

Series Revelation

This Message #15 Revelation 9:1-21

We are in the section of the book of Revelation in which certain judgments in the scroll are being carried out. In the previous message we thought about the first four of seven trumpet judgments. These were primarily directed at the environment of earth, although many people died because a third of the vegetation was burned up, a third of the sea was turned into blood, a third of the drinking water was poisoned, and a third of visible light was turned into darkness. Chapter 8 concluded with a warning to the inhabitants of earth — the remaining three judgments would bring them much more woe.

Before we get into chapter 9, I want to explain my understanding of the sequence of events in this book. I want you to recognize that the order in which John's visions are presented in Revelation cannot be the actual lineal and chronological sequence of events. From my diagram/outline you will observe that I have divided the book of Revelation into 7 "sweeps" or overview descriptions, and that six of these overview sections present similar information from different perspectives.

We are currently focused on the trumpet judgments, and there are strong indications that these trumpet judgments cover some of the same period of time as the seals, which we have previously thought about. As the seals were opened we were provided with explanations of events which were spread over the past 2000 years. The 6th seal brought world events to the end of the age, right up to the day of Jesus' visible return to earth. Today we will discover that the 6th trumpet judgment also brings world events up to the end of the age. Chronological, both the 6th seal and the 6th trumpet judgment arrive at the same point at the same time just before the visible return of Jesus. This indicates that there is some overlap in the earlier events of the seals and the trumpet judgments.

As an example of this overlap, let's read descriptions from different portions of Scripture which describe the same event. When Jesus taught His disciples about the end of the age He said, "Immediately after the distress of those days, 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken'" (*Matthew 24:29*).

In Revelation chapter 6, after the 6th seal was opened, we read, “there was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth ... , the moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth ... The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.” Revelation chapter 6 will be the fulfillment of what Jesus said would happen. It will be the great day of wrath when no one will stand.

Last week in chapter 8 we read, “The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night” (*Revelation 8:12*).

Here is what we can conclude about sequence: If, during the 4th judgment, only a third of light is turned to darkness, but at the 6th and last seal, the light of the sun, moon, and stars is totally extinguished, then we must conclude that the 4th trumpet judgment, although seen and described by John after the 6th seal, must occur earlier.

Jesus did not mention anything about seal and trumpet events when He taught His disciples. His disciples had asked, “What will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?” (*Matthew 24:3*). In His answer, Jesus omitted many details. The book of Revelation gives many details but it must agree with Jesus’ teachings. Hence we come to the conclusion that at least some of the trumpet judgments are simultaneous with and coincide with the seal events. This is indicated on the diagram/outline.

We can recognize some other similar but contrasting events between the seals and trumpet judgments. For example, the 5th seal alludes to the suffering and killing of believers by evildoers. In the trumpet judgments God gave permission for the suffering and killing of unbelievers.

Before the opening of the 7th seal, the servants of the living God were sealed so that they would be protected from the wrath of God. From today’s reading we will recognize that the 5th and 6th trumpet judgments will not affect God’s people, but only the “people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.”

We can summarize what we have studied so far this way: chapters 2 and 3 described church fellowships during this Church Age. The seals explained, in a general way, the behavior of unbelievers throughout history beginning with Pentecost, with a particular focus on the suffering and persecution of believers.

The trumpet judgments overlap some of the two preceding overviews. There is a “repetition” of some happenings, albeit from a different perspective. The climax of each series is reached at the sixth happening.

We must not assume that the events in Revelation are consecutive. Rather, in order to understand the chronological sequence, we must pay attention to the overlaps and the doubling back of events. We must also note the parallel and contrasting descriptions, and also make sure that the interpretations of Revelation fit into the teachings of Jesus.

Now let’s continue on with our study of the series of trumpet judgments. In this series, John saw and wrote about numerous details which were not described when the seals were opened. As we read chapter 9, we will learn just how intense and comprehensive the judgments at the end of the age will be.

Read Revelation 9:1-11

The first four trumpet judgments were described by John in just six verses in chapter 8. His description here of the 5th and 6th judgments requires 21 verses.

When the 5th angel sounded his trumpet, John saw “a star that had fallen from the sky to earth.” All commentators agree that the “star” is an angel, but they disagree whether he is a good angel or bad. Some commentators assume it is Satan. It is my opinion that the star-angel is another of the many creatures of heaven who carry out the will of God.

There are two main reasons to think this way. First, this is another example of a judgment which originates in heaven. You will remember that other judgments were “hurled” or “sent” from heaven. Second, note that this angel “was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss.” The Abyss was locked up until God was ready for it to be opened to administer judgment.

The words, “were given,” appear many times in Revelation, including this chapter. In verse 3, we read that the locusts “were given” power like that of scorpions. In verse 5 “it was given them that they should not kill.” These phrases indicate the control that God has over all things, including the forces of evil. He permits things to happen when He chooses them to happen.

In Scripture, the Abyss is sometimes identified as the place of the dead, but more often, it is the prison for evil spirits. People in the 1st Century believed that there was a “3 story universe” — “heaven,” “earth,” and “under the earth.” God and angels inhabited heaven, people dwelled on earth, and evil beings were from under the earth. This was the theological understanding of the physical creation by the human race for thousands of years. The Apostle Peter wrote that “God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to the underworld, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment” (*II Peter 2:4*). When Jesus was preparing to cast demons out of a man, “they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss” (*Luke 8:31*). Later in the book, Satan will be imprisoned in the Abyss for a thousand years.

Just to clarify, the Bible does not give a specific location for hell or the Abyss, and, as far as I know, no one accepts that there is a literal big hollow subterranean space under the surface of earth which is filled with fire and smoke and connected to the surface by a shaft. However, that was the common understanding of people in past centuries and it continues to be the popular way of differentiating heaven and hell today.

In his vision, John saw demon locusts come out of the smoke of the Abyss. Verses 3 through 6 explain the mission of the locusts. They were not permitted to harm vegetation, but “only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.” They were not permitted to kill, but “only to torture people for five months.” The pain that these creatures inflicted was so great that people sought death, but they were not able to die.

This event will be the fulfillment of a prophecy given many centuries previously by the prophet Joel. Joel predicted that a massive locust plague would devastate Judah. He described the locusts as the Lord’s army and that their coming would be a sign that the Day of the Lord was near. Let me read a few verses written by Joel: “What the locust swarm has left, the great locusts have eaten. ... A nation has invaded my land, powerful and without number; it has the teeth of a lion, the fangs of a lioness. ... Let all who live in the land tremble, for the Day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains, a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come. ... They have the appearance of horses; they gallop along like cavalry. ... At the sight of them, nations are in anguish; every face turns pale. ...

“Before them the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The LORD thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey his command. The Day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?” (*Joel chapter 1 and 2 excerpts*).

The demon locusts were a special class of evil spirits who had been kept under lock and key until God had use for them. In the Old Testament, God used locust plagues to punish the Israelites when they were disobedient. Punishment of evildoers is also the purpose here in chapter 9.

In verses 7 through 12 we are given a close-up description of these demon locusts. We would agree that they are very bizarre creatures. They were apparently large in size, “like horses prepared for battle.” John did not have words to adequately describe the creatures; he could only compare their features to something else. They were “like horses,” they wore something “like crowns of gold,” their faces were “like human faces,” their hair was “like women’s hair,” their teeth were “like lion’s teeth.” They had the protection of iron breastplates, they had wings, and they had tails with stingers. Really weird!

And they had a leader, one identified as “the angel of the Abyss.” John gave this leader’s name in two languages: “Abaddon” in Hebrew and “Apollyon” in Greek. Both of these names mean “Destroyer.”

In these demon locusts, the people on earth were seeing the reality of evil, and it was horrific and terrifying. They were also experiencing what supernatural evil creatures want to do — to torture and cause excruciating suffering so that victims will think only of death. The 5th trumpet judgment was terrible, but John wanted his readers to know that the inhabitants of earth were about to face evil in an even more severe way. He announced that the locusts plague was just the first of three “woes” which had been pronounced on the earth.

Read Revelation 9: 13-21

The 5th trumpet judgment will cause pain; the 6th judgment will bring death. Just like the other judgments, this one begins with a heavenly command. Also, just like the other judgments, it is connected to the prayers of God’s people. It was at the golden altar that the prayers of the saints were offered up before God. This entire series of judgments is God’s response to the prayers of His people.

The 6th heavenly angel was commanded to “release the four angels who were bound.” Did you notice that these angels “had been kept ready” for a specific hour on a specific day of a specific month of a specific year to be released? And did you notice that their mission upon release was “to kill a third of mankind?” God’s activities are carefully planned, and His sovereignty over the events on earth is total.

The River Euphrates represented the outer boundary of the land promised by God to Abraham and his descendants. It was also a kind of natural boundary which had to be crossed when enemies invaded the land of Old Testament Israel.

The four angels “at the river Euphrates” are like “generals” in charge of a demon army. This army was an even more fearsome threat than the locusts. Both groups of evil creatures will be instruments of divine judgment, and they will have no freedom to act until God gives them permission. All God’s plans for His human and physical creation were written in the scroll. Hence, all events in these judgments and the time of their happening have been predetermined.

These two judgments in chapter 9 highlight the contempt and cruelty of the forces of evil. Satan and his helpers have a consuming hatred for God’s human creation and seek to destroy it. Satan’s jealousy and hatred stems from the fact that mankind was created in the image of God, and, hence, people are exalted above all other creatures of the earth. Because of the disobedience and sin of people, and their resultant spiritual separation from God, the glorious image in which people were created is now less than it once was. However, it can be restored to its potential through faith in Jesus. As the creature who holds the power of death, Satan seeks to prevent people from obtaining the righteousness and holiness which would restore their fellowship with God and enable them to overcome the power of death. The devil does not want to relinquish his power to rule over the earth.

Fortunately, we can praise God for the fact that Jesus, by His death, “destroyed him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives are held in slavery by their fear of death” (*Hebrews 2:14-15*). The Apostle Paul added to this thought when he wrote, “The end will come ... after Christ has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. ... The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (*I Corinthians 15:24, 26*).

John heard that the number of mounted troops in this second group of evil creatures was 200 million, an unimaginably large number. Verses 17 through 19 provide a detailed description of this army of evil: bodies of horses, “heads of lions,” with unique powers from their mouths and in their tails. In Scripture, “fire, smoke, and sulfur” are symbols of divine judgment (*see Psalms 11:6; Isaiah 30:33; Ezekiel 38:22*). [Note: Sulfur is sometimes referred to as “brimstone,” as in “fire and brimstone.”] Apparently, injury was inflicted by the tails, but death was caused by the fire, smoke, and sulfur which came from their mouths.

There are two main reasons for the judgment plagues here in Revelation. The first reason comes from the cry of the martyrs in chapter 6, “How long, Sovereign Lord, ... before you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood” (*Revelation 6:9-10*). The second reason is here in verses 20 and 21. The plagues are designed to turn people to repentance. We might think that people would want to turn to God in view of all that they will see and experience, but unfortunately, in spite of all the devastation and pain and despair, survivors on earth will be unwilling to repent of their activities. The human heart can become so rebellious and hostile to God that not even the scourge of death will make them want to change their ways.

“The works of their hands” suggests the determination of unbelievers to be self-sufficient — to not be dependent on God in any way. The worship of demons and their idols indicates their blindness and foolishness. The Bible teaches us that idolatry is a form of demon worship. For example, when Moses predicted the rebelliousness of Israel, he said, “Israel abandoned the God who made him and rejected the Rock his Savior. He made him jealous with his foreign gods and angered him with his detestable idols. He sacrificed to demons, which are not God” (*Deuteronomy 32:15-17*). The Apostle Paul stated that “the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons” (*I Corinthians 10:20*). Idolatry is any kind of worship that is not directed to the true God, and, while idols have no life in themselves, there are spiritual powers behind them and those powers are demonic.

How ironic it is that the same powers which are behind the idols that people worship are turned against them to torture and kill. How sad it is that the foolish people of this world would rather worship the demons that mistreat them than turn to the God who would show them love and compassion.

Closely associated with idolatry are the evil practices of murder, sorcery, immorality, and theft. Incorrect religious thinking leads to ungodly behavior. The actions of unbelievers are controlled by their own depravity.

Scripture declares that God is not willing that any person should suffer His judgment but that all should repent and turn to Him (*Luke 13:3, 5; II Peter 3:9*). The 5th and 6th judgments extend over at least 5 months duration, more than ample time for people to reflect on their circumstances and change their ways of living, but they did not do so. Therefore, the Day of the Lord was imminent.

Chapter 9 is a sobering portion of Scripture when we think about how many unbelievers there are in the world. However, believers do not need to despair. There is a new heaven and a new earth to look forward to, and eternity with God.