

## Exploring Revelation 15B:

### The First Four Trumpets Of Revelation

An Exposition of Revelation 8:2-13.

The seven trumpets of Revelation are introduced by a scene in the first apartment of the heavenly sanctuary. Why are they introduced in this manner? Let us examine the scriptural passage. Revelation 8:1 properly belongs to the vision of chapters 4-7 and is therefore a part of the 7 seals. In the original there is no distinction between chapters and verses. Revelation 8 should commence with Revelation 8:2.

**“Another angel came and stood at the altar having a golden censer; and there was given to him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel’s hand. And the angel took the censer and filled it with fire of the altar and cast it into [upon] the earth: and there were voices, and thundering, and lightning, and an earthquake. And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.”**  
**Revelation 8:3-6.**

It seems quite clear that the seven trumpets are sent by God in response to the prayers of his people - the saints. Much incense is offered, because of the many prayers of the saints. What was it that led to the special prayers of the saints? Without doubt it was the overwhelming apostasy that had come into the church, particularly the church situated within the Roman Empire. This apostasy was supported by the authority of Rome, and so in response to the prayers of the saints God visits Western Rome with the first four trumpet judgments, in an endeavor to bring his people back to truth, back to loyalty to Christ. The fifth and sixth trumpets we will show, fell on Eastern Rome, the seventh trumpet falls on the whole world when it becomes Roman again, Rome revived when **“all the world wonders after the beast”**.  
**(Revelation 13:3)**

**THE FIRST TRUMPET: “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.”** Revelation 8:7

The language suggests a violent hailstorm. What does a hailstorm represent in prophecy? The Old Testament, on which Revelation is based gives the clue. In describing the invasion of the Assyrians into the land of Israel, the prophet declares, **“Behold, the Lord hath a mighty and a strong one, which, as a tempest of hail and destroying storm, as a flood of mighty, waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand.”** Isaiah 28:2

The prophet in describing the Assyrian invasion likens it to a mighty hailstorm. Again, in describing the invasion of Gog and Magog, the prophet Ezekiel says, **“Thou shall ascend and come like a storm, thou shall be like a cloud to cover the land. Thou and all thy bands and many people with thee.”** Ezekiel 38:9

We can safely conclude that a storm such as described in the first trumpet, denotes a military invasion. The description in the symbol indicates that it is an invasion from the North. Hailstorms that fell upon Roman territory always came from the North, so this suggests that this invasion would be from the Northerly regions. The symbolism also suggests the destruction of the countryside for “the third part of

trees was burnt up and all green grass". This indicates that forests, pastures and crops would be destroyed by the invasion. Thirdly it has "hail and fire mingled with blood" denoting carnage or the slaughter both of beast and people.

The prediction says "a third." "One third of the trees, and all green grass." The "third", that is mentioned throughout the trumpets applies to a third part of the Roman Empire. From the time of Constantine, there were three divisions of the Empire, the East, the West and the central section called Illyricum which comprised the Balkan Peninsular, except Thrace, right up to what we would now call Southern Austria.

Is there any evidence in history of a military invasion of one of the divisions of the Roman Empire that meets the specifications of this first trumpet? Yes there is. The man who fulfilled it, was Alaric the leader of the Visigoths, a branch of the Gothic peoples from which most Europeans are descended. They came from the Northeast of Europe, around the Baltic, where they were pressed by other peoples migrating from the East. The Goths began to move towards the warmer climate of the Roman Empire. Thousands had settled in Illyricum (the third part of the Empire which now involves Yugoslavia) where they were employed as mercenaries by the Romans to help defend the frontiers.

Alaric led the Goths into Greece and ravaged the countryside. The emperor of East Rome in order to pacify Alaric, made him the military general of the whole of Illyricum. Alaric took advantage of this and spent the next four years in preparation for the invasion of Western Rome. This began about 395 AD and the records of historians show that Alaric and the Visigoths abundantly fulfilled the specifications of the first trumpet. Notice the description by Edward Gibbon (perhaps the greatest authority on the fall of the Roman Empire) in his famous history, "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire."

This man was not a Christian, he was a skeptic and he has been called, "The Unconscious Commentator of the Apocalypse", because when he penned the events that brought about the fall of Rome, he uses almost the identical language of the Revelator in his description of the trumpets of Revelation. In a remarkable manner he shows how these trumpets met their fulfillment. Of the invasion of Alaric and the Visigoths, he writes, Valens [the Roman Emperor] "was informed that the North was agitated by a furious tempest." Edward Gibbon. "Decline & Fall of Roman Empire" 7 Volume Edition. "The Worlds Classics" Volume 3, page 3.

"A furious tempest was excited among the nations of Germany." Gibbon. "Decline & Fall of Roman Empire" Volume 3, page 307.

"A formidable tempest of the barbarians of Germany seemed ready to burst over the provinces of Gaul." Ibid. Volume 3, page 141.

"The Gothic nation [395 A.D.] was in arms. Deserted their farms at the first sound of the trumpet. The barriers of the Danube were thrown open, the savage warriors of Scythia issued from their forests directed by the bold and artful genius of Alaric. The whole territory was blasted by his baleful presence; Flaming villages. The deep and bloody traces of the march of the Goths." Ibid. Volume 3, pages 283-286.

"A victorious leader, who united the daring spirit of a barbarian, with the art and discipline of a Roman general, was at the head of an hundred thousand fighting men; and Italy pronounced, with terror and respect the formidable name of Alaric." Ibid. Volume 3, page 370.

The prediction said that "the third part of trees and all green grass was burnt up". Gibbon relates how an old poet called Claudian of Verona bewailed the destruction of his trees, revealing how this prediction was fulfilled to the very letter. Gibbon says, "His trees, his old contemporary trees must blaze

in the conflagration of the whole country." Ibid. Volume 3, page 294.

Isn't that remarkable? This gives us a glimpse of the destruction of forest, crops and grass etc. Again, "The dark cloud which was collected along the coast of the Baltic burst in thunder upon the banks of the upper Danube." Ibid. Volume 3, page 310. This scene of peace and plenty was suddenly changed into a desert and the prospect of the smoking ruins could alone distinguish the solitude of nature from the desolation of man. The consuming flames of war spread from the banks of the Rhine over the greatest part of the seventeen provinces of Gaul, that rich and extensive country, as far as the ocean, the Alps and Pyrenees, was delivered to the Barbarians." Ibid. Volume 3, page 318.

This was the description of the Gothic invasion by the unconscious commentator of the Apocalypse. Three times Alaric invaded Italy. One commentator says, "Alaric's course was to Italy, as he told an Italian monk. He felt a secret and preternatural impulse which directed and even impelled his march to the gates of Rom. As his trumpet sounded and his march advanced, terrible omens and prognostications preceded him. 'The Christians' says Gibbon, "derived comfort from the powerful intercession of the saints and martyrs." [This reveals the apostasy of the Christians] Thrice, in fulfillment of his destiny, he descended from the Alps onto the Italian plains, marking his course at each step as the awe-struck historians of the times tell us, in country and in town with ravage, conflagration and blood, till the gates of Rome itself were opened to the conqueror and the Gothic fires blazed around the capitol." E. B. Elliott. "Horae Apocalypae" Volume 1, page 351-353.

In fulfilling the first trumpet, it is significant to notice that Alaric possessed a powerful conviction, that he was divinely led to destroy Rome. This was recognized by the people of the day. When Alaric was intercepted by an Italian monk with a plea to spare the city of Rome, Alaric assured him that "he did not feel disposed to commence the siege, but found himself compelled by some hidden and irresistible impulse to accomplish the enterprise". "Sozamen's History" Book 9. Chapter 6.

Gibbon's remarks reveal that Alaric's invasion and sack of Rome dealt a deadly blow to the Roman Empire. "The king of the Goths advanced with unabated vigor; and he pitched his camp under the walls of Rome." Gibbon. "Decline & Fall of Roman Empire" Volume 3, page 338.

"During a period of six hundred and nineteen years, the seat of empire had never been violated by the presence of a foreign enemy." Gibbon. "Decline & Fall of Roman Empire" Volume 3, page 340.

"At the hour of midnight the inhabitants [of Rome] were awakened by the tremendous sound of the Gothic trumpet. Eleven hundred and sixty-three years after the foundation of Rome, the Imperial city, which had subdued and civilized so considerable a part of mankind, was delivered to the licentious fury of the tribes of the Germany and Scythia." Gibbon. "Decline & Fall of Roman Empire" Volume 3, page 380.

"This awful catastrophe of Rome, filled the astonished empire with grief and terror." Gibbon. "Decline & Fall of Roman Empire" Volume 3, page 387.

**THE SECOND TRUMPET: "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; 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." Revelation 8:8.**

This symbolism suggests a power connected with the sea; an invasion by a sea power likened to a burning mountain. What does a mountain represent in prophecy? Scripture is clear that a mountain represents a kingdom. "I am against thee O destroying mountain, said the Lord, which destroys all the

**earth, I will make thee a burnt mountain.” Jeremiah 51:5.**

This was alluding to the kingdom of Babylon that had conquered the world of that day and the prophet describes it as a “destroying mountain”. The kingdom of God is also likened to a mountain in Daniel 2:35-44. So we now ask: What kingdom invaded the Roman Empire, Western Rome, which was a sea power? History tells us that there was only one Gothic power involved in the downfall of Rome that was associated with the sea and that was the naval power of the Vandals. The Vandals were one of the Gothic tribes that migrated from Northwestern Europe at the same time as the Visigoths. In one invasion of Italy under a leader named Radagaisus, hundreds of thousands of Vandals, Burgundians and Suevi, besieged the city of Florence. When Radagaisus was killed, the Vandals, Burgundians and Suevi withdrew and passed on into Southern France. There the Burgundian division of these Goths settled and formed the kingdom of Burgundy.

The rest of the Goths continued on into Spain, the Suevi then separated and settled in Northwestern Spain, forming the kingdom of the Suevi which is now Portugal. The remainder of the Goths, the Vandals, continued on to Gibraltar, crossed the straits, and entered Northern Africa. There they established themselves with their capital at the site of ancient Carthage. Their leader was a man called Genseric. He was a Christian and under him, the Vandals also became Christians holding to the Arian faith. This faith was in conflict with the apostate Catholic church. The Vandals developed into a strong kingdom. They could not extend southwards because of the desert so they turned towards the sea. They built a strong navy and began to ravage the coasts of the Mediterranean. Historians declare that, being anti-catholic, the Vandals attacked the catholic centers, especially Western Rome.

“The Vandals were unique among the German nations by the fact that they maintained a fleet.” J.B. Bury. “History of the Later Roman Empire,” Volume 1, page 162.

The second trumpet symbolism suggested an invasion associated with the sea. “The third part of the sea became blood and the third part of creatures in the sea died and the third part of ships were destroyed.” The Vandals fulfilled this prediction completely. Africa was lost to the Empire of Rome. As Semondie says, “The loss of Africa was perhaps one of the greatest calamities which could have overtaken the Western Empire.” J.C.L. De Sisnordi “The Fall of the Roman Empire,” Volume 1, pages 155-156..

Africa was the granary of Rome so the loss of Africa meant the loss of a main source of Rome’s food supply. Gibbon in describing the attacks upon Western Rome by the Vandals declares, “The loss or desolation of the provinces from the ocean to the Alps impaired the glory and greatness of Rome. Her internal prosperity was irretrievably destroyed by the separation of Africa... after an interval of six centuries the fleets that issued from the ports of Carthage again claimed the empire of the Mediterranean.” Gibbon. “Decline & Fall of Roman Empire,” Volume 4, pages 1-2

It was from Carthage, 600 years before, where the Phoenicians had settled that they attacked Imperial Rome under their leader Hannibal. Once again from Carthage, came the Vandals under Genseric, attacking Western Rome and particularly the centers of the catholic church, where apostasy flourished. Gibbon continues, “The Vandals repeatedly visited the coasts of Spain, Liguria, Tuscany, Campania, Lucania, Bruttium, Apulia, Calabria, Venetia, Dalmatia, Epirus Greece and Sicily. They were tempted to subdue the island of Sardinia so advantageously placed in the centre of the Mediterranean and their arms spread desolation or terror from the Columns of Hercules to the mouth of the Nile.” Ibid. Volume 4, page 31

It is a significant point that Genseric, like Alaric the Visigoth, believed himself to be an agent of divine wrath. Thomas Hogkin declares: "The fleets became under Genseric's guidance, the first naval power on the Mediterranean. At length the work [of ravaging the coast] became almost monotonous and the choice of a victim hard. Once, when the fleet had weighed anchor and was sailing forth from the broad harbor of Carthage the helmsman turned to the king and asked for what port he should steer. "For the men with whom God is angry", answered the Vandal king and left the winds and the waters to settle the question who were the proper objects of the wrath of heaven." Thomas Hodgkin. "Dynasty of Theodosius," pages 219-220.

Finally the emperor of Eastern Rome combined with Western Rome to build a gigantic fleet in order to destroy the Vandal power. This Roman fleet was twice destroyed by fire of the Vandals, and maybe this is the fulfillment of the prediction in the trumpet, "the third part of the creatures in the sea died and the third part of ships were destroyed". The destruction by the Vandals was quite fantastic. Gibbon. "Decline & Fall of Roman Empire," Volume 4, pages 40-44.

Previously Genseric even sailed up the Tiber and sacked the city of Rome. Amongst the treasure that he took from that city were the golden candlestick and the golden table and other items that Titus had captured from the temple at Jerusalem. When the Vandal fleet was returning to Carthage there rose a great storm and one ship only, submerged beneath the ocean. It was the ship carrying the golden candle stick and the sacred vessels which originally had come from the temple of God in Jerusalem. Ibid. Volume 4, Pages 6-7.

Without doubt the Vandals fulfilled the second trumpet. The Vandals being of the Arian faith and in deadly opposition to the church of Rome, finally were confronted by the powerful Roman emperor, the catholic Justinian. Under Belisarius, he sent an effective army to Africa where the Vandals were destroyed.

"In 533 the Byzantine general, Belisarius, landed in Africa. The Vandals were several times defeated and Carthage was entered and the same year they were routed in the decisive battle of Tricameron. In the next year Africa, Sardinia and Corsica were restored to the Roman Empire. As a nation, the Vandals soon ceased to exist." Nelsons Encyclopedia. Volume 7. Article "Vandals," pages 380-381.

"There are few instances in history of a nation disappearing so rapidly and so completely as the Vandals of Africa." George Finlay. "A History of Greece," Volume 1, page 252.

"It is reckoned that during the reign of Justinian [the emperor of Eastern Rome] Africa lost 5 millions of inhabitants; thus Arianism was extinguished in that region, not by any enforcement of conformity but by the extermination of the race which had introduced and professed it." J.C. Robertson. "History of the Christian Church!" Volume 1, page 521.

THE THIRD TRUMPET: We now come to the third trumpet that helped terminate the reign of Rome.

**"The third angel sounded and there fell a great star from heaven burning as it were a leap and it fell on a third part of the rivers and the fountains of waters 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." Revelation 8:10.**

The great star from heaven is undoubtedly a meteor and it falls upon the third part of rivers and fountains of waters i.e. a third part of the Roman Empire, Western Rome. In scripture a star represents a leader, a falling star can represent an apostate leader (Jude 1:14). We look therefore for some powerful leader who invaded the Roman Empire and brought great bitterness to the peoples of a

particular area. The area is described as “a third part of the rivers and fountains of waters”. This would be the areas where the rivers commence - the alpine regions. Does history tell of an invasion that fulfills this specification? Yes! This was abundantly fulfilled by Attila with his multiplied thousands of Huns who invaded the Roman Empire in 450 A.D. In describing them the historian uses almost the identical language of the prophet.

“After a short space of time, as Orosius relates, the race of the Huns, fiercer than ferocity itself, flamed forth.” Jordanes. “Origin & Deeds of the Goths,” Chapter 24, page 38 (Mierow’s Trans.) Notice the expression, “flamed forth”, reminding one of a blazing meteor.

“The rise of the great Hunnic power which threatened European civilization in the fifth century was as sudden and rapid as its fall.” J. B. Bury. “History of the Later Roman Empire,” Volume 1, page 161

“This invasion is the most celebrated in our people’s discourses, of all those which the barbarians have made upon us; and is the most talked of among the vulgar [or common people] and now all the countries which were within the Apennine mountains and the Alps, were full of flight, of depopulation, of slaughter, of slavery, of burning and despair.” Sigonius-(A Contemporary) cited by William, Whiston. Cambridge Professor. “Essay on the Book of Revelation,” pages 184-187 (1744)

Such a description perfectly fits the symbolism of the third trumpet. Attila called himself “the scourge of God, and the terror of men”. As Creasy declares, “Not merely the degenerate Romans, but the bold and hardy warriors of Germany and Scandinavia, were appalled at the numbers, the ferocity, the ghastly appearance, and the lightning-like rapidity of the Huns. His own warriors believed Attila, to be the inspired favorite of their deities and followed him with fanatic zeal. His enemies looked on him as the pre-appointed minister of Heaven’s wrath against themselves.”

“During the retreat from Orleans a Christian hermit is reported to have approached the Hunnish king and said to him, ‘You are the scourge of God for the chastisement of the Christians.’” “Attila instantly assumed this new title of terror which henceforth became the appellation by which he was widely and most fearfully known.” Sir Edward Creasy. “Decisive Battles of the World,” page 148.

In the reign of Attila, the Huns again became the terror of the world; That formidable Barbarian who alternately insulted and invaded the East and the West, and urged the rapid downfall off the Roman Empire.” Gibbon. “Decline & Fall of Roman Empire” Volume 3, page 494.

One of the great battles that Creasy lists, was the battle of Challons in Northern France. Here 700,000 Huns under Attila met the Romans and Visigoths who had combined to meet Attila. On that battlefield Attila and his Huns were repulsed. It was a terrible battle with staggering slaughter. Sir Edward Greasy ‘Decisive Battles of the World,’ page 146-150.

Attila was not wholly defeated but he retreated to the mountain regions, to “the rivers and fountains of waters,” just as the prophecy had stated. There he reigned supreme. Later he returned to his capital and died of apoplexy. [stroke]

The Huns had spread over all of Eastern Europe, where they were irresistible. They even invaded China and Media, north of Persia, giving an idea of the tremendous extent of their conquests. After the death of Attila they began to withdraw from Europe and return to the east, but a remnant remained in what we now call Hungary. Thus the third trumpet was faithfully fulfilled in the terrifying invasion of Attila and his Huns.

**THE FOURTH TRUMPET: “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 a third part of them were darkened and the day shone not for a third part of it and the night likewise.” Revelation 8:12.**

“The symbolism of this trumpet is the most difficult of the seven. “The third part of the sun.” This undoubtedly is symbolic. It could not be referring to the literal sun because a third part of that would have no significance. What would the sun, moon and stars represent in the Roman Empire? “The third part” would apply to Western Rome. Undoubtedly they refer to the leading lights or rulers of Western Rome.

How was Rome ruled? How many bodies comprised its government? There were three, exactly three, the emperor, the consuls and the senate. The Revelator likens them to the sun, moon and stars, The emperor--the sun. The consul--the moon, and the senate--the stars. Under this fourth trumpet these ruling powers are put out of action bringing civil darkness over the third part of the empire. There is no leading Roman light, no ruling Roman power.

This prediction was fulfilled by the invasion of a Gothic people called the Heruli under their leader named Odoacer. They had been associated with Attila and his Huns and were left behind when Attila retired to the East. The Heruli invaded Italy in 476 A.D. and Odoacer gave orders that the office of the emperor of Western Rome be abolished. In response the reigning emperor abdicated and Odoacer was made king of Italy.

“Odoacer was the first Barbarian who reigned in Italy, over a people who had once asserted their just superiority over the rest of mankind. The disgrace of the Romans still excites our respectful compassion.” Gibbon. “Decline & Fall of Roman Empire,” Volume 4, page 63.

But what of the moon and the stars? The consulship represented by the moon was abolished in 541 A.D. [Ibid. Volume 4, page 316.] and in 553 A.D. the Roman senate represented by the stars, resigned because it was so powerless. [Ibid. Volume 4, page 495.] Thus terminated the rule of the leading lights of Western Rome. Under the fourth trumpet it all ended. Western Rome had come to her end. As Saint Jerome declared when he saw that Rome was to fall, “The world’s glorious Sun has been extinguished.” As the English poet Byron, in describing the same event wrote, “She saw her glories star by star expire.” E.B. Elliott. “Horae Apocalypticae,” Volume 1, pages 358-361.

This we believe meets the symbolism of the fourth trumpet. What was the reason for the fall of the Roman Empire? Historians give many reasons. Rome had ruled the world for 644 years. Undoubtedly the main cause of Rome’s downfall was internal corruption. She disintegrated from within. This is the inevitable outcome of almost anything that is connected with the human race. Man is possessed of a fallen nature and most things connected with man ultimately disintegrate. This is one of the lessons of history, civilizations finally disintegrate. This is the significance of the second chapter of Daniel. The image commences with the gold, and the successive metals representing the various kingdoms are all of inferior quality, the silver, brass, iron and finally clay. This tells us that the kingdoms of men, being comprised of human nature, degenerate and disintegrate.

The iron kingdom of Rome as the prediction stated in Daniel two, “would be divided”. Maybe one of the purposes of the trumpets is to show how Rome was divided, how the “ten toes” of the image, the kingdoms of Europe, were established. Europe was to play an important part in the conflict between good and evil throughout the Christian era and especially in the End Time.

If it were true that Rome’s downfall was due to internal corruption, how is this explained in the light of the fact that the empire had become Christian? The moral influence of the Christian faith should have

stemmed the tide of corruption. The answer is that the Christian church in the empire, had itself become corrupt. The ninth chapter of Revelation reveals that in spite of the judgment of the first six trumpets upon the apostate people of the empire, they continued in their downward course.

**“The rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues (or trumpets), repented not of the works of their hands that they should not worship devils and idols of gold, silver and brass and stone and of wood which cannot see, nor hear nor walk neither repented they of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their fornication or of their thefts.” Revelation 9:20.**

These sins were exactly the ones that were perpetrated by the apostate Christians of the Roman Empire. It is understandable why the trumpets were sent as visitations of divine judgment. It is recognized that when corruption is under the guise of religion, it is the worst kind of corruption and this is of significance to Christians today. Falsehood, hypocrisy and corruption always receive the frown of heaven, even though they may be under the guise of religion. In fact this makes sin all the more offensive to God and he does not pass it by.

The following counsel is worthy of note. “He would teach His people that disobedience and sin are exceedingly offensive to Him and are not to be lightly regarded. He shows us that when His people are found in sin they should at once take decided measures to put that sin from them, that His frown may not rest upon them all. But if the sins of the people are passed over by those in responsible positions, His frown will be upon them, and the people of God, as a body, will be held responsible for those sins. In His dealings with His people in the past the Lord shows the necessity of purifying the church from wrongs. One sinner may diffuse darkness that will exclude the light of God from the entire congregation. When the people realize that darkness is settling upon them, and they do not know the cause, they should seek God earnestly, in great humility and self-abasement, until the wrongs which grieve His Spirit are searched out and put away.

“The prejudice which has arisen against us because we have reproved the wrongs that God has shown me existed, and the cry that has been raised of harshness and severity, are unjust. God bids us speak, and we will not be silent. If wrongs are apparent among His people, and if the servants of God pass on indifferent to them, they virtually sustain and justify the sinner, and are alike guilty and will just as surely receive the displeasure of God; for they will be made responsible for the sins of the guilty. In vision I have been pointed to many instances where the displeasure of God has been incurred by a neglect on the part of His servants to deal with the wrongs and sins existing among them. Those who have excused these wrongs have been thought by the people to be very amiable and lovely in disposition, simply because they shunned to discharge a plain Scriptural duty. The task was not agreeable to their feelings; therefore they avoided it.” 3 Testimonies, pages 365-366.

When there is corruption and apostasy in His church, God will not pass it by but rather He will permit judgments to come upon the church in an endeavor to purify it and bring those in apostasy back to the faith. This we suggest was the fundamental purpose of the trumpets.