

Revelation 9:13-21
Beware of Idols

You should know the classic line from IAWL – “every time a bell rings, an angel gets his wings.”

Well in Revelation we get a different story...If ZuZu were to read Revelation, she'd say...
“EVERY TIME A STAR FALLS AN ANGEL IS CAST INTO THE ABYSS”

v.12-13 more is to come

The Sixth Trumpet of Seven (from 7th Seal) —Army from the East

13 Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, 14 one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.” 15 And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind. 16 The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.

17 And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: *the riders* had breastplates *the color* of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone. 18 A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths. 19 For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm.

20 The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; 21 and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts.

v. 13 the cry from the golden altar ties these visions back to the prayer of the saints as they cry out for justice (6:10). These trumpets are God's response to the saints' petitions.

The four angels are “released” at the time of God's choosing. When? We don't know. But it marks the end of a period of restraint of God's judgment. These are not the same angels of Rev 7:1-3 who stood at the four corners of the earth to hold back the Four winds until God's servants were sealed.

The Euphrates River had OT and contemporary significance for John. The Romans were fearful of the Parthians in that day, but their army wasn't that big. Euphrates was the eastern boundary of Roman rule and the northern frontier for the Jews. The Assyrians, Babylonians and Persians had come across that river in the past to impose their rule on God's people. Typically, that was a form of divine punishment for their idolatry and betrayal of the covenant.

Myriads x myriads, i.e. infinity.

The scene of death and destruction of v.13-16 describes the tragedy of war. There is no definitive information about the pervasiveness of war in human history, but one source indicated that in the 3,400 years of recorded history only 8 % of those years were without some kind of notable war.

One thing we can note is that war brings out the sin of man. One might say that it reflects the influence of demonic attack from the abyss – Rev 9:1-2. From ancient history to modern days, the atrocities of war seem to be indicators of the evil of a hellish influence. Accounts of what people are willing to do during wartime can be very disturbing.

v. 17-19 huge army coming to bring death to 1/3 of people. This is no longer simply torment as with the locusts. Now these forces are unleashed to bring about death.



The power of the horses is in their mouths (James 3) and in their tails. This points to the demonic influence of lies. Satan is a liar and the father of lies. Note the tail is like a serpent. Does a lying serpent ring a bell? Anyone, anyone?

The demonic goal is to mislead through false teaching. Cults thrive and once solid denominations decline because of false teaching. The rise of 'fake news' and 'disinformation' are not bugs in our cultural system; they are features of the spirit of the age. The terms themselves are a part of the scheme to deceive and create chaos.

What better way to sow confusion and despair than to call into question the existence of real or ultimate truth? We are not simply facing political or theological issues and differences. We are facing differences of **EPISTEMOLOGY**.

The branch of philosophy that examines the nature of knowledge, its presuppositions and foundations, and its extent and validity.

It deals with what is true and how can we even know it? Our culture is being ruled by Pontius Pilate when it comes to truth...

John 18:

Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this *purpose* I have been born, and for this I have come into the world: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice." 38 Pilate *said to Him, "What is truth?"*

When there is confusion about truth, it leads to the mental and emotional torment that we discussed in 9:5-6. Confusion about truth leads to cultural chaos

As with the description of the locusts, this is a shock and awe type symbol. Does this motivate us to mission? IT SHOULD.

In an age that lacks a firm foundation for truth, we have the GOOD NEWS of the one who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. In the chaos of the trumpets, Christ stands out as a Light to the Nations.

Jesus, who is the Truth, gave his disciples authority. Luke 10

He said to them, "I saw Satan as lightning fall from heaven. 19 Look, I give you authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy. And nothing shall by any means hurt you. 20 Nevertheless do not rejoice that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

The exhortation is valid for us today as well... Rejoice your names are written in heaven. As John puts in in Revelation, we have the seal of God on our foreheads, and we are protected.

But the serpent can injure the unbelievers. The sixth trumpet previews an intensification of satanic influence in deception, growing violence, death, and despair. We might think that this would shake up the idolaters so that they would lose hope in the "work of their hands" (v. 20) and they would cease to worship demons and idols, but sadly they did not repent.

We assume that people will simply repent, but they don't. Israel of the OT has a track record of NOT repenting even after God brings discipline upon them – Amos 4-6.

v. 20-21 The call to repent was a major refrain to the seven churches – ch 2-3.

Those not killed still don't repent. God, having provided sufficient opportunity and warnings to repent, is certainly fair and just when the SEVENTH trumpet sounds, and all are judged – Rev 11. (Beale)

The text in v. 20-21 explains that the problem WAS idolatry. That issue has been around since the Garden.

The 'hearing formula' of ch 2-3 was often repeated..." **He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**" This echoes Ps 135:15-18 Isa 6:10 and Ezek 3:27, Matt 13:9

Psalm 135

**15 The idols of the nations are silver and gold,
the work of men's hands.**

**16 They have mouths, but do not speak;
they have eyes, but do not see;**

17 they have ears, but do not hear;

neither is there any breath in their mouths.

**18 Those who make them are like them;
so is everyone who trusts in them.**

The sins that are named are the fruit of idolatrous love, a disordered love. Anything we love more than Jesus is idolatrous. An idol is something that captures our affections more than God does.

As Martin Luther put it, "To have a god is whatever you place your trust in and to whomever you go in times of trouble. The heart makes gods even where there are none. Theologically this means a person will not live without God.." - we are always making a "God" of something.

The idols and the fruit of idolatry are described under the categories of greed (gold, silver, brass) and then in terms of external behaviors – murder, sorcery, and immorality,

The words used to describe the unrepentant behavior are interesting and relevant today

Murders are on the rise

Sorceries - = pharmakia = medication= drugs, by extension witchcraft and sorcery

Immorality = porneia – Illicit sexual activity outside of the marriage bond. WHY? Because God is opposed to the sexual union that He created? NO! Because He knows the value and the power of that union, and He wants to preserve and protect it.

Greed, murder, drug abuse, and sexual practice outside the protective guidelines of God are rampant in our day. They've always been around but not to the extent we see today. In various ways they all have extensive networks that promote their practices.

- From corruption at every level of corporate and governmental life to riotous looting to the greed in our own hearts, there is a money loving financial industrial complex at work.
- From homicide to abortion to assisted suicide to a spike in death by drug overdose, there is a culture of death industrial complex at work.
- From over prescribed legal drugs to performance enhancing drugs to black market illegal drugs to chemical puberty blockers to transition affirming drugs to monopolies on drug treatment, there is a pharmacological industrial complex at work.
- From pornography to sex trafficking to the early sexualization and confusion of children in education and media, there is a sexual industrial complex at work.

All of these are the fruit of demonic idolatrous influences that have brought deception and confusion and have taken root in our hearts. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, came to bring abundant life, but the thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy. (John 10:10)

Idolatry is basically spiritual adultery.

It deconstructs God by believing the lies that reverse the order given in Genesis. Rather than embracing 1:27- "God created man in His image" we embrace "man creates God in our image."

We make a God out of ourselves or our preferences. Our culture today has embraced multiple lies regarding identify, the low value of life itself, and denied the reality and dignity of God's image in male and female. These lies are detrimental to emotional, spiritual, social, cultural, and relational health.

Revelation displays how believers are caught between the temptation to compromise with the culture through some form of idolatry and the threat of persecution for not compromising. The Spirit is saying to the churches, and to us, "Stand firm in the faith and maintain loyalty to the sovereign Christ who is the ultimate victor." In the seven letters of ch 2-3 Jesus commends those who overcome by resisting idolatry through faithful worship and obedience.

The theme of idolatry and the worship of the beast will return in Ch 13, so for now, let's consider some practical aspects of current idolatry.

How do we recognize our idols? The examples of gold, silver, brass, wood, etc represent the created order. These stand for anything that is NOT God, i.e worship of the creature rather than the CREATOR.

If we think that we have to look far and wide to find bizarre idols, we are mistaken. Often, they are hidden in plain sight in our own hearts and affections.

One way is to Look at our anger and our pride. Those are the red flags that something is too important to us.

What are we willing to engage in sinful behavior for to obtain?

Calvin 16th century French theologian pointed out that our hearts are "idol factories." They are always creating new idols – big or small- they just keep on coming.

EX: I love Lucy – chocolate candy assembly line.

The IDOLS of comfort, respect, approval, our reputation, pleasure, money, security..... may go undetected in our hearts.

– "Most of us live for years determined not to look too closely into our soul."- Larry Crabb

To the degree that is true of you or me, we are likely to have idols of the heart living in plain sight. We don't see them, but others do.

I'll close with these words from Horatius Bonar.

Misapprehension of God is the root of all idolatry; and worship under such misapprehension is idolatry or superstition. It is the true God that is to be worshipped, none else. He will not give His glory to another. Nor will the knowledge of any false god fill or pacify the soul. It is only that God whom Jesus of Nazareth revealed that will suffice for the human spirit.

Bonar, Horatius. Light And Truth: Or, Bible Thoughts And Themes: Volumes 1–5 The Complete Series (The Horatius Bonar Bible Commentary Series Book 6) (p. 365)

God has given us this "Revelation" so that we understand Him aright. Our response to this Revelation should be the same as that of those around the throne in chapter 4:

11"Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."

That is how we guard our hearts from idols.

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