

The Book of Revelation

Week #10 – The Trumpets (cont’d)

I. REVIEW OF WEEK #9

Surprisingly, the end did not come with the opening of the seventh seal.

- Instead we have another interlude of heavenly liturgy, then
- A new series of visions introduced by the seven trumpets.

A. Role of the Seventh Seal

The seventh seal establishes a sense of drama and suspense and provides a transition to the next series of visions, the seven trumpets, thus connecting two sections of the book.

B. Connecting Visions

It enables John to describe the same events from different points of view.

There is a growing intensity of the woes/judgments as we progress through the seven seals, to seven trumpets, and finally to the seven bowls – seven events told three times in different ways.

C. First Four Trumpets

The first four trumpets introduce natural disasters that ravish earth, sea, fresh water, and sky, and are separated from that of the following ones by a vision [v 13]; similar to the pattern of the seven seals.

D. The Flying Eagle

Now we come to a pause introduced by an eagle or vulture [an image of doom] flying high in the sky and announcing the next three trumpets or woes.

These disasters ravish, not nature or the cosmos, but the inhabitants of the earth; not God’s faithful people, but the unbelievers and sinners, those who have let themselves be led

astray by Christ’s enemies [Rev 6:10; Rev 11:10; Rev 13:8, etc].

II. THE FIFTH TRUMPET

A. Overview

The fifth trumpet unlocks the abyss, releasing volcanic smoke and swarms of warrior locusts. These are demonic forces let loose to torture and terrorize the earth.

The picture of terror mounts in its awful intensity. John is trying to convey the idea that God is going to loose demonic forces to wreak havoc on those who refuse to recognize God [cf. v. 4].

As the abyss is opened supernatural terrors [demonic forces] are unleashed upon the world.

Four restrictions are placed on the first woe to limit its impact:

1. Vegetation is to be left unharmed;
2. only the wicked are to be targeted for torment;
3. victims are not to be killed;
4. the plague is to end in five months.

These restrictions suggest that God is administering remedial or corrective punishment aimed at bringing about the repentance, rather than the total destruction of sinners.

Read: Revelation 9: 1-2

*[1] And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key of the shaft of the bottomless pit;
[2] he opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft.*

B. A Fallen Star

The image here of a “fallen star” should probably be understood as a “fallen angel” or demon. Stars, as we saw in Rev 1:20, are used as symbols for angels.

The image of fallen stars as fallen angels is also used in Revelation 12:4; 9-10, and 13.

Here, the fallen star most likely represents Satan, himself, of whom Jesus said, **“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven”** [Lk 10:18].

C. Bottomless Pit (or Abyss)

The abyss, or bottomless pit, is referred to as *Sheol* [Hebrew] or *Hades* [Greek] elsewhere in the Bible, and is the gloomy underworld where the spirits of men go after death to await the final judgment.

From ancient times the abyss was a symbol of the dark side of creation. It was the abode of the serpent, or Leviathan, the mythical sea monster [Job 3:8], but the idea has undergone biblical development over time.

In *Revelation* the abyss is the intermediate place of fiery punishment of the fallen angels, the demons, the beast, the false prophet, and of Satan. Their final place of punishment is the lake of burning fire and brimstone [Rev 20:10, 14, 15].

The key is given to the fallen star [Satan] to unlock the abyss, but Christ has authority over this realm since he holds the “keys” and he can order angels and demons to lock or unlock it.

The demons will be free to operate only for a limited time, and to a limited degree, and will have to obey the “angel of the bottomless pit” the prince of demons [Satan] – the same one who received the key.

III. THE LOCUSTS

Read: Revelation 9:3-10

*[3] Then from the smoke came **locusts** on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth;*

[4] they were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree, but only those of mankind who have not the seal of God upon their foreheads;

[5] they were allowed to torture them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torture was like the torture of a scorpion, when it stings a man.

[6] And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death will fly from them.

[7] In appearance the locusts were like horses arrayed for battle; on their

heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces,

[8] their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth;

[9] they had scales like iron breastplates, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle.

[10] They have tails like scorpions, and stings, and their power of hurting men for five months lies in their tails.

[11] They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.

[12] The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.

A. Like the Locusts of Egypt

The locusts are reminiscent of the eighth plague of Egypt [cf. Ex. 10:14, 15], and all through the OT they are a symbol of awesome destruction.

They are so numerous they appear as a dark cloud of smoke which darkens the sun. Yet the locusts John sees are far more dreadful than the ones seen by the Egyptians.

If they are enlarged grasshoppers, their heads would resemble those of horses, their antennae would resemble human hair, and their ravenous teeth would be like those of lions.

The description of the locusts is designed to show how terrifying demons are.

B. Target of the Locusts

Locusts usually attack the vegetation of the earth, but here they are forbidden to do that. Their attack is to be launched against the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

The attack is to last for five months – the life-span of a locust from birth to death. The suffering will be so great men will seek to die, but death will elude them – a description of intense suffering.

C. Fulfillment of Prophecy?

The five months of the locusts may also have a certain first-century fulfillment in the persecution of Gessius Florus, the

procurator of Judea, who killed thousands of Jews for five months, beginning in May of AD 66.

Revelation 9:7-9 seems to be taken from Joel 1-2, which also describe the coming of an enemy nation as locusts descending on Israel.

In Joel, just as in Revelation 9, the locusts come at the blast of a trumpet.

This prophecy of a demon-infested country seems to be confirmed in the accounts of Josephus [See *Coming Soon*, pg.130].

D. King of the Locusts

The king of the locusts is called *Abaddon* in Hebrew and means “destruction.” In Greek his name is *Apollyon* and means “destroyer.”

The locusts obey a leader Satan whose name [Abaddon, Apollyon], denotes death and destruction. [Not all commentators agree that *Abaddon* and *Apollyon* represent Satan].

IV. THE SIXTH TRUMPET

Read: Revelation 9:13-19

[13] Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God,

[14] saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."

[15] So the four angels were released, who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, to kill a third of mankind.

[16] The number of the troops of cavalry was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number.

[17] And this was how I saw the horses in my vision: the riders wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulphur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulphur issued from their mouths.

[18] By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulphur issuing from their mouths.

[19] For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; their tails are like serpents, with heads, and by means of them they wound.

A. Overview

With each increasing trumpet judgment, the horror mounts. The sixth trumpet releases four demons [angels of evil] that rouse an army of fire-breathing horses into battle.

The demonic locusts were allowed to injure but not kill; but now come hordes of demonic cavalry, an evil army of 200,000,000 [a symbolic number indicating an army too numerous to count] to annihilate a third part of the human race.

The vast size of the army indicates the scale of evil in the world.

B. The Voice from the Altar

A voice is heard from the heavenly altar of incense, where the prayers of the saints ascend before God, calling for the release of the four angels. This indicates that what is about to happen is a further response to the prayers of the martyrs and the faithful.

C. God’s Permissive Will?

But how can so dreadful a punishment possibly be willed by a loving God, or by Christians?

It is clear that the punishment, far from being God’s primary intention, is rather the effect of human wickedness. This destruction is part of God’s permissive will, not his absolute or perfect will.

God withholds the chaotic fruits of humanity’s sins for a while [the destructive angels are bound] in hopes for repentance. But when this does not occur he releases them [9:14-15] as a further call for repentance [Rev 9:20-21].

D. Purpose of the Punishment

The purpose of this frightful scenario is twofold:

1. A call to repentance;
2. An assurance to those who do repent, and to the faithful, that they will survive and conquer because of the Lamb.

E. At the Great River Euphrates

"Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."

The Euphrates was the longest river in ancient Mesopotamia and the boundary of the territory of Israel according to God’s promise to Abraham: *“To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt, to the great river, the river Euphrates”* [Gen 15:18].

Beyond the Euphrates had dwelt the enemies of Israel – the Babylonians and Assyrians.

The Angels of Punishment, therefore, come from the distant lands, from the alien and hostile places from which the Assyrians and Babylonians had in times past descended on Israel with destruction like a horde of locusts.

The Parthian Empire also lay beyond the Euphrates. Parthia was Rome’s greatest rival in the East. The most dreaded warriors in the world were the Parthian cavalry.

John may have been expecting an invasion of Parthian cavalry, but the numbers and description of the horses indicates more than a political enemy. [Hal Lindsey says it is Communist China].

F. God’s Timetable

[15] So the four angels were released, who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month, and the year . . .

The plan of God unfolds according to a precise timetable determined in advance.

G. The Evil Army

As in the other “trumpet” judgments, a “third” of the human race is killed. The destruction is meant to lead those left to repentance, but, as we shall see, they do not [Rev 9:20-21].

The coming of the army from the north of the Euphrates is also fulfilled by the Roman destruction of Jerusalem.

The Roman legions came down from the north, through the Euphrates, on the way to Jerusalem [See Josephus, *The War of the Jews*].

The description of the riders is similar to the fifth trumpet judgment. The both wear “breastplates,” are like “horses” and “lions”, and have power to harm with their tails.

The two trumpets describe two waves of attack by the same demonic forces.

The association of these warriors with serpents has demonic implications.

The fact that these warriors breathe “fire and smoke and sulphur” suggests that they originate in hell, and the destruction they bring is connected with the final destruction of the Beast and the false prophet.

The Beast and the false prophet are cast into the lake of death/fire, where their torment is associated with “fire” and “sulphur” and “smoke.”

This lake of fire is also mentioned in the destruction of the wicked at the end of the world [Rev 20:13-125].

“We can see from this image the two-fold prophecy of the book of Revelation. On the one hand the image points to Jerusalem, which will be destroyed by an army, and turned into a burning rubble of ‘fire and sulphur.’

Yet it also points to the end of the world, when the wicked will be cast into a ‘lake of fire’ and be tormented in hell” [*Coming Soon*, pg 132].

V. THOSE WHO DID NOT REPENT

The survivors of the sixth trumpet remained hardened in their wickedness despite the merciful purpose of these judgments to discipline sinners and to bring them back to God.

All the punishments in the book of Revelation are designed to move people to repentance, but people persist in turning away from God to worship idols, and idolatry is the root of all other sins.

Read: Revelation 9:20-21

[20] The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot either see or hear or walk;

[21] nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their immorality or their thefts.

The sins begin with idolatry [9:20], but others follow in its wake, murder, sorcery, immorality, theft [See Rom 1:18-32]. The Bible equates idolatry with the worship of demons.

Jerusalem, the new Babylon, will be destroyed because of the wickedness of the people.

Preparation for Week # 11 – Revelation Chapter 10

Review

1. *The Apocalypse* – notes by Archbishop Collins (handout)
2. The Four Senses of Scripture (handout)

Read

1. *Revelation to St. John* – Ignatius Catholic Study Bible Chapter 10 – The Angel and the Little Scroll.
2. *Coming Soon: Finish Chapter 8 – Trumpeting God’s Victory* – pages 127-146.

Discuss

1. Multiple Choice Questions 1-6, and
2. Discussion/Study Questions 1- 4 at end of Chapter 8 of *Coming Soon*.