

Revelation 8-9

The Seventh Seal and the Golden Censer

8 When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. **2** Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. **3** And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, **4** and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. **5** Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

The Seven Trumpets

6 Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.

7 The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

8 The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. **9** A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

10 The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. **11** The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter.

12 The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.

13 Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, "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!"

9 And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. **2** He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. **3** Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. **4** They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the

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seal of God on their foreheads. 5 They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone. 6 And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them.

7 In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, 8 their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; 9 they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. 10 They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails. 11 They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.

12 The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.

13 Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, 14 saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." 15 So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind. 16 The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number. 17 And this is how I saw the horses in my vision and those who rode them: they wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. 18 By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming 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 with heads, and by means of them they wound.

20 The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, 21 nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

The Seven Trumpets

The theme of judgement continues in Revelation 8 and 9. This awful visitation of death and destruction is popularly what the world thinks of first as the apocalypse (the Greek form of *Revelation*).

The 1950's movie, *The Seventh Seal*, gets rave reviews from many film buffs (myself included). This Swedish Cold War era film depicts the black plague of the Middle Ages as the type of cataclysm described when the seventh seal is opened in Revelation.

The plot of the movie involves a knight returning from the carnage of the Crusades to find rampant disease being inflicted on his homeland by personified character named Death. He famously challenges Death to a game of chess, determined to outwit him to save himself and his loved ones.

The bubonic plague wiped out about one third of the population of Europe during some of its worst outbreaks. It's no wonder that this type of historical event draws attention to the judgments described in Revelation 8-9.

Disease, war, and environmental catastrophe on this scale have happened before and will happen again. This is what makes the seventh seal such a terrifying part of the book of Revelation. It represents just one aspect of God's judgment of sin on the earth, particularly the sin of idolatry that led them to murder God's children.

The silence that precedes the unleashing of this judgment builds suspense and indicates something awful is about to occur. Every great Western movie has this scene of silence before the big shootout.

If you want to drive yourself positively bonkers try to figure out what each of the trumpets refers to that might exist in the world of 2017. This is an impossible task.

We need to make sure the actual message of Revelation is the one we are receiving. John is giving us every indication he can use to say that the judgment of God is brutal, horrifying, and imminent.

Everything that sustains quality of life on the earth is being attacked. For an ancient agrarian culture, there was nothing as swift and terrifying as an army of locusts coming to devour the crops they needed to live on for the next year. And these are locusts on steroids. They will not only cause hunger, but will inflict so much pain that people wish they could die.

When I hear Biblical phrases about people wishing to die I immediately think about the physical, emotional, and spiritual pain which leads people to commit suicide. We should in no way ascribe to a theology that says suicide is an unpardonable sin that automatically sends people to hell. But, I believe many of the factors that go into suicide give us a glimpse of what hell must feel

like.

These locusts are hellish creatures under the command of the king of hell, Apollyon.

It's interesting and encouraging that the worst hell has to offer can only affect those whom God has permitted. The sealed saints of God cannot be harmed by hell. Jesus has already promised in the Gospels that the gates of hell cannot prevail against his church.

The worst aspect of hell is the pure, unmitigated wrath that does not make anyone want to repent. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man asks Abraham if he can warn his brothers to repent of their ways so that they do not end up in hell. The response he gets is shocking. "Even if someone rises from the dead they will not repent." (Luke 16:31)

The lesson to be learned is that repentance is a gift of God and should be accepted today. If a person is not convinced by the Word of God and the resurrection of Christ that he should repent of his sins and trust God for salvation, then hell itself will have no redeeming effect.

- What do you find to be the most terrifying parts of Revelation 8-9? Why?
- Does this passage give you greater understanding of the ways that sin leads to death on the earth?
- Do you think hell exists in some aspects of life today?
- Do you think that things will get worse before Jesus sets them straight?
- How is this passage a call to repentance?
- How is this passage an encouragement to the saints?
- Do you have someone close who you may believe is in danger of the fury of hell being unleashed?
- What about that person's life concerns you so much?
- How can you pray for that person and lovingly give him/her God's call to repent today?