

Wormwood (Bible)

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Wormwood (ἀψίνθιον *apsinthion* or ἄψινθος *apsinthos* in Greek) is a star or angel^[1] that appears in the Book of Revelation.

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In the Bible

Wormwood is mentioned seven times in the Hebrew Bible, always with the implication of bitterness.^[2] Although the word *wormwood* appears several times in the Old Testament, translated from the Hebrew term לענה (*la'annah*, which means "curse" in Arabic and Hebrew), its only mention in the New Testament is in the Book of Revelation: "The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water— the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter." (Rev 8:10–11)

The Greek word is believed to refer to a plant of the genus *Artemisia*, used metaphorically to mean something with a bitter taste.^[3] The English rendering "wormwood" refers to the dark green oil produced by the plant, which was used to kill intestinal worms.^[3] In the Book of Revelation, it refers to the water being turned into wormwood, i.e. made bitter.^[3]

Interpretations

Certain commentators have held that this "great star" represents one of several important figures in political or ecclesiastical history,^[4] while other Bible dictionaries and commentaries view the term as a reference to a celestial being. *A Dictionary of The Holy Bible* states, "the star called Wormwood seems to denote a mighty prince, or power of the air, the instrument, in its fall."^[5]

Historicist

Various religious groups and figures, including Seventh-day Adventists and the theologians Matthew Henry and John Gill,^[6] regard the verses of Revelation 8 as symbolic references to past events in human history. In the case of Wormwood, some historicist interpreters believe that this figure represents the army of the Huns as led by king Attila, pointing to chronological consistencies between the timeline of prophecy they have accepted and the history of the Huns' campaign in Europe.^[7] Others point to Arius, the emperor Constantine, Origen or the ascetic monk Pelagius, who denied the doctrine of Original sin.^[6]

Alternative interpretations

A number of Bible scholars consider the term *Wormwood* to be a purely symbolic representation of the bitterness that will fill the earth during troubled times, noting that the plant for which Wormwood is named, *Artemisia absinthium*, or Mugwort, *Artemisia vulgaris*, is a known Biblical metaphor for things that are unpalatably bitter.^{[8][9]} The Ukrainian language word for "wormwood" is чорнобиль or "chornobyl", the Ukrainian name of the town of Chernobyl.^[10] The Ukrainian word used in translating Revelation is полин or "polin".

In popular culture

- In Anne Brontë's "If This Be All," the speaker of the poem makes an allusion to wormwood in its sixth stanza:

*While all the good I would impart,
The feelings I would share,
Are driven backward to my heart,
And turned to wormwood there;*

- In C.S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*, a senior demon named Screwtape wrote thirty-one letters to his nephew, Wormwood, a younger and less experienced demon, who is charged with guiding a man toward "Our Father Below" (Devil / Satan) and away from "the Enemy" (God).
- The character Lebedyev in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* interprets the "Star of Wormwood" as the network of railways spread across Europe. In the *Christ Clone Trilogy* by James BeauSeigneur, Wormwood is an asteroid.
- In an episode of *Bonanza* called "The Wormwood Cup", the theme of bitterness affecting two antagonists leads to conflict.
- In the Stephen King short story *Home Delivery*, an alien object enters Earth's orbit and causes the dead to rise as zombies and attack the living; the hellish object, a meteor-sized ball made up of many writhing worms, is referred to as "Star Wormwood." Also, in *The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger*, Sylvia Pittson, the preacher-woman in the town of Tull, makes reference to the "Star Wormwood" while she speaks of Satan during a Sabbath.^[11] In another Stephen King book, *Under the Dome*, Star Wormwood is mentioned several times by Chef Bushey. Star Wormwood is also mentioned by Mother Carmody in King's short story *The Mist* and its film adaptation. Similarly, in his early novel *Carrie*, the title character recalls her religiously fanatical mother citing the name. Finally, in King's novel *Cell* (2006), a woman mentions star Wormwood when comparing the previous events in Boston to the Book of Revelation, shortly after Clay, Tom, and Alice leave the city.

- In the film *Naked*, directed by Mike Leigh, the main character, when discussing the Book of Revelation, points out that the Russian (in fact Ukrainian) word for wormwood is Chernobyl (meaning Chernobyl disaster).
- In the film *The Seventh Seal*, written and directed by Ingmar Bergman, the reading of the Book of Revelation by Karin, Block's wife, at the end of the film includes "the name of the star is called Wormwood" as the subtitle translation (Criterion Collection DVD release).
- In *The Light of Other Days* by Arthur C. Clarke and Stephen Baxter, a meteor called Wormwood is heading for our planet. In the Shadowmancer series of books by G.P. Taylor, Wormwood is a comet headed straight for London which will destroy Earth.
- In the DC Comics miniseries *Kingdom Come*, the Secretary General of the United Nations is named Wyrnwood. He calls down a nuclear strike to rid the world of all metahumans.
- The popular comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes*, by Bill Watterson, has Calvin's domineering school teacher named Miss Wormwood.
- In "Invasion of the Bane", an episode of *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, Sarah Jane Smith speaks of the star called Wormwood falling to Earth and poisoning the water. The enemy in this episode was an alien called Mrs. Wormwood.
- In the manga series *Angel Sanctuary*, the Egg of Wormwood is kept hidden in Hades, and used to summon a meteor that will wipe out one third of earth's population, the devils and those who have blasphemed against God.
- In the "Vampire the Masquerade" and "World of Darkness" role-playing game, Wormwood is the harbinger comet that heralds the Time of Judgment, which precipitates the End Times, Gehenna & Apocalypse.
- In the *Rifts* role-playing game, Wormwood is an alternate dimension, specifically a living planet which is the only accessible location within the dimension. In *Vampire the Masquerade*, Wormwood is the vampires' name for the star Nemesis as it appears in the sky, growing brighter and larger, in the events leading up to the possible end of the world in the year 2000.
- The sixth season of the American television drama *Dexter* features two antagonists known as the "Doomsday Killers", who commit bizarre ritualistic murders in the likeness of events depicted in the Book of Revelation in an attempt to bring about the end times. In the season's tenth episode, "Ricochet Rabbit", it is revealed that the Doomsday Killers have built a chemical weapon which they call Wormwood, and plan to detonate the weapon at the headquarters of the Miami Metro Police Department.
- In the *Wheel of Time* series, Padan Fain, whose evil corrupts all those who spend time with him, sometimes goes by the name Ordeith, which means "wormwood" in the Old Tongue.
- In the young adult novel series *The Fallen* Wormwood, bearing the title the Abomination of desolation, is summoned by a blind trumpeter to start the End of the World and is subsequently defeated by Aaron Corbett and his band of nephilim warriors.
- In 1998, the avant-garde musicians The Residents released the album *Wormwood: Curious Stories from the Bible*, which centers around some of the more "curious" stories told in the Bible.
- In 2002, the Southern Illinois based caustic acoustic band The Woodbox Gang released an album titled *Wormwood*.
- In 2009, the black metal band *Marduk* released an album, titled *Wormwood*.
- In 2010, the hard rock band *Fozzy* released an album titled *Chasing the Grail*. The last song on the album is titled "Wormwood", and talks about the star, and the entire Book of Revelation.
- In 2010, the deathcore band *The Acacia Strain* released an album titled *Wormwood*.
- In the TV series *Kolchak: The Night Stalker* episode "They Have Been, They Are, They Will Be..." a group of alien abduction survivors are meeting, with one of the abductees describing "The destructive star Wormwood, is not a star but a missile".

- In *Cold Days*, by Jim Butcher, "Wormwood" is the label on a jar sitting on a shelf in the hut of the fairy queens Mother Winter and Mother Summer. Other jars on the shelf include Typhos, Pox, Atermors, Choleros, and Malaros, meaning Typhus, Small Pox, The Black Death, Cholera, and Malaria.
- In 2012, Disney animated television program *Sofia the First*, Wormwood is a raven and familiar of Cedric the Sorcerer.
- In the CW TV series *Supernatural*, the Revelation passage is used in the episode "Good God, Y'all".
- The zombie movie *Wyrnwood* is named after wormwood. The connection is made clear to the audience when a character tells other people his version of wormwood.
- In the game *Chrono Trigger* Lavos initially appears as a great celestial body falling from the sky. After he falls the sweet water you had been previously able to use to heal turns bitter. This seems to be a subtle nod to wormwood.
- In the book *Soul Harvest*, Wormwood, which is presented as a comet made of rotting wood, is discovered on a collision course with Earth by the Global Community. They attempt to destroy it with a nuclear missile, but the object splits into billions of burning pieces, which float down to Earth and taint one-third of its water.
- The Folk Rock Band, The Oh Hellos, released an album in 2015 titled "Dear Wormwood" as in reference to *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis
- The Grant Lee Buffalo song *Demon Called Deception*, from their 1994 album *Mighty Joe Moon*, contains the lyric "See the birds -- they're a droppin' like a star Wormwood."

References

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4. Henry, Matthew, *Commentary on the Whole Bible Volume VI (Acts to Revelation): Revelation Chap. VIII* (<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc6.xxvii.ix.html>), Public domain, Library of Congress call no: BS490.H4, at Christian Classics Ethereal Library (<http://www.ccel.org/>)
5. Rand, W. W. (1859), *A Dictionary of the Holy Bible: for general use in the study of the scriptures; with engravings, maps, and tables*, Entry: **WORM WOOD** (https://ia301314.us.archive.org/1/items/dictionholybible00randrich/dictionholybible00randrich_djvu.txt) at Internet Archive
6. Gill, John, *Exposition of the Entire Bible*, Revelation 8:10 (<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Commentaries/GillsExpositionoftheBible/gil.cgi?book=re&chapter=008&verse=010&next=011&prev=009>) at bible.crosswalk.com (<http://bible.crosswalk.com/>)
7. Nichol, Francis D (1957), *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Volume 7, Revelation*, p. 789, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Washington, D.C.
8. Johnson, B. W. (1891), *The People's New Testament, The Revelation of John, Chapter VIII: The Seventh Seal Opened* (http://www.ccel.org/j/johnson_bw/pnt/PNT27-08.HTM) at the Christian Classics Ethereal Library (<http://www.ccel.org>)
9. Revelation (<http://bible.crosswalk.com/Commentaries/GenevaStudyBible/gen.cgi?book=re&chapter=008>) in the *Geneva Study Bible* (1599) at bible.crosswalk.com (<http://bible.crosswalk.com>)
10. [#chornobyl Gernot Katzer's Spice Pages, *Mugwort (Artemisia vulgaris L.)*], by Gernot Katzer, 4 July 2006.
11. p. 51 of the Revised edition.

External links

- Revelation 8:11 The name of the star is called Wormwood (<http://bible.cc/revelation/8-11.htm>)
- Wormwood (<http://www.biblicalproportions.com/modules/wfsection/article.php?articleid=4395>) at Biblical Proportions Bible Dictionary and Index (<http://www.biblicalproportions.com/modules/wfsection/index.php?category=22>)

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