



Revelation

chapters **8** & **9**

Chapters Eight & Nine

The opening of the first six seals in chapter 6 described the conditions of the great tribulation that Christians were experiencing. In chapter seven, we have seen the sealing of saints, signifying their protection from the wrath which is about to come. Now, with the opening of the seventh seal, seven angels are revealed with seven trumpets. The sounding of their trumpets will describe the events of Rome's conquest of Israel – beginning with the cities outside of Jerusalem, and ending with the siege of Jerusalem itself. The events of each trumpet are recorded in chapters 8-11. The trumpets of first four angels is recorded in chapters 8 and 9. When the seventh trumpet sounds the mystery of God will be finished and Jesus and the saints will be avenged.

Outline of Chapters 8 & 9

- I. **Seventh Seal is Opened:** Seven angels with seven trumpets, 8:1-13
 - A. **Prayers mixed with incense**— 8:1-5
 - B. **First Four Trumpets**
 - 1) **First Trumpet**— 1/3 of the earth burns
 - 2) **Second Seal**— 1/3 of the sea dies
 - 3) **Third Seal**— 1/3 of the water turn bitter
 - 4) **Fourth Seal**— 1/3 of the light goes dark
 - C. **Eagle appears announcing three woes**— 8:13
- II. **Trumpets Five & Six:** 9:1-21
 - A. **The Fifth Trumpet** – the bottomless pit, 9:1-12
 - B. **The Sixth Trumpet** – the army from the east, 9:13-21

The Seventh Seal: Silence in Heaven, 8:1-6

The opening of the seventh seal introduces a time of silence before God's final vengeance is released. This silence lasts for about a half an hour which is said to be about the same time the High Priest used when entering the Most Holy Place of the temple. Three significant things take place at this time:

First, seven angels are given seven trumpets (8:2). Each will sound their trumpet in order, and we will see a picture of events which will take place on the earth as the Roman general Vespasian marches against Israel (AD 67-69).

Second, a second angel is given much incense which he adds to the prayers of the saints on the golden altar before God's throne (8:3-4). The smoke rises up before God, symbolizing that God

has heard the prayers of the martyred saints who have asked “how long” before they will be avenged (6:9-10). The wait is now over. God is ready to act.

Third, the angel fills his censor with fire from the altar and throws it to the earth (8:5). Thunder, lightning, and earthquakes follow – all showing that the days of vengeance have finally come as the angels prepare themselves to sound their trumpets.

Chapters 8 and 9 record the events associated with the first four trumpets. Each will provide a picture (without details) of God’s vengeance upon apostate Israel.

The First Four Trumpets: a third of Israel falls, 8:7-13

The First Trumpet: 8:7; *A third of the earth is burned*

Symbolic of the plagues sent against Egypt, and the fire and brimstone cast upon Sodom, the sounding of the first trumpets describes hail, fire and blood being thrown upon the earth.

Josephus describes the bloodshed which resulted when Vespasian marched against Palestine:

“By this means he provoked the Romans to treat the country according to the law of war; nor did the Romans, out of the anger they bore at this attempt, leave off, either by night or by day, **burning** the places in the plain, and stealing away the cattle that were in the country, and **killing** whatsoever appeared capable of fighting perpetually, and leading the weaker people as slaves into captivity; so that Galilee was all over filled with fire and blood; nor was it exempted from any kind of misery or calamity, for the only refuge they had was this, that when they were pursued, they could retire to the cities which had walls built them by Josephus.”¹

The Second Trumpet: 8:8-9; *A third of life in the sea dies*

John sees a great burning mountain cast into the sea which kills a third of everything. The Christians were familiar with the Old Testament language which described a conquering nation as a *destroying mountain*.² Rome took its war to the seas which resulted in severe casualties for the Jews. For example, Joppa was located on the coast of the Sea of Galilee. When the Roman army arrived, the Jews retreated to the sea on boats. Rough waves and heavy winds resulted in their ships being destroyed on the rocks along the shore. Many were “dashed to pieces” against the rocks “insomuch that the sea was bloody a long way”³.

“One might then see the lake all bloody, and full of dead bodies, for not one of them escaped. And a terrible stink, and a very sad sight there was on the following days over the country; for as for the shores, they were full of shipwrecks, and of dead bodies all swelled”⁴

“Now as those people of Joppa were floating about in this sea, in the morning there fell a violent wind upon them; it is called by those that sail there “the black north wind,” and there dashed their ships one against another, and dashed some of them against the rocks, and carried many of them by force, while they strove against the opposite waves, into the main sea; for the shore was so rocky, and had so many of the enemy upon it, that they were afraid to come to land; nay, the waves rose so very high, that they drowned them; nor was there any place whither they could fly, nor any way to save themselves; while they were thrust out of the sea, by the violence of the wind, if they staid where they were, and out of

¹ The Wars of the Jews, by Flavius Josephus; Book 3, 1.59

² Used to describe Babylon, Jeremiah 51:25, 42

³ Josephus, The Wars of the Jews, 3.9.3

⁴ Josephus The Wars of the Jews 3.10.9

the city by the violence of the Romans. And much lamentation there was when the ships were dashed against one another, and a terrible noise when they were broken to pieces; and some of the multitude that were in them were covered with waves, and so perished, and a great many were embarrassed with shipwrecks. But some of them thought that to die by their own swords was lighter than by the sea, and so they killed themselves before they were drowned; although the greatest part of them were carried by the waves, and dashed to pieces against the abrupt parts of the rocks, insomuch that the sea was bloody a long way, and the maritime parts were full of dead bodies; for the Romans came upon those that were carried to the shore, and destroyed them; and the number of the bodies that were thus thrown out of the sea was four thousand and two hundred.”⁵

The Third Trumpet: 8:10-11; *A third of the water becomes bitter*

When Rome initially marched against Israel with its army of 60,000 the Jews countered with their own army of 60,000 led by their general Josephus Flavius. In the ensuing battles Josephus was captured and initially thought to have died. But later it was learned that he was alive and well, working with the Romans. His treason was bitter to Israel:

“...it was reported that Josephus was slain at the taking of the city, which piece of news filled Jerusalem full of sorrow. In every house also, and among all to whom any of the slain were allied, there was a lamentation for them; but the mourning for the commander was a public one.”

“But as the truth came out in time, ... it found that the death of Josephus was a fiction; and when they understood that he was alive, and was among the Romans, ...they were as vehemently angry at him now as they had showed their good-will before, when he appeared to have been dead. He was also abused by some as having been a coward, and by others as a deserter; and the city was full of indignation at him, and of reproaches cast upon him; their rage was also aggravated by their afflictions, and more inflamed by their ill success; and what usually becomes an occasion of caution to wise men, I mean affliction, became a spur to them to venture on further calamities, and the end of one misery became still the beginning of another; they therefore resolved to fall on the Romans the more vehemently, as resolving to be revenged on him in revenging themselves on the Romans.”⁶

The Fourth Trumpet: 8:12; *A third of the day is darkened*

As this fourth trumpet sounds a third of the sun, moon, and stars fail to give light. This resulted in a *third of the day* being dark. This language depicts the fall of a nation’s leaders as already seen in the Old Testament.⁷ In July of 69 A.D. Vespasian withdraws his armies so he could go back to Rome to solidify his reign as emperor. At this time a third of Israel has fallen to the Romans.

"...ruler after ruler, chieftain after chieftain of the Roman Empire and the Jewish nation was assassinated and ruined. Gaius, Claudius, Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, all died by murder or suicide; Herod the Great, Herod Antipas, Herod Agrippa, and most of the Herodian Princes, together with not a few of the leading High Priests of Jerusalem, perished in disgrace, or in exile, or by violent hands. All these were quenched suns and darkened stars."⁸

In spite of all this death, there will be no reprieve for John hears a cry from an eagle saying, “Woe, woe, woe, to those who dwell on the earth”. The final three trumpets are about to sound.

⁵ Jewish wars, full text, 3.9.3

⁶ Jewish wars, 3.9.5 & 6

⁷ Chilton: The imagery here was long used in the prophets to depict the fall of nations and national rulers (cf. Isa. 13:9-11, 19; 24:19-23; 34:4-5; Ezek. 32:7-8, 11-12; Joel 2:10, 28-32; Acts 2:16-20)

⁸ F. W. Farrar, The Early Days of Christianity (Chicago: Belford. Clarke and Co., Publishers, 1882). p. 519 (as quoted by Chilton)

The Fifth and Sixth Trumpets: two woes are coming, 9:1-21

The Fifth Trumpet: 9:1-11; *The bottomless pit is opened, releasing tormenting locust*

The first four trumpeting angels symbolize the first half of the Roman-Jewish war.⁹ When Vespasian withdraws to Rome, he sends his son Titus back to finish the war with the Jews. The sounding of the fifth and the sixth trumpets depict these events. The imagery in this chapter can be correctly understood only by having a background of their usage in the Old Testament.

- **The fallen star is Satan.** He has already been cast out of heaven where he used to accuse the brethren night and day.¹⁰ He has been cast down to war against the saints.
- **The bottomless pit is the abyss,** which is the abode of Satan and his demons.¹¹
The Jews rejected Jesus and the signs He performed by the Holy Spirit. In rejecting the testimony of the Spirit they became open to the influences of Satan. Jesus explained that this would happen: “Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it. 44 Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came’; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. 45 Then it goes, and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is **the way it will also be with this evil generation.**”
Matthew 12:41-45
- **The smoke brings forth a plague of locust.** They had the face of men, and the hair of women. They had tails of scorpions to hurt men for five months. These will torment everybody but those who are sealed. Locust were one of plagues of judgment brought upon Egypt. Here in this text, the imagery depicts the evil acts of the three warring factions of Jews who converged on Jerusalem when Galilee fell. Josephus writes about their atrocities:
“They confessed what was true, that they were the slaves, the scum, and the spurious and abortive offspring of our nation, while they overthrew the city themselves...”¹²
"With their insatiable hunger for loot, they ransacked the houses of the wealthy, murdered men and violated women for sport; they drank their spoils with blood, and from mere satiety they shamelessly gave themselves up to effeminate practices, plaiting their hair and putting on women's clothes, drenching themselves with perfumes and painting their eyelids to make themselves attractive. They copied not merely the dress, but also the passions of women, devising in their excess of licentiousness unlawful pleasures in which they wallowed as in a brothel. Thus they entirely polluted the city with their foul practices. Yet though they wore women's faces, their hands were murderous."¹³
- **Their leader is Abaddon,** which is Satan, who is the ‘prince of the power of the air’.¹⁴ He is known as both the one who brings *destruction* (Abaddon) and he is the *destroyer* (Apollyon).
- **The Jews will be judged** for their acts of demon worship, their idols, their murders, their sorceries, their immorality, and for their thefts (Revelation 9:20, 21).

⁹ Ogden

¹⁰ Revelation 12:9-12 (see also Luke 10:17-19 for the fall of Satan as he is being bound, per Matthew 12:24-29)

¹¹ Luke 8:31 ‘They [demons] were imploring Him not to command them to go away into the **abyss.**’

¹² Flavius Josephus, The Jewish War, v.x.5

¹³ Flavius Josephus, The Jewish War, iv.ix.10

¹⁴ Ephesians 2:1-3

It is at this time the first woe is past. Even though Israel has been devastated two more woes are coming (9:12). How bad can it become?

“....no stranger who had seen the old Judea and the glorious suburbs of her capital, and now beheld utter desolation, could refrain from tears or suppress a groan at so terrible a change. The war had blotted out every trace of beauty, and no one who had known it in the past and came upon it suddenly would have recognized the place, for though he was already there, he would still have been looking for the city.”¹⁵

The Sixth Trumpet: 9:13-21; *The army from the Euphrates is released*

The voice coming from the golden altar reveals that prayer to God have been heard and now are being answered.¹⁶ This voice releases a huge army which will bring vengeance upon Jerusalem. When Titus converged on Jerusalem he brought with him a large army of 80,000, many from the area of the Euphrates (which served as a northern boundary between Israel and her enemies).

Be sure that this is **God’s army**, even though they serve Satan. Do not make the mistake of making its number literal in a Revelation of figurative numbers. This army numbers myriads of myriads, reminiscent of Psalm 68:17, “The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them as at Sinai, in holiness.” God will use them to accomplish His purpose and then judge them for their own wickedness.

- **Fire and brimstone came from their mouths.** This reminds us of the judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah. Jesus warned the Jews that this would be their fate for rejecting Him:
“And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in **Sodom** which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. 24 Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the **day of judgment**, than **for you.**” Matthew 11:23-24
“....but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained **fire and brimstone** from heaven and destroyed them all. 30 It will be just the same **on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.** 31 On that day, the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house must not go down to take them out; and likewise the one who is in the field must not turn back.” Luke 17:29-31
- **A third of mankind is killed.** The death toll among the Jews continues to rise. This should have been viewed by those remaining as a sign that God was judging Israel.
- **Yet, they did not repent.** God’s preliminary judgments were designed to give the Jews an opportunity to repent. Even though Nineveh was condemned to destruction, God relented when He saw their genuine repentance. Josephus records that several attempts were made by the Romans to negotiate a surrender with the Jews who were barricaded within the walls of Jerusalem. Each time they refused, even murdering those among themselves who wished to negotiate a surrender.

One more woe is past. Next, a short interlude, and then the seventh trumpet will sound.

¹⁵ Josephus, The Jewish War, vi.i.1

¹⁶ The sins of the nation were atoned for by offering a sacrifice on the brazen altar, then taking the blood and smearing it on the horns of the golden altar of incense (Lev. 4:13-21). In this way the altar was purified, so that the incense could be offered with the assurance that God would hear their prayers. Chilton, pg. 249