

Trumpets and Bowls

Revelation 8:1-2, 6

Introduction: People dismiss any explanation of the Book of Revelation because they believe events and descriptions in the book can be applied to anything. Frankly, they have good reason to believe that dismissive ideology. The Book of Revelation has been the book of speculation and farfetched theories for centuries.

However, the answer to that concern can be addressed by narrowing the options where no other option is available or by identifying an event that has never occurred in history and likely never will again.

I. The first four trumpets are related together in succession without an interlude.

- First trumpet seems to be related to a volcanic eruption (Rev. 8:7).
- Second trumpet seems to relate a volcanic eruption near or in the sea (Rev. 8:8-9).
- Third trumpet seems to relate a meteoroid (Rev. 8:10-11).
- Fourth trumpet relates an obscured sky for 8 hours (Rev. 8:12).

A. Individually, there's nothing to see here. Any such event could be assigned as a possibility. But if all four trumpets occurred in different locations on the exact same day, could we say that was just coincidence? Or was the hand of God?

B. Historically, four events that match the description of the first four trumpets occurred on October 23, 499! According to Joshua the Stylite, "In the month of the first Teshrin (October) of this year [499 A.D.], on the 23d, which was a Saturday, at the rising of the sun, his [the sun's] brightness was taken away from him, and his sphere of light appeared like silver. He [the sphere] had no perceptible rays, and our eyes could easily gaze upon him without hindrance, for he had neither rays nor beams to hinder them from looking upon him. Just as it is easy for us to look upon the moon, so we could look upon him. He continued thus till towards the eighth hour. The ground over which shone the little light that there was, seemed as if ashes or sulphur had been sprinkled upon it."¹

II. The fifth trumpet never occurred before or since in history (Rev. 9:3-4).

A. The locusts were commanded not to eat the grass, any trees or foliage. The historian Joshua the Stylite records this unusual event in A.D. 500. "There came a vast quantity of locusts into our country from the south. They did not,

¹ Joshua The Stylite. The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite, Kindle Edition, XXXVI.

however, destroy or harm anything in this year, but merely laid their eggs in our country in no small quantity.”²

B. The following year, the locust came out in droves (Rev. 9:5-6). “In the month of Adar (March) of this year the locusts came upon us out of the ground, so that, because of their number, we imagined that not only had the eggs that were in the ground been hatched to our harm, but that the very air was vomiting them against us, and that they were descending from the sky upon us. When they were only able to crawl, they devoured and consumed all the Arab territory and all that of Ras-'ain and Tella and Edessa. But after they were able to fly, the stretch of their radii was from the border of Assyria to the Western Sea (the Mediterranean), and they went northwards as far as the boundary of the Ortaye. They ate up and desolated these districts and utterly consumed everything that was in them... Presently after, in the month of Nisan (April), there began to be a dearth of corn and of everything else, and four modii of wheat were sold for a dinar. In the months of Khaziran (June) and Tammuz (July) the inhabitants of these districts were reduced to all sorts of shifts to live. They sowed millet for their own use, but it was not enough for them, because it did not thrive. Before the year came to an end, misery from hunger had reduced the people to beggary, so that they sold their property for half its worth, horses and oxen and sheep and pigs. And because the locusts had devoured all the crop, and left neither pasture nor food for man or beast, many forsook their native places and removed to other districts of the north and west. And the sick who were in the villages, as well as the old men and boys and women and infants, and those who were tortured by hunger, being unable to walk far and go to distant places, entered into the cities to get a livelihood by begging; and thus many villages and hamlets were left destitute of inhabitants. They did not, however, escape punishment.”³

III. The sixth trumpet dries up the Euphrates River (Rev. 9:13-15). Not that it is unusual... it has happened on other occasions in history. However, on this occasion (A.D. 502) it allowed the Persians to rally four nations to cross the Euphrates River and indiscriminately destroyed much of the Roman Empire in a 5-year reign of terror. The death count historically was well into the hundred thousands.

² Ibid, XXXIII.

³ Ibid, XXXVIII.

IV. The seventh trumpet announces the coming end of all prophecy (Rev. 10:7). When it sounds, it declares all the world kingdoms have become part of the Lord's kingdom (Rev. 11:15). Christ shall reign forever.

V. A long interlude occurs before the first bowl is announced. Various visions are seen by John until we reach chapter 16.

A. The first three bowls and the fifth bowl refer to sores, blood and death (Rev. 16:2-4, 10-11). In fact, we know they are plagues as the bowls were identified as plagues (Rev. 15:1, 6, 8).

B. The Black plague also known as the Bubonic plague struck the Roman Empire in A.D. 541. By A.D. 542, the entire Roman Empire was fully engulfed in the plague. In A.D. 546, Rome fell to Persian King Totila (Rev. 18:1-2). Never to be inhabited again. Coincidental?

C. The bubonic plague wiped out half the known population at that time. The city of Constantinople lost an estimated 60% of its population.

D. According to a historian named Procopius, "They had a sudden fever,... a bubonic swelling developed,...below the abdomen, but also inside the armpit, and in some cases also beside the ears, and at different points on the thighs.... The bubonic swelling became mortified and the sufferer, no longer able to endure the pain, died.... Death came in some cases immediately, in others after many days; and with some the body broke out with black pustules about as large as a lentil and these did not survive even one day, but all succumbed immediately. With many also a vomiting of blood ensued without visible cause and straightway brought death.... Now in those cases where the swelling rose to an unusual size and a discharge of pus had set in, it came about that they escaped from the disease and survived."⁴

VI. The fourth Trumpet brought famine (Rev. 16:8-9).

A. If the plague wasn't bad enough, add "the painful and bitter trial of famine for about eight years. It came in small steps until it should seize that place... so that three or four modii of wheat... were very difficult to find for purchase. The fields were now unsown because no seed was left, so that even people who were industrious and wealthy would find (only) a little to sow. The earth covered (the seed) but it did not germinate, or when it did sprout and come up, suddenly it faded and withered, to the effect that people were in difficulty and many would flee from one region to another and from one city to another, as a result of the tribulation of that bitter and harsh famine."⁵

⁴ Procopius, *Procopius History of Wars*, vol. 1, XXII & XXIII, p. 451-473.

⁵ Witold Witakowski, *Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre Chronicle Part III*, (Liverpool University Press, 1996), p. 103.

B. The fourth bowl produced a scorching sun with great heat. Yet, the inhabitants did not repent, nor did they turn to God in their misery.

VII. The sixth bowl, like the sixth trumpet, dries up the Euphrates (Rev. 16:12).

A. The similar consequence of the dried river allows the Ostrogoths under the leadership of King Totila to sack Rome in A.D. 546 after a yearlong siege. The ancient city of Rome was never inhabited again. Coincidence?

B. The first bowl of wrath was poured out in A.D. 541. The fifth bowl was poured out on the throne of the beast (Constantinople) in A.D. 542. Bubonic plague lasted for years, and famine plagued the Roman Empire for the whole of the 540's. Rome fell in A.D. 546. Coincidence?

VIII. The final bowl produced an unusual earthquake (Rev. 16:17-18).

A. This great earthquake was different than all the rest in that it had not occurred since men were on the earth. What was so special about this earthquake that never occurred in history? How about an earthquake that lasted 40 days!

B. In A.D. 551, "there was a great earthquake in the capital on Sunday the 7th of the month of August. There was a terrible, violent and mighty earthquake in the capital [Constantinople] in the night, as Sunday was dawning. Numerous houses were overthrown by it and became dreadful tombs for their inhabitants. (Also) numerous churches and baths and the walls of cities collapsed, particularly the wall of the capital which was called "of the Golden Gate." And again, many souls perished everywhere in this earthquake and many cities were overthrown and devastated. Nicomedia, the metropolis of Bithynia, was overthrown and totally destroyed. Most of it was swallowed up by the sea and the rest was buried in the collapse. (Later) many people were found alive in the ruins. Some of them were retrieved unhurt, some with injuries. These terrible earthquakes had taken place for forty days, coming one after another."⁶

C. Many historians believe Constantinople built a second wall after this devastating event to better protect the city. The city was already divided into two parts. The new wall divided the city into three parts (Rev. 16:19).

Conclusion: The Lord had the Book of Revelation written in such a way that coincidental interpretation serves to prevent the unbelievers from understanding it. Please do not dismiss what history so clearly reveals!

⁶ Witold Witakowski, *Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre Chronicle Part III*, (Liverpool University Press, 1996), pp. 112-113.