

CONSIDER THE TERRIBLE ACTS OF GOD

8 ⁶The seven angels who had the seven trumpets [now] prepared to sound them.

⁷The first [angel] sounded [his trumpet], and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and they were hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burnt up, and all the green grass was burnt up. ⁸The second angel sounded [his trumpet], and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was hurled into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, ⁹and a third of the living creatures that were in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. ¹⁰The third angel sounded [his trumpet], and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the heavens. It fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water—¹¹the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters were turned into wormwood, and many men died from the waters that had become bitter. ¹²The fourth angel sounded [his trumpet], and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. [Consequently,] a third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night. ¹³As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in mid-air call out in a loud voice, “Woe! Woe! Woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!”

9 The fifth angel sounded [his trumpet], and I saw a star that had fallen from heaven to the earth. [The star] was given the key to the shaft of the abyss. ²When he opened the shaft of the abyss, smoke arose out of it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and the atmosphere were darkened by the smoke from the abyss. ³Out of the smoke locusts came [down] upon the earth, and they were given ability like that of the scorpions of the earth. ⁴They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green [plant] or any tree, but only those men who did not have the seal of God upon their foreheads. ⁵They were not allowed to kill them, but [only] to torture them for five months. Their torture was like the torture inflicted by a scorpion when it strikes a man. ⁶In those days men will seek death, but will by no means find it; indeed, they will desire to die, but death will flee from them. ⁷The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. ⁸Their hair was like women’s hair, and their teeth were like [the teeth] of lions. ⁹They had breastplates that were like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the [thundering] of many horses and chariots rushing to battle. ¹⁰They had tails and stingers like scorpions, in their tails was the ability to harm men for five months. ¹¹They have as king over them the angel of the abyss, his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek his name is Apollyon. ¹²The first woe is past; but listen, there are two [more] woes yet to come!

¹³The sixth angel sounded [his trumpet], and I heard a voice [coming] from the horns of the golden altar that is before God. ¹⁴It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels that are bound at the great river Euphrates!” ¹⁵Then the four angels who had been reserved for [this] hour and day and month and year were released so that they might kill a third of mankind. ¹⁶The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million—I heard their number. ¹⁷The 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 brimstone. ¹⁸A third of mankind was killed by these three

plagues, [namely,] the fire and the smoke and the brimstone that came out of their mouths. ¹⁹The power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like snakes, having heads with which they inflict harm. ²⁰The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues did not repent of the works of their hands—they did not stop worshipping demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of bronze and of stone and of wood, [idols] that cannot see or hear or walk. ²¹Nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or of their sexual immorality or of their thefts. (Rev. 8:6-9:21)

11 ¹⁴The second woe is past; the third woe is coming soon. ¹⁵The 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 shall reign forever and ever.” ¹⁶The twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, ¹⁷“We give thanks to you, O Lord God, the Almighty, [the One] who is and who was, because you have asserted your great power and have begun to reign. ¹⁸The nations were enraged, and you expressed your wrath, and the time came for the judgment of the dead and [the time] for the rewarding of your servants the prophets and the saints, those who reverence your name, both the insignificant and the prominent, and [the time] for destroying those who destroy the earth.” ¹⁹Then the temple of God that is in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen in his temple. And there came flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hail [storm]. (Rev. 11:14-19)

Introduction

Some time ago a devastating earthquake shook the city of Los Angeles. The epicenter of the quake struck the very heart of the pornography district, leaving it in a shambles.

A day later the news media carried an interview with one of the porn dealers. In that interview he commented: “I guess Christians will view this as an act of God—a judgment from God.”

Then he added, “We’ll be back in business at full speed in about a week.”

There was a man who did not consider the terrible acts of God.

The temporal judgments that God enacts upon the world are terrible; they are awesome and dreadful forewarnings of the final judgment to come. In the Sounding of the Seven Trumpets and their resultant judgments upon the earth, two strands of biblical material are interwoven: 1) the Ten Plagues against Egypt; the intention of which was to call sinful, stubborn men to repentance rather than face the final judgment; and 2) the “De-Creation” of the World; that is to say, the judgments of the Seven Trumpets are in stages that correspond in reverse order to the original stages of creation. The point is that it is imperative that we heed God’s call to repentance,

because He has begun the work of dismantling this present creation and it shall finally culminate in the Final Judgment.

Because they are intended to prepare us for the coming Day of the Lord, we must seriously and perceptively consider the terrible acts of God.

I. Consider the Terrible Acts of God in the Upheaval of Nature

With the sounding of **The First Trumpet** *“there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and they were hurled down upon the earth”* (vs. 7.) One of the plagues poured out upon Egypt consisted of *“thunder and hail, and lightning,”* as recorded in Exodus 9:22-26,

Then Jehovah said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that hail will fall all over Egypt—on men and animals and on everything growing in the fields of Egypt.” ²³*When Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, Jehovah sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to the ground. So Jehovah rained hail on the land of Egypt;* ²⁴*hail fell and lightning flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation.* ²⁵*Throughout Egypt hail struck everything in the fields—both men and animals; it beat down everything growing in the fields and stripped every tree.* ²⁶*The only place it did not hail was the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were.* (Ex. 9:22-26)

When Revelation 8:7 speaks of *“hail and fire mingled with blood,”* it is stressing the destruction of human life in these natural calamities. As a result of this plague unleashed against the world, *“a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burnt up, and all the green grass was burnt up.”* According to Genesis 1:11-13, on the third day of creation God caused the grass and trees to spring up from the earth—Revelation 8:7 is reporting the reverse process: the destruction of this present creation is in progress.

Note that present series of judgments (The Seven Trumpets) is more severe than the previous series (The Opening of the Seven Seals;) previously, *“one fourth of the earth”* was affected (Rev. 7:8,) now *“one third of the earth”* is affected. Just as the birth pains become more intense and severe as the time of birth approaches; so, too, the temporal judgments become more severe and widespread as the Final Judgment approaches.

When **The Second Trumpet** is sounded John sees *“something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, hurled into the sea”* (vs. 8a.) According to Genesis 1:9-10, on the third day of creation God caused the dry land to rise up out of the waters—here, now, is the further “de-creation” of this present creation:

And God said, Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear; and it was so. ¹⁰*And God called the dry land*

Earth; and the gathered waters he called Seas; and God saw that it was good.
(Gen. 1:9-10)

As a result of this great mountain being hurled into the sea, *“a third of the sea turned into blood,⁹ and a third of the living creatures that were in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.”* The first plague upon Egypt caused the rivers to be turned to blood so that the fish died:

Moses and Aaron did just as Jehovah had commanded. He raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood. ²¹The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water. Blood was everywhere in Egypt. (Ex. 7:20-21)

The report that *“a third of the ships were destroyed”* again emphasizes that this judgment takes its toll on human life and commerce.

When **The Third Trumpet** sounds John watches as *“a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the heavens”* (vs. 10a.) With the falling of this star we see that God’s judgment will involve the “de-creation” (the destruction) of the whole universe, not just the earth; note 2 Peter 3:10,

... the day of the Lord will come like a thief. On that day the heavens will disappear with a loud noise, and the elements will be destroyed by being burned up, and the earth together with the works that are in it will be exposed.
(2 Pet. 3:10)

The star fell on *“a third of the rivers and on the springs of water.”* Again, according to Exodus 7:19, Aaron was commanded to stretch out his rod to bring the plague *“over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs.”* This falling star bears the name, *“Wormwood,”* because it turns a third part of the waters to wormwood. *“Wormwood,”* as we learn from Lamentations 3:19, is synonymous with bitterness, misery and affliction; in that passage Jeremiah pleads with the LORD, *“Remember my affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall.”*

When **The Fourth Trumpet** sounds *“a third of the sun was struck,”* and the moon and the stars were likewise affected (vs. 12.) Here is a further reference to the “de-creation” (destruction) of the entire universe. The result of the sun, moon and stars being smitten is that *“a third of them were darkened”*—the ninth plague that fell upon Egypt was the plague of thick darkness:

Then Jehovah said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness will spread over Egypt—darkness that can be felt.” ²²So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. ²³No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived. (Ex. 10:21-23)

The sounding of the first four trumpets depicts God's temporal judgments upon the world in the form of "natural disasters." When we witness the destructive forces of nature unleashed upon the world (volcanoes, earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, droughts, etc.), and as we see them occurring with greater intensity, may we consider the terrible acts of God, and not dismiss them as merely "natural occurrences" with no spiritual or moral significance. Let the Christian hear in these things the trumpet blast announcing that the kingdom of God is approaching:

There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. ²⁶Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken ... ²⁸When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. (Lk. 21:25-26,28)

May the unconverted perceive in these things the warning of the Final Judgment, the righteous indignation of God against sin and against all those who persist in their practice of sin:

... then if anyone hears the trumpet but does not take warning and the sword comes and takes his life, his blood will be on his own head. ⁵Since he heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning, his blood will be on his own head. If he had taken warning, he would have saved himself. (Ezek. 33:4-5)

***See the attached Appendix for a brief commentary on Revelation 8:13,
"One eagle, flying in mid-heaven"***

II. Consider the Terrible Acts of God in the Unleashing of the Forces of War

With the sounding of **The Fifth Trumpet** there is seen a star (Rev. 9:1.) This star has fallen out of heaven down to the earth. What is being depicted here is the devil, having been cast out of heaven, wrecking havoc on the earth; note, also, Revelation 12:7-9,12,

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels waged war against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought [back]. ⁸But they could not prevail, [and so] they lost their place in heaven. ⁹The enormous dragon was flung down—the ancient serpent, he who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. He was flung down to the earth, and his angels were flung down with him ... ¹²Therefore, rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! [But] woe to the earth and to the sea, because the devil has come down to you. He is filled with fury, because he knows that he has only a short time. (Rev. 12:7-9,12)

There was given to this “star” *“the key to the shaft of the abyss.”* The devil is given authority by God to unleash demonic forces against the world, as becomes evident from the following verses of this passage.

When the devil opened the shaft of the abyss, smoke came billowing out, like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the atmosphere were darkened. The smoke permeates the atmosphere and engulfs the world, indicating how the forces of evil are unleashed to engulf and darken the world with their demonic activity. Out of the smoke came forth hoards of locusts. The eighth plague poured out upon Egypt was that of locusts,

“If you refuse to let [Israel] go, I will bring locusts into your country tomorrow. ⁵They will cover the face of the ground so that it cannot be seen. They will devour what little you have left after the hail, including every tree that is growing in your fields. ⁶They will fill your houses and those of all your officials and all the Egyptians—something neither your fathers nor your forefathers have ever seen from the day they settled in this land till now.” Then Moses turned and left Pharaoh. (Ex. 10:4-6)

The locusts unleashed against Egypt consumed the vegetation, but they did not harm man: *“[The locusts] covered all the ground until it was black. They devoured all that was left after the hail—everything growing in the fields and the fruit on the trees. Nothing green remained on tree or plant in all the land of Egypt”* (Ex. 10:15.) But, in distinction to the plague of locusts upon Egypt, the locusts of Revelation 9 are commanded not to touch the vegetation, but only to harm men (vs. 4.) The locusts of Revelation 9 are distinguished from natural, literal locusts, they are something else.

These peculiar, demonically inspired locusts are described as follows: They are compared to horses prepared for battle—pictured here is a vast army bent on conquest and pillage. On their heads were crowns of gold—here is described the certainty of their conquest, they are seen wearing the crown of victory and plunder. Their faces resemble men’s faces—these hoards of locusts are, indeed, representing vast armies of men possessing demonic power to conquer. They have hair like women—the long-flowing hair depicts the grotesqueness and the fearfulness of these creatures, the terror of these invading, marauding armies. Their teeth are like the teeth of lions—this feature depicts their fierce, beast-like savagery. Their breastplates are like iron—here is depicted their invincibility. Their wings sound like chariots and horses rushing to battle—here is the terrifying sound of conquering, pillaging armies. Their tails are like scorpions with stingers—not only is their appearance terrorizing, but they are capable of inflicting terrible pain and suffering. They have over them as king the angel of the abyss whose name is *“Abaddon”* and *“Apollyon”*—the “general” in command of these armies is none other than the devil in his capacity as the destroyer.

The work of these demonic hoards of locusts is described in the following terms: They are to focus their attack upon the men who do not have the seal of God upon their foreheads. That is to say, the object of their attack, those who feel the brunt of their attack, are all those who are without Christ—as Psalm 46:1 indicates, the LORD is a Source of refuge for His people, especially in the midst of the most severe trials: *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."*

These locusts are not commissioned to kill, but to torment. God's intended purpose is not to use such armies to annihilate mankind, but to expose the world to the terrors of judgment as it comes in the form of war, so as to bring men to repentance and salvation. As a result of their attack, men shall *"seek death, but will by no means find it"*—the pain and misery these "locusts" inflict border on the unbearable. They are commanded to inflict their scorpion-like sting for *"five months."* The natural locust had a life span of five months; likewise, these "locusts" rise to power, have their day of conquest, and then pass away, (here is a temporal judgment, not yet the Final Judgment.)

What is being depicted by these hoards of demonic locusts unleashed by the sounding of the fifth trumpet? These hoards of demonic locusts appear to represent vast, terrifying military forces, conquering and occupying nations and peoples with demonic cruelty and ruthlessness.

With the sounding of **The Sixth Trumpet** John hears *"a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar"* (vs. 13.) It is the voice of God, introducing and controlling all that follows. The divine voice issues the command, *"Release the four angels that are bound at the great river Euphrates!"* The Euphrates River was the origin or headquarters for many of the ancient military powers: Assyria, Babylon, Persia. The four angels bound at the Euphrates, and now unleashed, appear to represent the collective military forces of the world, as opposed to representing any one individual military power. The work of these four angels is terribly destructive: slaughtering one third of mankind (vs. 15)—but it is not yet the total annihilation of mankind. In verse 16 the four angels slip out of view and in their place appears a vast multitude of cavalry: two hundred million. These vast armies are incited and possessed by the four demonic angels.

What is being depicted by the tremendous, demonically-incited armies introduced by the sounding of the sixth trumpet? Whereas the breaking of the Second Seal revealed *"wars and rumors of war,"* the sounding of the Sixth Trumpet reveals the world at war, (such as the world wars of the twentieth century.)

Revelation 9:20-21 gives a shocking and tragic report: *"the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent."* Even if others will not do so, let us be sure to seriously consider the terrible acts of God in the unleashing of the forces of war: it is God releasing man to his evil nature and giving him over to the

devil; it is a warning of the final judgment to come; and it is intended to lead men to repentance.

III. Consider the Terrible Act of God Yet to Come: The Final Judgment

After a parenthesis (Rev. 10:1-11:13,) the sounding of **The Seventh Trumpet** is reported in Revelation 11:14-19.

When the Seventh Trumpet sounds its blast, great voices in heaven make the great announcement recorded in verse 15, *"The kingdom of the world has become [the kingdom] of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever."* God's kingdom comes following the Final Judgment, which is depicted in Revelation 11:13, *"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."*

By means of a composite picture, Revelation 11:13 is depicting all the events that shall take place at the end. Sinful mankind shall be conquered by God—depicted by the great earthquake and the subsequent conquest of the city. Unrepentant mankind shall be condemned to everlasting judgment by God—depicted by the "killing" of the seven thousand persons, (seven thousand being a number of completeness and killing being a fatal blow, this image conveys God's eternal condemnation of the whole of sinful mankind.) Finally, apostate mankind shall be forced to acknowledge the absolute lordship of God and of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ—depicted by those who were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

As the vision of the Seven Trumpets comes to a close, the Apostle John observes, *"the temple of God that is in heaven was opened"* (vs. 19.) The heavenly sanctuary of God, the very dwelling place of God, is now revealed; this means that God is now revealing Himself in all of His divine fullness. As the sanctuary of God stands open, two antithetical sights are revealed: First, *"the ark of his covenant"* is seen in the LORD's sanctuary: the presence of the ark in the Old Testament represented the presence of God with His people in fellowship and blessing. The LORD declared to Moses on behalf of Old Testament Israel, *"There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commandments for the Israelites"* (Ex. 25:22.) Second, *"there came flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hail [storm.]"* These elements of devastation represent God's judgment poured out upon the ungodly and unrepentant. Consequently, what is revealed as the heavenly sanctuary of God stands open is the eternal state of experiencing the immediate, direct presence of God, which inevitably involves the experience of either heaven or hell.

Conclusion

Let us consider the terrible acts of God. Let us do so with all seriousness, with a repentant heart, and, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, with expectation and confidence.

Appendix:
A Brief Commentary on Revelation 8:13,
“One Eagle, Flying in mid-heaven”

Revelation 8:13 introduces a brief disruption in the account of the Seven Trumpet Judgments, an interlude that separates the first four trumpet judgments from the ones that are yet to come.

The Apostle John declares that he both saw and heard *“an eagle that was flying in mid-air.”* Here is an ominous sign, a lone eagle, or vulture, flying in mid-air. The eagle is heard to cry out with a great voice, *“Woe! Woe! Woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!”* Here is a message of warning directed to the men of the world, in distinction from the church, (the phrase, *“those who dwell on the earth,”* in the Book of Revelation is a designation for the unbelieving world of mankind.)

What is the significance of the lone eagle (or, vulture) and his cry of *“Woe”*? Here is God’s intense desire that mankind heed the warning of impending judgment, turn from their sins, and plead for God’s mercy. God desires the entire world to hear, so that they may take the warning to heart and repent, therefore, the lone eagle is both seen and heard. He flies in the zenith of heaven, he cries out in a loud voice, and he repeats his warning of woe following the fifth trumpet blast (Rev. 9:2) and yet again following the sixth trumpet blast (Rev. 11:14.)