

Third Trumpet

Revelation 8:10-11

By Phillip G. Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2016-07-03

Third Trumpet

Revelation 8:10-11

By Phillip G. Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2016-07-31

Text

10 So the third angel trumpeted, and a great star fell out of the sky, burning like a torch, and it fell upon a third of the rivers, and on the springs of waters. 11 The name of the star is called Wormwood; so a third of the waters were turned into wormwood, and many people died from the waters because they were made bitter.¹

Introduction

In this chapter we have been seeing how God was gradually and persistently heating up the judgments on both Israel and Rome. And I think that both family and church can learn from God's disciplines. He doesn't bring His severest disciplines right away. When there is no repentance He keeps increasing the severity of the discipline. But there is always room for repentance.

We also looked at the nature of God's judgments on Israel and Rome. We saw that He used angels, humans, and even the physical creation to fight against both of those statist nations. It shows God's creativity in His discipline, and how the discipline fit the crime. So far we have seen thunder, lightning, hail, fire, blood, asteroids, earthquakes, seaquakes, resulting tsunamis, fish kills, and red tides as part of His weaponry. Mostly those were warnings and symbols. But it is remarkable to see the detail with which each of those prophecies was fulfilled to a "t" between the months of May and September of AD 66.

But this week's and next week's trumpets are a bit tougher because there has been so little written on these two trumpets. So I have had to do a lot of original research, and because it is original study, I will hold my conclusions with much more tentativeness. But I am convinced that what I am about to share with you is 100% accurate. It fits the language of the passage, the time sequence, the historical dating, the parallelism in the chiasm, and the actual history of the ancient historians. But you can be Bereans and see if you are convinced.

¹ Translation of the Majority Text by Wilbur M. Pickering - [The Sovereign Creator Has Spoken.](#)

I. Summary of the significance of this third trumpet

Let me read the two verses again, and then I am going to give you a summary statement of where we are headed, and then I will dig into the details. And I will dig a little more than I usually do because there is almost nothing worthwhile that has been written on these two trumpets, and because this sermon will serve as a historical introduction to things that will keep reoccurring through the book. John wrote,

10 So the third angel trumpeted, and a great star fell out of the sky, burning like a torch, and it fell upon a third of the rivers, and on the springs of waters. 11 The name of the star is called Wormwood; so a third of the waters were turned into wormwood, and many people died from the waters because they were made bitter.

Here's what I believe happened in a nutshell. I believe that a literal meteorite fell into Lake Ram, which is located in the Golan Heights. Whether the meteorite created the lake or whether it fell into the lake is unimportant to determine. I am going to assume an establishment dating and say that the lake was already there. The evidence seems to indicate that immediately after the meteorite hit the water, it penetrated the underground aquifer and poisoned the aquifer and all of the springs and streams that flow from that aquifer. It just so happens that this Jordan aquifer and its connected springs and streams accounts for exactly one third of Israel's water supply. So it doesn't take but a few minutes for God to bring death and destruction through one third of Israel's water. It just shows you how vulnerable we can be to God's judgments. That's the literal fulfillment of these verses.

But since John said that these historical events were intended by God to be symbols of something significant happening in Christ's covenant judgments against Israel and/or Rome, I will quickly explain what I believe was symbolized by that meteorite. The star was the well-known symbol of the high priestly office of the Sadducees, and had been that sign for over one hundred years. It was a very well known symbol. And the fall of that star was a powerful symbol of the removal from office of the family of Ananas in late AD 66. Now when John prophesied this, that would have seemed like an absolutely impossible thing to happen. The family of Ananas had been the mafioso of Israel and were so well-entrenched into the infrastructure of that nation that removing them seemed like a pipe dream. But it happened.

The second half of the book will describe the tremendous power that Ananas, his five sons, his son-in-law Caiaphas, and his grandson Matthias wielded within Israel. In fact, many scholars believe that the parable of the rich man and Lazarus was Christ's not-so-subtle allusion to Ananas. Ananus was an enormously wealthy man with five sons, but was notoriously stingy.

And there are several details in that story that parallel Ananas. In any case, his family was an incredibly important family, and the events of the third trumpet that happened in the weeks immediately following the second trumpet were a tremendous judgment. It was a judgment that virtually everyone in the first century believed was well-deserved. But it took an act of God to get them out of office. Humans had tried to remove them from office many times, but were unsuccessful. But God accomplished what man could not. So that's the overview.

II. Explanation of the historical signs

Now let me dig into the text. Verse 10 says, "Then the third angel sounded..." Once again angelic power guides things like meteorites as well as the human power brokers symbolized by that star. They are under God's sovereign control and under the control of angels, who are His servants. And I have spoken to that enough in the past that I won't belabor it. But John wants us to never forget the fact that life is not out of control and Satan is not in charge of planet earth, so he keeps reminding us.

Verse 11 goes on to say, "And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch..."

A. Two different interpretations of the star like a burning torch

There are two plausible interpretations of that falling star. One takes this as a large meteorite or a small asteroid that falls onto the mainland source of one third of Israel's waters.² That's my interpretation.

Another interpretation is that this star is a demon who falls from heaven, like the demon in chapter 9. And there are some good interpreters who take it that way. In one sense it doesn't matter which of those two viewpoints you take, because either way it points to the fall of the family of Ananas that had exercised a tight-fisted rule over Israel since the time of Jesus. If the falling star was a demon, it spells the end of *his* influence over that mafioso-type family. If it was a meteorite (as I believe) it *symbolizes* the fall of Matthias the grandson or of the whole house from the priesthood, and perhaps of the demonic influence behind him. But let's examine each possibility.

² Stuart Moses says, "The image is taken from the blazing meteors, which often appear in the atmosphere, and which do actually fall upon the earth." Moses Stuart, [*Commentary on the Apocalypse, volume two*](#) (New York: Van Nostrand & Terrett, 1851), p. 184. Mounce says, "The burning star that falls from the sky may be a great meteorite set afire as it plunges through the earth's atmosphere." Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), p. 180.

A fallen angel?

The interpretation that says this was the demonic angel behind the high-priestly mafioso family comes from chapter 9. Let's read verses 1-2.

9:1 So the fifth angel trumpeted, and I saw a 'star' that had fallen out of the sky to the earth. And to him was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. 2 So he opened the shaft of the Abyss and smoke went up out of the shaft, like the smoke of a burning furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke from the shaft.

This star was clearly a personal being, and most believe it was a fallen angel. This fallen angel in turn unleashes millions of demons from the pit. So the star in chapter 9 is a demon. Angels are called Morning Stars in Job 38:7. So the argument is that if the star in chapter 9 is a fallen angel, then the star in this verse should also be seen as a fallen angel.

The second argument is that this star has a name - Wormwood. They say that it would be odd to name a meteorite or an asteroid, but it would not be odd to name a personal being.

And on the surface that theory makes sense. If you want to run with it, it won't change the way it points to the end of the brutal regime of the Sadducees.

A Meteorite?

Evidence for and against a meteorite

But let me give you several reasons why I and many commentaries are not convinced that this is a demon. And these commentaries that I agree with are Premil, Amil, and Postmil. I think the evidence strongly favors a literal meteorite.

First, the star in chapter 8:10 falls in AD 66. I think the Greek grammar is quite clear that this fall is the next thing that happens after the second trumpet. Well, that messes up just about anyone's timing of the fall of demons. It doesn't fit the sequence if it is a demon.

The same is not true of the star that falls in chapter 9. The New King James is not real clear, but the word for "had fallen" in chapter 9 is in the perfect tense, indicating that there was a previous fall with a continued state of being fallen. In other words, the fall did not happen in AD 66. It had happened long before. When did the fall of demons happen? There are two options - 1) you could say that they fell *spiritually* in Genesis 3, 2) or you could say that they were cast out of heaven *physically* in chapter 6:12-16.

But the Scripture knows of no other falls. There was a spiritual fall in Genesis 3 and there was a physical fall from heaven in May of 66.

Well, those facts completely rule out the third trumpet describing the same fall as the fifth trumpet. Whatever thing falls in the third trumpet falls no earlier than late September and no later than November of AD 66. That doesn't make any sense if it is a demon. To say that any angels fall from grace in AD 66 is a theological error. To say that they were cast out of heaven sometimes between September and November is a timing error, because that happened in chapter 6. I think that is a very strong argument against this being a demon.

Second, though chapter 9 does refer to a demon as a fallen star, the more immediate context of an asteroid in the second trumpet (which is the verse right before) and the literal stars in the fourth trumpet (which comes immediately afterwards) are a closer context. So the immediate context actually argues in favor of a meteorite, not against it. And this is especially the case when the description is so similar to the asteroid in verse 8.

Third, in the third trumpet, the star's fall onto the waters is what makes the waters polluted. That doesn't make sense if it was referring to either the spiritual fall of demons or the casting of demons out of heaven. It *falls* onto the waters and its *fall* pollutes the waters. That argues much more naturally in favor of a meteorite. It's not just that an already fallen demon messes around with the water and gets it poisoned. No - the poisoning seems to be synchronized with the fall.

But what about the name Wormwood? Doesn't that indicate that it is a person? Not necessarily. Psalm 147:4 says that God has numbered and named every star. And since the word for "star" can refer to suns, planets, comets, and meteorites, that means that God names all meteorites. Isaiah 40:26 says that he not only numbers stars but also all the created things of the heavens and calls them all by name; not one is missing. So those are two explicit references to God naming even asteroids and meteorites. NASA has numbered and named every rock that they can be seen in space, so why can't God?

But let's turn their argument around. Verse 11 says, "The name of the star is called Wormwood." The Greek word for "called" is in the present tense. While John was writing and before the star had fallen, the star had the name Wormwood. It didn't get the name wormwood after it poisoned these waters. So let's think about that. It doesn't make sense to say that the angel had the name Wormwood before his spiritual fall into sin. Why would God name

him something evil before he has fallen? But what about before his being cast out of heaven? While it is *possible* that a demon was named Wormwood because he had one role in life - to pollute waters in AD 66, it seems very unlikely that he would be named after one event in his 4000 year-old life. If it was a demon, he has been around since Genesis. Is it likely he would be named after this event in AD 66? It doesn't seem likely to me. But it is not at all hard to believe that God had prepared a poisonous meteorite whose only role in human history would be for this one event. Its whole goal was to poison these waters in precisely this measure. So God named it that so that angels would not use it for any other purpose. When earlier meteorites and asteroids were cast to the earth, the angels would know that they couldn't cast this one yet, because this one had a special purpose. Obviously that is not a definitive argument, but I think it adds weight to the previous ones.

Fifth, the waters take on the characteristic of the star. If the waters aren't literal, then I could see how they could take on the characteristic of the demon. They could be spiritually poisoned. But how do literal waters (which they clearly are) take on the characteristic of the demon? I don't know any way that they could. The star is wormwood and the waters become wormwood. So if the waters become wormwood, they are taking on some of the bitter components of the star. There appears to be a chemical transfer of properties from the star to the waters. To me that strongly leans in favor of a meteorite or small asteroid.

Sixth, many commentators point out that there is a deliberate parallel between this wormwood being thrown into the waters and making sweet waters bitter, and Moses throwing wood into the bitter waters of Marah and making bitter waters sweet. Most commentators believe it is a deliberate allusion to that event in Moses life. It's a reversal of that event. Well, if that is the case, it too argues for a *physical* object being thrown into the water. It's not a definitive argument, but it favors that interpretation. Both were literal events that symbolized something.

Seventh, the ancients frequently spoke of falling meteorites as falling stars, and such a meteorite would naturally burn like a torch as it entered earth's atmosphere. I've put a picture of one into your outline. No one argument is definitive, but I think all seven of these put together makes for a fairly water-tight case for this being a large meteorite or a small asteroid.

B. My interpretation: it was a literal meteorite that symbolized the house of Ananas cast out of the office of high priest and both Sadducee (trumpet 3) and Roman allies (Trumpet 4) being judged. Matthias (grandson of Ananus) was the last Sadducee to have the office

The literal meteorite

But let me dig into the history and show how it fits history perfectly. Though the ancient historian Dion Cassius speaks about the waters being poisoned, he doesn't know how. He just blames it on the Jews; somehow they managed to do it. But poisoning via a meteorite makes the most sense.

First, there is evidence of more than one large meteorite that fell in AD 66, so this is not at all an unreasonable interpretation. This was one of the heavenly signs that Josephus thought foreshadowed Israel's doom.

But could a meteorite or small asteroid actually poison one third of Israel's waters? A lot of people are skeptical of that. But my answer is, "Yes." There are two scenarios where this could work, and only one fits the first century evidence.

The theory that doesn't fit very well in my opinion says that the waters could be poisoned as a result of an asteroid exploding in the atmosphere and reacting with the oxygen and nitrogen in the air so as to produce prodigious amounts of nitric acid rain. And there is a Premil website that describes the scientific evidence for acid rain being produced by such an asteroid.³ It's a purely theoretical approach to this problem. But for it to have produced sufficient nitric acid to poison the waters, it would have to have been a pretty large asteroid that exploded in the air. Here's the problem: based on a similar explosion that happened in the Tunguska region of Russia in 1908, it's just not credible. That explosion flattened 770 square miles of forest and did major damage way beyond that radius. Did it produce acid rain? Yes. But such an explosion would have done more damage to Israel than the poison itself would do. So I reject that interpretation out of hand. I think it had to have been a much smaller asteroid or even a large meteorite.

The second theory is a much more targeted meteorite or small asteroid falling into one of the three aquifers of Israel and polluting just that aquifer. An aquifer is an underground body of water that you can drill down to with a well. I can't find any evidence of such an impact in two of Israel's aquifers, but there is perfect evidence that this did indeed happen to the Jordan

³ See for example, <http://www.messianic-literary.com/comet1.htm>

aquifer. That's the aquifer that Dion Cassius says was poisoned. The place of impact would have to have been the crater lake in the Golan Heights region called Lake Ram. There is a picture of it in your outlines. Scientists do not know how this crater lake was created or exactly when it was created. Some assume that it was a prehistoric volcano crater. Others assume that it was created by an underground explosion. Others think it was created by a meteorite. All seem to assume that it predates man by millions of years. We know that can't be true, since the planet is not millions of years old.

But let's assume that the lake was already there in AD 66. The key point for our purposes this morning is that its underground springs are tightly connected to the Jordan Aquifer, which represents one third of Israel's rivers and springs - exactly what the text speaks about. If a large meteorite hit the center of this lake it could do that job. There are no streams that leave the lake and only the underground springs from the aquifer feed it. So it would be the perfect spot to poison the whole Jordan Aquifer without people realizing that they now had poisoned water. And the reason for that is that this is so far north.

Now, I mentioned earlier that some attribute the poisoning of waters in AD 66 to the Roman leader, Cestius. They say that a demon (so they take the first interpretation of the star) made Cestius poison the water. That is a credible interpretation, and that may have been true, but it seems utterly inconsistent with Rome's honor code of not poisoning wells and water sources.⁴ Cestius was an old school soldier and he would not have wanted to ruin the water supplies for himself or for his local allies, like Herod Agrippa. Dion Cassius, tells us that the Romans had a hard time getting drinking water because it was poisoned. They would hardly have poisoned their own drinking water, and then complained about it.⁵ It seems it was poisoned from another source. Now, it is true that Rome did on occasion break that honor code, so I cannot be dogmatic that Cestius was not the guilty party for poisoning the northern waters as he came down from Galilee to Judea traveling the region of this aquifer. But I have read a history on chemical warfare of ancient Rome, and it sure speaks rather convincingly that Rome would not have done that - especially when Herod Agrippa was an ally who was fighting side-by-side with Cestius. He would have spoken vigorously against that tactic.

4 See Adrienne Mayor, *Greek Fire, Poison Arrows, and Scorpion Bombs: Biological and Chemical Warfare in the Ancient World*, (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2009), chapter 3.

5 [http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5212-dion-cassius?](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5212-dion-cassius?fb_comment_id=10150366776801037_24805310#f33f3d2848)
[fb_comment_id=10150366776801037_24805310#f33f3d2848](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5212-dion-cassius?fb_comment_id=10150366776801037_24805310#f33f3d2848)

So let's assume for a moment that this was just caused by a meteorite. Can meteorites poison waters? And the answer again is a definite yes. I'll just use the 2007 meteorite that fell in Peru as one example that has been studied by a number of scientists. It's called the Carancas impact event. I've put a picture of that into your outlines. Articles have been written about it by National Geographic,⁶ the meteorological society,⁷ wikipedia,⁸ the Associated Press, and other organizations.⁹ So there is a lot of information on it. Let me summarize what happened.

A meteorite was spotted blazing its way across the sky and landing in the Carancas region of Peru. The descriptions sound just like verse 10. I have many pictures of meteorites that look like a torch moving across the sky with a smoky trail behind it. The crater that was formed was only 15 feet deep and 43 feet wide, so it was a very small object on a very shallow trajectory. Yet despite its small size, it poisoned the underground water for the whole region. And it actually poisoned people who breathed in the fumes. Numerous people visited the crater and saw underground water boiling from the heat of the meteorite. The fumes that came off had a foul odor, and people in the region immediately got headaches, started vomiting, and developed skin lesions and other serious ailments. 600 villagers in that remote region got sick. Animals lost their appetites and bled through their noses, and many of the animals died. All the underground water sources were contaminated, and authorities considered declaring a state of emergency. So can a meteorite poison the water? Yes. The Carancas impact is a well-documented example. And I am giving this kind of background evidence because there are skeptics out there who say that meteorites cannot poison water. And I say, "No, they can. There is a great deal of evidence that they can."

But the unusual geography of Lake Ram makes it perfect for instantly contaminating all of the underground springs and streams that are connected to the Jordan aquifer. Yet the damage would be isolated to that aquifer alone, and because of the nature of the chemical reaction, this would not be a long-term poisoning.

As I mentioned, Dion Cassius blamed the Jews, but this passage seems to indicate that Jesus had His third angel guide a meteorite that had been

6 http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2007/09/070921-meteor-peru_2.html

7 <http://www.lpi.usra.edu/meteor/index.php?code=45817>

8 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2007_Carancas_impact_event

9 For example,

https://web.archive.org/web/20070929230315/http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5isWWHSxCh_u0yUNU9Gpk1qfg996A <http://www.browndailyherald.com/2008/04/04/professor-solves-a-meteor-mystery/>

reserved for this very day so that it would come burning through the atmosphere like a giant torch and hit the water of Lake Ram, penetrate the aquifers, boil the water, with the heat releasing poisons that at least for a time would poison anyone who drank the water. Granted, no one else has come up with this or any other solution, but I think it is *the perfect* explanation that explains every detail of the passage.

What was symbolized

So that was the literal event. But what did it symbolize?

Wormwood was a symbol of God's judgment on apostasy (Deut. 29:18; Prov. 5:4; Jer. 9:15; 23:15; Lam. 3:15, 19; Amos 5:7)

Wormwood was a symbol of God's judgment on apostasy. Apostasy means falling from the true faith. So this would make Israel as the main focus of this trumpet. Now it is true that Roman soldiers got poisoned too. All of these trumpets negatively impacted both nations. But what is the focus? Rome did not apostatize from the faith; Israel did. And even Dispensationalists like Walvoord admit that every one of the six times that this term "wormwood" is used in the bible, it is always used as a symbol of God's judgment on apostasy.¹⁰ So we are going to be looking for a fulfillment of something related to apostasy in Israel. The name "Wormwood" would indicate that. That is one of several clues of what kind of historical figure we are looking for.

Since a star is a symbol of an important leader or dynasty (Gen. 37:9; Numb. 24:17; Dan. 8:10; 12:3; Jude 13; Rev. 1:20; 22:16), the fall of a star represents the death of an important individual or the end of his dynasty. Stars symbolize religious leaders - in this case the high priesthood.

What about the star? There is general agreement among commentaries that a star represents an important leader, whether civil or religious. Albert Barnes would be one who thinks that it refers to a political leader, though he offers no Biblical proof. He says,

A star is a natural emblem of a prince, of a ruler, of one distinguished by rank or by talent... A star falling from heaven would be a natural symbol of one who had left a higher station, or of one whose character and course would be like a meteor shooting through the sky.¹¹

¹⁰ He said, "The star was named Wormwood. Wormwood is a bitter desert plant mentioned only here in the New Testament. It is mentioned seven times in the Old Testament where it represents sorrow and bitter judgment (Deut. 29:18; Prov. 5:4; Jer. 9:15; 23:15; Lam. 3:15, 19; Amos 5:7)." John F. Walvoord, "Revelation," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 952.

¹¹ Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament: Revelation*, ed. Robert Frew (London: Blackie & Son,

And he arbitrarily applies it to Attila the Hun. But I think Matthew Henry, the Geneva Bible, and several other commentaries are more accurate in pointing out that stars always pointed to religious leaders. In Jude they point to apostate false prophets. In Revelation 1:20 they point to pastors. In Numbers 24 it points to the Messiah.

And there is abundant evidence that the Jews had two symbols for the Messiah. Because they rejected Jesus, the unbelieving Jews saw two Messiahs - a political Messiah represented by a scepter and there was a high priestly Messiah (that they thought was Aaronic) represented by the star of Numbers 24:17. Of course, Christians saw Jesus as fulfilling both the kingly and the priestly offices in one person. But this star is not a reference to Jesus. It is a reference to a false messianic leader who illegitimately was holding to the office of high priest.

Now, since the chronology of Revelation boxes us in to the months of September to November of AD 66 for a fulfillment, I believe it narrows the field down to one interpretation: the family of Ananus got cast out of the office of high priest in the Fall of 66. And anyone who lived in the first century would have immediately thought of this high priestly family when they saw a person being symbolized by a star.

Let me give you a bit of history on why this even matters and why John would refer to the star as a "great star." The Sadducees were simply the descendants of Zadok, the first high priest to serve in the temple of Solomon. Initially there was nothing unusual or bad about the Sadducees. They were the high priests. But the Sadducees became corrupted about a century before Christ was born and began to steal temple money to enrich themselves and to control politics. It is hard to overestimate the corruption and power of the high priests in the decades leading up to the birth of Jesus and in the 70 years that followed. But where previous generations of this mafioso family were wealthy and powerful, the household of Ananas and Caiaphas had a stranglehold on the politics of the nation. One author said that the family of Ananas was more powerful than the mafia bosses of Russia and Sicily - and that is saying a lot. The wealth that this family siphoned out of the temple was enormous since multiplied trillions of dollars worth of gold and silver flowed through the temple. I told you before about how Caiaphas made a monopoly for temple sacrifices and for money changing. But he also started the process of selling the same lamb or bull to thousands of clients. If you brought a bull, you might think that your bull was being burned, but they would bring it around to the bull pens and sell it again. If you were

1884–1885), 203.

suspicious and insisted on seeing it, you would get beaten by the priests who were the Pharsees' enforcers. He increased his profits by a 1000-fold. By the time we get to AD 66 that family consisted of numerous (what we might call today) billionaires.

Ananas and his family used bribes to buy off opposition, and sometimes the bribes amounted to millions. One bribe in April of AD 66 was eight talents of gold. How much was that? Well, according to the Jewish Encyclopedia, the heavy common talent of the first century was 58.9 kilograms, or 130 lbs.¹² That makes for 2,080 oz per talent. Thus 8 talents was 16,640 ounces of gold. At this past Tuesday's price for gold of \$1,322.90 that amounts to a bribe of \$22,013,056.¹³ That's a pretty sizable bribe. But it wasn't enough for Florus. Bribe money had been flowing so fast and furious that Florus knew that there was plenty more to be had, so he demanded an additional 17 talents of gold. In today's dollars that amounted to a brazen demand of almost 47 million more dollars (\$46,777,774) from the temple coffers.

The high priests weren't too thrilled with the fact that Florus was asserting control rather than continuing to be manipulated, so they began maneuvering behind the scenes to remove Florus from office - and they had connections in Rome. They were the ones who got him appointed in the first place. Money flowed in all directions. They had connections everywhere.

But those two examples of bribery at least give you a tiny hint of the enormous wealth of this high priestly family. We will have much more to say about them in the second half of the book, because, as we will see, they controlled the banking cartels of Rome, and with that control had enormous influence over the emperors. So we are not talking about a petty person falling out of office. God symbolizes him as being a great star or a great light. We are talking about an enormous blow to the Jewish mafioso.

But to see how this language would have instantly and powerfully connected the high priesthood with this symbol in the minds of the people, let me tell you about when the Sadducees first co-opted the Star symbol as their own symbol. The Sadducees and Pharisees had both been at each others throats for control of the nation for at least one hundred years before Christ. The Sadducean mafia family started with Alexander Jannaeus, who lived from 103 BC to 76 BC. He was the first high priest to also claim to be king of the nation. Well, the Pharisees said that this was unlawful and no one but a descendant of David could be a king, so they resisted. Jannaeus won. He had

¹² <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14821-weights-and-measures#217>

¹³ 130 lbs x 16 oz = 2,080 oz. 2080 oz x 8 talents = 16,640 oz. 16,640 x \$1,322.90/oz = 22,013,056.

800 Pharisaic leaders crucified, and while they were hanging on the crosses he made them watch their wives and children have their throats slit one by one. And just to show you how demonically hardened this man was, he watched this slow slaughter for entertainment *while he ate at a banquet with his his concubines*. He was a ruthless and vicious leader.

Nevertheless, he usually had a facade of spirituality. He pretended to be the spiritual leader of Israel who had Israel's best interests in mind. He minted a coin that had a star surrounded by a diadem, and made the claim that he was the Messianic fulfillment of the Star prophecy in Numbers 24.¹⁴ So the star on that coin represents his high priesthood and the diadem represents his kingly office.¹⁵

From that time on the Sadducees entrenched their power in every way possible. They lost the ability to call themselves kings, but they used the high priesthood to at least control kings like Herod and Festus and others. They used the vast wealth of the temple to hire hit men, to hire priests to be their police-enforcers (and they regularly beat people who didn't cooperate), to blackmail, to bribe, and to influence. And they were incredibly effective. They got away with literal murder. Josephus gives fascinating accounts of various ways that the high priests would either intimidate or bribe opposition. If that didn't work, they would hire servants to assassinate them. It is a sordid tale. And the family of Ananas had perfected the power of this mafioso family to a high degree. Ananas (who was sometimes called Annas or Ananias) was feared by everyone. His network of spies was huge. His financial empire was huge. His ability to assassinate opposition was well-known. Jesus was first tried before Ananas (John 18:19-23) and then before his son-in-law, Caiaphas (John 18:24), whom Rome had put into the high priesthood in AD 18. And previous high priests retained the title of the high

14 The University of the Holy Land has an article that shows how the Star of David concept was coopted by the Sadducees. <http://www.uhl.ac/en/resources/blog/sabbatical-year-coins-alexander-jannaues/> Wikipedia says, "The most likely explanation is that the symbol is a star encased in a diadem and it is a religious explanation. Biblical law forbids the making of graven images (especially see Deuteronomy 4:16,23), yet the image of a monarch is a staple of Hellenistic coins. In place of an image of himself, therefore, it is likely that Alexander Jannaeus chose a star, in keeping with Numbers 24:17, "A star rises from Jacob, a scepter comes forth from Israel." This verse generally was seen as a biblical support for monarchy (and specifically as support for a Davidic monarchy). Jannaeus, however, could have seen it as an image of his achievements, if not his own rule. This is how the rest of Numbers 24:17 and verses 18 and 19 continue: The star, it says, "smashes the brow of Moab, the foundation of all children of Seth. Edom becomes a possession, yea, Seir a possession of its enemies; but Israel is triumphant. A victor issues from Jacob to wipe out what is left of Ir." Considering Jannaeus' conquests—creating a kingdom that rivaled those of David and Solomon and may have even exceeded those—the "star" envisioned in the prophecy of Balaam in Numbers was a perfect match for him." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Jannaeus

15 See FLUSSER, D. "Two Notes on the Midrash on 2 Sam. Vii." *Israel Exploration Journal* 9, no. 2 (1959): 99-109. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27924774>.

priest as the Gospel of John shows so well.

And I should point out that Rome appointed all of the high priests of the temple. These judgments on Israel were in part because Israel had gotten into bed with Rome. And when Rome would get frustrated with their criminal activity and intervention in Roman politics (which, yes, they were very much involved in it), occasionally a high priest would get deposed. For example, the procurator Gratus deposed Ananus in AD 15. It appears that he was slapped down by the higher-ups because he immediately put Ananus' son Eleazar into office. Why did he appoint his son instead of some other family of the Sadducees? Because there was money. It didn't seem to matter how many times a mafioso family member would get deposed, money still talked, and another family member would be put into that position. But behind the scenes constantly lay the hand of the Godfather mafioso, Ananas. One author said,

Through Ananus the Elder and five sons, Eleazar, Jonathan, Theophilus, Mattathias, Ananus, one son-in-law, Joseph Caiphas, and one grandson, Mattathias son of Theophilus, the power of Ananus and the House of Ananus extended clear to 66 CE and the start of the revolt with Rome. It was this family, the House of Ananus that put Peter and John in prison, captured Peter and many apostles, imprisoned and flogged them. They put Stephen the deacon to death by stoning, incited King Agrippa I to behead James the brother of John, and capture to kill the Apostle Peter. Then they stoned, beat and killed James the Just the brother of Jesus who was the leader for thirty two years over the Hebrew Nazarene Ecclesia in Jerusalem.

And I am giving this background not only to show that the family was indeed powerful enough to warrant special mention here, but because you will not understand a great deal of the second half of the book if you do not understand this ruthless family.

Yet this family propagandized brilliantly to give the illusion of being the conservative protectors of the nation. And the Star of Numbers was one of those propaganda symbols of nationalism and conservative patriotism and Davidic legitimacy that they constantly used. You can see it on the temple coins that I have put into your outlines. The temple coins had the star of the high priesthood on them. Even the coins minted in the Bar Kochba rebellion have a temple with a rising star over it to symbolize a desire for a restored temple and restored high priesthood. You can see the star on the twelve ossuaries that were recently discovered in Israel. A tomb was opened up and twelve ossuaries (or bone boxes) were found in the Talpiot region of Jerusalem. It is now known as the Caiaphas collection since one of the bone boxes holds the bones of Caiaphas the high priest and another one has a

relative of Caiaphas the high priest. They were all in the same tomb, and they all appear to be the ossuaries pertaining to one high priestly family. But for our purposes here, they are decorated with a star, the symbol of the high priesthood in Israel. They claimed to be David's star rising, and God is saying, "No way. This star is going down in flames."

16

I will try to put the pictures of all of these stars up onto the website. But I think the first thing that would come into the Jewish reader's mind when he read these verses would have been this mafioso family. Matthias, the grandson of Ananas was the last high priest who actually came from high priestly lineage. His fall from office in AD 66 did not end the influence of this family, but it ended their high priesthood and their ability to rob money from the temple.¹⁷ When there were complaints that the temple needed a high priest, the revolutionaries mocked the Sadducees by placing a common peasant into the position, a man who didn't have a clue about how to do anything in the temple. His name was Phanneas ben Samuel. Josephus said that it was the greatest insult that the revolutionaries could have made because it was a deliberate violation of Biblical law, a deliberate rejection of the mafioso, a rejection of the aristocracy in favor of the common man, and a declaration of independence (since Rome did not appoint Phanneas, unlike the previous high priests). The evidence fits perfectly.

16 The inscription on Miriam burial box is "Miriam Daughter of Yeshua Son of Caiaphas, Priests of Ma'aziah from Beth Imri." It has been rigorously tested and found to be authentic. See for example, <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/08/110829142513.htm> See James C. VanderKam, *From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests After the Exile*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004) <http://amzn.to/2ad3jAs>

17 If, as Ed Stevens claims, Matthias was not deposed until year 70, then this would simply be a foreshadowing of that. With no contrary evidence, Steven's conclusions might seem convincing, though he acknowledges that there are some contradictions with later histories. But other scholars have come to the conclusion that Matthias no longer functioned in that office after the Fall of 66. One of the things that sometimes confuses people is that high priests continued to be called high priests even after they had left their office. Thus, the New Testament speaks of both Ananas and Caiaphas as being high priests at the time of Christ's crucifixion. One was in office, the other was not. Montagu and Graetz base their conclusions that Matthias was not in office after 67 on numismatic evidence together with evidence from Josephus of a past tense verb. Thus the coin minted was not of Matthias, but of either Eleazar or Ben Gamaliel. They say, "In the first year [of the war] only were there two men who had such authority [to mint the coins], first Eleazar, and subsequently Ben-Gamaliel." Neither of those were high priests. Montagu, H., and Graetz. "ON THE SIGNIFICATION OF THE JEWISH COINS WITH THE LULAB (PALM-BRANCHES) AND PORTAL." *The Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Numismatic Society* 8 (1888): 165-98. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42682594>. Likewise, Dan Barag and David Flusser argue that Matthias was deposed in 66 and it was not until the need for another high priest in the festivals of 67 that Phinehas (an illegitimate high priest) was appointed. BARAG, DAN, and FLUSSER DAVID. "The Ossuary of Yehohanan Granddaughter of the High Priest Theophilus." *Israel Exploration Journal* 36, no. 1/2 (1986): 39-44. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27926007>. See the discussion in James C. VanderKam, *From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests After the Exile*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004) <http://amzn.to/2ad3jAs>

Where the Mediterranean is a symbol of the nations (Rev. 17:15; cf. Dan. 7:2; Is. 17:12,13; Ezek. 26:3,5), the streams and springs represent the factions of the people of Israel (Ps. 87:7; 126:4; Is. 58:11). When the family of Ananas fell from power they controlled one of three factions in Jerusalem, poisoning them with hatred for the other two factions, and resulting in the death of many.

But I want you to notice that the star poisons the waters after it falls. This shows that there was a continuing influence of the mafioso family after it fell from office, and this continuing influence was felt under the leadership of Eleazar.

What do the waters symbolize? Well, it depends on which waters. When Isaiah, Daniel, and Revelation speak of the Great Sea or the Mediterranean, the waters represent all the Gentile nations. But streams or springs are much less, and Scripture presents streams and springs as representing groupings of people within Israel. And specifically this mafioso family would control one third of the people. Verse 11 says that "a third of the waters were turned into wormwood." Obviously it is referring to a third of the literal waters, but those stand for a third of the people. So the outline summarizes by saying, "When the family of Ananas fell from power they controlled one of three factions in Jerusalem, poisoning them with hatred for the other two factions, and resulting in the death of many."

Though no member of Ananas' family remained in office, this mafioso family did everything in its power to regain control of Jerusalem. Of course, the other two factions didn't want to release their power, so they fought each other and killed many in the process. In fact, Josephus claims that these factions killed more Jews than the Romans did. It was a disaster. But I think that anyone who had lived through these times would have not only instantly recognized who these verses were symbolizing, but would have found tremendous comfort in what they taught.

III. Conclusion

And that is what I want to conclude with - the practical take-homes that would have been comforting for the first-century readers. I have already mentioned the comfort of God's sovereignty. We need not fear Satan. I've already mentioned God's patience in discipline. We can learn from that.

But there are three additional take-homes I want you to think about. The first is that you aren't the first generation to face corruption in national politics. You might complain about how both the Republican and Democratic conventions seem to be manipulated and controlled and bought off and/or

blackmailed. But if you read the history of first century Jewish politics you will realize that it was pretty bad back then too. Satan goes after the robes of power and he seeks to use those robes to cause trouble for the church. And we need to be looking at politics with spiritual eyes. And we need to realize that so many Christians fall into line with the Jezebel spirit when they try to manipulate voting through pragmatism. It seems to be the spirit of the age.

When first century Jews got frustrated with the Roman procurator (who had indeed been tremendously tyrannical and murderous) they turned to a hot headed Eleazar who was a rash young son of a high priest who made speeches of freedom and making Israel great again that resonated with the people. And many followed him. When *he* acted tyrannically, many people switched allegiance to others like John of Gischala, or Menahem. Menahem was an interesting character. He was not an establishment politician. He didn't have any connections whatsoever with the establishment. And what he boldly said against the establishment Sadducees resonated with people, just like non-establishment Trump's critiques of the establishment resonate with people today. He was a commoner who fought against the Roman sympathizers for liberty and distinguished himself as a "politician for the common people." But when he became a pompous king who surrounded himself with bullies, people got frustrated. And when he killed the high priest Ananias the younger without a trial, he was killed by Eleazar, Ananias' son, who was a part of the establishment. Then other politicians arose who made promises. It finally settled into three main factions, but all of them had their own corrupt reasons for fighting for power. Nothing is new under the sun.

The second thing that I have as a taken-home is that none of these men was their savior. Saviors turn into devils when they get enough power. What's the old maxim? "Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely." You read Josephus' description of these days and you could not have a better maxim to describe their situation. Each political deliverer ended up creating more trouble for Israel. And the second half of the book will show why - they were unbelievers who were totally under the thumb of Satan. Scripture warns us today as it did back then, "Do not put your trust in princes." Whether you sided with Eleazar (the establishment), or with John of Gischala (a breakaway) or with Menahem (the politician of the people) you got burned. And back then you deserved to be burned if you were trying to decide which one was the lesser of three evils you would side with because none of them were qualified to rule. Christians didn't support any of the three.

Third, God knows how to use humanism against humanism to destroy

humanism's pretensions. We don't have to side with a milder version of humanism to watch them destroy each other. This book calls us to be faithful to God in politics and watch Him deal with the Messianic state in His own way. And that Jesus *is indeed* involved in frustrating politicians can be seen from the fact that He opened the seventh seal which unleashed the trumpets of the angels. And each angel stands for an angelic leader of spiritual armies. When the third angel sounds his trumpet in verse 10, he starts a chain reaction of events in nature and in human relations that will ultimately serve God's purposes. These are events that no one human can control, but they are perfectly under the control of God and His angels. And that should comfort us.

We live in a time when politicians promise to be the Star of David. They promise to fix America and make it great again. I And if your only guiding principle is pragmatic outcome, you can justify voting for any of them. But the Bible gives absolute minimum qualifications for candidates. It's not perfectionistic. God approved of people who did not meet the ideal qualifications. But God never approves of support for any candidate who does not meet the minimum. God says in 2 Samuel 23:3, "He who rules among men must be just, ruling in the fear of God."

Nothing is new under the sun. And it is important that we not get frustrated and fearful with modern politics. For sure, don't stoop to voting for the lesser of two evils. If they are evil, turn them over to God for judgment, but make sure that you vote with integrity and live before God with integrity. We can hardly complain to God about the compromises of politicians if our own political votes are compromised. By doing that we are modeling to the politicians that it is OK to violate the constitution - even Christian voters do it. They vote for people who fully intend to perjure themselves and violate the constitution.

This passage gives us comfort that we can be faithful and trust God to handle those who are not faithful. God can make the political cronies of DC, of our State, and of our county fall like a blazing star. And it is my prayer that Christians will have the worldview and the courage to stand in the gap when that happens. May it be so Lord Jesus. Amen.