

LECTURES ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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CHAPTER TEN

THE FIRST AND SECOND “WOE” TRUMPETS

(Lecture 9)

WE are to be occupied this evening with the fifth and sixth trumpets, known respectively as the first and second “woes.” The added designation of these trumpets implies a solemnity and a fearfulness beyond anything we have previously considered. That we may have all the details clearly before us, I will quote the text in full as we go on with the address.

“And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key to the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit” (vers. 1,2).

The reference, I take it, is undoubtedly to that apostate leader referred to under the third trumpet.

There we read of a great star who fell from heaven burning like a lamp, and who, falling upon the third part of the rivers and fountains of waters, poisoned them so that men drinking of them died, the waters being made bitter. Under this fifth trumpet we have the development of the apostasy, of which this leader is evidently the head. He opens the bottomless pit, using a “**key**.”

We have been made familiar, in the Gospels, with the thought of the key where Christ commits to Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and you will remember our Lord’s words to the lawyers, “**Ye have taken away the key of knowledge.**”

From these Scriptures it is clear that a key implies a system of teaching, and possibly ritual observances connected with it.

With this hint we can readily understand what follows.

This arch-apostate, by a system of erroneous teaching, damnable heresies, denying the Lord that bought them, opens up the bottomless pit, from whence issues a blinding smoke as the smoke of a great furnace, so intense that the sun and air become darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

It is the strong delusion, to which we have had occasion to refer frequently in the course of these addresses. While it is said in II Thessalonians that **“God shall send strong delusion,”** we here learn that He sends it by permitting this Satanic envoy to delude the nations.

Darkening of the sun by means of these Stygian fumes implies the blotting out, from before men’s eyes or minds, the supreme source of light. Their whole spiritual sky will be made dark by the false system with which they will be deluded. The air is particularly Satan’s realm. He is called **“the prince of the power of the air.”**

The darkening of the air implies the control of this realm by Satanic agencies. I do not think we will be far wrong if we identify with this coming delusion the occult systems of gnostic origin, so largely prevailing and so rapidly spreading at the present time. These systems, as we have before noticed, are a unit in denying (in any true sense) the personality of God and in asserting the divinity of humanity. They reproduce, in some form or other, the primeval lie, **“Ye shall be as God.”**

This is the very essence of New Thought, New Theology, Eddyism, Spiritism, Theosophy, and other offshoots of these evil systems. After the restraining power of the Holy Ghost has been removed, they will spread like locusts over all the earth, having tremendous power over the minds of men.

This is what the third verse indicates: **“And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.”**

Anyone familiar with the locust plagues of the East will understand at once the figure here used. Travelers have told us how the locusts appear in swarms so vast that they seem like great clouds, actually shutting out the sun and filling the whole air. They devour everything before them. Falling upon a green field, within a few minutes they leave it as bare as though no vegetation had been there at all. They are the dread of Oriental husbandmen, who are utterly powerless to combat them. They aptly typify or symbolize the spiritual plague of the last days. The symbol of the locusts is coupled with that of the scorpion, because of the torment these evil teachings eventually bring to those who accept them.

That we do not have any merely literal plague of locusts in view here the next verses make evident:

“And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man” (vers. 4, 5).

Literal locusts would do the very thing which these are commanded not to do. The grass of the earth, green things, trees of all descriptions, are here distinctly protected from their power. This verse seems to be rather in the way of explanation than a continuation of the symbol; otherwise we might think of the grass and trees as representing mankind. But it would appear that the apostle here expounds rather than continues the description of his vision, in order that we may not be misled by a literal application. The locusts' power is expended upon those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads. These are tormented by them for five months, a torment akin to that of a scorpion when he striketh a man.

We have already seen that those bearing the seal of God are the remnant of Israel. These alone in Christendom and Judaism will be preserved from the strong delusion of that day. Our Lord Himself limits Satan's power in the same way, when, referring to this very period, And the plague of false teaching, He says, "**If it were possible, they would deceive the very elect.**"

Thank God, it is not possible; for the seal of the living God in the present dispensation is the indwelling Holy Spirit, given to guide into all truth, and in that coming dispensation of judgment the same Holy Spirit will illumine the minds of those who repent in Israel, and thus preserve them from this Satanic delusion.

For the rest, so great will be the distress caused by these evil teachings when men fully give themselves up to them, that, "**In those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them**" (ver. 6).

Anyone who has ever sought to give spiritual help to persons awakening in measure from the delusions of Eddyism, or Spiritism, or in fact any other Satanic system, will understand at once the condition of mind here depicted.

I shall never forget the almost insane glare of the eye and the hopeless wail in the voice of a poor woman who, after having been under spiritualistic influences for a number of years, at last began dimly to apprehend the dreadful character of the system that had been enslaving her. It was only through much prayer and earnest holding on to God on her behalf that she was delivered, but she told me on one occasion that she had suffered all the torments of the damned during the year and a half when she was seeking deliverance from demon control.

A few years ago I was laboring among the Mormons in Utah. There I learned of a most pitiable case. A family who had accepted the Mormon delusion and emigrated from Great Britain to Utah, after practicing the heathenish rites of Joseph Smith's abominable system for thirty years, were at last awakened to the untrustworthiness of it all by the perfidious conduct of certain eminent church-leaders. As a result, they renounced the entire system and were left, if one may so speak, without religious convictions of any kind.

A few months later, the wife and mother was dying. She tossed upon her bed in the greatest agony of mind, moaning in her distress and despair, afraid to meet God in her sins.

A minister of the gospel was urged by some friends to call and see her, though much against the will of the family, and finally gained admittance to the dying woman's room.

He sought faithfully to present the precious truth of the gospel from God's holy Word, but though for a time she seemed to listen eagerly, she turned from him at the very last, crying out, "Oh! sir, after one has been fooled by one religion all her life, it is too late to trust another in the hour of death." And so, in great agony, she passed away, so far as he could tell, into a hopeless eternity.

Oh! I would that I had the power to impress upon men and women everywhere the dreadful responsibility they assume when they tamper with these unholy teachings which already have escaped from the bottomless pit, and which even now have for many souls darkened the air and blotted out the light of the sun. No torture can be compared to spiritual torment, and the only remedy is that perfect love alone, displayed in Calvary's cross, which casteth out all fear.

In the days to which our chapter refers, those who have rejected the grace of God will never again hear that precious gospel, and so they are left to cry out in their anguish, seeking death and finding it not.

In verses seven to twelve we have a highly symbolic description of this delusion, which I wish to examine in detail, so I quote the passage in full.

"And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months. And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon. One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter."

The shapes of the locusts, we are told, are like unto horses prepared unto battle, thus symbolizing their rapid progress and apparently providential irresistibility, in obtaining sway over those unprepared to do battle with them. **"Upon their heads were crowns like gold"** - for apostasy, during that time of delusion, will seem to carry all before it triumphantly, driving from Christendom the last vestige of orthodoxy. Our Lord Jesus asked the solemn question in view of His second advent, **"When the Son of Man cometh shall He find faith on the earth?"**

The **"coming of the Son of Man"** refers not to the rapture, but to the appearing in glory; at that time it will, for the moment, seem as though all true faith has been driven from the prophetic earth; nevertheless there will arise by the power of God's word, from the distant parts of the world, a vast company, as we have seen, who will not have bowed the knee to this latter day Baal.

We are next told **"their faces were as the faces of men, and they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions."**

Three symbols here intermingle, all of which are very evidently found in the occult systems to which we have referred.

“Faces as of men” would seem to imply intelligence, and these evil teachers make a great appeal to human reason, and ridicule the truth of God as a system of cunningly devised fables, while actually they themselves follow but sophistical and illogical theories. Their appeal is to human intelligence - to the mind rather than to the heart and conscience, which Scripture does.

Moreover they are characterized by intense seductiveness and attractive fancies, typified by **“the hair of women.”** A woman’s hair, we are told in Scripture, is her glory; and in the Song of Solomon 7:5, following the marginal reading, we are told, “Thy head upon thee is like Carmel, and the hair of thy head like purple; the king is held in the tresses.” How many have been turned aside from the path of duty by natural attractions, grossly misused for the purpose of accomplishing unholy ends.

But seductive and apparently rational as these systems are when first presented, they prove at last to have **“teeth as the teeth of lions,”** tearing to pieces those who put their trust in them.

In the ninth verse we read: **“And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.”**

These iron breastplates utterly destroy all conscience, or, rather, render them impervious to the shafts of truth, so that the conscience is never reached; while the wings, whose sound is as that of myriads of chariots rushing to battle, would speak of the swiftness with which they conquer those who have turned from the truth and had pleasure in unrighteousness.

The tenth verse again emphasizes the scorpion-like torment they produce. **“And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.”**

What a mercy that their power is thus limited. I see no reason why we should not understand the five months literally. For a very limited time this apostate leader and his emissaries will be permitted to dominate those who would not have Christ the Lord to reign over them. In His place, Satan himself is worshiped as Abaddon and Apollyon.

“And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon” (ver. 11).

This can only refer to the Devil himself. He alone is the angel of the bottomless pit. So it is made evident at last that the “God within,” to which men are turning to-day, is no other than Satan, the great arch-enemy, who has been plotting man’s destruction from the very beginning. Self-worshippers are devil-worshippers, and in some instances already this has been avowed by the followers of present day apostasy. This then is the first **“woe.”**

“One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter” (ver. 12).

We next read,

“And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men” (vers. 13-15).

This is evidently something very different from that which we have already been looking at. It seems to be the result, however, of the previous woe. That is, it shows us what the effect upon the world will be when Satan-worship becomes everywhere prevalent in what was once called Christendom. It will bring about a tremendous conflict, setting nation against nation, and man against man, until the third part of men will be destroyed.

I think we have had a remarkable illustration of this in the great conflict from which we have so lately emerged. Who can deny that it was the direct result of rationalistic “Kultur,” and the denial of the authority of the Word of God? If education without Christ could save, Germany should have been the most blest nation on the face of the earth, for there, education seemed to have reached its highest point - but with what dire results, not only to that nation but to a large part of the human race! German philosophy had poisoned the world. The colleges and universities of almost every civilized land drank greedily from the poisoned streams of Teutonic philosophies and infidel hypotheses, and it is only now that we are beginning to awaken to the baleful effects of such folly.

I have no doubt that Satan himself would have restrained men from rushing into such bloody conflict had it been possible. What I mean is this: He was seeking to entrap men with his specious theories and unholy philosophies, and the great war of 1914 was an almost unforeseen result of this. The nations were thrown into confusion by the teachings they had imbibed. The war was like a great explosion which could no longer be prevented.

These considerations will help us, I think, to understand the second “woe.”

In chapter seven we saw the four angels restrained from letting loose the four winds of the earth upon the great sea of the nations. Here, a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, in response, undoubtedly, to the angel-priest’s intercession in chap. 8:3, cries out to the angel which had the sixth trumpet, **“Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates.”**

These angels are evidently at the present time restraining the great Asiatic hordes from pouring themselves upon the Land of Palestine and Europe. The Euphrates formed the eastern limit of the Roman Empire, and thus was the barrier, as it were, between the East and the West. We are told that the four angels were prepared, for the hour, day, month, and year. That is, there is a definite moment in the mind of God at which this awful power is to be let loose. Until that hour strikes, not all the evil machinations of men, not all the ambitions of nations, can bring about the conflict here predicted. But when that hour does strike, no astute statesman’s policy, no treaties, no world-federation movements can prevent the dire catastrophe predicted.

Two hundred thousand thousand horsemen are hurled upon the west of Asia and upon Europe. They seem like unearthly warriors, with breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone. The horses' heads appear as the heads of lions, because of the unspeakable ferocity of these Asiatic hordes; while fire, and smoke, and brimstone seem to issue from their mouths, telling of the Satanic character of this dire invasion. The result will be a third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issue from their mouths. When we recall the millions who have perished as the direct or indirect result of the recent war and pestilence, we can see how a greater war in the future may well tend to almost depopulate the earth, destroying one-third of the prophetic earth, which is identical with the limits of the old Roman empire. In verse nineteen we read: **“For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails; for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt.”**

Isaiah 9:15 helps us to understand both this passage and that in verse ten. **“The prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail.”** Whether it be the occult woe of the fifth trumpet or the carnage woe of the sixth trumpet, in each case lying prophets are the leaders in each movement and are responsible for the mental, spiritual and physical harm accomplished.

It is a solemn thing to realize that even judgments such as these will have no effect so far as leading men back to God and to repentance is concerned. Punishment does not of itself lead men to repentance; so we are told in verses 20, 21, **“The rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.”** This is in accordance with the general testimony of Scripture, which nowhere intimates that punishment produces penitence. The Restorationist and Universalist teachers deny this and insist that all punishment, whether in time or eternity, is with a view to the final salvation of the delinquent, and that eventually all men will learn by judgment, if they refused to learn by grace, and will turn to God for salvation. But both here, and later in this same Book of Revelation, we find that the heaviest judgments of God, falling on guilty men, do not soften the stony, rebellious hearts; but that rather men become hardened in their sins and are more blasphemous and God-defiant when judgment is poured out upon them than before.

In eternity, God will not permit open defiance of His will. Our Lord Jesus tells us that, in hell, there will be not only **“weeping”** because of suffering, but **“gnashing of teeth,”** which expresses not manifest opposition but the angry defiance of the heart of man, which will be filled with hatred to God but be powerless to openly oppose His government. If the cross of Christ, with its marvelous exhibition of holy love, will not reconcile men to God, punishment will never avail to win their hearts.

~ end of chapter 10 ~

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