

# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

## ***LESSON SIX***

As previously stated, each of the three series of seven events provides a different perspective to the dealings of God with mankind. The seals show the response of the unrighteous who reject the gospel and persecute the saints. The trumpets will reveal the working of God in calling men to turn from their evil ways. The seventh trumpet will reveal the bowls of wrath, which reveal the judgments of God against those who refuse to repent (chapters 15 and 16). Through chapter 7, we have already opened the sixth seal and seen its judgment, and seen God's people receive His seal. We finally come to the opening of the seventh or last seal by Christ in chapter 8. Instead of immediate action, we see a sudden and unexpected complete silence in heaven for one-half hour (a very short time). This is a dramatic pause, given the previous continual loud praises given by the entire host of heaven and even the entire creation and the many scenes of activity that have been portrayed. We now see God in heaven watching over His own, hearing the prayers of the persecuted and about to respond with great action in judgment. Heaven waits in anticipation. Once, when the Israelites were threatened with invasion and destruction by The Babylonians, Habakkuk questioned God twice regarding His plan for the Jews. God told him to wait patiently and see: "The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him" (Hab. 2:20).

## **CHAPTER 8**

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# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

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Seven angels now stand before God and are given 7 trumpets, signifying the completeness of the events to follow. Yet another angel appears before an altar of incense (a different altar than that of 6:9). This angel holds a golden censer or firepan, commanded to burn a large quantity of incense. We are reminded of the twice daily burning of incense on the altar of Solomon’s temple while the people stood outside praying (Luke 1:8-10). Here, we visualize the prayers of the saints ascending like the incense to God as a fragrant aroma, just like the lives of the saints (Ps. 141:2; II Cor. 2:15; Eph. 5:2; Phil. 4:18; Rev. 5:8). This angel fills the censer with fire from the altar and throws it on the earth, causing lightning, thunder and earthquakes. Again, we see the power of God, as the Israelites did on Sinai. Thus, God now responds to the ascending prayers: “...He will avenge them speedily” (Luke 18:8).

At this point, the previous seven angels prepare to sound their trumpets. The trumpets are a symbol of warning and instruction, heralding partial judgments on the wicked. As with the seven seals, the trumpets are broken into two divisions of judgments: four and then three. With the trumpets, the first four are closely related, and then the three following which are more independent. The first four warn of effects on the natural world, and the next three affect the spiritual and physical lives of mankind. When we see the seven bowls of wrath (16:1-21), this same pattern is followed. The natural judgments are reminiscent of the plagues God sent upon Egypt: water changed to blood (Ex. 7:20-21); hail (Ex. 9:23-25); locusts (Ex. 10:4-15); and darkness (Ex. 10:21-23). As each trumpet sounds, a third part of the world is affected and destroyed. Even today, natural disasters should invoke within us a reminder of our limited control in the face of God’s complete power.

The first trumpet sounds and hail and fire, mixed with blood, are thrown down to the earth. One third (a large part but not the total) of all **vegetation** is destroyed, causing great suffering. The blood mentioned here could possibly remind us that the blood of the wicked will be returned upon their heads (Gen. 9:6; Isa. 26:21; Joel 3:19). With the sounding of the second trumpet, something

# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

which appears to be a great blazing mountain is cast into the **sea**, causing it to turn into blood. This results in a third of all sea creatures are killed and a third of all ships are also destroyed. Those who remain should be brought to repentance.

As the third trumpet sounds, a great star falls from heaven and lands on the **fresh waters** of the earth, the rivers and springs. The star is called Wormwood, and turns one third of the fresh waters into wormwood. Wormwood was a poisonous plant, possibly the same as hemlock. Since hemlock is poisonous, it is considered accursed and therefore the word is used to convey a curse. It is used as such in Deuteronomy 29:18 and Jeremiah 9:15 & 23:15. Many died from this poison sent from heaven, but it symbolizes the poison and bitterness and sorrow men suffer from their sinful behavior.

A fourth trumpet sounds, causing a third of the sun, the moon, and the stars to turn dark. The result is that a third of the daytime and a third of the nighttime are plunged into complete darkness. We recall the ninth plague inflicted on Egypt. In that case, the entire nation of Egypt remained in darkness for three days, while the Israelites enjoyed light in their homes. The obvious parallel to the people of God today still stands. The light from the heavenly bodies always stood for God's protection, salvation, truth, and joy. Their removal forbodes the opposite, as if they are hiding rather than watch the shameful behavior of earth, warning the wicked to repent. We see the same imagery here that is often used for "the great and terrible day of the Lord", as previously discussed. This fourth trumpet complete the first group of these seven judgments which affect the earth, calling for men to repent and reform before destruction comes.

John now hears and sees an eagle flying in mid-heaven. A few translations say "angel" instead of "eagle", but the original Greek says *aetos* or "eagle". This eagle pronounces woe on the people of earth three times, signifying that the final three trumpet signals will herald three plagues worse than before, to be directed at the unrighteous on the earth. The eagle was often a signal of disaster in scripture (Hos.8:1; Hab. 1:8; Matt. 24:28). It is also not lost on the reader that the eagle was the animal insignia of Rome, often sitting atop the standards carried by the soldiers while marching. Here the eagle is no longer representing the evil empire, but has turned against the Great Persecutor to warn that it now faces

# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

judgment. We see nearly a similar image of the eagle in Hosea 8:1: “Set the trumpet to thy mouth. As an eagle he (the enemy) cometh against the house of Jehovah.”

## CHAPTER 9

As the final three trumpets sound, we see a change in the nature of the judgments. The fifth and sixth trumpets bring great suffering upon the wicked as a result of the actions of men. Thinking about the current world tyrant and persecutor at the time of the writing of this book, we remember the factors which contributed to the eventual fall of the Roman Empire included natural disasters, the internal decay and wickedness of society, and persistent attacks by outside invaders. We have seen the role of the first four trumpets in revealing God’s powerful anger in the forces of nature, and now the fifth and sixth will show man’s role in the destruction of Rome. As always, however, we must see the overall message being portrayed of spiritual forces at work in the world against the evil on the earth, and not just see it in a narrow context of particular people and places in time.

With the sounding of the fifth trumpet, we no longer see destruction poured out on nature, but now see judgments on the inward moral decay of mankind without God. As this trumpet sounds, a star falls from heaven. There is a strong desire to place a name on this star or great personality or angel, although the answer is not definite and certainly not necessary, The usual suspect is Satan himself. John previously referred to Satan as “the ruler of this world (John 12:31), and Paul calls him “*the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience*” (Eph. 2:2). Jesus remarked to the seventy: “*I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven*” (Luke 10:18). Isaiah 14:12 refers to the king of Babylon as the morning star (“Lucifer” or “light-bringer” in Latin) and taunts him as he “*falls from heaven.*” Some have suggested that this is a metaphor for the way Satan fell from heaven, and even reference the lamentation over the king of Tyre in Ezekiel 28:12-16 as another secondary reference to Satan’s fall. In direct contrast, Jesus is “*...the bright, the morning star*” (Luke 22:16). Whereas this fallen ‘star’ is given the key to the bottomless pit

# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

(a symbol of control), Jesus has the keys of death and hades (Rev. 1:18). The bottomless pit or abyss includes all the evil and wickedness to which Satan is given control, mostly referring to the Roman Empire in the current context. It is not Gehenna or hell, as that is likened to a lake of fire (the final abode of Satan, his angels, death, hades, and all the wicked), as seen in Rev. 20:10 & 14-15. The Lord has the final say regarding the fate of Satan and the world.

A great cloud of smoke from the abyss fills the air and darkens the sun and air. The darkness here symbolizes evil and wickedness, trying to cover and extinguish the light of righteousness (II Cor. 4:3-4). From this stifling smoke appear unusual and extremely powerful locusts. Their appearance is that of horses in battle, with breastplates of iron and teeth like iron. Yet, they have the faces of men and long hair as women (suggesting human qualities), as well as golden crowns (*stephanos*, the victory crown) on their heads. Despite their appearance suggesting earthly pleasure and success, they are still locusts: their singular focus is to consume and destroy. They possess powerful scorpion tails and stingers that torture their prey, and wings that beat furiously (“sound of chariots”) and allow them to overpower whomever they wish. Unlike earthly locusts, they are commanded to leave all vegetation alone and focus their terrible fury on men. They are given power to continually sting and torment evil men for five months (an incomplete or limited period of time). Men will long for death, but none will find it.

If we read the first eleven verses of the second chapter of Joel, we see the familiar symbols and situation of the “Day of the Lord”. If we look even closer and consider chapter one, chapter two is actually describing a terrible horde of locusts such as the world has never seen. Many of the same descriptions used in Joel 2 parallel those of this scene in Rev. 9, only these locusts terrorize only men. The ones affected are those without God’s seal – the evil ones, who will reap what they sow. The locusts from the pit are the agents of Satan that are affecting the hearts and lives of evil men. Not only will they suffer the consequences of their actions in this life, (the “due penalty of their error” from Rom. 1:27), but they will eventually learn “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). The miseries caused by sinful behavior are the roots for most of the suffering we see in the world, affecting both the evil and the righteous. Yet, Jesus assured His disciples that “/

# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

*have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall in any wise hurt you”* (Luke 10:19). The only protection we have against the sting of sin and death is through our Savior.

The king over these scorpions is called the angel of the abyss. He is named *Abaddon* (Hebrew), or *Apollyon* (Greek). Both mean “a destroying angel” or “destroyer”. Scholars are divided on whether the identity of this angel is Satan or a different subservient demon (some are quick to liken this to the angel of each of the seven churches). It matters very little, although the “star” who was given the key to the abyss is more likely Satan. Interestingly, the Hebrew name or word *Abaddon* is used in the Old Testament as the personification of **destruction** (Job 31:12), **Sheol** (same as Hades - Job 26:6; Prov. 15:11 & 27:20), **death** (Job 28:22), and the **grave** (Ps. 88:11). Perhaps all these concepts are here wrapped into one concept or name: Death and Destruction is in charge of the abyss of evil.

Verse twelve ends by saying that the “first woe” is past, and two more are to follow. We remember the eagle flying in mid-heaven announced that three woes would come, and the first vision or woe appeared. The sixth angel sounds his trumpet to begin the second woe. We hear a voice from the four horns of the altar call out to this sixth angel to release the four angels bound at the Euphrates River. These four angels are released, commanded to kill one third of the earth. As four is the number of creation or the world, we are here seeing a judgment affecting the entire earth. Their release is perfectly timed for the exact moment God has deemed appropriate (hour, day, month, and year). A great army of horsemen, **200,000,000**, (or  $2 \times [10 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10] \times [10 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10]$ ), is released. This conveys the same idea of the “myriads and myriads” or innumerable angels (5:11) surrounding God’s throne with praise. The riders have breastplates the color of fire and hyacinth and brimstone. The horses have heads like lions, and fire and smoke and brimstone proceed out of their mouths. The horses’ tails are like snakes with heads, also killing men. A third of mankind (likely evil mankind) is killed by these 3 plagues (the fire, the smoke, and the brimstone), as well as the snake-like tails.

Those scholars who believe that the white rider in chapter 6:2 represents general military conquest here believe this second woe suggests the same thing. They again point to invaders such as the Parthians, who continually plagued even

# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Rome. They suggest the reference here to the battle-boundary of the Euphrates (the basic western boundary of the Parthians) confirms this belief. Taking this approach, however, we could bring to mind any number of conquering powers along this boundary, such as the earlier Assyrians or later the spread of Islam. The Euphrates is not mentioned here as a specific geographical location, but rather symbolic of the restraint God exercises over His great power to allow for repentance... but only until it is too late and the proper time is ready for vengeance.

At the sounding of the first four trumpets, one third of each portion of nature was affected and destroyed. The fifth trumpet heralds the torture of men without killing them. With this sixth trumpet, judgment is turned to the inward corruption of men, and one third of mankind is killed. As with the breaking of the seals, these judgments are still just warnings and not a final destruction. We must also remember that those harmed are the unrighteous and not those already sealed by God.

Two-thirds of those who are evil still remain on the earth, continuing in sin. Their deeds are broken into two parts. Verse 20 talks about their idolatry. The futility and foolishness of creating and then worshipping an idol does not just show the ignorance of such behavior, but also shows the callous self-centeredness to suppress our natural desire to serve God and supplant His glory with a creation made in our own image. Regardless of the idol (an image, money, fame, power, pleasure), it reveals that we place ourselves at the center of the universe. Verse 21 shows sins directed at others and ourselves: murders, witchcraft, sexual immorality, and stealing. Moral depravity is the result of idolatry and a lack of respect for God. When we don't respect God, we can't respect others and we can't respect ourselves.

Chapter 9 closes with a sad commentary on the hearts of men. Despite seeing one third of the unrighteous on the earth being killed in this sixth judgment, the remaining two-thirds still refuse to repent. Despite the harsh punishment administered by God, anger and spiteful vengeance were not the motives behind these judgments. Instead, these actions were evidence of His love. He does not wish that any would perish (II Peter 3:9). In reference to the Roman Empire, these judgments were the means God used to warn Rome to

# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

repent or be destroyed. Despite these warnings, Rome eventually fell due to the same three basic factors presented (and ignored) in these judgments: 1) natural disasters; 2) internal moral decay; and 3) attacks from outside invaders.