

Revelation Chapter 9 Handout

We continue the seven trumpets. These last trumpets focus on humanity. While earlier trumpets inflicted damage on the earth (1/3 of grass, trees, rivers, etc.) we are now looking at punishments against those who have not given themselves over to God to have their foreheads sealed. There is here, as in much of this book, an ever increasing tide of destruction and death. It never comes all at once but grows through a slow steady progression of images. Again note that believers (those with the seal of God on their forehead) are present during this time of tribulation though they are spared. They have not been raptured off the earth.

And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit;

A star that had fallen: this time a star represents something else. It represents a satanic, or anti-God influence. Some people have speculated that it might be a rebellious angel, or even Satan himself.

Key: we are not clear who gives him/her the key, but chances are it is God for ultimately it is God and God alone who holds the keys to both life and death.

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.

Bottomless pit: a marvelous image for a flat world in which the shaft descends into a netherworld of smoke, flame and evil. This is where Satan's minions live and work. For those familiar with The Lord of the Rings Trilogy recall the images of Saruman creating Uruk-hai as a replacement for men. He does so deep in the earth and there is fire and smoke all around. Tolkien borrowed much of his imagery from Revelation.

3 Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given authority like the authority of scorpions of the earth. 4 They were told not to damage the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

Locusts: there was no more feared enemy of ancient peoples than the locusts. They would devour everything in their path, bringing starvation and misery. See also Joel 1:6 and 2:4-10.

Given authority: this was given by God. God removes his protection over those who will not worship him. They will receive their just punishment.

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 someone. 6 And in those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will flee from them.

Torture: they bring not death but pain to the people. No one can escape.

Five months: this is a limited period of time and is associated with the life span of a locust

Scorpion: again a known entity, people understood the pain and discomfort

7 In appearance the locusts were like horses equipped 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, with stingers, and in their tails is their power to harm people for five months.

Horses equipped for battle: these were not your ordinary locusts. They are far more formidable. However much of the description fits the appearance of ordinary locusts. The coloring, teeth, hair (antennae), and sound they make as they advance. Tails like scorpions: this makes these locusts very different... and satanic. In Revelation there is a competition between those things that God makes (real locusts) and those things Satan creates (locusts with scorpion tails). Again very much on the order of Lord of the Rings in which the evil powers attempt to create beasts that resemble, but are far more evil than those created in a more natural fashion.

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. There are still two woes to come.

King: these are not mindless forces. They are organized and directed by an evil power. The angel of the bottomless pit: this may or may not be the angel who fell with the key.

Abaddon: the name in Hebrew means destruction or ruin. Sometimes it even refers to Hades as the place of ruin. This name came to refer to the personification of death in later Jewish literature.

Apollyon: refers to exterminator or destroyer

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."

Voice: we are hearing God once again taking command. What lies in store must be dramatic if God himself is going to direct the angel.

Four angels: in a sense the Euphrates is the edge of the world. On one side lies the land of milk and honey (Israel) and on the other the land from which all evil had come (Assyria, Babylon, etc.)

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 humankind.

Hour, day...: this is the first time that we get a glimpse of a specific sense of timing to what is happening. It is as if God has been planning this and knows the time it will

happen. The important point in a way is that this is all happening according to God's time and no one else's.

Kill a third of humankind: we have now come to the 1/3 of humanity. The earth has suffered this and now it is time for people to follow suit.

16 The number of the troops of cavalry was two hundred million; I heard their number.

Number: there has been great speculation about this number. Some have envisioned a real army moving across the earth. However there have also been some papers done by military planners who state that such an army is an impossibility... impossible to equip or move. Even in WWII all of the combined forces of all combatants only reached 70 million. More likely (as you read what follows) they are a satanic army with satanic powers. This is also an army much larger than anyone in that day or time could possibly imagine.

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 sulfur; the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths.

Riders: the riders themselves do not appear to be all that important. Though they are brightly festooned they do not bring about the deaths of the people.

Heads of the horses like lions: what we have here again is something that God would not create. God creates horses with horses heads. These are some abominable cross breeding by an evil power. We see this as well in what they breath out...fire, smoke and sulfur.

18 By these three plagues a third of humankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. 19 For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they inflict harm.

Plagues: We are back to the imagery of Exodus. God's plagues are released upon this who oppress the faithful

A third of humankind: these forces do not care if they kill men, women or children. They are simply sent out to slaughter. This would not be an unusual vision. Often when competing armies clashed all in their way were destroyed. No one was left.

20 The rest of humankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands or give up worshipping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk. 21 And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their fornication or their thefts.

Did not repent: this is a very important piece of information. We discover that the intent behind these plagues was to make the people repent. Just as the original plagues were meant to have Pharaoh repent and let the people go, these plagues were meant to have the people repent and let go of....

Worshipping demons and idols of bronze and stone...: John makes a clear distinction between demons and idols. Demons are alive and have power. Idols are dead and do

not. However worshipping either means that people are relying on that which cannot give life, but instead leads to death.

Murders, sorceries...: all of these in some way stand against the Ten Commandments. They are fundamental sins that disrupt the intention of God for God's creation. All in all you have seven sins 1) works of hands (cultic items) 2) worship of demons (other gods) 3) worship of idols (graven images) 4) murders (thou shall not murder) 5) sorceries (Exodus 7:11 or 9:11) 6) fornication (shall not commit adultery) 7) thefts (shall not steal).

Did not repent II: their refusal to repent stands in the face of heaven being opened... people running for cover... people begging to die and yet they live... yet they learn nothing. They turn a blind eye to what God is trying to tell them. They are a "stiff-necked people" just like Israel in the wilderness. In one sense this is a morality play that reinforces the desire of God's people to do well and of non-believers to believe.