

- Reflections on the Interpretation of Prophecy -

The "Star" in Revelation 9:1

An E-mail Question Answered

Background:

This passage is a prophecy about a "star" who is given the key to the bottomless pit, in order to bring judgment to the earth (Revelation 9:1+). The context suggests that this is not a literal "star" (as we understand the word), but that it represents a living, perhaps heavenly, being. However, from John's perspective, what he saw may have looked like a star, when at a distance... but as it came closer, it became more recognizable as a living being, perhaps dazzling in appearance. (Other heavenly beings sometimes had a bright, dazzling appearance. An example would be the angel in Matthew 28:2-3.)

Note that the value of this question/answer isn't so much the specific answer to what was asked, but the other issues which are mentioned regarding the nature of prophecy itself.

E-mail Question:

Could you tell me more about the "star" in Revelation 9:1? Is this a good or bad star?

E-mail Reply:

Basic answer.

The Bible doesn't say whether this "star" was good or bad, so technically it doesn't matter. However, it seems that most commentators, *if* they had to choose between "good" or "bad," would choose "bad." I suspect it may be due in part to the statement that the star "fell" from heaven. Some may choose "bad" because the star has to do with judgment - but I think a righteous angel/star would be willing to execute judgment against sin - obviously for a different reason than a bad angel/star would.

Note that I used the word "angel," though technically the text doesn't say the star is an angel. Other passages in Revelation may suggest this as a possible interpretation.

Issue 1: How this symbolism correlates to what will happen.

There are a couple issues related to the way we interpret this passage. First, there are probably three ways to correlate what John saw with what will someday happen in the future.

- (1) It could symbolically *represent* something that is going to happen.
- (2) It could describe the way they are *actually* going to happen.
- (3) Perhaps the event might be recognized one way from the heavenly perspective and a different way from the earthly perspective.

In two of these scenarios (the first and third), the events that happen on earth might not be recognized as involving a "star" (however we may chose to interpret the word).

Issue 2: Will it be recognized when it is fulfilled?

Another related issue is whether or not people will recognize the fulfillment *when* it occurs, or if they will only realize its fulfillment at some point *after* it has occurred. This second alternative describes what happened for most of the prophecies about Jesus' *first* coming. Even direct "literal" fulfillment of prophecy was often not recognized as being fulfilled until later... *even when Jesus told them that the fulfillment was about to happen!*

It is quite likely that some (if not many) of the things that occur at the end won't be recognized for what they are, until later.

Additional comments about the nature of prophecy.

I strongly suspect that many of the prophecies we find regarding the future *aren't* given to us for the purpose of predicting the future *before* it happens, but so that we can praise God *after* it happens. The main focus of this passage (as far as our obedience is concerned) does not hinge on our interpretation of what the star is, but on our willingness to be faithful and obedient to the true God. When this prophecy is fulfilled, only those who are faithful and obedient will qualify for having God's seal on their foreheads (verse 4).

We need to realize that faithfulness and obedience to God is something that people in *all* ages need to have, not only those who will be alive when this prophecy is fulfilled. If we're willing to be faithful to God, we will be ready for *anything* that happens, whether or not our own personal views about prophecy are correct. If we *aren't* faithful to God, our views about prophecy could be totally accurate, but it won't do us any good at the Day of Justice.

Ultimately, we can look forward to the day when all prophecy will have reached its fulfillment. Then, whatever our views and interpretations may be right now, we will see things clearly. And we will be able to look back in amazement at all that God has accomplished down through the ages.