

Revelation Chapter 8

An Interpretation

Charles Dailey © 2015

Revision of 5/2017 NASB Printed 1/10/2026

Introduction:

1. In the last chapter we noted the collapse of paganism and the legalization of Christianity.
2. Now, great forces are about to be unleashed against the Empire.
3. **Willie Wallace Speck** writes:

Then an angel moves to give assurance to Christians that even though great calamities might happen upon the earth, they would be protected. The imagery is taken from the altar of incense in the temple, which represented the prayers of God's people. The smoke of the incense ascended before God, indicating that, although distress might occur upon the earth (voices, thundering, lightnings, and an earthquake) God hears their prayers.
4. There was a time of peace for the believers before the great storms broke loose.

THE SEVENTH SEAL IS OPENED

(1) When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

- **Johnson:**

When he opened the **seventh seal**. It is **the Lamb** who opens all the seals. I think that it is a hush of awe before the march of the awful judgments about to come, the calm before the storm breaks forth, the oppressive **silence** before the burst of battle. It is designed to emphasize the events that follow.



- The seventh and final seal is open. There is quiet in **heaven**. Soon great noise will be unleashed upon the earth.

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



- **Johnson:**

What he saw was **the seven angels** which **stand before God**; that is, the **angels** who act as his immediate ministering servants, to whom were **given seven trumpets**. The seventh seal, therefore, embraces these angels and their trumpets, and all they do in the following verses belongs to this seal.

Discussion: Can we name any of the angels who stand before God? Jude 9, Luke 1:19

(3) Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne.

- **Johnson:**

The scene reveals the **altar** of the tabernacle, "a pattern made after heavenly things." This is the altar of sacrifice from which the coal was always taken to light the incense (Leviticus 16:13). This **angel** receives the **incense** and offers it upon the golden altar, the altar of incense. The incense is "**the prayers of the saints**;" these to reach the **throne** must be lighted from the altar of sacrifice; or by faith in the blood of the Lamb of God.

- The **saints** are the believers in Christ, not a special class of Christians, but all Christians. God is aware of the plight of His people.
- In the tabernacle and temple, the **altar** was before the veil. Here it is directly **before the throne** of God.

- **Fred Miller:**

We have arrived at the end of the fifth century in our paralleling history with the symbols. The triumph of Christianity and its unprecedented growth in the Empire is pictured under the sixth seal and the interlude of the seventh chapter. The eighth chapter opens with the church offering much prayer just before the sounding of the trumpets and an event that causes much commotion in the earth. It must be these events for which the prayers are offered.

(4) And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand.

- **Johnson:**

As the **smoke** arose before the throne, so the **prayers of the saints** in the name of the crucified Savior arise to **God**. The special significance of all this is that in the terrible judgments about to follow, the prayers of the true and faithful saints will still come before God, and his providence will be over them.

(5) Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

- **Johnson:**

Fire is usually a symbol of suffering. This **fire** cast from the **altar** upon the **earth** indicates that the judgments of God are about to fall upon it. The earth in the sense used by John is the great Roman Empire, which embraced the civilized world.

There followed thunders, etc. These mutterings and the **quaking** are ominous of the terrible scenes to follow when the angels sound their trumpets.

- John could both see and hear as the contents of the **censer** were thrown to earth. **Thunder, lightening, and earthquake.**
- Heaven was determining the course of world events.

(6) And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them.

- **Johnson:**

There is the utmost deliberation. All must be made ready. The four angels hold back the winds (Rev. 7:1), then there was the silence of half an hour (Rev. 8:1); now the **seven angels prepared themselves to sound**. This implies that all things were being made ready for the great events to follow.

The trumpet is used to give a signal. Usually it implied the march or charge of armies. See Joel 2:1; 2:15. Sometimes it calls the people to worship. The reader will see that the first is likely to be the significance here.

THE FIRST TRUMPET SOUNDED

(7) The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

- **Hail** and **fire** are certainly opposites. **Blood** was added to the destructive mixture. A large minority of mankind was affected, but not everyone.

- **Johnson:**

When the trumpet **sounded** there followed the wonderful scenes described. When **the first** trumpet is blown John beholds a mighty storm-cloud rush over the earth. From it pour **hail and fire** mingled with **blood**. They fall upon the **earth** and a **third** part is scorched and blasted. These terms indicate desolation by some kind of judgments. The scene of the desolation is "**the earth**," or the Roman Empire in John's use of the term. The **blood** indicates carnage. The scorched and blasted land indicates the devastation of destroying armies. The language implies a terrible destruction descending upon **a third** of the world known to John.

- **Hinds:**

As already shown the four destructive powers to be let loose at the sounding of the first four trumpets must come between A.D. 396 and the end of the Roman Empire, A.D. 476. Of the expositors consulted three (Elliott, Barnes, and Johnson) hold the view that the Gothic invasion, under Alaric, in the first part of the

fifth century is signified by the first trumpet vision. This application of the language seems to have all the probabilities in its favor and is therefore accepted as correct.

The leading features of Alaric's invasions may be gathered from chapters 30 and 31 of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. They are as follows: In 403 Alaric was defeated by a Roman general and retired from Italy. In 408 he laid siege to Rome the first time when, according to Gibbon, "that unfortunate city gradually experienced the distress of scarcity, and at length the horrid calamities of famine" and "many thousands of the inhabitants of Rome expired in their houses, or in the streets, for want of sustenance.

The Gothic blow staggered the Roman Empire, but did not end it. In 412 Adolphus, Alaric's brother-in-law and successor, concluded a treaty of peace with Rome. He says that at first he aspired "to obliterate the name of Rome" and gain immortal fame as "the founder of a new empire"; but deciding that the Goths were incapable of sustaining a well-constituted government, he determined to "restore and maintain the prosperity of the Roman Empire." (*Decline and Fall*, Vol. 3, p. 295.)

THE SECOND TRUMPET SOUNDED

(8) The second angel sounded, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood, (9) and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed.

- A **mountain** in the book of Daniel was a kingdom, so the picture may apply here as well.
- Johnson:

Then the scene changes. Now a **great burning mountain** is cast into the sea. The sea is the theatre of destruction. Again there is **fire** and **blood** indicating carnage and **destruction**. In the first judgment the third part of the earth suffers; but now a third part of the **sea**. The symbols imply that some mighty volcanic power shall be turned upon the **sea**, and make it a scene of awful warfare and destruction.

- **Hinds:**

In A.D. 455, and three years later the Roman emperor had prepared a navy of "three hundred large galleys, with an adequate proportion of transports and smaller vessels." By a surprise attack by the Vandals the Romans were defeated, "many of their ships were sunk, or taken, or burnt; and the preparations of three years were destroyed in a single day." (*Decline and Fall*, Vol. 3, p. 482.)

The significant thing here is that the attack upon the western part of the empire was from the sea. A fact that does suitably correspond with the vision John saw.

THE THIRD TRUMPET SOUNDED

(10) The third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters. (11) The name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter.

Discussion: In Trumpet one, two and three, we have interpreted the earth, sea and rivers in a literally because they can be understood that way. Is it a reasonable rule to understand Bible statements literally unless they cannot be understood that way?

- Just as the second trumpet revealed a kingdom that we believe is the Vandals, so this **third** trumpet reveals a great **star** who could be a person of great notoriety. Hinds believes that is Attila the Hun.

- **Johnson:**

With the **third** trumpet the vision again changes. Now a great, burning, blazing meteor falls upon a third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of the waters. A "third part of the earth," a "third part of the sea," and now "**a third part of the rivers**" are subjected to judgments.

- **Hinds:**

If the two preceding trumpets have been correctly interpreted, then the third trumpet should find its fulfillment in the attacks made against Rome by Attila, whose career extended from A.D. 433 to A.D. 453.

Gibbon says that "in the reign of Attila, the Huns again became the terror of the world," and that Attila "alternately insulted and invaded the East and the West, and urged the rapid downfall of the Roman Empire."

The facts here gleaned from Gibbon are found in the *Decline and Fall of the Empire*, chapters 34 and 35. Attila was marvelously successful in gaining ascendancy over neighboring peoples and is said to have been able to bring into the field an army of some five to seven hundred thousand soldiers. As a military leader he was a star of the first magnitude.

Gibbon further says that Attila considered himself the recipient of "celestial favor" and "asserted his divine and indefensible claim to the dominion of the earth." Quite an appropriate view to harmonize with a burning star falling "from heaven." The last few years his operations were upon the river-frontiers leading to Italy; conflagrations and enormous bloodshed followed in his path. In the spring of 452 he is said to have set forth to conquer Italy.

THE FOURTH TRUMPET SOUNDED

(12) The fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way.

Discussion: The sun, moon and stars cannot be taken literally here so we have used a common explanation in Scripture to understand them. Genesis 37:9-10.

- **Hinds:**

John here sees **one-third** of the **sun, moon, and stars** smitten. Naturally this would represent some dire calamities that would affect the people in a certain part of the Roman Empire. Some understand the heavenly bodies to represent rulers, princes, and others in authority as being hurled from their positions.

If the three preceding interpretations are correct, the fourth trumpet vision found fulfillment in some devastating power that came against the Roman

Empire, the same western division affected by the preceding powers. According to historians the Western Empire ended in A.D. 476.

In the last half of the century the most of the Western Empire was controlled by barbarians and the emperors at Rome were only such in name. The rule was exercised by a patrician, the officer of highest military rank. In 476 the soldiers under Odoacer mutinied and ousted Augustulus, the young emperor, from the throne, and offered submission to Zeno, emperor at Constantinople. The former glory of both emperor and senate was gone, and Odoacer by authority of the Eastern emperor ruled Italy as patrician for fourteen years. (*Decline and Fall*, Vol. 3, p. 512.)

So ended the Western Empire; the rulers lost their power, yet enough was left to show the light had not been completely extinguished; or, if so, it would be restored by another and different kind of ruler in the city of Rome. It should never be forgotten that in all the calamities that befell pagan Rome there was an indirect effect upon the church. The overthrow of pagan rulers naturally gave religious teachers more influence, with the consequent result that the Bible was gradually taken from the people, and spiritual darkness began to spread. This in time led to the inauguration of a new spiritual ruler in the imperial city who, with the title of Pope, claims to be the universal father of the church.

(13) Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!"

- **Johnson:**

The **flight** of this messenger through the midst of **heaven** shows that an epoch has been passed with the four trumpet visions, and that another epoch is about to begin. The voice proclaims, **Woe, woe, woe**. There are three woes; there are three woe **angels**. **Upon the earth** as known to John. The geographical scene of those events which are historical must be

looked for somewhere within the bounds of the great Roman world.

Our space is limited in this folder, but online books describing this section of Revelation are available for no cost at:
<http://goo.gl/LomsOV>

Questions:

1. How is time reckoned in heaven? (Verse 1)
2. What instruments did the seven angels play? (2)
3. Incense is connected with which Christian activity? (3)
4. Can God use world events to control the future? (5)
5. When a third of the earth was burned up was everyone involved? (7)
6. Was the Roman Empire destroyed during the 1st trumpet? (7)
7. Was the Roman Empire destroyed during the 2nd trumpet? (8)
8. Was the Roman Empire destroyed during the 3rd trumpet? (10)
9. Was the Roman Empire destroyed by the 4th trumpet (12)
10. Was there life after the fall of Rome?