

The Book of Revelation

Session 5 - The True Nature of Sin (Chapters 8-9)

Book Overview

Chapters 8-9 continue the main action of the story, as Jesus confronts sin and darkness on the earth once and for all. They closely mirror the Passover story where God brings severe plagues upon Egypt.

A test for discernment as we seek to understand end time passages:

1. Is my understanding consistent with scripture?
2. Is my understanding consistent with the character and nature of God?
3. Am I drawing closer to God as I study this?

Chapter Overview

These two chapters can be divided into three sections:

1. End Time Intercession (Revelation 8:1-5)
2. Devastation on the Earth (Revelation 8:6-13)
3. A Final Call to Repent (Revelation 9)

These chapters describe God's severe end-time judgements against the earth. These judgements will bring incredible devastation to the earth, but are an expression of God's deep love for humanity and His deep desire for us to return to Him before it is too late. God is repaying humanity for their sinfulness (Exodus 32:20, Numbers 14:21-23, Numbers 32:23, Romans 2:5-11) so we might see the true nature of sin and repent (Isaiah 26:9-10).

Intercession and God's End-Time judgements (Revelation 8:1-5)

Verse 1:

"He opened the seventh seal" - The seven trumpets must still be understood as part of the seals. Jesus is allowing darkness to increase on the earth to prepare the world for His return.

"There was silence in heaven for about half an hour" - Heaven recognises the gravity of what is about to happen. This is a solemn event. God is grieving over the state of humanity.

Verse 3-4:

"He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of God's people, on the golden altar in front of the throne" - God is calling us to share in His grief for humanity. To share in His deep hatred of sin and His deep love for His world (Psalm 45:7). To cry out to him for justice for the oppressed and mercy for the oppressor.

Verse 5:

“Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake” - Fire from the altar purifies (Isaiah 6:6-7). God is revealing his holiness to the earth (Psalm 29:2, 96:9, Ezekiel 36:23)

Devastation on the Earth (Revelation 8:6-13)

Verse 7:

“The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood... a third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up” - These first four angels appear to be the ones John saw in Revelation 7:1-2. The earth is subjected to violent, supernatural weather patterns (Exodus 9:22-26, Job 38:22, Joel 2:30) which devastate its natural resources. The burning speaks of God’s anger. God is angry with the world but His punishments are redemptive. This time of crisis will test the hearts and motives of mankind.

Verse 8-9:

“The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed” - Something like a giant meteorite is thrown into the sea, and a third of the water turns to blood (Exodus 6:14-24). Blood speaks of all the innocent lives the world has taken. God is now using creation itself as an agent for His judgement as God confronts the earth with her sins (Revelation 9:20).

Verse 10:

“The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water” - The devastation on the earth continues through what resembles another meteorite. But God is not reckless - He has determined exactly how much of the earth’s natural resources are to be destroyed.

Verse 11:

“The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died” - This star is bitterness itself. The bitterness speaks of God’s grief over humanity. God is letting us taste in full how our sin tastes to Him (Revelation 3:16). Humanity will still need water but will have no way of knowing whether it’s safe. Could it be that this bitter water will test our hearts and our cleanliness before God (Numbers 5:11-31)?

Verse 12:

“The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars” - Now the heavenly bodies are struck. The earth’s climate will massively cool and the earth will become darker (Matthew 24:20, Luke 21:25-26). This echoes the spiritual state of the earth. In our desperation who will repent and who will harden their hearts towards God?

Verse 13:

"I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice" - This eagle could be a heavenly being or an earthly eagle that John has been given the ability to understand.

"Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded" - As devastating as the first four trumpets have been, the last three will be even more dreadful. Once the final trumpet sounds, there will be no going back.

A Final Call to Repent (Chapter 9)

Verse 1:

"The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth" - By the way John personifies the star (Revelation 9:2) it seems this star is in fact an angel. The fact that this star had fallen implies it is a fallen angel.

"The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss" - This angel is given a measure of authority for this time, to release demonic creatures locked in the Abyss. Luke talked about the Abyss as a literal place (Luke 8:31).

Verse 2:

"The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss" - The Abyss is clearly a spiritual place, but it has a physical dimension too. God is releasing a deep darkness onto the earth. We will start to experience the true nature of hell and the true price of our sin.

Verse 3-4:

"Locusts came down on 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" - John later describes the appearance of these creatures (Revelation 9:7-10), so locust seems to refer more to their function than their form - to ravage and destroy. But there is supernatural deliverance for those whom God has sealed, just as in the Passover story. Just like the demonic beings in Revelation 6, these locusts are also given power. They are serving God's purposes for a time. Yet they are still being restrained from operating in their full power.

Verse 5-6:

"They were not allowed to kill them but only to torture them for five months... during those days people will seek death but will not find it" - Torture also means 'test', as you would a metal. God is testing every human to reveal what is in our hearts. We will realise there are worse things than dying - facing the wrath of God. God is giving humanity a taste of hell so they might repent and be saved.

Verse 7:

"The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle" - This seems to tally with other descriptions of spiritual beings (Zechariah 6:1-8, Revelation 6:1-8). They are powerful beings.

"They wore something like crowns of gold" - They have been given authority.

"Their faces resembled human faces" - Spiritual beings are sometimes described as being human-like in appearance (Ezekiel 1:5-9, Daniel 10:5-6).

Verse 8:

"Their hair was like women's hair" - Possibly speaks of the allure and attractiveness of engaging in demonic and sinful activity.

"Their teeth were like lion's teeth" - But these creatures are at their heart killers and destroyers.

Verse 9:

"They had breastplates like breastplates of iron" - They are equipped for war. John is grasping for language to describe these creatures (Ezekiel 1:28).

"The sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses" - This is a terrifying army.

Verse 10:

"They had tails with stingers, like scorpions" - There is nothing good or natural about these creatures. They exist purely for wicked and hateful purposes. They are from the very depths of hell.

Verse 11:

"They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer)" - Is the angel of the Abyss the angel who opened the Abyss (Revelation 9:1)? This demon's purpose is to destroy.

Verse 12:

"The first woe is past" - These demons will only be permitted to operate on the earth for a small time.

Verse 13-14:

"The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the four horns of the golden altar that is before God... 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates'" - The altar is where prayer and intercessions are offered to God. We are called to partner with God in His plan. In the Old Testament, God used the Euphrates River as a physical symbol of how He was bringing Israel out of sin and into holiness (Joshua 24:2-3,14-15).

Verse 15:

"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" - These are clearly fallen angels (1 Peter 2:4, Jude 1:6, Matthew 25:41). Ready for a specific time in history. God is still sovereign even amidst all the trouble. Though God's judgements seem severe, this is humanity receiving what we are due and what we chose.

Verse 16:

"The number of the mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand. I heard their number" - This number could be symbolic for a lot, but the fact John states that he was told this

number indicates this is probably literal. These demons seem to be different to those from the fifth trumpet. Whether the same or not, the key point is that their purpose is different.

Verse 17:

"Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulphur" - A lot of this imagery is war-like. These are creatures of war.

"The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions" - They are fierce.

Verse 18-19:

"A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulphur 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" - This is more than just symbolic - these plagues will wipe out a third of the earth. This language speaks of judgement and hell. This is hell on earth.

Verse 20:

"The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the works of their hands; they did not stop worshipping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood - idols that cannot see or hear or walk" - We see laid bare the true condition of humanity in this time and God's grief at the unyielding hardness of our hearts. Despite all they've been through, humanity still refuses to turn from their sin. We are to call people to repentance and reject all other explanations for these judgements (Exodus 7:11,22, 8:7)

Verse 21:

"Nor did they repent of..." - God is not bringing these judgements because He hates us but because He loves us. These are an expression of His deep love for humanity and deep desire that we would not choose hell.

"Their murders" - John highlights four sins that will be prevalent in the culture at this time. The first is murder - not just violence and war but more subtle forms including abortion and euthanasia. Every way that we devalue human life.

"Their magic arts" - Witchcraft and the occult is becoming more normal in society. This way of accessing spiritual power through demonic beings is deeply troubling and will increase.

"Their sexual immorality" - We see this prevalent in culture in our complete disregard for God's laws on marriage and sexuality.

"Their thefts" - This speaks of dishonesty and how we treat others.

Summary

These chapters highlight three reasons why God is bringing this trouble on the earth:

1. To test humanity and reveal what is in their hearts (Revelation 9:5)
2. To warn humanity of the nature of sin and hell (Revelation 9:2-3,6)
3. To bring humanity to repentance (Revelation 9:20-21)

These chapters highlight three dimensions of this trouble:

1. Devastation of natural resources upon the earth (Revelation 8:7-12)
2. Physical torment (Revelation 9:4-6)
3. Death (Revelation 9:15)

These chapters highlight how God will use His church in these days:

1. We will share in His deep grief and anger over sin and injustice (Revelation 8:1-4)
2. We will partner with Him through intercession, praying for justice for the oppressed and mercy for the oppressor (Revelation 8:4)
3. We will be protected in the midst of the judgements as a witness to the nations of God's love and power (Revelation 9:4)
4. Just like John the Baptist, we will preach a message of judgement and repentance to the nations (Revelation 9:20-21)