

Revelation 8:6-12. The First Four Trumpets



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

Irruption Of The Goths, Etc., A.D. 395-565

[6] And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound. [7] ¶ The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.

[8] And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood;

[9] And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.

[10] And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters;

[11] And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.

[12] And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise. (Rev 8:6-12)

THE TRUMPET was of God's own appointment to Israel, to be used in the tabernacle or temple by the priests that "stood before God." (Num. 10:1-10) Its purpose was twofold. 1st, As regarded the Israelites, its use was to proclaim the advance of time – the Sabbaths and other festivals, to summon the congregations for prayer and praise, and to direct the movements of the camp in their pilgrimage. 2nd, As regarded their enemies, to proclaim war, as from God himself, in token that the Lord was about to fight for Israel.

Similar to these would seem to be the objects indicated by these symbolic trumpet-soundings in the Revelation. As one after another uttered its solemn and far-echoing clang, his own Israel, the true Church, might look upon the sign as one would note the strikings of the dial, to mark each epoch of progress toward the consummation. So, also, to the opponents of the truth, each successive blast was a denunciation of war and troubles about to come upon them. An interesting analogy might still further be observed between the mode of these Apocalyptic soundings and the trumpetblasts at the fall of

Jericho, commemorated up to the Apostles' time in the annual feast of tabernacles, when a palm-bearing procession, with trumpets blowing and chanting hosannas, were wont to visit the temple. Thus might the saints of God, even amid those forebodings of woe to the earth, direct their hearts in bright anticipation to their final victory over every enemy, when the glorious antitypical feast shall be celebrated in the kingdom of Christ.

The first four trumpet-visions, like those of the first four seals, are connected together by certain features of resemblance. They depict a series of tempests about to affect in succession the third part of the Roman earth, of the sea, of the rivers, and of the heavenly luminaries; each having sufficiently distinctive characteristics to fix the application of the symbol to the precise epoch of historical events.

For the explanation of the peculiar tripartite division of the Roman world here intended we are necessarily confined to that which will suit its application, not to one, but to all these four visions, in which the same, or corresponding third part is evidently designated.

And thus we are directed to that trisection of the empire which occurred just before the establishment of Christianity, when the entire provinces were apportioned between the three emperors, Constantine, Licinius, and Maximin. To Constantine there attached Gaul, Spain, Britain, Italy, and Africa; to Licinius, the vast Illyrian preefecture, which embraced the rest of Roman Europe; to Maximin, the Asiatic provinces and Egypt. This division continued geographically and historically recognized even after the well-known bipartition of the empire into Eastern and Western, the intermediate third province of Illyricum being subject to frequent alterations, sometimes belonging to the Eastern and again to the Western Empire, until, after the death of Theodosius, it became so detached, by Gothic occupation, from the rule of both Eastern and Western Empire as to require that it be henceforth treated of in distinct and separate history.

It will tend much to our comparison of the prophecy with the history if we endeavor to place ourselves in the situation of the Evangelist, and trace, as we may believe he was enabled to do, these successive visions as locally affecting each its assigned portion of the Roman world. The living, though miniature, landscape was stretched before him, with its triple divisions and boundaries, each portion including its third of the Mediterranean or Roman Sea, as well as its third of the land, and each one also its own characteristic stream of the three great frontier rivers, the Rhine, Danube, and Euphrates. It is the Western third to which the first four trumpet-visions alike refer.

Observe the vision. The Angel-priest has come forth from offering the incense of the faithful. He goes again to the great altar and refills his censer with the burning embers, not now to bless, but to destroy. He casts them upon the professing but apostate world below, devoting the land to a curse. Heaven and earth, animate and inanimate creation, feel the shock. From the cloud of glory issue thunderings and lightnings. The four angels have loosed their hold of the winds, and the tempests burst forth. The Roman earth quakes through its vast extent, and everywhere, from suffering or fear, men's faces

gather blackness. And now the angel sounds

The FIRST TRUMPET. Lo, coming from the bitter north, from the countries beyond the Danube, a tremendous tempest, charged with lightning and hail, appears driving westward. Its course is over the continental provinces of the Western Roman Empire. It touches the Rhaetian hill country, and sweeps over the Italian frontier. Other terrific thunder-clouds from the north-west intermingle with it; and once and again passing the Alps and the Apennines, spread in devastating fury over Italy. Dividing, a part bursts over the imperial city, and passes to the southernmost coast of Bruttium. Another part, driven backward, takes a westerly course over the Rhine into Gaul, causing devastation far and wide; then, crossing the Pyrenees, pours its fury on the Spanish provinces, nor spends itself till it has reached the far shores of the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Throughout the whole the lightning-fire runs along the ground, as of old-in the plagues of Egypt, burning up country and town, trees and pasture. Moreover, "blood mingles with the hail;" life is destroyed. The third part of the land is desolated. A short pause ensues; then presently

The SECOND TRUMPET sounds; another trumpet blast of judgment. Now is the visitation of the western third of the Mediterranean Sea, including its islands and the marine province beyond. A giant mountain-rock, blazing like Etna with volcanic fires, is upheaved from the southernmost point of Spain and cast into the sea. The waters are agitated by it. The burning ashes are scattered, for hundreds of miles round, on sea and mainland, coasts and islands; first on the shores of Africa, then opposite from Gibraltar Straits along to the head of the Adriatic. Ships are on fire in harb0ur and at sea, and blood, as before, marks the loss of life. Over the whole maritime scene of its ravages all that is habitable is destroyed. "The third part of the sea becomes blood," etc.

THIRD TRUMPET. The volcano is not yet fully spent when another angel sounds. Just where the Theiss, pouring itself into the Danube, marks the center of the Illyrian boundary, a portentous meteor, like a blazing torch trailing its red line of light 'behind it in the northern skies, descends, and taints the rivers in its downward course. Tracking the line of the Upper Danube and the Rhine, it poisons the waters even to the Belgic lowlands. Thence it shoots westwards; but, repelled by some counter-force, it turns south, and falls on the fountains of the European waters, even on the Alpine glaciers. Rivers and streams are "made bitter," and the dying and dead lie along their banks. "The name of that star is Wormwood," etc. So having done its part, it shoots back toward the Danube, there blazes for a moment, and is extinct.

FOURTH TRUMPET. Hitherto, while land, sea, rivers, and fountains had been in vision desolated, yet had the sun continued to shine on the Western Empire. Now this too is affected. One third of its orb is eclipsed, and the darkness of night supervenes; then the moon and the stars of the symbolic firmament, all that are in that third of the Roman sky, are darkened also.

Such, we may imagine, was the manner in which these successive visions passed before the Evangelist. Nor need we doubt the natural interpretation he would attach to them. Surely he would consider them as prefiguring the ravages of

some terrible invaders from Northern Germany, which should desolate the Western Empire successively in its continental and maritime provinces, followed speedily by a fresh scourge on the Illyrian prefecture, thence ravaging the countries of the Rhine and of its Alpine source, and, finally, symbolizing the extinction of the imperial dynasty of the West, and even of its inferior governments. In such manner, we believe, must St. John have interpreted these prophetic pictures. It remains for us to see the historical fulfillment of them.

And here, while expositors have with somewhat general consent designated the great Gothic destroyers of the empire, Alaric and Rhadayaesus, as well as Genseric, Attila, and Odoacer, as having in a remarkable degree answered to the prefigurations in these trumpet-visions, it is worth while tracing farther back the agreement with the prophecy of the events preceding their irruptions.

We have already remarked on the "silence in heaven," the stillness which supervened on the death of Theodosius, A.D. 395. It was but of short duration. "Before the winter had ended," says Gibbon, "the Gothic nation was in arms." In 396 the fearful tempest bursts upon Thessaly and the Grecian provinces. The march of ALARIC and his hosts was traced in blood. The land seemed to tremble. Nay, strange convulsions of nature gave literal portents of evil to come, uniting their voices with the voices of men² in sounding a solemn alarm.

Then was a pause, while "the angels prepared to sound." Then was Alaric preparing himself for his task. Through the infatuation of the Emperor Arcadius he had been made master-general of Eastern Illyricum, and thus was furnished by the Romans themselves with arms for their own destruction. There, seated in authority, between the two empires, he for four years meditated, like an eagle of prey, on which half of the devoted carcass he should fall, until his preparation was complete in his formal exaltation as king of the Visigoths.

This era of the first trumpet extended from about A.D. 400 to A.D. 410, or somewhat longer. Alaric was arrested suddenly by death while meditating further conquests, reserved however for another hand and another trumpet.

To the Vandal, GENSERIC, it appertained to follow up the scourge by smiting the maritime provinces of Africa and the islands which Alaric had left untouched. Scarcely had Italy begun to recover in part from its ravages, and while Gaul and Spain continued to be rent by the quarrels of the conquerors, Africa was made to feel that its time was come. In the year 429 the Second Trumpet had sounded. Genseric had transported his force across the African sea, and, like the noted volcano of that very age, entered on his rapid work of destruction. Hippo fell before him and was burnt; then Carthage. Resistance was at an end. The fire did indeed "mingle with blood," till all that province was vandalised. Then did Genseric cast his eyes on the sea. He created a naval power and claimed the empire of the Mediterranean. Sicily and Sardinia, all that was in the third part of the sea, sweeping from Gibraltar to the Adriatic, with their adjoining coasts, were mercilessly ravaged. When asked by his pilot what course to steer, "Leave the determination to the

winds," was his reply; "they will transport us to the guilty coast whose inhabitants have provoked the divine justice." Twice, on memorable occasions, the Roman navies were gathered to oppose the Vandal's progress, but in vain. Fire-ships were driven among them, and the prediction was fulfilled, "the third part of the ships was destroyed."

This second-trumpet era reached till A.D. 477, when this sea-tyrant died. Ere that period, however, another plague had been commissioned against the devoted empire in ATTILA THE HUN, – "the scourge of God." Alone of conquerors, ancient or modern, he united under his sway the two mighty kingdoms of Germany and Scythia. The superstition of the times regarded him as more than mortal, and their chroniclers tell how a blazing meteor in the heavens, with other fiery northern lights, boded ruin and war when Attila entered upon his conquests. Having made himself lord of the Lower Danube about A.D. 450, he crossed the Rhine and traced this great frontier river of the west down to Belgium, massacring its inhabitants and wasting its valleys; until, having burnt its principal cities, and left behind him a scene of desolation and woe, he was arrested in his course and repulsed in the tremendous battle of Chalons. Thence turning upon a new scene of predicted ravage, he fell upon "the European fountains of waters" – the Alpine heights and Alpine valleys. "From the Alps to the Apennines all was flight, depopulation, slaughter, slavery, and despair."³ Men fled into the sea for refuge, and then it was that Venice was built out of the deep – a standing memorial of Attila the Hun. And now that all Italy lay exposed before him, we might well ask what hindered that he should not have advanced in his career of slaughter? But his prescribed work was ended. The third of the rivers and fountains of waters had been made bitter by his means. An embassy from the Emperor Valentinian and the Roman bishop Leo sufficed to deprecate his wrath. He suddenly withdrew from Italy, recrossed the Danube, and the very next year, A.D. 453, was cut off by apoplexy. The meteor was extinct. The power of the Huns was broken; the woe of the Third Trumpet had passed away.

Little now pertained to Rome's empire but an empty title. Its glory had long departed; its provinces had been rent away; its power by sea annihilated; its country had become desert. The time was now come when Rome's imperial title was itself to come to an end. ODOACER, chief of the Heruli, a barbarian host left by Attila on the frontiers of Italy, gave command that the name and office of Roman Emperor of the West should be abolished. The command was obeyed. Romulus Augustulus abdicated. The insignia of authority were sent by the senate to Constantinople, with a profession that one emperor was sufficient for the whole of the empire. Thus the western third of the imperial sun was darkened – to shine no more. Still a shadow of authority remained at Rome. The senate assembled and consuls were appointed yearly, Odoacer himself being named governor. Thus the inferior lights, the moon and stars, for a while appeared not wholly extinguished. Before fifty years more had elapsed, these also were to pass away. Theodoric, the Ostrogoth, destroying the kingdom of the Heruli, ruled in his own name till A.D. 526; then, on the reconquest of Italy by Belisarius, the Roman senate was dissolved and the consulship abrogated. In the prophetic words of Jerome about a century before, "The world's glorious sun has been extinguished," or, as our modern poet has, in like Apocalyptic imagery, expressed it –

“She saw her glories star by star expire;”

till not one star remained to glimmer on the vacant and dark night.

So the Fourth Trumpet sound died away.

Meanwhile, amidst all these troubles, the elect and sealed of God were preserved. Searching and trying indeed must those times have been to them, and not from the secular afflictions alone of the world around them, but yet more, be sure, from the advancing apostasy in the professing Church. By many even of the most eminent of the teachers and rulers of the Church superstitious practices were encouraged, and their influence and talents zealously and most lamentably exercised for the upholding of grievous errors. Sulpicius, Paulinus, Jerome, Martin of Tours, contributed each his aid in so helping forward the apostasy at the end of the fourth century, and others still succeeded in the fifth. But the influence also of Augustine continued. He had himself died in peace the very year Hippo was burnt, and then been numbered with the Church above. But his doctrine, his holy doctrine, died not.

Continued in [Revelation 8:13. Forewarnings Of Coming Woe](#)

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