

Apocalypse 11:15 – 12:12

Penetrating to The Transcendent (4)

Sounding of the 7th trumpet (11:15)



Apocalypse 11:15

Then the seventh angel sounded the trumpet and there were loud voices (1:10) in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever'.

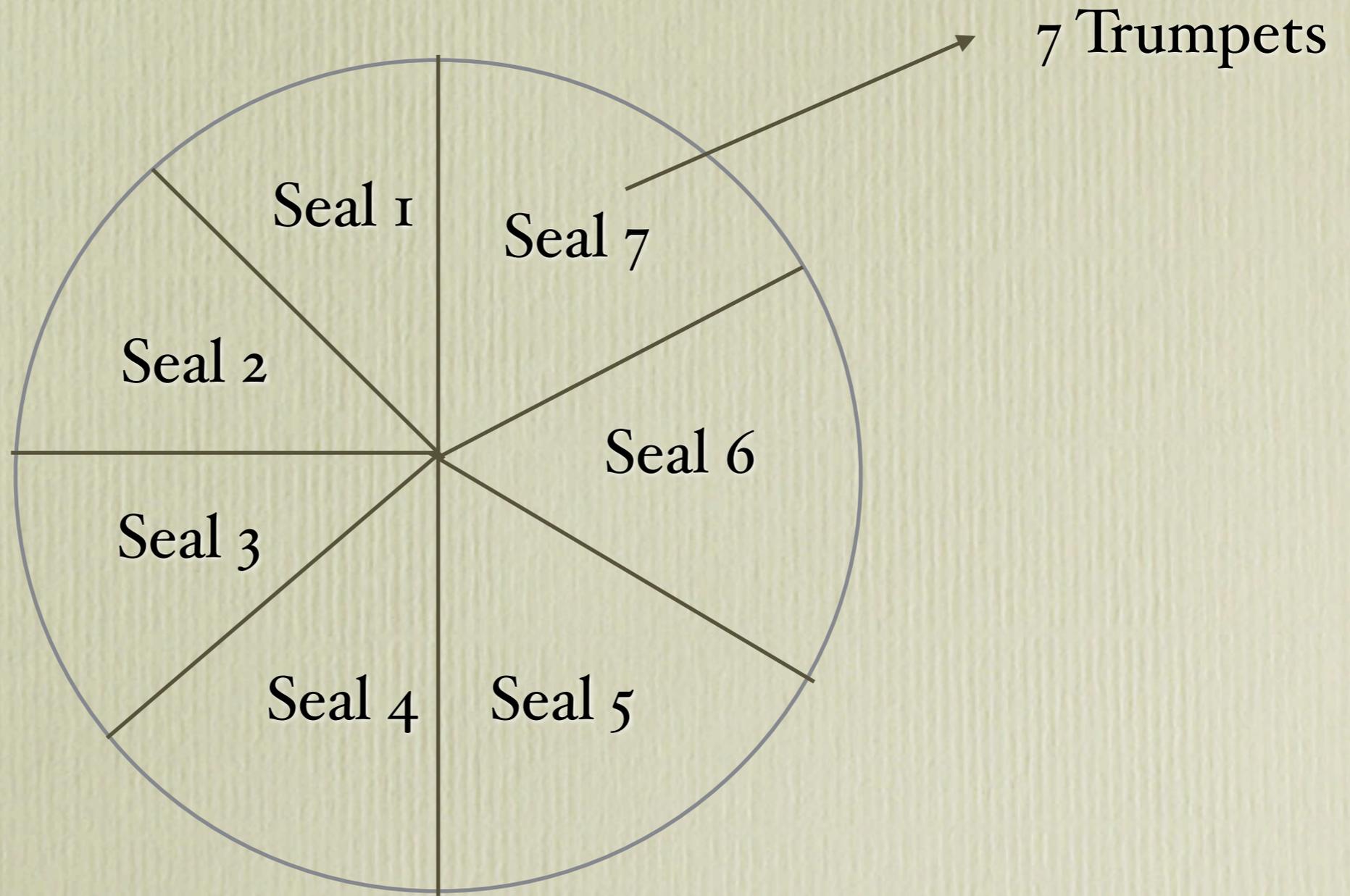
Seventh & Final Announcement

Everything from this point to the end of the apocalypse is a spelling out of the final insight which John has into the ultimate meaning of history:

'In the days when the seventh angel is to sound the trumpet, the mystery of God will be fulfilled, as he announced to his servants the prophets' (Apocalypse 10:7).

Apocalypse 8:2

I saw the seven angels who stand before God,
and seven trumpets were given to them.



‘The seven angels who had the seven trumpets
(announcing God’s judgment) **made ready to blow them.**’(8:6)

Trumpets 1-4
Judgment
is cosmic
8:7-12

Martyrdom and Reward
of Christian Leaders
(10:1 - 11:14)

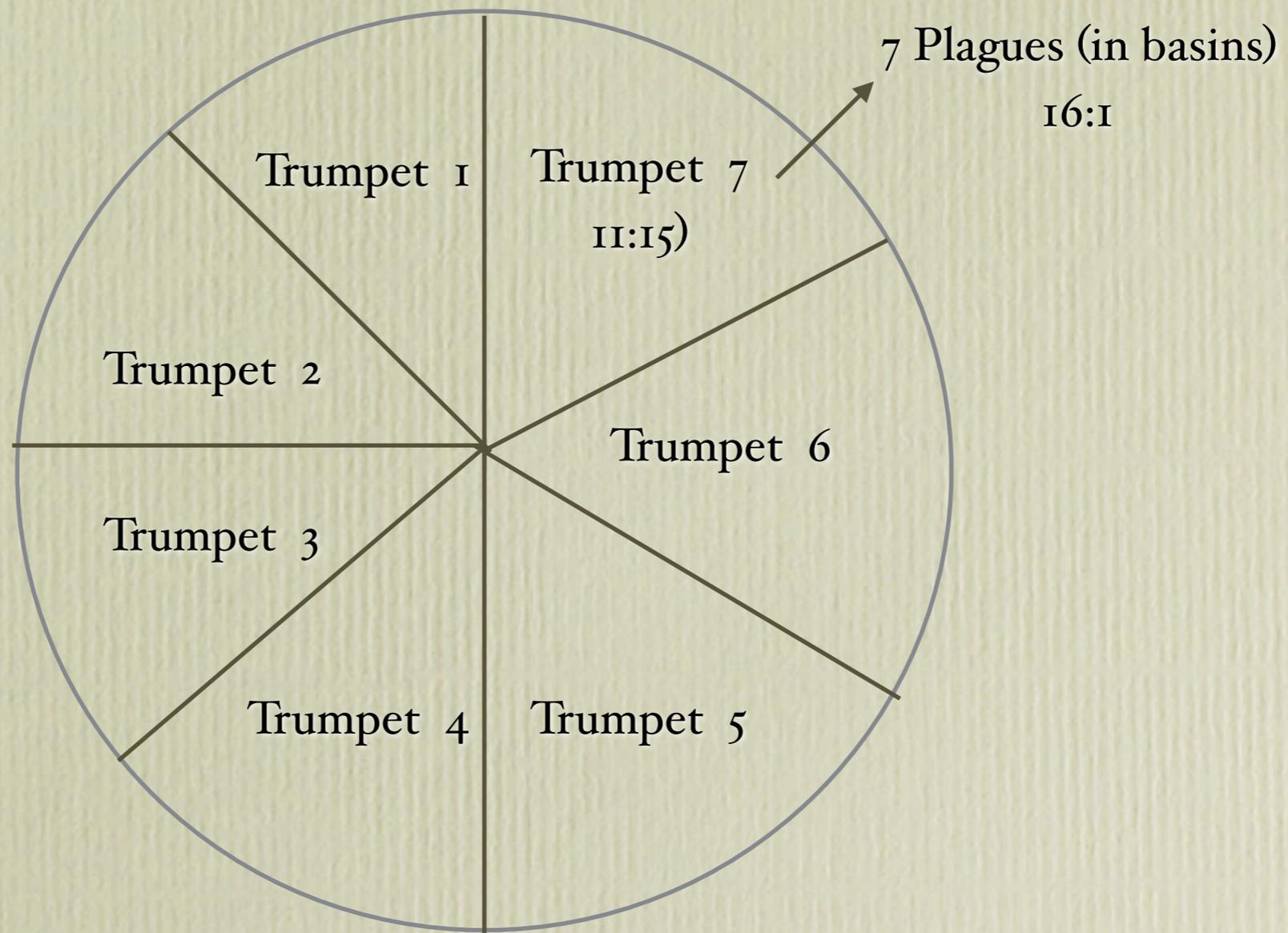
Trumpet 7

‘Then the
7th angel blew
his trumpet’
(11:15)

Trumpets 5-6
War &
Natural
Disasters
9:1-21

Ark of the Covenant
Woman Vs Dragon
Lamb Vs Beasts
Victory is assured
(11:19 - 14:20)

God’s judgment is carried
out in 7 stages – 7 Plagues (15:1)



The seventh trumpet coincides with the third and final woe. Just as the opening of the seventh seal revealed all that is announced by the seven trumpets, so the sounding of the seventh trumpet announces all that is revealed in the remainder of the book: the destruction of all that opposes God and the ultimate vindication of the good. The reign of God, through the life-giving of his Messiah, is assured of triumph.

Apocalypse 11:16-18

Then the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshipped God, singing, 'We give you thanks, Lord God Almighty, who are and who were, that you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath has come, and the time for judging the dead, for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and all who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying those who destroy the earth'.

'The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed'(Daniel 2:44).

'On to him (the Son of Man) was given dominion and glory and kingship ... and his kingship is one that shall not pass away'(Daniel 7:14).

Apocalypse 11:19

Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

John opens this scene with the ark of the covenant, for he wishes his readers to see in what follows the fulfilment of God's promise to establish a new and everlasting covenant with his people. This is the climax of God's action in history, and John dramatises this by adding heavy hail to the symbols that appeared in 8:5.

We are reminded of the legend which tells of the prophet Jeremiah hiding the ark prior to the destruction of Jerusalem: 'The place shall remain unknown until God gathers his people together again and shows his mercy. Then the Lord will disclose these things, and the glory of the Lord and the cloud will appear'(2Maccabees 2:7-8).

Its revelation now signifies that the end has come.

Apocalypse 12:1-2

The first sign : The woman in labour

[needing decoding]



A great [emphatic] sign was seen in heaven: a woman clothed [by God, Genesis] with the sun [1:16 - Christ], the moon [cult] under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant [with the 'Body of Christ'] and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth.

'Woman' in the Old Testament is used symbolically for the people of God as spouse (see Hosea 2:1), and as mother (see Isaiah 60:4; 66:7-9). John follows this tradition as he portrays God's people as loved by him, and as having an obligation to do all in their power to carry out the mission of the Messiah on earth and so to bring history to its goal. This mission, as the churches of Asia know only too well, involves them in suffering.

Apocalypse 12:1-2

The first sign : The woman in labour

A great [emphatic] sign was seen in heaven: a woman clothed [by God, Genesis] with the sun, the moon [cult] under her feet, and on her head a crown (2:10) of twelve (7:5-8) stars. She was pregnant [with the 'Body of Christ'] and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth.

Writing to the Galatians, Paul could speak of himself being 'in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you'(Galatians 4:19). The role of the Church is to continue to bring Christ to birth in his members.

Clothing symbolises the way a person or a community is seen by others (see 1:16). John presents the Church, symbolised by the woman, as clothed in the sun: presenting to the world the glory and the nurturing warmth of the exalted Christ (see 1:16).

Apocalypse 12:1-2

The first sign : The woman in labour

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The Christian communities are, according to John, bringing salvation to the world, and so he encourages them to remain faithful in spite of difficulties which they are undergoing and the sacrifices which they have to make. By way of contrast read Isaiah:

‘Like a woman with child, who writhes and cries out in her pangs, when she is near her time, so were we, because of you, O Lord; we were with child, we writhed, but we gave birth only to wind. We have won no victories on earth, and no one is born to inhabit the world’(Isaiah 26:17-18).

Apocalypse 12:3

The second sign : The dragon

[needing decoding]

Then another sign was seen in heaven: A great, red dragon with seven heads and ten [only apparently complete] horns, and seven diadems [royal crowns] on his heads.

The second sign is of a dragon (compare Isaiah 27:1). In the case of the woman it was the sign that was described as great; here it is the dragon. As a sign the dragon is of secondary importance. It is red and therefore associated with the demonic (see 6:3-4: 'Out came another horse, bright red; its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people would slaughter one another; and he was given a great sword'). John chooses an animal, thereby indicating that he is referring to something that belongs to the created universe but is, at the same time, beyond human comprehension.

Apocalypse 12:4

The dragon's tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Then the dragon is standing before the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born.

The dragon opposes the forces empowered by God (the stars, 1:16, 6:13), but as only a third of these are swept down (see 8:7-12), any victory he has is essentially limited. We find the same kind of imagery in Daniel's symbolic description of Antiochus Epiphanes IV, the Syrian king responsible for persecuting the Jews:

'The horn grew as high as the host of heaven. It threw down to the earth some of the host and some of the stars, and trampled on them'(Daniel 8:10).

Apocalypse 12:5-6

She gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to shepherd all the nations with a rod of iron (Psalm 2:9).

The child refers primarily to Christ, born of God's people: the promised one. The powers of evil attempted to destroy him, but God raised him up and glorified him. The image includes those to whom the church has given birth.

But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne; and the woman fled into the wilderness where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished for 1,260 days [3.5 years].

The desert as a place where the chosen people experienced a special intimacy with God (Hosea 2:16-17). The church, too, receives its bread from heaven in the desert prepared for it by God (see Exodus 16).

Apocalypse 12:7-9

In the transcendent perspective, evil has been defeated

[the heavenly equivalent of the woman]

War arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent [Isaiah 27:1], who is called the Devil [Διάβολος, diabolos] and Satan [Σατανᾶς, accuser], the deceiver of the whole world - he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

The book has been unsealed. The end time is here. John is declaring that the battle has been won.

Satan is thrown down to the earth, and so the identity of Satan, and the evidence of his deceiving activity is to be sought on earth, in the ambit of the human historical situation.

Daniel 12:1-4

‘At that time **Michael**, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky; and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. But you, Daniel, keep the words, and the book sealed until the time of the end.’

Luke 10:17-20

The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!'. He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'

Apocalypse 12:10-12

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming, 'Now have come the **salvation** and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah, for the accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who **accuses** them day and night before our God. But they have conquered him by the **blood of the Lamb** and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death. Rejoice then, you heavens and those who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and sea, for the Devil has come down to you with great wrath, because he knows that his **time is short!**'

Salvation comes from Christ, not the Empire.

From the ultimate perspective of the transcendent, evil has already been conquered. However, the struggle is still going on here on earth. John is summoning the church to courage, to perseverance and to hold on to the victory already achieved by Christ, whatever the appearances and the price of the struggle. The power and frustration of evil is evident in the way the Christians are being persecuted. But 'his time is short'. Evil has no enduring significance and has already suffered the essential defeat. As John said earlier, they are in the desert, but they are being nourished by God there:

'The woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished'(Apocalypse 12:6)