



Part 22 – “Nor did they repent”

Revelation 9:13-21

Though restrained, the Lord has been exercising judgment upon the world ever since the rebellion of the first man and woman (Genesis 3). The four horsemen of chapter six have been riding through the world all along as instruments of Divine judgment. The trumpets of divine justice have been sounding with increasing volume. But while so many have and will repent, many others remain hardhearted. Tragically, the warnings sounded in the first six trumpets are met, by many, with sinful indifference.

The vision of the fifth trumpet (the first woe) ends with an ominous reference to the two “woes” yet to come. The second woe is connected to the sixth trumpet as we see in this passage. “But the third woe is never clearly identified; the seventh trumpet brings an anticipation of the End, but the next ‘woe’ comes only after the account of Jesus’ ministry in Revelation 12, when Satan is cast down to earth, filled with fury at his heavenly rout (12:12).”¹

Vs. 13 – We know from the final chapter of Revelation that there is no temple or altar in heaven. Remember, John is writing in symbols. The “golden altar” is symbolic of the Lord’s ongoing ministry in the lives of his people. Here, the altar reminds us of the martyred saints crying out to the Lord for justice. The “horns” on the golden altar are symbolic of power. “So the vision refers to the completeness of God’s power coming from His presence, a power He is beginning to exercise in response to the prayers of the saints.”²

Vv. 14-15 – For John’s original readers, the Euphrates River was the northeastern boundary of the Roman Empire. This is likely a way of referencing the entire region from which the empire was routinely harassed by hostile invaders. It is most likely that the “four angels” are demonic messengers unleashed but still hemmed in as they will not be allowed to destroy all of humanity. God is still mixing his judgment with mercy. Notice the use of the number four, which typically refers to that which is worldwide. The vision is pointing to the universality of war, not an end time battle of Armageddon. Like poverty and pestilence, war has been a constant feature in the fallen world. “The number four symbolizes that no part of the globe or point of the compass will escape the ravages of war.”³

The precision of timing referenced in verse 15 indicates God’s sovereign control over the actions of these demonic messengers (“angels”). “The point of specifying down to the hour the time of releasing these hordes is to emphasize that all events of history, whatever Satan’s involvement, are under the ultimate authority of God.”⁴

Vs. 16 – The demonic horde is numbered symbolically (“twice ten thousand of ten thousands”). Literally, “double myriad of myriads.” In Greek, the word “myrias” is used to refer to an innumerable multitude. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew equivalent is used in the same way (Genesis 24:60; Leviticus 26:8; Deuteronomy 32:30; Daniel 7:10).⁵

Vv. 17-19 – John explicitly refers to what he sees as a “vision.” These reminders are important lest we forget that Revelation is written as apocalyptic literature and must be interpreted as such. The horses and riders John sees in his vision are just as peculiar and threatening as the monstrous locusts in the previous passage. These “horses” sound a lot like the mythical *chimaera* thought to originate from modern Turkey. These creatures were said to have the heads of lions, breathe fire, and tails that ended with a snake’s head.⁶ These creatures would also have reminded John’s original readers of the feared Parthian archers who could fire accurately from horseback.

The reference to a “third of mankind” killed by these plagues (vs. 18) is meant not as a precise calculation but to indicate both significant loss of life as well as the still restraining power of God who continues to mix his justice with mercy.

¹ Ian Paul, *Revelation*, TNTC (Downers Grove:IVP Academic, 2018) p. 180

²G.K. Beal, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015) p. 189

³ Joel Beeke, *Revelation*, Lectio Continua (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2016) p. 280

⁴ Beale, 191

⁵ Beal, 191

⁶ Ian Paul, p. 182

Vv. 20-21 – Chapter nine of Revelation ends with the tragic announcement that those sinners whom the Lord spared did not open their eyes and shake themselves out of their moral and spiritual insanity. Rather, having been spared by the Lord's mercy, they refused to repent and instead continued on in their sin. It is yet another reminder of two truths. First, the Lord forgives every sinner who repents. Second, God does not judge the innocent. Those sinners who continue to suppress the truth and worship idols are not innocent victims of a vindictive god. Whether they are nice or cruel, polite or hateful, they are evildoers who demand gods of their own making. They hate the righteous boundaries established by their benevolent Creator and instead insist on being a law to themselves.

The cycle of trumpet judgments begins with a reminder that those whom the Lord has sealed cannot ultimately be harmed by those dread messengers of judgment. Those are words of great comfort given that Christians do indeed suffer all the sorrows and afflictions that are common to mankind in a sinful world. Nevertheless, they have been freed from the power of cancelled sin. They have been delivered from the sting of death.

1. Judgment – God opposes evil.

The Book of Revelation is the account of a war between God and evil. It is a war that has been going on for ages. This explains why John's vision involves images of vast armies and desperate battles. The world is at war because it hates God. Divine judgement is the proper answer to this rebellion. "Revelation is thoroughly consumed with judgment, yet these judgments are essential if the world is to be made right."⁷ In his judgment, God removes all that opposes life and righteousness and justice. There is no new creation apart from the judgment of the old fallen creation. God's ultimate eradication of all that is wicked is the fruit of his goodness. He cannot and will not make peace with sin, death, or the devil. God's concern in judgment is essentially merciful – to deliver his people from evil.

2. Trust – God never does the wrong thing.

It is not unusual for graphic passages depicting the judgment of God to cause many Christians to wonder how such severity can be consistent with the goodness of God. But is mankind, with our rather dismal track record, in a good place to judge the ways in which God exercises justice? To trust God is to believe that he always does what is right. God's judgements are always in perfect harmony with goodness and truth (Revelation 15:3-4; 16:5-7; 19:1-2).

God's judgment is never simply retribution. Indeed, "there is woven into the fabric of the judgments a message of hope and salvation for the followers of the Lamb."⁸ The plagues upon Egypt were repeated opportunities for everyone throughout the kingdom to repent. Even then, judgement was not God's final word. After the plagues was the exodus. Judgment is always the prelude to a great salvation. Do not despise the Lord's judgment. In pleading with the Lord to spare the city of Sodom for the sake of only ten righteous men (something the Lord promised to do!) Abraham confessed what we can fully trust: "Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Genesis 18:25). If we find ourselves opposing God's actions in judgment, then it is we who need adjusting, not the Lord.

3. Repent – God is merciful.

God forgives, without exception, every sinner who repents. He is loving and compassionate bearing with sinners patiently for generations. The story unfolded in the Bible is one of God's loyalty toward and compassion for his people. The Father sent his Son to be the Lamb who would be slain for the sins of his people throughout every generation. God's compassion can be seen in the ways in which his judgments are unfolded, repeatedly mixing his justice with mercy. Notice the repeated references to "one third" of that which is destroyed. Even in his judgment, God provides greater measures of mercy. Consider the patience of God when he tells the martyred saints to be patient as he allows for more of his people to be martyred as witnesses to the world (6:10ff). In the economy of God's justice, judgment is never the end but a means toward an end. That end is an eternally blessed life for all the redeemed in the new creation where sin, sorrow, and death will be no more.

⁷ J. Scott Duvall, *A Theology of Revelation*, BTNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2025) p. 439

⁸ Paul Spilsbury, *The Throne, The Lamb, and The Dragon* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002) p. 118