

## God's Justice and Patience (*The 7 Trumpets*)

Revelation 8-9 on October 16, 2022

Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson

*Please read Revelation 8:1-13 before going further in this transcript.*

Today's message needs to begin with a PG-13 disclaimer. As we move into some of the more severe stages of God's judgment, the content is growing increasingly more violent. So, with that disclaimer, here we go...

Two weeks ago, when we were in Revelation 6-7, it revealed the stark reality of human sinfulness and depravity. In light of all this, God shook the heavens and got their attention. In fact, He shook them SO fiercely that all of these unrepentant sinners ran to the mountains and hid in caves. They were now fully aware of their impending doom under God's terrible wrath. Revelation 7 proclaimed that God is a God of Salvation. It indicated that many of these unrepentant sinners may have indeed repented, after being awakened to the reality of God's coming wrath. But even though it seems that some of these sinners did repent, certainly not all of them did. And sadly, in Revelation 8-9 we'll learn more about the fate of those who remain persistently unrepentant. And even more sadly, we won't find any encouraging words that might cause us to think that some of them turned to God in faith. But it won't be for lack of opportunity, it'll be due to their own incredible hardheartedness toward God. Because of their outright refusal to repent and change their rebellious ways.

Revelation 8:1 begins, "When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour." So the first thing that happened, when Jesus broke open the 7<sup>th</sup> and final seal on the scroll, was about 30 minutes of complete silence. Back in Revelation 4:8 we saw John's vision of heaven filled with the sounds of worship and praise.<sup>1</sup> But in Revelation 8:1 all of heaven STOPS. There was silence for about half an hour. (When is the last time you were completely silent for 30 minutes straight?) Silence can actually be a wonderful way to worship God. There are times when it is right and fitting and honoring to worship the Lord by being silent before Him; Revelation 8:1 is one of those times.<sup>2</sup> It's a dramatic pause, in anticipation of God's imminent, final judgment.<sup>3</sup>

In verse 2, the 7 angels are given trumpets. But, before any of them can blow them, another angel takes center stage. Revelation 8:3-4 tell us, "Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar.

---

<sup>1</sup> The four living creatures around God's throne kept repeatedly proclaiming "holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." The 24 elders are bowing down in worship. Then Jesus is found worthy to open the scroll and thousands upon thousands of angels join in the worship. Pretty soon every creature in heaven and earth was worshipping the One who sat on the throne and the Lamb.

<sup>2</sup> See Habakkuk 2:20 and Zephaniah 1:7.

<sup>3</sup> Can you picture John, as he's having this vision, now just standing there in silence with all of heaven, considering what's about to come next? With the 7th and final seal removed, we can now get to the contents within the scroll!

He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God's people, on the golden altar in front of the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God's people, went up before God from the angel's hand."<sup>4</sup> Not too many of us use a censer these days. It's basically a pan that's "used to hold live charcoal for the burning of incense."<sup>5</sup> By incense we just mean a collection of aromatic herbs and spices that smell really nice when they're heated up.<sup>6</sup> So that's the picture here: the golden altar in front of the throne had hot coals on top of it.<sup>7</sup> This angel puts a bunch of incense on top of the hot coals which produces smoke and a pleasant aroma; a scent pleasing to the Lord.<sup>8</sup> But what really pleases the Lord is the aroma of the prayers of His people which are rising up in the midst of the incense smoke.<sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup> Apparently in response to these prayers, the silence is broken as this angel then hurls the fiery censer down onto the earth. The silence of heaven is shattered by "peals of thunder, rumblings, and flashes of lightning."

Revelation 8:6 goes on, "Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them." So opening the 7th and final seal leads to an entirely new set of 7s, the 7 trumpets which the 7 angels will sound off, one at a time.<sup>11</sup> <sup>12</sup> Trumpets are used all throughout Scripture to announce important events.<sup>13</sup> So the progressive sounding off of each one of these trumpets is a clear declaration to God's people that His final, End Times' plan is underway! The first four trumpets are sounded off in the remaining verses of chapter 8:

- 1<sup>st</sup> trumpet: 1/3 of earth/trees burned up and the grass, by hail/fire/blood.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> trumpet: 1/3 of sea to blood; 1/3 sea creatures die/ships destroyed.<sup>14</sup>
- 3<sup>rd</sup> trumpet: 1/3 of rivers/springs turn bitter; many die from the water.<sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> "The thought of God's final victory over the forces of evil should produce in us both anticipation and prayer." Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 338.

<sup>5</sup> *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2160 footnote on Revelation 8:3.

<sup>6</sup> Back in Revelation 5:8 the 24 elders each had a bowl of incense.

<sup>7</sup> "The altar in heaven blends together the altar of burnt offering (primary in 6:9) and the altar of incense (primary here in 8:3-5)." Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, top of p. 344.

<sup>8</sup> In the Old Testament, the Altar of Incense was separate from the bronze altar where animals were sacrificed. This altar was specifically designated solely for burning incense before the Lord. In fact, it was positioned right in front of the curtain that closed off the Most Holy Place that held the Ark of the Covenant. In other words, this incense was offered up right on the edge of God's presence, close enough for Him to smell its pleasing aroma, close enough for Him to easily hear the prayers of His people. See Exodus 30:1-10 and any *Study Bible* notes you may have. Also consider Psalm 141:1-2.

<sup>9</sup> Learn more about pleasing aromas at <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/four-aromas-god-loves-most>

<sup>10</sup> Here's a prayer exercise you might want to consider for this week: when you sit down for your daily prayers, or kneel down or whatever it may be, burn some incense or light a fragrant candle. As you are praying and smelling this aroma, visualize the reality of your prayer being lifted up to God and being a pleasing aroma to Him.

<sup>11</sup> See Numbers 10:1-10, Joel 2:1, and 1 Thessalonians 4:16. "In Old Testament times the trumpet served to announce important events and give signals in time of war. The seven trumpets of Revelation...announce a series of plagues more severe than the seals but not as completely devastating as the bowls." *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2160 footnote on Revelation 8:2.

<sup>12</sup> The opening of the 7 SEALS functioned more like preliminary judgments, which revealed the sinful depravity of mankind, and proved just how much God's judgment was necessary. (See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, top of p. 339.) Now, as we move to the 7 TRUMPETS, and then the 7 BOWLS after that, we'll discover God's more direct judgment on wickedness. However, this doesn't mean that His merciful offer of salvation has been rescinded. Much to the opposite! Revelation continues to give us glimpses of opportunities for even the most WICKED to repent of their sin and find God's salvation.

<sup>13</sup> "In Scripture, trumpets summon the community for worship or battle and announce the Lord's glorious presence in revelation, judgment, and salvation." *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2601 footnote on Revelation 8:6.

<sup>14</sup> Much like today, the transportation of food and commerce were highly dependent on the shipping industry. *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2602 footnote on Revelation 8:9.

4<sup>th</sup> trumpet: 1/3 of sun/moon/stars turn dark; 1/3 of day/night w/o light.<sup>17</sup> A scholar named Bruce Metzger notes that... “the overall intention of the sounding of the seven trumpets is not to inflict vengeance but to bring people to repentance... Instead of total destruction, only a third.... The fraction is symbolic of the mercy of God.... [It] leaves those who can learn from tragic events.”<sup>18</sup> It’s also worth noting that this judgment is worldwide; it’s not limited to any one particular nation or focused on any one particular geographical area.<sup>19</sup> However, it is limited to the ungodly, to those who don’t have God’s protective seal on their foreheads. We learned about this back in chapter 7, and we’ll see it reiterated when we get to chapter 9.<sup>20 21</sup>

Many of these trumpet judgments closely echo the plagues that God sent on the Egyptians during the Exodus in the Old Testament.<sup>22</sup> So this protection of God’s people in Revelation is similar to God’s protection over His people back in Exodus. Back then you may recall that they sealed their doorframes with the blood of the Passover Lamb, and they were shown mercy when the destroying angel came through all of Egypt.<sup>23 24</sup> In one of his sermons on the book of Revelation, Micah Carpenter notes that “When the Christians who received the book of Revelation heard about these disasters in chapters 8 and 9, they would have made the connection: new plagues mean a new Exodus.”<sup>25</sup> In fact, the overlap of some of these plagues may have been God’s way of encouraging the 1<sup>st</sup> century believers that this is now “the final exodus of God’s people from the bondage of a world controlled by hostile powers.”<sup>26</sup> Speaking of hostile powers, these trumpet judgments are about to take a significant turn for the worse. You see, the first four trumpets were brutal, but they were focused more directly

---

<sup>15</sup> Wormwood underscores their bitterness of their current situation and their bitter sorrow. It’s “a plant with a strong, bitter taste.... It is not poisonous, but its bitterness suggests death.” *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2161 footnote on Revelation 8:11.

<sup>16</sup> Water goes from a source of life to a source of death. Back in Revelation 7:17 we’re told that Jesus leads his people to springs of LIVING water. But here we see that those who reject Jesus, encounter bitter water that leads to DEATH. See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, bottom of p. 354.

<sup>17</sup> The Roman pantheon no doubt had multiple gods connected to each of these areas being judged: A god for the earth, trees, and grass. A god of the sea. A god of the rivers and springs. A god of the sun, moon, and stars. BUT, none of these gods could put a stop to the trumpet judgments being issued from the throne of the One true God. For those humans still left on the earth, their one and only recourse was to call out for God’s mercy.

<sup>18</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1993, p. 66.

<sup>19</sup> See *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2601 footnote on Revelation 8:7.

<sup>20</sup> See Revelation 7:3 and 9:4. See also Revelation 3:10.

<sup>21</sup> Given the intensity of martyrdom at this time in history, and depending on whether or not, at some point, believers are removed from the earth, there will likely be very few, if any, Christians left by this time in history. There’s no small debate over how long God’s people will remain on earth when we get to these final judgments. Some believe that we’re raptured out before God’s wrath is poured out. Others believe we’re pulled out halfway through. Still others feel that there will be at least some believers right on through to the very end of God’s judgment on this earth. But any who may still be around, will be sealed and protected from God’s wrath.

<sup>22</sup> Compare the 1<sup>st</sup> trumpet with Exodus 9:13-25 for the plague of hail. Compare the 2<sup>nd</sup> trumpet with Exodus 7:20-21 for the plague of blood. Compare the 4<sup>th</sup> trumpet with Exodus 10:21-23 for the plague of darkness. Note how verse 23 ends, “...Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived.”

<sup>23</sup> See Exodus 12:23-30. Also note the Destroyer in Revelation 9:11.

<sup>24</sup> They’re “kept from the plagues to make it obvious...that God’s mercy belongs only to his followers.... However, those who have rejected God, and his seal, will face ‘the wrath of God and the Lamb.’” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, bottom of p. 366.

<sup>25</sup> Micah D. Carpenter, *The Victory of the Lamb: Sermons on Revelation*, self-published, p. 88.

<sup>26</sup> *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2161 footnote on Revelation 8:12.

on nature, so they only impacted people indirectly. But the trumpets in Revelation 9 will be aimed directly at unrepentant sinners.<sup>27</sup>

Revelation 8:13 signals just how much worse things are about to get, “As I watched, I heard an eagle<sup>28</sup> that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: “Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!” Woe, woe, woe because God is holy, holy, holy, and His just judgment is now coming in its fullness. This three-fold repetition stands in unison with the “holy, holy, holy” being proclaimed in God’s throneroom. (In other words, God’s holiness demands His justice for the wicked.)<sup>29</sup>

And so, we come to Revelation 9. Revelation 9:1-2 begin, “The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss.<sup>30</sup> When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss.” [The Abyss is the bottomless pit where Satan and his demons live.<sup>31 32</sup> A key thing to know about the Abyss is that God alone is in charge of when it’s open or shut. The Abyss is unlocked only because He allows it, at this particular time, for His particular End Time purposes.]

Revelation 9:3-4 continue, “And out of the smoke locusts came down on the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did NOT have the seal of God on their foreheads.” [So here is where verse 4 connects back to Revelation 7:3 and reminds us that God’s people are sealed from God’s wrath.]

Revelation 9:5-6 continue, “They were not allowed to kill them but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes. During those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them.” We might be wondering, why doesn’t God just let these demonic hordes kill them and get it over with? Well, one reason may be that He is allowing them to suffer as an appropriate punishment for the suffering they caused to His beloved martyrs. He may allow this suffering for another reason though; it could very well be that He is yet again giving them one last chance to receive His forgiveness. There’s still an opportunity for them to

---

<sup>27</sup> “The first four trumpets were directed at nature, these last three are directed at people...who have rejected God... the last three are...called...‘woes’ and are ‘worse than the initial four in that they directly strike the wicked.’” Citing Beale in part, Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, top of p. 358.

<sup>28</sup> This could be translated as either eagle or vulture. Eagle does seem more likely for the original audience since “eagles were viewed as the messengers of the gods.” Either way, the main emphasis is really about the visibility of this bird for all to see and hear that judgment was coming on the inhabitants of the earth. (Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 360.)

<sup>29</sup> See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, pp. 360-361.

<sup>30</sup> The *ESV* and *NKJV* translate Abyss as the “bottomless pit.”

<sup>31</sup> See Luke 8:31 and Revelation 20:1-3. *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2161 footnote on Revelation 9:1.

<sup>32</sup> It also contains “the wicked dead.” *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2602 footnote on Revelation 9:1.

repent. As harsh as these demonic hordes are, they may be the instruments of God's wrath which bring these hard-hearted rebels to their breaking point of finally turning to God.<sup>33 34</sup> Pastor Martin Kiddle said it this way: "By exhausting every attempt to [change their minds], God demonstrates His sovereignty, vindicates His holiness, and justifies His final sentence of doom."<sup>35</sup> You see, sometimes God hands mankind over "to the very evils which they worship" (see v. 20).<sup>36 37</sup> These evil forces serve God's purpose of judgment against unrepentant peoples. God turns them over to the evil that they've been embracing. He does this in judgment, but ALSO in the hope that they might repent, once they experience the consequences of these evil forces unleashed upon them.<sup>38</sup>

These evil demonic hordes are described in more detail in Revelation 9:7-11, "The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails with stingers, like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon<sup>39</sup> and in Greek is Apollyon<sup>40</sup> (that is, Destroyer)." We don't really have enough information to be certain who the "King of the Abyss" is.<sup>41 42 43</sup> But we do know that this king hungers only to destroy, because his name literally means "Destroyer."<sup>44</sup> He isn't given free reign though, He's only allowed to go as far as the One true King allows him to go.<sup>45</sup>

Now this only gets us up through the first woe; there are still two more to come. We'll only get to the second one today. (The 3<sup>rd</sup> woe comes in future

---

<sup>33</sup> God gives these demon hordes permission to torture but He also sets limits. He isn't commanding them to do this harm, "He simply allows their evil to express itself." Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 365.

<sup>34</sup> God is allowing evil to take its natural, destructive course. Evil is not given full reign by any means, but it's certainly given a lot more leash than humans have ever encountered before.

<sup>35</sup> Kiddle wrote this in 1940. He's quoted in Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, bottom of p. 361.

<sup>36</sup> P. 92 and see discussion by Micah D. Carpenter, *The Victory of the Lamb: Sermons on Revelation*, self-published, pp. 90-93.

<sup>37</sup> Even in this judgment, God keeps their good in mind, providing a final opportunity for their eyes to be opened and for them to choose repentance.

<sup>38</sup> Similar to the way that God worked back in Revelation 6 by allowing human depravity to implode upon itself, so also, we see God allowing evil to run its course.

<sup>39</sup> "uh BAD uhn" W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That's Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 15.

<sup>40</sup> "uh PAHL yuhn" W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That's Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 26.

<sup>41</sup> This king who is "the angel of the Abyss" has been "variously identified as Satan, the antichrist, personified destruction, or the angel of death." *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2602 footnote on Revelation 9:11.

<sup>42</sup> This demonic king may very well be Satan, but is just as likely a key, high-ranking official in Satan's kingdom. See discussion by Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, bottom of p. 373.

<sup>43</sup> However, Apollyon may actually be a reference to Apollo, who was the "Greek god of pestilence, often symbolized by the locust. [Emperor] Domitian considered himself Apollo incarnate, so this may be a further presentation of emperor worship as demonic." (*NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2602 footnote on Revelation 9:11.) Not to mention the emperor's powerlessness to do anything more than submit to God's purposes in history.

<sup>44</sup> "There is also a certain irony in that the 'Destroyer' was himself soon to be destroyed (20:10)." Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, bottom of p. 373.

<sup>45</sup> Consider Job 1:12 and its surrounding context.

chapters.) Revelation 9:13-14 continue, “The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice<sup>46</sup> coming from the four horns<sup>47</sup> 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.” [The exact nature of these four angels isn’t made explicit in the text, but the fact that they are “bound” seems to indicate that they are fallen angels, in other words demonic. So they are probably Satan’s leaders for the demonic cavalry that we’ll read about in the coming verses.<sup>48 49</sup>]

Revelation 9:15-16 continue, “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 twice ten thousand times ten thousand. I heard their number.”<sup>50</sup> What an incredible confirmation of God’s detailed and masterful control of our universe’s timetable. He’s got things scheduled out to the very hour and day.<sup>51</sup> At this point, God now allows 1/3 of mankind to be killed; not all of them though, only 1/3.<sup>52 53</sup> In other words, their continued stubbornness in sin, leads to God’s continuing increase of the pressure.<sup>54</sup>

To be clear, Ezekiel 33:11 reminds us, “...As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! ...” 2 Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” Psalm 103:8 says, “The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.” But God’s patience does not mean that He will wait forever. And being “slow to anger” doesn’t mean that God will never pour out His anger. A key feature of the book of Revelation is to clearly demonstrate this very thing.

---

<sup>46</sup> This VOICE is probably the voice of the same angel from back in Revelation 8:5, the angel who offered incense on this same golden altar before God. He’s the one who hurled the fiery censer on the earth, and now he is God’s instrument to issue the command to release four angels who are bound near the great river Euphrates. See discussion by Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, bottom of p. 378.

<sup>47</sup> “People sometimes expressed a desire to seek safety and protection from others by holding on to the horns of the altar (1 Kings 1:50–51; 2:28–34).” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 506.

<sup>48</sup> See discussion by Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, bottom of p. 379.

<sup>49</sup> “These angels have apparently been restrained against their will, like the demons confined to the abyss in 9:1–3. They are probably also wicked angels.” (G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 506.)

<sup>50</sup> 200 million cavalry would be at least 1,000 times bigger than any army at that time in history, so this unstoppable force would have most certainly gotten the attention of anyone reading Revelation in the 1st century. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, bottom of p. 381.

<sup>51</sup> God’s sovereignty is at work here in a very EXACT timetable. *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2162 footnote on Revelation 9:15.

<sup>52</sup> “The first Woe brought torment; the second brings death.” Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 197.

<sup>53</sup> To be clear, there will be no second chances after we die. Those who die physically while in a state of spiritual unbelief and rebellion against God, “will remain in that condition forever.” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 512.

<sup>54</sup> “It is because of their continued stubbornness that pressure on the wicked is progressively increased.” Bruce M. Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1993, p. 66.

So, God allows 200 million horses and riders to be released! Revelation 9:17-19 describes them, “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. A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths. The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes,<sup>55</sup> having heads with which they inflict injury.”<sup>56 57 58</sup>

Shockingly, even this intense level of physical suffering still did not change their attitude toward sin and evil.<sup>59 60</sup> Revelation 9:20-21 concludes, “The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues STILL did not repent of the work of their hands;<sup>61</sup> they did not stop worshiping demons,<sup>62</sup> and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk.<sup>63</sup> Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.”<sup>64</sup> The hardheartedness of some sinners is SO great, that they will never repent. No matter how much time God gives them. No matter how severely God disciplines them, they will continue in their evil ways.<sup>65</sup>

Have you ever encountered a hardened sinner like this? I believe I have, and I’m going to close by sharing their story. Just a heads up, it’s a PG-13 story. Back in 1982, there was a brutal murder in the town where I grew up. In Minocqua, WI a young woman named Barb Mendez was bludgeoned to death. Barb and her family attended the same church as my family. I was

---

<sup>55</sup> “That the horses had tails like snakes is perhaps another way of emphasizing the demonic origin of the horses. In 12:9 the devil is designated “that ancient serpent,” and throughout antiquity snakes and demons were closely associated.” Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 197.

<sup>56</sup> Since verses 17-19 share some key similarities with verses 3-10, most scholars believe that this is yet another demonic army unleashed on unrepentant sinners.

<sup>57</sup> “This description of the devilish army of verse 16 is the sole subject of the vision. It is quite similar to the description of the demonic locusts in verses 3–10.” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 510.

<sup>58</sup> I appreciate the humility of these words by Grant Osborne: “I do not believe that God is telling us which elements of this book will actually occur and which are symbolic. We are to take this as a whole picture, at one and the same time literal and symbolic, and leave the question ‘what exactly will happen’ up to God. We will find out when it happens.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, top of p. 290.

<sup>59</sup> See *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2162 footnote on Revelation 9:21.

<sup>60</sup> Consider Amos 4:6-11, “I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me,” declares the LORD. ...Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees, yet you have not returned to me,” declares the LORD. 10 “I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt. I killed your young men with the sword, along with your captured horses. I filled your nostrils with the stench of your camps, yet you have not returned to me,” declares the LORD....”

<sup>61</sup> This implies that there was STILL time to repent. They didn’t embrace the opportunity, but God’s salvation was right at their fingertips. Thus their hardheartedness is revealed in their ongoing willful rebellion and sin.

<sup>62</sup> Even though these demons and these idols were powerless to help them, they continued to worship and serve them, and they refuse to repent of their evil behavior. To put it another way, these trumpet judgments are serving to prove that this particular section of mankind is wicked to the very core. They are beyond God’s salvation, but not because God’s mercy is lacking in any way, but rather due to their own extreme hardheartedness. Salvation was there for the asking, but they weren’t asking for it because they didn’t want it. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, top of p. 340. Although there may be a few who respond later on in Revelation 11:3. Also see Revelation 14:6-7.

<sup>63</sup> I agree with Grant Osborne’s assessment of the grammar in verse 20. The connection between the clauses “is probably epexegetical, meaning “that they should not worship demons, NAMELY idols.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, footnote #15 on the bottom of p. 386.

<sup>64</sup> Consider 1 Peter 4:3-5.

<sup>65</sup> “One would think that the terrors of God’s wrath would bring rebels to their knees. Not so. Past the point of no return, they respond to greater punishment with increased rebellion. Such is sinful nature...unmoved by the mercies of God.” Robert Mounce quoted by Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, bottom of p. 376.

11 years old at the time. They had two daughters who were friends of mine, about the same age as me. We were in youth group together. As you might imagine, Barb's murder had horrific consequences for her family. And it shook our smalltown community to its core, not to mention our small country church. For many years, her murder remained unsolved. It seemed as if the murderer had gotten away with his/her crime. For 37 years it remained an unsolved "cold case." And then, a group called "Cold Justice" looked into the case. They uncovered new evidence; this led to the case being reopened, and the murderer being arrested, and then sentenced to life in prison in 2019.

The murderer turned out to be none other than Barb's husband, Bob Mendez. According to witness testimony, shortly after the murder, he'd told someone he was now "footloose and fancy free." Another report says that when they arrested him (37 years after his crime) he laughed and said, "you're arresting me now?" In other words, he didn't feel the slightest bit of remorse; he didn't regret what he'd done. In the words of Revelation 9:21, "he didn't repent of this murder." In fact, he seemed pretty pleased with himself. Throughout all those 37 years, he never turned himself in, and he never confessed to his crime. He didn't even apologize to his own daughters. He just went on living however he wanted to.<sup>66</sup>

Some sinners are like this, they just keep on sinning. No matter how much time they're given, no matter how wickedly they've behaved. Many of you listening to this message probably know a sinner like this. They've sinned in some truly horrific way. They've damaged the lives of people closest to them. And they don't seem to feel any regret about it whatsoever. This morning I'm here to tell you that there comes a point when God's patience runs out with sinners like these. When His righteous anger is finally ready to be poured out. And it's ok to feel encouraged by this fact, even to find consolation in it. Now, I'm not suggesting that we should take pleasure in their punishment. But it is ok for us to feel a sense of relief and gratitude to God that He doesn't let these things go on forever unchecked. In other words, eventually there will be no such thing as unsolved "cold cases." God's righteous wrath will be thorough, it will be complete, and it will be final. (We must ALL give an account before God.<sup>67</sup>) God has prepared a place for hardhearted sinners like these, a place called hell. And if you think the pain and suffering in Revelation 8-9 sounds bad, let me tell you, hell is so much worse. For sinners who refuse to repent, there WILL BE a final reckoning before God.

---

<sup>66</sup> Her family's story is available online at <https://www.wausaudailyherald.com/story/news/2019/04/30/minoqua-murder-robin-mendez-guilty-1982-killing-barbara-mendez/3563023002/> and <https://www.oxygen.com/crime-time/robin-mendez-found-guilty-wife-barbara-murder-oxygen-cold-justice>.

<sup>67</sup> See Ecclesiastes 12:13-14.