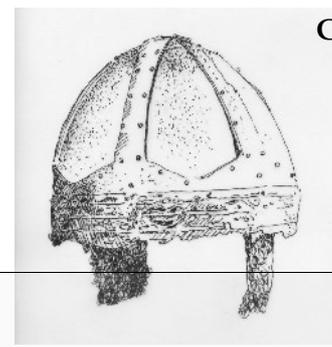


# Roman Empire from 324-500 CE

Chapter

# 2



## Key Bible References

Revelation Chapter 8

## Overview of Revelation 8

After the opening of the 6 seals there is a short period of peace, or “holding” of the “winds”, for the growth of Christianity. A vision of the glory of God's future Kingdom follows. Each prophetic era of Revelation is followed by the vision of the hope, for those symbolically “sealed”, of the time when the Lamb will rule in peace over all nations and kingdoms.

## Peace for 14 Years

### Bible Reference:

And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets. And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand.

And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake. And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound. (Revelation 8:1-6)

## History

The years between 324 and 337 CE were peaceful, until the death of Constantine.

The state church instituted by Constantine now incorporated pagan ideas, which were opposed by some Christians.

After the death of Constantine, war, violence and revolt followed, as each of his sons battled for total control. Constantine's son, Constantine II ruled in the West of the Empire. Constans, his brother, ruled Italy and Illyricum. Constans took control of his brother's domain in 340CE when Constantine II died on his way to destroy his brother Constans. Constans himself was assassinated in an attempt to hold back the Franks, who were pouring into Gaul.

## Commentary: Revelation 8:1-6

When the seventh seal is opened there is a period of peace indicated by the “silence in heaven.” This relates to the years of peace between 324 and 337 CE until the death of Constantine.

This period of 14 years is represented by the time period of “about...half an hour.” Consistently in prophecy short time periods are used to indicate long eras. A day for a year is frequently used. However, this is the only occurrence of half an hour. In this case a day is used for a year of prophetic days (or 360 years). A Jewish day, or 12 hours, will then represent 360 years, so that 1 hour is 30 years, and the half hour represents 15 years.

### History Con't

At this time the Picts and Scots were invading Britain, further weakening the Empire. A third son of Constantine, Constantius, was now ruling the Empire, once again united.

Constantius relied on the support of two young cousins, Gallus and Julian, as subordinates and possible successors. Gallus proved a failure and Constantius had him executed in 354CE. By 359CE Julian controlled the Rhine, having displayed great ability as a military commander, repelling the invasion of the Franks and Germans.

In 361CE Julian renounced Christianity and declared war on his cousin Constantius, who was a cruel, ruthless and oppressive ruler. Civil war was averted in 361CE with the sudden death of Constantius, leaving Julian as his successor.

Julian attempted to reestablish paganism as the state religion and reduce the privileges of the Christian Church, although professing tolerance of all religions.

On 26th June 363 CE, Julian died of wounds received in battle against the Persians and his death ended paganism's last hope.

He was succeeded by Jovian, an ardent Catholic, who abolished Julian's edicts. However, Jovian died suddenly the following year and was succeeded by Valentinian (364 – 375) in the West, and his brother Valens (364 – 378) in the East.

The following decades of the 4th century saw the barbarians converging on the borders of the Empire and within the Empire itself ever increasing civil disorder and unrest.

In 366 CE the Goths crossed the Danube, extending their power to the Baltic. Further west, the Alemanni and Ostrogoths crossed the Rhine and the Saxons invaded the borders of Gaul. Rome was forced to enter into a treaty with the barbarians. The northern tribes were permitted to settle in Thrace, Phrygia and Illyricum.

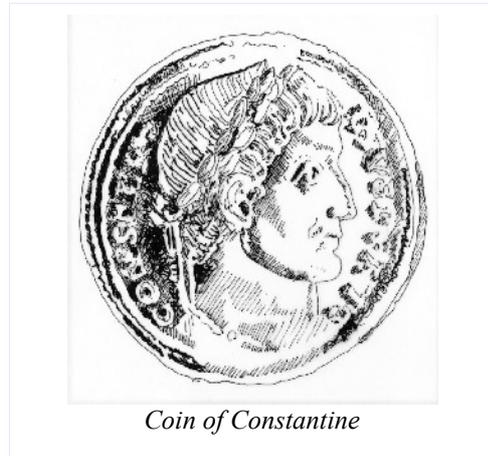
These incursions by the barbarians were the prelude to the calamities that were soon to come upon the Empire.

### Commentary Con't

The incorporation of paganism compromised the purity of the Apostolic teachings and doctrines. The “altar” and the “incense” represent the prayers of those who had remained faithful and who had been praying for help against the state church during this period.

Julian's tolerance of all religions in this era can perhaps be seen as an answer to the prayers of the faithful. It allowed a consolidation of true Christianity.

Julian's re-establishment of paganism was signified by the “earthquake” as a political change. This political and religious earthquake was shortlived.



The vision then reveals seven angels preparing to sound their trumpets.

Trumpets, in the experiences of the nation of Israel, were used to summon the people together, particularly in relation to preparation for war and invasion by enemies. These trumpets were to call the enemies of Rome to rise against Rome.

## Alaric and the Goths

### Bible Reference:

The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up. (Revelation 8:7)

### History

The Goths, a tribe of fugitives from the Huns, sought permission to settle within the borders of the Roman Empire, in the waste-lands south of the Danube.

Alaric, one of their number, became an officer in the Roman Army, under Theodosius.

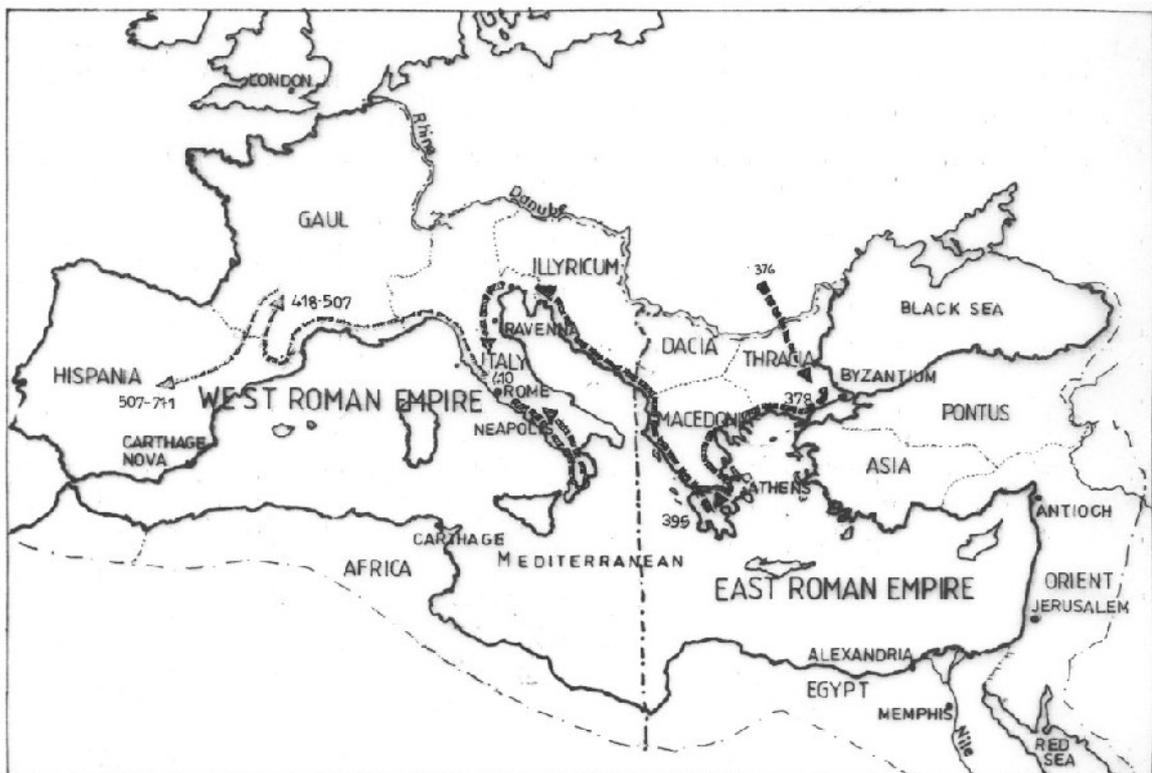
When Theodosius died in 393CE, the West of the Empire (Rome) passed to Honorius, and the East of the Empire (Constantinople) to Arcadius. Arcadius drove Alaric from his service by refusing to promote him.

Alaric, the fiery Goth returned to his own countrymen, who proclaimed him king. Alaric, with the Goths began a campaign of conquest.

Finding Constantinople too strongly defended, he turned westward and attacked Greece. He left a trail of devastation and destruction in Greece.

Stilicho, a Roman General, forced Alaric to retreat, but in 402 Alaric crossed the Alps advancing on Milan in Italy. He was again defeated by Stilicho.

Meanwhile, a large army of Germans invaded Italy. Emperor Honorius and the Senate fled from Rome in fear. Stilicho, Honorius' General saved the Empire by defeating and dispersing the invaders, although he failed to expel them entirely from the Empire.



*Alaric and the Goths invasions from 376 to 410CE affected 3<sup>rd</sup> of the Empire*

**History Con't**

Honorius who was jealous of Stilicho's success had Stilicho beheaded on 23 August 408 at Ravenna. By Honorius' act of incredible ingratitude and lack of foresight in executing his successful General, Italy was deprived of a great military leader and defender of the Empire.

In October 408, Alaric again crossed the Alps and advanced on Rome, which was placed under siege, causing great suffering, deplorable conditions and death. Alaric accepted a huge ransom to withdraw.

Negotiations for peace broke down and Rome was besieged again in 409 and 410. The Goths were finally admitted into the city and with great fury swept it with death and destruction. They then turned with a vengeance on the southern provinces of Italy.

In 410 Alaric died and his forces disintegrated and dispersed, bringing some alleviation to the ravaged Italian third of the Empire.

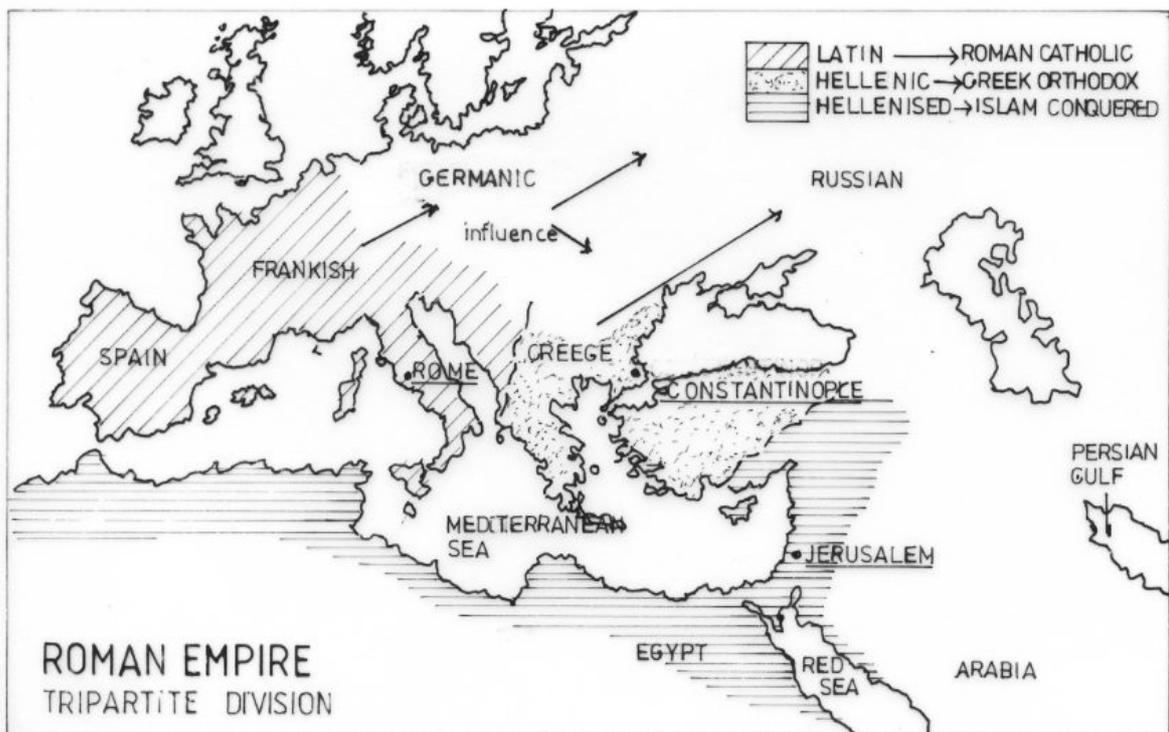
**Commentary: Revelation 8:7**

*1<sup>st</sup> Trumpet Hail & fire on 3<sup>rd</sup> of trees & grass*

The devastation caused by the Goths under Alaric is fittingly described by the "hail that was mingled with blood." Alaric was a powerful and ruthless destroyer, leaving widespread death, bloodshed and destruction in his path.

The best texts indicate that the extent of this destruction occurred to a third of the Empire described as a "third part of the earth". On the death of Constantine the Roman Empire, which ruled the civilised Mediterranean "earth", was divided into three geographical and political areas. Alaric's campaigns devastated the western section of the Empire, which was the Italian third of the Empire.

It was a land based campaign that affected the physical environment as well as the leaders and the people. This is symbolically depicted by the burning of the "trees" and the "green grass."



*Map of Tripartite Cultural Divisions: Latin, Greek and Oriental*

## Genseric and the Vandals

### Bible Reference:

And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed. (Revelation 8:8-9)

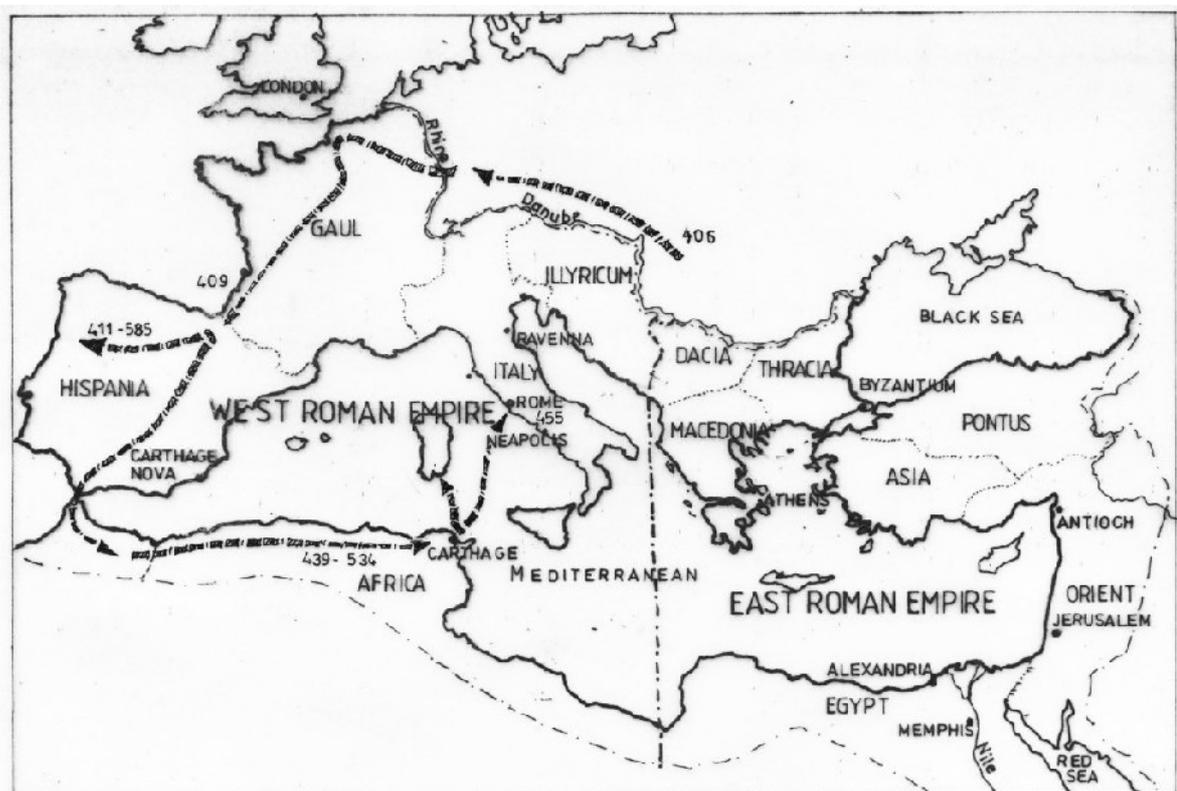
### History

Genseric, the king of the Vandals in Spain, on ascending to the throne was requested by Boniface, governor of Africa. to help him in his revolt from Rome.

In North Africa Genseric, who claimed to be a Christian, was joined by the Donatists, who were suffering severe persecution by the Catholics. Others also joined Genseric causing Boniface to regret having asked Genseric for help and he attempted to restrain Genseric.

Genseric was beyond restraint. He became the scourge of North Africa, destroying and pillaging the country.

Genseric established himself as master of Hippo and Carthage, over which he established firm control. He organised piratical excursions against the Romans, ravaging the coasts of the Mediterranean and boldly attacked the Roman navy. He was victorious on the sea by deploying fire ships.



*The Invasion of Genseric and the Vandals*

### History Con't

All maritime trade ceased as the sea became a battleground. In 455 CE he set sail for Rome, transporting a large army across the sea. The Emperor Maximus in Rome was unable to resist Genseric's attack. Disembarking at Ostia, the Vandals marched on Rome and the city was taken and for fourteen days they ravaged the city. Much of Rome's wealth was taken by Genseric to Carthage.

After Maximus' death two unsuccessful attempts were made to defeat Genseric.

In 457, the Emperor Majorian assembled a large fleet at Carthage to invade Africa, but most of his ships were burnt at night in a surprise attack.

In 468 Leo, emperor of the East, launched an expedition against Genseric. The fleet was almost entirely destroyed by Genseric.

Genseric died in 477. He had clearly demonstrated that the Roman Empire was vulnerable to attack and that Rome's defences were weak. Africa had been severed from the Empire and Rome's glory and greatness had been greatly impaired.

### Commentary: Revelation 8:8-9

*2<sup>nd</sup> Trumpet 3<sup>rd</sup> of the Sea as Blood.*

Genseric can be appropriately described as a “great mountain”, in his role as a powerful leader of the Vandals.

“Burning with fire” and “cast into the sea” depicts those maritime campaigns that Genseric waged against Rome. Not only that, the use of fire ships fulfils the prophecy of the relationship of the sea to the burning fire.

As is clearly evident from the historical records many “died” and commerce was affected when the “ships were destroyed.” As the sea became the battleground with much loss of life it could be said to “become as blood”.

As in the previous vision, these campaigns were concentrated on a “third part” of the sea. This again corresponds to the Western third, the Italian “third” of the Empire and in the Mediterranean waters that were adjacent to the Italian Peninsula and the coasts of Italy. Also, the North African provinces were affected.



*Barbarian Warrior from German Stone Carving*

## Attila and the Huns

### Bible Reference:

And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter. (Revelation 8:10-11)

### History

While Genseric was occupied in Africa, Attila the Hun ravaged southern Europe and menaced Constantinople. The Huns were to prove ruthless, barbaric and ferocious. They originated in Scythia in Central Asia.

Attila was chief of the most warlike section of the race. Theodosius the Younger, Emperor of the Eastern Empire, powerless to restrain Attila, had granted a treaty acknowledging Attila as lord of the lower Danube, but this did not bring peace to the area.

Attila then attacked the Persians who defeated him. Undeterred by this defeat, he then successfully attacked the Eastern Empire, destroying cities in Illyria and Greece.

Attila then turned his attention towards the west and devastated Europe, but was defeated in an attempt to invade Gaul by the combined forces of Rome, Visigoths and Franks at Chalons 451 CE. He then invaded the Alpine regions of Italy, at the head of an enormous army. When the Emperor Valentinian III refused Attila the hand of his sister Honoria and the surrender of almost half of the provinces of the Empire, Attila took and levelled to the ground Aquileia, at the head of the Adriatic.

He afterwards destroyed the cities of Padua, Vicenza, Verona and Bergamo. At the appeal of Pope Leo I, he retired to the plains of Hungary. Attila's name caused terror throughout the Empire and this was heightened by the wild and ferocious appearance of the Huns. By their ruthless and senseless destruction they had turned scenes of peace and prosperity into smouldering and smoking ruins and deserts. Attila died at the height of an orgy in 453.

### Commentary: Revelation 8:10-11

Attila, symbolically, was a ruler or leader who like a meteor, was to fall "as a great star from heaven."

The devastation caused by Attila's meteoric rise and fall was as a "burning". As a star blazing through the air, he was recognised with fear for his rapidity and energetic movement as he and his army ravaged Italy.

"The rivers ... and fountains of waters" aptly describe the area of the Rhine, Danube and Alpine districts, which suffered most from Attila's attacks. His power extended from Scythia to the Rhine, to Scandinavia and the Baltic, and, to the head of the Adriatic. Again, as with the previous invasions, the area affected was the Italian "third" of the Roman Empire.

The title 'wormwood' is given to the 'star'. This is significant as the word in Greek is 'apsinthos', which is also the name of the River Illyricum and this is the district that Attila came from. The word means bitterness and this appropriately describes Attila's destruction and violence and its affect upon the people of the Empire. Many died as a result of his violence and the devastation that ruined the rich plains of the countryside brought suffering and hardship to the population of the Italian 'third'.



*Map of Movement of Ostrogoth People in Roman Empire*

## Theodoric Barbarian Emperor

### Bible Reference:

And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise. And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound! (Revelation 8:12-13)

### History

Orestes, secretary of state to Attila the Hun, placed Romulus Augustus on the throne as Emperor of Rome. Romulus Augustus was succeeded by Odoacer, king of the Heruli, who took Rome in 476 CE, deposed Romulus and became king of Italy, bringing the Western Empire to an end.

The Imperial regalia was sent to the emperor at Constantinople. The Empire was no longer united under one ruler, but was divided into a number of independent nations, with new governments. Odoacer was the son of Edecon, who had served under Attila and he assumed the title of king over his followers.

The reign of Odoacer was like an eclipse as the nature of Roman rule lingered with the Roman Senate continuing to assemble and consuls being appointed yearly. Odoacer governed Italy under the title of Patrician, conferred on him by the Eastern Emperor.

Odoacer, who was deposed by Theodoric, the king of the Ostrogoths (Eastern Goths), was later assassinated in 493 CE. Although Theodoric was a Goth his government was essentially Roman retaining its laws, titles and administration. The Emperor in the East sent the Imperial regalia back to Rome to Theodoric, recognising and giving Theodoric the outward show of an emperor.

Through marriages, he brought the Franks, Burgundians and Visigoths under his influence and exerted some power in Gaul and Africa. In his later years he had the appearance of a Western emperor, ruling over almost half of the original Western Empire.

### Commentary: Revelation 8:12-13

#### *4<sup>th</sup> Trumpet 3<sup>rd</sup> Part of Sun Smitten*

This trumpet heralded Gothic rule under Odoacer and Theodoric. Rome was under the control of barbarian invaders and in this way in the Italian 'third' of the Empire the ruling political powers, symbolised by the 'sun' and 'moon', were 'smitten'. The symbols used here imply an eclipse of the government in the Italian third of the Empire. The Imperial line in Italy had been removed from the Italian scene.

The extent of Rome's power was reduced, but had not been totally destroyed, as remnants of the political system still survived under Theodoric, who ruled a significantly reduced Western Empire as an emperor and retained for his Roman subjects Roman laws and administration, and as such, the Gothic head can be reckoned as one of the 'heads' of the seven headed beast in Revelation 17: 10. The Imperial system, although eclipsed for a time, was revived for a season with Theodoric's rule. Theodoric's skill in the arts of war and government finally brought to Italy a period of peace and prosperity.

There follows a dramatic change of subject. The Angel (Greek: eagle) that flies through heaven and the words of the angel that follow, indicate that there are further judgements to come on the remainder of the Empire, the 'earth'.

There are still three trumpets that are left to sound and these bring clear warnings of trouble, this time for the Eastern Empire, as indicated by the three 'woes'. The survival of the Eastern Empire and Constantinople will be threatened and they too will face judgement.

