

WOE, WOE, WOE!

Revelation 9

Introduction:

Last week I was reminded again of the uncertainty of the times in which we live. After we had returned our rental car in Phoenix, and we were being driven to the airport, we discovered that our driver was a Christian. He was a very interesting person. His father was Italian, from the island of Sicily, and his mother was Mexican, from Guadalajara. But as we were talking, he talked about the troubling things happening in our world and commented that it seems like it can't be too long until Jesus comes back. He did say, "It may not happen in our time, but it's coming soon."

No, we do not know the day nor the hour of the coming of Christ, but He did give us signs to indicate when it was coming close. As I said a couple of weeks ago, there is nothing that needs to happen—no events or prophecies that need to be fulfilled—before the rapture, the catching away of the church which will introduce the 7-year period of tribulation and the rule of the Antichrist. And what a difficult time that is going to be. As we have seen in our study of the book of Revelation, things continue to get worse and worse throughout this Tribulation period.

A few years ago, in 2008, we saw tremendous upheaval in our world, particularly in the realm of economics. It seemed that the bottom was dropping out of the stock market. Much of the world was moving into a deep recession. The United States was hit especially hard. That was also an election year in the US – the year that Obama was making his first run at the presidency.

Now, whether we like it or not, there is no question that the US is a world leader in terms of economics, military force and most areas of power and influence. And in the situation that the world was in at that time, I recall saying, I don't know why anyone would want to be the president of the United States at a time like this, when it seems like the whole world is going into the tank, and he's going to take the blame for

everything. Well, time has proven that it has been a very difficult few years to be in charge of what is generally recognized as the most powerful nation in the world.

Well, that is kind of what I think of when I look at the role of the Antichrist. He will rise to power as the one who will save the world. People are looking for some kind of Messiah, who will take control and make everything better. That is exactly what he appears to be when he rises to power to establish order out of chaos following the Rapture.

However, following a brief period of conquest and peace, things begin to unravel. The time of peace and security is followed by war and bloodshed, famine, uprising and natural disasters. People are dying, the Antichrist is trying desperately to quell opposition, especially by those "infidels" who choose to put their faith in Jesus Christ and refuse to obey his orders.

We have looked at the unleashing of the seven seals which bring chaos on the earth. The opening of the seventh seal ushers in a new round of disasters and catastrophes introduced by seven angels with seven trumpets. Preceding these trumpet judgments there was a period of silence in heaven as all of the angelic hosts and the raptured saints held their breath, as it were, awaiting the terrible events which were soon to occur.

A couple of weeks ago we looked at the first four of those trumpet judgments. In chapter 8, John gives us a quick description of events that bring catastrophe to all of nature. A third of the earth is burned up, a third of the sea and its creatures are destroyed, a third of the fresh water on the earth is contaminated and many die because of it. Even the sun, moon and stars are affected as the earth becomes dark and cold.

And at the end of all of that, another angel appears to pronounce even further judgment and tragedy is yet to come. Look at 8:13 – read it. If you think that what has happened already is bad, just wait. There are three more trumpets, each indicating great woe to the people who live through this time. These disasters are not to bring harm to the earth or to the environment, but to the people themselves—the inhabitants of the earth—those who are committed to the worldly systems.

The Fifth Trumpet

Well, we need to begin our look at chapter 9 by reading through it – *read the entire chapter.*

I cannot begin to fathom the extent of the torment and agony that is awaiting those who are rebelling against God, as it is being described in this account. We have here two more severe judgments, the fifth and sixth trumpets, the first two of the woes declared by the angel at the end of chapter 8.

There is much that could probably be said about these disastrous attacks, but I am going to be quite brief. First, let me just say that I am not going to try to define what these creatures might actually be, to try to find significance in the details of the descriptions of them. I want to simply make a few important points about them.

There is a significant change here from the first four trumpets. In chapter 8, the object of the attacks was the earth itself—the grass and trees, the water, the sea and its creatures. Of course the harm done to the earth indirectly hurt those living on the earth. But here the attacks come directly on the people—the inhabitants of the earth. In fact – see 9:4 – they were not to touch plants or trees or people sealed by God.

So where did these creatures come from? Look at verses 1-3. They come out of the bottomless pit. These are demonic creatures. They are the worst of the worst. *Discuss demons confined to the pit...*

For a period of 5 months they are given power to torment people on the earth, but not to kill them. The torment and torture will be so bad that people will long for death. They will plead for death to take them, but “...death will flee from them.” (v. 6)

Verses 7-10 describe these creatures. As I said I am not going to try to define what these were, but their power to harm the people was in their tails, and their orders came from the angel of the bottomless pit. This is not Satan, but a demonic being known as Abaddon or Apollyon.

That is the first of the three woes. Verse 12 is almost ominous in its tone. *“The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.”* If you think this was bad, just wait, we’re just getting started.

The Sixth Trumpet

When the sixth angel sounded his trumpet, John heard a command, followed by the release of an army, the likes of which has never been seen. There was a massive army of mounted troops numbering “...twice ten thousand times ten thousand.” He was told that number. Folks, that is 200 million horses and riders coming from the region of the Euphrates River in the east.

These “horses,” which seem to be unlike anything we have today, were belching out fire, smoke and sulfur, and this time were killing the inhabitants of the earth. Verse 18 tells us that one third of mankind was killed by the plagues unleashed by these creatures.

What a disastrous time to be living on the earth. It would appear that by this time there are few, if any, believers still alive on the earth. And vv. 20-21 record the unwillingness of the inhabitants of the earth to turn away from their sin and wickedness. In spite of the terrible attacks of the demonic world, people will refuse to turn to God, the only one who can save them.

Conclusion

So what are the lessons for us? There are a number of things that I see in this chapter that should encourage us even now. We live in times of great turmoil and wickedness—nothing like what is described in this passage, but bad, nonetheless. Note these important truths:

1. Even when the devil seems to be in charge, God is still in control. These beasts were given power only to a certain point – see vv. 3-5.
2. Even in the midst of terrible and horrifying events, God is still orchestrating the events on earth. He is actively involved in the lives of people on earth – see vv. 13-15. God had these angels especially prepared for this specific task.
3. Mankind, apart from Christ, is so blinded to the truth that even the most terrifying judgment is not enough to convince the one who is opposed to God to repent – see vv. 20-21. We sometimes wonder why people can’t see the truth, but they are blinded by the enemy.
4. The obvious truth that we must be ready for the Rapture so that we do not have to face the awful judgments that are coming.