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THE ANGEL OF THE ABYSS (REV 9:11) IN JOHN'S THEOPOLITICS

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Abstract

The Church of Christ is seemingly misreading Revelation 9:11. This has apparently promoted levity among Christians toward obeying Christ's command for the Church to back out of the world's political ideology of imperialism that is today sadly championed by the predominantly Christian West. Revelation is a political tract. John composed it with various literary genres, one of which is fable—employing metaphorical creatures to powerfully drive home his theopolitical message. John writes about a star that had descended from heaven to earth. It receives the key to the passageway of the abyss, opens it and lets out a horde of locust army which torments rebels in God's government. In John's fable the locusts have a commander, "the Angel of the Abyss," most likely linking him with the Star that is given the key to the abyss. Parodying, John calls him Apollyon—Destroyer—indicating his function in God's war against evil powers usurping his world government. Most interpretations of this angel, failing methodologically to consider his function in the tract's prophecy, illogically identify Apollyon with Satan. Considering the social, religious, and political forces acting upon John's prophetic party and further light from comparable contemporary Jewish linguistic and ideological expressions, this study, employing ideological and culture-linguistic methods, identifies the angel of the abyss with the star that is given the key to the abyss as an agent of God commanding troops in God's war against imperialism.

Key Words: Apollyon; Abaddon; Angel of the Abyss; fallen stars; theopolitics; economic imperialism; socioeconomic colonisation; Revelation 9:11.

Introduction

The thesis of this study is that the star that had descended from heaven to earth and was given the key to the abyss (Rev 9:1-2) is the same personage as the angel of the abyss (Rev 9:11). This negates the widely-held view that the star, which released a locust army from the abyss against the enemies of God, is a demon or even Satan¹ and the locusts are a demonic horde² or yet, "the armies of hell, sent by death itself to fill its

bowels”.³

The view of the Angelic star of the Abyss held in this article is informed by the fact that the popular view is problematic for several reasons: the trendy view tends to becloud the political message of Revelation; throughout biblical literature, God's agents for the kind of errand the star performs are not known to be fallen angels. In other Jewish literature too angels rather than demons are God's emissaries (cf. TSol 1:7); their primary function is to thwart the demons (TSol 6:8). This makes it difficult to see the angelic star in Revelation 9:1-11 as something other than God's agent on a divine errand to convey prophetic warning to those rebelling against the one sovereign Lord of the universe. This opinion is held, moreover, in view of John's fondness of multiple descriptions of same personages and events. It is also observed that as a political tract John, the leader of the Prophetic Party of Jesus Messiah in Asia Minor, produced Revelation to educate and sensitise his community to take unwavering action against the social, religious, and political forces acting upon it. The functions of the star and angel in that tract bespeak sameness of character. Furthermore, the theopolitics of this tract also undergirds other extant Johannine literatures, and gleanings of similar features from those literatures suggest that the subject matter of this tract was a chronic problem of John's community.

Revelation is the leading biblical book that is used by most Christians today to interpret political events and trends globally. Probably because of the blurring of Revelation's message, the global Christian community has been deluded into championing a course that strangulates and consequently colonizes the already impoverished nations by the developed West in the name of globalisation. Recently China has joined the scramble for Africa in this neo-colonisation as is evidenced by its activities in countries like South Africa where China has 13 police stations and is even teaching Chinese language to the locals.⁴ China equally has heavy presence in Zambia where the Chinese community is estimated to have reached 20,000 heads by 2015.⁵ Today, economic imperialism that strangulates developing nations and perpetually enslaves them to developed nations is trendier than occupation and building of territorial colonies like what China seems to be doing in Africa. If Christians understand Jesus' stand against imperialism, which led him to command his Church: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues" (Rev 18:4), they would obey their principal and fight socioeconomic colonisation as the angelic star did rather than promote it as the Christian West and China are doing.

To drive home this article's theopolitical view of the identity and function of the characters of Revelation 9:1-11, first, the text is analysed

to see possible identity link between the star (9:1) and the angel called Apollyon (9:11). Secondly, an assessment of how credible or probable the connection is, based on the social and religious worlds of the text, is made. The third section closely scrutinizes data supporting the identity of Apollyon as an angelic star especially with light from Jewish literature prior to and around the time of the writing of Revelation. In conclusion, I make a reconstruction of events underlying Revelation 9:1-11.

Analysis Of Revelation 9:1-11

Revelation 9 opens with John continuing to watch and hear the fifth of the seven angels sound his trumpet which introduces the first of the last three woes. When he sounds the trumpet John sees a star that had fallen from heaven to earth receive the key to the passageway of a bottomless deep. In the spirit of John's symbolic imageries, this star represents an intelligent being since it receives a key and opens an abyss. In Jewish literature, stars are often depicted as angels and angels as stars (Judg 5:20; Job 38:7; ApAb 14:6; 1 En 86:1; 88:1; 90:24) and other intelligent beings. In Numbers 24:19, for instance, Balaam predicts that a "star" would arise from Jacob and "exercise dominion" (āōēā).

But, the identity of this star in Revelation 9:1-2 has been elusive. The main moot issues are whether its fallen status is to be understood in the sense of its being out of favour with God thus making it a demon or the term "fallen" simply loosely describes descent from above as in the case of the stars in 6:13. Other lines of thought concern the identification of the star with the angel of the abyss (Rev 9:11) and or the angel that has the keys to the abyss and locks up Satan there (Rev 20:1-3). Further thorny moot issues relate to the identity of the "abyss" and the locusts that the star releases from it and their function in the scene John narrates. Unlike normal locusts, these ones are described with military features and are commanded not to eat vegetation, their usual food, but to torment, with scorpion-like venom, people who do not have God's seal of identity (cf. Rev 7:1-8) for a specified period of time.

The star "was given" the key to the shaft of the abyss (Rev 9:1). The subject of āyēçāPō÷!ēēāvò is probably God. Hence it is circumlocution—a usual Jewish way of paraphrasing divine action (cf. Matthew 5:21: EōēññsēçōīÖōñ÷āwīēō "that it was said to the ancients"). The point emphasised here as in the many passives in this section (cf. Rev 8:3, 7-8, 11-12; 9:1, 3-5) is God's control of all that is happening. The possession of a key to a place signifies authority over that place and the holder of authority over this abyss is God (cf. Isa 22:22; Mat 16:19; Rev 1:18; 3:7; 20:1) who only delegates it to the angel that descended to earth. According to TSol 5:5, angels rule over demons. This suggests an angel of good standing with God receiving that key since it is illogical

thinking that God would give his authority to an evil being to oversee the prison house where rebels against him are held.

The star opens the entrance to the abyss with the key and lets out smoke out of which appears a great horde of locusts that is described in military language (Rev 9:7). Indications are that John is here using the locust imagery, which John F. MacArthur though, sees as “outward form of demons”⁶ in the same manner that Joel used it in his time, as a symbol of an invading army (Rev 9:7; cf. Joel 2:4-5, 7-9; cf. Exo 10:12-15; Joel 1:4; 2:1-6). We can be sure, Joel speaks of real locusts that destroy vegetation (Joel 2:25).⁷ They “ravage fields, trees, and fruit, but do not kill, or plunder, or take prisoners of war.”⁸ But John’s locusts are not ordinary locusts as in Joel’s prophecy; they are not only described in military terms with deliberate weird features, but they are barred from feeding on vegetation as is usual of locusts. Instead, the locust army—with human faces is to torment God’s human enemies. Joel’s language indicates that the locusts are symbolic of an invading army (Joel 2:4-7). Craig Keener even sees John borrowing from Joel’s locust imagery (e.g., Joel 1:6; 2:4-5) to amplify the imagery of the 8th Egyptian plague (Ex 10:12) and paint a picture of a devastating invasion (747; cf. Jer 51:27; 51:14). The Jews closer to that period understood Joel in this sense. As cited by Leslie C. Allen, the Targum at 2:25 calls them “peoples, languages, rulers, and kingdoms”; the LXX MS, Q (6th cent AD) identifies it with Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Greeks, and Romans.⁹ It is noteworthy that John is employing fable and simply paints the picture of these creatures to drive home his message. In that case, they are not necessarily demonic but a fabulous depiction of human weapons in God’s eschatological judgement of political powers.

The locust army that this star releases from the abyss has a commander, their king, who is called “the angel of the abyss” (Rev 9:11). One of the leading responsibilities of kings in that period was to lead their subjects into battle as the military commanders (cf. 1 Sam 8:20). Presumably, this links this commander with the star that was given the key to the abyss (Rev 9:1) and possibly also with the angel having the key to the abyss (Rev 20:1). Angelic stars are common in Jewish literature (ApAbr 14:6; 1 En 86:1). Some of them control strategic gates, including the gate to the abyss (3 En 14:3). If so, these links are highly suggestive of the same identity for both the star and the angel, especially when seen in the light of his function in the scene. John calls him *Abaddon* in Hebrew, meaning “destruction” and *Apollyon* in Greek, which means “destroyer.”

ὁ ἄγγελος τοῦ ἄβυσσος in this 9:11 usage is a nominative of apposition. It is a participial appellation referencing the one who destroys, hence “Destroyer”. The lead question in the quest for meaning here is who is destroying whom? Or who is destroying what? The answer to the

question becomes easy if it is understood that these characters are acting in a war scene (Rev 4-20). Revelation 12 provides the background to that war. There John depicts the Church-State conflict in Revelation as a continuation of a war that Satan fought with the hosts of heaven but lost and was thrown down to the earth (Rev 12: 8-12). Having lost the battle in heaven he turns around to destroy the Church on earth (12:13). He employs the services of his allies—the beast out of the sea, the beast from the earth, Babylon, and the false prophet. They employ various strategies, some subtle like miraculous signs of deception (13:13-14) and some aggressive—including economic exclusion (13:13-17)—to sandwich the Church and render it dysfunctional. John understands all this as a spiritual war to replace the kingdom of Christ by the imperial power (11:7; 13:7-8, 12; cf. Dan 7:12). Despite his coalition though, the Dragon loses out again; a double defeat that the Tiv describe as *agirgba*.

When viewed from the standpoint of the warfare motif of John's visionary prophecy, the question 'who is destroying whom or what' indeed presents one of two answers: it is either the devil with his allies destroying the people of God or the Warrior-Lamb, that is featured in this section, destroying the devil and his supporters. But the answer most consistent with the war being depicted in the Revelation is that the warrior-Lamb of God, the Word of God and King of kings, Jesus the Messiah of God's kingdom, is the victor who destroys the enemy (Rev 12:7-8, 11; 17:14; 19:11-16). Therefore, his angelic commander is the Destroyer (ḏiēē{ūi}) of the forces fighting to destroy his kingdom.

This is sarcasm of which John is known in Revelation to be very fond. Notice that the personage in Revelation 9:11 is called an angel which negates the normal identity of Satan in Jewish literature of John's period as Belial (IQSI 17, 24; CD IV 13; XIII 1); Beelzeboul, the Prince of Demons (TSol1-3), etc. Is it that God's sovereign prerogative is usurped by Satan? Itāšfiēōī. On the contrary, as a rhetorical device, in Revelation John employs much mimicry and parody to reveal the devil's falsehood and inconsequentiality in the political war being depicted. John's primary concern in his prophecy generally is to show that God and his messiah are the joint owners and rulers of the universe of creation. This is what he means by the statement that "āsiāōī ! āāóēcāwā ḏiāēyóliḏōīāēōñwīḏi!ḏi ēāv ḏiā+ñéóḏiā áPōīā, ēāv āāóēcā{ōāēā0ḏōizō á0ōiāḏ ḏōi á0}iūi. (Rev 11:15 BNT) "The world kingdom has become *the kingdom* of our Lord, and of His Messiah; and He will reign forever and ever" (Rev 11:15; cf. 14:6-8). To use Stephen D. Moore's terminology, it means that the global *imperium* (authority to rule) has been transferred from the usurper emperors to the duo.¹⁰ As Moore argues, "The book's representation of the Roman imperial order is essentially parodic ... and parody is a species of mimicry: it mimics in

order to mock.”¹¹ Seen from the stance of Revelation's heavy use of mimicry and parody too, it seems more plausible that sarcasm is employed in the fable of Revelation 9:1-11. The same idea is in John's depiction of the devil as the ruler of this world who has no power over Christ and is already judged and cast out by the atoning death of Christ (Jn 12:30-31; 16:11; Lk 10:18; Rev 12:9).

Notice that the star releases the locusts from the abyss to torment rebels in God's government (Rev 9:3-6). This is a stern warning for them to stop rebellion (Rev 9:20-21; 16:9, 11) or face destruction (*abaddon*)—by the destroyer of God's enemies (*apollyon*). This agrees with John's fondness of parody and multiple descriptions of same personages and events. In the Gospel, he introduces the eternal Word of God (Jn 1:1-4) who becomes flesh (Jn 1:14), but later reintroduces him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Jn 1:29). In the throne scene at the beginning of this second cycle of Revelation, John is shown the Lion of the tribe of Judah, but he turns and sees a slain Lamb referencing the same figure; among others.

One reason for the difficulty in appreciating the relationship of the star and the angel in Revelation 9:1, 11 is because scholars understand the Jews' conception of the abyss differently. For Bruce J. Malina, “The bottomless pit is the celestial abyss ... located in the Hades half of the sky”¹² though in Jewish thought, Hades is beneath the earth. H. Bietenhard says abyss in Late Greek “stood for the primal deep, the primal ocean, the realm of the dead, the underworld” and in the LXX, “mostly to translate Heb. *tehom*, the primal ocean (Gen. 1:2), deep (Ps. 42:7 [LXX 41:7]), the realm of the dead (Ps. 71:20 [LXX 70:20]).”¹³ Thomas argues that “Better judgment dictates that the abyss is the preliminary place of incarceration for fallen angels” which informs his conclusion that “Its inhabitants include the demonic prince of 9:11 and the beast from the abyss mentioned in 11:7; 17:8.”¹⁴ Influenced by 1 En 10:4; 18:11; 21:7, a near contemporary of John, Walter C. Kaiser Jr. et al see abyss simply as “the prison of demons and fallen angelic beings ... for it is the standard place to imprison such beings.”¹⁵ Similarly, the locusts coming out of the abyss are for these scholars, demons.

These positions however seem to be governed by a narrow view of the Jewish concept of “abyss.” In Jewish literature abyss is not so much a specific place. There is “the abyss of the Red Sea” meaning the depths of the Red Sea (TSol 6:6) and the abyss of darkness—the terrible underworld characterised by darkness (1 IQ 12-6). In Romans 10:7 Paul uses abyss as a place of the dead but clearly without limiting it as a specific place. To be sure, abyss also came to refer to the prison house of fallen spirits (1 Enoch 10:4 ff.; 18: 11 ff.; Jub. 5: 6 ff.) as the Prince of Demons, Beelzeboul, is said to bind men in Tartarus (Greek for abyss),

believed to be commanded by the demon Abhezithibou (TSol 3:5; 6:3; 23-25).

The lack of unanimity about the essential nature and function of the abyss hints that there are certain aspects of it that were unknown and so unexpressed in prior Jewish literature. Such might include God's use of it as a "camp" for his terrestrial military hordes which in John's Revelation appear as locusts looking like war horses (Rev 9:7) but might be humans metaphorically depicted, just as Assyria was God's weapon to chastise Israel. This observation suggests that the locusts that the angelic star releases from it are not demons imprisoned there as suggested by some interpreters like Mounce,¹⁶ Koester,¹⁷ among others, but God's army (cf. Joel 2:25).

There are several reasons for this position. First, the locusts appear to be a metaphor of a military detachment since they have human and military features and are directed not to harm the grass or trees which are known to be food for locusts (Rev 9:4; cf. Joel 2:3-11). Secondly, the idea of a demonic horde controlled by Satan in this context negates the judgement motif of the trumpets and the seals that introduced them as well as the bowls of wrath following them. An important interpretive hint is dropped when the third seal is opened (Rev 6:6) and when the sixth trumpet is blown (9:13-14) where voices from the servants of the Throne Occupant are directing what should happen in each case. These are God's agents directing the activities of the judgement acts. It seems odd to find John suddenly switching from a God-directed judgement to a Satan-directed one in the same cycle. It also negates the established biblical teaching that Satan's activity and goal in life are always to lead astray people who are loyal to God (Gen 3:1, 4-5; 2 Chr 21:1; Mat 4:1-10; Jn 8:44; 2 Cor 2:11; 11:3; 2 Thess 2:9; Rev 2:9; 13:14; 20:3, 8, 10) and increase the number of God's children who will perish with him "knowing that he has only a short time" (Rev 12:12, 17). John indicates this thought by his depiction of the purpose of the plagues brought by the last three trumpets, which is to evoke repentance (Rev 9:20-21; 16:9, 11; cf. 3:3, 19).

Another important clue of divine control of happenings in this scene is the imagery of smoke billowing from the pit when the angelic star opens it (Rev 9:2). Smoke usually characterises God's presence: "Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire" (Exo 19:18). It also symbolises God's judgement, as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:28) as well as of the nations (Isa 34:10) and Babylon (Rev 18:9). In the present judgement context, the smoke was the vessel that bore God's army, the locusts.

By their function of leading out locusts from the abyss and commanding their military operation therefore the star and angel of the

abyss most probably reference one and the same personage involved in this programme of God's. The impact John's tract is intended to make on his readers and hearers is to strengthen Jesus' followers in their resolve to remain loyal to their principal and to evoke repentance among the rebels. This comes out more clearly in the following credibility assessment of the connection between the star in charge of the abyss and the angel in charge of the abyss, based on the socio-political and religious worlds of the text.

Revelation as a political tract against Roman Imperial Order

The book of Revelation is a down-to-earth criticism of Roman imperial system by a leader of Jesus' prophetic party in Asia Minor. Jesus succeeds John the Dipper who is the last Old Testament leader of that party founded by Samuel in the wake of Israel's decision to adopt monarchy. Jesus revives the party's royal theology which promotes the government of God—God's running of people's lives; guiding and guarding their ways to conform to God's ways. That ideology espouses that the rule of God is his governing of the world system. It "Subordinates the state to God and to the law" where the human ruler and the ruled "submit to God's precepts of justice, respect, and neighbour love."¹⁸ This is the idea of living on God's terms, putting away self-pride and self-referencing royal ideologies. It is a social system where the dignity of the human person and the common good are primary concerns of government. By this character, Storkey posits that God's government rejects ruler-god, autocracy, arbitrary rule, and double standards¹⁹ which characterise the Roman imperial system in Asia Minor. By this, the Apostle John understands Jesus as having brought a new political order which he has to promote and defend.

In line with the foregoing, Yair Hoffman believes that Revelation "is the attempt of a powerless man to attack in writing the triumph of power, a power which strode over corpses and which is continuing to produce further victims."²⁰ The architect of the Roman imperial order is Augustus (Octavian). He accedes to power as *princeps* in 31 BC and reigns, exercising sovereign authority in collaboration with the Roman senate until AD 14. Augustus soon after receiving power realises that the task of securing the empire and providing for the ruling classes, the populace, and the Roman military is enormous and expensive, but the political system as he inherits it does not provide enough authority space for survival and prosperity of the system and its people. To remedy the situation, Augustus initiates a number of reforms that lead to what is today termed Augustan ideology.

First, he tactically transforms the Roman political system from the Senate-controlled republics to an emperor-centred empire. To ensure

success, Augustus adopts his father, Julius Caesar's use of the clientele-structure in administering certain areas. He soon greatly influences both urban and area elites who benefit a lot from it. Across the empire he becomes "the benefactor" (cf. Lk 22:24-27; Mk 10:41-45; Mat. 20:24-28). This makes him "a leader as opposed to a mere official (however powerful)."²¹ Secondly, to finance the administration of the vast empire, Augustus reorganizes, expands, and centralizes Roman taxation.²² Thirdly and above all Augustus orders and achieves relative peace among all the conquered peoples with the threat of heavy penalty using military might on violation of the peace by anyone. Indeed, the key feature of Augustan ideology is the enforcement of this coercive peace.

Plutarch, a Roman historian, is quoted to have said it is Caesar's "insatiable love of power and a mad desire to be first and greatest"²³ that birthed this dominating strategy to scare anyone who might nurse any idea of rebellion.²⁴ Trajan also is quoted to have said of the conquered peoples: "Our enemies are afraid, and crave permission to obey commands. ... They pray, they implore, we grant, we refuse—both in accordance with the majesty of sovereign power."²⁵ The Pax Romana is thus intrinsically connected with "Roman authority"—the Roman power structure and the status of people in that system. Warren Carter states it well: "The Empire was very hierarchical, with vast disparities of power and wealth."²⁶ As he reveals, the ruling elite preserve and sustain the imperial power by controlling the resources of the agrarian empire through a heavy taxation policy using a patron clientele system.²⁷ Thus, the ruling class and those in the corridors of power, who altogether number less than four percent of the entire society, live contented lives whereas the overwhelming majority of the ruled live miserably.

The above scenario creates a number of problems for which the imperial system comes under intense criticism from a number of quarters. Jesus Messiah is critical of its hierarchy and control when he says that whereas "the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them" it should not be so with his followers (Matt. 20:25). The Roman peace that is so cherished and jealously guarded is criticised even by the Roman nobility. Tacitus writes in *Annals* I.10.4: "After that there had been undoubtedly peace, but peace stained with bloodshed."²⁸ This is because, as Cassidy points out, Augustus' peace is an imposed peace achieved by military campaigns or the threat of such campaigns;²⁹ "a victory-peace for the Romans," but "a peace of subjection" for conquered peoples³⁰ and is maintained by 25 legions across the empire.³¹ Indeed, anyone who dares to breach the peace in any way is considered a rebel and treated accordingly.

In this Roman world, religion and politics is one and the same thing. In this wise the Roman imperial authority becomes a problem for

John and his community in particular. In Asia Minor where they live, the authority of the Roman emperor is "mediated through the Imperial Cult."³² Principal Asian client cities (particularly Ephesus, Pergamum, and Smyrna) compete for favour and recognition from their benefactor, Rome, through their participation in the imperial cult as a way of demonstrating their level of loyalty to the emperor.³³ Christians in Asia are required to participate in the religious festivals in the pagan temples as part of their civic duties. Among other Asian social activities Christians are for instance, required to eat foods that are first offered to Asian gods and to have sex with temple prostitutes which are seen by the society as means of appeasing the gods to bless the land. Cultic prostitution is believed to invoke "the fertility of the land and the prosperity of society."³⁴ The Christians' faith however bars them from participating in that hybrid religion. Eating food offered to idols and also partaking in cultic prostitution at once violates the messianic kingdom's moral standards and would make the Christians approve of the local patron gods. But, in the spirit of Augustan ideology, the Christians' religious attitude is viewed by the provincial imperial authorities as subversive and has to be checked with iron hand.

The imperial authorities hold the Christians suspect moreover because the designation, *Christiani*, by which John's group is known, is a political identity tag, usually given a group by outsiders who associate such a group with a political leader. Hoffman explains that *-iani* in the Roman world "always indicates the political affiliation of a person."³⁵ At Thessalonica they are explicitly charged with "acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus" (Acts 17:7). In the wake of the Jewish revolt of 66 AD many Christians fled to Asia and in the following years formed a sizeable community there. Their historical antecedents would easily make their present antisocial attitude politically suspect. Hence, as Stefanovic notes "anyone who wanted economic, political, or social status in the society had to participate in these religious demands."³⁶

These uneasy realities are both external and internal to John's Christian community and reveal that the predominantly Jewish Christianity is being persecuted from two fronts: by non-Christian Jews and by other clients of the imperial power in Asia.³⁷ For John, a first generation follower of the messianic prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, this state of affairs is tantamount to the spiritual war that started in heaven, but followed his principal during his earthly mission and is continuing with his followers after him (Rev 11:7; 12:1-20:16; see especially Revelation 12:7, 17; 13:4, 7; 16:14; 17:14; 19:11, 19; 20:8).

Observably, the theopolitics of this tract also undergirds other extant Johannine literature, which means that the subject matter is a

chronic problem of John's community. In the Fourth Gospel for instance, John is reacting against Augustan ideology. Lance Byron Richey rightly argues that he criticises and denies the conceptual structure of the authority of the Roman emperor that is "mediated through the Imperial Cult in the provinces of Asia Minor."³⁸ In Revelation John paints symbolic imageries to overwrite the symbolic world of his audience which depicts power structures in the Roman world as sovereign. One of such imageries is the war between God and Satan over the rule of the universe. As many have attested, the sovereignty of God's Messianic Lamb Prince over the universe is pitched against similar claims by the Dragon.³⁹

The two masters employ the services of their agents in this war. On the one party the dragon is aided by his allies, the beast from the sea and the beast from the land (11:19–15:4) who, as Baucham notes, cause economic destruction and the whore Babylon (Rev 17-19), who causes religious and moral destruction⁴⁰ through false religion, and anti-Christian seduction to the lust of the flesh respectively, according to Hendriksen.⁴¹ This is a picture of Imperial Rome and her client kings head-bent on establishing the imperial cult as a power control tool in John's community. Severally and collectively, these satanic agents unleash terror on the Church to turn members' allegiance away from the Lamb, the Lord of Lords and King of Kings, to the dragon (cf. 6:9-10; 13:12).

On the other party God's Messianic Prince parades his angels who carry out assigned duties under his watch as seen in the opening of seals (Rev 6-7), blowing of trumpets (Rev 8-11), and the outpouring of bowls of God's wrath (Rev 16). It is one of these angels that is called the "Angel of the Abyss." He is the guardian angelic star of the abyss (Rev 9:1-2), who commands the army encamped there (Rev 9:11) in light of similar angelic beings in contemporary Jewish literature (See 2 En 40:8; 42:1; 3 En 1:3; 12:5; 18:3; 3 Bar 11:2, 4).

Notice that John's premier concern in writing this tract is to paint a picture of a war situation that has political underpinnings with serious negative impact on his community; to prepare his people for adequate response. From the co-text it is observed that John sees that the Roman political society is terribly distorted, relishing an abused system of power and injustice such that he is compelled to call his community members to come out of it (Rev 18:4). The message John seems to be consistently sending to his party members is that God is going to wage war against the prevailing evil powers that have usurped the world's government (Rev 11-15). In the course of the war the universe that has been marred will be destroyed. But the righteous will be saved and a new creation will be put in place where they will live. However, as God never does anything

without prior preparation of his people for it, his agents bring warnings to the rebellious world. One key agent for this assignment is the Angelic Star of the Abyss. People need to be educated about this in order to avert the dire consequences of not doing the needful. And the Apollyon text has this heuristic concern.

Apollyon, the Angelic Star, as God's Agent: Evidence from Jewish Literature

It is germane at this point for us to examine the data supporting the identity of Apollyon as the star-angel especially with light from Jewish literature prior to and around the time of the writing of the *Revelation to John*. As has been intimated before, many who have studied John's prophecy of the star that descends from heaven to earth and releases locusts from the abyss to penalise rebels, identify this star as a demon and the locusts as a demonic horde. In Jewish literature however it is angels who are God's emissaries (TSol 1:7) and their most important function is to thwart the demons (TSol 6:8).

Rosemary Guiley has called attention to the existence of Angels of destruction in Jewish and biblical literature, such as Uriel, Harbonah, and Azrael among others who were tasked to penalize the wicked and purify souls in Hell. According to her, the Bible also has many accounts of annihilation or punishment carried out by destroying angels: Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:1, 15); the firstborn of Egypt in the Passover (Exo 12:18–30); the 185,000 of the Assyrian troops (2 Kgs 19); Jerusalem (1 Chron 21:15); and Herod (Acts 20:23). The context of Revelation 9:1–11 is the three parallel judgement scenes of seals (Rev 6), trumpets (Rev 8–11), and bowls of wrath (Rev 16) carried out by angels.⁴² From this stance, it is only natural to see the angel of the abyss as another agent of God, not a demon. It should also be noticed that in the OT it is the servant of Yahweh who is the angel of death (cf. Exo 12:23; Job 15:21), and he is oftentimes personified as Yahweh (Exo 12:13; Exo 12:29).

It is true that Beelzebul is depicted as having bound certain disobedient personages in Tartarus (TSol 6:3). But, that same Tartarus is also under the watch of Archangel Uriel (1 En 20:1). In fact every sphere of life is under the watch of an angel; seven archangels in all (cf. 1 En 9:1; 10:1). In that case, the angel (not demon) that is in charge of the abyss in Revelation 9:11 cannot be an inmate, but an external agent from God. Notice that he is the only creature associated with this abyss that is designated as “angel” and specifically as “the angel” evidently to indicate his duty post at that abyss in the line of the seven angels discussed above, who though, are not inmates of the areas they oversee.

From another perspective, those who hold the defection view of the star normally identify it as Satan, the chief of demons, whom they

think is called the Morning Star in Isaiah 14:12. Arthur Walkington Pink characteristically states, "This we believe refers to Lucifer, or 'Day-star' (see Isa. 14:12 margin)."⁴³ This identification is however, grossly defective. The context of Isaiah 14:12 is the prophecy of a taunt, "a song of triumph", that would be taken against the king of Babylon (Isa 14:4-22) when his power is destroyed and he himself consigned to Sheol. As Peter D. Miscall notes, "'Taunt' is a word that also means 'likeness' and 'simile'; the taunt uses the comparison of parody."⁴⁴ The parody here is the comparison/contrast of the king's boasting during the days of his glory to be "like the Most High" with his humiliation by death, being "like us" (Isa 14:10). The spirits of the kings the Babylonian king had oppressed (Isa 14:6) receive and greet him in Sheol (v 9) with joyful song celebrating their triumph and deriding the oppressor: "Even you have been made weak as we, you have become like us" (v 10). Then they gloat over him, "How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations!" (v 12). This is sarcastic depiction of an impostor who exalted himself saying: "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High" (Isa 14:14). It is mockery just like when the Jewish leaders knelt down before Jesus, the Nazarene and contemptuously addressed him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (Mat 27:29) meaning he was a charlatan.

In Jewish literature almost all the occurrences of the phrase "morning star" are connected with Satan and indeed, objects and scenes in ordinary life, only by comparison, not as appellation (cf. ApElj 4:11; 3 En 21:4; 25:6; 26:4). Further, Satan, who is often called Azazel (ApAbr 14:6) or Beelzeboul (TSol passim), resides in the Evening Star (TSol 6:7). He cannot therefore bear morning star as an appellation. The expression אֶלֶי־אֵי־נֶחֱמֶיֶל בֶּן שַׁחַר (*šəḥeyl ben šaḥar*) (Shining One, Son of the morning, Isa 14:12), is an epithet of the king of Babylon, but it is hardly an honorary title. It is for sure, a difficult expression, but with the sense of taunt. The Septuagint interpreted it as Ἀὐρορῆνιος, "one who brings morning," and set the stage for its titular use as "Morning Star" and several similar constructions. Elsewhere in biblical literature though, it is God's Messianic King that is *titularly* called the "Morning Star" (Num 24:17; 2 Pet 1:19; Rev 2:28; 22:16). Interestingly, in IQPsJ 9-13 this Star is an eschatological figure—and is associated with judgement (TLevi 18:2-3. cf. 1QM 9:6; 4QPBless 5.27; TJud 24:1), just as the angelic star in Revelation 9:1, 11 is.

Although some⁴⁵ see this star as a meteor, it is more plausible to see it as an intelligible being, most probably an angel, since it receives a key and opens a pit (Rev 9:1-2). Recall that angels are often identified as stars in Jewish literature (ApAbr 14:6; 1 En 86:1). However, these

archangels are nowhere depicted as fallen angels. Even the statement made to Azazel, "For your heritage is over those who are with you, with the stars and with the men born by the clouds whose portion you are" (ApAbr 14:6), does not imply his control of the stars or angels. 3 Enoch makes a list of designated angelic responsibilities, including "the angel of the stars" (14:3) whom he calls Kokabiel (v 4), but there is no indication that they are fallen angels or demons. Fallen angels though, like Azazel, head fallen angels (ApAbr 14:4, 6; IEn 6:4; 10:4). As Garland notes, "If the star that had previously fallen is Satan, then there is considerable irony in the fact that he now releases his demonic horde from the very region where he himself will be confined (Rev. 20:1-3)"⁴⁶ though this is hardly the case.

Finally, the control of the abyss is elsewhere in the New Testament ascribed to Jesus Messiah. When the Lord expelled the legion in that demon-possessed man of Gerasenes, the demons begged him not to send them into the abyss (Lk 8:31). This is probably the same abyss, the key to which an angel who came down from heaven holds as also does the star from the sky (Rev 20:1; 9:1). Abyss in these contexts may be understood in its parallel idea of *Hades* over which the Son of Man rules (Rev 1:18). Hades (Hebrew, *Sheol*) denotes the deepest depth (Ps 86:13) of black darkness (Job 10:21 f; cf. II En 40:12) under the earth (Mt 12:40). It is an "endless hollow expanse beneath the abyss."⁴⁷ In virtue of this position, Hades can hardly be controlled by one who has no authority, first of all, over the abyss. Moreover, common sense tells it that Jesus Messiah can hardly recruit from the opposition for such sensitive assignments as John depicts the angelic star doing in this text.

Conclusion

The Angel of the Abyss as the Star that Had Fallen

This study has argued simply that whereas some have seen the angel of the abyss in Revelation 9:11 as a demon, an inmate in charge of a demonic horde of locusts released from the abyss by another demon, the fallen star, there is a more plausible view. There are more indications, and simple logic shows, that the personage identified as a star that had fallen to earth and was given the key to the abyss (Rev 9:1) is the same with the angel of the abyss (9:11) in John's animetaphoric parody. The term "fallen" used of the star does not seem to convey the idea of a lost or renegade angel. 1 Enoch 86:1 uses the same term in describing the descent of an angel who is there like in Revelation 9 described as a star: "Behold a star fell from heaven and it arose." The same text describes the same descent of the other stars to meet this first one with the term "descend" in verse 3. This suggests synonymy. LXX Isaiah 14:12 has a

similar diction with regards to a star that had descended to the earth, though not referencing his lost or renegade character: “δδοῖς δ’ αὖ αἰθέριαι Πνάϊαι· Αὐοὶ γὰρ Ἰοῦ Αδὴν υἱάσ’ ἐκυῖοι δ’ ἰαδὼν ῥά τ’ αὖ οὐρανῷ· Εἰ.” This is not surprising; as noted above stars usually symbolize angels in Jewish thought and John is engaged in parody using metaphoric animals.

The receiving of the key to the abyss by the star means delegation of authority over it to him just as he exercises that ruling authority by releasing and commanding the locust army to penalise rebels in the messianic kingdom to evoke repentance in them or in alternative secure justification to destroy them from the kingdom. This is consonant with Jesus' own teaching that Satan cannot fight Satan if his kingdom is to prevail (Lk 11:21-23). In this light this angel in charge of the abyss, the Apollyon, can hardly be Satan, or even his agent. For, he leads an army against Satan. He is more plausibly an agent of God Almighty on divine errand.

Endnotes

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