

The Three Woes

part 1

Rev. 8:13-11:19

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Surveying the history of Israel from its conception to the time of Christ - and some would even say, to the present, there is one event that stands out over all others as an example of redemption and deliverance, by God, of His people - and that event is the Exodus - when the LORD came down and through his spokesman, Moses, delivered Israel from their hard bondage to the Egyptians. Many of you know the story (see Exodus 1—15).

The LORD had spoken to Abram (as recorded in Genesis 15) that his descendants would be sojourners in a land not their for four hundred years, after which time He - the Lord - would bring them back to the land of Canaan. When Genesis closes, the family of Israel - that is, of Jacob - had traveled to Egypt - Jacob and all his sons and their children - during the time when Jacob's son Joseph ruled in Egypt. Four hundred years then passed from the time of Joseph's death at the close of Genesis to the opening of the book of Exodus - and the Exodus begins with the Israelites being under the cruel ruler Pharaoh - king of Egypt.

Exodus then records how God raised up a deliverer for Egypt - a man named Moses - how Moses grew mature, how he was banished from Egypt and how he eventually was sent back to Egypt by the LORD to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go free. But Pharaoh would not do so and so, over the course of time, the Lord judged Egypt, by sending ten plagues - each of which was directed against one of the ten primary deities of the Egyptians - until the land of Egypt was laid waste and the Egyptians begged Israel to depart their land. Do you remember the story?

The LORD, according to the scriptures, delivered the Israelites - and He did so with a strong arm and an outstretched hand - which is an idiom denoting that He delivered the Israelites with power and great authority - and the people of Israel then left Egypt and went on an Exodus to Mt Sinai, worshipped the Lord there, and received the Law of God (aka the Law of Moses) before eventually entering the land of Canaan, and ultimately finding rest in the land promised to Abraham, and to Isaac and to Jacob.

The Lord delivered His people during the Exodus with a strong arm and an outstretched hand. And the Exodus is considered the great example of God's deliverance of His people, even to this day by many of Jewish descent. And the Exodus was indeed a great example of the Lord's delivering power. The Exodus even points forward to the deliverance which we, the church have, today, through the Lord Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us. BUT, there will be a deliverance, of God's people - that is greater still than even the Exodus - and that deliverance is what we are studying here, in the Revelation of Jesus Christ. And this fact is so important for us to keep in mind as we continue our study in the Revelation.

In our day and age, many, many people are interested in the Revelation of Jesus Christ primarily because they are interested in the prophetic aspect of the book as well as in the judgement. The prophetic aspect of the book is NOT the primary topic of the Revelation however (as I have said off and on as we have studied together) and neither is judgement. **The primary topic** of interest in the Revelation is actually the **deliverance of God's people** - the church - from the control and influence of the Evil World Empires totally and finally - which will take place as the gospel is preached to all nations and Jesus Christ finally returns, as the rightful King over all of creation, all peoples and all nations!!

If you had lived in the first century, under the hard yoke of Imperial Rome; and if you and I were experiencing the trials and persecutions that the churches in Asia Minor had, or were, or were about to experience, this then, would be GRAND news! Truly, the kingdoms of this world were becoming the kingdoms of the Lord and of His Christ - meaning, our deliverer is soon to come - help, is on the way!!

Because the deliverance of God's people - the people of faith - the true Israel - is at the forefront of the book, one of the common threads that runs through the book of Revelation is the use of Exodus language - and understanding the OT references to the Exodus helps us then understand more clearly what the Revelation is revealing, for Exodus language runs like a thread through Revelation. For example:

1) 1:5 is a reference to deliverance through Christ's blood - Exodus language, harking back to a time when God's people were also delivered by blood - at Passover;

2) 8:7: hail and fire mingled with blood, similar to the seventh plague: hail and fire (Ex. 9:23ff)

3) 8:12 : darkness, similar to the ninth plague (Ex. 10:21ff) only that darkness was over all Egypt

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4) 9: 3: locusts, similar to the eight plague in Egypt (Ex. 10:14) - only in Egypt the locusts were insects

5) 11: 8 shows us that the two witnesses will win victory over a wicked city - called Sodom and Egypt - so here is Exodus language;

6) 15:1-4 Song of Moses (see Ex. 15:1ff)

7) And so the judgements, which come as each of the seven trumpets are blown, should be taken in this light - that in the same way the Lord sent plagues upon Egypt, so the risen Lord sends plagues upon the world - so that the people of God will finally be delivered - the blood of the martyrs will finally be avenged - and the evil world powers, spiritual and human, will finally be judged and destroyed.

Last week we saw in some detail the first four of the trumpets which were blown as a result of the opening of the seventh seal and the acceptance by God of the prayers of the saints. And we saw several things about the first four trumpets. We saw that:

1) The trumpets brought judgements that came down from God Himself;

2) We saw how these judgements affected nature;

3) We saw how these judgements exposed the hearts of people as they were sent;

4) We saw how these judgements anticipated something good for those who are Christ's - for they anticipate final deliverance for God's people.

5) And finally, we saw how, as bad as the first four judgements were, the worst was yet to come - for there were three more trumpets to be blown - and those trumpets and their respective judgements were directed, not toward nature but toward people.

The first of these judgements is described in 9:1-11 - and these verses describe for us the fifth trumpet and the judgement that came after the fifth trumpet was blown. Let's read together.

These eleven verses divide up into three parts. We are shown the **Executioners of the judgement, Objects of the judgement, and Results of the judgement.**

1st, we have the **Executioners of the Judgement** (vv.1-3, 11). From these verses we see that the Executioners of this judgement originate from somewhere, and we see that the executioners are described as locusts and we see that these locusts have a king ruling over them.

Where do these 'locusts' originate from? see v.1-2. A star falls from heaven and this star is given a key to the shaft of the abyss - ESV the bottomless pit - and this star opens the shaft of the abyss with this key - and when he does this, smoke arises from out of the shaft, like the smoke of a great furnace - and this smoke, in John's vision, darkens the sun and air (I'm not sure how air can be darkened - but this is what is described). And then, locusts come out. This begs three or four questions:

1) Is this star literal or figurative? From what we have seen thus far, how would you answer this question? I would answer the literal vs. figurative question by saying, the term 'star' is figurative. And from the text, we can see clearly the 'star' is not a real star (see v.2). What do we know?

As we saw last week from Isaiah 14 and elsewhere (1:20), the word 'star' can describe a king or it can describe an angel. Further, we know that:

a) The star is a HE.

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b) The star is given something - a key.

c) The star carries out a task - he opens the shaft to the bottomless pit. We also know that . . .

And so, this 'star' is not a literal star - John uses a figure to speak of a being. And this brings us to the second question:

2) Who is this 'star'? From v.1 we see how the star came down from above - John saw a star - notice the wording though - it is NOT 'a great star fell from heaven' as in 8:10 but rather John saw a 'star fallen from heaven to earth' - and the tense of the verb is reflected in the translation and is such that we know John did not see this star falling - but rather that he took note that the star had ALREADY fallen - so the fall of this star was in the past. But the verb tense also denotes that this star is in a perpetual state of fallenness. This star fell sometime in the past, and fallenness is this stars perpetual state - and so we are dealing with a fallen star - or to be more direct, a fallen angel.

Does scripture give us insight into who this star might be? Yes it does. Consider three references:

In **Isaiah 14:12**: How are you fallen, O Day Star, Son of the Morning (ESV: O Day Star, son of Dawn) - who is this? NKJV translates How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer. . .for Lucifer means 'Day Star'

Again, in **Luke 10:18** Jesus told how he had seen "Satan like lightening fall from heaven. . ."

Again, in **Rev. 12:7–9** . . . Could this star that John saw be Lucifer - Satan _ the Devil? I think so - and v. 11 settles it for me because this angel is identified as Abaddon and Apollyon - destruction and destroyer - the devil himself - and if not the devil himself, one of his chief fallen angels.

3) Verses 3 and 4 show that after the shaft to the bottomless pits opened, 'from the smoke came locusts on the earth. . .' **Are these real locusts or again, is this figurative?** From the text we can be sure that the locusts are NOT huge insects - and we determine this from the text at hand in two ways.

First, notice what the locusts are like (v.3, 7-10). This is NOT a description of an insect - but if it is, WOW, you better run for the hills because Black Flag or Raid is NOT gonna help you much!

Second, notice what these locusts are tasked to do (v.4). They are told NOT to harm vegetation - but they are given permission to torment people for five months. So, will they harm any and all people or only some people? What do we learn from the text about WHO these locusts harm? Notice v. 4,5 - they were to harm **only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads** - meaning, those who belong to Christ will be protected while those who do not will be tormented.

4th, Who are what are the locusts? Based on where these locusts come from, it seems clear the locusts are demons from the abyss - the bottomless pit - and they follow their king - Abaddon - the destroyer. The abyss, you see, is the abode of demons.

You may remember, for example, the story of Jesus and the demoniac of Gadara - we learned of the demoniac of Gadara when we studied Luke 8:26-31 - and if you recall, before Jesus cast out the legion of demons out of this man, they begged him with a specific request - do you recall what the request of those demons was? They begged him not to send them to the abyss - the bottomless pit - so he sent them into the herd of swine instead, and they drove the pigs out of their minds and they ran over a cliff into the sea and were drowned. The abyss is where the demons are sent - it is also where those who have been banished dwell.

This place is reference by Peter in 2 Peter 2:4; and again it is referenced by Jude in Jude v.6 - notice in the verse from Jude what is said there, about how long these angels who sinned will be kept in chains under darkness - the verse says they will be kept there until '**the judgement of the great day**'. . . could this be a reference to what John describes, after the fifth trumpet is blown, and the shaft of the bottomless pit - the abyss - is opened?

Now, when we put all this together, what do we have? Do you remember how verse 13 of chapter 8 records the great eagle flying over head, and how this great eagle cries, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts

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of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow"? We have only looked at the first aspect of the fifth trumpet and this single aspect presents a terrifying picture of coming judgement. At the blowing of the fifth trumpet:

A fallen angel - Satan himself - is given the key to the abyss - and he opens the shaft of the abyss and out comes locusts - which are actually demons - and they are given power to torment people - people who do not belong to God and Christ - for five months - and the torments will be severe - so severe that people will desire to die - in order to escape these torments - but DEATH itself will flee from them. . .and so it will be, for the wicked - those who do not have the mark of God on their foreheads.

THIS is the first WOE - that in judgement, Christ the Lord will release DEMONS on unsaved people in judgement! And this is only the FIRST of three woes - and the worst is still, yet to come!

In light of this WOE, this fifth trumpet, what should we who understand what this trumpet releases do, as we live in anticipation of these things?

1st, realize this, that as bad and as horrible as this judgement is, the LORD is in absolute, total control of it, as well as of His whole world. The detail of this trumpet is as wonderful in what it affirms about God as it is terrible in what it affirms about judgement. Notice again:

a) Verse 1: the fallen star is given the key - meaning he doesn't have it of his own accord. Who gave it? The same person who open-end the seals - the Lamb - meaning the Lamb and He who sits on the throne are in absolute and total control, even over Satan - and the control our God exercises is so great that He is able even to use evil to punish evil, for His own glory and purposes. And this is the testimony of scripture all around.

Satan is a created being - the LORD is the creator - and the KING - and as such even satan is subject only to what the LORD allows.

1) The LORD at times allows satan to test believers (see Job 1 and 2)

2) Satan is sometimes allowed to chasten believers (see 1 Cor. 5)

3) Satan is sometimes allowed tempt people (Genesis 3, Luke 4 and Acts 5)

4) Satan is sometimes allowed to judge sin and evil with his own evil (Rev.9). But he is NEVER given free reign nor does he have unlimited power - we do not live in a dualistic world like Star Wars pushes or like some religions teach. The LORD is supreme and satan is created. Never forget that

b) Verse 3 shows that the locusts who come up out of the smoke of the abyss are GIVEN power - meaning they do not have any power apart from he who gives it to them - or should I say, part from He who allows them to exercise power;

c) Verse 5 tells us they are only allowed to torment people in certain ways (they cannot kill but only hurt them) and they are only able to hurt people for a limited amount of time - five months; and verse 4 shows that they can only hurt certain people - and those who belong to Christ will be exempt.

2nd, what the Lord's control over His universe says to we who belong to Christ is, REJOICE for the LORD is KING - and in Christ, we - though we face many dangers, toils and snares - can be confident of this very thing - that even in the midst of severe judgment on the earth and on unbelieving people - yet, the Lord will preserve us safe; and this should fill us with thanksgiving - for such a great salvation - NOT earned, but given freely by God's free grace;

3rd, knowing these truths - knowing the terror of the Lord, these truths should spur us on to urgency in prayer, fervency in evangelism, steadfastness in serving Christ and one another;

4th and finally, knowing that we are not destined for wrath, these truths should empower hope.

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Do you know Christ? Do you love His appearing? Do you believe He is the Lord and that God raised Him from the dead. To know Him is life and peace - to reject Him is terror and death - please, trust Him with your life and your future. May all of us be found safe in the haven of Christ when the great and terrible day of the Lord finally comes.

Amen