



THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

LESSON 6 – The First Six Trumpets

LESSON OBJECTIVE

The goal of this lesson is to understand the interpretation of chapters 8 and 9 of the Revelation, with particular emphasis on the meaning of the first six trumpets within the overall scheme of the book.

NOTES ON REVELATION 8

8:1 “And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.”

Recall that the “title deed to creation” (chapter 5) has seven seals. The first six seals take place (probably) during the first half (3.5 years) of the Tribulation, and the seventh seal takes place during the second half. The seventh seal itself consists of seven “trumpet” judgments, and the seventh of those consists of seven “bowl” or “vial” judgments. This means that the seventh seal is the severest of the judgments, containing within it several judgments that occur in quick succession. John has a parenthesis (chapter 7) that comes between the breaking of the sixth and seventh seals, and another parenthesis that comes between the sixth and seventh trumpets. Recall that in chapter 7, God shows us a scene that is contemporaneous with chapter 6. Now, in chapter 8, we move into the second half of the Tribulation as Jesus breaks the seventh and final seal. That this is the severest judgment of the seven seals is the reason that, at its breaking open, there is a half-hour of silence in heaven.

8:2 “And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.”

We are not told any details about the seven angels, except that they are given trumpets. As we read on, we will find that, as each angel blows his trumpet, there is a new judgment (all under the umbrella of the seventh seal). Also, as we have now seen many times in the book, there is significance in the number seven. It is God’s number of completion; it takes seven seals to complete the Tribulation judgments, seven trumpets to complete the seventh seal judgment, and seven bowl judgments to complete the seventh trumpet.

8:3 “And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer *it* with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.”

By another angel is meant an eighth angel. This is not one of the seven trumpet angels. The altar was first mentioned in Revelation 6:9, and will again be mentioned in 8:5, 9:13, 14:18, and 16:7. In 6:9, we were introduced to the Tribulation Martyrs. In the Old Testament, the priests burned incense upon the altar of incense, and the smoke would fill the Temple and ascend, symbolically, to heaven. The incense was symbolic of prayer and worship, its sweet smell a reminder of the character and value to God of prayer and worship. (Exodus 30:1-9; note the contents of the incense in Exodus 30:34-38) The prayers in view here are for Jesus to establish his kingdom and, the flip side, to avenge the Tribu-

lation Martyrs. As an aside, note that many commentators take this angel, who is performing a priestly function, to be Jesus (our high priest). Given the consistency thus far of referring to Jesus as the lamb, and that past references to Jesus were clear, I do not take this as a reference to Jesus.

8:4 “And the smoke of the incense, *which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand.*”

We are assured that God has heard the saints' prayers. This is encouraging. No matter where you are in life, no matter the tribulation or testing you are experiencing, you have access to your heavenly Father in prayer and our prayer goes before Him.

8:5 “And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast *it* into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.”

The censer corresponds to the Old Testament censer (Exodus 37:25-28; Hebrews 9:4). It was made of gold and used to take fire off the altar for use in the Holy of Holies. There, in the Holy of Holies, incense was added so that the sweet odor (representing prayer and worship) would be in the very presence of God. Something quite different happens here. The angel already burned incense as recorded in the last verse, putting the prayers before God. Rather than using the censer to burn more incense, the censer is used to hold fire from the altar, which is then cast to the earth. The point is that the prayers are now being answered affirmatively by God; there is no reason to burn more incense because God is now taking action to fulfill what was prayed for. That fulfillment is judgment, and specifically is in the form of the seven trumpets. When the judgment is cast to the earth, for those on earth are the recipients of the judgment, John hears voices and thunder and sees lightning and an earthquake.

8:6 “And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.”

The seven angels with the seven trumpets prepare themselves to sound their trumpets. At the appointed time, each will sound his trumpet and a judgment will follow. Keep in mind that all of this happens (probably) in the latter half (3.5 years) of the Tribulation.

8:7 “The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.”

Most commentators do not take this event literally. But we have history to back up a literal interpretation. (See Exodus 9:18-26, the tenth plague) God did this before, and He will do it again. The hail here has in mind stones, not necessarily ice. These stones probably contain a substance that burns. The blood may come down with the hail, or may indicate the result of the hail stones falling on people. If the blood comes down with the hail, the question is raised as to whether the blood is real blood, or if what John is indicating is that there is red rain. I prefer the latter, that it is red rain symbolic of blood, but is in fact literal rain. Periodically, red rain (or blood rain) does occur naturally, typically as a result of rain occurring at a time when there are airborne particles to give it a red coloration, for example, sands from the Sahara Desert. Perhaps the substance in the hail stones that burns lends to the red rain. In any event, there is no mistaking the import of blood red rain. This judgment results in many deaths. And this is just the beginning of the seventh seal. Note, however, that this judgment is primarily aimed at the vegetation, trees and grass. Burning these things produces natural results. In the news, we routinely see stories about thou-

sands of acres burning due to forest fires or grass fires in areas suffering from drought. Here, however, the fire is not limited to a few tens of thousands of acres in one state, but engulfs a third of the planet. This will produce more famine, as well as health problems associated with the air pollution.

8:8 “And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood;”

We cannot be certain about the source of this mountain. Explanations such as a great meteorite are possible. What is important is that we understand that a literal rock of great size (as big as a mountain) plunges into the sea. This will produce some natural results, such as a tsunami. But there is more, for this rock pollutes the oceans and turns about a third of the oceans red. We cannot disconnect this with the first trumpet. It seems probably that this is basically the large scale version of the hail stones from the last verse. Like those hail stones, this one burns. This stone also turns the water in the ocean to blood, or makes it blood red, further supporting the conclusion in the last verse that John literally saw blood rain and it was connected with the falling hail stones.

8:9 “And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.”

The rock not only discolors the water, but actually kills one third of the ocean life. It may be that, in some diameter around the location where the stone falls to the ocean bottom, the water turns red and kills all the sea life within the red zone. For this zone to cover one third of the oceans, it will have to cover hundreds of square miles.

8:10 “And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters;”

This may be a falling meteor (i.e., shooting star), which appears like a lamp as it falls to the water. Its target is one third of the rivers and the underground waterways.

8:11 “And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.”

The term wormwood means bitter. The meteor poisons one third of the rivers and underground water, and the poison is deadly.

8:12 “And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.”

The first three trumpets indicated judgments on the earth. With the fourth trumpet, the judgment turns to the skies. Here again, there is no reason not to interpret the verse in its plain, normal sense. John is not trying to set forth a scientific treatise, but is recording real events for us. Recall that the sixth seal judgment included a darkening of the sun and hiding of the stars. Unless that has subsided at this point, then this trumpet would not make much sense. The point seems to be that the daytime hours are reduced by a third because the sun is restricted, and even at night, it is considerably darker than normal because the moon (which, of course, merely reflects the now restricted sun) and stars are restricted. Recall that God is light. (e.g., 1 John 1:5) Moreover, the heavens declare God's

glory. (Psalm 19:1) This absence of light points to the fact that it is God doing the judgment.

8:13 "And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!"

Just as earlier in the book, we heard God's holiness exclaimed in triplicate (holy, holy, holy) for emphasis, here the emphasis is on the severity of the judgments to follow (woe, woe, woe). This angel has a loud voice so that his pronouncement is heard. I do not think those on earth will hear it. This angel is in heaven and his announcement is made there. The three trumpets to follow will be worse than the first four.

NOTES ON REVELATION 9

9:1 "And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit."

This is not a literal star, for it is referred to as "him." This star is an angel, but the question is what angel. This angel is likely Satan himself. (See Isaiah 14:12-17; Luke 10:18) The bottomless pit, or the abyss (Greek *abyssos*) is referred to here for the first time, and also in Revelation 9:2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3. This is the place where certain fallen angels (i.e., demons) are imprisoned. (Luke 8:26-33) Satan is permitted to free these angels to bring additional havoc to the earth. As an aside, note that demons do not have bodies, indeed, angels cannot manifest themselves materially unless God allows them to. That is why they are referred to as spirits (Hebrews 1:14), and that is why the legion of demons in Luke 8 beg Jesus to let them go into the swine. This is why Satan had to appear in an animal body back in the Garden of Eden. Demons do not have bodies unless God permits it.

9:2 "And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit."

Satan does precisely as God intends and frees the imprisoned demons. John sees smoke coming out of the pit, indicating that the pit is a place of torment. The smoke is so thick that it blocks the sun.

9:3 "And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power."

God has allowed the demons to take a material form that, from a distance, looks like locusts. Remember that John is describing what he sees in common place language so that his readers can understand, and everyone in John's day and culture understood locusts. These insects move in tremendous numbers, and when they leave, no living vegetation is left behind. These are no ordinary locusts however, for they have the power to sting a person like a scorpion.

9:4 "And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads."

God will use the locust-demons for judgment, but as God did with Satan in regard to Job, they are limited in what they can do. I think also this limitation is offered to show us that these are not literal locusts, but demon creatures that look like locusts from a distance.

They are not on the earth to eat green vegetation, nor can they. Instead, those men not sealed of God (recall the 144,000) are their targets. Because John does not specifically indicate the 144,000, I think that the command here is that no Christian can be harmed by the locusts. This is consistent with God's pattern throughout the Scriptures that when His hand of judgment falls on a people group, the believers are excluded.

9:5 "And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man."

The purpose of the locusts is torment, not death. For five months, they fly about stinging anyone that is not a Christian. We are to understand that this sting produces tremendous pain, indeed so much pain that people would rather die than be stung again.

9:6 "And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them."

So painful is the sting of the locusts that people will try to commit suicide, but God will not let them kill themselves. I do not know how God will accomplish this, but we should simply accept it as a miracle. These people will suffer the full five months of torment.

9:7 "And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men."

Here, John gives us further details about what the locust-demons look like. In actuality, up close, they do not look like locusts. When a horse is prepared for battle, it wears protective shielding, so that we are to understand the locusts to have some sort of protective armor preventing men from harming them. The crowns on the locusts indicate that for a time they have domination of the earth. They also have faces like men, indicating intelligence. These are not dumb animals to be easily outwitted, but instead, are cunning creatures.

9:8 "And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as *the teeth* of lions."

The creatures have long hair like women and long, sharp teeth like lions.

9:9 "And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle."

This is consistent with the description in verse 7. The breastplates are protective armor so that they cannot be harmed. Also, John explains that their wings are loud. When these creatures fly overhead, they will produce panic as people hear them and begin to flee.

9:10 "And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months."

John reiterates what was already said about the tails and the five months. The point needs reiteration. These terrible creatures really will spend five literal months tormenting ungodly men on the earth with scorpion like stings.

9:11 "And they had a king over them, *which is* the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue *is* Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath *his* name Apollyon."

The locusts have a king, the angel of the bottomless pit. His name is Abaddon in Hebrew and Apollyon in Greek. Both terms mean destroyer. This likely refers to Satan as the

name is consistent with what he does. This is the angel that was given the key to the bottomless pit to release the demons. Although their actions are permitted by God and used to judge men, it is Satan that is ordering them to torment.

9:12 "One woe is past; *and*, behold, there come two woes more hereafter."

Note here that John refers to trumpet number five as a "woe." Recall that the last three trumpets were stated to be the worst of the seven, and therefore they are appropriately called woes. The first woe, or the fifth trumpet, is the locust judgment. Two more woes (or trumpets) will follow.

9:13 "And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God,"

Angel number six sounds the sixth trumpet. With the sound, John hears a voice from the horns on the altar. (See Exodus 30:2-3 regarding the horns) The point of John referring back to the altar of incense is to remind us that the sixth trumpet is in partial answer to the prayers of the saints that went up before God.

9:14 "Saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates."

We do not know whose voice this is. It may be the voice of God the Father or the angel that was burning the incense before the altar. In any event, a command goes out to four angels that are bound in the Euphrates River. This reminds us of the four angels holding back the four winds of the earth. (Revelation 7:1) The difference, however, is that these angels are bound, which suggests they may be demons (fallen angels). As with the locusts, these demons are loosed to carry out a judgment.

9:15 "And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men."

The purpose of the loosing of these four demons is to permit them to kill one third of men. I take it that only non-Christians are being killed. Recall that we have already seen that one fourth of the population (of non-Christians) were killed in Revelation 6:8 during the first half of the Tribulation, which amounts to well over 1.5 billion people. Now, a third of those that remain are killed. This means that over half of the world's population of unsaved people die during the seven-year Tribulation. Finally, note that the phrase "an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year" indicates that these four demons are loosed at exactly the point in time when God allows it. God is in control, even though He chooses to use these demons to carry out His will in this instance.

9:16 "And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them."

John told us the purpose of the army in verse 15. The point is that the four demons released lead armies of 200,000,000 (two hundred million). We should understand the number literally as John tells us he heard the number (obviously, he could not count them). The army is cavalry, the most deadly military forces in the ancient world.

9:17 "And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone."

There seem to be demons on the horses, akin to the locusts. The riders have fiery breastplates, and the horses are no ordinary horses, for they have lions' heads. They breathe fire and smoke and brimstone. This is the fiercest army ever, far worse than any human army we can imagine.

9:18 "By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths."

This is not an additional one third of men killed, but a reiteration of the one third John referred to in verse 15. The deaths are caused by the fire that the horses breathe out.

9:19 "For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt."

Moreover, the horse's tails have what appear to be snake heads on the ends of them, and they bite and cause tremendous pain. This protects the horsemen from attacks from behind.

9:20 "And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk:"

John here indicates that not all of the unsaved are killed by the army, but of those that survive, not one single one repents of their idolatry. These people know the judgment is from God, and yet their hearts are so hardened that not one of them repents. I believe this verse indicates that during the second half of the Tribulation, no one is saved. There are Christians, as we have already seen in the Tribulation Saints, but I think the indication is that they are all evangelized during the first half of the Tribulation. We will see further support for this later in the book. Instead of repenting, and therefore escaping the judgment, these people look in futility to their idols and false religion to save them.

9:21 "Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts."

This verse gets to the heart of the matter. They do not repent because they prefer to sin it up, even if it means the wrath of God for them. (John 3:19) They steal, kill, fornicate, and practice the occult, and what happens to them at the hand of God is just.

COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY

Henry M. Morris, *The Revelation Record*, Tyndale House Publishers (1983)

RECOMMENDATION

It is highly recommended that each person taking this course read chapters 8 and 9 for this lesson and chapters 10 and 11 for next week in Henry M. Morris' commentary.