

THE GREAT REVERSAL

Revelation 8

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Going in reverse is usually a bad thing. At FedEx they train their drivers to try to avoid going in reverse if at all possible. When you go in reverse the chances are high that you will hit something. I found that out first hand. When I was in high school my best friend and I decided to rent a movie. We decided to meet at Blockbuster, and then go somewhere to watch it. When we parked our cars, he parked his on the left side of the drive, and I parked mine on the right. When we left, we both pulled out quickly like a couple teenage boys and we backed into each other. I remember turning around to look at him, and he was turning around to look at me, and I had never seen his eyes so big in my life.
2. Today we are going to see a great reversal in the book of Revelation. That's really what Revelation is all about it. It is a reversal. When God made a covenant with Israel, Israel became God's bride. They were God's chosen people. They were blessed. In Revelation we witness a great reversal as God rejects and divorces Israel for her unfaithfulness to Him, and then pronounces judgment against her.
3. Let's begin with a recap of Revelation so far.
 - i. In the first three verses, we are told that Revelation is all about events that "must soon take place," because "the time is near" (Rev 1:1-3). Revelation is not about the end times, but about the near future – the first century.
 - ii. Rev 2-3 – Before Jesus gives the visions, He has a specific message to the seven churches in Asia.
 - iii. Rev 4 – God is on the throne as judge.
 - iv. Rev 5 – God holds out a seven-sealed scroll. The scroll is God's divorce certificate against apostate Israel. The seven seals represent God's seven-fold judgments and curses against Israel.
 - v. Rev 6 – Jesus, the Lamb, opens the first six seals, one at a time. When each seal is opened, John sees a different vision of destruction that awaits Israel.
 - vi. Rev 7 – Before Jesus opens the seventh seal, John sees a vision of what will happen to the Christians as judgment is being carried out against Israel. The Christians in Jerusalem will be able to escape before the Romans level the city. At the same time, all the Christians around the world who were being killed for their faith will go to heaven to be with God.
 - vii. Rev 8 – Jesus proceeds to open the seventh and last seal.

II. TEXT AND COMMENTARY

1. *1 When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. 2 Then I saw the seven angels who stand in the presence of God; seven trumpets were given to them. 3 Another angel, with a golden incense burner, came*

and stood at the altar. He was given a large amount of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar in front of the throne. 4 The smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up in the presence of God from the angel's hand. 5 The angel took the incense burner, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it to the earth; there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

- i. Jesus opened the seventh seal. There was silence for half an hour. Seven trumpets were given to seven angels. Jesus is not finished describing the impending destruction of Israel. As each trumpet blasts we will get a more detailed and more frightening vision of the judgment that was to take place in 70 AD.
- ii. All of this is an allusion to the burning of incense in the OT, which was done twice a day by a priest in the temple.
 1. The temple had two rooms. The first room was the Holy Place, and the second Room was the Most Holy Place, or the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies had the ark of the covenant, a container which held the ten commandments. The Holy of Holies was considered to be God's dwelling place; His throne room. No one could enter except the high priest of Israel, and only once a year. The two rooms were divided by a curtain. Right outside the Holy of Holies, in the Holy Place, there was a piece of furniture called the altar of incense. It was only 18 inches wide and long, and three feet high. It was made of acacia wood (uh-kay-shuh), overlaid with gold. Twice a day, in the morning and evening, a priest would burn incense on the altar.
 2. The officiating priest (incensing priest), chosen by lot, chose two other priests to be his assistants. Edersheim
 3. The three then approached first the altar of burnt offering. One filled a golden censer with incense, while the other placed in a golden bowl burning coals from the altar. Edersheim
 4. The three went into the Holy Place. One assistant spread the burning coals on the golden altar. The other arranged the incense. Then the assistants left. Edersheim
 5. Then the incensing priest burned the incense, laying it upon the coals. This would last about thirty minutes to enter, burn the incense, and return.
 6. While the incensing priest burned incense inside the temple, outside the temple all the people fell down before the Lord, spreading their hands in silent prayer. A deep silence rested on everyone throughout the vast Temple buildings.

7. After a time of prayer, the incensing priest would exit the temple, and stand on the steps of the temple. Then he would lift his hands above his head, and recite the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:24-26.
 - a. **Numbers 6:24-26** “May the LORD bless you and protect you; may the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; may the LORD look with favor on you and give you peace.”
 - b. Imagine what it must have been like when Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, came out of the temple after offering the incense, and was unable to give the benediction.
- iii. In Revelation 8, when Jesus opens the seventh seal, an angel stood at the altar to burn incense, just like the priest in Israel.
- iv. The incense represents the prayers of God’s people. What are God’s people praying? The prayers are those offered by the martyred saints in heaven in Rev 6:9-10, crying out to God for vengeance against the Jews who were persecuting them.
- v. Then the angel filled his incense burner with fire and hurled it to the earth (land; land of Israel).
 1. **This is the first great reversal in Revelation 8.** Normally after burning incense the priest would exit the temple to bless the people of Israel. In Revelation 8, after the angel burns the incense, instead of blessing the nation of Israel, he punishes them.
- vi. When the angel hurled the fire to the land of Israel, there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.
 1. This is an allusion to Mount Sinai in the book of Exodus. When the Israelites left Egypt, they came to Mount Sinai in the wilderness. This was when God officially adopted Israel to be His people. A marriage ceremony, if you will, when God took Israel to be His bride. God called Moses up to the top of the mountain to give him the ten commandments, the covenant, while the people waited at the foot of the mountain. As Moses was receiving the ten commandments, God descended on the mountain. There was thunder and lightning, a thick cloud on the mountain, the mountain was completely covered with smoke, and the whole mountain shook violently (Ex 19:16-19). When the people saw this, they trembled with fear. Moses told them, “Don’t be afraid, God has put on this display so you will fear Him (Ex 20:18-21).” It was a warning. In other words, “God doesn’t want to harm you. He loves you and wants what is best for you. But as you can see, He is not to be defied, ignored, disrespected, disobeyed. If you ignore these commandments, if you break His covenant, He will punish you.”

2. That is exactly what is being portrayed in Revelation. First century Israel had broken God's covenant. They murdered Jesus, and the apostles, and countless Christians. So now the God who gave them the law is punishing them for breaking the law.
 3. **This is the second great reversal in Revelation 8.** In the wilderness God manifested His power to marry the nation of Israel. In Revelation God manifested His power to divorce the nation of Israel. In Exodus, God manifested His power when He gave Israel the covenant. In Revelation, God manifested His power when Israel broke the covenant.
2. *6 And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.*
- i. Then the seven angels get ready to blow their trumpets. Just as seven trumpets were used to signal the destruction of Jericho (Josh 6), seven trumpets are used to signal the destruction of Israel in 70 AD.
 1. In the case of Jericho, seven priests, each with a trumpet, marched around the city one time for six days, blowing their horns. On the seventh day, they marched around the city seven times, blowing their horns. After the seventh time, the priest blew the horns, and the troops shouted, and the walls of the city came down.
 2. **This is the third great reversal in Revelation 8.** In the story of Jericho, God destroys the idolatrous city of Jericho through the army of Israel. But in Revelation 8, Jerusalem becomes Jericho; the Jews become the idolaters; and God destroys the city of Jerusalem through Roman army.
 - ii. The seven trumpets, like the seven seals, signal the destruction that is coming soon upon Israel.
 - iii. The seven trumpets do not represent seven more events to occur after the events described with the seven seals, which would then equal 14 different events. The seven trumpets are not new events to follow the seven seals, but are a reiteration and an intensification of the judgments that await Israel. They are showing the same judgments from a different and more severe angle. Jesus is not finished describing His wrath which was to be poured out in the Jewish War of AD 66-70.
 1. **Milton Terry** "[The trumpets are] another set of symbols pointing to the same calamities [as the seals]."
 2. **Wilson** "There is no pressing reason to take all these [seven seals and seven trumpets] in serial fashion, as though we now have a total of fourteen railroad cars or beads on a string. The description is of the apocalyptic destruction of the city of Jerusalem, and each trumpet gives us a fuller picture of what was going to happen in the one cataclysmic judgment that was going to fall upon that wretched city."

3. *7 The first angel blew his trumpet, and hail and fire, mixed with blood, were hurled to the earth. So a third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.*
- i. When the first trumpet is blown, hail and fire mixed with blood were hurled to the earth.
 - ii. This is an allusion to God's wrath poured out on Egypt when Pharaoh refused to let the Jews leave. Do you remember the story? The Jews had been living in Egypt for 430 years, and they were enslaved to the Egyptians. So, God sent Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses went to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and said, "God said we need to leave." Pharaoh said, "I don't think so." Then God sent a series of ten plagues against Pharaoh and the Egyptians. The seventh plague was hail, which was accompanied by fire – lightning and thunder. It destroyed people, animals, and much of their crops.
 - iii. **This is the fourth great reversal in Revelation 8.** In the OT God punished Egypt with the plagues. In Revelation, Israel has become Egypt. In Revelation 11:8 Jerusalem is called Egypt. Now God isn't sending His plagues against the enemy of Israel; He is punishing Israel, who has become His enemy.
 - iv. What is the significance of the thirds – a third of the earth, trees, and grass were burned up?
 1. This has both a symbolic and a literal meaning.
 - a. Symbolically, this means that the wrath poured out on Israel will not completely destroy it. There will be a remnant who will survive. And indeed, the Jewish war didn't result in the annihilation of every Jew. 1,000,000 were killed, but many of them escaped with their lives.
 - b. Literally, this was also a prophecy of what would actually take place in the Jewish war. When the Romans invaded Israel, they practiced a scorched earth policy. In every city, in every village, and even in the countryside, as they made their way south toward Jerusalem, they burned everything. They cut down all the trees to use as fuel, to build their equipment, or to simply ruin the land of their enemies.
 - c. Josephus records that the Romans cut down all the trees around Jerusalem for 11 miles. The city was surrounded by beautiful gardens, like the garden of Gethsemane. These were all burned and destroyed.
 - d. **Josephus** "The countryside, like the city, was a pitiful sight, for where once there had been a multitude of trees and parks, there was now an utter wilderness stripped bare of timber; and no stranger who had seen the old Judea and the glorious

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

4. *8 The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain ablaze with fire was hurled into the sea. So a third of the sea became blood, 9 a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.*

- i. There are four facts that you need to understand to interpret this trumpet:
 1. In the OT, the Jewish prophets would prophesy about impending judgment on different nations. The language they used was highly symbolic and metaphorical, rather than literal. In Revelation, the visions that John sees are very similar to the OT prophecies. Along with the fact that Revelation is the most symbolic book in the Bible, this should tell us that the visions in Revelation are symbolic and not literal.
 2. In Scripture, kingdoms and nations are called mountains, and the judgments that are spoken against them use that imagery. Listen to this prophecy against Babylon.
 - a. **Jeremiah 51:25** “Look, I am against you, devastating mountain. This is the Lord’s declaration. You devastate the whole earth. I will stretch out my hand against you, roll you down from the cliffs, and turn you into a charred mountain.”
 3. Third, keep in mind that Israel was God’s holy mountain; Mount Zion (Ps 48:1-2; Is 27:13; Is 30:29; Is 66:20; Joel 3:17).
 4. Fourth, in scripture the Gentile nations are often referred to as the sea, or waters, or a flood (Rev 17:15; Ps 65:7; Ps 144:7; Is 17:12; 60:5; Jer 46:7-8; 47:1-2; Ez 26:3).
 - a. In Daniel 7, four beasts arise out of the sea. They are four Gentile nations – Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome.
- ii. In this trumpet the prophecy is that Israel, the mountain of God, will be destroyed with the fire of God’s wrath, and the surviving Jews will be dispersed to Gentile nations. This was fulfilled in 70 AD when Rome destroyed Israel, and Jerusalem. The Jews no longer had a homeland, so they had to move to the surrounding nations.
- iii. **Revelation 8:8b-9** “So a third of the sea became blood, 9 a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.”
- iv. This has both a symbolic as well as a literal meaning.
 1. Symbolically it is an allusion to ten plagues that God brought against Egypt in the book of Exodus. The first plague was turned water to

blood – all the waters of Egypt, the rivers, canals, ponds, water reservoirs, even the water in wooden and stone containers. This caused all the fish to die. This is part of the fourth great reversal that we saw with the blowing of the first trumpet. In the OT God punished Egypt with the plagues. In Revelation, Israel has become Egypt. In Revelation 11:8 Jerusalem is called Egypt. Now God isn't sending His plagues against the enemy of Israel; He is punishing Israel, who has become His enemy.

2. There is also a literal fulfillment in the Jewish War. Josephus records a battle between the Jews and the Romans on the Sea of Galilee that was a bloodbath. "One might see the lake all bloody, and full of dead bodies, for not one of them escaped...dead bodies all swelled; and as the dead bodies were inflamed by the sun, and putrefied, they corrupted the air."
5. *10 The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from heaven. It fell on a third of the rivers and springs of water. 11 The name of the star is Wormwood, and a third of the waters became wormwood. So, many of the people died from the waters, because they had been made bitter.*
 - i. We now come to the third trumpet.
 - ii. There are two important facts to understand to interpret this trumpet.
 1. Wormwood is a kind of plant that is noted for its intense bitterness.
 2. In the OT, the term wormwood was used to describe God's judgment against Israel. God's wrath is compared to a bitter poison.
 - a. **Jeremiah 9:14-15** "14 Instead, they followed the stubbornness of their hearts and followed the Baals as their ancestors taught them." 15 Therefore, this is what the LORD of Armies, the God of Israel, says: "I am about to feed this people wormwood and give them poisonous water to drink."
 - iii. The third trumpet compares the Roman army to wormwood, a great star that will fall on Israel. And the people of Israel will drink its bitter poison and die.
 - iv. There is another OT allusion in this trumpet. When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, they crossed the Red Sea and came to a place called Marah. They named it Marah, which means bitter, because the water there was bitter and poisonous, and then couldn't drink it. So, God told Moses to throw a tree in the water, and the water became drinkable. Then God said, "If you will be careful to obey me, I will not inflict on you the illnesses that I inflicted on the Egyptians, because I am the Lord who heals you (Rev 15:26)."
 1. **Here we have the fifth great reversal of Revelation 8.** In Exodus God gave them clean water to drink. In the first century, God is giving them poison to drink. In Exodus God offered to be their healer. In the first century God is their enemy.

6. *12 The fourth angel blew his trumpet, 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 was without light and also a third of the night. 13 I looked and heard an eagle flying high overhead, crying out in a loud voice, "Woe! Woe! Woe to those who live on the earth, because of the remaining trumpet blasts that the three angels are about to sound!"*
- i. The fourth angel blows the fourth trumpet.
 - ii. In the OT, a collapsing or failing solar system referred to God's judgment against a nation.
 - iii. **Ezekiel 32:7-8** (a prophecy against Egypt) "When I snuff you out, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars. I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon will not give its light. I will darken all the shining lights in the heavens over you, and will bring darkness on your land. This is the declaration of the Lord God."
 - iv. So here in Revelation, God is about to topple the Jewish state. He is about to kill many of its leaders. Some will survive, and that's why the language of "thirds" is used.
 - v. Then John sees an eagle flying overhead crying out, "Woe! Woe! Woe to those who live on the earth ("land") because of the remaining trumpets (three more!).
 - vi. In OT God promised that Israel that He would send a nation to destroy them like an eagle devouring its prey.
 1. **Deuteronomy 28:49-50** " 49 The LORD will bring a nation from far away, from the ends of the earth, to swoop down on you like an eagle, a nation whose language you won't understand, 50 a ruthless nation, showing no respect for the old and not sparing the young."
 2. The eagle represents the Roman empire. The Roman empire's logo was an eagle with its wings spread open. Rome destroyed Israel in 70 AD.

III. CONCLUSION

1. In Revelation 8 we see a great reversal. God's bride becomes God's enemy. God's blessing on Israel becomes God's curse on Israel. In the OT God heals Israel, in Revelation God poisons Israel.
2. As Christians, each of us experience a great reversal too. Compare your life before Christ to after Christ. Before Christ you were dead in your sins; in Christ you are alive. Before Christ you were under God's wrath; in Christ there is now no condemnation. Before Christ you were a child of Satan; in Christ you are a child of God. Before Christ you were alienated and separated from God; in Christ you are brought near and have access to God.
3. Revelation 8 is a reminder of the wrath that awaits those who reject Christ. And it is a reminder of the wrath that we get to escape because of Christ.