together.

- [16 : 27] Like the first four seals, which were all horsemen. The first four trumpets in chapter 8 all linked together. The first one sounded his trumpet. And there came hail and fire mixed with blood hurled down upon the earth.

A third of the earth was burned up. A third of the trees was burned up. And all the green grass was burned up. Hail, fire, blood. All symbols that have been there earlier in the Old Testament.

Many of them symbols that come from the Moses miracles performed against Pharaoh. Back in the middle or to early chapters of the book of Exodus. Chapters about 7 to 12 or so.

Reminding us of the power of God against God's enemies, I guess. Notice that it's a third, a third, a third. Almost entirely. Symbolizing, I think, that God is still sparing some.

It's a warning judgment. It's not the end judgment. It's a severe judgment. But some is spared. The majority, in fact, is spared. And we'll see why shortly.

- [17 : 27] But notice that in verse, we get here that all the green grass was burned up. And just to show you that it's not a chronological sequence, when we get to chapter 9, if you look at chapter 9, verse 4, there's grass still there.

So it's obviously not meant to be a chronological sequence. But just little pictures of what's going on. The second angel sounded his trumpet. And now there's something like a huge mountain all ablaze thrown into the sea.

I think we're asking the wrong question if we try and identify this geologically or historically. Some people say, oh, it's all about Mount Vesuvius erupting in 79 AD. Maybe some of the language actually reflects that.

Maybe, or certainly people, when Vesuvius erupted and destroyed those two towns, people thought this was the judgment of God on the Roman Empire. Maybe indeed it was. But this is something greater still.

A third of the sea turned into blood. Again, a bit like the Nile turning to blood with Pharaoh and Moses in Exodus 7. A third of the living creatures in the sea died.

- [18 : 25] A third of the ships were destroyed. A third, a third. Warning judgment. God is sparing a lot. But much is being destroyed. The third angel sounded his trumpet.

A great star blazing like a torch fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter.

And many people died from the waters that had become bitter. Wormwood was a bitter plant. Maybe the bitterness is meant to convey something of death.

Certainly in the Old Testament, bitterness was something symbolizing death. Proverbs 5 and Lamentations 3 talks about the wormwood and the gall, which is picked up, of course, in a hymn we sang last week.

What's going on here is a bit like a reverse of a miracle that God had already done back in the wilderness. You remember when the water was bitter, God made it sweet and drinkable at a place called Marah in Exodus 15.

[19 : 26] This is the reverse of that. This is God's judgment. He's undoing things that he's done before. It's an undoing of the creation. It's an undoing of the provisions of God for people.

And again, it's a third. Again, it's restricted judgment. The third, the third, the third. The fourth angel sounded his trumpet. And a third of the sun was struck. A third of the moon.

A third of the stars. So that a third of them turned dark. And a third of the day was without light. I'm not sure that we're meant to think of a third of a day as eight hours.

It's all picture language. I think we ask the wrong question if we try and find some sort of physical or geographical or whatever solution to what's going on here.

It's a picture of something that's in a sense beyond description. It's God's warning judgment on this world. He's sparing much of it.

[20 : 19] But he's giving a severe warning to the rest. Again, it's a bit like the plagues of Moses against Pharaoh.

The sky turning black and so on in Exodus 10. And of course, darkness is always, it seems, in the Bible, a symbol of that which is opposed to God. Even back in Genesis 1 when God created light, darkness is sort of left there on the outer in a way.

Darkness is somehow opposed to God. In Joel 2, in Isaiah, in Amos 5, darkness is a symbol of judgment. A symbol of God's judgment against the world.

Of course, it's picked up by John's gospel. The same John. Somebody asked me last week, something I should have said the first week, that the John of Revelation is the John of the gospel, who's the beloved disciple, in my opinion. One of Jesus 12.

Probably a very old man at the time of Revelation. And he's on an island in the Aegean Sea, probably not enjoying a summer holiday, but an island called Patmos in between Greece and Turkey today.

[21 : 26] Well, I've said that these are not to be interpreted chronologically, but rather little pictures of the judgment of God upon the world. Visions of the same sort of realities, but from different angles.

If there's an escalation in the trumpets compared to the seals, this is very much direct judgment of God. Whereas in the seals, there's a slightly less direct feel about it.

Of course, it came from God, but it's sort of the world in catastrophe, but now it's very definitely God sending things to the world and destroying. But maybe that's reading a bit too much into it.

But certainly, God is the one who's bringing about this judgment. Remember that the seals, what we found there was that the suffering Christians in the world, the suffering church, we might say, is crying out for justice.

And now, in a sense, we get a picture of that justice happening. Yes, God is punishing the world. But as we'll see, it's not the church that's suffering here now. It's the world, the non-Christian world, that is suffering in these series of trumpets.

[22 : 37] In one sense, these are general events of nature. Yes, they're cosmic upheaval, but they could be explained naturally. I'm not sure that we need to.

It doesn't bother me if people do. But what it does also pick up when it's natural events that are being talked about is the decay of this world. This world is subjected to decay by God.

Ever since the fall of humanity back in Genesis 3, the world has been subjected to decay or frustration, as Paul says in Romans 8. It's ultimately going to be destroyed.

It's collapsing. I mean, we know that. We can see it in our world today with things like the ozone layer and pollution and so on. And I guess that's all part of it. This is a bit more dramatic in its description.

But the world is subjected to the decay that God brings it. In one sense, this description in these seals and trumpets is typical of the world in which we live.

[23 : 34] Or maybe it's painted in very dramatic senses, but then that's trying to give us a sense of what this world, how to interpret the world in which we live. To help us understand why it is that this world is so frustrated, so full of trouble and strife and cosmic disasters and persecution and so on.

So this is trying to give us a handle on why is the world like it is now. Yes, it's painting things in very dramatic pictures. But it's not all end time events. The destruction of a third is meant to say to us this is not the end.

It's a portent of the end. But perhaps it's really explaining what the world is like now. God is judging the world now. Some, of course, have always tried to link these things with particular events.

Vesuvius I mentioned in 79 AD. Apparently there was an earthquake. I think it was in Lisbon in 1745. And everybody suddenly saw the fulfillment of Revelation in an earthquake in Lisbon.

Hiroshima. Chernobyl. Some say the word Chernobyl is the same word as the word Wormwood. So there we are. It must be the fulfillment of the book of Revelation. Well, I don't wish to sort of say no, they're wrong totally there.

[24 : 47] But I think it's wrong if we try to find one event that fulfills what's being described here. Because it seems to me this is a picture of the world today. Not meaning 1997. But rather the world between the resurrection and the return of Christ.

And if Chernobyl fits this, then yes, it probably does. And if Lisbon's earthquake fits it, then yes, it probably does. And so might all earthquakes. And so might all destructions of the world and forest fires and nuclear disasters and so on.

It's all part of the world's decay and the judgment of God upon this world. I think there's something deliberate in the linking between these pictures and the Exodus plagues of the book of Exodus.

When Moses, to liberate the people of God, confronted Pharaoh. And you remember that series of plagues that he brought. Hail and locusts. The Nile turned to blood and so on. Time after time, trying to convince Pharaoh to let the people of God go.

What was the point of all those things, those disasters? The point of it was the liberation of God's people and their salvation. What's the point of all these? But in the end, the ultimate liberation of God's people.

[25 : 56] And I think here, though it's on a bigger scale, I think we're meant to see a parallel. The God is confronting the world opposed to him. Because Pharaoh was seen by Egyptians as a God opposed to the real God.

And so in a sense, what's happening in the book of Exodus is God, the real God, against this fake God, Pharaoh. What's happening in the book of Revelation? God, the real God, confronting the false gods.

Whether they're Roman emperors or whether they're other gods and idols in the world. And the real God, of course, is triumphant. And he is liberating, vindicating, protecting and saving his people.

And bringing judgment on those who oppose him. And that, I think, is what's going on here as well. Later on, we'll get to a lake. Possibly a symbol of the Red Sea. And again, the destruction of God's enemies there.

And so on. So I think there are deliberate links between this passage and Exodus. And as I said the very first week, the key to interpreting Revelation, if any, lies in the rest of the scriptures.

[26 : 54] Not in some other key that people make up in modern times. It was written for people who knew their Old Testaments better than we do. Who probably knew their New Testaments even by the time that this was written in 95 or so AD.

They understood some of the symbolism. They may not have understood the detail because it's not meant to be understood. It's a general picture. It's a watercolour picture where the edges are blurred. You've got to take a step back to see the general thrust of what's going on.

And the purpose of all of this so far? Certainly it's saying that God's judgment now is limited. It's real. It's severe. But it is limited.

God is judging and destroying now, not for total destruction. But rather for warning. As we're about to see. It's just like when I was at cadet camp when I was a teenager.

The worst part about, well there are lots of bad things about cadet camp. The first bad thing, first because it was the first thing of the day, was the trumpet blaring in your room to tell you it was time to get up.

[28 : 00] It was still dark. It was cold. It was freezing cold. But the trumpet blared. It was the warning that you had to be on the parade ground in so many minutes. For the first drill of the day or some other stupid exercise.

That's what's going on here. The destruction of a third is a warning for the rest. A warning, a portent of what will happen in the future. They're signs of repentance.

Calling people to change before it's too late as we'll see. Verse 13 makes all of that clear. It's a transition verse from the fourth trumpet into the fifth and sixth and seventh.

As I watched, I heard an eagle. That's a bird of prey. A sign again of judgment, most probably. That was flying in midair, calling out in a loud voice. Woe, woe, woe. Three woes.

I think three woes because, as we're later told, it applies to the last three trumpets. Four have gone, three to come. Woe for five, woe for six, woe for seven. When we eventually get to seven.

[29 : 00] Woe to the inhabitants of the earth because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels. It's an announcement of warning. But is the warning heeded?

When we get into chapter nine, which I'm just going to skim over because it really fits together. And it's I can do that fairly briefly. The fifth trumpet comes and it comes on unsealed people.

Not on the sealed people, the numbers that were sealed back in Revelation 7 as we saw last week. So it's very clear here that the judgment that's coming is not judgment on the church.

It's not persecution on the church. But it's rather judgment on non-Christians, those opposed to God's people. Now the object of the destruction is people.

It's not cosmic upheaval anymore. It's very clearly people. And the fifth trumpet is to do with torture and torment. Not death, but torture and torment.

- [30 : 00] So in verse three, for example, the smoke came or from the smoke came locusts on the earth. They were given authority like the authority of scorpions on the earth.
- They were told not to damage the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree. But only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.
- They're allowed to torture them for five months. Why five months? Well, could be because five months is the length of the AFL football season. More probably it's because the length of a locust's life is five months.
- And some say the period, the dry period of the year is five months. And that's when locusts attack. But not to kill them. Attack, torture, torment, but not to kill them.
- And the torture was like the torture of a scorpion when it stings someone. And in those days people will seek death, but will not find it. What an irony compared to those who've been killed.
- [30 : 59] The martyrs who are crying out for justice and so on. They will long to die, but death will flee from them. It's even worse than death. They're wanting death because the pain, the torture, the torment is so great.
- But not being able to die makes it indeed even greater. This is the judgment of God against those who persecute God's people. And therefore against those who persecute God himself.
- The tables are turned. Verses 7 to 11 go on to describe in bizarre fashion the locusts. We won't have to worry about this. Let me just read verse 11.
- Abaddon means the destroyer.
- Apollyon the same. It's a reference I think in the end to Satan. Interestingly some of the Roman emperors and apparently Domitian who's probably the emperor at the time of the book of Revelation in the 90s AD.
- [32 : 04] Saw themselves as the god Apollo incarnate. And some suggest that the name Apollyon is meant to be a sort of derisory comment back to Apollo and therefore back to Domitian.
- The locust apparently was also a symbol of the god Apollo. Now I'm not very good on all that sort of stuff. I've just sort of read all that. But if it's true it's a fairly much a slap in the face for Domitian.
- Who saw himself as all powerful and here he's just seen as a sort of in the end an agent of Satan. A destroyer. Even of his own people. Verse 12.
- The first woe has passed. There are still two woes to come. The eagle announced three. The one's down. That's the fifth trumpet. Now comes in verses 13 to 19 the sixth trumpet.
- And this is to kill a third of people. A third. Again a third. Not all. Again it's a warning. It's an omen for the end. But it's not the end itself.
- [33 : 04] The fifth trumpet was torture. Torment. The sixth trumpet is death. Logical sequence I guess. Verse 14 says to the sixth angel.
- Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates. The river Euphrates was the boundary. The eastern boundary of the Roman Empire apparently.
- It was also one of the boundaries of the promised land of Israel. As promised by God in Genesis 15. And even though probably only very briefly under the reign of Solomon did Israel ever extend its boundaries as far as the Euphrates River.
- Maybe what this is saying is that this is coming from outside the promised land or outside the Empire. Apparently much of Rome often lived in fear of the Parthians who lived beyond the Euphrates.
- Whether or not this is an allusion to that is hard to determine. But again note that it's God who's in control. It's God who gives the order for them to be unleashed. And let them go.

[34 : 05] And kill a third. Always the sovereignty of God is in the background here. We're not sort of talking about a fight where we don't know who's going to win. We're talking about the unleashing of evil forces and judgment.

Always under the sovereignty of God. All the forces of history come under the sovereignty of God. No matter how powerful any nation, person, empire is.

God's power is greater. The Roman Empire was one of the most powerful of all time. And the book of Revelation makes it very clear that God is more powerful.

And we get a fairly horrifying picture in verses 13 to 19 of what's going to happen. Well these trumpets, six so far, have trumpeted, announced, a warning for the end.

It's not the end, but they're warning. One of the tricks that people sometimes fall into with the book of Revelation and sometimes how the New Testament fits the old is because they want to see the fulfillment of the old all at once.

[35 : 20] There's got a little diagram I'll show you to illustrate the point. In the Old Testament, the first, the top half there that you can see was people's expectation.

And many of the grand prophecies of the Old Testament that are full of cosmic upheaval and the sky turning black and all that sort of thing, what they're anticipating is a day of the Lord in the future, which will come sort of vroom and then comes the new era after that.

As though it's a sort of single event. And all these cataclysmic events would all sort of happen, not so much in one day, necessarily 24-hour period, but would all happen there.

And then comes the new era, the era of rejoicing, of peace, of being with God, freedom from enemies, prosperity, bounty, blessing and so on. When we get to the New Testament, we find a new dimension placed on that diagram.

So the bottom half, as now you can see, sees that the day of the Lord is in fact two events. The first event is the cross and the resurrection of Jesus.

[36 : 25] And the second event is the coming of Jesus again, the second coming or the parousia of Jesus back to this world. Both of those events, cross-resurrection, we might even say incarnation, cross-resurrection and ascension, all as sort of the first day of the Lord, and the second coming of Jesus, are the two sort of places where the Old Testament expectations of the end will be fulfilled.

And we live in between. So Joel, you remember, anticipated the spirit of God being poured out and the sun turning dark and moon blood and all that sort of stuff.

And we're told that it's all fulfilled in the giving of the spirit at Pentecost. That's, if you like, the first where I've got cross there. That's the sort of first event. But some of the rest of it will be fulfilled at the end of time.

So the Old Testament fulfillment is sort of split in two as we see a new perspective on the Old Testament when we get to the new. Now one of the tricks about this is that we live in between, which means that there's an element of fulfillment already, and some that's yet to be fulfilled, and also that there's some in between that is in the process of being fulfilled.

And that's why sometimes Old Testament prophecies are a bit hard to pin down when they're fulfilled, because some of them seem to have been a bit, and some are not yet, and some are sort of being fulfilled now.

[37 : 42] Now that's the sort of diagram to give you a bit of a picture on what's going on here. It means that Revelation, which is picking up so much of the Old Testament, sees some of it already fulfilled in the Lamb's death, and he's walking up to take the scroll and so on, and some yet to be fulfilled in a day in the future.

And we live in between. And Revelation is in a sense describing that in-between period, between the death, resurrection, ascension, and giving of the spirit, and the second coming of Jesus at the end of world history.

God fills this world with signs of his judgment. And we live in the world with signs of his judgment, anticipating that day of Jesus to come. And the purpose of it all is not just destruction, not just havoc, not just God playing games, saying, oh, what bit of havoc can I wreak today?

It's all about warning. It's about warning to call people to repentance. Sometimes I think we, as Christians, just anticipate that we'll grow old, and Jesus will yet to have returned.

We've lost the imminence and the urgency that's there in the New Testament. As people cried out wanting Jesus to come again, as the Bible ends, in fact, with that cry in Revelation 22, urgently seeking him to come, yet knowing that the delay is a delay to give us time for repentance.

[39 : 01] As Romans 2 verse 4, for example, and 2 Peter say, that this time is due to God's kindness in order to give people time to repent. And Revelation is saying the same thing.

All this warning is to give people time to repent. Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near, because the time will end.

And for some, it will be too late. The question is, will these people repent? And the end of verse chapter 9 is not optimistic.

The rest of humankind, who are not killed by these plagues, did not repent. Despite all that they'd seen in the catastrophe of the world and the judgment upon the world, they didn't repent.

And that's the picture of today, isn't it? Our world is a world subject to the judgment of God, the warning signs of God, its decay and destruction round about, and yet people refuse to repent.

[40 : 02] Refuse, as verses 20 and 21 say, to turn from their idolatry and turn from their immorality. People complain and blame God for all that's going on, but they fail to repent of their own idolatry and immorality and turn to him in faith and trust and in repentance.

People love darkness more than light. I guess there's a huge challenge here to the church that this is the time to call the world to trust in God and turn before it's too late.

But of course it's also an encouragement. It's an encouragement to faithful Christians suffering in this world. They are spared from all the destruction of God's judgment.

That doesn't mean they're not spared from its effects in this world, but even if they were to be killed as we saw last week and the week before with the martyrs in heaven, they're still under God's protection.

The seal doesn't mean freedom from any pain or suffering or evil in this world, but it means an ultimate protection by God that even in the midst of the evil, the destruction, the warning signs, the cosmic upheaval, the wars and battles and so on, in the midst of all that, not out of it, but in its midst, God's people are protected by a sovereign God.

[41 : 24] As we sang at the beginning from Psalm 46, though the earth should change, though mountains shake in the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult, we will not fear.

The people of God will not fear because all that's described in the fifth and sixth trumpets is not against those who are sealed. And we, if we're people of faith and repentance in the risen Lord Jesus Christ, are those who are sealed by him.

And we can stand confidently on the day of judgment because of the grace of God exercised to us in the blood of the Lamb. Let's have a moment's silence as we reflect on that before we sing the praises of God.

One of my favourite hymns, how firm a foundation you people of God is laid for your faith in his excellent word. What more can he say than to you he has said to everyone trusting in Jesus our head.

Whoever has come to believe in his name will not be deserted and not be put to shame. Though hell may endeavour that Christian to shake, though his Lord will not leave him nor ever forsake.

[43 : 06] That's the message of what we've heard tonight. That's a very encouraging message for us and we're going to sing hymn 430. How firm a foundation you people of God.

Said last week that I'd have a time of questions and that's always a touch tricky with a big group so I've deliberately tried to leave quarter of an hour for questions. The title St John the Divine does not mean that John himself is divine as though he's a sort of incarnation of God like Jesus who is uniquely human and God.

A divine, a divine, was a sort of holy person and so in church history we find periodically people being called divines or a divine or the divines or something like that.

So it means he's a sort of specially holy person. I don't know why it's been dropped out of the NRSV. I suspect it may be because these days the term may be a touch ambiguous or confusing.

It may mislead people to think that it's a claim that John the Apostle was somehow divine in nature. I don't think it means that. Beyond that I don't know. Other people may in fact know.

[44 : 19] I was going to repeat questions and I should have done that for the benefit of the tape and those who couldn't hear. Doug's question was why is it used to be the revelation of St. John the Divine and now in the NRSV it's just the revelation of St. John.

So that's what my answer is to. Well not necessarily in the sense that I'm sure there will be a trumpet when Jesus returns. I don't think that excludes the possibility of other trumpets and things happening.

The other thing of course is that the things that are happening described in Revelation are a lead up to Jesus coming. So in a sense trumpet sounding is sort of the warning signals if you like that Jesus is about to appear.

I mean I don't see that there's a sort of inconsistency there in that the Gospels themselves as Mark 13 and parallel passages in Matthew and Luke especially talk about similar events to what we find in the book of Revelation.

Cosmic upheaval, battles, wars, famines, pestilence and so on. Revelation describes the same things but in different sort of language. Again I should have repeated the question I must get into the habit.

[45 : 28] The question was the Gospels say a trumpet shall sound and Jesus shall return and in Revelation we find lots of trumpets but no Jesus returning. Well I think the reward for deeds in the book of Revelation must be seen in the context that those who are rewarded ultimately in heaven are those whose robes are washed white in the blood of the Lamb.

so that the reason they're there is not because of their deeds that is their works or their goodness but rather in the end because of Jesus' death and their grace and forgiveness. And yet throughout the Bible Jesus' parables as well as in Revelation there is talk of people being rewarded in the life to come.

Whoever gives up this, this and this will be rewarded manifold times. So there is a doctrine of reward I think in the rest of the New Testament but it's a secondary step to adoption of justification that is that we are accepted by God through faith rather than earning it through our goodness.

But having become Christians or people who are Christians it seems that there are rewards spoken about by Jesus and elsewhere in the New Testament as well as in Revelation. The question is what do I think an angel is?

The medieval theologians used to debate at enormous length I think from Augustine onwards I think it was Saint Augustine not the Augustine of Canterbury but of a place called Hippo in North Africa in the 400 AD period how many angels would fit on a pinhead because if lots and lots could they wouldn't have any sort of physical space.

[47 : 15] Well I it seems to me that angels are notoriously difficult to define. In the Old Testament there are appearances of what look to be like people and occasionally it seems almost God himself such as in Genesis what is it 14 or 18 or something and but they're called angels and then other places we get angels who seem to sort of hover around in the sky or in heaven.

They're certainly agents of God the word angel sort of is linked to the word messenger but there are other messengers of God who are not angels.

I don't know that angels necessarily have wings they're certainly not all feminine most of the angels in the Bible are masculine it seems. They're involved somehow in conveying things of God to the world or to Christians in the world.

What else can I say? I don't I can't give a sort of totally confident answer because I don't think the Bible ever really sits down and describes what an angel is sort of physically metaphysically or it's usually a bit more functionally that's what's important cherubim or seraphim well I'm not sure that they're necessarily angels cherubim or seraphim the first question was it's okay for God to be God of justice but what about the torture and torment I think I would say that the torture and torment described in the fifth trumpet is probably nothing compared to hell and hell is a just reward if that's the right word for those who oppose

God refuse to worship him and practice immorality and so on and it's very horror to our eyes ought to make us more aware of the absolute holiness of God for I think we all in this world compromise our sort of perfect you know our attempts to reach something of the perfect standards of God we cringe at sort of punishment but I think to be absolutely fair God exercises a justice and that's a horrific thing the torture and torment that precludes death in the fifth trumpet may well be in part intentional to give people yet another chance to repent at the very end as it were before that third were destroyed by the sixth trumpet so it may even be a sign of God's grace that he brings the calamities of the world in a sense to fever pitch but allows them to live in order to give them yet just another chance of repenting before they're destroyed maybe now in part

[50 : 46] I'm reading into that although the context goes on after the sixth trumpet as we saw to talk about repentance and I think you know there's something there for how we view pain and difficulty as well I think even as Christians we are too keen to flee pain it seems to me that throughout the Bible pain is actually a very good thing on the whole yes in part it's a reflection of the fallen world and therefore part of evil but time and time again pain and suffering are meant to purify us if we're not Christians to bring us to faith and if we are Christians to purify our faith and strengthen it that we sort of trust God more the wilderness experience of Israel and you know Romans 8 and numerous other passages about about the sort of disciplining purifying effect of pain and and even we could say torture and torment so that I mean that's a slightly different angle to come at it the second question was about hell is hell some sort of conscious existence or is it annihilation the traditional

I guess Protestant view of this Christian view of it even would be that hell is some sort of conscious existence without God some sort of eternal punishment it's becoming trendy in sort of biblical circles to think in terms of hell being annihilation that is you're judged you're annihilated that's it so if you're not a Christian there's no eternal suffering or torment in hell it's just non-existence I think personally the weight of evidence suggests the former not the latter that is that hell is some sort of conscious existence the weeping and the gnashing of teeth which comes a number of times in Jesus parables and so on some say the parable of Lazarus and Dives where he goes into hell and then he wants God to bring down a warning for the rest of his family and so on

I think the parables don't necessarily teach doctrine in that way so though it's used sometimes to support the idea of a conscious existence in hell I'm not sure that I would want to use it that way because I'm not sure the parables are meant to be but as I've said there are things like the weeping and gnashing of teeth and so on and the fires of hell and that that seem to me to suggest some sort of conscious existence without God and I a corollary of that would be it's a conscious existence without anything good anything of God there's nothing of God there I mean the world in which we live is mixed each of us is mixed good and bad evil and so on but it'll be a world which is all the goodness of God is taken out and that'll be horrific yeah that's probably enough answer yeah nearer than yesterday the question yes I'll repeat the question thank you the question is as

Christians we should be expecting Jesus return and do I think that that is near as say Simeon did and so on at the first birth of Jesus Jesus could come at any time I think it possible that he could come tonight before we sing our next song it's quite possible that he'll come in a million years time I think we tend not to live with the sense of urgency and imminence that we're meant to from the New Testament we should live with the expectation that Jesus may welcome very soon and I think that's how revelation begins as well it's saying look he's coming with the clouds every eye will see him even those who pierced him and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail and so what we find in revelation is the sort of signs that Jesus is imminent now that was 1900 years ago so he's obviously more imminent

I'm not one who sort of sees in world events now a sort of sign that this is the very end necessarily because I think that if we are reading revelation right we could have lived in the year 200 AD 400 AD 1000 AD or 1550 AD and still seen that yes Jesus this could be the very end of time and I think the way people have interpreted revelation in part show that because time and time again people are saying these are the events of today now while I'm not a person who says 666 is Ronald Reagan and stuff like that there is a sense in which every generation can see in revelation the world in which they live and so for me the end days are the days between the resurrection and the second coming and we are living in the end days and have been for 1900 years if you're that old the response was that we having more hindsight can see things like the nation of

[56 : 07] Israel being established as a fulfilment of prophecy I must say that I don't see the modern state of Israel since 1948 as a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy I sort of alluded to my view on Israel and the church either last week I think it was or the week before where I said that the New Testament says that Christians are the Israel of God and the distinction now from Jesus onwards is not a distinction between Jew Gentile but a distinction between Christian and non-Christian and it seems to me the modern state of Israel being formed since 1948 is I would say by and large irrelevant for fulfilment of prophecy now I realise that's a very controversial issue and in a sense I don't really want to get digressed into debating it but it seems to me that consistently throughout the

New Testament all the categories of thinking of the Old Testament are transformed the anticipation of a king to rule over Israel is fulfilled in Jesus whose kingdom is not of this world if Jesus' kingdom is not of this world what are we doing talking about a geographical fulfilment of the nation of Israel but yet the king is not a king of that sort of world he's a king of some other world it seems to me the fulfilment is the kingdom of God or the kingdom of Jesus rather than the state of Israel and the way the New Testament deals with Christians by saying you are Israel in effect shows to me that we actually misread the New Testament if we think that modern day Israel is somehow a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy the church is fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy now that's not to deny that those who are racially Jews still remain some sort of treasured people in God's eyes but I don't think the state of Israel is a reflection of that it seems to me that signs of the end times will be things when everything is coming under Christ who is the head that's God's purpose for the universe as expressed in say

Ephesians 1 and Colossians 1 and the modern state of Israel is far from that it's actually not a religious state even it's a secular state and it's certainly not doing much to enhance everything coming under the headship of Christ please hear me right that's not an anti-Semitic statement it's a theological statement I have this is sort of great affinity with Jews because they have the same heritage as us the Old Testament but I don't yeah anyway one last question before we finish I think we're told that it's an angel and he writes down what he sees as well oh the question was who dictated the revelation to John I'm not sure that it was necessarily dictated he wrote down what he saw and he was told to write down things by angels and heavenly beings and so on I'm just trying to remember the reference and I can't offhand but there's a couple throughout the book

I'm always very cautious of scholarly debate I'm one who's a scholar I've done a PhD recently and it's full of all sorts of nonsense I mean not the PhD but scholarly world is full of all sorts of nonsense because scholars in order to be academics need to think up something new and therefore there's a pressure on them to think up something heretical or false or offbeat and well she's well I think that's just fiction and nonsense and so does all the scholarly world there's no scholar of repute in the world who thinks she's got anything worth saying it's heretical because the Bible tells us who a Christian is not Barbara Thiering and there is a fundamental difference between the truth of God's word and the nonsense made up by a woman who's not a Christian we should stop there and because we need to sing and pray to finish