

Seven thunders

Thunder is associated in scripture with the voice of God. The rabbinical term is the *bat qol* (literally, 'daughter of a voice') tradition has it that the voice of God on Sinai was heard as seven thunders. The voice of God is often compared with the sound of thunder¹ though only in Psalm 29.3-9, **with seven thunders**, with the Lord sitting as King on the **flood** (v.10).

Thunder (voices) and storm imagery, taken together with the **rainbow** of Rev 10.1 and the **five months** of torment (Rev 9.5,10, denoting the 150 days of flood water in Gen 8.3) all point to an overflowing of destructions.

John (the son of thunder cf. Mk 3.17) was instructed to "seal up" the thunders --- the instruction given to John to "write not" (Rev 10.4) was intended to signify that the time had not yet arrived,² however, in Rev 14.3 he receives the counter instruction: "Write, Blessed *are* the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth". The seven thunders (voices) are therefore unsealed in Rev 14:

- **1st thunder** - - Voice from heaven [many waters] (14.2)
- **2nd thunder** - - Another angel saying [everlasting gospel] (14.6-7)
- **3rd thunder** - - And there followed another angel, saying, [Babylon fallen] (14.8)
- **4th thunder** - - third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice [mark of Beast].(14.9)
- **5th thunder** - - And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write (14.13)
- **6th thunder** - - crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud (14.15)
- **7th thunder** - - And I heard a great voice out of the temple. (16.1)

The rabbis reasoned that as they were custodians of the Torah, and as the Law was not in heaven but rather on earth (Deut 13.12), therefore a heavenly voice (from God) must not be allowed to overturn or interfere with their interpretation of the Law, an interpretation adopted by the majority opinion of the sages.³ In other words, their interpretation of God's Law was more authoritative than a voice from heaven instructing them otherwise! However, the voices (thunders) of Rev 14 could not be as easily ignored and the outworking of the thunders would have consequences lasting millennia for the obdurate nation. Although God would (eventually) have mercy on the nation (rainbow) the left (curse) foot of the angel rested on the land and the right (blessing) foot on the gentile sea. The nation was about to be cast off. The gospel would henceforth be preached not only to the earth but to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people (14.6).⁴

National death and the passion

John 12	Rev 14
Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed <i>is</i> the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord (v.13). Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh...(v.15)	And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Zion (v.1)
If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there also shall my servant be. (v.26)	These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. (v.4)
Verily, verily, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it bringeth forth much fruit. (v.24)	These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and unto the Lamb. (v.4)
He that loveth his life shall loose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. (v.25)	From henceforth saith the spirit, (RVmg), yea, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them. (v.13)
A voice from heaven saying. (v.28) The people said that it thundered, others said, an angel spake to him. (v.29)	Saying with a loud voice (the voice of an angel) The voice of a great thunder. (v.2)
For this cause came I unto this hour.(v.27) Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. (v.31)	The hour of his judgment is come. (v.7)

It is now frequently observed by scholars that the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, with its procession of palms and laudatory praise, echoes the entry of the Maccabees into Jerusalem following their triumph over the Seleucids. (See, for example, Witherington's summary of the material in *John's Wisdom*, p., 221.) Simon entered Jerusalem "with a chorus of praise and the waving of palm branches" (1 Macc. 13.51).⁵ The Lamb stands triumphant on Mt Zion.

Moreover, the **two harvests** depicted in this chapter (the grain and the vintage) depict the “body and blood” of the nation, very similar to the “Super of the Great God” (Rev 19.9)⁶, this messianic banquet (“last supper”) is reserved for the nation and the winepress **was trodden without the city** (Rev 14.20) to simulate the crucifixion outside of the city walls (cf. “without the camp” in Heb 13.11).

The theme of John chapter 12 is the crucifixion. The “*judgment of the world*” occurred when Jesus was “*lifted up*” (v.32). In the same way the judgment of Jewry is present in the death and martyrdom of the saints (first-fruits = true witnesses). The point that John emphasises repeatedly is that initial victory by Jesus needed to be repeated in the victory of the conquerors (those that overcome). This is followed by the death of what the prophet Isaiah terms as, “the blind and deaf witnesses” (Isa 43.8-12) --- the nation that refuses to listen and therefore they witnesses passively (through their obstinacy) rather than actively (like the true witnesses). Everything that Christ endured is reflected first positively by the true witnesses and then negatively by the stubborn “witness” of the nation. **What happens to one happens to the other.** They wanted to live by the Law and the Law demanded (though not literally) an “eye for an eye”, now they would experience *lex talionis* to its fullest extent ---the day of wrath and retribution ---the day of vengeance.

Isaiah 5 tells of the vineyard, which God had prepared for His “Beloved.” In spite of much effort and tender care it brought forth only wild grapes. Wherefore, “I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be burnt up (RVm.): I will break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down ... My people are gone into captivity because they have no knowledge: and their honourable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst ... Therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them; and the hills did tremble: and their carcasses were as refuse in the midst of the streets (RV).” Then follows a description in vv. 26-30 of how this retribution is to come - nations coming from far, with horses and chariots (the Fifth and Sixth Trumpets!) roaring like lions (the Fifth and Sixth Trumpets!) and all this in a day of unnatural darkness (the Fifth Trumpet!).⁷

Without Guile verses Son of a deceiver

“And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God” (Rev 14.5).

This links Rev 14.5 with John 1.47, “Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no **guile!**” This is important because in John 1.49 Nathanael recognises Jesus as, “**The Son of God and the King of Israel**”. There was no deception (Jacob) in Nathanael --- he was a true Israelite.⁸ The suggestion has been made that Nathaniel was meditating under the fig tree on his forthcoming wedding (described in John 2) and his thoughts had wandered to how Jacob (the deceiver) had himself been tricked on his wedding night. **Jesus had read Nathanael’s mind.** ⁹

Jesus responded as follows: “Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. ⁵¹ And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man” (John 1.50-51). This is a reference to the dream that **Jacob had** at Bethel, known as “Jacob’s ladder” (Gen 28.12).

This is significant because the “first-fruits” follow the Lamb for, like Nathanael, **they recognize Jesus as the true messiah**. In contrast many Jews followed the false messiah Bar Kochba the “son of a star”, regarded as the fulfilment of the “Star out of **Jacob**” prophecy (Num 24.17). Kochba was derided (after the failed revolt) as the “**son of a deceiver**”. Just as Jacob (the deceiver) had been tricked on his wedding night, so also the nation had been deceived with the exception of the “virgins” (Rev 14.4) who follow Christ. Bar Kochba had truly become the son of Jacob. Not only John 12, but also John 1 has multiple connections with Revelation 14:

John 1	Revelation 14
39 Come and see	1 And I looked
36 Behold the Lamb of God!	1 lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion
37 they followed Jesus	4 which follow the Lamb
49 Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.	Contrast- “Son of a star”, Bar Kochba “star out of Jacob ” renamed “son of deceit”
47 Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile (Jacob)	5 And in their mouth was found no guile (Jacob)
51 Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.	14 And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud <i>one</i> sat like unto the Son of man

Jesus is not only the Son of God and the King of Israel he is also a Rabbi --- “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God” (John 3.2). In fact in the Fourth Gospel Jesus is depicted as the *rabbi par excellence* admonishing the sage Nicodemus --- “Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?” (John 3.10). Over a century later rabbinical Judaism had completely corrupted the interpretation of Torah and had singularly failed to recognise the messiah even though their own scriptures spoke of him. Their obstinacy and self righteousness drove them to choose a false messiah, well might Jesus say; “I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, **him ye will receive**. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that *cometh* from God only?” (John 5.43-44). They listened to Rabbi Akiva, rather than to Rabbi Jesus.

The **Son of man** designation in both John and Revelation is pertinent. It is an obvious reference to the judgment scene in Dan 7.13 paraphrased by Jesus at his trial, “Hereafter shall ye see the **Son of man** sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Matt 26.64).

In effect, Jesus is telling the Sanhedrin and rabbinate that he would return and function as **their judge**. Jesus uses the same “like unto the Son of man” circumlocution in Rev 1.13 and introduces his Revelation (1.7) with a conflation of Dan 7.13 and Zech 12.7, -- “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they *also* which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him”. Appropriately, the Sanhedrin had sought refuge with their false messiah Bar Kochba and perished together with him in Betar.

Daniel 7	Revelation 14
14,27 whose kingdom <i>is</i> an everlasting kingdom	6 the everlasting gospel to preach
13 behold, <i>one</i> like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven	14 behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud <i>one</i> sat like unto the Son of man
26 But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy <i>it</i> unto the end.	7 Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come

Bar Kochba and Revelation 14

For the general history of the period and of the revolt, readers are referred to the chapter on the Post 70 CE Jewish History. After the fall of Jerusalem, Bar Kochba and the Sanhedrin fled to the fort at Betar. This fort overlooked the valley of Sorek, the place where Samson encountered Delilah (Judg 16.4). Interestingly, rabbinic legend recounts **the strength and courage** of Bar Kochba ---he could rip out “Cedars of Lebanon” with his bare hands from horseback. Apparently, he honed the skills of his cavalry by having them rip seedlings out of the ground.

The valley of Sorek is doubtless Wadi eṣ-Ṣarār, which commences about 13 miles west, slightly south of Jerusalem and pursues a tortuous course in a north westerly direction toward the Mediterranean Sea. It is traversed by a stream which falls into the sea about 8.½ miles south of Joppa.¹⁰ This was the location **“without the city”**, where the grapes were crushed.

The destruction of Betar in 135¹¹ put an end to the last great Jewish revolt against Rome, and effectively quashed any Jewish hopes for self-governance in that period. Accounts of the event in Talmudic and Midrashic writings thus reflect and amplify its importance in the Jewish psyche and oral tradition in the subsequent period. The best known is from the Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 57a-b:

These are the eighty thousand battle trumpets which assembled in the city of Bethar, when it was taken and men, women and children were slain in it until their blood ran into the Great Sea [=Mediterranean].

It has been taught: R. Eleazar the Great said: There are two streams in the valley of Yadaim, one running in one direction and one in another, and the Sages estimated that [at that time] they ran with two parts water to one of blood.

In a Baraita it has been taught: 'For seven years [after the massacre at Beitar] the gentiles fertilized their vineyards with the blood of Israel without using manure.'

Rab Judah reported Samuel as saying in the name of Rabban Simeon b. Gamaliel; What is signified by the verse (Lamentations 3:51), "Mine eye affecteth my soul, because of all the daughters of my city?" There were four hundred synagogues in the city of Bethar, and in every one were four hundred teachers of children, and each one had under him four hundred pupils, and when the enemy entered there they pierced them with their staves, and when the enemy prevailed and captured them, they wrapped them in their scrolls and burnt them with fire.

The Jerusalem Talmud relates that the number of slain was so enormous, that the Romans "went on killing until their horses were submerged in blood to their nostrils,"¹² and that the flow of blood overturned large stones in its course, and that when the flow of blood travelled along a riverine brook at a distance of 40 biblical miles to the Mediterranean sea, the red hue from the blood of the slain could still be seen in the sea at a distance of 4 biblical miles. Such hyperbolic speech was used only to emphasize the horrendous scene after the capture of the city, and the ensuing massacre of its inhabitants. The same account reports that the corpses were collected and used to make a hedge around the vineyard belonging to Hadrian, and which hedge stretched many long biblical miles and was as high as a man's stature.

Hadrian had prohibited their burial, and so all the bodies remained above ground. Miraculously, they did not decompose.¹³ Many years later Hadrian's successor, Antoninus (Pius), allowed the dead to be afforded a decent burial.

Rabbinical accounts and the trumpets:

Revelation	Rabbis
8.8 Second trumpet: third part of sea becomes blood	One third becomes blood Sea becomes blood
8.10 Third trump: a great star falls	Son of a Star
9.5 Fifth Trump: Five months torment	Five month siege destroyed on 9 Av
14.20 Winepress was trodden without the city	Betar fortress located 13 miles from Jerusalem
14.20 Blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles	Blood up to the horses nostrils Blood used to fertilize vineyards
11.9 True witnesses unburied	Contrast: Rebel corpses left unburied (corpses used as a vineyard hedge)
11.2-3 3½ years	Revolt lasted 3½ years

The Rabbis describe the utter devastation of Yahweh's vineyard (Isa 5) in similar terms to those found in Revelation. Were they subconsciously influenced by the apocalypse? It was most certainly in circulation at that time. Perhaps they deliberately appropriated some of the language as they saw themselves as the "true" witnesses?

Bar Kochba's followers were religious fanatics (compare the Islamic Taliban or "students").¹⁴ They were ordered to cut off their little fingers to demonstrate their devotion to the cause (mark in their right hand? Rev 13.16). Three hundred baskets of phylacteries (Hebrew: *tefillin*) were found in Betar.¹⁵ The strap was wrapped around the arm, hand and fingers while the head-tefillin, or *shel rosh*, is placed above the forehead (it contained portions of the Torah) and was worn during prayer in what was an obvious corruption of Exodus 13.16.¹⁶ Obviously, during the revolt only the coins issued by Bar Kochba would be valid currency¹⁷ --- the use of Roman coinage was probably regarded as traitorous and Jewish-Christians, who dismissed Kochba's messianic claim, would no doubt, refuse to use his denomination.

Many other, semi-legendary anecdotes and tales exist around Bar Kochba. For example, Jerome notes his pseudo-miracles: "That famed Barchochebas, the instigator of the Jewish uprising, kept fanning a lighted blade of straw in his mouth with puffs of breath so as to give the impression that he was spewing out flames".¹⁸

Bar Kochba had strong religious support from the sage Eleazar, his uncle, who sat in sackcloth and prayed continually (false witness?). However, Eleazar was kicked to death by Bar Kochba after being set-up as a spy in a Roman ruse. Among the dead bodies, the legionaries recognized that of Simon, the son of Kosiba. When they brought his head to the emperor Hadrian, he said: ‘If his God had not slain him, who could have overcome him?’ Other accounts relate that a snake was found wrapped around his body. According to the Talmud, Kochba became so convinced of his own powers that he arrogantly ordered God to stay out of his affairs, demanding, “Lord of the Universe, neither help nor hinder us”. This is reminiscent of Zeph 1.12: “... will punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil”.

Zephaniah 3	Revelation 14
8 Therefore wait upon me saith the Lord, until the day when I rise up for a witness.[LXX]	1 And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion
8b For my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation.	10 The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation
11 For then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty in my holy mountain. (RV)	11 They have no rest day and night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.
12 I will also leave in the midst of them an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.	1 The 144,000
13 neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth.	5 And in their mouth was found no guile

Bar Kochba most certainly instituted some form of sacrificial worship in Jerusalem, even if it was only the building of an altar in anticipation of reconstructing a temple. He issued coinage depicting his “star” above the Ark of the Covenant and the Temple; “And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie (2 Thess. 2:11).....Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 2:4).

A banquet of consequences

Robert Louis Stevenson said that, “Sooner or later everyone sits down to a banquet of consequences”. The nation sat down and ate its fill of their “messianic banquet” suffering indigestion from their “last supper” that lasted two millennia. The revolt cost 580,000 Jewish lives (Dio Cassius) and the nation was “cast off” as the time of the Gentiles commenced. Christianity became a distinct religion rather than a Jewish sect and the “everlasting gospel” outlived the messianic ructions of the era, and was preached to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people. Jerusalem was turned into a pagan city called Aelia Capitolina, and Jews were forbidden to live there. They were permitted to enter only on the 9th of Av to mourn their losses in the revolt. A pagan temple was erected.

Bloom notes that, “Hadrian changed the country’s name from Judaea to Syria Palestina — a pointed **reference to the Phillistines**, the Jews’ long-established arch-enemy. The appellation “Pales-tine” was thus enshrined for two millennia as a deliberate rebuke to and repudiation of the Jewish connection to the land, until the accession of the Zionist movement of the late nineteenth century. Note, though, that by that time the advocates of a Jewish homeland were already referring to the preferred location as Eretz Yisroel (the Land of Israel)”.¹⁹

Like Samson, Bar Kochba had pulled the house down on his own head and the country now bore the name of the “uncircumcised” Philistines. Unlike Samson, Kochba was not a main of faith. The Zionist movement draws heavily on the historiography and hero worship of their failed messiah --- the lesson of the age has not been learned.

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¹ 2 Sam.22:14; Job 37:2-5; Ps.18:13; Isa.29: 6; 30: 30-31; Jer.25:30; Amos 1: 2

² Or, possibly the thunders could have remained sealed if the nation had responded differently

³ See, Talmudic tale (Bava Metzia 59b)

⁴ **Galatians 3:8** And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, *saying*, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

⁵ But the power of this reminiscence, particularly in John's Gospel, is not recognized until the full interplay of resonance between the two events are fed carefully through the interpretive framework established by the two principal biblical texts informing Palm Sunday: Psalm 118 and the context of Zechariah 9.9-10. Tim Gallant, The triumphal entry: Israel's new King's counterpoint to the Maccabean triumph: an intertextual meditation (Biblical Studies Center) [Accessed March 2017] [Access here](#)

⁶ Rev.19.9 depicts a similar scenario; "...treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (Rev 19.15) with judgements against the beast and his image (Rev 19.19-20 cf. 14.9-11). Rev 19 is the outworking of the agenda of the vial/plagues of Rev 16. The vial/plagues themselves belong to the seventh (LAST) trumpet, **which is not sounded in the first or second centuries as Israel was cast out**. Therefore, another pattern is set to repeat in the near future.

⁷ This section is taken from Whittakers' Revelation: A Biblical Approach. Whittaker equates the Jews with "witnessing" in a passive negative sense. However, the Jews are not the "true witnesses" as will become apparent when the question is addressed in the chapter on witnessing. Suffice to say that the witnesses are depicted in a contest (with the false), that the Jews celebrate their death at Purim and that their witnessing mimics that of Christ himself. [Access here](#) [Accessed March 2017]

⁸ Israel means "God Rules" and Jacob (the deceiver) was renamed after the wrestling, when he overcame (his old nature)

⁹ On this see Whittaker, Studies in the Gospels. Apparently, Nathanael's sobriquet was Bartholomew, meaning "son of a secret" [Access here](#) [Accessed March 2017]

¹⁰ Westminster Dictionary of the Bible (1944), p., 576

¹¹ The following paragraphs taken from: Betar (fortress). (2017, February 14). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 03:47, March 27, 2017, [Access here](#)

¹² Ta'anit 4:5 (24a-b); also repeated in Midrash Rabba (Lamentations Rabba 2:5)

¹³ The Burial at Betar [Retrieved Jan 2018] [Access here](#)

¹⁴ The [Bar Kochba] letters seem to confirm the image of the man either as a tyrannical fanatic or a strict disciplinarian, depending on one's modern political or religious sensibilities. (so, Bloom, *Ibid*, p., 209)

¹⁵ Midrash Rabba (Lamentations Rabba 2:5)

¹⁶ **Exodus 13.16** - And it shall be for a sign upon your hand, and as *totafot* between your eyes; for with a mighty hand did the LORD bring us forth out of Egypt.

¹⁷ **Revelation 13.17** -And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

¹⁸ Jerome, *Against Rufinus* 3.31.

¹⁹ Bloom, *Ibid*, p., 208