



THE LAST DAYS

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RETHINKING BIBLE PROPHECY IN THE LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY

'Eschatology' is the study of last things. Christians should never fear having their eschatological 'system' scrutinised by the plain teaching of the Bible. If you subscribe to the currently popular "Left Behind" system of eschatology, prepare to be challenged by Scripture and history. Moreover, prepare to gain a greater respect for the integrity of the Bible.

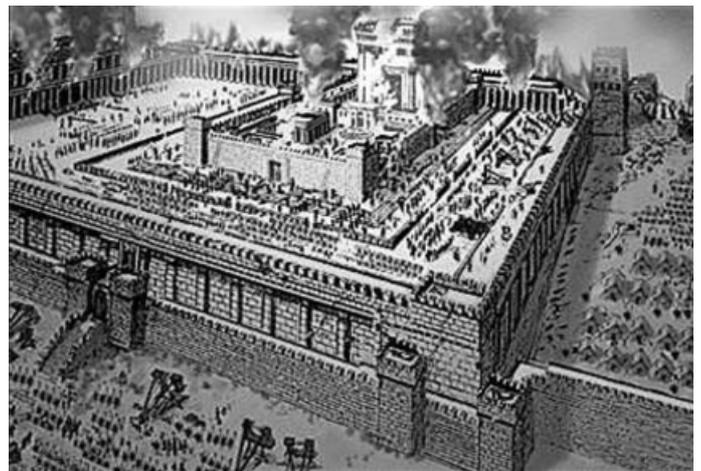
ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE

FROM "THE DAYS OF VENGEANCE"
BY DAVID CHILTON

The Fifth Trumpet

NOTES ON REVELATION 9:1-12

- 1 And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the well of the Abyss was given to him.
- 2 And he opened the well of the Abyss; and smoke went up out of the well, like the smoke of a burning furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the well.
- 3 And out of the smoke came forth locusts upon the earth; and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power.
- 4 And they were told that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.
- 5 And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but that they should be tormented for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man.
- 6 And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; and they will long to die and death shall flee from them.
- 7 And the appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads, as it were, crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men.
- 8 And they had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions.
- 9 And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound



of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle.

- 10 And they have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months.
- 11 They have as king over them, the angel of the Abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.
- 12 The first Woe is past; behold, two Woes are still coming after these things.

1-6 With the first Woe, the plagues become more intense. While this curse is similar to the great swarms of locusts which came upon Egypt in the eighth plague (Ex. 10:12-15), these "locusts" are different: they are *demons* from the Abyss,

"Write the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and the things which ARE ABOUT TO HAPPEN after these things." (Rev. 1:19)

"Anyone who accepts the Præterist system finds an increasing consensus among competent enquirers of all nations, and can see an explanation of the book [of Revelation] which is simple, natural, and noble—one which closely follows its own indications, and accords with those to be found throughout the New Testament." — Frederic W. Farrar (c.1831-1903) D.D., F.R.S.

the bottomless pit, spoken of seven times in Revelation (9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3). The Septuagint first uses the term in Genesis 1:2, speaking of the original deep-and-darkness which the Spirit creatively overshadowed (and metaphorically “overcame”; cf. John 1:5). The Abyss is the farthest extreme from heaven (Gen. 49:25; Deut. 33:13) and from the high mountains (Ps. 36:6). It is used in Scripture as a reference to the deepest parts of the sea (Job 28:14; 38:16; Ps. 33:7) and to subterranean rivers and vaults of water (Deut. 8:7; Job 38:16), whence the waters of the Flood came (Gen. 7:11; 8:2; Prov. 3:20; 8:24), and which nourished the kingdom of Assyria (Ezek. 31:4, 15). The Red Sea crossing of the covenant people is repeatedly likened to a passage through the Abyss (Ps. 77:16; 106:9; Isa. 44:27; 51:10; 63:13). The prophet Ezekiel threatened Tyre with a great desolation of the land, in which God would bring up the Abyss to cover the city with a new Flood, bringing its people down to the pit in the lower parts of the earth (Ezek. 26:19-21), and Jonah spoke of the Abyss in terms of excommunication from God’s presence, a banishment from the Temple (Jon. 2:2-6). The domain of the Dragon (Job 41:31; Ps. 148:7; Rev. 11:7; 17:8), the prison of the demons (Luke 8:31; Rev. 20:1-3; cf. 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6), and the realm of the dead (Rom. 10:7) are all called by the name *Abyss*. St. John is thus warning his readers that hell is about to break loose upon the Land of Israel; as with Tyre of old, the Abyss is being dredged up to cover the Land with its unclean spirits. Apostate Israel is to be cast out of God’s presence, excommunicated from the Temple, and filled with demons. One of the central messages of Revelation is that the Church tabernacles in heaven; the corollary of this is that the false church tabernacles in hell.

Why does the locust plague last for five months? This figure is, first of all, a reference to the period of five months, from May through September, when locusts normally appeared. (The unusual feature is that *these* locusts *remain* for the entire period, engaging in constant torment of the population.) Second, this may refer in part to the actions of Gessius Flurus, the procurator of Judea, who for a five-month period (beginning in May of 66 with the slaughter of 3,600 peaceful citizens) terrorized the Jews, deliberately seeking to incite them to

rebellion. He was successful: Josephus dates the beginning of the Jewish War from this occasion.¹ Third, the use of the term *five* is associated in Scripture with power, and specifically with military organization – the arrangement of the Israelite militia in a five-squad platoon formation (Ex. 13:18; Num. 32:17; Josh. 1:14; 4:12; Jud. 7:11; cf. 2 Kings 1 :9ff.).² By God’s direction, Israel was to be attacked by a demonic army from the Abyss.

During the ministry of Christ, Satan had fallen to the earth like a star from heaven (cf. 12:4, 9, 12); and the key of the well of the Abyss was given to him. And he opened the well of the Abyss. What all this means is exactly what Jesus prophesied during His earthly ministry: the Land which had received the benefits of His work and then rejected Him, would become glutted with demons from the Abyss. We should note here that the key is given to Satan, for it is God who sends the demons as a scourge upon His rebellious people.

The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment, and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South shall rise up with this generation at the judgment and shall condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and does not find it. Then it says, “I will return to my house from which I came”; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. Then it goes, and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation. (Matt. 12:41-45)

Because of Israel’s rejection of the King of kings, the blessings they had received would turn into curses. Jerusalem had been “swept clean” by Christ’s ministry; now it would become “a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird” (18:2). The entire generation became increasingly demon-possessed; their progressive national insanity is apparent as one reads through the New Testament, and its horrifying final stages are depicted in the

pages of Josephus’ *The Jewish War*: the loss of all ability to reason, the frenzied mobs attacking one another, the deluded multitudes following after the most transparently false prophets, the crazed and desperate chase after food, the mass murders, executions, and suicides, the fathers slaughtering their own families and the mothers eating their own children. Satan and the host of hell simply swarmed throughout the land of Israel and consumed the apostates.

The vegetation of the earth is specifically exempted from the destruction caused by the “locusts.” This is a curse on disobedient men. Only the Christians are immune to the scorpion-like sting of the demons (cf. Mk. 6:7; Lk. 10:17-19; Acts 26:18); the unbaptized Israelites, who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads (see on 7:3-8), are attacked and tormented by the demonic powers. And the immediate purpose God has in unleashing this curse is not death, but merely torment, misery and suffering, as the nation of Israel was put through a series of demoniac convulsions. St. John repeats what he has told us in 6:16, that in those days men will seek death and will not find it; and they will long to die and death shall flee from them. Jesus had specifically prophesied this longing for death among the final generation, the generation of Jews which crucified Him (Lk. 23:27-30). As the wisdom of God had said long before: “He who sins against Me wrongs his own soul; all those who hate Me love death” (Prov. 8:36).

7-12 The description of the demon-locusts bears many similarities to the invading heathen armies mentioned in the prophets (Jer. 51:27; Joel 1:6; 2:4-10; cf. Lev. 17:7 and 2 Chron. 11:15, where the Hebrew word for *demon* is *hairy* one). This passage may also refer, in part, to the Satanic gangs of murderous Zealots that preyed on the citizens of Jerusalem. As Josephus tells us, the people had more to fear from the Zealots than from the Romans: “With their insatiable hunger for loot, they ransacked the houses of the wealthy, murdered men and violated women for sport; they drank their spoils with blood, and from mere satiety they shamelessly gave themselves up to effeminate practices, plaiting their hair and putting on women’s clothes, drenching themselves with perfumes and painting their eyelids to make themselves attractive. They

copied not merely the dress, but also the passions of women, devising in their excess of licentiousness unlawful pleasures in which they wallowed as in a brothel.

Thus they entirely polluted the city with their foul practices. Yet though they wore women's faces, their hands were murderous. They would approach with mincing steps, then suddenly become fighting men, and, whipping out their swords from under their dyed cloaks, they would run through every passer-by."³

One particularly interesting point about the description of the demon army is St. John's statement that the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle. That is the same sound made by the wings of the angels in the Glory-Cloud (Ezek. 1:24; 3:13; 2 Kings 7:5-7); the difference here is that the noise is made by fallen angels.

St. John goes on to identify the king of the demons, the angel of the Abyss, giving his name in both Hebrew (Abaddon) and Greek (Apollyon) — one of many indications of the essentially Hebraic character of the Revelation.⁴ The words mean *Destruction* and *Destroyer*; Abaddon is used in the Old Testament for the realm of the dead, the "place of destruction" (Job 26:6; 28:22; 31:12; Ps. 88:11; Prov. 15:11; 27:20). St. John thus presents Satan as the very personification of death itself (cf. 1 Cor. 10:10; Heb. 2:14). Clearly, for Satan's entire host of destroyers to be let loose upon the Jewish nation was a hell on earth indeed. And yet St. John tells us that this outbreak of demons in the land is only the first Woe. Even this is not the worst, for two Woes (i.e., the sixth and seventh trumpets) are still coming after these things.

NOTES

1. Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War*, ii.xiv.9-xix.9.
2. The Hebrew word in these texts is usually translated *harnessed, armed, or in martial array*, but the literal rendering is simply *five in a rank* (that is, five squads of ten men in each squad). See James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21-23* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), pp. 264f.; idem, *Judges: God's War Against Humanism* (Tyler, TX: Geneva Ministries, 1985), p. 17.
3. Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War*, iv.ix.10.
4. For a lengthy discussion of St. John's grammar, with particular attention to the Hebraic style, see R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), Vol. 1, pp. cxvii-clix. Charles's summary of the reason for St. John's unique style is that "*while he writes in Greek, he thinks in Hebrew*" (p. cxliii).

The Nature of Revelation: Apocalyptic?

BY DAVID CHILTON

The Book of Revelation is often treated as an example of the "apocalyptic" genre of writings which flourished among the Jews between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100. There is no basis for this opinion whatsoever, and it is unfortunate that the word *apocalyptic* is used at all to describe this literature. (The writers of "apocalyptic" themselves never used the term in this sense; rather, scholars have stolen the term from St. John, who called his book "The *Apocalypse* of Jesus Christ.") There are, in fact, many major differences between the "apocalyptic" writings and the Book of Revelation.

The "apocalyptists" expressed themselves in unexplained and unintelligible symbols, and generally had no intention of making themselves really understood. Their writings abound in pessimism: no real progress is possible, nor will there be any victory for God and His people in history. We cannot even see God acting in history. All we know is that the world is getting worse and worse. The best we can do is hope for the End — soon. Ferrell Jenkins writes: "To them the forces of evil apparently had control in the present age and God would act only in the End Time." (This should have a familiar ring.) Feeling impotent in the face of inexorable evil, the apocalyptist "could accordingly indulge in the wildest speculation. . . he had written off this world and its activities, so there was no question of his trying seriously to provide workable solutions to its problems." The practical result was that the apocalyptists rarely concerned themselves with ethical behavior: "In the last resort their interest is in eschatology, not ethics."

St. John's approach in the Revelation is vastly different. His symbols are not obscure ravings hatched from a fevered imagination; they are rooted firmly in the Old Testament (and the reason for their *seeming* obscurity is that very fact: **We have trouble understanding them only because we don't know our Bibles**). In contrast to the apocalyptists, who

had given up on history, "John presents history as the scene of divine redemption."

Leon Morris describes St. John's worldview: "For him history is the sphere in which God has wrought out redemption. The really critical thing in the history of mankind has already taken place, and it took place here, on this earth, in the affairs of men. The Lamb 'as it had been slain' dominates the entire book. John sees Christ as victorious and as having won the victory through His death, an event in history. His people share in His triumph, but they have conquered Satan 'by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony' (Rev. 12:11). The pessimism which defers God's saving activity until the End is absent. Though John depicts evil realistically, his book is fundamentally optimistic."

The apocalyptists said: *The world is coming to an end: Give up!* The Biblical prophets said: *The world is coming to a beginning: Get to work!*

Thus, the Book of Revelation is not an apocalyptic tract; it is, instead, as St. John himself reminds us repeatedly, a *prophecy* (1:3; 10:11; 22:7, 10, 18-19), completely in keeping with the writings of the other Biblical prophets. And — again in stark contrast to the apocalyptists — if there was one major concern among the Biblical prophets, it was ethical conduct. No Biblical writer ever revealed the future merely for the sake of satisfying curiosity: The goal was always to direct God's people toward right action in the present. The overwhelming majority of Biblical prophecy had nothing to do with the common misconception of "prophecy" as foretelling the future. The prophets told of the future only in order to stimulate godly living. As Benjamin Warfield wrote: "We must try to keep fresh in our minds the great principle that all prophecy is ethical in its purpose, and that this ethical end controls not only what shall be revealed in general, but also the details of it, and the very form which it takes."

The fact that many who study the prophetic writings today are interested in finding possible references to space travel and nuclear weapons, rather than in discovering God's commandments for living, is a sickening tribute to a shallow and immature faith. "The testimony of *Jesus* is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev.

19:10); to ignore Jesus in favor of atomic blasts is a perversion of Scripture, a blasphemous twisting of God's holy Word.

From beginning to end, St. John is intensely interested in the ethical conduct of his readers:

Blessed is he who reads and those who

hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written in it. (1:3)

Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his garments. (16:15)

Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. (22:7)

Blessed are those who do His commandments. (22:14)

Darby's Dispensationalism

JACK VAN DEVENTER

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) changed the Church more dramatically than most people realize. We have today legions of pastors, missionaries, and parachurch ministers who tell willing flocks that the end-times are upon us, our only hope is the secret rapture, and cultural transformation is futile. These well-meaning individuals would like us to believe that such teachings are the obvious conclusion of a simple, literal interpretation of the Bible. Mr. Darby started the Church thinking along these lines.

Mr. Darby began his career as a lawyer, but quit to become a curate for the Church of England. Shortly thereafter he joined the Plymouth Brethren movement. The Brethren were a group of men who, having become disenchanted with the Established Church and the trappings of denominationalism, established a new denomination designed to conform to New Testament church principles. Because the Brethren movement was a breakaway group, there were few doctrinal constraints or safeguards.

Early on, Darby and other early Plymouth Brethren leaders claimed to teach "rediscovered truths" that had been lost since the time of the apostles. The Brethren claimed their teachings were a departure from the "man-made doctrines" of the church fathers and the Reformers. They warned followers to be wary of the commentaries, creeds, and catechisms that were mere doctrines of men, and believed that they alone were submissive to the Scriptures.

Darby is credited by most as the inventor of the "secret rapture" theory. He taught that Christ would snatch believers out of the world without warning. Similarly, he is also known for popularizing the any-moment or imminent return of Christ. To support these theories Darby inter-

preted the bulk of the prophetic passages futuristically, in sharp contrast to the prevailing historicism of the day. Although Darby did not invent futurism (which was developed by 16th century Roman Catholics), he popularized it.

Other members of the Brethren immediately challenged Darby's controversial teachings as unbiblical. Samuel P. Tregelles, a noted biblical scholar, rejected Darby's new scheme as the "height of speculative nonsense." So tenuous was Darby's rapture theory that he had lingering doubts about it as late as 1843, and possibly 1845. Another member of the Plymouth Brethren, B.W. Newton disputed Darby's new doctrine saying they were only possible if one declared certain passages to be "renounced as not properly ours." Historian E.R. Sandeen writes, "[T]his is precisely what Darby was prepared to do. Too traditional to admit that biblical authors might have contradicted each other, and too rationalistic to admit that the prophetic maze defied penetration, Darby attempted a resolution of his exegetical dilemma by distinguishing between Scripture intended for the Church and Scripture intended for Israel... Darby's difficulty was solved by assuming that the Gospels were addressed partly to Jews and partly to Christians."

Darby sought to convince his hearers that his new doctrines stemmed from a literal approach to the Bible, but was forced into ever-increasing exegetical gymnastics to counteract their skeptical reception. Not only did he carve up the Scriptures according to a "for the Church" and "not for the Church" system, he further divided the Scriptures into time periods (dispensations). Hence, Darby is known as the "father of dispensationalism."

As a former lawyer, Darby was a formidable debater. The early history of the Plymouth Brethren church was characterized by infighting, rivalries, and schism. Darby was known as a "dominating force" in these frays. Characterized as a "tyrant" by some historians, Darby

was quick to charge opponents with heresy if they disagreed. Once in control, he often excommunicated dissenters. He even excommunicated George Muller when Muller received into fellowship individuals whom Darby had excommunicated.

Given this background, it may seem odd that Darby's doctrines of dispensationalism have gained such widespread acceptance in the modern church. The key to Darby's success was marketing. He did an "end around" the Church and took his teachings to the masses.

Simultaneously, he went on the offensive by attacking the traditional church with vigor. The "any moment" rapture was the great attraction that popularized dispensationalism. It was a vehicle for generating interest, enthusiasm, and converts.

In the early days, these new doctrines were popularized through prophecy conferences funded by the wealthy young widow Lady Theodosia Powerscourt. Later, Darby took the show on the road and traveled extensively through Britain, Switzerland, Italy, France, Germany, Holland, Canada, the United States, the British West Indies, New Zealand, and Australia. Between 1862 and 1877 he came to North America seven times promoting his doctrines. After Darby's death, the biggest catalyst for the spread of dispensationalism was when another lawyer, C.I. Scofield, condensed Darby's notes into the Scofield Reference Bible, published in 1909. In the context of a study Bible, Darby's doctrines were perceived as credible and gained widespread acceptance.

Through individualism, persistence, and great marketing, dispensationalism is now popularized and embedded into the psyche not only of the modern church but society as well. The *Left Behind* series is recycled Darbyism, the "height of speculative nonsense" in book form. Fictional stories of fictional theology. But hey, it sells. P.T. Barnum was right. At least for now.