

Saint Paul's Sunday Morning Bible Class Book of Revelation, Chapter 9 Notes and Questions

Reel 3 of John's Revelation began at Chapter 8 verse 6 with the Second Vision of the New Testament Era. The stage is now set: The first four trumpets have sounded and revealed the judgments which will take place in this world throughout the NT era via *natural* causes. Now, we are about to witness the judgments which will take place in this world throughout the NT era via *supernatural* causes. Woe! to all who do not have Christ on their side.

Rev. 9:1-2

As the "fifth trumpet" is sounded, St. John sees "a star that had fallen from the sky to earth." This "fallen star" is none other than that fallen angel named Lucifer, who led a rebellion in heaven and was cast out, and is now identified as the devil, or Satan. (This is new information that was absent in the first vision) From this point in Revelation until its conclusion, Satan will be a primary figure. He is the "prince of this world" and is given power to afflict this world. He is the enemy of Christ and His Church and will do everything in his power to keep people from the salvation which Christ has accomplished. What Revelation teaches us, in a very graphic way, is that Satan is not some imaginary being, but is real – very real – and is responsible for the evil in the world. His power is limited, as Christ has defeated him, and he can harm no one who belongs to Christ, but, if we enter into his domain, he can inflict much damage upon us.

Satan possesses the "key to the shaft of the Abyss." It is not his of his own authority, but is "given" to him. The "Abyss" is Hell, and Satan, the leader of the fallen angels, is permitted to reign over Hell. "When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose . . ." The "smoke" which comes forth from Hell graphically portray the spiritual darkness that is perpetuated by Satan and his cohorts, a darkness that covers the entire earth and its human population. This reminds us of the darkness St. John speaks of in the first chapter of his Gospel account. Christ is the "light that shines in the darkness" of this sinful world. Without Christ, the whole world remains in the darkness of sin, where Satan reigns. The fact that this darkness covers the whole world can be readily seen to those whose eyes have been opened by the light of Christ. Sin is everywhere because the darkness of the "Abyss" has been unleashed upon the world. It entered in when our first parents fell prey to the temptation of the "angel of the Abyss" in the Garden, and it will remain until the Last Day when Christ returns.

Rev. 9:3-6

When Satan unlocked Hell, "locusts came down upon the earth and were given powers like that of scorpions of the earth." These are not literal locusts, like those which came down in a plague upon Egypt (Exod. 10:1-20). These "locusts" are those fallen angels who joined Lucifer in his rebellion. They are demons who, under the authority of their ruler, Satan, are unleashed upon the earth to injure mankind. The injury they inflict upon mankind is spiritual, not physical (although physical injury results when spiritually injured people do harm to others). Like a scorpion which stings its prey and injects its poison, so demons will sting people and inject the poison of sin and unbelief. If this poison does not receive the antidote of faith in Christ, it will ultimately result in eternal death in Hell, which is the goal of Satan and his demons. ". . . only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads" – Like their ruler, Satan, these demons cannot harm the people of God, who have received the sign of the cross upon their foreheads and hearts in Holy Baptism and remain faithful to their Baptismal vows (the same as the "seal" in chapter 7). This is a great comfort to Christians, for they need not fear these demonic attacks. It is also a stern warning to Christians to remain steadfast in the Word, lest they fall from grace and open themselves up to these demonic attacks. What a reminder for Christians to attend Divine Service and Bible Study regularly!

". . . not give power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months" – Demons will not be permitted to inflict spiritual harm on unbelieving mankind perpetually, but only in series of short periods of time. This is by the grace of God alone, who will not give Satan and his minions the power to constantly and continuously torment people. There will be periods of peace, even for unbelievers. God will also not allow Satan and his

minions to physically kill unbelievers. Their influence can lead unbelievers to kill themselves and others, but they cannot, strictly speaking, kill anyone. The very reason God permits Satan and his minions to torment unbelievers is so that they will come to an awareness of their lost condition and turn to Him. If they do not, it is not the fault of Satan and his minions, but their own fault, for they failed to see these afflictions as God's warning to repent and turn to Christ.

“. . . men will seek death, but not find it” – Even though Satan and his minions can only harm unbelievers for limited periods of time and cannot kill them, the damage they inflict can be severe, to the point that some unbelievers will falsely believe that only death can set them free. This is the ultimate delusion and shows the severity of the demonic attacks, for those not “marked with the seal of God” who believe that death will set them free from the agony they are facing in this life are sadly, and tragically, mistaken. They long for relief, but will not find it in physical death. Rather than bring relief, it will be much, much worse for them, as physical death will only give way to eternal death, where they will be tormented forever in Hell. The serious message here is that physical death does not bring an end to the life of a person's spirit. All people, believers and unbelievers, live forever – believers in the perfect bliss of Heaven; unbelievers in the everlasting torment of Hell.

Rev. 9:7-11

“. . . looked like horses prepared for battle” – Satan and his minions are armed like a mighty cavalry with their weapons of deceit to go out into the world and capture souls. They are an organized force prepared for war, not a group of rag-tag bandits. They have a strategy and intend on carrying it out. Their goal is to capture as many prisoners as they can. The point is that they are a formidable enemy which needs to be taken seriously. But, again, they offer no threat to the Christian who is armed with the “sword of the Spirit,” i.e., the Word of God, which assures them that victory over this powerful enemy is theirs through Christ, who defeated this enemy completely on the cross with His precious Blood. “. . . they wore something like crowns of gold” – They will often appear to be the victors in the world, for the evil they bring will be readily seen throughout the world, but the crowns they wear are not *true* crowns of gold, but only *something like* crowns of gold. The real victory is Christ's alone, and those who belong to Him will receive true crowns of gold to wear for eternity, as they reign with Him in heaven.

“. . . their faces resembled human faces” – They will act with human intelligence and will use human reasoning to afflict human beings. They know how to tempt mankind and play to mankind's sinful wants and desires.

“. . . their hair was like women's hair” – The cunning deceit which they use to tempt will appear to be attractive to sinful mankind. They do not come in ways that would be readily seen as vile and evil, but in ways that appear to be pleasing and good. Their goal is to make sin look attractive to unbelievers, so that they long for it and believe that it is for their good. A great example of this is seen in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, where he employs a female actor to portray Satan, thus eluding to the truth that Satan and his minions will not *appear* to be evil, but *attractive*.

“. . . their teeth were like lion's teeth” – Though seemingly harmless and even attractive to unbelievers, these demons are vicious and seek to devour their victims, tearing them apart like a lion tears apart his prey. As St. Peter tells us, “Your enemy the devil [and his demons] prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).

“. . . breastplates of iron . . . sound of their wings” – Again, the imagery here is that of a battle-readied army. They are protected against any counter-attack on the part of their victims. Unbelievers can do nothing to ward off their attack and cannot harm them in any way, no matter how hard they try. They are completely helpless on their own. The only defense against this army is faith in Christ, which they lack. Rev. Dr. Louis Brighton reacts to this verse: “*The noise of their attack, as sounded by the loud buzzing of their wings, was in human ears like the noise of chariots and horses rushing into battle. Whether taken as a physical noise of numerous chariot wheels and horses' hoofs, which could be deafening the closer they approached, or whether the noise is taken as a metaphor, the fear alone caused by even the rumor of their approach will instill terror in the intended*

victims” (Brighton, *Revelation*, CPH, p. 239).

“They had tails and stings like scorpions . . . five months” – Again, they are not able to harm unbelievers continuously, for they can only do so for limited periods of time. Like a scorpion’s sting, which is not usually lethal to humans, but can be tortuously painful, so it is with their attacks. They come and inflict their damage and leave, only to come again later. The unbeliever will experience these ongoing attacks, each time suffering their devastating effects, even though he/she may not realize it.

“They had a king over them . . . Abaddon . . . Apollyon” – This king, as we have already met, is the “angel of the Abyss” who holds “the key,” i.e., Satan. Like every powerful army, this one has a ruler who organizes and guides it, strategically preparing it for battle. All of the demons are in the charge of Satan and answer to him. They willingly placed themselves under his authority when they joined his rebellion against God. He bears the name

“Abaddon” in Hebrew, or “Apollyon” in Greek, both of which mean the same thing, “Destroyer.” The name we most often associate with him is Satan, which means “Adversary.” He is the Adversary of Christ, for he seeks to Destroy all that is holy and godly. People often have the wrong impression of Satan/Destroyer, for they believe he stays away from the Church and only wreaks havoc in the world outside of the Church. Nothing could be further from the truth. His main goal is to destroy the Church. The rest of the world already belongs to him, but he longs to have what belongs to God. We see his work “in the ‘Church’” all around us today with the plethora of false teachings accepted within the “Church.” Every false teaching is the result of his deception. He seeks to convince

Christians to incorporate worldly principles into their doctrine and practice and to turn Christianity into a “religion” that appeals to the sinful wants and desires of human beings. He is having *enormous* success today! Look around you! He has deceived most Christians into believing that faith is a *personal decision* they make, thus turning faith into a work they accomplish, instead of the gift of God delivered to sinners through the Holy Word and Sacraments. He has deceived them into turning God’s Holy House into a “house of entertainment,” where man-centered “worship” is “experienced,” instead of Christ-centered worship is delivered. Many Christians now accept women’s ordination, homosexuality, and deny that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God. Many deny the Holy Sacraments and believe they are nothing but empty symbols which we accomplish. Satan is having great success in his bid to destroy the Church. He will never enjoy complete success, however, for “the gates of Hades shall not prevail against [Christ’s] Church” (Matt. 16:18). God will always keep for Himself a remnant; He will always raise up men to defend His Word and maintain sound doctrine and practice. The main purpose of Revelation is to comfort Christians with this glorious truth, *and* to warn them against forsaking this truth. Revelation is a stern reminder to the Christian Church to remain steadfast in the Word, so that it will remain free from Satan’s attacks and inherit life in the eternal kingdom prepared for it.

Rev. 9:12

“The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come” – As if all that has mentioned thus far were not bad enough, it is only the beginning!

Rev. 9:13-16

When the “sixth trumpet” is sounded, St. John hears “a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God” – This is the voice of Christ, who holds the “censer of incense” and is in control of all of the events which have already happened and which are about to take place.

Christ instructs the sixth “trumpet angel” (archangel) to “Release the four angels . . .” – These are the same “four angels” we have already heard about in 7:1-3. Remember, what we are hearing in these seven “trumpet judgments” is a retelling of what we heard in the seven “seal judgments.” The four angels in 7:1-3 “held back the four winds” and were released at the appropriate time. So it is here. They had been “kept ready for this very hour

and day and month and year.” This is a vision of the “little season” of Satan (cf. Rev. 20:7), who will be released just before Christ returns to earth. We are nearing the end here, when Satan and his minions will be released to afflict mankind more severely than ever before. The four angels are given the charge of releasing them for the judgment to come.

“. . . to kill a third of mankind” – So devastating will the affliction of Satan and his minions be upon the earth during this “little season” that a large number of people, though a minority of the people on earth, will be killed by the plagues they bring. This does not mean that two-thirds of mankind will be saved, for as we’re told later in verse 20, “the rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues did not repent,” indicating that the end result will be that the vast majority of mankind upon the earth during this “little season” will be deceived by Satan and suffer eternal punishment in Hell. Contrary to popular belief, Revelation teaches us very clearly that the closer we come to the return of Christ, the worse things will be on earth, especially in the Church, for most will reject, or fall away from, the faith.

“The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard the number.” – These mounted troops are the demons from the pit of Hell, with Satan as their Commander and King. They are many and the force with which they will attack during this “little season” will be nearly impossible for anyone to withstand.

Rev. 9:17-19

As we hear about the devastation of these demonic attacks here, we are convinced that this “second woe” is more severe than the “first woe” which has passed. The same battle imagery is employed again (horses, breastplates), but, this time, these “lions of Hell” are given more power to influence sinful mankind. No longer is their attack limited to short periods of time, but it is continuous until the End comes. As we will learn as we go through Revelation, so severe is the demonic attack during Satan’s “little season” that Christians, too, will suffer, as Satan and his demons are given the ability to do their best to “deceive the elect,” if that were possible. In other words, the protection Christians enjoyed during the first woe (the entire NT era until the “little season” of Satan) is no longer in place. Satan and his minions are now allowed to attack Christians by suppressing the preaching of the Gospel and filling the Church with false teachings as never before.

“. . . out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur” – This refers to the Satanic/Demonic delusion that will fill the world and even penetrate the Church during this “little season”. The “fire, smoke and sulfur” call to mind the judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Just like then, when only Lot was spared, so it will be at the End, when only as small remnant of faithful Christians remain upon the earth.

Rev. 9:20-21

“The rest of mankind . . . did not repent” – Here we see how bad it will be, namely that the vast majority of mankind will give in to the Satanic/Demonic delusion during this “little season.” The rest of mankind is not to be taken literally, as if *all people on earth* will be deceived, for God will always keep His remnant. It simply implies that nearly all people will be deceived and that the remnant will be extremely small. It is like when Christ says,

“When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). He does not mean that there will be no faith left, but that it will be so minute that it will seem as though that were the case. This is how it will be in the last days during Satan’s “little season” just before Christ returns. This time will be so bad that men “will not stop worshipping demons and idols of gold, etc.” Worship of the Triune God will be all but lost and people will worship anything, and everything, but Him. Worship of anything or anyone but the Triune God is “worshipping demons and idols, etc.” There is no middle ground. Either you worship the Holy Trinity or you worship the devil. In that day, most, nearly all, will worship the devil. There will be a great falling away from the faith in the Church, as foretold by our Lord and His apostles in many Scripture passages, so that the Church itself will accept evil and present it as good. Not only will people refuse to repent, but, influenced by Satan and his minions, they will promote sin as being a means of salvation. Murder will not only be condoned, but promoted in society as a good thing (abortion/euthanasia). Magic arts will be everywhere and people will cling to them (increase of so-called psychics, fortunetellers, and faith-healers in our day. Not to mention the new-

age, occultist spirituality plaguing our society – scientology, mysticism, kabbala, pyramid power, fascination with aliens, etc.). Sexual immorality will not only be condoned, but promoted as well (and remember, all of this not only outside of the Church, but within the Church – women’s ordination, homosexuality accepted as legitimate, same sex marriage, alternative lifestyles, the condoning of sex before, and outside of, marriage. Not to mention the promotion of sex in the media– it’s everywhere!). All of these should be signs to awaken Christians to the fact that we may very well indeed be living in the “little season” of Satan. More on this as we go along.

Study and Discussion Questions for Revelation Chapter 9

1. Why does false religion, such as Islam, have such a strong appeal to people?
2. How can you benefit in knowing that the devil approaches you in ways that will appeal to you?
3. If your whole family turned to the Muslim religion, what appeal would there be for you to join them?
4. What can we as the church today learn from these events and the effects they had on the visible church?
5. What kinds of programs or efforts do you think we, as a church, should concentrate on to meet these challenges today?