

Trumpets 5 and 6
Revelation 9
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The closing words of Revelation 8 proclaim the coming of 3 intense times of grief yet to fall upon the earth. Chapter 9 records 2 of those times referred to as woes. The time frame continues in the first 3 ½ years of the great tribulation period. You will remember believers have been sealed to provide protection from demonic attacks even though they are experiencing persecution. The first woe begins at the sound of the fifth trumpet.

Some interpreters have suggested the 9th chapter of Revelation is the most difficult to interpret of the entire book. There are evident parallels to the Exodus account with fascinating imagery. John's explanation of what he sees in his vision is terrifying to say the least. The horror coming clear in his mind forces him to use descriptions he understands for something he has never seen before.

The sounding of the fifth seal is described by someone who could be standing on the earth. He sees a star fall from heaven and sees all the way to a bottomless pit. The identification of the star has ranged from angels to fallen angels, to Satan. The star was no doubt a physical being because he received the key to the pit. The key had been in the hands of the Lord and upon His approval that the time was in order; it was handed to this fallen star. The ancients often looked at the stars as being heavenly bodies. When the angels who followed Satan fell, they were referred to as stars. The use of the word fallen to describe his descent to earth corresponds to having once been a servant of God and now a servant of Satan.

Out of the pit came a great amount of smoke. This pit is often thought of as the place of the dead where hell bound souls remain until the final judgment when they will be cast in to the lake of fire. It is no doubt a place of torment and although the smoke is unleashed when the pit is opened, there is actually no mention of fire. From within the smoke comes a swarm of locusts. The parallel to the Exodus account is vivid. God sent the plague of locusts upon the Egyptians and their crops were destroyed. Ironically, the locusts of Revelation 9 were not given power to eat the green grass, but rather the power to torture men with the sting of a scorpion. They have only the power to torment but not the power to kill. They cannot cause pain upon those who have been sealed. This is a clear reference to the 144,000 from a previous chapter.

According to verse 6, the day will come when men will seek death and not be able to find death. This is an interesting contrast to the scene revealed concerning the martyrs who have died for their faith. The length of time when death cannot be found is recorded as being 5 years. This period would coincide with the normal lifespan of locusts. While this could be considered a literal 5 year period it could also be seen as a season. It is very clear that the time frame is limited and once again the Bible reminds the reader that God is in control of the times and the seasons.

The next 4 verses seek to describe these creatures that resemble a locust yet have the sting of a scorpion in their tails. Their preparation is complete as if they were horses adorned for battle.

The picture is of a regimen of soldiers mounted on horse in full battle attire. The appearance of crowns of gold on their heads could refer to the dress piece placed on the top of a horse's head indicating he is fully ready for battle. Their faces resembling the faces of men could be a physical feature or it could be a reference to the senses in the human face that allow him to act and react quickly to changes on the battle field. Perhaps the hair as of women refers to the beauty of a woman's hair when it is well adorned. Lion's teeth were known to be sharp and understood to be ferocious. A vision is emerging of a grand warlike creature that is a site to behold as well as to be feared.

Not only are these war creatures to be feared because of their ability to torment, but also because of their indestructibility. They are pictured with breastplates as of iron indicating the inability of man to inflict damage. The sound of their movement is also terrifying being compared to the sounds of many chariots and horses. The sting that causes men pain and torment comes from their tails and is given power for only five months.

Many explanations have been given for these creatures. Some have compared them to recent wars and nations of the time period surrounding the vision given to John. Others such as Hal Lindsay have compared this creature to modern war machines such as a Cobra attack helicopter. There may be no need of any such comparisons. These creatures are demonic according to description and may very well be something the earth has never seen before. These creatures have a king and he is called the angel of the Abyss. He has sometimes been identified as Satan. John gives his Hebrew name of Abaddon and his Greek name Apollyon. Both refer to destruction and a destroyer. This description is consistent with other descriptions of Satan when he is known as the great deceiver and destroyer. However, the angel of the abyss could very well be one of the other fallen angels. The Old Testament background for this occurrence is Joel 2:1-11. In Joel, the judgment is against Israel, in Revelation the judgment is against rebellious unbelievers.

In a continued dramatic fashion, John proclaims the truth, one woe is past yet two are yet future. The reminder is clear, judgment has come, an opportunity is at hand to repent, and without repentance, two more judgments will come. Commentators generally agree that torments are present in the current age and may be a prelude to the tribulation period. One should not conclude, however, that the current torments are on the scale of intensity as envisioned by John in the Revelation.

The Sixth Trumpet

Theatrical producers have learned to capture the attention of audiences in various ways including a change in sounds. In an outdoor amphitheater production near Canyon Texas, the producers of the show "Texas" have put together a flash of light stretching from the bottom to the top of Palo Duro Canyon with an audio recording of a violent thunderstorm to wake the audience and call their attention to the coming scene. As the will of God is played out during the tribulation period, it is the sound of trumpets from heaven that announces each scene and changes the focus of men on earth.

John sees four angels being released from the Euphrates River. The fact that these angels had been bound, again displays the sovereignty of God over all the earth including angels both those serving God and those who have fallen. The release coupled with the statement of preparation in

verse 15 indicates the perfect timing of the Lord in all things. God's judgment will not come early, it will not be late, and it will come in the perfect time of God's orderly plan upon the universe.

While the creatures of the 5th trumpet had only power to torment, the angels of the 6th have the authority and power to kill. They will exercise this authority and power to kill 1/3 of mankind. John was playing to the natural fears of 1st century Jews. Their greatest fears in relationship to powerful armies were those of armies arising from beyond the Euphrates. This river was a recognized boundary of the land given to Abraham. The Jews would have been fearful of the Assyrians and the Romans were fearful of the Parthians all coming from the region of the Euphrates. The fear for modern Americans would be armies arising from China. Two decades ago the fear was the great military power of the Russians. Even so, it is not believers who will be killed by these angels; it will be those without the seal of God,

The size of this emerging army is vast. Most English translations record the number of troops to be two hundred million. John did not count this number but it was one he heard. The interesting phenomenon connected with this number is that there were not 200 million people in the whole world when John recorded his vision. Today wide speculation points to China as a power who could produce an army of that number. This interpretation is not without its problems. The ability to raise and support an army of this magnitude across this region of the Middle East is seen as impossibility. Comparatively, the number of allied and axis forces at their peak in World War II was about 70 million.

Another interpretation of the 200 million concludes it is a number beyond counting. This symbolic interpretation is consistent with seeing this multitude as demonic hordes. Most commentators see this as a demonic attack giving power to manifest as pestilences and epidemic diseases. The fact that John heard this number as opposed to counting should not be alarming. He clearly uses all of his senses to comprehend the "Revelation" and is particularly sensitive to all that is happening around his presence.

Lindsey sees the imagery of verse 17 as some of the wonders of modern military power such as mobilized ballistic missile launchers. While this is a possibility, we must use caution when forcing modern mechanical inventions into an interpretation of visions given by the Lord. The language could again be and likely is highly symbolic. The colors of the breastplates of the riders of horses are brilliant and all connected to fire. Fire is often used as a symbol of God's judgment and purification. From the mouths of the horses come fire, smoke and brimstone. Again the major theme here is destruction through the judgments of God. Following the trumpet blast of this sixth trumpet, plagues, fires, smoke, and brimstone issue from the mouths of horses killing 1/3 of mankind. Further descriptions of the horses reveal tails that are like heads and power to kill in both the head and the tail. There is no place man can go to avoid the judgments of God.

Conclusion

After all the intensity and drama of the sounding of six trumpets, the saddest scene on earth is not the devastation and it is not the death or torment, it is the continuing attitude in men's hearts to refuse to repent. The continuing message of Scripture has been to repent and submit to the living God. It is and always has been to love God and enjoy the blessings He so bountifully

distributes on those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. Verse 20, however, illuminates the real problem with man. Man desires to worship the works of his own hands and demons. Rather than submit to God, man naturally turns to idols of gold, silver, wood, and stone. The amazing attribute of all these gods created by man is they do not even have the ability to speak. There are no creative thoughts that can discern the needs and hurts of man to offer solutions, blessings or interventions. They have no ability to hear the prayers of man. They cannot come to the aid of man because they have no power beyond the psychological deceptions man allows in his own mind. This is truly the opiate of the masses that Karl Marx assigned to all religions.

The second description of the failure of man to repent has to do with morality rather than worship. Man refuses and will refuse to repent, or turn from, murdering, sorceries, immoralities, or thefts. Each of these are direct contradictions to the Ten Commandments and speak of man's rebellion toward God and His decrees. Man will be looking for outside reasons for the devastation and refuse to believe he has brought on the calamity due to his refusal to submit to the authority of the divine. The foundations for these great sins are already at hand, the first is killing, the second is occult drug activities (the word translated sorcery is pharmakeia), rampant immorality, and thievery of all kinds. We live in a day when man's senses have been dulled to sexual sins and he can come up with all kinds of new schemes to steal from each other.

The last two verses of Revelation 9 remind the reader of God's purpose in these judgments. God is giving humanity one last chance to repent. Today man blames God and says He is unjust yet man refuses to hear Him speak and heed His continued pronouncement of warnings. He has sent the prophets and He has sent the judges. Today He has sent His Son and commissioned the church to preach the good news. Even so, man refuses to hear and in the great tribulation his rebellious refusing nature will be magnified and easily seen by those who believe in Christ.