

Article of the Month

July, 2020

Four Angels and the Corona Virus

It would, indeed, be neglectful if we were to ignore the present pandemic and its effects. But we would be equally irresponsible if we were to speculate wildly and to issue emotional but undocumented conclusions about what is happening. We are living in spectacular times! But spectacular times, more than any others, require cool heads and rational examinations of what is happening.

We are students of prophecy. We are not prophets. Many of us have been following the slowly unfolding events of the last century, carefully comparing them against Biblical prophecy. Indeed, many of us have “chafed at the bit” as we have seen how slowly the end-of-the-age events have progressed. Our human time-clocks are rarely coordinated with the schedule determined by our Lord. But now things seem to be escalating. This can only be good news. However, we must not hastily conclude that we now know exactly what is happening or when it is to happen. After all, the Harvest period of the Gospel Age is now about 146 years old. This is not to say that it will or will not progress for some time yet — even though we think the Peaceable Kingdom is markedly near.

Among other things, prophecy has shown us a “window of time” in which to expect the Peaceable Kingdom. That window is shown in the Lord’s parable about the Fig Tree (symbolizing the land of Israel) in Matthew 24:32-36. So we are not being wildly speculative when we have confidence that we are approaching the wonderful climax of prophetic things.

Already, during this “wrapping up” of the Gospel Age which we call “The Harvest,” we have seen a Spanish Flu pandemic for a few years following the First World War; and we have seen a Polio pandemic beginning about the same time but remaining rampant until the 1950s. Thus we see that pandemics are not a proof of anything.

But today’s pandemic is a little bit different. When it appeared only a few months ago, and when it began its frighteningly fast spread, many were understandably focused on IT as the event. Please do not misunderstand. IT IS a frightful event! And it is consuming the livelihoods — if not the lives — of a vast number of people. We cannot help but have sympathy for all experiencing the pain which it is causing.

However, there is something larger coming out of this pandemic. As if the pandemic were not a large enough problem, its indirect EFFECTS are, perhaps, what will be changing the world more dramatically than the disease.

FOUR SPECIAL “ANGELS”

Those who are students of prophecy have come to realize that “angels” in prophetic contexts are rarely spirit beings. As the matter of fact, “angel” should probably NOT be translated “angel” at all. The word means “*messenger*.” And anyone or any thing that delivers a message to us is, by Biblical definition, an “angel.” Thus, “angels” can be spirit beings, men, donkeys, inanimate things, or truths. This distinction and understanding must be had before certain prophecies can be understood by us.

We do not wish here to explain all of the detail of how the following conclusions were reached. That would take a small book. But we do wish to draw attention to a group of “four angels” in prophecy which help us to evaluate the place of the Corona-Virus in its relationship to mankind’s current experiences and soon-to-be experiences.

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In the days of Martin Luther, the likely 6th “angel” to the Christian Church (Revelation 1:20; 3:7), we find in Revelation 9:13-15 a prophecy regarding how Luther’s message released “four angels” bound in the great river, Euphrates. This is a highly symbolic passage. But our understanding of it is this:

1. The Roman church is given the symbolic name of “Babylon” in prophecy (Revelation 17:5). In the literal city which had this name, the river Euphrates was an important factor. It flowed through the city, supporting its commerce, its protection, even its very ability to exist. Indeed, King Cyrus put an end to Babylon’s empire by drying up the river bed of the Euphrates. Thus, in the Revelation prophecies, the waters of the river symbolize the peoples who support the system. During the “Dark Ages,” when the Roman Catholic Church was virtually the ONLY religious authority in Europe, the people’s support of the social-political-economic-religious monolith guaranteed that the system could be perpetuated.
2. When the great Reformation came along due to the heroic stance of Martin Luther, the Roman church finally found a formidable opponent. Europe would never again be the same. The “Protestant Reformation” was in no sense only religious! It freed much of Europe from its political structure, its economic practices, and its social standards in addition to its religious practices. THIS seems to be the symbolism in Revelation 9:13-15. The “four angels” (the standardized messages or practices of religion, social norms, economics, and politics) were suddenly RELEASED from the control of the old “Euphrates” in which they had been held captive for hundreds of years. They were all, consequently, free to function differently — which they did, and which they have done ever since. But they are still the factors which govern and hold together the lives of men. The Kingdom of God will not be able to function until this old way of doing things disappears.

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3. According to the context of Revelation 9, these “angels” were released most particularly for the effect they would eventually have at a particular “hour and day and month and year.” (Verse 15) Studies of these time symbols point to the period of the French Revolution — an event which perhaps, even as dramatically as the Reformation, changed the world.

This description is given under the symbolisms of the “6th Trumpet.” Martin Luther was the “angel” of the 6th Church (“Philadelphia”). But under the symbolism of the “6th Seal” (Revelation 6:12-17 and Chapter 7), we get information which brings us down to our own day.

(Just as a matter of information: The Churches, Seals, and Trumpets of Revelation are all contemporaneous with each other. Thus, for instance, the 1st Church, Seal, and Trumpet all refer to events from Pentecost to A.D. 70 — the fall of Jerusalem. Thus, also, the 6th Church, Seal, and Trumpet all refer to the period begun under Luther in 1521, and they extend to the time of Jesus’ return.)

4. The great “earthquake” of Revelation 6:12-17 is the French Revolution which ended in 1799. When Chapter 7 begins, it describes a REACTION COMMAND given as the result of the Revolution. Jesus did not want this revolutionary trouble to spread all over Christianity until he had completed his Church. Thus he commands, “Do not harm...until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God in their foreheads. And...the number of those who were [eventually] sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand.” (Verses 3 and 4) These 144,000 are not sealed until we have gone through the 7th period of Church history. But THAT is the point of this passage. The passage demands of these “four angels” that they NOT allow things to fall apart until the Church is completed. As a result, this passage in Revelation 7 covers a long span of time — from 1799 into our day.

THE CORONA VIRUS’ EFFECT ON THE “FOUR ANGELS”

We can now look at some exciting detail from Revelation 7. In Revelation 7:1, we see these “four angels” (political, social, economic, and religious forces) “standing at the four corners of the earth.” “Standing” is a symbol of controlling. Four is a symbol of universality. Even outside of Biblical symbolism, we see that terms like “four corners of the earth” or “four points of the compass,” etc., are used to symbolize the totality of the world. These “angels,” as we have seen, DO, indeed, control all of earth’s affairs. In this verse, they are “holding back the four winds of the earth.” Winds are a symbol of strife — a very apt symbol as we have seen the destructive nature of storm winds, tornados, and hurricanes.

This “holding back” is, of course, exactly what the Lord wants. He wants destruction of the earth’s fabric to await the completion of the Church. Jesus is the “angel” of verse 2. He acknowledges that these “four angels” DO HAVE THE POWER and WILL HAVE THE FUNCTION of “harming” earth’s component parts. In other words, Jesus knows

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that the power of politics, religion, economics, and society can and will, once they strive with one another, destroy the old order of things.

But this destructive power must not be allowed until the Church is completed. That is WHY Jesus gives the command in verse 3 that we have already considered. It is an order to earth's functional factors to "hold it together" until Jesus gives the "okay" to let it all loose. It is comforting to know that earth's problems are measured and controlled by the Lord.

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This now brings us to the Corona Virus. As we have mentioned, it is a bad enough plague in itself. But its RESULTS seem to be the more important factor. The Corona pandemic has stimulated unusually dramatic events in at least three out of the four "angels." We are not suggesting that the winds have been let loose! We are merely suggesting that these four winds are beginning to be agitated — a sort of preparatory step to their loosing. Consider each of them:

ECONOMICS. Perhaps the first and most obvious effect of the pandemic is that it immediately caused widespread failures in the economy. People are losing jobs — or at least being temporarily furloughed from them. Companies and shops which have existed "for ages" are going out of business. International corporations and trade are all being affected. Enormous governmental expenditures are being made to combat the problem — only to lead to national debts which seem to have no prospect for repayment. And we are speaking world-wide — not just the United States.

POLITICS. An already fractured cooperation level between political parties has been magnified by the attempts to handle the problems of the virus. Agreement seems a thing never again to be regained. It seems so illogical that a world-wide disease wouldn't bring increased cooperation for its destruction. But, instead, it is bringing fracturing of political thought. Politics cannot survive a lack of civility.

SOCIAL CONCERNS. This is a big one! Society and its practices are usually more or less stable. But the economic concerns and political strife are having their effects on society. The inability of the population to cope with the stresses is manifesting itself by the breakdown of manners, cooperation, trust, and even mental health. People are losing nearly all trust in their institutions. This is actually pictured in the symbolism of Revelation 16:12 where, again, this river Euphrates (representing the people who support the system) dries up — that is, the people withdraw their support from their own institutions. But mankind is not yet giving up. He still hopes to reform. So, current lack of faith in institutions is only a precursor to totally giving up on the current order of things.

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An additional effect of the virus isolation orders is that education has been affected. Millions of students from grade school through the graduate college level are finding their educations, at the very least, changed. This can only have some sort of dramatic effect on this generation of students.

The fact that people have been sheltering for months to avoid the virus has led to a pent up frustration level. People restrained at home have had more opportunity to watch television; and, in so doing, they witnessed the George Floyd murder. We must keep in mind that these cruel murders have happened before without the current kind of reactions. But this virus has focused attention on something that has for eons needed attention. A “cooped-up” population found it exhilarating to latch on to social injustice reports in the news, and they decided to demonstrate on behalf of the “cause.” This manifested itself when June began, and cities all over the country broke down into demonstrations which, unfortunately, included the crimes of vandalism, looting, and even killings. It should be carefully noted, however, that the “demonstrations” were primarily based on opposition to the unjust treatment of minorities. THAT is an acceptable reason for the people’s demonstrating opposition to unjust social practices. And we have nothing but sympathy for the victims and disgust with the perpetrators of the injustices. This revulsion with our past is just one step in making the population ready to accept a better future — the Kingdom!

(Just a note: Saints are not authorized to participate in political and social reforms. Even though we “love righteousness and hate iniquity,” we know the answer is the soon-to-come Kingdom — NOT in our demonstrating against injustices.)

We might want to note that vandalism, looting, and even killings, while criminal and despicable, are actually a kind of “normal” over-reaction. These things are caused when ages of frustrations mount up and are released all at once. And, while we can have no sympathy with lawlessness and hurtful destruction, we must realize that the injustices of the past often result in compensating injustices in the end. (See Matthew 23:35, 36 as a Scriptural example of this.) Humanity has a hard time controlling its excesses!

Nevertheless, we should focus on the GOOD which comes out of all of this. What Abraham Lincoln called “The better angels of our nature” are being manifest. Mankind is realizing that most of us favor the improvement of our thinking. This is setting the stage for a general, but unrealized, desire for the Kingdom.

It should also be noted that George Floyd is a name now known in Europe, in Africa, and, virtually, to the uttermost parts of the earth (“the four corners of the earth”). This is not just an American awakening. The Scriptural prophecies deal with the whole earth. The pandemic is helping the whole earth “hear.”

RELIGION. This fourth “angel” is not so obviously affected by the pandemic. It is interesting, however, to note that, particularly among evangelical Christian groups,

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there has arisen a kind of persecution complex. They seem to think that government has purposely singled them out to close down their services. Of course, their closing down was only a part of an equally-administered closing of all social gatherings where people congregate in large groups in closely-spaced and enclosed areas. Thus the fourth of these “four angels” seems to be the least affected by the Corona outbreak. It remains to be seen if the involvement of religion becomes more vocal and significant as a result of virus-inspired conditions.

WHERE DO WE STAND?

We live in a world of conspiratorial theories, short tempers, failing hopes, and very real pain for many people. We see how things like the COVID-19 pandemic get all kinds of prophetic prognostications attached to them. But we like to think that the Scriptures are a careful and non-sensational guide to those who have faith.

We have offered the above assessment of the possible place of the pandemic in God’s plan for the soon establishment of His Peaceable Kingdom on earth for which Christians have so long prayed.

God uses the “wrath of man” to praise Him. Any part of that wrath that will not do good, He will restrain! (Psalm 76:10, KJV) Therefore, we need not be unduly concerned over all that is happening. The Psalm assures us that God is using it ALL for the ultimate benefit of His plans and purposes for the good of mankind.

But, assuredly, we all must have compassion for this poor groaning creation (Romans 8:22). Its hope lies in the promises of God which they yet do not know. When they do, they will proclaim, “Behold! THIS is our God! We have waited for Him!” (Isaiah 25:9) And they will break out into singing when the whole earth is quiet and is at rest. (Isaiah 14:7)
