The Book of Revelation

Zanesville, OH | Wednesday/Sunday Bible Study

**Chapter 9**

* **9:1-12– Fifth Trumpet (First Woe): Merciless Torment of God’s Enemies**
  + The first four trumpets pertain to judgment inflicted on nature and the cosmos which incite major consequences and fear among the inhabitants of the earth. Only six verses are used to describe the first four trumpet judgments. 21 verses are used in chapter 9 to describe the fifth and sixth trumpets whose judgments directly affect mankind.
  + **Verse 1**– As the fifth trumpet is sounded, John observes a star which had fallen from heaven to the earth (cf. Isa. 14:12; Lk. 10:18; Rev. 12:4). Several seek to identify this star as a fallen angel or perhaps Satan himself but it is most likely representative of a divine agent executing the will of God (cf. 8:10-11).
  + This star is personified as opposed to the star called wormwood in 8:10-11. This star is given a key to a bottomless pit. Some group this pit or abyss along with Hades and/or Hell or the place where evil spirits are confined by God (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 1:6).
  + **Verse 2**– The abyss is opened up releasing a dense smoke which darkens the air and the sun. This continues the idea of judgment previously mentioned (6:12; 8:12; cf. Isa. 13:10). The audience clearly knows something bad is coming with the idea of this smoke.
  + **Verse 3**– Locusts arise from the abyss and they are commissioned with authority from God. The image of these locusts evokes the eight plague in Egypt where locusts were sent as judgment and they are so numerous that darkness falls on the land (Ex. 10:4-15; Joel 2:10).
  + Locusts are commonly associated with judgment in the OT (Deut. 28:42; 1 Kings 8:37; Psa. 78:46). These locusts are said to have similar power to the scorpion in that scorpions are known for their powerful and painful sting.
  + **Verse 4**– The locusts are commissioned to harm the earth-dwellers and not nature. They inflict those who do not have the seal of God (13:16-17; cf. Ezek. 9:6)). As the Israelites were protected from the plagues in Egypt, so too God’s people are spiritually safe-guarded because of the seal they have received (7:1-8).
  + **Verse 5**– The locusts are given limitations in terms of the judgment they will execute. They are not to kill anyone (this sounds like a good thing but in reality it isn’t) and their torment will last five months. For this limited period of time they will inflict torment on man like the sting of a scorpion.
  + **Verse 6**– The level of pain and anguish experienced by the inflictions of the locusts creates an earnest desire for death within the victims. God, however, will not allow them to die because He wants them to be tormented for their sins (Hos. 10:8; Rev. 6:16).
  + The irony is that these people killed the saints which led to their eternal comfort but they seek death as an escape to the torment they face but to no avail. This picture again points us to the reality that sin is not worth these consequences!
  + **Verse 7**– The description of these locusts in vv. 7-9 is terrifying and overwhelming. John does his utmost best to describe what he sees but even then he cannot properly describe what he sees. Their appearance is said to be like horses ready for battle with crowns like gold (cf. Joel 2:4-5).
  + Furthermore, their faces are said to be like that of a man’s face. The locusts were sent against Pharaoh and the Egyptians in Exodus because of the hardness of their hearts and their unwillingness to repent. The same was true for the Israelites in Joel’s day and for the idolaters in John’s rendition of the plague.
  + **Verse 8**– The hair of the locusts (antennae?) was like that of a woman’s hair and their teeth was like that of a lion (cf. Joel 1:6). An image of terror builds as the description goes on.
  + **Verse 9**– The locusts had armor of breastplates like that of iron indicative of strength and lack of weakness. The sound of their wings is like chariots of horses rushing to battle (cf. Joel 2:4-7). Everything about these agents of torment is perfected to create terror of the highest order.
  + **Verse 10**– This verse reiterates some of what has been said or hinted at earlier. The locusts’ tails are like scorpions which also mean their stings are like the scorpions’ sting. Their tails have the power to torment for a limited period of time.
  + **Verse 11**– There is a king over the locusts whose name in Hebrew means *“destruction”* (Abaddon) and in the Greek means *“destroyer”* (Apollyon). This could be the same agent of v. 1 or another entity. The important idea of this verse is destruction. Sin puts one in the pit leading to overwhelming destruction (cf. Psa. 40:1-2).
  + **Verse 12**– As overwhelming and terrifying as this first woe has been, John warns that there is still two more to come. The enemies of God look for the end but instead they find the beginning of more destruction and torment.
* **9:13-21– Sixth Trumpet (Second Woe): The Four Angels Execute Punishment**
* **Verses 13-14**– As the sixth angel sounds the trumpet, a voice is heard from the four horns of the altar before God. This could be the angel from 8:3-5, the prayers of the saints or perhaps Christ or another agent (cf. 6:10-11; 8:3-5).
* What follows in this section seems to be an answer to the prayers of the saints in 6:10 so it could very well be that the voice here is their unified prayers. The voice speaks to the sixth angel to release the four angels bound at the great river Euphrates.
* The mention of the Euphrates and four angels being bound there brings to mind OT prophecies of God bringing judgment upon nations and sinners from the north (Euphrates; Gen. 15:18; Isa. 8:7-8; Jer. 1:14-15; 4:6-13; 46:1-24). God is bringing judgment upon His enemies here in like manner.
* **Verse 15**– Unlike the first woe, the second woe exacts death from those it is unleashed on. The angels are released with the purpose of killing a third of mankind (cf. 8:7-12). It seems that these angels had been ready for this very purpose for some time and they are now able to carry out their mission. They are released according to God’s timetable.
* **Verse 16**– In a somewhat abrupt manner, we learn of a great army of horsemen that number 200,000,000. This number is stated primarily for a dramatic and terrifying effect drawing us to the reality of God’s incomparable power and strength (cf. Psa. 68:17; Dan. 7:10; Rev. 5:11).
* **Verse 17**– John relates to his readers the description of the horses and the riders which is similar to the description of the locusts from a terrifying standpoint. The riders have breastplates that are the color of fire, hyacinth and brimstone (red/scarlet, blue/purple, yellow).
* The horses’ heads are like those of lions and out of their mouths proceed fire, smoke and brimstone. Altogether this description points us towards fierce judgment and the execution of God’s wrath upon the wicked (cf. Gen. 19:24, 28; Deut. 29:23; Isa. 34:9-10; Ezek. 38:22).
* **Verse 18**– A third of mankind is killed by these three elements coming forth from the horses’ mouths. They are identified as three plagues signifying their deadly nature. This is very reminiscent of the judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24, 28). This is also foretold to be a part of the covenant punishments found in Lev. 26 and Deut. 28.
* **Verse 19**– Like the locusts, these horses have tails that inflict torment and much harm. They are described as being like a serpents having heads (cf. Num. 21:6-9). Their mouths also inflict punishment because of the smoke, fire and brimstone.
* **Verse 20**– Those who were not killed by the plagues did not repent which indicates the hardness of their hearts (cf. Ex. 14:4-8; 17) and God’s willingness to give them an opportunity to change. The things they are said to not repent of include the worship of demons and the idols made of various objects which are inanimate and useless (cf. Deut. 4:28; 32:17; Psa. 115:4-8; 135:15-18; Isa. 44:6-8).
* **Verse 21**– In addition to their lack of turning away from idolatry, they did not repent of murders, sorceries, thefts and immorality. All these things are symptoms of idolatry and idolatry is a symptom of selfishness and self-righteousness (cf. Rom. 1:18-32).
* As bad as God’s judgments are on these people and as overwhelming as it seems, the punishment does fit their crimes and justice must be achieved on account of God’s holiness and righteousness. The saints are being vindicated with these punishments being levied on their enemies.