The Godless Will Refuse to Turn to God

Revelation 9

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| **Natural Divisions** | * Revelation 9:1-11 As the fifth angel sounded the fifth trumpet, John saw a vision of Satan’s being given the key to the Abyss, and his releasing demonic locust-like creatures that had the power to torment unbelieving mankind for five months. * Revelation 9:12-19 As the sixth angel sounded the sixth trumpet, John saw a vision of God’s commanding that four bound Euphrates angels (demons) be released to send forth 200 million demonic troops to kill one-third of mankind. * Revelation 9:20-21 Even in the face of divine judgment, unsaved man will refuse to repent of their idolatry and their sin. |
| **Summary Sentence** | The fifth and the sixth trumpet judgments constitute the release of demonic beings to bring torment to unbelievers and death to one-third of mankind, but even this terrible set of judgments will not result in rebellious mankind’s coming to repentance. |
| **Central Idea** | In the day of judgment, the godless refuse to turn to God |

I didn’t become a Christian until I was thirty, so I can remember very well what it was like to be hostile to the gospel message. I can remember very well what it was like to be scornful of Christians—believing that they were foolish and unscientific and illogical. I can remember what it was like to have an instant resentment toward those who wanted to teach me about Jesus.

I have a friend whom I love dearly, who is clearly strongly resistant to any kind of serious consideration of the reality of God. I could have serious discussion with her about the benefits of some weird diet; I could have a serious discussion with her about the merits of some political philosophy; I could have a serious discussion with her about principles of childrearing—but I can’t have a discussion with her about salvation. There’s an instant barrier that goes up when I try it.

You would think that she would be interested in the opportunity of knowing the God of the universe. You would think that she would be interested in understanding about life after death. But she isn’t. And it doesn’t get better with time. As the years go by, she is more and more hostile to any discussion of the gospel. She lives her life apart from God, and **she refuses to turn to God**.

In our study of the book of Revelation, we have seen that over the course of the church age God has been active in our world, bringing events—judgment events—that display the damaging consequences of sin and godlessness and the power and mercy of God.

In our study of the book of Revelation, we’ve seen that our world is not the way it’s supposed to be—not the way God designed it to be. As a result of the fall of man, our world is thoroughly corrupted by the presence of sin. Our world is characterized by the destructive actions of evil men.

In chapter 6, when Jesus took the scroll with seven seals and began to open the seals, John saw with the opening of each seal a vision that pictured the reality of life on this fallen world. John saw that there was conquest, war, famine, and death. John saw a multitude of Christians who lost their lives because of their witness of the gospel.

In chapter 8, John saw angels in heaven blowing trumpets to announce the coming of God’s judgment. John saw visions of natural disasters, of the rise and fall of kingdoms, of God’s withholding of natural resources that mankind has taken for granted.

All of these disasters—all of these sources of suffering—are events that characterize the entirety of the church age—from the day of the ascension of Christ until the future day when Jesus returns. You would think that over course of a lifetime, godless men would observe the power of God and would turn to God for forgiveness and blessing. But what we see in our lesson today is that **even in the day of judgment, the godless refuse to turn to God**.

Last week, at the end of our lesson, we saw the warning cry of a heavenly messenger. An eagle, flying overhead, called out, *“Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!”*

The last three trumpets to sound will bring great woe—agony—misery—torment on those who dwell on the earth. The warning is given to the *“earth-dwellers,”* to *“those who dwell on the earth,”* and that phrase refers to nonbelievers, not to believers. That phrase refers to those who have chosen to reject the authority of God and to align themselves instead with the godless thinking of the secular world. They are the people of the *earth*, in contrast to the people of *faith*, who are people of the Kingdom of God. Believers are citizens of the Kingdom of God; earth-dwellers are citizens of the kingdom of darkness.

The eagle’s announcement warns of woes that will come on the godless of the earth. These next two trumpet judgments are woes to come on the citizens of the kingdom of darkness.

In our study of Revelation thus far, we’ve seen two types of judgment events from God. We’ve seen the sorts of events that come to our fallen world as a result of man’s sin. We’ve seen disruptions in the natural order—natural disasters—designed by God to demonstrate His power and His rightful authority over our lives. Now in chapter 9 we see that God will use even the destructive powers of demons to accomplish God’s purposes in history. God will rid this world of evil, but we’re going to see in our lesson today that **even in the day of judgment, the godless refuse to turn to God**.

Open your Bibles to Revelation chapter 9.

I’ll begin by reading all of verses 1-11. *“Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him. He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit.*

*Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man. And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them.*

*The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads appeared to be crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. They had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle. They have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months. They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.*

*The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things.”*

As we look at this passage, we should first ask, *“what are the concepts—what are the Old Testament allusions—that would be immediately apparent to the first-century reader?”* As we consider those concepts, the meaning of this passage will become clearer.

* First we have a star falling from the sky.

We’ve already seen several times in the book of Revelation that the term *star* is used to refer to an *angel*—to a created spiritual being. This vision of a star falling from heaven would remind the first-century reader of the account of the fall of Satan in Isaiah chapter 14.

* This star, this fallen angel—Satan—is given the key to the Abyss. What is the Abyss?

We understand from the Bible that the Abyss is a prison for demons. In Luke chapter 8, when Jesus was healing the demon-possessed man of the Gerasenes, the demons who possessed the man begged Jesus not to send them into the Abyss. And so Jesus sent the demons into a herd of pigs instead.

The Abyss is the place where the demons are kept bound until the day of judgment. It’s a place of darkness. It’s a place where Satan and the demons are held so that their power to influence and to harm mankind is curtailed.

In John’s vision, Satan is given the key to the Abyss, and when Satan opens the Abyss, demonic creatures will be released to roam about the earth and to bring torment and destruction to inhabitants of the earth. This increased activity of demons is a part of God’s judgment on the earth.

* When the Abyss is opened, smoke rises, and out of the smoke come locusts.

To the people of the Middle East, a swarm of locusts represents total destruction in the same way that, for us, a tornado represents total destruction. In the book of Joel, the prophet speaks of the power of locusts to turn a land as rich as the Garden of Eden into a barren desert when the swarm passes. Locusts represent destruction.

In the Old Testament, locusts are associated with God’s judgment on a land. God punishes the land because of the evildoing of the people. The first-century reader would be reminded of God’s judgment against Egypt in Exodus chapter 10, when God sent a plague of locusts.

These locusts in Revelation, however, are different from the locusts that plagued the land in the first century. These are demons. These are demonic creatures. And they are only allowed to operate within limits that God has specified. These creatures harm people, not plant life. These creatures are only permitted to harm the godless inhabitants of the earth. These creatures are only permitted to harm the people who are *not* protected by the seal of God. They may not harm those who are protected by God’s Holy Spirit.

* God provides a seal of ownership to protect His people from judgment.

The first-century reader would have been reminded of the account of the Passover in Exodus chapter 12. God announced His intention of bringing judgment to the land of Egypt, but the people of Israel were to put the blood of a lamb as a mark on the doorposts of their home. The blood of the lamb served as a mark of ownership, and God’s judgment passed over the homes marked with the seal of the blood.

God permits these demonic creatures to bring torment to those in rebellion against God, but they are limited in terms of the extent of the damage they can cause—they may inflict pain, but they may not kill. They are limited in terms of how long they may operate—just five months. God is in control.

The description of the locusts given in verses 7-11 abounds with imagery. How are we to understand this bizarre description? Should we be on the lookout for creatures that look like this? Is this John’s attempt as a first-century man to describe a twenty-first century technology, like helicopters?

As we consider the images in Revelation, we need to keep in mind that John is describing *visions* that he has been given, not videos. Throughout the Bible, visions tend to be full of images, of symbolism. Visions tend to require interpretation.

You’ll recall that when John saw a vision of Jesus receiving the scroll, Jesus appeared as a Lamb in that vision, with seven eyes and seven horns. Does Jesus have the form of a lamb? He does not! In the incarnation, the eternal Son of God became man. Jesus has the appearance of a man, not a lamb. Figuratively He is the Lamb of God, but if you were to see Him, He would be a man.

John saw a vision of Jesus as a lamb to convey the concept that Jesus is worthy to open the scroll because of His victory on the cross as the sacrificial Lamb of God.

Does Jesus have seven eyes? He does not! John saw a vision of Jesus with seven eyes in order to convey the concept that Jesus is omniscient. Does Jesus have seven horns? He does not! The vision of Jesus with seven horns illustrates the concept that Jesus has all power and all authority in heaven and earth.

So here, when we read this fantastic description of these demonic creatures, we are to understand aspects of their nature. We’re to find in the description of the locusts not information about how they looked, but information about their capacity for destruction.

So we have:

* locusts – total destruction
* horses prepared for battle – military organization
* crowns of gold – power
* human faces – intelligence
* women’s hair – fearsome
* lion’s teeth – strength
* breastplates – invincible
* sound of wings – vast multitude
* scorpion sting – torment

These demonic creatures have as their king the angel of the Abyss, whose name is Apollyon, which means *Destroyer*. The descriptive term *Destroyer* characterizes Satan’s purpose and his activities. Since the fall of Satan, his purpose has been to bring about destruction.

But again, it’s important to realize that *this* trumpet judgment will only bring torment to non-believers. Satan’s demonic creatures bring destruction, but only on his own people. This is how Satan punishes his own subjects. Satan offers happiness to those who will indulge in sin, but Satan is a liar, and in the end Satan brings emptiness.

God brings hope to His people; Satan brings despair to his. God brings joy to His people; Satan brings misery. God brings salvation; Satan brings condemnation. God brings fulfillment; Satan brings loss.

You would think that as men and women of earth suffer the torment of these creatures, that they would turn to God in desperation. You would think that men and women would cry out to God for mercy. You would think that man would repent, but the Bible says that **even in the day of judgment, the godless refuse to turn to God**.

Next we come to the sounding of the sixth trumpet. Look at verses 13-16. *“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.”*

When the sixth trumpet is sounded, a voice from the altar in heaven commands that four bound angels be released to vent judgment on the earth.

Four angels—who are demons—are bound at the river Euphrates. They are to be released at the precise hour appointed by God, and their job is to eliminate one-third of the earth-dwellers from the face of the earth. When these demons are released they will set in motion an army of demonic creatures that is 200-million strong. This army of demons will kill one-third of godless mankind remaining on the earth.

Some have suggested that this huge army is a human army, but I believe that these troops, like the locusts, are demons—demons that were released from the Abyss. Remember, John saw a vision, and the vision conveys concepts by the images John describes. The images have symbolic or figurative significance.

The weapons of this army are described as fire, smoke, and sulfur, and these are elements that the Bible associates with judgment from God. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by a rain of fire and sulfur. In Deuteronomy chapter 29, God warned His people that if they disobeyed His law, He would bring a judgment against them—a judgment of fire and burning sulfur.

In this sixth trumpet judgment God has permitted an army of demons to come against the godless inhabitants of the earth and destroy one-third of these earth-dwellers with fire and smoke and burning sulfur. These are demons from the Abyss.

Again, you would think that in that day that godless rebels would relinquish their resistance and turn to God. You would think that men and women would cry out to God for mercy. You would think that man would repent, but the Bible says that **even in the day of judgment, the godless refuse to turn to God**.

Look at verses 20-21. *“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.”* The Bible says that **even in the day of judgment, the godless refuse to turn to God**.

Man refuses to worship God, and instead, they worship idols. What kind of idols? Success, wealth, possessions, beauty, luxurious homes, social status. We look to material things for satisfaction. We look to worldly success for our fulfillment. We look to exercise and diet for immortality. Man may reject the notion of God, but every man worships something. Every godless man lives his life engaged in idolatry, whether he recognizes it or not. And one day, when judgment comes, **the godless will continue to refuse to turn to God**.

This brings us face to face with one of the myths of modern thinking—the myth that man is basically good. This is a basic tenet of philosophical thought in our culture. Haven’t you heard that notion over and over—the notion that man is basically good?

It’s interesting that in the academic institutions, the universities, where that notion is most fervently taught, that when you go into the university libraries you’ll find that there are elaborate security systems there to keep you from stealing books from the library. Now if you’re basically good, why would you steal their books? And why do they put locks on the lockers in a police station? Surely the police, the defenders of the law, would not be stealing one another’s property. And yet, everyone knows that locks are necessary. They’re necessary because man is *not* basically good.

In fact, man is depraved. The Bible teaches that man is totally depraved. To be totally depraved means that every aspect of our being has been corrupted, polluted, infected by sin. Every aspect of our being—our desires, our motives, and our thoughts are all corrupted by sin.

It’s important to understand the distinction between the Biblical doctrine of total depravity and the notion of *utter* depravity. To be utterly depraved is to be as wicked as you could possibly be. Hitler was evil; he was extremely depraved, but he could have been worse than he was. He could have killed one more person than he actually killed. He could have told one more lie than he actually told.

I am a sinner. I sin a lot; and yet, I could sin more often and more severely than I actually do. I am not *utterly* depraved, but I am totally depraved in the sense that I have been infected with sin in every aspect of who I am. My desires are corrupted by sin; my responses are corrupted by sin; my motives are corrupted by sin; my thoughts are corrupted by sin. Because of the fall, I am totally depraved. I am not basically good, and neither are you.

The Bible says, in Jeremiah 17:9, *“The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can understand it?”* Romans 3:10-12 says this: *“There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands. There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable. There is none who does good, no, not one.”*

This is not a flattering picture, but this is God’s truth. This is why man does not repent. This is why man shakes his fist at God. This is why God’s judgment falls on this present world.

When man is blessed to live in a moral culture—in a culture with values shaped by a godly heritage, then men may tend to restrain their behavior to conform to the general boundaries of what is acceptable in the culture. We may see what appears to be goodness in the behavior of man. But when left to his own devices, man will sink deeper and deeper into wickedness.

In the book of Genesis, back in the days of Noah, mankind lived independently from God. Man chose to decide for himself what was right and what was wrong, and the result of man’s *“following his heart”* is described in Genesis chapter 6.

Genesis 6:5-6 says this: *“The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.”* Think of this indictment of the depravity of man. Left to his own devices, the final state of man is that *“every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.”*

Here in our passage today in Revelation 9, man suffers under the judgment of God and he continues to refuse to repent. John 3:19-20 says this: *“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.”*

Men don’t reject the gospel because they don’t understand it. Men don’t reject salvation because they’ve not been adequately instructed. Men don’t refuse Christianity because they’ve not been persuaded. Men reject Christ because they prefer evil over righteousness. They prefer darkness rather than light. They choose rebellion and autonomy rather than obedience. **Even in the day of judgment, the godless refuse to turn to God**..

C.S. Lewis has said that in the end there are only two types of people: those who say to God, *“Thy will be done,”* and those to whom God says, *“thy will be done.”*

And the fundamental question is this: why are you and I not a part of this godless multitude? Are we smarter than they? No. Were we more virtuous than they? No. Did we have a softer heart toward the gospel than they did? No. Ladies, you and I are not a part of the godless multitude because of God’s grace. We are not a part of the community of the lost because of God’s unmerited grace on our behalf. We were dead in our trespasses and sins—just as dead as they are. But God reached down and saved us. God changed our hearts. God made us alive. God opened our eyes. It’s by God’s *grace* you have been saved. And that salvation is not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. It’s not as a result of works, lest any man should boast.

Thanks be to God for His unfathomable gift!

Let’s close in prayer.