

The Furious Longing of God in the Book of Revelation

God's Plan to Expose the Darkness of Idolatry

Jim Hall - June 21, 2016

In the book of Revelation “Worship produces judgement as well as joy because God is characterized by both love and justice and these are not separate but interdependent aspects of his being.” -Grant Osborne

Introduction

- I. Review: This series has been looking at Revelation 1-5 through the lens of God having a furious longing for relational intimacy and union with us, as His creation formed in His image. His heart is full of overwhelming, indescribable passion and longing for the redemption and reconciliation of broken human beings. God has perfect wisdom and sovereign power and He has a plan to cleanse the earth of evil and bring together the heavenly realm.
- II. In Revelation 1 we are introduced to the glorious person of Jesus Christ as the central focus of the entire book. In Revelation 2-3 we are introduced to the church community and see an incredibly rich description of what Jesus is longing (and planning!) for His redeemed community to look like. Jesus is preparing His Bride to face the many challenging times that they will face in the time ahead. Revelation 4 and 5 go together to show us clearly that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are in sovereign control of all things and have a glorious plan to cleanse the earth of evil and wickedness.
- III. In Revelation 6 we see Jesus opening a series of seals that release numerous judgements toward the earth with the purpose of cleansing the earth from sin and turning human beings toward God. Revelation 7 shows us that God will protect His people and deliver them from evil, and in Revelation 8 we discover that believers will play a pivotal role in God's plan through dynamic intercession.

The Trumpet Judgements (Rev. 8:6-9:19)

- I. In Revelation 8:5, God manifests His Presence through “peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake”. As we saw last week, this is intentionally connected to Exodus 19:16-18. Another aspect of Exodus 19:16 is the blowing of a trumpet, which again links to the next series of judgements in Revelation 8-9: the trumpet judgements.
- II. The first six trumpets are described in Revelation 8-9. They are divided into two groups: the first four trumpets are judgements come against the physical creation. The 5th and 6th trumpets are judgements against human beings. Many commentators have recognized that the first four trumpets are similar to the plagues released in Egypt when God delivered Israel.
- III. **The first trumpet** (Rev. 8:7) releases a judgement of ‘hail and fire mixed with blood’ that burns up 1/3 of all the grass and trees across the earth.
 - A. The first trumpet is similar to the seventh plague of Egypt.
 - “When Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, the Lord sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to the ground. So the Lord rained hail on the land of Egypt; 24 hail fell and lightning flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation.” -Exodus 9:23-24
 - B. It is also likely a major fulfillment of Joel 2:30
 - “I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke.”

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- IV. **The second trumpet** (Rev. 8:8-9) causes something similar to a great mountain that is *on fire*, being thrown into sea! Quite frankly, we don't know what is being described here. Some have speculated that this is a volcano, possibly an allusion to historic volcanic eruption at Mount Vesuvius in AD. 79¹; some believe that this should be understood as an actual mountain, while others point out that John describes something 'like' a mountain. There is also the obvious parallel to Jesus' declaration in Mark 11:23 "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them."
- V. **The third trumpet** (Rev. 8:10-11) is similar to the second. This time the judgement affects the fresh waters. Most people agree that what John is describing is a huge meteor.
- A. The second and third trumpets are similar to the first Egyptian plague.
- "Moses and Aaron did just as the Lord had commanded. He raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood. The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water." -Exodus 7:20-21
- B. In the second trumpet 1/3 of the oceans turn to blood and the fish die, and in the third trumpet 1/3 of the fresh waters are affected, which is similar to Moses striking the Nile river.
- C. In the third trumpet, the waters are made bitter. Here there is another connection and actually a reversal of Exodus 15:
- "When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah. So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?" Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became fit to drink." - Exodus 15:23-24
- D. There is also a connection to God's discipline in Jeremiah 9:
- "The Lord said, "Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice nor walked according to it, but have walked after the stubbornness of their heart and after the Baals, as their fathers taught them," therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, "behold, I will feed them, this people, with wormwood and give them poisoned water to drink." - Jeremiah 9:13-15 (NASB)

¹ "Mount Vesuvius spewed a deadly cloud of volcanic gas, stones, and ash to a height of 33 km (21 mi), ejecting molten rock and pulverized pumice at the rate of 1.5 million tons per second, ultimately releasing a hundred thousand times the thermal energy of the Hiroshima bombing. Several Roman settlements were obliterated and buried, the most well known being Pompeii and Herculaneum." -Wikipedia

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VI. **The fourth trumpet** (Rev. 8:12) is similar to the sixth seal, in striking the heavenly bodies of the sun, the moon and the stars.

A. There is another connection to the ninth Egyptian plague of darkness

- “Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness spreads over Egypt—darkness that can be felt.” So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or move about for three days.” -Exodus 10:21-23

B. Jesus spoke about this as well when he taught the disciples about the end of the age:

- “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” -Matthew 24:29 (ESV)

VII. **The fifth trumpet** (Rev. 9:1-11) transitions from judgements affecting the created order to judgements directly affecting human beings, specifically people who have rejected God and those whom God is calling to repent. At first reading this is a very confusing passage, however when we look to other portions of Scripture, the images can be understood more clearly.

A. In v. 1 God sends a heavenly being to open a supernatural ‘shaft of the Abyss’. There is debate about whether this is an angel or a demon, but the point is that God is sovereign and giving the key to open the shaft at exactly the right time. The reference to a key indicates that the shaft is closed until the appointed time.

B. The Abyss in v. 2 is literally ‘a bottomless pit’. While some take this literally, I do not feel that the intent of the passage is to describe a shaft that leads to some hollowed out portion of the earth. It is more consistent with the rest of the passage to understand the Abyss as a symbolic place, or at least as a location that is not literally in the middle of the planet.

C. When the shaft is unlocked immense ‘smoke from a gigantic furnace’ rises up, which is an allusion to Exodus 19:15. With the smoke comes an invasion of locusts. This is again a reference to the plagues of Egypt

- “So Moses stretched out his staff over Egypt, and the Lord made an east wind blow across the land all that day and all that night. By morning the wind had brought the locusts; they invaded all Egypt and settled down in every area of the country in great numbers.” -Exodus 10:13-14

The locusts describes in Revelation 9 are not to be understood as literal locusts because they come from the Abyss, rather than from the natural world. The reference to the Abyss makes it clear that these ‘locusts’ are actually demonic creatures.

D. These demonic creatures are given a specific assignment to afflict people who do not have the ‘seal of God’ on their forehead (see Rev. 7:2-3). Thus they are only allowed to torment those who have refused to repent and respond to God’s invitation.

E. There is a very dramatic description of these demonic creatures in v. 7-10, which has led to a great many differing interpretations! There is an important allusion to the locust army that is described in Joel 2; in fact there is a real possibility that Joel was prophesying the same ‘locust army’ as John sees in Revelation 9. The connection to Joel 2:4-5 does help

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us understand that these demonic creatures are order and rank, similar to an actual army.

- “Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, and like war horses they run. As with the rumbling of chariots, they leap on the tops of the mountains, like the crackling of a flame of fire devouring the stubble like a powerful army drawn up for battle.” -Joel 2:4-5

F. In v. 11 there is a reference to a ‘king’ named *Abaddon* or *Apollyon*. These are the Hebrew and Greek words for ‘Destroyer’. Most commentators believe that this is the leader of the demonic army, likely a very high-ranking demon.

VIII. **The sixth trumpet** (Rev. 9:13-19) is a continuation of the fifth trumpet. It is actually a dramatic escalation because while during the fifth trumpet, the demonic creatures were prevented from killing the people, during the sixth trumpet a second demonic army arises that has permission and authority to kill 1/3 of humanity!

- A. It begins with four ‘angels’ being released, and given authority to kill 1/3 of mankind. These are high-ranking demons; we know this because they were ‘bound’, and will go forth to kill massive numbers of people.
- B. The size of the demonic army is staggering: 200 million (v. 16). Past Bible commentators (such as Hal Lindsey and others) believed that this army was describing an invasion of a human army from Asia. However the majority of scholars have understood this as a second demonic army.

The Call to Repentance (Rev. 9:20-21)

- I. The purpose of the trumpet judgements is to expose the false idols and demons that mankind are worshipping, and to call them to repent and worship Yahweh as the true and Living God! We find out that in spite of all the trumpet judgements, the majority of mankind will refuse to repent. God is allowing people to see the true nature of the idols and demons that they have trusted in and worshipped. The trumpets are actually an expression of mercy.
- II. It is stunning that people would continue to worship demons (v. 20), the very demons that are killing people across the earth. People will continue to trust and worship the demons. This clearly indicates that there will be more demonized people on the earth in the last days than at any other time in history.

Conclusion: The Bold Witness of the Church

- I. During this time of the trumpet judgements the Church will rise up in the power of the Holy Spirit to give verbal witness to the unbelievers. It always has been the role of God's people to give testimony about the truth of who God is, to expose idolatry and call people to repentance and salvation through Jesus Christ. This role will intensify dramatically in time when the trumpet judgements are ultimately fulfilled.
- II. The role of the Church is and will continue to be to give a spiritual interpretation of the current ‘signs of the times’. We are to watch and pray in order to have the spirit of wisdom and revelation (Eph. 1) and spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding (Col. 1).
 - **“But if they had stood in my council, they would have proclaimed my words to my people and would have turned them from their evil ways and from their evil deeds.”** -Jeremiah 23:22