

18. Revelation 9:1-20 HELL ON EARTH... LITERALLY! Ps. John Lesnik 15/9/2024

INTRODUCTION

If you haven't been here for a while, you may feel a little bit confused, because this message is kind of hard to understand without hearing it in the context of all the other messages. Let me give you a little perspective. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is going to come back to this planet and will "Rapture the Church." It will happen secretly, silently and suddenly. That means all true Christians are going to be caught up... similar to how Elijah was caught up into heaven on a fiery chariot in the Old Testament. According to 1 Thessalonians 4, Christians will be caught up to be with the Lord and all of the ones we love who died and are Christians will also be caught up. The thing about the Rapture is that it can happen at any moment, no one knows the day nor the hour... only God knows that... and so we are encouraged to 'be ready' at all times. That will be the hour that the whole Church, every true born again Christian, will be in heaven. It is the moment that the believer's heart looks forward to, when we will finally be in the presence of our Saviour, our Redeemer, the One who shed His blood for us, He who made it possible to be forgiven of our sins, our life, our breath, our Creator... the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is what the Bible teaches and that's what we are studying now in Revelation. There will be a 7 year period of terrible tribulation and crisis on the earth led by a one-world ruler whom the Bible calls the Antichrist. We don't know who he is now but he will come to the spotlight after the Church is taken out of this world. During that time there will be terrible judgments poured out by God upon the earth called the seven seals, the seven trumpet judgements, and the seven bowls of wrath. Now, I'll be honest... this isn't really pleasant reading and I don't really enjoy reading it because it depicts so much death, severe wrath, and terrible judgement. I want to remind you as you listen to this sermon today, that if you are a Christian, you will not be here during this time! So, why are we even studying it? Because it is in God's Word and we believe every word of God's Word is profitable and we are committed to studying it verse after verse... yes, even the unpleasant parts.

****What would you think if scientists and astronomers knew about a huge meteor that was on course to collide with planet earth, and was going to cause untold catastrophes and innumerable deaths... and they never told anyone what was going to happen? Well, a preacher would also be derelict in his duties if he never spoke about the catastrophe that is coming to this earth and what the Bible says you can do about it.*

Last time we studied the first four trumpets and there are three more left. Today we'll focus upon the 5th and 6th trumpet... trust me, these two will be enough! And we will leave the 7th trumpet for a later time as it's in chapter 11 which is simply an announcement of a further seven bowl judgements. Today's message is called, "**Hell on Earth... Literally!**"

John says in *Revelation 9:1-6*, "*The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft [or the door] of the Abyss [or the pit]. When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.*" We studied that God put a seal on the foreheads of 144,000 Jewish evangelists so they could not be hurt. That's whom he is talking about here. They'll hurt everybody except them. "*They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a man. During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them.*"

Folks, last time we read about the first four trumpet judgements – the first trumpet was judgement on the land. The second trumpet was judgement on the sea. The third trumpet was judgement on the fresh waters. And the fourth trumpet was judgement on the heavenly bodies where it says that "the third of the sun, the moon the stars were smitten, and a third of them darkened, and the day did not shine for a third of it and the night in the same way." This is unbelievable stuff! Since the creation of time, the heavens have declared the glory of God and shown His handiwork. Now, we are reading how the heavens are declaring His wrath. We saw how the heavens were unravelling, unfolding, coming apart... and bringing such disaster, devastation and fear upon earth... well, now we will read that is nothing like what hell can do upon this planet and its people!

Things are going to be so bad, people will try to commit suicide and will be unsuccessful. In verse 7 there is a description of the locusts: It's like a bad dream after eating doughnuts, ice cream, chilli and garlic, and then taking a ride on a massive roller coaster!! *"The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek Apollyon." [which means "the destroyer"] The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come.*

The eagle flying in heaven saying, "Woe, woe, woe." This talking eagle is interesting because I believe this is showing God's mercy in the midst of judgement. God is still warning people that they still can turn, still can repent, believe, and be saved before the next judgement comes, and hell opens up and spills out all over the world. God is always eager to warn the lost, but He gives them the right to decide.

I. THE FIFTH TRUMPET: AN ARMY FROM HELL IS RELEASED

The first thing I want to talk about is the fifth trumpet, and it is literally an army from Hell coming forth onto earth when a place called 'the bottomless pit' is opened up. We read how a star that had fallen was given a key and how he opened up this Abyss. I'll just mention a couple of points here. First, what is the Abyss, or the bottomless pit? That is where the Bible says demons reside, where they are kept waiting until the time when they will be set loose. Do you remember the story from Mark about the *"demon possessed man"* and how those demons said to Jesus, *"Don't send us into the pit before our appointed time"*? That's the same thing they are talking about. It's also the place Revelation 20 mentions that Satan will be thrown into for a thousand years.

And what is this star? Chapter 9 tells us that this star was given a key, and he opened the Abyss... so this star is personified and is an angel, because Scripture will at times refer to some stars as being angels. I'll just briefly cover here that this might be Satan, or it might be a heavenly angel who is given the task of opening up this bottom pit called, 'the Abyss'. It could be Satan because it uses the phrase, "star that had fallen". And we know Satan was a fallen star or angel according to Ezekiel 28:12-16 and Luke 10:18. And this might be saying that God gives Satan a temporary authority to open up the pit of hell to let out a whole bunch of demons, and this really bad demon called Apollyon. However, one problem with this view is that it doesn't really make sense that God would give Satan the very key to the place that later he himself would be thrown into according to Rev. 20. My understanding is that Satan does not have the key to hell but rather will be the victim of it and imprisoned in it.

In **Revelation 20** we read about an angel who comes down from heaven, who is holding the key of the Abyss with a great chain, and then he grabs Satan, binds him, and throws him into the Abyss for a thousand years. *Revelation 20:1-3, "And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss, and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time."*

In my simple understanding, I see this angel of Rev.20 being the same as in Revelation 9, and the reference to being fallen is not that this is an evil angel or Satan, but rather a similar concept as in Revelation 20, that the angel had come down to the earth. That's not rock solid, but I thought I'd mention two interpretations here... and this is definitely an angel who has a special role with this key to this pit where these imprisoned demons are kept and he lets them out on the earth at God's permission. Let's be thankful to God today there are not more demons released on this earth than there are right now. There are many, many more held in this prison right now until this time. This is going to be a demonic army, and they are coming.

Some observations that stand out about this army...

1. Demonic army from the pit appears as a swarm of locusts: What we need to understand is that this is describing creatures that are unnatural, demonic, things we have never seen before, and it's difficult to comprehend the form they take. But so many will spew out. We can't really relate to locusts because most of us have never seen a swarm of locusts, but John describes them as locusts because in biblical times and even today in some parts of the world a swarm of locusts is millions upon millions of locusts that cover the sky, blocking out the sun. They are little grasshoppers, sometimes big grasshoppers, and they eat anything green. I saw on YouTube how a swarm of locusts will pass over a forest and in their path there is nothing green left: every leaf, every blade of grass, everything green has been eaten up and they leave devastation in their wake. That's why he describes this army that way, because there is a whole cloud of them coming up out of the pit. The closest thing we have here to compare it to is when we have those masses of bats flying across our skies at certain times in the year... they can look like a dark cloud. To John, it appeared like a cloud of locusts moving out.

2. They have power to inflict terrible pain for five months: However, even in this time they are limited by God. You see, God is still in control. He says, *"You guys cannot kill anybody but you can cause them to suffer."* The word there means *"torture for five months,"* a specific period of time. Why are they described like scorpions? We don't see many scorpions here... although there are some. I read that in certain countries, for every person that dies from a snake bite, 10 die from scorpion stings. Scorpions are insects that belong to the arachnid (spider) family. They have long, coiled tails with a sharp stinger in it and in that stinger is a neurotoxin different than venom. When a scorpion strikes its prey, the neurotoxin attacks the nervous system and when people die from a scorpion sting, it is oftentimes not from the venom itself. The neurotoxin causes their throat muscles to constrict and many times they choke to death. What a terrible torture that is! So if God is trying to describe the pain this army inflicts on people, he describes it as the pain in the sting of scorpions.

3. They are led by "the Destroyer": It is very obvious this army is led by *"the destroyer."* Look at that phrase, *"Abaddon"* in verse 11, the Greek *"Apollyon."* Some suggest this might be Satan because he is a 'destroyer'.... However, my understanding is that this seems to be a high-ranking demon that had been imprisoned until this time, and then allowed out to lead this demonic army. And their appearance is described from verse 7 onwards. I'll just say that some people have explained that John is trying to describe things such as tanks, artillery, planes, jets, and helicopter gunships of the Antichrist... that's all very interesting but I don't agree. I think that John is describing something that is completely unnatural, absolutely hideous like we've never known before, and has much cruelty involved. *I think mankind's thirst for unimaginable cruelty and horror in terrifying beasts and monsters that is so often depicted in our movies will finally come true.* How are they going to be? Matthew Henry's commentary says that these locusts were of "monstrous size and shape"... it's hard to imagine, but it's going to be a demonic army so awful they are going to inflict pain on many, many people on the earth during the Tribulation for 5 months, which is 150 days.... Which, incidentally, is the same amount of time that God allowed it to rain whilst Noah was in the ark.

How's everybody feeling so far? Are we excited about these trumpets? Absolutely not! But wait... there's more. We read how this is the first of three woes in verse 12, and two more woes are yet to come.

II. THE SIXTH TRUMPET: DEATH ANGELS ARE RELEASED

With the sixth trumpet we see death angels are released. *"The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God. It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.' And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number. The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulphur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions,"* *"And out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulphur. A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke, and sulphur [brimstone] that came out of their mouths. The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury."* (Rev 9:13-18)

Have you noticed how each one of these trumpets gets worse and worse and worse, just as each one of the seals got harder and harder... and we have yet to see the *"bowls of wrath"!!!* Each one gets more and more terrible.

This is a picture of the four death angels released... special fallen angels created apparently for no other reason than for this. The previous demonic locusts were restricted to tormenting mankind, but these four angels have the authority to kill on a massive scale! It says in verse 14: *"They were held at the river Euphrates. And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind."*

Now, they are released from the River Euphrates... this is relevant. Today, the Euphrates River is the longest and one of the most historically important rivers of Western Asia. It originates in Turkey and flows for 2800kms through Syria and Iraq and empties into the Persian Gulf. In the Bible, the Euphrates River was one of the major rivers that came out of the Garden of Eden, we see that in Genesis. It was where Satan first seems to have come upon this planet to tempt Adam and Eve. And so it was also near the River Euphrates that man first fell into sin; it was near the River Euphrates that Cain murdered Abel, the first murder; it was near the River Euphrates that Babel and Babylon first raised their heads to defy God. It seems that this place in Iraq is the geographical source of all humanity's problems... But now God is doing something, and where the birth of the sin problem took place, God is going to bring it all to a conclusion!

These death angels appear to be driving forth this massive army of two hundred million. This number isn't a guess, John says he heard the number being said. That is a phenomenal number. In ancient history, the greatest army that ever existed was the army of Xerxes of Greece who some claimed may have been around one million soldiers, although many scholars actually believe that number to be more accurately around 100,000 – 300,000. At that time, it was the most massive army in the world... the movie '300' is based on that. In World War II, the total size of all armies on both sides were 70 million soldiers. In 1965, China claimed to have an army of 200 million, and some believe that we are reading here about a full-on invasion of the West by China, and here we are reading about their weaponry and firepower.

However, the more I've read and studied the judgements of Revelation, the more I tend to believe that this is once again very unnatural and extremely cruel, and therefore I think this is more so most likely 200 million demonic beings that are led by these death angels. Just like the creatures that came out from the bottomless pit, here again we have terrifying creatures that are demonically inspired. A lot of speculation can be made about what John is describing here... we can't be 100% certain on exactly what it is, but we know that the devastation and the destruction is going to be great! Every time I read this I am just thankful that I am not going to be here. Amen! I thank God I am going to be in heaven!

III. THE RESPONSE OF MAN

Let's begin to wrap this up by looking at how people at that time react judgement after judgement after judgement after judgement? Look what mankind continues to do.... Look at verse 20. *"The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts."*

1. The sin of false worship: This is literally worshipping things that are driven by demonic forces. This can be Satan worship, or involvement in demonic practices such as Spiritism, communication with the dead, Ouija Boards, Tarot Cards, New Age mysticism, Horoscopes, Fortune telling, etc... but it also refers to worshipping, or ascribing worth, to anything that is not the God of the Bible, the creator of heaven and earth. It can be "things" in your life right now – your car, your bank account, your stuff, your status, your looks... all these things can be false worship.

It means looking to any other source of direction and revelation other than God and His Word. It can also be listening to the doctrines of demons as 1 Timothy 4 states. This all happens today, and during the Tribulation it's going to continue in spite of everything happening to people around them.

2. The sin of murder: Verse 21, *“Nor did they repent of their murders.”* From kids punching up some other kid, filming it and uploading it to YouTube, to kids who are taking guns to school wanting to blow away their classmates when they get angry, to legal mass murders taking place right now as around 125,000 babies are killed everyday! Things are getting worse and worse and murders are on the increase, even here in Logan City.

3. The sin of sorcery: This is very interesting. It says in the New International Version, *“their magical arts”* but the NKJV says *“sorceries.”* It is the Greek word *pharmakeia*. You don't have to have a degree to know what the word *pharmakeia* stands for. It means pharmacy, drugs. Witchcraft or sorcery in the Bible had to do with potions and drugs and medicines and things like that. What this is talking about is during the time of the Tribulation drug abuse is going to continue to be a massive problem as it is today.

4. Sexual sins: This is no surprise to you but sexual immorality is the Greek word *porneia*. We get our word pornography from that. Is there any surprise during the time of Tribulation, even though people are dying all over the world, that there will be an increase in sexual promiscuity and perversion?

5. The sin of theft: Theft is on the rise right now... and will continue in the Tribulation. *I heard a story about a certain shopkeeper who has been robbed seven times in seven months by the same man. The police asked him if he noticed anything different about the robber each time. He said, “Yeah, each time he is dressed better.” 😊* It's important to remind ourselves of what Paul said and be on guard that we as Christians are not involved in any of these behaviours, *“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sodomites, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor. 6:9-10)”*

CONCLUSION

Despite all the signs, despite all disasters, the countless loss of life... why won't mankind stop, repent and turn to the living God? The answer comes back as clearly as it was written originally in the Gospel of **John 3:19... “Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.”** They love their sin even to the death. God mercifully keeps saying, “Turn, turn, why should you die?”

Folks, what we've read about is a taste of hell on earth. But if you thought this was bad, then what must it be like in hell where men and women go who reject Christ? May God open up our hearts today, may we turn to Him, and call upon His name. Let's pray.