

The Soon Coming End – Part 13

2 Peter 3:9-13

Revelation 9

May we turn to chapter 9 of the Book of Revelations, and there read about the “foreboding woes” the messenger from God was warning about in the closing words of chapter 8. Recall, in verse 13 of chapter 8, we heard the cry of an eagle saying,

13 . . . “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!” (Revelation 8:13 (ESV))

And now here in chapter 9 we read,

1 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. 2 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. 3 Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. 4 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. 5 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. 6 And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them. 7 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. 8 They had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions. 9 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. 10 They have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months. 11 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.

12 The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things. 13 Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, 14 one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.” 15 And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind. 16 The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. 17 And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of

their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone. 18 and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths. 19 For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm. 20 The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; 21 and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts. (Revelation 9:1-21 (NASB))

It has often been said by preachers as they have preached from these words of the Book of Revelations, that the Apostle John must have been completely overwhelmed by all the imagery before him, all the many mysterious manifestations and appearances of the creatures and events that he witnessed during his visit to heaven. And I agree. His “first-century mind” was not at all accustomed to such visions as these.

And yes, surely the Holy Spirit was enabling John to have some level of personal understanding, and the Holy Spirit surely guided every word that is written here. But still, by the time these descriptions reach our human minds, we struggle to envision exactly what John’s eyes were seeing.

Thankfully, such things as described here, flying objects that could be airplanes and missiles and bombs, and even asteroids and meteorites are a little more understandable for you and me. But again, not to John.

The simple truth that we gain from reading these words is that while we may not know, or even need to know, exactly what these visages really are, as with the “locusts” spoken about here, if they are just some visual presentation of demons, or as some commentators argue, they are some sort of military weaponry, or something else, this is God’s war, and He can simply speak anything He envisions into existence in order to carry out His plans and purposes.

May I also interject a thought? Throughout most of the beginning stages of the tribulation, these words speak of men doing evil things to men, yes with demon possession being exercised over those men, but still most all of the misery is brought on by the hands of men. And that will continue to take place.

But here in these particular revelations, we see that these demons are not being disguised within the form and flesh of men, but are beginning to come out from their hidden realms, showing themselves openly as demons, as they begin directly attacking

men and women. Here, as “Apollyon”, the angel of the abyss, a great and powerful demon, leads hordes of locust creatures out from the abyss, these are demons, actual demons and not people and not actual locusts. And for one of the first times, men will be able to actually see demons with their natural eyes. And oh, they will be so afraid. And the suffering that these demons will bring will be so great that those who are stung by these demon locusts will long to actually die, but they can’t, at least not quickly, said here to be a period of suffering of five months.

May we pause for a moment and again remind ourselves of the circumstances and conditions that have brought us to where these “woes” are being poured out upon the people and the nations of the world. As we have said on other occasions, the sequence of the events that will take place over the seven years of tribulation is not concurrent with the same order as the chapters are given to us here in the Book of Revelation.

Shortly after the “rapture” of the saints takes place, we see in chapter 6, Jesus beginning to break open the seals of the great “scroll”. It is then that “the great dragon”, satan, and his helper “beasts” will begin their rise to power. Then in chapter 13, through the “antichrist”, satan and his demons will begin to set up their evil kingdom on the earth, bringing about their “one-world religion” spoken about in chapter 17 as the “Great Harlot”. And also, at the same time, the antichrist will begin to set up his financial empire, spoken about in chapter 18 as “Babylon the Great”.

But all the while, God is ever and always at work. As evil rises and troubles begin to churn, in chapter 14, we read where God calls forth His 144,000 Jewish evangelists and sends them out to minister. And also, in chapter 11, we read where God sends out His two powerful “witnesses” to minister there in Jerusalem. And from those ministries and others, men and women from every tribe and nation and tongue on the earth will begin turning their hearts to Christ, in “great multitudes”.

And while all these things are taking place, Jesus continues to break open seal after seal, and powerful angels continue to sound their trumpets and to pour out bowls of wrath of every kind imaginable upon the people and upon the nations of the world, stars falling from the sky, killing people and killing wildlife and sea life, burning up the land and poisoning the waters. All of these things working their way towards a final ending spoken about here in chapter 9, which then culminates in chapters 16 and 19 with the “Battle of Armageddon”.

Listen again to these words that we read a moment ago here in chapter 9, beginning in verse 12

12 The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things. 13 Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, 14 one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." 15 And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind. 16 The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. 17 And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone. 18 and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths. 19 For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm. 20 The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; 21 and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts. (Revelation 9:12-21 (NASB))

Reading these words, we can clearly see that everything is being brought to a final "last stand". The "one world religion" and the "one world government" cannot continue to withstand such enormous destructive forces as those that are being brought upon the people and the land as God rains down stars and hailstones and plagues, killing billions of people, poisoning the water supply and destroying the land.

And please don't fail to note in verses 20 and 21 how the people stubbornly refuse to repent. Throughout most all of the bible, we are able to read where God uses suffering as an instrument to turn people's hearts to Him in repentance. And yes, during the tribulation, many do turn their hearts to Him. But here we see that even with all the horrible suffering taking place, many, many people still will refuse to turn and repent of their sinful ways. For those who give their hearts and minds over to the power and the control of the demons and accept the 666, that is most likely a form of blasphemy, and people's hearts will have gone one step too far to ever be able to turn back. Listen to these words in verse 20,

20 The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; 21 and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts. (Revelation 9:12-21 (NASB))

And in chapter 16, we read similar words, only more intense.

9 They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory. 10 The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish 11 and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds. (Revelation 16:8-9 (NASB))

With people suffering in these horrific ways and with the antichrist finding that his financial empire, “Babylon the Great” is crumbling, all the many “wars and rumors of wars” that have been taking place all over the earth will begin to consolidate down to just one area of the world, and one big and final battle. And all eyes will begin to be focused upon just one nation of the world, Israel.

Think about that for a moment. With all that is taking place in all the nations of the world, and with the antichrist and his “one-world religion” and “Babylon the Great” collapsing, what becomes the focus? It is this one tiny portion of land that occupies such a very, very small part of the world, the tiny nation of Israel. Why would that be so? Why do people hate Israel so much that they will risk everything in this one big and final battle of Armageddon?

Again, the nations that will gather for this final battle will be many. Most bible commentators believe that Gog and Magog mentioned in the Book of Ezekiel clearly identifies Russia as being the “army from the far north” who will be in that battle. And here in verse 16, these armies of 200 million “horsemen” are assumed by most commentators to likely be the “armies of the east”, from China, because even now China boasts of having an army of over 200 million soldiers. And as we read here, this great army will be amassed somewhere near the Euphrates River, near Babylon, the power control center of the antichrist, poised for an invasion of Israel, where they will meet for battle on the “Plains of Megiddo”.

As I have pondered the question of why this last great battle will take place, and who will be the participants, and who will be fighting against whom, I must confess that God has not made all those answers very clear to me as yet? But I will give you what I understand thus far.

First, by this point in time in the tribulation spoken about here in chapter 9, God has been pouring out painful wrath and suffering, continually thwarting the plans and purposes of the antichrist and all of his worldly allies, causing them to want to do

whatever it takes to try to bring an end to God's onslaught against them. You'll recall how frustrated the leaders of the world become with the things that the "two witnesses" are able to do, wanting them dead, but unable for the longest time to do anything to stop them.

Also, there will no doubt be many other factions throughout the world who will join in this last great battle, each trying to protect and enlarge their position and power in the world. I would think that the Muslim world will be a major force within the battle, because even now they hate and want to destroy everyone who is not their own.

But for more than any other reason, satan and his demons, and all their earthly counterparts, they all hate God, and they want, once and for all, to defeat Him and to defeat anyone who is on God's side in the battle.

Jesus told us in the gospels that people will hate all those who follow after Him for no reason. And even now, we see that taking place with us as Christians, the liberal world constantly despises us. And even more, the world vehemently hates Israel and its Jewish people, also for no good reason. But again, behind it all, their real hatred is toward God Himself. And so, as these powerful forces gather for battle, their real desire is to fight against God to try to defeat Him. And unfortunately for them, they will actually meet God face to face on the battlefield real soon, and woe be to them!

In chapter 19 we read that it will be Jesus Himself who will lead the armies of God into combat against the demonic forces of satan. In that battle, Jesus will come riding on a white horse, accompanied by His armies on white horses, and He will have the name "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" emblazoned on His robe and on His thigh. And in those final moments, there will really only be two sides in the conflict, the armies of the world, the flesh and the devil fighting against the armies of God. And may I say, I look forward to that battle!

We will pause at this point and the Lord willing, we will pick back up at the "Battle of Armageddon" next week.

Let's pray!