

# Revelation 8:13. Forewarnings Of Coming Woe



This is the continuation of [The Last Prophecy: An Abridgment of Elliott's Horae Apocalypticae.](#)

**A.D. 565-612.**

And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound! (Rev 8:13)

THIS VISION, coming between those of the fourth trumpet and the fifth, corresponds with that period of time in history between the extinction of the old government at Rome and the rise of Mohammed – from the Emperor Justinian's death, when the Lombards settled in Italy, to the beginning of the seventh century, the usually admitted period of transition from ancient to modern history.

From the angel flying through mid-heaven we may infer that his message of warning was one that might be recognized by all who observed the signs of the times, and in the Church of Christendom doubtless there were those who at this crisis were not insensible to the forebodings of evil. From the time of St. Paul through the different centuries following, we find in the writings of the Greek and Latin fathers that the expectation of the Church was, that with the fall of the Roman Empire the coming of Antichrist in power might be looked for. Jerome, about the time when Alaric took Rome, wrote again and again, "The Roman world rushes to destruction and we bend not our neck in humiliation, the hindrance in Antichrist's way is removing and we heed it not." Many were the writers, in different centuries who had sent forth from their retirement, some from their monasteries, their note of warning. Well might they regard that as being Rome's downfall, when the name of Roman emperor had been extinguished in the west by Odoacer, and then (in A.D. 550) that of consul and of senate by Justinian's generals. From Rome prostrate the solemn voice seemed to rise and echo through the world, "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, by reason of the judgments now pending."

There was in the chronology of this particular time also that which favored the idea that the consummation of all things approached, it having been universally believed, both amongst the Jews and the Christian fathers, that the present world was designed to last but 6000 years, at the end of which the expected Millennium was to commence. But according to the Septuagint, the

reckoning of which was generally received by the Romans, these 6000 years were at this period nearly completed.

There was also something in the outward aspect of affairs that omened ill. All the empire seemed affected. The newly founded Gothic kingdoms were still in commotion in the West. Another barbarous horde, the Lombards, had seized on many parts of Italy. The Avar Tartars had settled themselves in Hungary. War from Persia likewise threatened the Eastern third. Nor were they the terrors of man's wrath only that tended to alarm. Pestilence during fifty-two years infected the greater part of the empire, by which many cities were depopulated and made desert. At Constantinople 5000, and at length 10,000, died daily. At Rome, in a solemn procession for imploring the mercy of Heaven, no less than eighty persons in a single hour dropped dead from the infection of the pestilence.

The greatest man of that age, the then Pope of Rome, Gregory the Great, gave out a warning cry of what he too thought to be portended by the state of the times. His forebodings are on record. "We know from the Word of Almighty God that the end of the world is at hand, and the reign of the saints which shall have no end. In the approach of which consummation, all nature must be expected to be disordered, seasons deranged, wars raging, and famines, earthquakes, and pestilences. If not in our days," he concludes, "we must expect it in those following." Was it not like the angel flying in mid-heaven, and crying, "Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth, by reason of the judgments about to come"?

Nor was it only concerning the coming of the Lord as being near that Gregory raised his cry: he spoke of Antichrist's being at hand also. In consequence of the Patriarch of Constantinople having taken the title of "Universal Bishop," Gregory wrote, at intervals from A.D. 580 to nearly the end of the century, letters to emperors, bishops, etc., declaring before Christendom that whosoever claimed this title was the likeness, the precursor of, and the preparer for Antichrist; that he bore the same characteristic of boundless pride and self-exaltation; that the tendency of his assumption, if consented to, was to withdraw all members of the Church from its only true head, Jesus Christ, and to connect them with himself. His letters state or imply that he considers such title as the name of blasphemy connected with the ten-horned beast of the Apocalypse; the self-exaltation above his fellow-men, as that predicted by St. Paul of the man of sin; (2 Thess. 2:4) and the consenting to it, as that departure from the faith and the apostasy named by the same apostle. (1 Tim. 4:1) What would this wise observer have said had he but foreseen that, before fifteen years after, this title should be adopted by the Bishop of Rome, his successor, and extended even to that of universal episcopal supremacy over the whole professing Church on earth – an assumption never to be abandoned? Surely the fact was well calculated to excite the misgivings of thinking men, and to awaken the inquiry, whether, in truth, the very Antichrist of prophecy was not even then in existence.

We have, in a former lecture, observed the gradual progress in the Church visible of these anti-christian tendencies; and we have seen the grievous judgments commissioned by God against the portion of the Roman world in which these errors had become more flagrant. What then, we may ask, had been the

moral effect of these warnings and judgments which the Gothic wars had so distinctly pronounced? Had they led to the rooting out the growing evils? Alas! no. Those evils had gone on advancing; old superstitions continued, and new were added. The Baptismal sacrament was still regarded as having the mysterious efficacy of a charm for man's salvation; and the Lord's Supper was held up in nearly the same light. The saints and their merits were still invoked, and in the best authorized liturgies set forth as the most powerful mediators and the best pleaders with God, and their relics and pictures more than ever venerated. One Christian bishop, Serenus of Marseilles, having cast out the saints' images from his churches, on account of the idolatrous worship paid to them by the people, Gregory the Great took part with the people, and had them retained. This same Pope Gregory just then gave his authority to the doctrine of purgatory. This arose from the custom of thanksgivings for the dead. Originally it alone applied to martyrs; but in time more doubtful characters were solemnly remembered; and church prayers were offered for the remission of punishment, and for the purification of those souls which had departed in sin. Then came with this error, and as a part of it, curious questions relative to the purifying of the soul by fire; and now Pope Gregory, at the close of the sixth century, fixed authoritatively the awful and false doctrine of a purgatorial fire immediately after death. This was done on the presumed evidence of recent visions and revelations. The Bishop of Capua asserted that he had himself seen the soul of Paschasius the deacon boiling in the hot baths of St. Angelo!

We noticed the power put into the hands of the priesthood by the sacramental error, and that of saint and relic worship. About the middle of the fifth century private and particular confession to priests instead of public general confession was substituted; after this came indulgence for sins, granted by the priest, as well as remission from their guilt, and from penance. Now the doctrine of purgatory increased the priestly power – a power fearful to contemplate. They (the priests) were forbidden to marry, and thus detached from the ties of the world. Ecclesiastical power was their sole ambition; and this, when their morals, like their knowledge, were debased and low. The use made of this priestly power was to come between Christ and the Church, and to shut Christ more and more out of the ecclesiastical system. When, after all this exaltation of the priesthood, one among them not only assumed the title of "Universal Bishop of the whole Church," but a still higher title ascribed to him by the Italian bishops and priesthood in council, viz., "Christ's Vicar," or "God's Vicar on earth," must it not again have struck the thinking mind of every real Christian that herein was the very likeness of that "man of sin" referred to in God's Word?

Except in the religious murders, there was not a single sin in the catalogue mentioned in the ninth chapter of Revelation, verses 20, 21, as the cause of these woes, which was not to be found at this time in the Roman Church. There was the worship of demons, or saints canonized, and of images of gold, silver, brass, stone and wood, which neither could see, nor hear, nor walk; there were the sorceries, or lying miracles: and there was licentiousness, and priestly religious-thefts. Must not all these have seemed to an enlightened Christian to cry to heaven for vengeance against apostate

Christendom? Might he not well have anticipated the angels cry, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth," by reason of the other judgments yet to come upon it? By the world, however, the interval of warning was neglected, and soon passed away; and the trumpet sounding again gave sign to the Apostle that judgment was once more aroused, and the threatened woes about to begin. Previously to our entering upon the consideration of the coming vision, let us endeavor to mark the limits of its infliction.

We find no express intimation as to the particular division of the Roman earth that was now to be visited. But it may be inferred that the eastern or Asiatic third, as the one nearest to the Euphrates, was to be the scene of suffering under the fifth as well as under the following trumpet. To this portion, comprehending Asia-Minor, Syria, and Egypt, the former troubles reached not. Its religion had been sinking deeper and deeper into superstition. In its controversies, the characteristic of the Greek ecclesiastical history of the times, we look in vain for the Christian spirit. Now its hour was come. But what the scourge, and whence? The answer is conveyed in Scripture by means of locally figurative and characteristic symbols, which will require an attentive consideration before we enter on the explanation of the fifth trumpet.

It must strike an observant reader how often in Scripture symbols are taken from either the plants, the animals, or the people of the country prophesied of, so as to identify it in respect of its geography, natural history, or national habits. Thus, is Judah symbolized? We find the olive, the fig tree, and the vine-trees peculiar to that country. "The Lord called thy name a green olive." (Jer. 11:16) "He hath barked my fig-tree." (Joel 1:7) "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt." (Ps. 80:80) If Egypt be characterized, Isaiah describes Rabshakeh as saying, "Thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt;" (Is. 36:6) and again Ezekiel complains, "They have been a staff of reed to Israel," (Ezek. 29:6) the reed being characteristic of the banks of the Nile. So David indicates his own land. "The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon." (Ps. 92:12)

With the same local appropriateness animals are used as symbols. Judah is again and again depicted as a lion; – "Judah is couched as a lion." (Gen. 49:9) "Ephraim also is like a silly dove," (Hosea 7:11) the dove being constantly used in the Jewish sacrifices. Judah in sorrow is "like a pelican in the wilderness." All animals well known in these countries.

The personal appearance, the dress and armor in general use, is sometimes taken to indicate the nation intended. Take that beautiful personification of Judah as a female child brought up to womanhood, affianced to God, and then faithless. (Ezek. 16.) Here the long hair, the anointing with oil, the brodered dress, the jewels and other ornaments, are all appurtenances of the Jewish female of olden times.

Many other examples will readily occur to each Bible reader, but these will suffice to enable us intelligently to enter upon the coming subject.

We may take this opportunity of noticing an objection which has been taken to

the admixture of literal and figurative language, so apparent in the foregoing explanation of the first four trumpet visions, as also in those we have yet to consider. But are there not in truth numerous instances of the like throughout the Scriptures? Take the prophetic description of our Lord's sufferings: "They pierced My hands and My feet," in immediate connection with "strong bulls of Bashan have beset Me round:" (Ps. 22:12, 16) – this figurative, that literal. See also Ezek. 27:2 5; and Ps. 80:8.

Continued in [Revelation 9:1-11. The Fifth Trumpet](#)

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