

Study 20: Revelation 9:13-21

17 The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God.

- The first trumpet was sounded in chapter eight. It has taken a while for us to reach the sixth trumpet. There were also seven seals that were opened and now seven trumpets to be sounded. The number seven figures prominently in Revelation. There were seven churches, seven angels of the churches, seven stars and seven lamp stands. I had a Bible teacher tell me once that when he found seven points in his teaching lesson, he stopped looking for any more.
- John's vision is a vocal vision. He hears many things. What are you hearing lately from the Spirit's world?
- This is the first and only reference to the golden altar before God. The altar in the Old Testament was a place of sacrifice, atonement for sin and mercy or judgment. The altar could be a place of mercy for anyone who unintentionally sinned and took hold of the horns of the altar. Their case would then be evaluated to see what their punishment would be. If they killed somebody willfully, the altar could not provide them mercy. They were condemned to death. If they killed someone by accident, they could receive mercy. Even in the Old Testament, God judged the thoughts and intentions of the heart as stated in Hebrews 4:12-13:

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Hebrews 4:12-13).

- The Old Testament altar was a shadow of this heavenly altar. This altar has a voice and speaks to mankind. This altar speaks of the sacrifice for sin that Jesus made once and for all. Those who do not appropriate that sacrifice are condemned to eternal suffering. Those who apply that blood to their lives find forgiveness for sins and eternal life.
- The writer of Hebrews told us that the earthly tabernacle was a shadow or type of the heavenly one:

It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own.

Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him (Hebrews 9:23-28).

18 It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."

- Revelation was written to the churches in what is modern-day Turkey. The river Euphrates is a good distance away from these churches. Very often God releases an answer to prayer or a judgment on a nation, but both take time to arrive. Remember what the angel told Daniel, who had been praying for two weeks when the angel appeared:

At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over. On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude. I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; the men with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground. A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. He said, "Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you." And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling. Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia (Daniel 10:2-13).

- If you are praying for something, don't assume the answer isn't coming. Assume that it is on the way and thank God for the answer in advance. Jesus said:

"Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours" (Mark 11:24).

19 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.

- God has a plan and He carries it out to perfection. He is never late or early. And God does release judgment on the earth. As we have mentioned in previous studies, God does this in part so that men will fear and cry out to Him for salvation and mercy. But too often, the hard heart of man resists to his destruction.
- Is this a literal third of all mankind to be killed? I doubt it, but rather language that communicates great tragedy and loss of life.

20 The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number.

- This is a lot of troops! There is no way for men or nations to resist the judgment of God. As fearful as the Roman legions were at the time of Revelation, there was a heavenly host that could easily overwhelm the power of Rome. That is the message of Revelation. God is in control, not Caesar. God is more powerful than Caesar. Caesar is to be feared, but God even more!
- God is “into” numbers. There is a book of the Bible called Numbers. God is very specific. God is both administrative and creative. When He functions in one, it does not take away from the other. God created the universe, yet we know what time the sun will rise tomorrow. He is a God of order and creativity.

21 The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur.

- Apocalyptic literature stirs the human imagination. Do you find yourself trying to picture what these creatures looked like? I do. These creatures and their horses stir fear in the heart of anyone who would visualize them. They look fierce and smell bad, like sulfur.
- This is once again an imagery that the churches receiving this could identify with. If John would have seen a tank or a missile, he would not have had any cultural context to understand the warlike nature of what was being described. He could not have described it to the churches to whom he was writing. So the Spirit chose something that the Revelation churches could identify with, and future generations were left to draw their own conclusions.
- Some commentators have seen specific wars, weapons, and battles in these verses. I do not. That would be too subjective, with no one to say whether they were right or wrong. I don't use the Bible in that manner. These verses are an image of the fearful and terrible nature of God's wrath, which has been released on mankind from time to time.

Dr. John W. Stanko

22 A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths.

- This points to the power of the heavenly army to achieve earthly results. Did this point to a time when a literal third of mankind will perish? Probably not. But the thought of a third of mankind dying is evidence of some cataclysmic event that was produced by spiritual forces, under God's control and with His knowledge, that were released on earth.

23 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.

- If God can think and communicate with such visual richness, the Church should encourage the artistic gifts and abilities of its members. There is power in art to communicate the message and words of God.
- That is why *The Chronicles of Narnia* along with his *Space Trilogy* by C. S. Lewis are so popular even today. He used graphic images and storytelling to communicate spiritual truth.
- Symbols as in the verse above are not to be interpreted down to their details, saying that the tail means this and the mouth means that. I think the image is to be taken as a whole with the results generalized. These creatures represent powerful spiritual forces, under God's control, that will do some kind of damage on the earth. The Church simply needs to know whenever it happens that God is in control and that the Church can be protected, just like God protected the Jews in Egypt when the plagues came.

24 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.

- How far man fell when Adam and Eve sinned! We lost our ability to see God, and actually blame God for our problems, when it is our sin that has caused the problems.
- We should not be surprised that people do not repent or change when calamity strikes. The hardness of man's heart does not allow him to turn to God. Human history is full of examples of men redoubling their efforts to avoid God when God has revealed His power and judgment.

25 Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

- The Church must continue to preach to a world that hasn't only ignored God, but has rejected Him outright. It took me some time to get used to the idea that some people just don't accept God, they hate Him! They despise what He stands for and actively work against His purposes.

Dr. John W. Stanko

- The fact that these verses report that men did not repent leads me to believe that the fearful events described were allowed for that to happen: that men would repent and turn to God when they see His awesome judgments. Paul wrote:

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

- We must remember that, while judgment is released from time to time, God wants all men to know Him. Therefore what He does must in part be to bring men to a saving knowledge of His grace. The Church must avoid the angry rhetoric and not portray God as someone who is angry all the time. Yes, we must tell the world that His patience has an end, but we must continue to point to God's love and appeal for men and women everywhere to repent and come under God's mighty protection.