

BITTER HONEY: THE REVELATION

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CHAPTER 8: THE THREE WOES

Verse 1

This verse should be a part of chapter seven.

Verse 2

In chapter 6, the martyrs were told to rest until the full number of the martyrs were killed. The Old and New Testament church stood before Christ. Chapter 7 also promised that another camp of Jews would arise. Chapters 8 and 9 would describe this camp and its final conflict with man's empire. Chapter 8 would begin with Israel's return from exile. The interpretation of this chapter hinged on understanding one of the prominent symbols in Revelation. That symbol was "Babylon." Chapters 17 and 18 would later describe "Babylon" and her fall in detail. "Babylon" would also play a part in chapters 8, 9, 16, and 19. What was "Babylon?"

The Old Testament prophets recorded how God's people were carried away into captivity by Assyria and Babylon. After an initial period of suffering and disruption, the Jews prospered in exile. Many became wealthy and comfortable. After 70 years, God called His people home to Palestine, but many did not want to return. Life in Palestine was at best dangerous and difficult. Why should they leave the security that they had found in their adopted home lands. Looking forward to this time, Isaiah and Jeremiah warned Israel that God would eventually judge Babylon (Isaiah 43:14; Jeremiah 25:12). Jeremiah warned the Jews to leave Babylon so that they would not share in her suffering (Jeremiah 50:8-9; 51:6). Israel's exile would be over when Babylon fell to the Persians.

Israel's New Testament exile has followed a somewhat similar pattern. By Christ's day, Jews were already scattered throughout the Roman world. There were far more Jews in southern Egypt than in Palestine. After the Jewish revolts of 70 AD and 135 AD, the Israelites were cut off from their homeland completely. The land was laid waste and the Israelites were dispersed among the nations. Today, the New Testament exile has been gradually ending. After centuries of persecution, many Israelites are returning to Palestine. Yet, large numbers of Jews are still living very comfortable lives in exile and have little desire to return to the danger and conflict of Palestine. In this context, John warned that a second "Babylon" would be destroyed. God warned His people to leave that rich land before they shared in its eventual suffering. John promised that this later day "Babylon" would be destroyed by the nations of the world so that they could give their authority to the antichrist. So the completion of Israel's return to the land would open the last chapters of history. After "Babylon" was destroyed, a new world empire would appear that would be an outgrowth of the old Roman empire. The new Rome would overrun Israel at Armageddon. The antichrist's armies would then turn against each other. Nearly the whole world would be destroyed in the fires of their battle. Then Christ would return on the clouds of heaven.

Revelation 8 and 9 described these climactic events with 7 trumpets. The trumpet motif may have grown from several Old Testament passages. The seven trumpets followed a pattern somewhat similar to the order of the creation days in Genesis 1. They were also somewhat similar to the list of ten plagues as they were recorded in Psalm 105:25-36. God may have intentionally drawn parallels from these passages. The Lord may have intended to destroy the world in a way similar to His creation of it. Another possible parallel might be Joshua 6. Israel walked around Jericho for six days. Then on the seventh day, they blew their trumpets seven times and the city fell. Jericho's fall may have been in part of "type" of the final judgment. When God blew His trumpet seven times, the whole world would fall. The trumpet theme could also have been tied to a few other Biblical references. In Exodus 19:16, Israel heard a loud trumpet sound. Then God descended onto Mount Sinai. Christ's descent onto Sinai may have been partly a "type"

of His second coming. Then the wilderness community may have symbolized in several ways the beginning of Christ's eternal kingdom.

Verses 3-5

In verse 2, John saw seven angels who were given seven trumpets. Before John explained these trumpets, he added three verses of introduction. John began by pointing back to the period of mixed nations during which Israel lived in exile. In Revelation 6:9-10, this period was symbolized by martyrs beneath the altar. These martyrs were asking God how long He would refrain from judging the earth. In Rev 8:3, an angel appeared who stood by the altar with the martyrs. This angel added to the martyrs' prayers. These prayers went up before God as incense on the altar (cf. Psalm 141:2). In Revelation 8:5, this angel filled his censer with these prayers and threw them to the earth in judgment. Then God answered the prayers of His people with thunder, sounds, lightning, and an earthquake. The angel who cast fire to earth may have been a symbol for Christ. This image of Christ may have been carried over from Ezekiel 10:6-7. Christ appeared in Ezekiel 9 as a man clothed in linen. Then in Ezekiel 10, God commanded Christ to take fire from between the cherubim and scatter it over Jerusalem. The coals of God's judgment destroyed Jerusalem through man's first empire, Babylon. The fire in Revelation 8:5 would destroy the earth through man's last empire, the new Rome.

Verses 6-13

In verse 13, an eagle cried, "Woe, Woe, Woe" to the earth because of the three angels who are about to sound. The seven trumpets described three "Woes:" Babylon's fall, Armageddon, and the final judgment. The first five trumpets described Babylon's fall. After John's description of the fifth trumpet, he said, "The first Woe is past; behold, two Woes are still coming after these things" (Revelation 9:12). Babylon's fall was past. Only Armageddon and the final judgment remained. After John's description of Armageddon in Revelation 11:13, John wrote, "The second Woe is past; behold, the third Woe is coming quickly" (Revelation 11:14). After Armageddon, God's final judgment would be near.

What did trumpets 1-5 have to do with Babylon? All five were drawn from Old Testament prophecies about God's judgments on Assyria and Babylon. Assyria led the northern kingdom into exile. Then Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and exiled Judah. God promised to judge both nations for harming His people (Jeremiah 51:24). The first trumpet sounded, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood. These were thrown to the earth, and a third of the earth and trees and grass were burned up. Scripture often used fire and storm to describe God's anger and judgment. When used, these symbols pointed men beyond God's imminent judgment to His final three "woes." In Isaiah 30:30-31, the symbols of fire and hail were used to describe Assyria's fall. The prophet wrote, "And the Lord will cause His voice of authority to be heard. And the descending of His arm to be seen, and in the flame of a consuming fire, in cloudburst, downpour, and hailstones. For at the voice of the Lord Assyria will be terrified, when He strikes with the rod." Fire and hail would now become the rod of God's punishment, and He would be avenged on those who harmed His children. The first trumpet served as a transition between chapters 7 and 8. The first trumpet burned the earth, the trees, and the grass. John was pointing back to Revelation 7:3. The new Rome had been prevented from harming the earth, sea or trees until God's people were sealed. These men were sealed in the rest of chapter 7. Now the new Rome would be released, and God's judgment would begin.

The second trumpet sounded, and something like a great burning mountain was thrown into the sea. Then a third of the sea became blood. A third of the sea's creatures died, and a third of the sea's ships sank. The second trumpet came from Jeremiah 51:25. Here God condemned Babylon with the words, "Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain, who destroys the whole earth." God declared, "I will stretch out My hand against you and roll you down from the crags. I will make you a burnt out

mountain." God called Babylon a great mountain which He would cast down and burn out. So the second trumpet spoke of Babylon's fall.

The third trumpet sounded, and a great star fell from heaven which burned like a torch. It fell on the rivers, and men died from drinking the water. The star's name was Wormwood. These verses also described Babylon's fall. The symbol of a great falling star came from Isaiah 14:12. God was talking about Babylon in that passage as well. God said, "How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations!" Babylon was the great star fallen from heaven, and she was identified with Satan. The idea of Wormwood may also have been related to Numbers 5:12-22 which described God's bitter water of jealousy. In Jeremiah 9:15 and 23:15, God said that He would destroy Israel. The Lord threatened to give His people wormwood and bitter poisoned water. The threatened punishment was destruction by Babylon. So Babylon was associated with Wormwood. The same motif was used in Amos 6:12. God's people were accused of turning justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood.

The fourth trumpet sounded, and a third of the sun, moon, and stars were smitten so that a third of the day and night were darkened. Isaiah 13 described Babylon's fall to Persia with the same symbols. Isaiah wrote, "For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will not shed its light. Thus I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity... Behold, I am going to stir up the Medes against them" (Isaiah 13:10, 11-17). Armageddon was usually described with the same kind of fire symbols because the same kind of fire will destroy Babylon and the new Rome. This fire could be many things, but it seems to be a weapon. Revelation will later claim that the new Babylon would be destroyed by the nations around her (Revelation 17:16-17). Then the armies of Armageddon will destroy each other. It is appropriate that man's violence should destroy him. God judged men this way more than once in the Old Testament (Judges 7:22; 1 Samuel 14:20; II Chronicles 20:23). Ezekiel, Haggai, and Zechariah promised that the armies of Armageddon would destroy each other (Ezekiel 38:21; Haggai 2:22; Zechariah 14:13). Habakkuk made a similar promise. He said that God would kill the head of the house of evil with his own spears (Habakkuk 3:13-14).