

IN RESPONSE - A FALLING STAR (Revelation 8:12-9:1)

by Dennis Prutow

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We continue the exposition of the third major section of Revelation, chapters 8-11, with the fourth trumpet.

The fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way (Revelation 8:12).

The fourth trumpet affects the lights of heaven. Once again, remember this book is full of symbols. The symbols portray certain realities. For example, physical death is devastating. Scripture often uses physical death to portray the agonies of hell, spiritual death. Similarly, with regard to we humans, light is a symbol for either the rational capabilities given to us by God as part of His image, common grace, or gracious spiritual illumination given by God.

Note John 1:4 and 9. "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men." "There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man." Calvin comments:

I think that this is a reference to that part of life in which men surpass the other animate creatures. It is as if we were saying that the life given to men was not life in general but life united with the light of reason.... [B]eams from this light are shed on the whole race of men, as I said before. For we know that men have this unique quality above the other animals, that they are endowed with reason and intelligence and that they bear the distinction between right and wrong engraven in their conscience.¹

In our day, people use the powers of reason unreasonably. Tragic diseases such as Alzheimer's also dim the powers of reason, intelligence and conscience.

Jesus also warns us, "If anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him" (John 11:10). He adds to this in the Sermon on the Mount, "If your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in

you is darkness, how great is the darkness (Matthew 6:23).

Spiritual blindness is more devastating than physical blindness. It leads to eternal death. When God withdraws the light of heaven, men and women lose their sensibilities. Rationality goes out the window. Spiritual illumination is also wanting. This is the picture the fourth warning trumpet gives us. Surely the warning applies to our day as it applied in the first century. Once again, because God is *warning* the earth, there is a limit set on the plague. Without repentance, more serious calamity is inevitable.

Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound" (Revelation 8:13).

Yes, the first four trumpets are only the beginning. An angel in midheaven, one having a message in full view, although often unseen, pronounces a three fold woe. In Hebrew this represents the superlative. When Isaiah saw the Lord in the temple, the seraphim "called out to another and said, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory'" (Isaiah 6:3). God is the holiest of all. Here the three fold woe represents the gravest of warnings given by God to rebel humankind. As in the case of the seven seals, the trumpets are divided into a set of four and a set of three.

Revelation 9:1-11 gives us the vision of the fifth trumpet. We will deal with this in two parts, the opening of the abyss (verses 1-6) and the description of the locusts (verses 7-11). Revelation 9:1,

Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him.

This is a fascinating picture. We see a star which has fallen from heaven. This is heavenly power now groveling in the earth, the spiritual world opposed to God. This power is identified in verse 11 "as the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon." This angel is the Destroyer. The commentators generally

accept he is Satan. They refer to Isaiah 14:13 where the king of Babylon (verse 4) haughtily affirms, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north." He is a type or picture of the rebellion of the devil. Isaiah 14:12 says of him, "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!" Jesus says of this angel of light, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning."

The picture gives us a star falling from heaven, the angel of the abyss. The reality involves emissaries of the devil arising from within the pale of the visible church proclaiming doctrines of demons. These are teachers and pastors, filled with the spirit of the world and full of themselves, spewing pious sounding worldly wisdom in the name of the Christ. Paul warns the Ephesian elders,

I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them (Acts 20:29-30).

He also tells Timothy to beware. "The Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons (1 Timothy 4:1).

The key to the bottomless pit, the abyss, is given to this angel. In other words, ministers and teachers who oppose Christ have the keys of hell. Jesus promised Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 16:19). Through the apostles, the officers of the church are charged with the duty of receiving people in the visible church and excluding others. In part, teaching and ruling elders do this through teaching. Emissaries of the abyss also open that awful place to poor souls through their false teachings.

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¹ John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 1-10, Trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), pp. 11 & 15.

IN RESPONSE - THE FIRST WOE, SMOKE FROM THE ABYSS (Revelation 9:2-11)

by Dennis Prutow

The angel of the abyss uses the key given to him.

He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit (Revelation 9:2).

Literally, the angel opened the shaft of the abyss. The abyss is the home of demons (Luke 8:31), the home of the beast (Revelation 11:7) and the dragon's prison (Revelation 20:1). The picture is of a long shaft reaching into the pit of hell.

Smoke billows from the pit like a great blast furnace from which seemingly uncontrollable heat and smoke belch. The smoke fills the air and conceals the sun. This is the picture. The doctrines of hell often conceal the light of heaven. Men and women choke on the pollution coming from hell. Eternal life is threatened.

The picture becomes more complex, perplexing and awesome. "Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power" (verse 3). The locust plague from hell reminds us of the plague which threatened Egypt. Then the locust brought physical devastation. These locust bring spiritual woe. The earth is that spiritual kingdom ruled by the devil. The spiritual plagues fall on this kingdom. The locust are given specific directions.

They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads (verse 4).

The targets of the plagues coming from hell are people not having the seal of God, the Holy Spirit. The grass and trees are fruits of the earth, the institutions of the world built on anti-Christian principles. We will speak more about them under the heading of the beast and false prophet. The institutions of government, education, science and the arts are used to propagate anti-Christian views and remain active. Those who act within them to propagandize the earth find woe. There are limits placed on the locusts.

And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a

man. And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them (verses 5 and 6).

Remember, the vision is symbolic and pictures reality. The locust are demon spirits loosed from hell propagating their lies through human instruments. They do not have the prerogative of bringing eternal death to their victims. The ferocity of these plagues increases as men and women ignore them and think they can work through them. What is the purpose of the plagues? Revelation 9:20 tells us.

The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood.

The scorpion sting is sharp, very painful and potentially deadly. Here the pain is spiritual. It is pain of heart, soul and conscience. It is so severe men and women do almost anything to escape but are unable. Suicide is the second highest reason for death among teens. The only remedy for fallen sin filled souls is Jesus Christ. Otherwise torment increase exponentially and eternally.

The torment is also limited to a span of five months. All the numbers in Revelation are symbolic. Five is less than seven, the number of completeness. The torments of soul do not issue in repentance. These agonies of spirit are incomplete without repentance. Those who are under these plagues of spirit are like governor Felix in Acts 24:25 when Paul spoke to him.

As he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you." Conviction is not full blown. It does not produce repentance. This is a warning of immense significance. The object of the trumpet plagues is repentance.

Verses 9-11 describe the locust.

The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads appeared to be crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. They had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were

like the teeth of lions. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle. They have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months. They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.

Keep in mind the symbols picture reality. The reality is how powerful, stately and enticing the doctrines of hell can be. The locust are like powerful horses ready for battle. They have crowns. They are stately rulers in their domain and are to be respected. So the purveyors of falsehood in our worldly institutions present themselves.

These horses have human faces. They are not brute beasts but articulate and attractive teachers. At the same time, these children of the devil and these broods of vipers are enticing and vicious. The hair of women is their crown. They are beautiful to look upon. Beauty is often deceptive. The teeth of lions brings to mind 1 Peter 5:8. "Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." This is the devil. He seeks to kill and destroy. The warning goes unheeded.

The breastplates of iron may portray the fact these devilish teachers and preachers think their positions are impenetrable. They are stout of heart and proud. They think they will be victorious. Their teachings set forth an intimidating sound. This is true in religion, education, science and the arts. The Kantian critique dominates religious discussion. Evolution is taught as fact. Atheistic thought is supremely unscientific in its rejection of the Creator. Movies, television and the theater major in promoting perversity and mocking holiness. Yet the sophisticated voices of experts intimidate and frighten. We have already spoken of the scorpion sting, the five months of verse 10 and of Abaddon and Apollyon of verse 11.

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IN RESPONSE - THE SECOND WOE, TWO HELLISH ARMIES (Revelation 9:12-21)

by Dennis Prutow

“The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things” (Revelation 9:12). These woes are warnings of the last three trumpets. They exhort the earth to repent. Unheeded, they lead to the seven vials in which God’s judgment is spent. These warnings can come at any time to us as individuals or to the institutions we hold dear.

Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates” (verses 13-14).

The sounding of trumpet number six reveals a golden altar. It is the altar of burnt offering under which we saw the saints killed because of the testimony they maintained (Revelation 6:9). God answers the prayers of these saints (Revelation 6:10). We see a similar representation in Revelation 8:3-5. The voice from the altar, symbolic of God answering prayer, commands the release of four angels bound at the Euphrates.

These are no doubt evil angels. The word translated *bound* is the word used in Revelation 20:2 where Satan is bound. The concepts appear to be the same. There is also a parallel here with the four winds held back until the sealing of God’s bond-servants (Revelation 7:1-3).

The Euphrates was the eastern extremity of the Israelite kingdom, the ancient visible church of God. The enemies of Israel traditionally came from the east. God warns Israel through Isaiah,

In that day the Lord will shave with a razor, hired from regions beyond the Euphrates (that is, with the king of Assyria), the head and the hair of the legs; and it will also remove the beard (Isaiah 7:20).

The picture is of an attack on the visible kingdom of God. Remember, this kingdom was and is a mixed multitude. Enemies abound within the pale of the church. Their existence is a warning call of God. See my understanding of the fifth trumpet given above. The attack viewed under the sixth trumpet is also a warning call to repentance. I keep repeating this because of the overall importance to our discussion and application.

And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind (verse 15).

The emphasis here is on the eternal decrees of God. He determines all that transpires. Christ is in the process of opening the book of God’s plans. He is setting the purposes of God in motion. There is always a good reason in the good plan of the good God for the seeming evil which befalls so many. As said above, the good purpose here is a call to repentance.

Under the fifth trumpet, the restraint on the locust was “they were not permitted to kill anyone” (verse 5). When warnings are unheeded and sorrow is worldly in nature (2 Corinthians 7:10) repentance does not follow. Death is inevitable. This fixes responsibility.

Under the sixth trumpet, the warning is more severe. The angels released from the east may kill a third of mankind. Under the seven seals, the judgments and warnings are limited to one fourth of the earth (Revelation 6:8). As people in this life see and experience war, famine and death, both physical and spiritual, and fail to see the hand of God behind the forces at work, the terror of the warnings escalates. Fear is indeed a component of conviction (Acts 24:25). And a fear of the Lord is but the beginning of a wise understanding of reality (Proverbs 1:7, 9:10). Now the limits of power born by the four angels is withdrawn slightly. We see a similar picture in the plagues brought on Egypt and also in the wonderful Book of Job.

“The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them” (verse 17). Again, the numbers in Revelation are symbolic. Literally, the number is two myriads of myriads. The angels gathered around the throne in worship and adoration number myriads of myriads (Revelation 5:11). In this chapter we see two hellish armies under the fifth and sixth trumpets. Satan’s ploys are in two primary areas, the forces of political power and of worldly wisdom. We see this graphically in the emergence of the beast and false prophet (Revelation 13). Although the forces of the enemy are formidable and we

must not underestimate them, they are limited and doomed.

And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone. A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm (verses 17-19).

Once again, the vision describes the enemy army. We see the pride of the horsemen in their brightly colored breastplates. They are bright blue and orange and red representing the smoke and brimstone and fire coming from hell. The horses are lion like, ferocious. The battle they wage is a verbal one. They spew the deception and lies of hell as they belch fire, smoke and brimstone. Those who swallow their lies are rewarded with the same fire, smoke and brimstone. Note the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails. They have tails like serpents. The good reason behind the plagues is fulfilled. Those heeding the warnings of God repent. Those who do not are confirmed as reprobate. God’s awesome purposes stand.

The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts (verses 20-21).

Jesus says it all, “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? (Matthew 23:33).

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IN RESPONSE - THE TRUMPET CALLS PRACTICALLY APPLIED

by Dennis Prutow

Let's reflect on what we have seen. My refrain with regard to the seven trumpets reminds us these blasts from heaven are warnings from God. They call the earth, the spiritual system opposed to God, to repent. The trumpets are also warning calls to the visible church. Enemies exist within and without. Repentance should be a way of life. The world enters the heart and core of the church. Worldly rather than biblical standards set the tone and content of her worship.

Under the heading of the six trumpets we see the warnings escalate. We see hearts become hard like that of Pharaoh. As mentioned in the previous lesson, these warning trumpets sound all around us in varying degrees. From a contemporary perspective, what are these warning blasts from heaven?

Over a period of decades, interesting phenomena have been occurring in our culture. We have been moving into what many philosophers and theologians call the post-modern era. Along with the devolution of the moral base undergirding education, science, and the arts we see scientists, educators and entertainers, whose endeavors depend upon the rational use of rationality, leap into the irrational. At the same time, anti-Christian governmental power, executive, legislative and judicial, is being seriously challenged at its foundations.

My position is the beast of Revelation 13:1 is anti-Christian governmental power having atheistic roots and exercised in and through kingdoms and nations. The false prophet of Revelation 13:11 and 16:13 is the power of hell manifested in the fields of education, science and the arts and exercised through atheistic based institutions such as schools, laboratories and studios. These are the twin armies of political power and worldly wisdom represented in Revelation 9.

These engines of evil work to produce virulent opposition to God and the rule of Christ over all areas of life. When the lights of heaven are dimmed by smoke from the pit, these powers are at work. They are warning trumpets of God.

Not too many years ago the Supreme Court banned the display of the Ten Commandments in public school classrooms. This was a symptom of a greater

problem. Moral relativism was and is pervading our culture. Along with it came many unfortunate and unseemly teachings. The battles are verbal ones. As the vision tells us, "For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm" (Revelation 9:19).

This power is exhibited in counterproductive sex education which touts the use of condoms rather than abstinence. The DARE program exhibits this power and has done little if anything to reduce drug use among teens. Death education is another avenue of this unseemly hellish voice. It tells teens the last and final way for them to take charge is suicide. This contributes to suicide being the second largest cause of death among teens. Not only so, it claims many poor souls for hell. Situation ethics is still taught in our high schools under the rubric of Values Clarification. Evolution is taught as fact rather than a theory. Pluralism, egalitarianism and multiculturalism rule. Christianity is much too narrow to tolerate. The self-esteem movement is losing steam because it has resulted in lowering educational standards and increasing violence with its me-first approach.

The outcropping of these teachings, making the work of the church difficult at best, is a series of trumpet blasts from God. He warns us to see how counterproductive these materialistic, hedonistic, atheistic approaches to life really are. Worldly wisdom is waging war against our souls. Are we listening? Is the world listening?

On the other side of the coin we see struggles with anti-Christian civil government erupt in violence. I recall driving through the south from my home in New Jersey to Fort Hood, Texas. It was 1964. I had a little red Volkswagen bug with a New Jersey license plate on the back. I drove through small towns where the streets were lined with police and National Guardsmen fully equipped with weapons and riot control gear. This frightened me. The civil rights movement was in full bloom.

I was in Pasadena, California attending seminary when the riots in Watts erupted. You could drive on the freeway

through Watts in central Los Angeles and see the city burning. You could see riflemen in the streets who were later awarded combat ribbons for their service during that terrible time. There was a machine gun emplacement under the shadow of the seminary's main entrance. This was frightening.

Twenty years later a similar riot broke out in Los Angeles. This demonstration occurred in response to the Rodney King verdict. The O. J. Simpson trial had policemen on alert. One of the attorneys for Mr. Simpson challenged the jury to right the wrongs of racial injustice and send a message to the police by setting the defendant free. This was a direct challenge to the legal system of America.

At the other end of the spectrum we have a similar rebellion against governmental powers, the rise of militia groups and paramilitary cultic societies. We have witnessed the tragedies of Ruby Ridge, Waco, the Oklahoma City bombing, and the Freemen of Montana.

The rise of these unseemly forces are trumpets sounded from heaven warning the earth, the church and anti-Christian powers, to repent. The anguish provoked by these events is immense.

I am intrigued by the debate in Christian circles over the Oklahoma City bombing. Was this event a judgment of God or an act of the devil? The debate raged back and forth. My response is simply, Yes. I think of the seven trumpets. As earlier trumpets go unheeded, more devastating warning calls to repent will be seen. These are trumpet sounds, sent in God's providence, calling us to repentance. Are we listening? Is the world listening? Revelation 9:20 warns,

The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk.

Revelation 10 shows we find the answer in the Bible and in the gospel.

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