

Understanding Revelation – Topic 12

# **The seven trumpets**

**Trumpets 1-4  
Visigoths, Vandals, Huns and Heruli**

**An exposition of Revelation Chapter 8**

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## Introduction – discussion of alternative views

### 1. End Time application of the seven trumpets prophecy

Although the historic Seventh-day Adventist position was always that only the seventh trumpet had an End Time application, the view that the whole prophecy has an End Time application is held by an increasing number of interpreters today. The following Spirit of Prophecy statement has been used as authority for holding this view:

*Trumpet after trumpet is to be sounded; vial after vial poured out one after another upon the inhabitants of the earth.<sup>1</sup>*

On the basis of this statement some have concluded that the fulfillment of the seven trumpets prophecy is yet future.

Firstly, there is no indication that the above statement is an exposition of the seven trumpets prophecy of the Book of Revelation. In fact it is clear that the term *trumpet* is being used in the general sense of a call to battle in the coming crisis of the church. The context of the above quotation reads:

*In this last conflict the Captain of the Lord's host (Joshua 5:15) is leading on the armies of heaven and mingling in the ranks and fighting our battles for us....We would lose faith and courage in the conflict, if we were not sustained by the power of God.*

*Every form of evil is to spring into intense activity. Evil angels unite their powers with evil men...they will not yield the last great final contest without a desperate struggle and all the world will be on one side or the other of the question.*

*The battle of Armageddon will be fought. And that day must find none of us sleeping....the Captain of the Lord's host will stand at the head of the angels of heaven to direct the battle....Trumpet after trumpet is to be sounded; vial after vial poured out one after another upon the inhabitants of the earth.<sup>2</sup>*

The term *trumpet* is employed here as a call to battle, an injunction to stand up and be counted in the great conflict ahead of us.

### No link to the seven last plagues?

Are the seven trumpets identical to, or associated with, the seven last plagues? The statement reads:

*Trumpet after trumpet is to be sounded, vial after vial poured out...*

Some conclude that if this refers to the seven trumpets then these trumpets must be associated with the plagues. This is not necessarily so. While the word *vial* does imply pouring out of a plague, the expression could be referring to the other types plagues that may fall upon humankind before the close of probation. For example, already there is evidence of plague epidemics. The Auto Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) has even been labeled by some as *the wrath of God*. Of more recent times we have had alarms

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assoc, 1958), 3:426  
. See Appendix

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 3:425-426.

over other pandemics, such as swine influenza and bird (or avian) influenza. In the future we will see more plagues emerge which will be so devastating that the population of the earth could be significantly reduced.

The seven trumpets of Revelation are used in connection with the term *plague*:

*But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands. Revelation 9:20*

The seven trumpets were certainly a type of plague upon the inhabitants in the area where they applied, but they don't constitute the seven last plagues. The seven plagues just prior to the Second Advent are the last plagues implying that there were other, previous plagues.

The setting of the trumpets clearly indicates that the first six were fulfilled before 1844. In the introduction to the trumpets an angel offers the prayers of the saints at the altar of incense in the heavenly temple. This ministry was performed in the first apartment of the sanctuary and continued from Christ's ascension until 1844 when it transferred to the second apartment. The sixth trumpet prophecy commences with:

*...I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God. Revelation 9:13*

It is claimed by some that the four horns of the golden altar indicate that this is a second apartment scene. In fact the ministry connected with the four horns is in the first apartment as well as the second (see Leviticus 4:7, 13-18). So this could be a first apartment scene indicating that the sixth trumpet was being fulfilled during the time when the ministry of Christ was in the first apartment, that is, before 1844.

There are some parallels between the seven trumpets and the seven last plagues as the following table shows.

<b>Parallels between the seven trumpets and the seven last plagues</b>			
<b>Trumpets</b>	<b>Reference</b>	<b>Plagues</b>	<b>Reference</b>
Upon the earth	8:7	Upon the earth	16:2
Upon the sea	8:8	Upon the sea	16:3
Rivers and springs of waters	8:10	Rivers and springs of waters	16:4
Sun smitten	8:12	Upon the sun	16:8
Air darkened	9:2	Darkness	16
Great River Euphrates	9:14	Great River Euphrates	16:12
Mystery of God finished	10:7	<i>It is done</i>	16:17
Lighntnings, voices, great hail, thundering, earthquake,	11:19	Voices, thunders, great hail, lighntnings, earthquake,	16:18

On the face of the above parallels, it appears that the trumpets and plagues are identical, and many scholars have drawn this conclusion. However, there are an even

greater number of differences between the plagues and the trumpets as the next table reveals.

<b>Differences between the seven trumpets and the seven plagues</b>	
<b>Trumpets</b>	<b>Plagues</b>
6 plagues symbolic. 1 plague literal	Six plagues literal. 1 plague symbolic
First 4 plagues affect 1/3 earth	First 4 plagues are worldwide
First plague - hail, fire and blood	First plague - a foul and loathsome sore
Second plague - 1/3 sea becomes blood and 1/3 of the creatures die	Second plague - the sea becomes as the blood of a dead man.
Third plague - 1/3 of all waters are bitter	Third plague - all drinking water turned to blood
Fourth plague - 1/3 of sun, moon, stars are struck and 1/3 of a day is darkness	Fourth plague - the sun is more active, men are scorched with fierce heat
Fifth plague - smoke from pit, darkness. Locusts torment for 5 months	Fifth plague - Papal kingdom is filled with darkness
Sixth plague - Angels (spirits) loosed from Euphrates. Myriads of horsemen kill 1/3 of men.	Sixth plague - Euphrates dried up and evil spirits unite the whole world against God.
Seventh plague - Gospel concluded, events extend to the end of the Millennium	Seventh plague - a great earthquake. Cities of world fall. Ends at Second Advent.

These differences, among others, show that the seven trumpets and the seven last plagues are separate and distinct.

(See Appendix A for discussion of another errant use of a Spirit of Prophecy statement).

## 2. An alternate interpretation

The interpretation currently taught by some Seventh-day Adventist scholars follows that of Dr. Edwin Thiele. Dr. Mervin Maxwell in *God Cares* Volume 2 aligns with this.<sup>3</sup> The first trumpet, it is claimed, deals with the destruction of Jerusalem, the second with the fall of Western Rome, the third with the pollution of the gospel by the Papacy. The fourth trumpet deals with Christ's heavenly ministry being obscured by a false system of mediation. The position on the fifth trumpet prophecy is in agreement with the historic Seventh-day Adventist view – the prophecy refers to the Arabs. Likewise it is claimed that the sixth trumpet refers to the Turks. This is the current view held by some concerning the seven trumpets.<sup>4</sup>

Concerns with the current interpretation are set out below.

1. *...things which must shortly come to pass...* Revelation 1:1

<sup>3</sup> C. Mervin Maxwell, *God Cares* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Assn, 1985), 2:232.

<sup>4</sup> Edwin E. Thiele, *Outline Studies in Revelation* (Angwin, CA.: Pacific Union College, 1990), 162-181.

In the alternative interpretation the first trumpet is applied to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. This event occurred twenty-five years before John began to write the Book of Revelation, and when he wrote he was shown *things which must shortly come to pass* (*Revelation 1:1*). Therefore the destruction of Jerusalem does not meet the specification because it was already history at the time of writing. The destruction of Jerusalem was a fulfillment of other great predictions made many centuries before. Moses in Deuteronomy 28:49-68 gave a very detailed prediction concerning the siege and destruction of Jerusalem. In Daniel 9:26-27 Daniel predicted the same event, as did Jesus in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and in particular Luke 21.

2. *...all green grass was burned up.* Revelation 8:7

In the first trumpet *...all green grass was burned up...* and this, it is claimed, symbolizes God's people flourishing in righteousness.<sup>5</sup> However during the destruction of Jerusalem the Jews were not flourishing in righteousness. The opposite was true. They had reached the height of their rebellion against God: they were no longer God's people. Their probation as God's people had ended in 34 AD.

3. *...a great star fell from heaven...* Revelation 8:10

The third trumpet mentions a star falling from heaven and this is seen to represent Satan. In Scripture a star represents a leader. While Satan was the leader of the angels, in Jude 1:13 apostate leaders are referred to as *wandering stars*. So it is more likely that this star could refer to another leader altogether. In Revelation 1:20 the leaders in God's church are likened to stars. Daniel 8:10 indicates the same.

*The stars of heaven are under God's control. He fills them with light. He guides and directs their movements. If He did not, they would become fallen stars. So with His ministers.*<sup>6</sup>

A falling star, then, may refer not just to Satan but to human leaders - even religious leaders. In this topic it will be demonstrated that there is another interpretation of the third trumpet that is far more satisfactory.

4. *...a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea...* Revelation 8:8

During the second trumpet a mountain is cast into the sea, and this is claimed to represent the Gothic invasions that overthrew the Roman Empire.<sup>7</sup> However it is only one mountain, or one kingdom, that is cast into the sea - for in Scripture a mountain represents a kingdom. The Gothic barbarians who invaded the Roman Empire and brought it to its end included at least six different peoples or kingdoms. In fact there were probably at least ten different peoples involved – including the Visigoths, the Ostrogoths, the Huns, the Vandals, the Suevi, the Burgundians and the Heruli.

The mountain is thrown *into the sea*, so it is connected with the sea, and history is quite clear that only one Gothic power had an association with the sea. (Sea = peoples ??)

5. *...the name of the star is Wormwood....* Revelation 8:11

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<sup>5</sup> C. Mervin Maxwell, *God Cares Vol 2* :237.

<sup>6</sup> Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington: Review & Herald Publishing Assn, 1948), 13-14.

<sup>7</sup> C. Mervin Maxwell, *God Cares Vol 2* 2:238-240.

In the third trumpet the falling star called *Wormwood* is claimed to represent the polluting of one third of the world by Rome's apostasy during the Middle Ages<sup>8</sup>. However Rome's apostasy affected almost the whole of the then-known world, not just one third of it. According to Revelation 2:20 even some of God's people were infected with Rome's apostasy.

#### 6. Meteorological phenomena

In the fourth trumpet a third of the sun was darkened, etcetera. This is claimed to represent the counterfeit system of mediation, the papal priesthood, obscuring the truth of Christ's heavenly ministry.<sup>9</sup> However the papal counterfeit obscured not just a third of the world of the day, but more likely nine-tenths of it.

There is a more satisfactory interpretation of the first four trumpets.

### The seven trumpets - historic Adventist interpretation

How should we interpret the seven trumpets of Revelation? The historic Seventh-day Adventist view is that the first six trumpets apply to the downfall of the Roman Empire and the seventh trumpet refers to the downfall of the whole world when it becomes, as it were, a revived Roman empire under the papacy. The historic Seventh-day Adventist position did not originate with the Adventist pioneers. It was held by many scholars prior to 1844.<sup>10</sup>

#### A mix of literal and symbolic

When we re-examine the historic Adventist interpretation there are some things we need to consider. Is every item mentioned in the trumpet prophecy to be taken as symbolic? It is generally understood that the trumpets are symbolic, but how much is symbolic, and how much is literal? There is confusion on this issue. Can the symbolic and literal be employed in the one description? In truth, Scripture often combines the two, employing the symbolic and literal together. Therefore it is important to differentiate between their usage. Note the following from the Psalms:

*You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it. You prepared room for it, and caused it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with its shadow, and the mighty cedars with its boughs. She sent out her boughs to the Sea, and her branches to the River.*  
*Psalms 80:8-11*

Here we find a combination of the symbolic and the literal:

*You have brought a vine out of Egypt.* Egypt is literal and vine is a symbol of Israel.

*You have cast out the nations* (literal) *and planted it* (symbolic).

*You prepared a room for it* (literal) *and caused it to take deep root* (symbolic)

*it filled the land* (literally)...*the hills were covered with the shadow of it* (symbolic)

*the mighty cedars with its boughs* (symbolic)...*she sent out her boughs* (symbolic)

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid 240-242.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 241-242.

<sup>10</sup> Le Roy Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1954), [page](#)

*to the sea* (literal sea - the Mediterranean) *and her branches to the river* (literal - the Euphrates River).

A similar pattern is found in Jeremiah 3:6; Ezekiel 27:26; Ezekiel 32:6-7 and Hosea 13:15. It is necessary, therefore, to determine what is symbolic and what is literal in the wording of the seven trumpets.

In examining the first six trumpets it appears that generally the initial terms used to describe a trumpet are symbolic. The effects of the first three trumpets are expressed in literal terms but in the fourth trumpet they are expressed in symbolic terms. In the fifth and sixth trumpets the initial description again is symbolic, with one or two exceptions, but the explanation of the symbols is in literal language, except for a couple of points. The effects of the fifth and sixth trumpets are mostly to be taken literally.

## Trumpet symbolism

In Scripture the trumpet is employed in four different ways.

1. To proclaim the various festivals of Israel such as the Sabbath, New Moons, New Year, Holy Convocations and Feasts.
2. To summon Israel to prayer and praise.
3. To proclaim the time of each advance of the camp of Israel in their wilderness journeying toward the Promised Land (Numbers 10:4-9).
4. As a call to arms, or to warn of an enemy invasion.

The fourth purpose above seems to be applicable to the seven trumpets prophecy. A trumpet alerts to an invasion of enemy forces. This is made very clear by Jeremiah:

*Declare in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem, and say: Blow the trumpet in the land; Cry, 'Gather together,' and say, 'Assemble yourselves and let us go into the fortified cities'. Jeremiah 4:5*

Blowing the trumpet alarms that an invasion is imminent - enemy forces are at hand.

*O my soul, my soul! I am pained in my very heart! My heart makes a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because you have heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. Jeremiah 4:19*

The trumpet symbolises an alarm of war. The historic Adventist position is that the first six trumpets depict a military invasion against the mighty Roman Empire while the seventh trumpet depicts an invasion against this rebel world by Christ and the armies of heaven, when *the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord*<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Uriah Smith, *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation* (Battle Creek, MI.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1881), 475-517.



## Evidence for connecting Trumpets 1-6 to the Roman Empire

Seventh-day Adventists have historically applied the first six trumpets to the downfall of the Roman Empire. The following points must be considered in determining if the historic SDA interpretation is justified.

1. When the Book of Revelation was written, according to the greatest authority on Rome, Edward Gibbon, it was a Roman world. *The Roman Empire filled the world*. John was a prisoner on the isle of Patmos, a victim of Roman oppression.
2. The scene of the trumpets is described at least four times as *the earth* and also as *the sea, vegetation and waters*. These represent the elements of this world. The world of New Testament times, until the fifth century, was the Roman world. In Luke 2:1 it mentions how a decree from Augustus Caesar went forth for *all the world to be taxed*: that is, the Roman world. Secular authors in those years also recognized that the world of that era was indeed the Roman world.<sup>12</sup>
3. The renowned scientist Sir Isaac Newton was also a Biblical scholar. Newton studied this prophecy for more than 40 years. In commenting on Revelation 8:5 and the *fire being cast upon the earth*, he states

*Such a fire was cast upon the earth, the Roman world, the territorial platform of prophecy.*<sup>13</sup>

4. The first four trumpets are linked together, as are the last three trumpets. The language used in the first four trumpets describes invasion, destruction and military powers which are employed to punish an apostate people. Only one historical drama back to the time of John the Revelator meets such a specification: the downfall of the Roman Empire wrought by the barbarians who swept over Western Rome and ended the dominance of that empire.

While the first four trumpets deal with Western Rome, the fifth and sixth deal with Eastern Rome. Notice this comment by Dr Albert Barnes (Presbyterian scholar of the 1850's).

*There are four of these "trumpets", and it would be a matter of inquiry whether there were four events of sufficient distinctness that would mark these invasions or that would constitute periods or epochs in the destruction of the Roman power. At this point in writing I looked upon a chart of history, composed with no reference to this prophecy, and found singular and unexpected prominence given to four such events extending from the first invasion of the Goths and Vandals at the beginnings of the fifth century to the fall of the Western empire 476 AD.*

*The first was the invasion of Alaric of the Goths, 410 AD; the second was the invasion of Attila king of the Huns, 447 AD; a third was the sack of Rome by Genseric king of the Vandals, and the fourth resulting in the final conquest of Rome, was that of Odoacer king of the Heruli.*<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ovid & Dionysius, in Edward B. Elliot, *Horae Apocalypticæ* (London: Seeley, Jackson and Halliday, 1862), 359.

<sup>13</sup> Isaac Newton, *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel and The Apocalypse of St John* (London J. Darby and T. Browne, 1733),

<sup>14</sup> Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Book of Revelation* (New York: Harber and Brothers, 1859), on chapter 8.

5. The trumpets are described as

*...divine judgments on God's professed people in apostasy... (source)*

Revelation 9:20 confirms this. Apostasy was spawned in the Christian church during the reign of the Roman Empire – in the Roman world of the Mediterranean, where it finally centered in the Church of Rome itself.

Political powers and influential people supported and protected this apostasy. After the Caesars became 'Christian' it was the Roman Empire which fostered and protected this apostasy. No other powers or peoples of that era fit the specification. Therefore the first six trumpets inevitably apply to the Roman Empire. Dr M. Maxwell correctly notes:

*It is noteworthy that the century of disasters (378-476 AD) we have been talking about, befell Rome after she had adopted Christianity. The Roman Empire had become in a sense an apostate people of God, ripe for experiencing the judgment of God, inflicted by her enemies.<sup>15</sup>*

6. Seven times in the first six trumpets the term *one-third* is specified. What does this third part apply to? The only satisfactory conclusion can be that it applies to the third part of the Roman Empire. There were a number of divisions of the empire during the history of Rome, but there was one which particularly fits the prediction during this time. Three divisions of the empire were formed in the time of Constantine. The empire was divided between Constantine himself as well as Licinius and Maximin. These three divisions existed at the time of the barbarian invasions of the empire. No other application of the one-third satisfactorily fills the prediction.

*In the time of Constantine the Roman empire was divided into three great sections: to Constantine was assigned Gaul, Spain, Britain, Italy, Africa; to Licinius the Illyricum prefecture; to Maximin, the Asiatic provinces and Egypt.<sup>16</sup>*

*Either Diocletian or after him Constantine, made Illyricum one of the four prefectures... This prefecture included Pannonia, Nortium, Crete and the entire Balkan peninsular except Thrace, which was attached by Constantine to the prefecture of the East... The whole peninsular except Thrace was still known as Illyricum.<sup>17</sup>*

*Each one included its third of the Mediterranean or Roman sea, as well as its third of the land: and each one also its characteristic stream of the three great frontier rivers, the Rhine, Danube and Euphrates.<sup>18</sup>*

This is the most satisfactory explanation of the *one-third* which is appears in five of the six trumpets.

It is significant to note that there were other prophets who predicted the fall of Rome. After dealing with the first three universal kingdoms the primary prophecy of Daniel states of the fourth, the iron kingdom, that *it shall be divided* (Daniel 2:41). This fourth kingdom was Imperial Rome.

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<sup>15</sup> C. Mervin Maxwell, *God Cares Vol 2* 2:240.

<sup>16</sup> John Cumming, *Apocalypse Sketches* (London: Hall, Virtue & Co, 1851), 2:63.

<sup>17</sup> Phillip Jacob Spener, "Pietism", in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, ed. 1911), 14:326.

<sup>18</sup> Edward B. Elliot, *Horae Apocalypticæ* 1:342.

In the prophecy of the four beasts of Daniel 7, the four kingdoms are again presented. Of the fourth, the Roman kingdom, it says

*...the ten horns out of this kingdom (Rome) are ten kings (or kingdoms) that shall arise. Daniel 7:24*

The first four trumpets reveal how the ten kingdoms were formed out of the Roman Empire and this is possibly one of the purposes of the first four trumpets. Jesus Christ also predicted the end of the Roman Empire.

*Jerusalem will be trampled by the Gentiles (the Roman Gentiles), until the times of the Gentiles (the Roman Gentiles) are fulfilled. Luke 21:24.*

The sixth trumpet reveals how the Gentile Roman Empire came to its end with the capture of Constantinople by the Turks. Prior to this the Arabs, under the fifth trumpet, had broken the Roman Gentile rule over Jerusalem.

It is instructive to recall that the early Christians believed that according to 2 Thessalonians 2, the man of sin - the antichrist - would not appear until after Imperial Rome was removed.

*Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.  
2 Thessalonians 2:3-4*

The majority of Protestant scholars through the ages have been quite clear that this prediction was fulfilled in the person of the Bishop of Rome. The apostle continues:

*And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. <sup>7</sup> For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7*

The entity which restrained *the man of sin* was understood to be Imperial Rome. It is an historical fact that the Papacy, *the man of sin*, did not become a political power until Imperial Rome *gave its power and seat, and great authority* to the Papacy by removing its capital from Rome to Constantinople (Revelation 13:2).

The early Christians believed that the Roman Empire *which filled the world* must end before antichrist could reign. Such a world-shaking event would be of importance to the people of God. It is therefore understandable for the people of God to recognize that the first six trumpets should apply to the downfall of the Roman Empire.

In this introduction to the study of the seven trumpets, may the Lord help us to take care that our interpretations will stand up under the microscope of Scripture. Faithfulness to Jesus Christ involves faithfulness to His Word.

## Background to the sounding of the trumpets

***And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake. So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound. Revelation 8:2-6***

Here we have a first apartment temple scene prior to the trumpets sounding?

The presence of so much incense is explained by the fact that it accompanies the many prayers of the saints. As a result of these prayers being heard the censer is filled with fire and thrown to the earth. Fire achieves two things: it purifies or punishes. Here it purifies the prayers of God's saints and punishes the saints' oppressors. It punishes the apostates. Fire cast *to the earth* represents the judgments of God, the visitations of justice in the form of the trumpets.

Some have concluded that this represents the Close of Probation. However, this is not the case. It does not represent the Close of Probation as such, unless it is the close of probation simply in the local sense of the Roman Empire, or the close of probation of the apostate church of the Roman Empire.

When God answered the prayers of the saints He sent the trumpets upon the earth: the trumpets were God's response to these prayers of the saints. Matthew Henry, the elder statesman of Bible commentators wrote,

*These prayers that were thus accepted in heaven, produced great change upon earth. The same angel with the same censer took the fire of the altar and cast it into the earth and this presently caused strange commotions, voices and lightnings and thunders and an earthquake.<sup>19</sup>*

Jameson, Fawcett & Brown, all noted Biblical scholars, stated

*The hot coals off the altar, cast on the earth, symbolized God's fiery judgments about to descend on the church's foes in answer to the saints' incense-perfumed prayers, which have just ascended before God.<sup>20</sup>*

How marvelously powerful are the prayers of God's saints!

In all likelihood the great apostasy was what prompted the saints to engage in so much prayer that the trumpet judgments descended upon the Roman Empire. The *falling away* of 2 Thessalonians 2 had taken place; *the man of sin* had arisen. Constantine had amalgamated church and state, and much of the Christian church had been brought to ruin. The true faith was in peril and the majority of Christians had strayed into apostasy.

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<sup>19</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1706-1721), on Revelation 8:20.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Jamieson et al., *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1871), on Revelation 8. 21

True believers knew that antichrist would come, that apostasy would arise; now the dismaying reality was that idolatry was established throughout the church. The specious worship of saints and martyrs flooded in. This could have been the situation which led to much prayer on the part of the faithful. When the cause of God looked hopeless all the saints could do was to pray. Their prayers ascending to the temple resulted in the divine judgments falling upon the apostasy in the form of the trumpets.

## **A lesson for believers today**

There is a great lesson here for the saints of today. God's church is currently under the threat of apostasy. God's true people are also to send their prayers to the sanctuary to make sure that they are purified by the merits of Christ. It may well be that God will again answer our prayers by sending judgments on the church. The Lord may have to act to bring His church into line so that it may receive the latter rain. This is the clear prediction of the Spirit of Prophecy in regard to the church of God in the last days.

*When the judgments of God are in the earth, then will the people learn righteousness. Isaiah 26:9.*

## **The first trumpet**

***The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up. Revelation 8:7***

This language suggests a violent hailstorm. The Old Testament, on which the Book of Revelation is based, gives the clue to what a hailstorm represents in prophecy. In describing the invasion of the Assyrians into the land of Israel, the prophet declares

*Behold, the Lord has a mighty and strong one, like a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, like a flood of mighty waters overflowing, Who will bring them down to the earth with His hand. Isaiah 28:2*

The prophet, describing the Assyrian invasion, likens it to a mighty hailstorm. Again, in describing the invasion of Gog and Magog, the prophet Ezekiel says,

*You will ascend, coming like a storm, covering the land like a cloud, you and all your troops and many peoples with you. Ezekiel 38:9*

Firstly, we can safely conclude that a storm such as described in the first trumpet symbolises a military invasion. Hailstorms that fell upon Roman territory always came from the north, suggesting that this invasion would be from the northerly regions. Secondly the symbolism also suggests the destruction of the natural environment, for *the trees were burned up* as well as *all green grass*. This indicates that forests, pastures and crops would be destroyed by the invaders. Thirdly, there was hail and fire *mingled with blood* indicating carnage, the slaughter of both humans and beasts.

## Significance of a *third*

*...a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.*

The *third* that is mentioned throughout the trumpets applies to a third part of the Roman Empire.<sup>21</sup> From the time of Constantine, there were three divisions of the Empire, the East, the West and the central section called Illyricum, which comprised from the Balkan Peninsula, excepting Thrace, up to what we now call Southern Austria.

There is historical evidence of a military invasion of one of the divisions of the Roman Empire that meets the specifications of the first trumpet. The man who achieved it was Alaric, the leader of the Visigoths, a branch of the Gothic peoples from which most Europeans are descended. The Goths came from the northeast of Europe, from around the Baltic, where they were pressured by other peoples migrating from the east. Alaric led them all the way into Greece, and they ravaged the countryside as they passed.

The Goths began to move towards the warmer climes of the Roman Empire and thousands had settled in Illyricum (the third section of the Empire - now the southern Slavic states) where they were employed as mercenaries by the Romans to help defend the frontiers.

In order to pacify Alaric, the emperor of Eastern Rome made him the military general of the whole of Illyricum. Alaric took advantage of this development and spent the next four years in preparation for the invasion of Western Rome. This began around 395 AD and historical records show that Alaric and the Visigoths fulfilled the specifications of the first trumpet prophecy. Note 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*. Gibbon was not a Christian. He was a skeptic and has been called *the unconscious commentator of the Apocalypse* because when he wrote about the fall of Rome he used almost identical language to the apostle John in his description of the trumpets of Revelation. In a remarkable manner Gibbon showed how these trumpets met their fulfillment. Of the invasion of Alaric and the Visigoths, he wrote:

*Valens (the Roman Emperor) was informed that the North was agitated by a furious tempest.*<sup>22</sup>

*A furious tempest was excited among the nations of Germany*<sup>23</sup>

*A formidable tempest of the barbarians of Germany seemed ready to burst over the provinces of Gaul.*<sup>24</sup>

*The Gothic nation (395 AD) 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*

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<sup>21</sup> See page 1 "An Introduction to the Trumpets"

<sup>22</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, (7 volume edition "The World's Classics") 3:3

<sup>23</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: Strahan and Cadell, 1789), 3:307.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 141.

*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*<sup>25</sup>

*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.*<sup>26</sup>

The prediction stated that *the trees...and all green grass was burned 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:

*His trees, his old contemporary trees must blaze in the conflagration of the whole country.*<sup>27</sup>

This is remarkable. It gives us a glimpse of the destruction of forests, crops and grass: the total ecology. Gibbon again:

*The...dark cloud which was collected along the coast of the Baltic burst in thunder upon the banks of the upper Danube.*<sup>28</sup>

*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 men...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.*<sup>29</sup>

This was the description of the Gothic invasion by the *unconscious commentator* of the Apocalypse. Alaric invaded Italy three times. Another commentator states,

*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 Rome. 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.*<sup>30</sup>

While fulfilling the first trumpet prophecy, it is significant that Alaric himself possessed a powerful conviction that he was divinely led to destroy Rome. This was even 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 while he did not feel disposed to

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 283-286.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 370.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 294.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 310.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 318.

<sup>30</sup> Edward B. Elliot, *Horae Apocalypticæ*

commence the siege, he found himself compelled by some hidden and irresistible impulse to accomplish the enterprise.<sup>31</sup>

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.*<sup>32</sup>

*During a period of six hundred and nineteen years, the seat of empire had never been violated by the presence of a foreign enemy.*<sup>33</sup>

*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 Germany and Scythia.*<sup>34</sup>

*This awful catastrophe of Rome filled the astonished empire with grief and terror.*<sup>35</sup>

## The second trumpet

***Then 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. And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. Revelation 8:8-9***

Scripture is clear that a mountain represents a kingdom; consequently this symbolism suggests a power connected with the sea - an invasion by a sea power likened to a burning mountain.

*"Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain, who destroys all the earth," says the LORD. And I will stretch out My hand against you, roll you down from the rocks, and make you a burnt mountain". Jeremiah 51:25*

This alluded to the kingdom of Babylon that had conquered the world of its day so that the prophet described the nation of Babylon as a *destroying mountain*.

The kingdom of God is also likened to a mountain in Daniel 2:35-44. So which sea power kingdom invaded the Roman Empire (Western Rome)? Only one Gothic power associated with the sea was involved in the downfall of Rome - the Vandals.

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<sup>31</sup> Salminius Sozoman, *History of the Church*, Book 9 Chapter 6

<sup>32</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 3:341.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 3:380.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 3:387.



## The Vandals

The Vandals were one of the Gothic tribes that migrated from Northern 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 and their allies withdrew and moved on into southern France. There the Burgundian division of these Goths settled and formed the kingdom of Burgundy. The remainder of the Goths continued on into Spain. The Suevi then separated and settled in north western Spain, forming the kingdom of Suevi which is now Portugal.

The remainder of the Goths - the Vandals - continued on to Gibraltar, crossing the straits and entering Northern Africa. There they established themselves with their capital at the site of ancient Carthage. Their leader was a man called Genseric, a Christian. Under his rule the Vandals became Christian, holding to the Arian faith. This faith was in conflict with the apostate Catholic Church. While the Vandals developed a strong kingdom they could not extend their borders southwards because of the desert boundaries. They turned towards the sea, building a strong navy which began to ravage the coasts of the Mediterranean. Because they were anti-Catholic, the Vandals attacked the Catholic centers, especially in Western Rome.

*The Vandals were unique among the German nations by the fact that they maintained a fleet.<sup>36</sup>*

**...a third of the sea became blood and a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.**

The second trumpet prediction and symbolism which suggests an invasion associated with the sea was fulfilled by the Vandals completely. Africa was lost to the Roman Empire. As Semondie states,

*The loss of Africa was perhaps one of the greatest calamities which could have overtaken the Western Empire.<sup>37</sup>*

*Africa was the granary of Rome, so the loss of Africa meant the loss of a main source of Rome's food supply. Gibbon describes the attacks upon Western Rome by the Vandals.*

*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.<sup>38</sup>*

It was from Carthage, where the Phoenicians had settled 600 years before, that Hannibal had attacked Imperial Rome. Once again from Carthage came the Vandals under Genseric, attacking Western Rome and particularly the centres of the Catholic Church where apostasy flourished.

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<sup>36</sup> John B. Bury, *A History of the Later Roman Empire* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1889), 1:162.

<sup>37</sup> JCL Sismondi, *History of the Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: 1834), 1:155-156.

<sup>38</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

Gibbon continues

*The Vandals repeatedly visited the coasts of Spain, Liguria, Tuscany, Campania, Lucania, Bruttium, Apulia, Calabria, Venetia, Dalmatia, Epiraeus 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.*<sup>39</sup>

It is significant that Genseric, like Alaric the Visigoth, believed himself to be an agent of divine wrath. Thomas Hodgkin records:

*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.*<sup>40</sup>

Finally the Emperor of Eastern Rome allied himself with Western Rome to build a gigantic fleet in order to destroy the Vandal's naval power. This Roman fleet was twice destroyed by fire by the Vandals, and this could be the fulfillment of the trumpet's prediction that

*...a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. Revelation 8:9*

The destruction wrought by the Vandals was extraordinary.<sup>41</sup> Previously Genseric had 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 as well as other items that Titus had captured from the temple at Jerusalem in 70 AD. While the Vandal fleet was returning to Carthage they struck a great storm. While only one ship sank it happened to be the ship carrying the golden candlestick and other sacred vessels.<sup>42</sup>

The Vandals fulfilled the second trumpet. Finally, in deadly opposition to the Church of Rome because of their Arian faith, they were confronted by the powerful, strongly Catholic Roman emperor, Justinian. In 533 AD He sent an army to Africa under General Balisarius. That same year the Vandals were routed in the decisive battle of Tricameron and Carthage was overthrown. The following year Africa, Sardinia and Corsica were all restored to the Roman Empire. As a nation, the Vandals soon ceased to exist.<sup>43</sup>

*There are few instances in history of a nation disappearing so rapidly and so completely as the Vandals of Africa.*<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 4:31.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Hodgkin, *The Dynasty of Theodosius* (London: Clarendon Press, 1889), 219-220.

<sup>41</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 4:6-7.

<sup>43</sup> *Nelsons Encyclopedia*, ed., s.v. "Vandals." 12:252.

<sup>44</sup> George Finlay, *A History of Greece* (London: Clarendon Press, 1877), 1:252.

*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.*<sup>45</sup>

## The third trumpet

The third trumpet helped terminate the reign of Rome.

*Then 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 water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter. Revelation 8:10*

The great star from heaven is a symbolic meteor which falls upon the third part of rivers and fountains of waters, that is, 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 14). We look therefore for some powerful leader who invaded the Roman Empire and brought great bitterness to the people of a particular area. The area is described as *a third of the rivers and...springs of water*. This would refer to areas where the rivers commence – the alpine region.

## Attila the Hun

History tells of an event that fulfills the specifications in Revelation 8:10-11. Attila, with his thousands of Hun warriors, invaded the Roman Empire in 450 AD. In this description the historian used almost identical language to that of the prophet.

*...after a short space of time, as Orosius related, the race of the Huns, fiercer than ferocity itself, flamed forth.*<sup>46</sup>

Notice the expression, *flamed forth*, which reminds one of a blazing meteor.

*The rise of the great power which threatened European civilization in the fifth century was as sudden and rapid as its fall.*<sup>47</sup>

*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 (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.*<sup>48</sup>

Such a description fits perfectly with the symbolism of the third trumpet. Attila called himself *the scourge of God, and the terror of men*.

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<sup>45</sup> J.C. Robertson, *History of the Christian Church* (London: 1854), 1:521.

<sup>46</sup> Charles C Mierow (Tr), *Jordanes Origin and Deeds of the Goths* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1908), , *Jordanes, Jordanes Origin and Deeds of the Goths* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1908),

<sup>47</sup> John B. Bury, *A History of the Later Roman Empire*

<sup>48</sup> [Details in pamphlet p 41](#)

Creasy writes:

*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, "Thou art 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.<sup>49</sup>*

*In the reign of Attila, the Huns again became the terror of the world...that formidable Barbarian who alternatively insulted and invaded the East and the West, and urged the rapid downfall of the Roman Empire.<sup>50</sup>*

One of the great battles listed by Creasy was the battle of Châlons in Northern France. Here 700,000 Huns under Attila's leadership met the Romans and Visigoths who had combined to counter Attila. It was a terrible battle which saw staggering slaughter.<sup>51</sup> In fact Attila and his Huns were repulsed on that battlefield. Yet he was not wholly defeated and retreated to the mountain regions, to the rivers and springs of water, just as the prophecy stated. There he reigned until returning to his capital to later die of apoplexy.

The Huns had spread over all of Eastern Europe, where they were impossible to oppose. They even invaded China and Media – north of Persia – which gives an idea of the extent of their conquests. However after the death of Attila they began to withdraw from Europe, returning to the East, while a remnant remained in what we now call Hungary. Thus the third trumpet was fulfilled by the terrifying invasion of Attila and his Huns.

## The fourth trumpet

*Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night. Revelation 8:12.*

### The sun

The symbolism of this trumpet is the most difficult of the seven. The term a *third of the sun* must be symbolic because it could not be referring to the literal sun. What then would the sun, moon and the stars represent within the Roman Empire?

*The third part* could apply to Western Rome, so this symbolism most probably refers to the leading lights, the rulers, of Western Rome. Interestingly there were three bodies involved in governance of the Roman Empire. These were the Emperor, the consuls and

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<sup>49</sup> Edward S. Creasy, *Decisive Battles of the World* (London: University College Press, 1899), 148.

<sup>50</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

<sup>51</sup> Edward S. Creasy, *Decisive Battles of the World*

the senate. The Revelator likens them to the sun, moon and stars. The Emperor may be represented by the sun, the consul by the moon and the senate by the stars. Under the fourth trumpet these ruling powers were put out of action, bringing civil darkness over the third part of the empire. There was 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 Odoacer. They had been allied with Attila and his Huns and remained behind when Attila retired to the East. The Heruli invaded Italy in 476 AD and Odoacer gave orders that the office of the Emperor of Western Rome was to be abolished. As a response the reigning Emperor abdicated and Odoacer became 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...*<sup>52</sup>

## The moon and stars

What was the ultimate fate of the moon and the stars? The consulship represented by the moon was abolished in 541AD<sup>53</sup>. In 553AD the Roman senate, represented by the stars, resigned because it had become unable to govern.<sup>54</sup> Thus the rule of the leading lights of Western Rome was terminated. Under the fourth trumpet Western Rome had come to her end. As St Jerome stated when he saw that Rome was to fall:

*The world's glorious sun has been extinguished.*

The English poet Byron, in describing the same event wrote

*She saw her glories star by star expire.*<sup>55</sup>

This interpretation explains the symbolism of the fourth trumpet.

## Cause of Rome's downfall

Historians give many reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire after it had ruled for 644 years. However it is generally agreed that the main cause of Rome's downfall was internal corruption. It disintegrated from within. This is the inevitable outcome of almost every system which is constructed by human societies. Man is possessed of a fallen nature and the works of man ultimately disintegrate.

The failure of civilisations is one of the lessons of history. This is the significance of the second chapter of Daniel. The image commences with the golden empire, while the successive metals representing the various kingdoms are all of increasingly inferior quality – from silver to brass, iron and finally clay. This tells us that the kingdoms of this world, built upon human devising, eventually degenerate and disintegrate.

As predicted in Daniel 2, the iron kingdom of Rome would be divided. Maybe one of the purposes of the trumpets was to show how Rome was to be divided and how the feet of the image – the kingdoms of Europe – were to be 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.

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<sup>52</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 4:316.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 4:495.

<sup>55</sup> Edward B. Elliot, *Horae Apocalypticae*

## Apostate Christianity

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 surely have stemmed the tide of corruption.

The answer is that the Christian church within the Empire had itself become corrupt. Revelation 9 reveals that in spite of the judgments of the first six trumpets upon the apostate people of the empire, they continued in their downward course.

*But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts. Revelation 9:20*

These sins were exactly the ones that were perpetrated by the apostate Christians of the Roman Empire. It is easy to understand why the trumpets were sent as visitations of divine judgment. It is recognized that corruption which exists under the guise of religion is the worst kind of corruption.

This phenomenon is of significance to Christians today. Falsehood, hypocrisy and corruption always receive the disapproval of heaven - even though they may occur under the guise of religion. In fact this makes these sins all the more offensive to God and He will not overlook them. 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.... 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.*

*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.*

*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....*

*The true people of God, who have the spirit of the work of the Lord and the salvation of souls at heart, will ever view sin in its real, sinful character. They will always be on the side of faithful and plain dealing with sins which easily beset the people of God, especially in the closing work for the church.<sup>56</sup>*

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<sup>56</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1948), 365-366

## Conclusion

When there is corruption and apostasy in His church, God will not overlook these. 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 was the fundamental purpose of the trumpets.

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## Appendix A – An errant view

Another Spirit of Prophecy statement which refers to trumpets is found in a diary entry of Ellen White's in 1895. A violent windstorm reminded God's servant of the judgments of God during the seven last plagues.

*Terrible are the judgments of God revealed. The seven angels stood before God to receive their commission. To them were given seven trumpets. The Lord was going forth to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, and the earth was to disclose her blood and no more cover her slain.<sup>57</sup>*

Some believe that this is an explanation or comment on the seven trumpets prophecy of Revelation 8 and 9. However, in this statement the prophet is borrowing the descriptive language of Scripture and using it out of context to describe the seven last plagues. This is termed the homiletic use of Scripture - the practice of using a passage out of context to describe a given situation. Such a use is recognized as permissible in preaching and writing.

The wording of Revelation 8 which Ellen White borrows fittingly describes the plagues because there are also seven angels involved and the plagues form a part of God's controversy with regard to the unsaved. Trumpets are symbolic of war or invasions.

To take a Scriptural term from a diary entry, used homiletically, out of context, and employ it as authority for a new application of the seven trumpets is most unfortunate. The evidence for the fulfillment of the seven trumpets as espoused by Bible scholars of longstanding and by Seventh-day Adventists is so overwhelming that any undermining of that interpretation should not be taken lightly.

Uninformed statements have been published stating that the historic interpretations of prophecy as promulgated by Seventh-day Adventists are deficient and inaccurate. This practice is misleading and can only cause confusion. This last observation is confirmed by the Spirit of Prophecy:

*The great waymarks of truth, showing us our bearings in prophetic history, are to be carefully guarded, lest they be torn down, and replaced with theories that would bring confusion rather than genuine light.... Some will take the truth applicable to their time, and place it in the future. Events in the train of prophecy that had their fulfillment away in the past are made future, and thus by these theories the faith of some is undermined.<sup>58</sup>*

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<sup>57</sup> MS 59 (Diary)

<sup>58</sup> Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* 2:101-102.

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