Hordes & Armies of Demons: Oh My! — Delivery Transcript

Revelation 9 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, October 24, 2021 · *Scorched Earth*

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Have you ever had a season of your life where you knew what God wanted you to do? You knew you weren't doing it. You were living in sin. And you didn't care because you were having way too much fun or you thought this is actually ultimately going to work out better for me, even though I'm not doing what God wants. And so you just kind of persisted in unrepentant rebellion against God. Anybody ever been there? Wait, don't raise your hands. No, of course, a lot of us have been there. You can raise your hand if you want.

No shame in your game. No shame in my game. I've been there. What happens, though, to the life that lives in continual, unrepentant rebellion against God? Never stops. Takes God's will for his life, her life, turns around the other direction and runs, and never stops running. What happens to the person that lives in continual unrepentant rebellion against God? I remember asking that question in a season of my life where I was running from the Lord. And I was thinking to myself, how long can I go before it's too late? How long until God strikes me with lightning?

I didn't actually think that, but until he wrecks my life, puts an end to this madness. I was having a good time. I didn't want to stop. Maybe you can sympathize with that. Today's passage is a text that I think raises that question and answers it definitively, and the answer is not a good answer. And for those of you who find yourself in a season of your life where you know you're living in rebellion against God, today's message will be uncomfortable, but a mercy and an extension of God's grace to you to invite you to stop because there are simply unavoidable consequences that visit a life that lives in continual unrepentant rebellion against God.

So let's look at our passage in Revelation chapter 9. We've been moving through this book slowly but surely from chapter 1 all the way up to Revelation chapter 9. Revelation chapter 8 and Revelation chapter 9 are what's called the trumpet judgments of the book of Revelation. They are judgments from God on the earth that absolutely wreck the earth and wreck the people who live on the earth. Something I failed to mention last week that I should have mentioned is the parallels between these trumpet judgments in Revelation chapter 8 and 9 and two Old Testament stories that I think John is pulling from as he describes what he saw in his heavenly vision.

The two stories are, one, the story of Joshua and the walls of Jericho. Do you guys remember the story of Joshua and the walls of Jericho? We sang a song about it in Sunday school when you were growing up, if you grew up in church. Seven trumpets were given to seven different priests. The seven priests blew the seven trumpets, and what happened to the walls? They came a-tumblin' down. Yeah, they came a-tumblin' down. Well, you see the same thing in Revelation chapter 8 and 9. You have seven angels that are given seven trumpets.

When the seventh angel blows the seventh trumpet, the kingdom of this world is swallowed up and it becomes the kingdom of our God and of his Christ. So there's that parallel, but the second parallel, and maybe the stronger parallel, is the parallel of Moses in the story of the Exodus. You guys remember this story, or you watched the movie, one or the other? God in the Exodus poured out specific plagues on Egypt and on Pharaoh. And the aim of the plagues in the Exodus story was that Pharaoh might soften his heart and let my people go, or however he says it, you know, Charlton Heston.

And it was a grace gift, it was God's mercy in judging Egypt, but of course ultimately Pharaoh hardens his heart over and over and over again until finally he, in a moment of weakness, lets the people go and then takes it back and you have the whole story and the whole bit. But you see parallels between the Exodus and the trumpet judgments in Revelation. We don't have time to go through all the nitty-gritty. I just want to kind of expose it to you so you can take it deeper in the next couple of days if you want to.

The first trumpet was the trumpet with fire and hail mixed with blood. And that of course is in Revelation chapter 8, verse 7. It is a parallel with the seventh plague that was poured out on Egypt in the Exodus, in Exodus chapter 9, verse 18. You can make these cross-references if you want. I'm not going to go through and read all of it, but you had hail and fire mixed with blood in the trumpet, and then you have hail that destroys the earth in the Exodus story. The second trumpet was a huge mountain ablaze with fire.

That's potentially a volcano, and the volcanic ash erupts and goes into the sea waters and it destroys the sea waters, destroys the fish of the sea, and destroys one-third of trade ships in Revelation chapter eight. That's reminiscent of the first plague on Egypt, that turned the Nile River in Egypt to blood and killed all the fish. The third trumpet is a falling star, maybe some

kind of a comet or something like that. It destroys one third of all the drinking water on the earth. I think he calls it Wormwood. It kills— go one more over, Mike.

Wormwood kills all the fresh drinking water. What you see in the book of Exodus, in Exodus chapter 7,[1] is a plague on Egypt. The first plague on Egypt that Moses extended his staff, it touched the water, all the water turned to blood, all the fish in the water died, and it said that the people in Egypt couldn't drink the water because everybody who drank the water was— what— they died. So you see parallels with the first trumpet, the second trumpet, the third trumpet, and then the fourth and final trumpet, Revelation chapter 8, verse 12, it says that one third of the moon, the stars, and the sun is struck.

It does not give its light. I said last week I think that is God tweaking the fine-tuning of the universe, which is right now finely tuned for human flourishing and human life. When that gets tweaked in this trumpet judgment, you're going to see extreme temperature shifts, extreme hot, extreme cold. The twenty-four-hour day that we're used to maybe becomes a six-hour day or four-hour day, whatever the case may be. The psychological effects are going to be absolutely crazy. But you see the same thing happen in the Exodus with the ninth plague.

The ninth plague in Exodus chapter 10, verses 21 to 23.[2] The whole world goes dark, and then they live in the darkness for three days. So pretty interesting the parallels between Joshua and the story of Jericho, Moses and the story of the Exodus. John is not just coming up with these ideas on his own. And again, that's a vision that's given to John by Jesus. But you see some parallels between how God has acted in the past and how God's going to act in the future. And the reason I draw out the parallels is because of the reasoning behind God's judgment.

His aim with the Exodus, his aim with the trumpet judgments in Revelation is repentance. He's destroying the creation in trumpets one, two, three, and four. He destroys the physical creation because the people who were living on the earth in that time were putting their hope in the creation instead of the creator. That's the essence of idolatry. And the Lord is basically saying, do not hope in the creation. Do not put your trust in money or substances or all of the things that you're doing. Put your hope in the Lord. And if you refuse to put your hope in the Lord, then I'm going to remove your hope, I'm going to destroy this creation that you're worshiping and putting your hope in.

And he does that. Trumpet one, two, three, and four. But the people do not repent. And as a result of them not repenting, what we see in trumpets 5 and 6 is God's shift from destroying the creation to actually tormenting people. The judgment shifts from the creation onto human beings. And in both cases his invitation is repent, but they do not. And so it answers the question of what happens when a human being lives in continual unrepentant rebellion

against God. This text is going to answer the question, what happens when a culture, a nation, lives in continual unrepentant rebellion against God.

It will store up God's wrath up to a certain threshold, but when the threshold is finally met, God's judgment will fall, and his judgment is sweeping and totalizing and very, very terrible. I'm going to put it under three headings. Number one, demonic torment that cannot be escaped. Number two, divine judgment or devastating judgment that cannot be avoided. And then lastly, damaged hearts that cannot repent. Demonic torment, devastating judgment, and damaged hearts. Let's pick it up in Revelation chapter 9, verse 1. We see the fifth angel blow the fifth trumpet. And as he blows this fifth trumpet, John says, I saw a star that had fallen from heaven.

So he doesn't see it falling. He says, I saw that it had fallen from heaven to earth, and the key for the shaft to the abyss was given to him. There's a lot of questions that pop up out of that. Number one, who is this star? Some say that is a reference to Satan himself because of what Jesus said in the Gospels, where he said, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven to the earth. It's a past tense action, so maybe John saw the fall of Satan from heaven to earth.

Whoever it is, whether it's Satan, another angel, or another figure, that person is given this key to a thing called the abyss meaning he didn't have the authority in and of himself; God gave him the authority to open this thing called the abyss. And this abyss, you're going to see, is a housing place or a prison for the worst of the worst demons who have ever existed at any given time. You see this in Jude chapter 1, verse 6, where you had certain fallen angels who came to earth and they tried to have sexual relations with human beings to corrupt the human seed line.

Essentially they were trying to keep the Messiah from coming by intermingling human and angelic, you know, stuff. I want to PG this sermon, not PG-13. But as a result of that, these angels are punished. Look at Jude chapter 1, verse 6. It says, the angels who did not keep their own position, but abandoned their proper dwelling, the Lord has kept in eternal chains in deep darkness for the judgment on the great day. So he's talking about the day we're looking at in Revelation. He uses the same Greek word, deep darkness.

It's translated deep darkness, but it's really the word abyss, abyssos.[3] And so the key that this fallen angel is given in Revelation chapter 9[4] is the key to the same place that Jude says is housing a group of terrible demons that have been kept in chains since all the way back in Genesis chapter 6. You see this again in Luke's gospel, Luke chapter 8, Mark chapter 5. We read this two weeks ago in our daily Bible reading as a church. Jesus encounters a man who's possessed by demons, not just one or two demons, but by a lot of demons.

Jesus comes up to the man and says, what is your name? The man can't even answer himself. The demon answers for him and says, we are Legion because we are many. And they

begged Jesus not to banish them to where? The abyss. So it's a prison for demons. And they say, well, you still believe in demons, Wes? You still believe in all that Satan demon stuff? Yes, I do. I'm sorry. I believe in demons. I believe that they're real. I believe Satan is the chief architect, the man in charge, that right now God in his grace has a restraining hand on the evil and demonic powers that are at play in the world, but that on the day of judgment when this fifth angel blows his trumpet, the key that has been given to Satan is he's going to be released to unlock the abyss and the worst of the worst are going to be released.

These demons who have been held in captivity because of the torture and torment that they inflicted on the world when they were released are now going to be re-released. Imagine going to like Alcatraz or, you know, the worst prisons in the world, Guantanamo Bay, and unleashing those prisoners and saying, go have fun. They would wreak havoc on the earth. In fact, we saw a little bit of this during COVID when all the prisoners, you know, got released and all this bad stuff started happening. Now imagine these are not human actors, but these are spiritual actors and they're the worst of the worst demons who have ever existed, they are going to bring torment and havoc on the earth that you cannot even imagine.

That's what's going on with this abyss. Look what happens in verse two and three. He opened the shaft to the abyss, and smoke came up out of the shaft like smoke from a great furnace, so that the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke from the shaft. Then the locusts came out of the smoke onto the earth. So this demonic horde is described by John as a locust horde. So you got all the smoke, all these locusts that are coming up with the smoke on the earth. And John says power was given to this demon horde, like the power that scorpions have on the earth.

So what is this smoke? What does it represent? You could take this literally and say this is literal physical smoke coming out of a literal physical hole and you have literal physical locusts that are possessed by demons that come out of the hole and wreak havoc on the earth. Some people take it that way. It could be not meant to be taken literally or physically, but rather spiritually, because this is John using apocalyptic imagery, and I kind of lean more that direction because John actually uses the word smoke figuratively in Revelation chapter 14.

It talks about the smoke of their torment. And so the picture is you have this demonic horde that has been tortured by God essentially in judgment for thousands and thousands of years. Satan is given authority to release this demonic horde from the abyss. And so you see them come up with smoke, which is symbolic of torment, and they, having been tormented for years and years and years, are now released to go and torment the earth. And John describes the nature of their torment as the kind of torment that's inflicted when you get stung by a scorpion.

It could go either way, but I tend to think that it is some kind of spiritual demon oppression, some kind of spiritual demonic possession that is poured out on the earth. So the first consequence of a life that is lived in continual rebellion against God is demonic torment. Demonic torment that cannot be escaped. We see this in the verses that follow. It reminds me of that show, Penny Dreadful. Anybody watch the show on Netflix? A couple of you appreciate good art out there. I probably shouldn't recommend the show by any means, because it's a show full of grotesque evil, but it captures this dynamic: that there are these powers at play in the world that are being kept at bay by the Lord's grace, his restraining hand, he takes his hand away and they bring chaos.

But the chaos is limited in scope. Look at verses four and five. God is still merciful and gracious in that He doesn't allow them to do all that they could do. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green plant, or any tree, but only those people who do not have God's seal on their foreheads. Now why can't they harm the grass? Well, you remember the first trumpet. The grass and the green trees, they were all destroyed. So perhaps they're growing back by now. I don't know.

But God basically says to these locusts, you don't do what locusts do. You don't get to destroy the earth. You can only destroy people. And not just anybody, not just any kind of people, but only those people who do not have God's seal on their foreheads. This is a reference to Revelation chapter 7, where God seals the 144,000, which I think was a reference to a Jewish remnant. It's also likely or possible that it is a reference to Jews and Gentiles, so just a reference to God's people. So for those who believe that Christians are still on the earth during this time, this is essentially God saying, people are going to be tormented by demons, but God's people will not be tormented.

They will be protected. So the earth is protected. The people who have the seal are protected. And then the last restriction in their torment is that they're allowed only to torture them, not kill them. Verse 5 says, they were not permitted to kill them, but they were to torment them for five months. And the torment is like the torment caused by a scorpion when it stings somebody. Look at chapter 9, verse 6. I don't think we read this earlier. In those days people will seek death, but they will not be able to find it.

They will long to die. But death will flee from them. So this demonic torment is limited in scope, but it is absolutely devastating for the people on whom it falls. It is a kind of demonic torment that will lead people to try to commit suicide, but even in their attempts to end their own life, it cannot be done. Now, a lot of demon possession or demon oppression leads people to depression, suicidal thoughts, but this is beyond just suicidal thoughts. This is an agony and torment that is so terrible death feels like a better alternative, but even in them trying to end their life, they cannot make it happen.

I Googled, what does it feel like to be stung by a scorpion? Some of it is pretty lightweight. Has anybody ever been stung by a scorpion? Of course you have. You know, it's West Texas. It's one of those things. I remember deer hunting with my brother, and I was taking a shower, and he lived in this little barn and I got in the shower and there was a scorpion in there. I've never had a dancing shower until that day, but it was crazy. Here's some of the side effects. Pain, numbness, tingling, and swelling.

Don't sound too bad. If you really get a bad booger, it's difficulty breathing, muscle thrashing, involuntary body movements. That kind of looks like demon possession, if you ever watched The Exorcist. Drooling, sweating, nausea, and vomiting— that's me before I preach a sermon. And then if you really get a bad case, they say restlessness, excitability, or inconsolable crying in children. And those of you who have ever had children that are inconsolable in their crying, you know that's a description of hell on earth. It is the worst of the worst. So I just think this is John's way of saying it's bad.

People are miserable. The demonic torment, the evil that's unleashed on the world, the false lies, the deception, the false teaching, the corruption, the evil is so great because God has removed his hand, and that's a consequence of living your life in continual rebellion against God. It'll be limited in scope, but absolutely agonizing for those on whom it falls. Now, why is God doing this? He's doing this to lead to repentance, but essentially I think this is God's way of saying, if this is what you want, then have what you want.

This is not God getting off on pain. He doesn't delight in the death of the wicked. He does not delight in human beings being tormented. Those are people he created, people he loved, people that are created in his image. This is just the Lord getting his glory. And God is going to get his glory one way or another. He is either going to get his glory in your life by saving you, delivering you, rescuing you from sin, or he will be glorified in your life by punishing you, showing that he's more righteous than you, more holy than you, wiser than you, and that he is just and righteous in judging you for your sin.

So you get to decide: how will God be glorified in me? Will he be glorified because I repent and believe and trust in him and as a result have life and joy and peace? Or will he get his glory in me by showing the just penalty of a life that's lived in continual rebellion against him? Demonic torment that cannot be escaped. He goes on to talk about what the locusts looked like in verse 7. He says the appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for war. Something like golden crowns was on their heads, their faces were like human faces, they had hair like women's hair— that's nice— their teeth were like lions' teeth, they had chests like iron breastplates, the sound of their wings was like the sound of many chariots with horses rushing into battle.

They had tails with stingers like scorpions, so that with their tails they had the power to harm people for five months. Same reference as earlier. They had as their king the angel of

the abyss, so the top dog in the dark hole. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon. Some say it's a Hebrew name and a Greek name to say that he has dominion over Jews and Gentiles. So the demons are torturing people, but it's not just Gentile people, it's Jewish people as well.

I don't know. Notice how often John uses the word like, like lions, like scorpions, like women's hair. I think this is metaphorical symbolic language. Because if it's not, this is one weird-looking locust. A locust that looks like a horse but also has like a human face and long hair. And some people do take it literally. I'm not saying that you can't or that it's impossible. Certainly God can do whatever he wants. But I tend to think that this is John using categories and language and pictures to try to capture what he saw.

What he saw was real and literal, and maybe even physical, but he didn't know how to describe it. So he uses all of these different metaphors. If you're taking notes, whatever the case, whether they're literal, symbolic, or something else, this demonically possessed horde is described by John as something terrifying and horrific. Let me give you some of what I think he's trying to communicate when he says that they are like horses prepared for war. I think he says that to say this demonic horde is not like a mall cop. Okay, they're not a peace officer.

These are warriors bent on destruction. Okay. Their aim is to destroy and to ruin. They have crowns on their heads. I think that is to convey that they are successful in what they do. Maybe if these are people who've been in prison because of their past torment. They're like the hall of fame of the demons of the world. They have victories in their past. Batting four hundred. They are the best of the best, and so they have a sense of swag and confidence and the kinds of affliction that they bring on the world because of past successes.

They have crowns. They have human faces. This might mean that these are demons that are animating human beings, so these are human actors possessed by demons. Or it could be he's talking about a human face to convey that they are intelligent. They are strategic. They're extremely smart. He says they have hair like women. Some think that means that these demons are attractive. I don't know how you could think that they're attractive if they have all the other things that are going on, but I think it's more a reference to their vitality, their strength, like Samson had long hair, which was the source of his strength.

And so it talks about their power and their vitality. It says they have teeth like a lion. That's used in Joel chapter 1[5] when it talks about the invading army that was going to destroy Israel. Teeth like a lion was used to communicate their fierceness. They are just cruel. They're unusually mean. We have laws against cruel and unusual punishment in the U.S. They did not adhere to those kind of laws. Some of the things that an invading army caused Israel to do was to eat their own children. Horrendous evils. That's the kind of evil this army, this demon horde will cause people to do.

They have teeth like lions. They inflict pain through their mouth and their tails. That's a head scratcher to me. That's another reason I think that these are maybe spiritual agents instead of physical agents, because they harm people through their mouth and through their tails. Later on the tails are described as having the heads of snakes. So the idea is that they use false teaching and deception, lies and cunning to sow strategic levels of evil and deception and chaos. That produce maximum damage on the world and the people who are oppressed and tormented by these demons.

So it could be that, they could be literal, physical, they could be some combination of both, that they're demon-possessed actors, whether they're humans or something other than that. Whatever they are, they're bad. They're terrifying, and it is a consequence of people living in lifelong continual rebellion against God. And it's a reminder for us today, even though we may not be alive on that day when that day comes, it's a reminder for us of the danger of Satan and demons for us. No Christian could ever be possessed by a demon, they're protected by God, that's what you see here in this text, but that is not to say that you cannot be affected by the demonic realm.

That's not to say you can't be harmed by the demonic realm. People who kind of flirt and toy around with and play with the occult and all the Ouija boards or whatever they're called, thinking it's harmless, it's not going to hurt me, or watching countless numbers of movies or episodes on Netflix that deal with the occult, which by the way is a growing number of TV shows out there, just more and more of an interest in this kind of stuff. It's not harmless and you can't toy with it and play with it and think it's not going to mess me up.

It's also a reminder that if you're living in sin and there's something that God wants you to do and you're saying, I don't want to do it your way, I want to do it my way, and I'm going to keep running. You're running towards this kind of danger. Demonic torment awaits the people who live in continual unrepentant rebellion against God. And it's not because God hates you or wants to see you suffer. It's just the natural consequence of a life that chooses to do it my way instead of God's way.

So it invites demonic torment. What are they? I don't know. We know the intent, torture, we know the extent: people who do not have God's seal, but I don't know their methods or the means of their destruction. The main point is that God's judgment awaits those who live in unrepentant sin, and one form of that judgment is demonic torment. The second woe is in verses 12 to 21. The first woe is over, thank God. If there was ever a chapter in the Bible you didn't want to preach as a preacher, this is the one.

The first woe has passed, there's still two more to come after this. The sixth angel blew his trumpet, and from the four horns of the golden altar that is before God, I heard a voice say to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, Release the four angels bound at the great river Euphrates. That was a big river that was on the eastern border of Israel. So the four angels

who were prepared for the hour, day, month, and year were released to kill a third of the human race. So you're talking billions of people die.

They're not afflicted. They're not tormented. They're dead. So not only does it invite demonic torment, continual unrepentant rebellion against God invites devastating judgment on you and on the people you love and on the world in which you live. Look at the way he describes this. You've got these four angels, which I think are maybe demons, fallen angels because they're in chains, which means they're in trouble. And they are released at the— so it's not as though God loses his temper or has a mood swing and says, I can't take it anymore, and releases the angels.

No, he's been patient, he's been waiting for evil to reach a certain threshold in the earth. But as soon as it hits that threshold, the Lord says to the angel, Now's the time, blow the trumpet. He blows the trumpet. The four angels are released, and what these four angels do, I do not know. But the effect of what they do is this 200-million-man army that kills one-third of the human beings who are alive on the earth. It is a reminder of the severity of our sin before a holy God. Look at verses 16 through 19.

The number of the mounted troops was 200 million. There is no such thing as a 200-million army right now in the world. You have 200 million people in places like China and North Korea, but this is a 200-million-person army. I heard their number. And this is how I saw the horses and their riders in the vision. So just like John's looking at a television screen, he says they have breastplates that were fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow. The heads of the horses were like the heads of lions, and from their mouths came fire, smoke, and sulfur.

Now the fire, the smoke, and the sulfur correspond to the colors red, blue, and yellow. A third of the human race was killed by these three plagues, the fire, the smoke, and the sulfur that came from their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouths, and in their tails, because of their tails, which resemble snakes. They have heads that inflict injury. So they harm people through the mouth and through the tails. The tails have the heads of snakes. This is again metaphorical apocalyptic language. Some people actually think that this two-hundred-million-man army is the same thing as the demon horde that's mentioned earlier.

There are certain parallels for sure, but this seems to be a different kind of force. That's not to say they're not demonically possessed by the demonic horde, certainly that's possible, but these seem to be human actors, not spiritual actors. This seems to be not just mental spiritual torment. This seems to be physical torment and death. We don't know where they come from. It depends on what way you interpret the book of Revelation, depends on how you define the red, the blue, and the yellow. And the breastplates and the head and the tails and all that stuff.

All that's depending on how you interpret the book of Revelation. I would be wary of anybody who says this is exactly what they represent. Thus saith the Lord, these are Apache helicopters, and the red is a nuclear bomb, and the yellow is a gas bomb, and I don't know what all they come up with, but they come up with some very fanciful, crazy ideas. I don't think you can know. Here's what we know. There's 200 million of them. John hears their number. They have breastplates with different colors, red, blue, and yellow.

Those colors associate with the three different plagues of fire, smoke, and sulfur. We know from Revelation chapter 14 that the smoke is symbolic of torment. And so the fire and the sulfur could be metaphorical or allegorical to something like that, something like torment. So we don't know the means or the methods of this 200-million-man army, but we know their effect is to destroy or to kill one-third of the human race. I did a survey of how different interpretive methods define these elements. The historicist camp, which believes that the book of Revelation is being fulfilled throughout history, they say that the red and the yellow and the blue is a reference to the artillery that was used by the Turks in the siege of Constantinople.

So that historical battle, that's what they say this is. The preterists, who think that Revelation was fulfilled by AD 70, say this is a reference to the Romans invading Jerusalem, not the big one in AD 70, but the second-biggest one, which was done in AD 66. And so the 200 million is just a it's not a literal 200 million, it's just a reference to a really big army like the Roman army destroying the Jews. Cruelty and all that stuff, all that's there, but some think it's a reference to that. Some futurists, which is the take I'm taking, get really crazy with it, and I don't know that I'm going to go with them on the crazy, but they would say, like, it's a coalition of nations from the east because you have the Euphrates River which is the eastern border, so they would say nations like China, India, North Korea, some conglomeration of eastern nations are going to bind together and create some kind of World War III, a devastating blow on the Middle East and the West, so that one-third of the earth dies.

And they would say these are nuclear bombs, this is modern-day weaponry. Then the idealists or the people who spiritualize the book of Revelation, they would say this is literal warfare. It's just symbolic of what God does when a nation persists in sin. So they would point to Hitler's Germany, they would point to World War I, World War II, they would point to the invasion of the Babylonians on Israel. Times when God's people persist in sin and rebellion, and as a consequence of that sin and rebellion, God will raise up a godless nation to destroy them.

And that this is one more example of that on the day of the Lord. Who's right? Who's wrong? Who's to say? I don't know. I really think it could go either way. The point is, living a life of unrepentant rebellion against God invites his judgment. One form of that judgment is devastation in your life that hurts you, it hurts the people you love, it hurts the world in

which you live. So demonic torment awaits those who live in unrepentant sin. Devastating judgment awaits those who live in unrepentant sin. And then the last thing, and with this we'll be done: the life lived in continual unrepentant sin results in a damaged heart that cannot repent.

Look at verses 20 to 21. The rest of the people who were not killed by these plagues did not repent of the works of their hands to stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood, which cannot see, hear, or walk. And they did not repent of their murders, their sorceries, their sexual immorality, or their thefts. So the third consequence of unrepentant rebellion against God is a damaged heart that cannot repent. And I remember when I was in my season of rebellion at a certain point in my past that I would hear preachers say things like, today if you hear God's voice, do not harden your heart.

Because there may come a day where you can no longer hear God's voice say, do not harden your heart. And that's what this is getting at. He's saying that if you continue to live in unrepentant sin, and every time God says repent, every time God says stop, every time God says this doesn't have to be your future. And every time he says that, you say, no thanks, never mind, I'll do this on my own. That when you do that, your heart gets harder and harder and harder and harder. And that if you persist in that unrepentance, that state of non-repentance, there will maybe come the day where you can no longer hear the invitation at all, which means you cut yourself off from salvation.

Because without repentance, there is no salvation. You do not become a Christian by mentally assenting to certain truths about Jesus and praying some prayer or getting wet in the baptistry. You become a Christian by repenting and believing. Repentance must precede faith or it's not saving faith. Repentance is this spirit that says, I'm wrong, God is right. I'm dead. God is life. I cannot save myself. I must be saved by a power bigger than me, outside of me, and Jesus is that power. That's repentance. Repentance is a change of mind. It's a change of heart that produces a change of action, but you cannot have the action without the repentance.

And so today, I'll tell you what my preacher told me. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart. It's what the author of Hebrews said— the first sermon you see in the New Testament. Hebrews chapter 3, today if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart. And some of you know exactly what it is in your life, you know exactly the thing where you're saying, God, I don't want to. I'd rather not. I'll do it my own way. And he's saying to you, do not harden your heart.

Do not do it again today. Do not make today the one more day where you reject me and tell me you're better off on your own because you are heading towards a path that is going to destroy you, destroy the people that you love, and it does not have to be that way. It can be different. You can have life. You can have forgiveness. You can have joy. You can have peace.

But you've got to repent. And so that's how I want us to close. I know this is not a feel-good message, but it is God's mercy to you if you will hear the word of God and repent.

And so I want to take just a few minutes with every head bowed, every eye closed, for you to do business with God. I'm not reading your mail. I don't know what's between you and the Lord, but you know areas of your life where you can sense your heart becoming hard. You can sense God's conviction. You know that he's pulling and nudging you to go a different direction. And up until this point, you have not surrendered. And all I want you to do is to ask the Lord to give you the courage and the power to repent.

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1. Transcript note: spoken as "Exodus chapter eight"; the first plague, in which the Nile turned to blood and the fish died, is in Exodus 7:14–24. Source: Exodus 7:20–21 (CSB). ↩
2. Transcript note: spoken as "verses 20 to 21"; the plague of darkness is Exodus 10:21–23 (verse 20 closes the locust plague). Source: Exodus 10:20–23 (CSB). ↩
3. Transcript note: spoken as "abysmos"; the word in Jude 6 is zophos ("gloom, deep darkness"), not abyssos ("abyss"); abyssos is the word used in Revelation 9:1–2, 9:11 and Luke 8:31. The point about a prison for fallen angels stands, but the Greek word is different. Source: Jude 6 (NA28 Greek text); BDAG, "zophos" and "abyssos." ↩
4. Transcript note: spoken as "Revelation chapter 8"; the key to the shaft of the abyss is given in Revelation 9:1. Source: Revelation 9:1 (CSB). ↩
5. Transcript note: spoken as "Joel chapter 2"; the invading army with "the teeth of a lion" is in Joel 1:6 (the army of Joel 2 is described in similar terms but without that phrase). Source: Joel 1:6 (CSB). ↩