

Is God at War?

God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation everyday. If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and readied his bow; Psalm 7:11-12

If God is at war with our culture, there is only one response – repentance. Leaders need to fall down and repent of their continued iniquitous sin. God does respond to true repentance. I look forward to the day when I actually see this kind of response to God, and it is my hope that God will bring revival and reformation when that day comes.

Today we are talking about Revelation 9, the fifth and sixth trumpet.

Let's read chapter 9:1-11

And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. ² He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. ³ Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. ⁴ They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. ⁵ They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone. ⁶ And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them.

⁷ In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, ⁸ their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; ⁹ they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. ¹⁰ They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails. ¹¹ They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.

Again with the start of the fifth trumpet we have a star falling from heaven, just like in the last chapter. Now, before proceeding I want to point something out. In verse 1 it states, "I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth." In some other places in Revelation the text states an angel was coming down from heaven. Examples are Revelation 10:1 and 20:1. But in Revelation 9 it says, "a star fallen". In the Greek the word is "pipto" which means to descend, to fall or be cast down. It can also mean to fall under judgment. This word "pipto" is also used in Revelation 14:8 where it says, "fallen, fallen is Babylon the great". This clearly means a falling down from a higher place. The Greek word used in Revelation 10 and 20 is "katabaino" which means to come down or descend. You always have to look at the context as well, but it seems clear that the English translation is correct by saying a star fallen in Revelation 9. Why is this important? Because many commentators have tried to identify the angel in Revelation 9:1. The text says star but we know stars in Revelation can represent angels. And in this case I think it is fairly important to

know if we are talking about a descending angel or a fallen one. In Revelation 9 the angel is given a key to the abyss or bottomless pit. When the angel opens the pit, it releases what appear to be demons. So, we can see why it is important to know the identity of the angel if possible. And certainly we are reminded of Luke 10 where Jesus says, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." And in Revelation 12:9 where it says, "the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan." But is Revelation 9 referring to Satan? Well, some commentators think so. Some believe it is another angel and some believe it is Christ because he is given the key to the abyss. The belief that it is Christ is based on Revelation 1:18 where Jesus says, "I have the keys of Death and Hades." And in Revelation 20 where an angel has the key to the bottomless pit. I think it is clear that Revelation 20 does indeed refer to Christ. But the angel or star that has fallen in Revelation 9 cannot be Christ. Jesus is never referred to in this way. So, who is this star? In all honesty, I don't think we can know for sure, but it is likely Satan or one of his representatives. We must also remember that stars also represent human rulers. So, we could also be talking about a king or ruler that falls.

Now this judgment comes in the form of locusts, and while we may be reminded of the eighth plague of Egypt (Exodus 10:12-15), these locust represent something else entirely. Let's read Joel 1:2-7.

Hear this, you elders;
 give ear, all inhabitants of the land!
Has such a thing happened in your days,
 or in the days of your fathers?
³ Tell your children of it,
 and let your children tell their children,
 and their children to another generation.
⁴ What the cutting locust left,
 the swarming locust has eaten.
What the swarming locust left,
 the hopping locust has eaten,
and what the hopping locust left,
 the destroying locust has eaten.
⁵ Awake, you drunkards, and weep,
 and wail, all you drinkers of wine,
because of the sweet wine,
 for it is cut off from your mouth.
⁶ For a nation has come up against my land,
 powerful and beyond number;
its teeth are lions' teeth,
 and it has the fangs of a lioness.
⁷ It has laid waste my vine
 and splintered my fig tree;
it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down;
 their branches are made white.

This text here is talking about locusts but it is a metaphor for national conquest where an enemy destroys the land. In Revelation 9:7 the text says the locusts are like horses prepared for battle. Locusts are in fact a Biblical metaphor for an invading army. In addition, the Babylonian Talmud states, “The destruction of Jerusalem [during Israel’s first century war with Rome] came through a Kamza (locust) and a Bar Kamza (son of a locust).” Again this is because locusts were a symbol of a foreign army. Now the locusts in Revelation 9 had an odd physical description. They had human faces, women’s hair, teeth like a lion’s and tails like a scorpion. The Roman legions would often use a military flag to identify with a sign of the zodiac. In 70 A.D. Titus took over the Roman siege on Jerusalem. This was a 5 month siege just like the text of Revelation 9 says. Ironically, on the night when Titus began his assault on Jerusalem which was during Passover, the constellations were Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Ophiuchus, and Sagittarius. In the text, you have the metaphoric language of a lion, women’s hair (Virgo), the tail of a scorpion, and imagery of a horse with a human face (like a centaur). Now, I don’t want to go too far with this but clearly here as with other portions of Revelation, the stars or constellations are being referenced in the text.

Let’s step back a moment, we started with a fallen star, which definitely represents Nero at his death. After this we have a 5 month siege, which we know is likely Titus when he takes over for his father, Vespasian, in the Jewish-Roman war. And it should be noted that this scene could be a type of resurrection of the Roman Empire. When Nero died the empire was in chaos and the Julio-Claudian dynasty ended. But it was resurrected or healed (Rev. 13) with the ascension of Vespasian to the throne, which was also the rise of the Flavian dynasty. In verse 11, it states, “They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon. Now, Abaddon means destruction and Apollyon means destroyer. Here is my question. Is this king the same person as the angel? Is this Nero, could it be Titus? My answer to that is yes. Often the Bible is talking about a system, and I believe here it is referring to both Nero and Titus because they were leaders in the same beast system. So, what I am saying is the fifth trumpet is describing the death of Nero and the siege of the Romans on Jerusalem.

Now, before moving to the sixth trumpet, I want to point something out since some may not buy into an angel representing a heavenly and earthly person. In Ezekiel 26-28 the prophet is prophesying against Tyre. In chapter 28 the prophecy is about the earthly prince or king of Tyre. However, starting in verse 11, the text seems to be describing a heavenly being. Listen to verses 12-17.

“Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus says the Lord GOD:

“You were the signet of perfection,
full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.
13 You were in Eden, the garden of God;
every precious stone was your covering,
sardius, topaz, and diamond,
beryl, onyx, and jasper,
sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle;
and crafted in gold were your settings
and your engravings.

On the day that you were created
they were prepared.
¹⁴ You were an anointed guardian cherub.
I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God;
in the midst of the stones of fire you walked.
¹⁵ You were blameless in your ways
from the day you were created,
till unrighteousness was found in you.
¹⁶ In the abundance of your trade
you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned;
so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God,
and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub,
from the midst of the stones of fire.
¹⁷ Your heart was proud because of your beauty;
you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor.
I cast you to the ground;
I exposed you before kings,
to feast their eyes on you.

Clearly again we have an earthly king and a heavenly being described, so either you have an earthly king being described in earthly and heavenly language or, more likely, what is happening on earth is a mirror image of the heavenly realm. There is a heavenly being who has an earthly counterpart.

Now, as we approach the sixth trumpet I would like for us to read the text, Revelation 9:13-21.

Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, ¹⁴ saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." ¹⁵ So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind. ¹⁶ The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number. ¹⁷ And this is how I saw the horses in my vision and those who rode them: they wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. ¹⁸ By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. ¹⁹ For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails are like serpents with heads, and by means of them they wound.

²⁰ The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, ²¹ nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Immediately when the sixth angel blows the trumpet there is a voice. And we notice the voice is coming from the four horns on the golden altar. Now, symbolically horns represent power, and since this is on the golden altar before God, we are talking about God's power. So, Yahweh is

about to act in power in response to the prayers of the saints. Is prayer powerful? Do our prayers matter to God? Well, according to the Bible, God acts on our prayers. There is nothing more powerful to invite God to act than righteous prayer. Now, what we see in the text also is referring back to the Old Testament as we have seen over and over in Revelation. In Leviticus 4 we have what is termed the purification offering. The sins of the nation were atoned for by offering a sacrifice. Leviticus 4:18 says, “And he shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is in the tent of meeting before the LORD, and the rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting.” This is how the altar was purified and the people would know that the incense would go up to God and he would hear their prayers. In addition, I want to mention something that David Chilton points out. Leviticus 26 contains a repeated sevenfold judgment upon Israel if they pollute the land with sin. Revelation does much the same with the seven seals, trumpets, and bowls. The good news is that as Jesus ushers in his kingdom, his blood is what purifies us and we can approach the king and his throne with confidence because our sin has been washed clean by King Jesus.

Moving back to Revelation 9, the command from heaven is to release four angels who have been bound. Now 2 Peter 2:5 and Jude verse 6 mention angels who have been kept in chains until the judgment. However, as already mentioned the Bible often uses angels to refer to heavenly and earthly activity. We might see it as heavenly authority that has an earthly counterpart – what we experience on earth is a mirror image of what happens in the heavenlies. This seems to be why the Bible mixes the earthly and heavenly language.

During the Roman-Jewish War in the first century, there were four Roman legions under the command of Titus, Legio V Macedonia, Legio X Fretensis, Legio XII Fulminata, and Legio XV Apollinaris. The four angels here in Revelation could indeed refer to the four generals of the Roman legions. But of course we cannot know that for sure, it is possible they refer to four kings or leaders involved in the conflict. In 63 A.D. at the end of the Roman-Parthian War, these four generals and the legions were stationed close to the Euphrates River. The Euphrates River is very important in the Bible. It marks a boundary, and in the first century the Euphrates marked the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire. In fact, in Revelation 16 when the text discusses the sixth bowl this is what the text states, “The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east.” (16:12)

Now, when we look back at the fifth trumpet this is what it says, “They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone.” (Revelation 9:4-5) So, in the fifth trumpet the Romans were allowed to torment but not kill. But when we get to the sixth trumpet the legions are released. And when we get to verse 16, it tells us the number of troops. Of course, like many numbers in the book of Revelation, it seems clear this number is symbolic. In Psalm 68:17 it states, “The chariots of God are twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them; Sinai is now in the sanctuary.” And in Revelation 5:11 it says, “Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands.” In the Greek Revelation 9:16 reads two myriads of myriads. And in ancient Greek a myriad is ten thousand. Some have translated this number as 200 million. But the language is using symbolism and

hyperbole, the number means thousands upon thousands, a very large number of troops. So, we are talking about a huge army.

When the text describes the army it again becomes apparent that we talking about Roman legions. The text says, “the heads of the horses were like lions’ heads.” Have you ever heard of a chamfron? Well, in ancient times, it was a protective armor for a horse’s head. It is a known fact that Roman war horses would wear these chamfrons in battle. And often these chamfrons would have the head of a lion. These date back to the first century A.D. Now, one of the plagues mentioned is fire, and we know Jerusalem was destroyed by fire. But the whole picture laid out here reminds us of the Leviathan in Job 41. This mythical sea creature is often used to symbolize enemy empires. Speaking of Leviathan in Job 41 the Lord states, “Out of his mouth go flaming torches; sparks of fire leap forth. Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke, as from a boiling pot and burning rushes. His breath kindles coals, and a flame comes forth from his mouth.” (vs. 19-21) Firebrands or as the text states flaming torches were used in warfare. It is very likely the Romans launched firebrands during the Jewish War.

The text mentions a couple of times that a third of mankind is killed. According to Josephus, during the siege about 3,000,000 people were trapped in the city. However, we know that about 1,100,000 of the Jews died during the war. In other words, about 1/3 of the people died. Interestingly enough those who did not perish by the plagues do not, I repeat, do not repent as the text says in Revelation 9:20-21.

David Chilton in his commentary on Revelation mentions five signs that were given to Jerusalem leading up to the Jewish War. God was warning his people, he was blowing the trumpet. But the Jews did not heed the warning. I will mention a couple of the signs. The following is one thing that happened in 66 A.D. according to Josephus. “The east gate of the inner sanctuary was a very massive gate made of brass and so heavy that it could scarcely be moved every evening by twenty men; it was fastened by iron-bound bars and secured by bolts that were sunk very deep into a threshold that was fashioned from a single stone block; yet this gate was seen to open of its own accord at the sixth hour of the night [midnight].” Some thought this as a good omen. We might even think of an open door so to speak. But in reality, this was a sign of an open door to the enemy. The wise saw it as a sign of coming destruction.

Josephus reports another sign during Passover in 66 A.D. “A supernatural apparition was seen, too amazing to be believed . . . before sunset chariots were seen in the air over the whole country, and armed battalions speeding through the clouds and encircling the cities.” (*The Jewish War*, vi.v.3)

Another sign I have already mentioned is that a star that looked like a sword stood over the city for a whole year. These and other signs were given by God to warn his people. Yet, as noted, the Jews did not repent and Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. Over 1,000,000 people died and many others were scattered all over the world. God’s kingdom brings devastation to the wicked and rebellious. Kingdoms are shaken and even removed. God made his covenant plain to his people – he also made plain the blessings and punishments for obedience and disobedience. The sounding of the trumpets is an alarm. And just as God gave his people warning after warning before sealing their fate, God still warns today. Steven Keillor in his book, *God’s Judgments*,

notes several cases to consider. And in chapter 7 he discusses the burning of Washington which occurred in 1814. Keillor notes that the crisis was likely a divine judgment, however, that is was a judgment on the ruling class. He writes, “Fires that temporarily disabled the national government had some effect on ordinary citizens, but the decentralized country carried on without its national leaders, as state and local governments functioned.” Toward the end of the chapter, Keillor asks the question, is the burning of Washington God’s judgment on the elite? He writes, “We have a long-term cause – elite disdain for Christian faith – that could provoke God’s judgment.” Now, I do want to point out, as does Keillor, not all disasters are God’s judgment. But in this case in 1814, it seems clear due to the embarrassing nature of the events and the exemption of ordinary Americans, God was judging national leaders. And guess what? We live in a day just like that - the constant revelation of inept leaders, embarrassing facts and failures. The constant failures of national leadership. God does judge nations and leaders. There are many things we can point to, but I think Keillor is on point. The most devastating judgment comes to the top because of the constant disdain for the Christian faith. The angels have been blowing the trumpets of warning. Will we repent – and more specifically will leaders repent? How many disasters have to come? When will leaders listen and change? The only true king is Jesus Christ! And he will bless this nation again. But until national leaders submit their operations to the leadership of Jesus, who alone is holy and righteous, they will continue to experience God’s correction and judgment.

And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. ¹¹ Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.”

¹² “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”
Revelation 22:10-13

What is God’s message to us today? Repent! If God is at war with our culture, we must bow the knee in humility and repentance. Give everything to God and watch him change you and the world around you.