

The Three Woes
part 2
Rev. 9:3-21
05.30.17
mdb

It doesn't take a person who attends a church long to learn that, in conversation about God, there are certain words which are commonly used to describe him - and those specific words are words which a christian may say, if and when that christian is confronted with certain types of problems or when they are asked certain types of questions about why God allowed some event. And one of the primary words I have in mind, that falls into this category, is the word 'SOVEREIGN'.

When someone is a 'sovereign' we mean that this particular someone is a supreme ruler or lord; one who possesses the highest authority without control - or so says The American Dictionary of the English Language of 1828. And so to BE sovereign is to be *supreme in power*. Someone who is sovereign, then, would be one who possesses *supreme dominion*. This is true of a sovereign IF the position of the sovereign is real as contrasted with someone who holds a position of authority - someone who holds an office as a ruler - in name only.

The United Kingdom, for example, has today a living monarch - the monarchy in the UK is alive and functional today. However, the Queen of England, though possessing moral influence, is a SOVEREIGN in name only, while the real authority in the UK vests in the Prime Minister and the parliament - and at times in the vote of the people.

This term SOVEREIGN is often used about God, as I already mentioned. But, when this term is used, what do we really mean by the term? I must say, some mean one thing while others mean something else. Some christians would say of God that He is absolutely sovereign, meaning He is in supreme control over His creation, while others might say, "Yes, He is absolutely sovereign, BUT, His sovereignty is *limited* in that He can not or would not ever override the human will. And still others say that God is sovereign over what He knows or what He plans to do - BUT, he has no knowledge of what His free creatures will choose to do until they make their choice.

So we must ask, just how sovereign is the Sovereignty of God? What is the height, width and depth of God's sovereignty? Is God truly in control of His whole creation and all that takes place? Is He sovereign over all without exception? Is He sovereign over me? Over you? Over the details of our lives? Over things like cancer in three year olds, or eye problems, or miscarriages, or seizures, or wars, or terrorist attacks, or over raises in may and winning the lottery? Or are there limits to God's sovereignty as some say?

When we look at scripture, we find that scripture gives a uniform testimony as to just how sovereign the Sovereignty of God really is - and Revelation 1 to 8 goes far in showing us what the scriptures teach about God's Sovereignty over all. Some examples will suffice:

Revelation 1:8, the Lord says of Himself that He is the Alpha and the Omega - meaning he is the beginning and the end - the Eternal God; and this God is also the Almighty God, meaning He has supreme power in every way on every day;

In Revelation 2:7 we learn that this God is the one who grants people the right to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God - and by the use of this symbolical - eat of the tree of life - we have the meaning that God exercises supreme power over salvation for individuals;

In Revelation 4:2-10 we learn that this God sits on a throne - as all Sovereigns do - and that the elders around the throne cast THEIR crowns at HIS feet and not vice versa - and this tells us He is supreme over all who are in His presence in heaven and to that end they worship Him;

And in Revelation chapter 5 we see that it is this God who holds in His hand the scroll of destiny for His universe - meaning, it is He who controls providentially all that comes to pass on earth; and we also see in chapters 4 and 5 that he is the object of worship for the entire creation and the created order!

Then, in Revelation 6, it is He who slits open the seals of the scroll of destiny - and we see how His sovereignty includes the execution of judgement in exacting justice on the enemies of the gospel and of His kingdom;

Revelation 7 shows us how God is also sovereign over the protection and security of His people; and how He will wipe away even the tears of His people, as He ultimately frees us from all suffering and death; and finally. . . .

The Three Woes
part 2
Rev. 9:3-21
05.30.17
mdb

Revelation 8 and 9 show first, how God pours out wrath - which comes down from the righteous judge above, upon the earth and its rebellious inhabitants; while chapter 9 illustrates God's Sovereign rule in graphic and meaningful descriptions, as we see the Lord God use evil itself to punish evil itself.

All of this shows that our God is KING - our GOD rules over all, as the Psalmist says (115:3); and for the suffering churches of Asia Minor, as well as for any and all Christians and churches who suffer from anything - the fact that our God is Sovereign becomes exceedingly practical and and sweetly comforting - for the Sovereign nature of our God says to us that come what may, He is nevertheless in control - and this cries to us that in testings, trials and sufferings, we can rest assured that our Lord and God is in control and the things faced are not random - but purposeful.

Last week, we began to look together at chapter nine - as we began to see how God actually used evil to judge evil. - meaning God is even Sovereign over the bounds evil can go to and the end to which evil can work - and yet, God is in control over evil although He is not the author of it. For what John recorded when the fifth angel blew the fifth trumpet was a scene where he saw a star which had fallen, open the shaft of the bottomless pit with a key that he had been given - and we identified this star first as an angel and then as a particular angel - and angel names Lucifer, a.k.a. Satan - who is also the king over the 'locusts' which came up out of the bottomless pit. Do you remember? Satan then - or if not, one of his chief fallen angels - is the star who was given the key to the abyss (v.1-2).

Last week, we also saw locusts which came up out of the shaft of the bottomless pit (vv.2-3) - and these locusts were described vv.7-10 as being *LIKE horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like man faces; their hair like woman hair; and their teeth like lions teeth*. John's use of the word 'like' tells us he is struggling to describe what he saw - but describe the scene he does, using earthly language to portray the reality he was seeing in visions. But where did he get these descriptors? From the OT descriptions of judgement.

- a) Joel 2:4-7, for example, describes locusts to horses and men preparing for battle;
- b) Joel 1:6 is the basis for the description of teeth like the teeth of lions - for in Joel 1:6 the locusts which came up and devoured Israel were described as a 'nation whose teeth were like the teeth of lions';
- c) The description of armored breastplates is the common description of a soldier or a war horses breastplate;
- d) Finally, the description of the sound of the wings of these locusts is taken from Joel 2:4-5 as well

Were these locusts actual insects - or were they some modern weapon - or were they something else? Last week, we identified these locusts, NOT as insects, nor as descriptions of some modern day war machine that John was trying to describe, but rather, as demons which are released from the bottomless pit - and one way we know this is that they arose out of the abyss, which is the domain of demons; and these demons were given authority, not to hurt vegetation - but rather, to attack (vv.3-5) - and they were given authority to attack people.

What were they allowed to do to people? They were NOT allowed to kill people - but they *were allowed* to hurt people. How? These creatures from the bottomless pit were to **TORMENT** people and their torment was like that of a scorpion when it strikes a man - meaning, PAIN will be inflicted and that, severely. Some scorpion strikes are not very painful when they sting - some, however, are quite painful - and others will kill a man with their sting.

What John is doing here among other things is drawing on Jewish tradition as he describes these locusts which come up from the bottomless pit - for Jewish tradition held that there were angels of destruction over Sheol and Abaddon - and these angels of destruction were in authority over thousands of scorpions. This was mere tradition of course - and yet, we can see a parallel here.

When we put all this together, what do we have as this first woe? First, this, clearly, is *a scene of judgement* - and we know this from v. 2 by the reference to the smoke which ascended from the bottomless pit and darkens. The darkness here is in part, symbolic for deception - for spiritual delusion - and this is what darkness symbolizes through out the NT - see Lk. 11:36; John 1:5; 3:19-21; 8:12; 11:10; 12:35-36; Rom. 13:12; 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Pet. 2:9; 1 John 1:5);

The Three Woes
part 2
Rev. 9:3-21
05.30.17
mdb

and so an aspect of this judgement is that God, through these demons released, sends delusion upon a part of unbelieving mankind.(see also 1 Tim. 4:1-2; 2 Thess. 2:11-12)

Second, this judgement is **brought about by demonic beings released by a fallen angel** (Satan himself or one of his chiefs) from the bottomless pit;

Finally, with the spiritual delusion comes something else. With the release of these demonic beings on 1/3 of humanity, **torment** comes on people (see v.5). TORMENT here refers primarily to emotional, spiritual and mental suffering - in the same way the pain from a scorpion sting brings with it mental/emotional suffering along with physical pain. This is how this same word is used in other places in Revelation (such as 11:10; 14:10-11 and so forth).

This 'torment' is described in other places in scripture. This is the torment spoken of by Moses, for example, in Dt. 4:20 and chapter 28 - where Moses said to Israel that in **the latter days God would visit** on Israel not only the plagues of Egypt but also "madness and . . .bewilderment of heart, and groping at noon, as the blind man gropes in darkness (vv. 28-29); madness - that is, people being driven mad (v.34), trembling of heart . . .despair of soul (v.65).

Jesus also spoke of this suffering, as recorded in Luke 21:25-26:

And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars and on earth, distress of nations with perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

And so **this first woe** brings all this on 1/3 of mankind - where 1/3 of mankind is afflicted by God by and with madness, bewilderment, despair of soul, spiritual blindness, fainting due to fear, and so forth. And this bewilderment will be so severe that people will desire to die but death will flee from them 9v.6). What is this about?

In much popular end times, futurist literature, a picture is painted of people who try and commit suicide - people who shoot themselves, or jump off high buildings or bridges, or jump in front of cars or trains, or jump out of airplanes without parachutes, or take massive doses of pills - and they hit the ground or the water or take all the meds they can eat - but they can't die. Maybe this is what John alluded to - but more than likely this isn't what was i mind.

A more likely scenario is this - that people, steeped in idolatry and following false religions, will be terrified by what comes upon them, and will know that their religious practices cannot help them - but because they know how futile their belief is, and because they hold no assurance about good things that might await them beyond the pale of physical death, will be too afraid, even to commit suicide.

The way G.K. Beale explains this - and though I don't like all of Beale's views, I like this explanation, is to say: ***they will want to die. yet be so afraid of death they will not find it within their power to kill themselves. The effect of the locusts is to remind the church's ungodly persecutors that their idolatry is vain and that they are separated from the living God, and consequently have no hope. In them the prophecy of Moses that the disobedient will be driven mad by what they suffer will be fulfilled (Deut. 28:28, 34).***

This is the first woe - and we see how this judgement is severe - but worse is still yet to come. Verse twelve is a segue from the first to the second woe.

What of the second woe - and the sixth trumpet (vv.12-19)? Read these verses with me. Notice the various parts:

1st, the sixth angel blew his trumpet (v.13a); and John heard a voice from the four horns of golden altar before God (v.13b);

2nd, The angel who had the sixth trumpet is told to release the four angels who are bound at the great river, Euphrates (v.14);

3rd, the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, day, month and year were released to kill 1/3 of mankind (v. 15);

The Three Woes
part 2
Rev. 9:3-21
05.30.17
mdb

4th, An army is described, numbering 200, 000, 000 - which is 10,000 x 10,000 x 2 (vv.16-17);

5th, this army kills 1/3 of mankind with three plagues - fire, smoke and sulfur (vv. 18-19);

What is this woe really about? There are various views on this - perhaps the most popular, held by some **futurists**, being that this is a description of Communist China - which has an army which is alleged to number 200 million - and other Asian armies. **John Walvoord**, **Merrill Tenney**, **Frank Gaebelein**, and **Harry Ironside** held this understanding - and if this is accurate, China is spoken of along with her allies,

Other futurists, however, such as **Charles Ryrie** and **Leon Morris** see this army as a demon army, similar to the demons mentioned under the first woe; and **Ray Stedman** believed that this number was merely symbolic - because in his view, no nation or coalition of nations had the capability of MOBILIZING an army of 200 million - so he concluded that all the armies in the world were meant by this picture - and would be involved in a battle that involved 200 million troops total. What this means is, the futurists don't know what is meant by this picture - so there is much speculation!

Preterists see this number as symbolic, and see the vision as referring to a vast physical army that slaughtered people; and they see this army as either that of the Romans at the end of the Jewish War when the army of Rome broke through the walls of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. or to the initial invasion of Israel by the Romans in 66 A.D. The preterist sees this picture as referring to an initial invasion of Israel however, for in this view the final invasion is described by the seven bowls later in the book.

Historicists saw this woe as describing the Turks and Tartars and the wars they waged against the Byzantine empire; and the fire, and smoke was from their cannon - the largest of which had a bore of three feet and could hurl a 1, 200 pound ball, while the smallest could hurl a 200 pound stone shot;

And **the Idealist** either sees this vision - this woe - as being the other side of the coin described in the first woe, or a description of the destruction of false thoughts, false customs, false beliefs, and false religions. In the first view, the first woe unleashed **spiritual forces** while this next woe **unleashes physical forces** - and together they bring a great punishment and a great warning to unbelieving and rebellious mankind; or put another way, the fifth trumpet depicts internal corruption of a wicked culture and the psychological, emotional trauma of false belief, while the sixth trumpet describes the external forces that bring that society to its end. In the second view, everything described is spiritual.

Question is, which view is correct? Next week, I personally think that the Idealist has the most reasonable understanding - and that trumpet six describes the other side of the coin that the fifth trumpet began to explain. That will have to wait until next week. I do want to talk with you a bit about vv. 20-21 however.

Verses 20 and 21 give us three insights into why the judgements God sends actually come and what they are designed to accomplish. First, we see why the judgements come upon mankind. Then we see a desired outcome. And thirdly, we see the actual outcome of the judgements, which come as a result of the first six trumpets.

Why do the judgements come upon mankind? They come due to the pride mankind has in the works of its own hands - human accomplishment; and against mankind worship of demons; and against idolatry in the form of gold, silver, bronze and wood. Further, the judgements come in response to four other sets of iniquity: Murder, sorcery, sexual immorality and theft/stealing (see also Romans 1:28-32; Eph. 5:4-7; 1 Cor. 6:9-11)

What are these judgements designed to accomplish? Repentance on the part of mankind is what is implied

What is the outcomes of these judgements? Verse 20 and 21 tell us that despite these judgements, the rest of mankind did not repent - and this is written twice. Now, why would the rest of mankind refuse to repent?

The Three Woes
part 2
Rev. 9:3-21
05.30.17
mdb

Remember what we saw about trumpet #5 and how an aspect of the release of the demons from the abyss involved spiritual delusion? Spiritual delusion brings with it spiritual blindness - and this blindness brings with it an inability to repent - even when opportunities arise. And this teaches a valuable lesson - and that is, repent while you are able, if you are outside Christ - and if you have friends and over ones outside Christ, pray for them and encourage them to repent while they are able - for according to 2 Thess. 2:11-12, a time will come when the Lord actually sends delusion so people will not be able to repent. And that is the ultimate judgement - which ends in final destruction of the wicked and all who die in unbelief.

That the Lord does this to individuals and to groups is seen elsewhere in scripture. Take for example Pharaoh in Egypt, Exodus 1 to 10. As Moses went to him and asked that he let Israel go into the wilderness so that they could worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not allow Israel to go free. But eventually, it was the Lord who hardened Pharaoh's heart - and once this began to take place, the time of repentance was passed and full, devastating judgement came about, until the gods of Egypt were seen to be impotent and the whole of the nation was laid waste, not to mention the first born dead, from Pharaoh's house down to the first born of cattle.

This same scenario unfolded in Israel during the time of Jesus's ministry - where we read in Matthew 13 that Jesus spoke to the multitudes in parables so that seeing, they would not comprehend and hearing they would not understand, lest they turn and believe and the Lord heal them. Thus, in Israel during the time of Jesus's sojourn, the patience of the Lord had run its course so that except for a remnant who embraced their Messiah, the time for repentance passed Israel by and, as Messiah was rejected and finally crucified. And the end was judgement on the nation, which began in 66 A.D and was complete by 125 A.D.

And so the lesson - repent while you can. Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as the Israelites in the wilderness did. Repent while you still are able; and if you know Christ, please with the Lord to save those of your family and friends who do not trust Christ, so that they will be able by God's grace, to repent while there is still time - for once the door is shut, no one is able to enter.