

Chart: The Fifth Trumpet: #12

PREFACE

At the end of our last session we had a spirited discussion about the “literalist” interpretation of the Tribulation events, and in particular the “star” in Revelation 9:1. By the term “literalist” I refer to the method of interpretation that considers a *literal* explanation of an event or actor to be the default, and only veering from that—and then only to the extent necessary—as the passage requires. Regarding this, I believe it will be instructive to take just a moment to demonstrate how actually slight, how relatively minor are the disagreements revealed among ourselves when compared to some of the interpretations by respected, published scholars of God’s word. So let’s take this “star” of 9:1 as an example; how do other learned commentators of the Bible interpret this “fallen star”?

Wordsworth	an apostate Christian teacher
Bengel, Andreas, De Wette	a good angel
Hengstenberg	“The star here, as throughout the Apocalypse, denotes a ruler. The ruler is an ideal person, who appears in history in a whole series of real individuals. The last great embodiment of this star was Napoleon. But he shall not remain the last.”
Matthew Poole	“John is not here told a story of what was in the beginning of the world, but what should be, and that five hundred years after Christ’s coming. And the same reason holds against those who think those seditious persons are meant, who did so much mischief in and about Jerusalem during the siege; this had been to have revealed to John those things which he knew were done many years before. Amongst those who think some particular eminent minister of the church, who apostatized, is meant, those seem to me to judge better, who think that Boniface the Third is meant, who, in the year 606, obtained the privilege of the pope’s supremacy...”
Matthew Henry	“Some understand it of Boniface the third bishop of Rome, who assumed the title of universal bishop, by the favour of the emperor Phocas, who, being a usurper and tyrant in the state, allowed Boniface to be so in the church, as the reward of his flattery. To this fallen star was given the key of the bottomless pit. Having now ceased to be a minister of Christ, he becomes the antichrist, the minister of the devil; and by the permission of Christ, who had taken from him the keys of the church, he becomes the devil's turnkey, to let loose the powers of hell against the churches of Christ.”
Peter Lange	“Not an angel, either good or bad; certainly not the Devil... we may take the star, which has fallen from Heaven, to be repentance without faith, or the sorrow of this world—so-called Cain or Judas repentance—or the remorse and penance of religious self-torment, whether clothed in a more ancient and mediaeval or a more modern form.”
John Gill	“wherefore by this star is meant antichrist; but whether the western or eastern antichrist, the pope of Rome, or Mahomet, is a question”

As I have referenced here and there in earlier sessions, these variations between scholars are actually rather tame compared to those expressed regarding other events in the Tribulation, but they nonetheless illustrate for us how even *more benign* are our differences with others here in this room. No matter our individual positions, when considering this event in the first part of Chapter Nine, I believe that most of us—at least those who have been courageous enough to state their opinion—can agree to the following regarding vv1-5:

Someone who was once in heaven (or the heavens), but now fallen to earth—a being, that is, in contrast to an object—is given a “key” (i.e., authority over) the gate to the bottomless pit, or abyss in which demonic beings are imprisoned and about to be released upon the earth.

And if you do *not* agree with even that generalized interpretation, then no harm; every believer housing the Holy Spirit is free to form his or her own conclusion about this fantastical, apocalyptic text, so long as we treat each brother and sister with respect and courtesy whenever it is discussed.

Read Revelation 9:1-6.

v2

He opened the bottomless pit,

As promised I have included a handout that discusses the various words used in the Bible for the underworld, of which “the pit,” or abyss, is just one category. One of the pleasures of consulting some of the older commentators is the reading of their English. How our language has degenerated; it breaks the heart. Here is how J. A. Seiss describes this passage.

J. A. Seiss: The doors of separation between the earth and the prison of evil spirits are opened, and mysterious and malignant tenants of the underworld are permitted to overrun the globe, and to inflict torture and woe upon its unsanctified inhabitants.

One cannot improve upon that.

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.

More than once we have conjectured atmospheric reasons for celestial objects being dimmed or going dark all together. Here that is stated explicitly: it is the smoke rising out of the pit that is responsible for “darkening” the sun and the air.

Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power.

We will soon see in the coming verses that what John labels here “locusts” are not at all the grasshopper-like insects that can become not just a nuisance, but at times a destructive plague upon the earth. Neither are they “scorpions,” but are equipped with a weaponized tail meant to inflict upon humans “torment...like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man” (v5). I take it from the passage as a whole that John chooses to refer to them as locusts because they emerge from the unlocked gates of the pit flying and swarming in a manner visually similar to a plague of locusts.

Sidebar: The way the text describes the emergence of these foul beings —“Then out of the smoke came locusts...” —leaves open the possible interpretation that instead of the locusts emerging from the pit *through* the smoke, they materialized *from* the particles of smoke.

The same frustrating phrase as used in v1 is repeated here: “was given,”—in v1, “the key of the bottomless pit was given to him,” and in v3, “power was given them.” But as before, there is no mention of who it is doing the giving. In v1 I concluded that the giver *could* be Christ, but we can’t be sure; here the question remains: Is the power being given from heaven or hell? Considering the explicit restrictions on the use of this power (vv4-5), I incline toward Christ, the probable giver of the key, being the one who sets the rules of engagement under the fifth trumpet. Both trumpets five and six are all about a holy God spending His righteous wrath on an unbelieving and rebellious world. Thus, it is logical to conclude that

He is the one calling the shots;

He is the one inflicting these demons on human beings;

He is the one placing restrictions on who they may torment—under the sixth trumpet, the numbers those demons may kill.

And the purpose of the limitations ordered by God are so that men may still repent and turn toward Him—the grace of God remains, always willing, always eager for souls to be saved right up to the last minute. Yet the prophecy reveals that they will reject this offer.

Read Revelation 9:20-21.

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.

The natural food for locusts is the foliage of the earth, the green things, the growing things, the leaves of the trees and bushes. *These* “locusts,” however, are instructed to limit their “hurt” (*adikesosi*, to do wrong, act wickedly, damage, harm, injure) to “the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads” (“men” = *anthropous* = human being, man or woman).

...but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

Walvoord offers a pretty good argument, from Scripture, to support this restriction protecting not just the 144,000 (7:3-8), but also anyone “sealed” in Christ during the Tribulation. [Let’s first look at his two references.](#)

Read 2 Timothy 2:19.

Read Ephesians 1:13-14.

The operative word in both of these—as a noun in 2 Timothy and in verb form in Ephesians—is the same as in our Revelation passage: *sphragis*, (sfrah-GEES) “seal.”

Walvoord: Apparently the entire human race is open to [the locusts’] activity except those who are sealed by God in their foreheads. This obviously excludes the 144,000 of Revelation 7, and the protection may extend as far as this plague is concerned to all who know the Lord in that day. According to 2 Timothy 2:19, “the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.” In a similar way, believers in the present age are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise according to Ephesians 1:13-14. It would seem improbable that any true believer in that day would be subject to the torment of the locusts; the torment is rather a judgment upon Christ-rejecting men.

For me, this tracks. If God’s purpose in these two trumpets is two-fold, first to punish evil, and second, to goad the unregenerate to repentance, then why so inflict those who are already “sealed” in Christ?

Yet, we must admit, we must acknowledge that the text may just be speaking of protecting only those bearing the physical “seal of God on their foreheads.” For, why make such a point of specifically sealing (i.e., protecting) 144,000 if you intend to protect from torment *all* believers? Haven’t we seen true believers martyred during the tribulation (6:9-11; 7:9-17)?

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 they were not permitted to kill anyone,

Literally this is one more “given” (*edothe* = was given): “it was given to them that they may not kill them” (YLT, NIV84). It’s a minor point, but a distinction nonetheless. The more common rendering sounds as if these locusts were natural killers, but were now being prevented from killing. But the text makes it clear that except for the power in their tails (v10), all the capabilities and action in this fifth-trumpet drama is being not just initiated, but systematically controlled through sovereign grants by Almighty God. First, the key is *given* to Satan; second, power is *given* to the locusts; third, the locusts are *given not* to kill, but only torment; and finally in v6, death itself (literally, *ho thanatos*, the death) is withheld from those who seek it as relief from the locusts’ torment. Holy God is meticulously “giving,” granting, bestowing every component of this five-month scene.

...their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man.

God in His word likes to use similes, perhaps the most common being, “Pain as a woman in childbirth.” This comparison is made to intense pain with such regularity that the male of the species is forever left in awe of the female for such courageous endurance. Here, however, John employs a different simile for intense pain: “like the torment of a scorpion when it stings.” It is said that the sting of a scorpion, while generally not fatal to adults, is excruciating, and ranks as one of the worst pains humans can experience. (How it compares to childbirth I will leave to others.)

...but to torment for five months;

The passage is not clear: Does this mean that every individual will be tormented by such intense pain *continuously* for five months? or inflicted *intermittently* over five months? All people or just some or most? In any case, the monsters will be “upon the earth” for a duration of five months. Some say the five-month period comes from that being the typical span of earthly locusts plaguing an area. But these are not earthly locusts, but horrific, demonic beings that—absent the Lord God’s restrictions—would surely proceed well beyond that length of time. Whatever the scope of this torment it will be horrible, apparently inflicting mankind to the brink of sanity.

And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them.

Walvoord: Literal death is meant here. This is a horrible picture of domination by demons to such an extent that men lose their ability of free choice and are in agony of body and soul.

As I pointed out before, the text here is literally, *ho thanatos, the death*, which adds a certain weight to this verse.

YLT: and in those days shall men seek the death, and they shall not find it, and they shall desire to die, and the death shall flee from them.

But this is a false hope—as it will be for those seeking to be free of the Lord’s wrath by letting the mountains collapse upon them in the sixth seal.

Read Revelation 6:15-17.

David Guzik offers some sobering context to this verse.

Guzik: The idea of “Death as an escape” is a demonic deception. The infamous murderers of Littleton, Colorado made chilling home movies before their killing spree. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold left behind a videotaped document spelling out their motivation. In the last segment of tape, shot the morning of the murders, Harris & Klebold are dressed and say they are ready for “our little Judgment Day.” Then Klebold, looking tense, says goodbye to his parents. He concludes, “I didn’t like life too much. Just know I am going to a better place than here.” What tragic deception to think—on the day you will commit terrible murders—that you will go “to a better place.” There was no escape in death for Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. *Now* is the time of repentance, to escape from sin, and to be restored.

Albert Barnes: A large part look forward to death as a release, when, if the reality were known, death would furnish no such relief, for there are deeper and longer woes beyond the grave than there are this side of it.

CONCLUSION

Far too many commentators seemingly choose to disregard two important clues that are given to this book's interpretation, found in its earliest passages.

Read Revelation 1:1.

First, the first verse explains that this will be the *Apokalypsis* of Jesus Christ; the word means an uncovering, a revealing, a laying bare, a disclosure of divine truth. If that is indeed God's purpose in this book, why should we not take Him at His word? Yes, there is such a thing as *apocryphal language*, just as there is *poetic language* found in the Psalms and elsewhere. This is one reason why the study of this book's events can be so challenging.

Walvoord: [The book] is a revelation of truth *about* Christ Himself, a disclosure of future events, that is, His second coming when Christ will be revealed. It is as well a revelation which comes *from* Christ.

That being the case, why should we approach its content as if it were “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma” (Churchill describing Russia)? I contend that the book of the Revelation is not filled with parables which, like many of the parables of Jesus, require some deeper, even select knowledge with which to ferret out their cryptic meaning. If that were the case, it would not be called “the Revelation.”

Second, it is clear in v1 (and v19, as well) that the events so described in this book are yet future. The words translated “in a short time,” or “must soon” (*en tachei*), do not necessarily mean “imminent” in a human sense or even from God's perspective: “...yet long delay is implied. Expressions like this must be understood, not according to human measurement of time, but rather (as in 2Peter 3:8). The idea is, before long, as time is computed by God” (M. R. Vincent).

Beyond that, the word can also mean, as in YLT, “come to pass quickly” or speedily. That is, once it begins, it will unfold speedily, quickly.

Thus the habit of some scholars to conclude that the events detailed in Revelation find their basis in historical events and characters, some even as near to its writing as a few decades or a few centuries—or even as recent to us as the twentieth century—result in tortuous interpretations far more fantastical than just taking the text as written.

Which we will endeavor to do.

THE TRIBULATION

Terminology for the Underworld

God's word includes a number of words or phrases that speak of eternal damnation, or temporary incarceration and/or torment. In this paper we will examine these and compare the differences between them. Clear, distinct lines are not always drawn between the various terms; there are shades of difference that at times overlap. Likewise these terms often (but not always) mean something different in the Old Testament from the New Testament.

Hell

This is the most common term for a dwelling for the wicked dead. As such, it has become, often with good reason, a catch-all term for all of the rest.

"Hell" translates the Greek *geena* (GHEH-en-nah) and in just one instance ([2 Peter 2:4](#)) *tartaroo* (tar-tar-OH-oh) from "Tartarus," the name in Greco-Latin mythology for the underworld abyss where wicked gods and humans were imprisoned in punishment. The KJV, in ten instances, uses "hell" to translate the Greek *hades*, which the other versions transliterate "Hades" (see below).

The term Gehenna traces back to the Valley of Hinnom, near Jerusalem, where children were sacrificed by fire to the pagan god Molech. The righteous king Josiah turned this valley into a garbage dump and latrine when he went about ridding Judah of its pagan altars ([2 Kings 23:10](#)). To the Jews of the OT this valley would literally become, after the final judgment, the hell of fire. "In time *gehenna* became simply the place of punishment and so attracted the corresponding ideas about Hades. *gehenna* thus became a temporary place of punishment until the final judgment" (*Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Brown).

Hades

The term "Hades" is far more prevalent in the OT than the NT, by a factor of ten, and more often than not translates the Hebrew *sheol*, which is the place to which people descend at death. Originally in the early OT and in Greek thought, Hades is the underworld, a place of darkness in which God is not remembered ([Job 10:20-21](#); [Psalm 6:5](#)). In Rabbinical Judaism, and later the NT where Jesus establishes and confirms the belief in bodily resurrection, *hades* lost its role as the eternal resting place of souls and became a preparatory, temporary resting place for souls until the resurrection ([Revelation 20:13](#)).

In the NT Hades lies within the earth, so that one has to go down to it ([Matthew 11:23](#); [Luke 10:15](#)). It is a prison with gates ([1 Peter 3:19](#); [Matthew 16:18](#)), and Christ Jesus holds the key to these gates ([Revelation 1:18](#)).

Bottomless Pit, Abyss

The Greek *abyssos* is an adjective that when used by itself with the noun *ge* (earth) understood, means a bottomless place. In the OT the word usually translates the Hebrew *tehom*, and often refers to the primal ocean, the deep, and the realm of the dead (the underworld; [Psalm 71:20](#)).

In [Romans 10:7](#) (after [Psalm 107:26](#)), the apostle Paul refers to a subterranean place that is the realm of the dead. In the Revelation, however, it is a prison reserved for demons ([Revelation 9](#)), Satan ([Revelation 20:1-3](#)), ruled by a demonic prince named Apollyon, or Abaddon ([Revelation 9:11](#)). In [Revelation 11:7](#) and [17:8](#) the beast (Antichrist) emerges from it.

The pit or abyss is not a final, eternal dwelling, for Satan is imprisoned there for one thousand years, released from it, then cast into "the lake of fire and brimstone": "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" ([Revelation 20:10](#)).

Conclusion

Amid all these overlapping terms for the underworld there is only one place spoken of in God's word that is permanent, eternal, from which no one will ever emerge. It is referred to as a place of "burning fire" ([Daniel 7:11](#)); "fire and brimstone," where those who worship the beast and receive his mark "will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb" ([Revelation 14:9-11](#)); and "the lake of fire" and "the second death" ([Revelation 19:20](#); [20:10,14-15](#)), where Satan, the beast and the false prophet, as well as anyone who rejects Christ, will spend eternity ("day and night forever and ever").

