

Chapter 5

The Vision of The Seven Trumpets

(Rev. 8:1 - 11:19)

The Seventh Seal and The Golden Censer

8:1 **When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.**

The opening of the seventh seal was followed by a dramatic pause, - a half an hour of silence in heaven. This silence of breathless suspense indicates awe and respect for the seriousness of the judgments to be revealed in the vision of the seven trumpets. Although the judgments in the vision of the trumpets are more intense and severe, yet this vision parallels the vision of the seals. In other words, as the seventh seal dissolves into the vision of the seven trumpets, we have another view of the same period of time that was covered by the six seals, since both visions cover the entire New Testament era and both visions end with judgment day.

8:2 **And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.**

John says that he “saw the seven angels who stand before God.” No further description is given of these angels. We can only surmise that they were in the immediate service of the Lord, ready and willing to carry out His commands. To each of these angels was given a trumpet.

The traditional interpretation is that these seven trumpets are symbols of the various heresies and false doctrines that have plagued, and will continue to plague, the Church throughout the New Testament era. (Others regard them as foreshadowings of physical calamities which affect both the natural creation and mankind).

In any event, the use of trumpets in Scripture is associated always with important announcements or to give signals in time of war. In looking at the three sevenfold numbered series of judgments (the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls), we observe that the series of plagues announced by the trumpets is more severe than the seals, but not as totally devastating as the bowls.

8:3-4 **Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints,**

on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand.

Before any trumpets are sounded, however, John saw another angel who “came and stood at the altar.” (In the Old Testament tabernacle, the golden incense altar was situated just before the entrance to the Holy of Holies.) This angel had in his hand a golden censer, - a pan in which live charcoal were placed for the burning of incense. Much incense was given to the angel that he might offer it together with the prayers of the saints; and we are told that the smoke of the incense together with the prayers of the saints went up before God, thus symbolizing that their prayers were acceptable to God.

There can be no doubt that the incense, which goes up in a great volume of smoke, represents the merit of Christ. By nature we are sinful human beings; and as such, we have no right whatsoever to approach God in prayer. But by faith in Jesus, who suffered and died for us and has washed us clean from all sins in His blood, we have the high honor and privilege to approach God in prayer and address Him as “Our Father.” It is solely because of the atoning merit of Christ that our prayers are acceptable to God. That is why Jesus has given us the promise: “My Father will give you whatever you ask in my name” (John 16:23). Is it not comforting and reassuring to know that by faith in Christ we are the sons and daughters of God (Gal. 3:28) and that for Jesus' sake the heavenly Father will hear the prayers of His children and will grant their requests?

We might note here that it is not the angel who makes the prayers of the saints acceptable. The angel merely acts as the Lord's “hand” in serving the people of God. Nowhere in Scripture will you find the teaching that angels serve as mediators. There is only “one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5).

8:5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

Here we have a different picture. The same angel takes the censer, fills it with fire from the altar, and hurls it on the earth. This certainly indicates a punishment that is inflicted on the ungodly; and it indicates that this punishment comes partially as an answer to the prayers of the saints.

The instant the fire was hurled from the censer to the earth, there were “peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.” These are not only

symbolic of the awesome majesty and power of God, but they also are tokens of His anger against sin. The saints, on the one hand, can be certain that their prayers are acceptable to God. The inhabitants of the earth (the unbelievers), however, can only expect to experience God's wrath and punishment. And "it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31).

The Trumpets

8:6-13 Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them. The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water - the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter.

The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night. As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in mid-air call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!"

As we prepare to consider the trumpet visions, we must realize that we have before us supernatural judgments of God that descend upon the earth with increasing and terrifying impact. The first four trumpets describe great disasters which inflict horrible damage on the earth and cause tremendous loss of life. These disasters seem to resemble some of the plagues inflicted upon Egypt in the days of Moses. And why not? The world today resembles Egypt of old in its opposition to God and in its obduracy against His will.

After the sounding of the first trumpet, hail and fire followed, mingled with blood. In the seventh Egyptian plague (Ex. 9:18-25), hail and fire destroyed crops and killed many animals and human beings.

When the second trumpet sounded, something like a mountain on fire was cast into the sea, turning a third of the sea into blood. A third of the sea creatures were killed and a third of the ships were destroyed. In the first Egyptian plague (Ex. 7:21), God turned the water into blood, and the fish in the Nile died.

After the third trumpet had sounded, a great star, called Wormwood, like a blazing torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and springs; and the waters turned bitter, and many people died. About the only similarity to an Egyptian plague that we can find here is that in the first plague the waters became undrinkable.

In the vision of the fourth trumpet, a third of the sun, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars were darkened; and a third of the day, as well as a third of the night, were without light. In the ninth Egyptian plague, all of Egypt, except the land of Goshen, was darkened for three days.

We must remember that all of these disasters are symbolic of some severe judgments of God. If, as some believe, these disasters signify great catastrophes that will occur on land and sea, then they serve as signs of God's wrath against a wicked world. Thus every flood, every earthquake, and all other physical disasters, whenever and wherever they occur, are intended to call people to repentance before it is too late.

However, there is a difficulty in such an interpretation. We know that the purpose of the Egyptian plagues was to punish Pharaoh and the Egyptians because they had hardened their hearts and had refused to heed God's command to let the people of Israel leave the land of Egypt. The people of God, however, were not affected by these judgments. If the judgments announced by the four trumpets are to be understood as disasters in the realm of nature, such as terrible earthquakes, floods, etc., then they would affect also the children of God; for certainly, in almost every community, we find both the godly and the ungodly. We have not witnessed any storms, floods, earthquakes, and the like that have punished only the ungodly and have left the children of God unscathed.

Furthermore, the disasters announced by the four trumpets are extremely unnatural: - (1) Hail and fire mixed with blood hurled down on the earth; (2) a mountain blazing with fire hurled into the ocean and turning a third of it into blood; (3) a blazing star falling from the sky on a third of the rivers and springs and polluting the water; (4) a third of the sun, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars darkened, leaving a third of the day and a third of the night without light. If such monstrous catastrophes, as announced here by the four trumpets, were actually

wrought in the realm of nature, we hesitate to think of how this would be handled by the press and news media.

Therefore, it appears that we ought to view these calamities, which are described as inflicting so much damage on the earth, as symbolizing the destruction wrought by heresies and religious delusions. Lies and deception, too, are not only horrible, but they are also wholly unnatural.

God has given us His Word in its truth and purity. In it, God reveals His will, as well as His grace and mercy. In clear and unmistakable language, He points out to us the one and only way to eternal salvation. When men refuse to accept the plain teaching of God's Word and, in their pride and conceit, turn a deaf ear to the truth, or deliberately falsify and corrupt the truth, then all that is left for them is to believe lies and delusions. When God's Word is rejected, error and deception follow as natural punishments. It definitely is a Scriptural teaching that when men repeatedly and deliberately reject the truth, God finally sends them strong delusions so that they actually believe lies. Hear what St. Paul writes in 2 Thess. 2:9-12: "The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness."

In these four trumpet visions, we are told of the damage that these disasters caused: a third of the earth, a third of the trees, and all the green grass burned up; a third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the sea creatures killed, a third of the ships destroyed; a third of the rivers and springs rendered lethal for multitudes of people; a third of the sun, a third of the moon, a third of the stars darkened.

Similarly, heresies and false doctrines produce much damage in the world. This is portrayed symbolically in each of the four trumpet visions. (1) By robbing men of the truth, by believing and fostering lies, the green pastures of God's Word are sadly burned. (2) Heretical fanaticism in the world and the rise of false teachers, who apparently show forth great signs and wonders, are the direct cause for the eternal ruin of multitudes. (3) By a mixture of dangerous errors, especially those espoused by rationalistic teachers, the Water of Life, the pure doctrines of the Gospel, are made bitter and poisonous; and instead of finding life and refreshment, men now find ruin and spiritual death. (4) When the light of God's Word is dimmed by men who call themselves ministers of the Gospel, when the light of Scripture is darkened by human

opinions and speculations, then countless souls are plunged into spiritual darkness and are placed on the road to eternal damnation. This judgment was foretold in Amos 8:11-12: “‘The days are coming,’ declares the Sovereign Lord, ‘when I will send a famine through the land - not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it.’”

However, while these heresies, these lies and delusions, and these violent storms of false doctrine bring great danger and destruction to the world, yet in each of the four trumpet visions we are told that only a third of the affected areas are destroyed. This definitely tells us that these heresies will never be able to destroy completely the precious Word of God. The Word of the Lord will endure!

Before the final trumpets are sounded, John sees an eagle flying in midair, giving this warning to the inhabitants of the earth (the unbelievers and the ungodly): “Woe, woe, woe,” - thereby indicating that the three remaining trumpets will introduce judgments even more terrible than the first four.

9:1 The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss.

With the sounding of the fifth trumpet, John saw a star that had fallen to the earth; and to this star was given the key to the Abyss. On the basis of the commentaries that we have consulted, fifty percent of the commentators believe that this star is an agent of God, perhaps an angel; and the remaining fifty percent claim that this star is Satan himself. Basically, does it really make much difference who opened the Abyss? The important thing is what followed the opening of the Abyss. Whether it was opened by an angel from heaven, or by Satan, - in either case, the Abyss could not have been opened without God’s permission.

Those who identify this “star” as Satan claim that this star is the same as the “angel of the Abyss” in verse 11. While we do not hesitate to identify the “angel of the Abyss” in verse 11 as Satan, we are hesitant to say that the star that fell from heaven in verse 1 is the same person who is called the “angel of the Abyss” in verse 11.

Furthermore, in Rev. 20:1-2 we read: “And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.” Since we cannot convince ourselves that the key to the Abyss would be given at one time to Satan and at another time to an angel of God, we shall agree

with those who interpret “the star” as being an agent of God, undoubtedly one of the holy angels. This conclusion, that it was an angel of God who opened the Abyss, would be in harmony with the interpretation that the six woes symbolize the judgments of God upon those who reject the Gospel and refuse to believe the truth. These judgments become increasingly more severe until now we see that, as a punishment upon an obdurate and unbelieving world, even the furies of hell are unleashed; for there can be no doubt that the “shaft of the Abyss” is the “bottomless pit,” - one of several designations for hell.

9:2 When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss.

As the “gates of hell” are unlocked, tremendous clouds of black smoke pour forth from the bottomless pit, darkening the sun and the sky. It is hell pouring forth its infernal powers of delusion.

As the sun is the great light in the physical world, so Jesus and His Word are the light of the world in a spiritual sense. You will recall that Jesus said of Himself: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). You will recall also that the Psalmist, speaking of the Word of the Lord, said: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Ps. 119:105). As in nature, the light of the sun is darkened by black and heavy clouds of storm, just so does false doctrine, like a billow of smoke out of hell, obscure the Word of the Lord and the precious Gospel of Jesus Christ. All this comes as a judgment of God upon the ungodly. Because they had refused to believe the truth, the true light of truth is extinguished. Having rejected the Word of the Lord, which is like “a light shining in a dark place” (2 Pet. 1:19), they now are plunged into the depths of spiritual darkness, blinded by the delusions of Satan, and finding their “delight” in believing lies, which have their origin in hell. To be totally deprived of the Word, - that is a most severe judgment of God upon the ungodly and the despisers of the truth. To see how serious a matter it is to be given over into the powers and terrors of spiritual darkness, it might be well to hear the following words of Scripture: “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator - who is forever

praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them" (Rom. 1:21-32). Can you not see how these words are applicable to, and descriptive of, the very times in which we are living?

9:3-5 And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a man.

Emerging from the black smoke were swarms of locusts descending upon the earth; and to them was given the power to sting like scorpions. It is evident immediately that these locusts, who came up out of hell, were no ordinary locusts. Ordinary locusts strip large areas of land of all vegetation; these locusts were forbidden to destroy the grass, the plants and the trees. Then, too, while these locusts were permitted to inflict harm on human beings, yet this harm could be inflicted only on those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. That means that they could do no harm to the elect of God. Note furthermore that these locusts were not permitted to kill the ungodly, but only to torment them for a limited period of time. This torture which the ungodly must endure is comparable to the agony caused by the sting of a scorpion.

From all this it is apparent that these locusts symbolize the many heresies and false doctrines which God permits to come upon those who despise the truth and reject the Gospel of Jesus. The powers of hell are used in this judgment of God upon an unbelieving world; however, these powers are determined and limited by God.

In the final analysis, all false doctrine has its origin in hell. The devil "is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). In 1 Tim. 4:1 we read: "The Spirit clearly says that in

later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.” Even the appearance of the Antichrist is the work of Satan, as we see from 2 Thess. 2:9-10, where we read: “The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perished because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.”

The locusts were not given power to kill their victims, but only to torture them for five months. Although not at first easily detected, yet heresies and false doctrines bring torment and torture to the hearts of men, robbing them of all peace of mind and soul. Often working slowly and secretly, heresy, like the sting of a scorpion, is poison to the soul. In the end it will result in agony and bitterness.

The time span of “five months” is rather difficult to explain. We know that five months is the normal life-span of locusts. The “five months” here in Revelation in all likelihood indicates a definite period of time fixed by the Lord. Some have explained this number “5” as a symbolical number. As “10” is a number signifying completeness, so “5” represents half of “10,” implying that the other half is to follow, which it does in the next woe.

Terrible as this judgment is upon an unbelieving world, yet the children of God, though in the world, are not of the world. The hellish delusions which bring darkness and agony to all despisers of the truth, leave the lovers of the Word, the true and faithful Christians, unharmed. The elect of God rejoice in the promise of their Savior: “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28).

9:6 During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them.

Tortured by a condemning conscience, blinded by the delusions of Satan and his hellish heresies, the despisers of the truth are led to pessimism and despair. They see death as an escape from their hopeless condition; yet when the most painful curse of their delusion strikes them, their tortured consciences keep reminding them of even greater agony that will await them after temporal death. Theirs is a state of mind that defies description. How different, however, it is with the true believers who have not been blinded by Satan’s delusions. Possessing the light of the Word, they have peace of heart and mind and soul in a world that is feeling the increasing severity of God’s righteous judgments.

9:7-12 The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lion's teeth. They had breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon. The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come.

We now are given a further description of the locusts, - a description which is symbolic of the treachery of Satan. That they looked like horses prepared for battle seems to indicate the militant attitude and behavior of many heretical sects. They appear to possess great authority; they wear something on their heads that resembles crowns of gold; and indeed, they often appear to be highly successful and victorious. But it is a counterfeit authority, and the victory promised them by Satan turns out to be nothing more than a delusion. The devil can never, never be trusted. He will make many enticing and alluring promises, - even as he promised to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them if Jesus would but fall down and worship him, - but all of his promises only result in torture and destruction to those who are victims of his lying and deceit. Their crowns that "look" like gold are just that, - they are made of "fool's gold."

A further description of the locusts follows: their faces resemble human faces, their hair is like women's hair; but their teeth are like lions' teeth. What a true picture this is of all false prophets and of all who disseminate heresies throughout the world. In their human appearance, they seem to possess wisdom and sagacity; they seem to be completely harmless; yes, they even seem to be very attractive and peaceful. However, though they appear with the tenderness of women, yet their teeth are like lions' teeth, and it becomes evident that they are servants of him who "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). How all this reminds us of the description that Jesus gave when He issued the warning: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing; but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (Matt. 7:15).

The fact that the locusts had breastplates of iron may indicate the protection of earthly powers often extended to the disseminators of heresy. They go from country to country. They make a great noise in the world, similar to the noise made by an army of thundering horses and chariots. But although they conquer the hearts of many by their flattering lies and deception, yet there is the sting of the scorpion in their tails.

Their poisonous doctrines, seemingly attractive and luscious at first, in the end will result in torment and destruction.

They have as king over them the angel of the Abyss. This, of course, is none other than Satan himself. The Hebrew name “Abaddon” and the Greek name “Apollyon” both mean “Destroyer,” - an appropriate name for the devil, whose one ambition it is to lead immortal and blood-bought souls into eternal perdition.

As we reflect on this first woe, we certainly are reminded of the demonic activity so prevalent in the world today. Surely, we cannot close our eyes to the escalation of Satan-worship and demonology in recent years. Suffice it to say, that large numbers of those who were drawn into Satan-worship and other Satanic activities today are in mental institutions or in hospital wards for the violent. All this is proof once again that following Satan and his cohorts always ends in misery, torment, and devastation. Words simply cannot tell the damage that heresy has done, and still does, to the souls of men. We must mention once again, however, that these terrible heresies, which have their origin in the bottomless pit, are a judgment of God upon all who refuse to believe the truth.

The first woe ends; the second is about to begin.

9:13-16 The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God. It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.” And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number.

As the trumpet sounded, John heard a voice coming from the four projections at the top of the incense altar. This tells us immediately that the curse or judgment to follow comes once again by the direct authority of God. The command is given to the sixth angel: “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.”

While it is not mandatory for us to regard these four angels as evil angels (since God often uses His holy angels in executing His judgments upon the world), yet the fact that these angels were “bound” leads us to assume that they represent forces of evil. At any rate, it is necessary and important to emphasize the truth that God controls all events in the world and that all the forces of evil are held in check by Him until He sees fit to have them unleashed. This truth is emphasized also by the fact that these “four angels....had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and

year.” They simply could not be released until God’s appointed time had arrived and the divine command to release them had been given. The fact that now they were being released tells us also that when God’s patience and long-suffering are exhausted, the judgment of God will descend.

The four angels had been bound at the great river Euphrates. In the preceding vision, the swarms of locusts came out of hell; in this vision the enemies apparently are given an earthly origin. Euphrates was the region where the great world powers of the Old Testament, the enemies of God’s chosen people, arose and spread their dominion over the world. We are thinking of such powers as Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia. Israel of old, time and again, had experienced destructive judgments of God from beyond the great river. The announcement of the release of the four angels who had been bound at the Euphrates, therefore, might signify that the forces of evil, which heretofore had been held in check, are now released as a judgment of God upon the world. In all likelihood, we have here the most severe judgment prior to that at the end of the world.

In the preceding vision, - the swarms of locusts, - we noted how Satan and his hellish hordes are actively involved in spreading all kinds of false doctrines throughout the world and causing multitudes to be led astray by their terrifying and blinding delusions. We must not forget, however, that the “world” is a powerful ally of Satan. Words cannot describe the damage that has been done, and is being done, to the souls of men by the false doctrines that have their origin in the “world.” (We must issue the reminder once again, however, that the world and our flesh are in league with Satan, so that all three constitute the great triple alliance of evil.) The “world,” - no doubt supported by Satan, - has been very clever in concocting all kinds of heresies and erroneous philosophies, which are designed for the sole purpose of leading immortal souls into the very jaws of hell. As examples of such soul-destroying theologies, we might mention rationalism, modernism, materialism, humanism, liberalism, evolutionism, atheism, communism, and many other isms. The mounted troops from the region of the Euphrates are symbolic of the countless isms fabricated and promulgated by the world. “Countless,” we say, because John writes: “The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number.” This number, which must be taken symbolically, represents an incalculable host rather than a precise or specific number. What a large number and what a great variety of false teachings are prevalent in this world of ours! Some of them are very brazen; others are extremely subtle; but all are intended for our destruction, - yes, all are designed to rob us of eternal life.

9:17-19 The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads

of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths. The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury.

John now proceeds to describe the horses and riders that he saw in his vision. The phraseology he uses emphasizes the terror of these demonic monsters. The riders had breastplates of the following colors: fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow. Since all of these are hellish colors, it is obvious that the riders and their horses are in the service of Satan. The horses are monstrous, their heads frightfully resembling the heads of lions and their mouths emitting fire, smoke and sulfur, - again suggesting the terrors of hell. The heresies symbolized in this vision come from the professed enemies of the church, “their mouths emitting fire, smoke and sulfur.” What a graphic picture of the damning nature of false doctrine!

By these plagues, - by the hellish doctrines symbolized by the fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of the horses’ mouths, - a third of mankind was killed. Does this mean that men were put to death physically? In the previous vision, the locusts were not allowed to kill men, but only to torture them. The demonic army of this sixth trumpet is permitted to kill a third of mankind. From this it would appear that physical death is here implied. Luther and some other commentators identify the movement here described with that of Mohammedanism, which rose at the beginning of the seventh century. And surely, it cannot be denied that it was with a murderous fanaticism that the Mohammedans waged their so-called holy wars, using all the abominations of hell in attempting to spread their destructive heresies. Since they were promised salvation for slaying “the infidels,” these followers of Mohammed, numbering countless thousands, overran large areas of Asia, Europe, and Africa.

However, it is our opinion that the horses and riders in this second woe cannot be identified exclusively with the rise of Mohammedanism, even though Mohammedanism was, and still is, one of the most destructive of all heresies. For one thing, the bloody attacks of the Mohammedans were carried on against Christian nations. How does this agree with the fact that these woes are judgments of God upon “the inhabitants of the earth, ” that is, the unbelievers? Furthermore, it seems fairly evident that in the fifth and sixth trumpets, we are given a description of the terrible judgments of God that are coming upon this godless world toward the end of the age. In view of these and other considerations, it appears that the killing of a third of mankind might mean that, through heresies and false doctrines, a third of mankind was deprived of spiritual life, and thus also deprived of eternal life. The only prospect

for those who permit themselves to be taken in by false doctrine is eternal death.

It is as John writes: “The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury.” The riders do not kill; their horses do that. The power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails. Horses that kill by emitting fire, smoke and sulfur, - horses that inflict injury with tails like snakes having heads, - this symbolism seems to point to the world curse in its ultimate stage, to the vicious and blood-curdling false doctrines which are spread throughout the world, yes, to the delusions of hell that obscure the light of God’s Word. The godless inhabitants of the earth have brought this disaster, this killing curse, upon themselves.

9:20-21 The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood - idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

The fact that “a third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur” does not mean that the remaining two-thirds will be saved. Far from it!

God indeed does not want anyone to be eternally lost. Scripture makes that very clear. In Ezekiel 33:11 we read: “Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.’” And in 1 Tim. 2:3-4 St. Paul writes: “This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” That all men might be saved, God has given them His Word, containing the wonderful promise which we so often call “the Gospel in a nutshell:” “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

When men reject this Word of God, when they exchange the truth for the lie, when they choose darkness instead of light, when they listen to the voice of false prophets and permit themselves to become enslaved by heresies of all kinds, then finally God’s patience becomes exhausted and He permits terrible judgments, - and these are here described in the fifth and sixth trumpets, - to descend upon “the inhabitants of the earth,” that is, upon the unbelievers and the ungodly.

But in spite of these extremely severe judgments, which resulted in much injury and many fatalities, the majority of men still refused to heed God’s call to repentance. They did not repent of the work of their hands; in other words, they continued to hold

fast to materialistic things. They refused to stop worshiping idols and demons. There is a close relationship between demonology (devil worship) and idolatry, - both being direct consequences of rejecting the truth of God's Word. False doctrines inevitably lead to idolatry. When men despise God's Word and refuse to worship the Triune God, they, in their spiritual blindness, turn to worship idols, the work of their own hands, - idols made of "gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood -idols that cannot see or hear or walk!" How unreasonable! Still worse, when men become the victims of false teachings, they, in reality, give honor to the devil and thus actually worship this "father of lies." When the world is flooded with such gross violations of the first commandment, then the seventh trumpet blast certainly cannot be far off.

Indeed, as we have stated already, we might suppose that those who "were not killed by these plagues" would have been terrified by what they had witnessed and would have returned to God with truly penitent hearts. But, no; they hardened their hearts even more. In this vision, John sees them as not only persisting in their idol-worship and demon-worship, but they also refused to repent of "their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality and their thefts."

Thus we see in this world of our day not only an abundance of heretical teachings and isms of all kinds, but we also see an increase in sins against the second table of God's Law. We see human life as being very cheap and expendable. Thousands upon thousands of people, young and old alike, are removed from the ranks of the living each year by brutal and ruthless killers; and millions upon millions of unborn infants each year are deprived of their right to life by those who so cruelly promote and practice abortion.

We see magic arts, in the form of sorcery and witchcraft, on the increase. Having cast aside the Word of God, which alone can give life and light and peace and joy and certainty, untold multitudes are turning to occultism, divination, astrology, fortune-telling, and other satanic arts and practices, hoping against hope to find some ray of light at the end of their dark tunnel, but finding nothing but pitch-black darkness.

We see sexual immorality sweeping over this earth of ours like a huge river overflowing its banks, completely out of control. Considering themselves wise and liberated, men and women, young and old, have abandoned all laws pertaining to purity and decency, and have adopted a style of living in which women exchange natural relations for unnatural ones, - a style of living in which men abandon natural relations with women and commit indecent acts with other men (Rom. 1).

Finally, John sees these hardened people as refusing to repent of their thefts, - as

people who have no respect for the property of others and who consider it a natural and normal behavior to resort to unjust means in order to accumulate vast amounts of wealth.

Such is a description of the world in its final stage, - a world in which God and His Word are ignored, a world in which Satan is extolled, a world in which crimes of all kinds are not only tolerated but often even advocated, a world in which heresies and false doctrines are readily accepted by a thankless and godless generation, - but above all, a world that, in spite of the warning judgments of God, refuses to repent and insists on “doing its own thing” right down to the very end. Since this sixth trumpet reveals the world in its final impenitence, we might well ask: “What, then, is left?” The answer is found in connection with the seventh trumpet (11:15).

We note that in these visions John saw nothing pertaining to God’s people and the Church. Thanks be to God, before the seventh trumpet is sounded, we have in chapters 10 and 11 a sort of an interlude in which all true Christians are assured once again that false doctrines and heresies will never be able to destroy completely the true Word of God. The ultimate triumph of God’s Word is guaranteed!

The Angel and The Little Scroll

10:1-4 Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars. He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, “Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down.”

It must have been an exceptionally impressive sight that John was privileged to view in this particular vision. Among the many angels that John had seen in the previous visions, he now saw still another angel coming down from heaven. He was a mighty angel, possessing great strength; he was robed in a cloud, indicative of heavenly majesty; above his head was a rainbow, - a sign of God’s pledge, - signifying perhaps that he was a messenger of the covenant God of mercy; his face was like the sun, reflecting heavenly glory; his legs were like fiery pillars, symbolizing power over the enemies and reminding us somewhat of the pillars of fire that protected and guided the Children of Israel on their journey from the land of bondage to the land of promise; and he planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, symbolizing great power and majesty and at the same time signifying

that his message was to resound throughout the entire world.

Some of the phrases used to describe this mighty angel from heaven are used also to describe Jesus. In Rev. 1:15-16, it is said of Jesus that “His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace” and that “His face was like the sun.” In Rev. 4:3, we are told that a rainbow encircled God’s throne. When Jesus ascended into heaven, a cloud received Him out of the sight of His amazed disciples; and we are told that Jesus will come again in the clouds of heaven. In various passages does the New Testament speak of Jesus as having control over all things, and that all things have been put under His feet. In the Old Testament, Jesus frequently is called “the angel of the Lord.” In the light of this similarity, many interpreters say that this angel in chapter 10 is Jesus Himself. This may very well be true. Although in the opening words of this chapter John says, “I saw another mighty angel.” At any rate, if this angel is not Jesus, he is an angel very closely associated with Jesus and one who comes directly from God’s presence.

The mighty angel held in his hand a little scroll. This scroll was not at all like the scroll in chapter 5. That scroll was sealed, and its contents were made known only after Jesus had opened the seven seals. This scroll in chapter 10 was small; and instead of being sealed, it was open, signifying that its message was to be revealed and proclaimed to the entire world. When the angel spoke with a loud voice, it was similar to the roar of a lion. His voice resounded throughout the world, and it was a voice that spoke with authority. Thereupon, like a reverberating echo, the seven thunders spoke. Although the seven thunders are not identified, they very likely are associated with God, who confirmed the loud shout of the mighty angel. In Rev. 4:5 we are told: “From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder.”

John must have heard the message of the seven thunders, for he was about to write it down; but then he heard a voice from heaven say: “Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down.” We have no way of knowing the contents of the message uttered by the seven thunders. Since thunder usually is a symbol of God’s wrath, we may surmise that the seven thunders had spoken of judgments that will descend on all who reject and despise God’s love and grace. However, this is mere supposition on our part. John was ordered to seal up what the seven thunders had said, telling us, in effect, that there are things about the future that God does not want revealed to us until the proper time comes. It is interesting to note that John is not permitted to record everything, but only that which God wants His Church to know.

10:5-7 Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. And he swore by him who lives for ever and

ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, “There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets. ”

After John had received the instruction to seal up what the seven thunders had spoken, he saw the mighty angel raise his right hand to heaven, - the customary gesture, even today, for taking an oath. With great solemnity, the angel swore by the eternal and everliving God, the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth and sea, that there would be no more delay. In Rev. 6:9ff., we heard how the souls of the martyrs cried out, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” At that time they were told “to wait a little longer.” But now the cry of the martyrs is about to be answered; the end is imminent. The mighty angel declares with an oath: “There will be no more delay!”

With the sounding of the seventh trumpet, which will usher in the final series of judgments known as the seven bowls of wrath, “the mystery of God will be accomplished.” God’s entire purpose for the world, as revealed in His Gospel promises, will have reached its goal. The Gospel will have finished its course. God will have won the victory over the forces of evil and will reign forever. No longer will the faithful have to await the fulfillment of God’s promises; for all the things that God has prepared for those who love Him will then have become realities. Yes, the completion of the mystery of God will be “just as he announced to his servants the prophets,” that is, just as He proclaimed this good news to His servants of old.

However, please take note of this: the fact that the mystery of God will be accomplished includes both a comfort and a warning. For the true believers it will mean an end to all their sufferings. For the unbelievers it will mean an end to all opportunities for repentance.

10:8-11 Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: “Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.”

So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, “Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.” I took the little scroll from the angel’s hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.”

The same voice that just a short time before had told John, “Seal up what the seven trumpets have said and do not write it down,” now says to John: “Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel.”

Take note again of the fact that the booklet is open. In fact, it has never been closed. It is the Word of God, the everlasting Gospel of our crucified and risen and living Lord. It is God’s revelation, proclaiming to men how He will complete the mystery of salvation through Christ when history will have reached the goal that God has set for it.

When John approached the angel and requested the scroll, the angel said to him: “Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.”

In the Old Testament, the prophet Ezekiel had a similar experience when he was handed a scroll and was told: “Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.” Ezekiel replied: “So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth” (Ezek. 3:3); but in verse 14 of the same chapter, Ezekiel also speaks of going “in bitterness and in anger.”

A similar effect is related by St. John, who found that what the angel had told him proved to be true. He writes: “I took the little scroll from the angel’s hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour.” *A Journey Through Revelation*

The symbolic meaning of all this is not too difficult to understand. As we have heard, the open scroll is the Word of God. Eating the scroll signified that John was to receive, assimilate and digest the entire Word of God. He was to make the Word of the Lord his own word; it was to become a part of him. Such reception of the Word is sweet, as the Psalmist also testifies, when He describes God’s words as “sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb” (Ps. 19:10). John puts it this way: “It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.” And indeed, it was a delight for John to proclaim to the aching hearts of men the sweet Gospel of God’s grace and forgiveness.

On the other hand, John also found that his proclamation of the Gospel met with much opposition from the enemies of the Lord. This, too, was in accord with the angel’s prophecy: “It will turn your stomach sour.” The same Gospel message that brought sweet comfort and hope to the penitent also invited bitterness and persecution from the impenitent. Thus, while John found it a sweet thing to proclaim God’s word

of pardon and peace, yet he also found it to be a bitter experience to pronounce the judgment of God upon a rebellious world, as well as upon an unfaithful church.

We feel that it is not out of place at this time to make a few remarks with regard to our present-day preachers. Let all preachers, who desire to be known as Christian preachers, make it a primary duty, first of all, to receive and digest the whole word of God, both Law and Gospel. Only as they have done this will they be in a position to share the Word with others, preaching the Law of God in all its severity and proclaiming the saving Gospel in all its sweetness. They must not seek to please men by softening the blows of the Law or by lulling the impenitent into a spiritual slumber by preaching a social gospel. Nor must they be guilty of permitting terror-stricken sinners to sink into despair and hopelessness by withholding from them the beautiful and comforting promises of the Gospel.

All preachers who are faithful in their proclamation of the Word will find that the effect of the Word is both sweet and bitter; and in their preaching they will experience both joy and grief. Seeing people respond whole-heartedly to the preaching of God's Word is pure sweetness. Proclaiming the judgment of God's wrath upon those who reject Christ and who refuse to repent of their sins is a painful and bitter thing, often causing one's stomach "to turn sour."

But even in the face of bitterness, hostility and persecution, the preaching of God's Word in its truth and purity must go on. The angel told John that he "must prophesy again" before "many peoples, nations, languages and kings." Notice that word "must," which implies "necessity." Such Christian preaching is a "must" if men, women and children are to call on the Lord and be saved; for St. Paul writes: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"

And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" (Rom. 10:14-15).

Again, such Christian preaching is a "must" if the world-wide prophesying, which was commanded by Christ, is to be carried out. Just prior to His ascension into heaven, the Lord Jesus gave this commission to His disciples (the Church): "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20).

Finally, such Christian preaching is a “must” in order for the Scriptures to be fulfilled. In His final discourses with His disciples, prior to His suffering and death, Jesus told them: “And this Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14).

The Two Witnesses

11:1-2 I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told “Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months.”

John was given a reed, a straight bamboo-like cane, which often was used as a measuring rod; and he was told to measure the temple of God and the altar, and to count the worshipers there. This is a reference to the Church as God sees it, - the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, - the Church which is composed of all true believers in Christ, but only the true believers. We commonly refer to this Church as the “invisible” Church, since we cannot look into the hearts of individuals and tell whether they are sincere Christians or hypocrites. However, the Lord, who searches the hearts and minds, knows those who are His. This numbering of the believers is parallel to the sealing of the 144,000 in Rev. 7:1-8. Most assuredly, there is untold comfort in the fact that the Lord knows His own, and guards and protects them.

In addition to the invisible Church, we also speak of a “visible” church, which includes the entire number of those who profess to be Christians, but among whom there are sham Christians, or hypocrites. Every true believer is not only a member of the “invisible” Church, but is also a member of the “visible” church. However, not everyone who is a member of the “visible” church is a member of the “invisible” church. Simply stated, not all who claim to be Christians are genuine Christians. They may be hypocrites, - unbelievers pretending to be believers.

In a certain parable, Jesus likened the visible church to a net full of all kinds of fish, some good and edible, others bad and worthless; but the separation of the good from the bad will not take place until the last day. This same truth is expressed in these directions given to John: “Exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles.” The outer court, although seemingly a part of the temple, nevertheless was outside the temple. It belonged to the Gentiles.

The “Gentiles” in this verse are the sham-Christians, the hypocrites, the unbelievers. They say they are Christians, but God knows they are not. “They will trample on the holy city for 42 months.”

There can be no doubt that the holy city is Jerusalem. Figuratively speaking, however, Jerusalem is a name for the visible church on earth. (There is also the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God, and the home of God's elect). In spite of the fact that these Gentiles are unbelievers and hypocrites, they, for the time being, reside in the holy city, that is, they are on the "membership rolls" of the visible church, but they do not really belong there. We might brand them as intruders, who actually "trample" on the church and do the church no good whatsoever. In Luke 21:24, Jesus had prophesied: "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." The Greek verb used in Luke is the same verb used in Revelation and it means "to tread down," "to trample," which here implies "to desecrate."

The unbelievers in the visible church will remain there and will hinder the church in her progress; yes, they will corrupt and defile the church in many ways. This will continue until judgment day, when the sheep will be separated from the goats. In the new Jerusalem, the city of the living God, there will be no corruption or defilement of any kind.

The "42 months" here spoken of will be mentioned a number of times in the remaining chapters of Revelation. 42 months - 3 1/2 years - 1260 days, they all are synonymous. Each is equal to the "time, times, and half a time" of Daniel (Dan. 7:25; 12:7), and each represents the entire New Testament era from the first coming of Christ to His second coming on judgment day. During this time the Gentiles, or unbelievers, will desecrate large areas of the visible church. The Church, however, the Holy Christian Church (the sum total of all true believers, but only believers) is kept perfectly safe during this period. No powers on earth or in hell shall ever be able to harm God's elect.

11:3-4 "And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.

The Lord will not be without His witnesses. Here He gives the assurance that He will supply His witnesses with power and that they will proclaim His message for 1,260 days, that is, throughout the New Testament era. This reminds us of the promise which the Lord Jesus gave His disciples shortly before ascending into heaven. He said: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Since the 1,260 days are the same as 42 months or 3 1/2 years, and since each of these represents the entire New Testament era, it becomes evident immediately that

the “two witnesses” cannot refer to two specific individuals. “Two” denotes competent and adequate legal testimony. Throughout Scripture, no less than two witnesses are demanded. “Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses” (2 Cor. 13:1). Thus the Lord is here reminding John that throughout the New Testament age, even though there would be large numbers of false prophets disseminating all kinds of hell-born heresies in the world, yet there would always be faithful witnesses to proclaim God’s word in its truth and purity to an apostate church and to an unbelieving world.

The fact that the Lord’s witnesses are clothed in sackcloth is an indication of their penitence and sorrow. Repentance and sorrow for sin must be a characteristic mark of all Christian preachers and witnesses. Otherwise, if they did not feel true sorrow over their own sins, how could they bring to others the Gospel of Jesus Christ in all its sweetness? And since sackcloth was worn also as a sign of mourning, this could imply, too, that Christian witnesses often experience the bitterness which the proclamation of God’s word brings with it. It is a well-known fact that Christian witnesses frequently must endure sorrow and suffering at the hands of the sham-christians and unbelievers in the visible church.

We note next that the two witnesses are called the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord. This terminology marks the witnesses as authorized representatives of God. The olive trees supply the lamps with oil. In the Bible, oil frequently is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. When Samuel anointed Saul with oil, the Holy Spirit came upon Saul. In Psalm 45 it was prophesied that Jesus would be anointed with the oil of gladness; and in Acts 10:38 we read the fulfillment of this prophecy: “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power.”

Let us never forget that the power for effective witnessing is given by the Holy Spirit, who comes to individuals through Word and Sacrament. He is the divine source of all Christian testimony. Thus, as the Lord’s witnesses are filled with oil, that is, as they are filled with the Holy Spirit, they are at the same time lampstands, sending forth the light of God’s Word and fulfilling the Lord’s will concerning them when He said, “You are the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14).

11:5-6 If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

Possessing the Word of God and filled with the Holy Spirit, Christian witnesses are thus equipped by the Lord with tremendous power. “If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies.” Fire is a symbol of God’s consuming wrath. The fire which comes forth from the mouths of the witnesses is the Word of God which they proclaim. Those who scorn the Word of the Lord will find themselves “devoured” by it. The word which Christian witnesses proclaim brings severe judgment to those who belittle or despise it. Yes, refusal to heed God’s Word will result in death. “This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die.” In other words, this is simply how it must be with anyone who rejects God’s word, - there is no alternative, - “Whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). God’s word is not an empty sound; and let no one imagine that this is not a serious matter. If people persist in unbelief and refuse to repent, the penalty will be, and indeed, must be death!

Furthermore, we are told that these witnesses “have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying.” Reference is now made to two dramatic and outstanding events in the Old Testament.

Because Ahab, the wicked king of Israel, had led his people into the sin of gross idolatry, the Prophet Elijah told him: “As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word” (1 Kings 17:1); and it did not rain for a period of three and a half years. Although most of the Israelites had forsaken the worship of the true God, and although Elijah was one of the few true witnesses left in Israel, yet behold the power which was given him by the Lord! The sky literally “was shut up,” so that there was no rain or dew until the people of Israel repented and returned to the true God. Indeed, the word of the Lord which Elijah proclaimed was a word of power.

Another example of the power which God gives His witnesses is alluded to in the words: “they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.” Although Moses and Aaron had informed Pharaoh of God’s command to permit the Children of Israel to leave Egypt and go to the land of Canaan, yet Pharaoh stubbornly ignored and despised the Word of the Lord. You will recall how God supplied Moses and Aaron with the awesome power to bring one plague after another upon Egypt until, after the tenth plague, Pharaoh finally allowed the Israelites to leave the land of bondage. Again we say, what a demonstration of the power with which God’s witnesses are endowed when they faithfully proclaim His Word!

We might add that the last words of verse six, - “to strike the earth with every kind

of plague as often as they want, ” - do not indicate arbitrariness. Moses and Aaron did not act arbitrarily. When they called down these judgments upon Egypt, they were acting in accord with the Lord’s will and were faithful in their proclamation of the Word of the Lord.

The power of Christian witnessing is as great today as it was in the days of Moses and Elijah; and the divine warnings and threats are just as effective and meaningful now as then. Let this be a source of comfort and hope to the true and faithful members of Christ’s little flock. To all who accept the Gospel in true faith, Christian witnesses are the fragrance of life. At the same time, let this be a reminder to all unbelievers and despisers of the Word that unless they repent, they are doomed to eternal death. To them, Christian witnesses are the smell of death, because, by rejecting God’s grace, the unbelievers choose for themselves eternal death (2 Cor. 2:16).

11:7-10 Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.

There can be no doubt that the testimony of Christian witnesses will be fully completed before the end of the world. We have our Lord’s own word for that. He has said: “This Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14).

However, just shortly before the end, “the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them.” This is in harmony with Rev. 20:3, where we are told that Satan is held in check throughout the thousand year period, that is, throughout the New Testament era; but then, at the end of the New Testament age, “he must be set free for a short time.” In this “short time,” immediately before the end of all things, the Church will suffer a most severe, but final, persecution. Christian witnesses, having completed their testimony in the world, will be attacked, overpowered and killed by “the beast that comes up from the Abyss;” and thus their testimony will be silenced.

It has been suggested that this beast, this major opponent of God’s people, is either the Roman Antichrist, or the whole antichristian power (civil and/or ecclesiastical), or

Satan himself. Certainly, we will agree that the beast could be symbolic of any of these three evil powers.

First of all, there is no greater enemy of the Christian Church, and there is no greater danger to the preaching of the Gospel of Christ than the Church of Rome. Scripture clearly teaches that we are saved, not by our own works, but solely by the grace of God through faith in Christ Jesus. This doctrine the Roman papacy does not permit its adherents to accept and believe. The Church of Rome actually curses the Scriptural doctrine of justification by faith. Because of the Pope's shameful perversion of the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Christ, Luther exposed the Pope as being the Antichrist. To this day, the Church of Rome upholds the anathema of the Council of Trent upon all who adhere to the Scriptural teaching of justification by faith, without the deeds of the Law. Hence, we can see how the beast could be symbolic of the Roman Antichrist, and very appropriately so.

Others see the beast as a symbol of the whole antichristian power in the world, either civil or ecclesiastical, which even now, in a greater degree than ever before, is attacking and seeking to silence Christian testimony. When we consider the present growing paganism which deliberately scorns the Gospel, - the numerous articles appearing in public print which boldly attack the doctrines of Sacred Scripture, - the modern-day schools and colleges which not only exclude God's word, but also mock and ridicule the truths of Christianity, - the ever-increasing trend to ignore God's word entirely when it comes to moral standards, faithfulness in marriage, abortion, homosexuality, sexual promiscuity, and other issues, - the adoption and promotion of numerous heresies and human philosophies which have their origin in hell and are designed to destroy completely the testimony of Sacred Scripture, - yes, when we take into consideration these and many other trends which attempt to discredit Christian witnessing, then we must say that the beast could very well be symbolic of all the antichristian power in the world.

Finally there is good reason also to believe that this beast is Satan himself. He is described here as coming up from the Abyss, or, hell. However, if we identify this beast in verse 7 with the two beasts that are described in chapter 13, then we should remember that the two beasts of chapter 13 come out of the sea and out of the earth, while the beast here in verse 7 comes up from the Abyss, which would seem to indicate that the beast is Satan himself. And surely, it is not necessary to point out how Satan continually expands his efforts to attack and overpower and kill all Christian witnesses.

In the final analysis, however, is it really a paramount issue whether we identify the beast as the Roman Antichrist, or as every antichristian movement, or as Satan

himself? Each one of these three evil powers is an enemy of all who faithfully proclaim the Gospel of Christ; and each one in an attempt to silence Christian witnessing, is determined to promote heresies, all of which really have their origin in hell.

When this great opponent of Christ and His Gospel apparently succeeds in his effort to overpower and kill the Christian witnesses, we are told that “their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.” The last words of this verse (“where also their Lord was crucified”) make it clear that “the great city” is Jerusalem, the same city that in verse 2 of this chapter is called the “holy city,” symbolizing the visible church.

Because of its sins of immorality, the Old Testament city of Sodom was destroyed by fire and brimstone; but still today “Sodom” stands for a low level of morality. And when we think of Egypt, where the Children of Israel were enslaved for so many years, we at once are reminded of slavery, disobedience and oppression.

When the “great city,” the “holy city,” the visible church becomes vile and corrupt, tolerating immorality and homosexuality, allowing “gays” and lesbians to retain membership in the church, even permitting them to hold high positions in the church; and when the visible church ignores doctrinal differences and condones the teaching of heretical doctrines, thus suppressing the pure Gospel and flagrantly disobeying God’s holy word, then indeed it deserves to be called “Sodom and Egypt.” It is sad, but true, that the most treacherous enemies of the Holy Christian Church are to be found in the visible church. As the Scribes and Pharisees, the religious leaders at the time of Christ, entertained an intense and bitter hatred against the Messiah, so do many of the so-called religious leaders in the visible church of today ridicule and persecute those who faithfully proclaim God’s word in its truth and purity.

Of these Christian witnesses we are told: “Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city.” As the Jewish religious leaders would not rest until they had silenced Christ’s testimony by having Him crucified, so today many of the recognized leaders in the visible church apparently are not content until, symbolically speaking, they see the bodies of the witnesses lying in the street of the great city, their Christian testimony stifled and silenced. But when that happens, when the voice of Christian testimony is finally silenced, then shall the end come. Indeed, then it must come; for then the Gospel testimony has been completed.

The unbelievers in the visible church are joined by “men from every people, tribe, language and nation” and they will gaze on the bodies of the witnesses for three and a

half days, refusing to bury them. (In the near East, refusal of burial was a gross violation of the rules of decency.) We have here a picture of the abominable, brutish and animal-like manner in which the precious Word of God is treated. "Gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial," - it seems that a stubborn and hardened world cannot easily dismiss the divine testimony. It is strange, but true, that those who ridicule and reject the Word actually never get rid of it.

The inhabitants of the earth," that is, mankind in its hostility to God, - those whose only home is the earth and not heaven, - will show their bitter hatred against the Christian witnesses by gloating over them and by exchanging gifts with each other, thereby celebrating the fact that the voice of the witnesses has been suppressed. Yes, they rejoice to be rid of these witnesses, "because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth." By their faithful proclamation of the divine word, these witnesses had aroused and terrified the consciences of their enemies and had filled them with rage and malice. Even today, there are multitudes who do not like to be rebuked for their ungodly life or for their false religious beliefs. The Word of God cuts deeply into the hearts of the impenitent. Hence, they rejoice to see this Word suppressed.

However, this rejoicing and gloating on the part of the unbelievers and the ungodly will endure but three and a half days. This is a symbolic way of saying that Satan's celebration of his apparent victory over the Gospel witnesses is of very short duration.

11:11-12 But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on.

As previously stated, the three and a half days very likely are identical to the "short time," right before the end of the world, in which Satan must be set free. At the end of this short period of time come resurrection, ascension and judgment. We are told that after the three and a half days "a breath of life from God" entered the witnesses, "and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them." What a dramatic scene!

Thus the joy of the enemies was turned into fear. The resurrection of the witnesses was positive proof that their testimony had been truly the Word of God; and since their testimony had been God's truth, the enemies now sensed the terrible judgment confronting them. No wonder,

then, that they were struck with terror! In the final analysis, no enemies of the Word (whether they are within the visible church or on the outside), no powers of hell, no, not even Satan himself, can ever completely conquer the Word. When men cast that Word, as it were, onto the street and celebrate its death, that Word will rise again to their terror and dismay.

The ultimate and unmistakable victory of the witnesses became apparent “when they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, ‘Come up here.’ And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on.” Thus it is evident that the real victory is not won by Satan or the enemies of the Church, but by the witnesses who are loyal to Christ and who faithfully testify to the truth. Having been restored to life by the miraculous power of God, they now are summoned into the very presence of God. As we ponder their ascension, we recall the words which Paul addressed to the Thessalonian Christians when he wrote: “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

The ascension of the witnesses took place “while their enemies looked on.” This reminds us of some words recorded in the opening chapter of Revelation: “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be. Amen” (Rev. 1:7).

The Lord not only supplies witnesses, but He also finally withdraws them; and when He withdraws them, He at the same time withdraws His Word. Then the final judgment is sure to follow very quickly.

11:13-14 At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.

In conjunction with the end of the world, mention is frequently made

of a great and severe earthquake. In the vision of the seven seals, the passing away of the present world is depicted in these words: "I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place" (Rev. 6:12-14).

In this earthquake, which occurred at the very hour that the resurrected witnesses were taken to heaven, a tenth of the city collapsed and seven thousand people were killed. Since the holy city is symbolic of the visible Christian church, this ought to tell us that the visible church is not necessarily a haven or refuge of safety. In fact, a large number of people in the visible church will perish. The words which God spoke prior to the Flood may be applicable here: "My Spirit will not contend with man forever" (Gen. 6:3). When the task of the Word is completed, when God's witnesses have fulfilled their mission, then God is through with the world; yes, then the end will come.

When a tenth of the city collapsed and seven thousand people were killed, "the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven." This does not mean that shortly before the end there will be a mass conversion of the impenitent. When the judgment descends, it will be too late for repentance. No; this is rather a terrified realization that Christ, and not the Antichrist, is the one who is to receive all honor and glory. In the end, every tongue will have to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:11). No longer will the unbelievers and the ungodly be able to deny the glory of God.

The second of the "three woes" is now finished. The third, and last, woe is coming quickly.

Certainly, there is much in Revelation, especially also in chapter 11, which we cannot understand or interpret. God alone knows the answers to these mysteries. In deep humility, we bow before Him and say: "Thou, O Lord, knowest all things. Help us to know and proclaim the truth; and preserve us in the saving faith unto the end." And so, in seeking to summarize this chapter thus far, we humbly make the following general observations: the two witnesses apparently represent all faithful witnesses who throughout the New Testament era testify to

the truth of God's Word. Many reject the word that is proclaimed and, as a result, must face the judgments of God. As the end of the world approaches, antagonism and rebellion against God's Word increase; and in the final days, right before the end of all things, it may even seem as though "the beast," the chief opponent of Christ and His Gospel, will succeed in silencing completely the voice of Christian testimony. However, the Lord will come to the rescue of His little flock. When judgment day dawns, the world will be judged; and the faithful witnesses will be received into the joy and bliss of heaven.

The Seventh Trumpet

11:15 The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

The seventh trumpet brings us to the end of the world and the final judgment. Notice, however, that instead of describing the final judgment, or enlarging upon it, the seventh trumpet pictures a scene in heaven after the judgment. The loud voices in heaven, - perhaps the voices of angels, - announce the uncontested and everlasting reign of the Lord and His Christ after divine judgment and grace have done their work. When the end comes, Jesus will deliver all kingdoms, powers, and authorities to His Father; and then He, being one with the Father, will reign for ever and ever.

11:16-18 And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great - and for destroying those who destroy the earth."

The twenty-four elders, representing the Church, fall on their faces before the throne of God in a posture of reverence and humility and join

the voices in heaven in singing the doxology of praise: “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.”

We note that this song of thanksgiving is addressed to “the One who is and who was.” In previous chapters He was called “the One who is and who was and who is to come.” Here the words, “who is to come,” are omitted, because in this vision of the seventh trumpet the second coming of the Lord is viewed as having taken place, and the Lord’s full and complete reign is viewed as having begun. For a long time God had permitted Satan and his allies to raise their heads against Him; but now, with the end of the world, this state of affairs is ended forever. God has taken complete control, and He will reign forever and ever. This overwhelming victory of the Lord God Almighty calls forth songs of praise from His angels and from all the Church in heaven.

In their doxology, the twenty-four elders also declare the meaning of all this for both the believers and the unbelievers. First, they say: “The nations were angry.” Very likely, this is a reference to the Gentiles (the unbelievers) who had trampled on the holy city (the visible church) for forty-two months. We are reminded of the words in Psalm 2:1-6: “Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. ‘Let us break their chains,’ they say, ‘and throw off their fetters.’ The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, ‘I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.’” The complete defeat of the ungodly causes them to become furious with anger.

“And your wrath has come.” God’s wrath triumphs. This is a theme that permeates both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Of course, in the New Testament, when we read of the day of God’s wrath, that is the end of the world, - that is judgment day. A Journey Through Revelation

“The time has come for judging the dead.” Skeptics may ask in a mocking tone of voice: “How can the dead be judged?” We would remind them that there will be a resurrection of both believers and unbelievers. For the believers, this will not be a day of wrath. On that day, God will reward His “servants the prophets.” What the prophets of old had foretold will now be manifest before their very eyes. That,

perhaps, will be one of their greatest rewards. It ought to be self-evident, however, that the “reward” spoken of is not a reward of merit, but a reward of grace.

The same reward of grace is in store for the saints and for all who revere God’s name, both small and great. The saints are those who have great respect for everything that God has said in His Word, and they trust implicitly the words and promises of God. What a glorious day it will be for them when the day of judgment comes and when, with their own eyes, they shall see their great God and Savior and behold all the indescribable things that God has prepared for them.

This gift, or reward of grace, will be there for “both small and great.” All Christians, whether in the eyes of man they have held prominent positions or not, - all who revere the name of the Lord will receive this reward. This truth is expressed also in Psalm 115:12-13: “The Lord remembers us and will bless us: He will bless the house of Israel, he will bless the house of Aaron, he will bless those who fear the Lord - small and great alike.”

The day of judgment, however, will be a day of horror and punishment for the unbelievers, who are described in this song of the elders as “those who destroy the earth.” By their immorality, wickedness and unrighteousness, the ungodly have brought destruction on the earth. “Destroying those who destroy the earth” expresses just recompense. The final judgment will bring them their final due; and this will be described in greater detail in later chapters.

11:19 Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

The temple of God in the holy city, which, in the opening verse of this chapter John was told to measure, is symbolic of the Holy Christian Church on earth, surrounded on all sides by the ungodly and the unbelievers. God’s temple on earth has its counterpart in heaven, - the Church delivered from all her enemies.

A Journey Through Revelation

In the vision of the seventh trumpet, John saw the temple in heaven opened; and within the temple was seen the ark of the covenant. In the Old Testament, the ark of the covenant symbolized the presence of God among His people. But, being located in the Holy of Holies, it was seen normally only by the high priest; and he saw it very seldom. Now, however, the temple of God in heaven is opened, and the ark of the covenant is visible to all. This simply means that God's covenant promise, - "I will be your God," - is fulfilled; and all who reach the heavenly temple will see Him face to face and will dwell in His presence throughout eternity.

This chapter closes with the words: "And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm." All of these symbolize the destruction that the wrath of God will bring upon the ungodly and impenitent people in the world. God grant that we never will have to face His wrath. Rather, may we, by God's grace, always cling to our Savior in true faith, knowing assuredly that by His sacrifice on Calvary's cross He has made full atonement for our sins and has reconciled us to His heavenly Father. Now God is also our Father, and by faith in Christ we are His adopted sons and daughters. What a privilege! What a blessing! Never will we be able to extol sufficiently the love and grace and goodness of our great God and Lord!