Revelation 9—Hell Unleashed upon Unrepentant

Pastor Emeritus Joe Fuiten, February 19, 2020

In studying this chapter it might be helpful to begin at the end of the chapter before going back to the beginning. The end shows the outcome of the first 19 verses of the chapter and in a microcosm of the theme of the whole book. It is all about the kingdom of God coming to earth and motivating rebels to repent and receive God’s rightful rule. Once you see the rebellion of the end time you get a clearer understanding of where the rebellion of our time is headed. It is instructive to note the nature of the sins to which the end time rebels so earnestly cling.

Here is how the chapter ends: “*20 The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood — idols that cannot see or hear or walk. 21 Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.”* NIV

Consider the actual text and the list of sins people cling to. “Worshipping demons and idols” indicates people were choosing all sorts of inferior gods over God himself. Murder, whether in the streets or in the womb, would be defended. There would pride in sexual sin rather than repentance for it. Even with the dreadful consequences of this chapter, sexual sin would still be defended. The use of drugs as a means of power would characterize the rebellious. Rounding out this list of intractable sins is the dedication to theft, to taking of things from others. Let’s look in more detail at these sins.

Inferior gods and demonic systems will be preferred over God and will be worshipped. This is literal paganism and the type of paganism that hides under other labels. It could be worshipping “science” and its revelations. It might be the worship of “nature” and the earth. Whatever the type of paganism, it will be the work of man’s hands and all under the jurisdiction of Satan. Rebels will prefer this even over the increasingly clear revelation of the Almighty God.

Murder will be defended by the unrepentant. We see people unrepentant and even championing the 65 million abortions in the United States since 1973. Also in the United States they say there are 5 murders per 100,000 people per year. Violence will control their lives and murder will have become a badge of honor, a rite of passage. Life will not be important or protected and can be snuffed out without remorse. It will feel like the Nazis or the drug cartels are in charge.

Maybe the drug cartels will be in charge because the use of drugs will be defended. The word translated here as “magic arts” is the Greek word *pharmakia* or *pharmakeus.* The primary meaning has to do with the preparing and giving of medicine. As the art of medicine developed various types of incantations were added to it. It came to be associated with magic, sorcery, or enchantments. Our word pharmacy derives from this Greek work. In the New Testament this word is never used in a positive way but always associated with egregious sins. People will still love their drugs and the ideas that come from drug use. Drugs will mean more to them than family, friends, or God. It will feel like Charles Manson is everywhere. The ancients had and commonly used abortifacient drugs which the apostles taught against their use as recorded in the Didache. Intoxicating gasses from a crack in the earth and laurel leaves were used by the Oracle at Delphi’s Temple of Apollo.

Sexual immorality will characterize the rebellious. None of the various plagues of this chapter in which many died did anything to diminish the commitment to sexual sins or to cause people to repent.

To this list is added theft. People will be addicted to getting things from other people without paying for them.

“Mankind will defend breaking the first two Mosaic commandments by making and worshiping idols. In their murders, they will violate the sixth commandment, and in their thefts, the eighth. By their sexual sins, they will break the seventh commandment. It will be an age of lawlessness with "every man doing that which is right in his own eyes."

Paul saw the beginning of it in 2 Thessalonians 2: 7-12 with the full fruits of it in Revelation 9 in the end times. “*7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.”* NIV

In our days an evidence of the end time is seen in how much these same ideas are already defended. In many ways the list of sins sounds a lot like the party platform of American Democrats today and particularly so here in Washington State.

The idea of taking things from one group and giving it to another defines Democrats. Most property crimes in Washington are never even investigated. Theft from stores is often ignored unless there is camera evidence. Most credit card crime is never solved. In 2017 nearly four billion people had their data stolen in data breeches. In America only 9.2% of those financial crimes resulted in an arrest warrant. In 2017 1.3 million Americans lost over $744 million to fraud. Theft is big business in advertising meant to deceive and cheat. All kinds of statistics could be noted but the point is that theft occurs big time and it is not going to decrease.

In spite of all the adverse consequences to sexual sins, the defense of it rises. STDs are at epidemic levels and still unrestricted sex is championed. A bill currently before the Washington State legislature would decriminalize prostitution by minors which is just a way to cover for pedophiles. (SSB5744/3SHB1775). When I chaired the Public Funding Assessment Committee for the Governor’s Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS our committee figured out that over 100 million dollars was being spent annually in Washington State in behalf of those with HIV infection, a disease almost 100% caused by sex among homosexuals and later transmitted through dirty needles in drug use. In spite of the fierce consequences of homosexual sex America came to defend it, fund it, and champion the right to marriage among homosexuals. Access to abortion, which is primarily motivated by a desire to try to take away the consequences of sexual sin, is demanded as a right which should be paid for by taxpayers whatever their personal beliefs to the contrary. The radical defense of abortion in America is a picture of the unrepentant in the end times. I used to wonder why male homosexuals served on the board of Planned Parenthood since they were unlikely to need abortion services or other health care for women. What both groups share in common is an opposition to the rule of God and their desire to actively thwart God’s rule and to make other people pay for it.

The details of this passage are interesting. However, it is possible to get so far into the details that you miss the point which is expressed in verses 20 and 21. In spite of all Hell literally emptying out on the earth with the resultant deaths of 1/3 of the population, people will still cling to their sins. The key phrase of the whole chapter is they “*still did not repent…*” God wants them to repent. The gates of hell being opened are for the purpose of repentance, at least from God’s point of view. The people want to live like the devil so God lets them have a full dose.

God normally retrains the devil which allows people to survive. Here a good portion of that restraint is removed. He can’t kill everyone but he can torment greatly in a little preview of hell. God is turning them over to the demons from the abyss.

The devil is a killer, no matter how he makes it appear to the deceived. We live in an era when sin wears the dress of freedom. Revelation 9 is what happens when God steps back and the devil is in charge.

Now let’s go back to the beginning of the chapter to see what happens to those who continue to adhere to their sins.

*The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. 2 When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. 3 And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. 4 They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. 5 They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a man. 6 During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them.*

*7 The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. 8 Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. 9 They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. 10 They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. 11 They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon.*

*12 The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come. 13 The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God. 14 It said 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 kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. 16 The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number.*

*17 The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. 18 A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths. 19 The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury. 20 The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood — idols that cannot see or hear or walk. 21 Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.* NIV

Adam Clarke’s (1762-1932) commentary on this passage relates it entirely to the Muslim attacks against the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church’s attacks on Protestants. Albert Barnes’ notes (1798-1870) offered similar and detailed explanations. These two commentators held to the general view that Revelation describes the fall of the Roman Empire and its replacement with the Muslim under the Arabs and the Turks. Reading their commentary these centuries later they do not seem convincing.

When I think about a passage like this certain ideas come to mind.

First, sin is serious. You see how seriously God takes sin. It is not a small thing. It is a big deal. If God thinks it is a big deal, so should you.

Second, sin is addictive. That is, once it gets a grip on you it won’t let go. It starts out as apparently no big deal but it changes over time. We all know the power of addiction but we may not have applied that understanding to sin. Well, the types of sin mentioned here are as addictive as drugs.

Third, the dreadful creatures of Revelation 9 have a limited commission. They cannot destroy property nor can they kill humans. Their only power is to torment. Even at this late date, there is some semblance of a hedge of protection around the earth and its citizens. The restraint on the evil power is a hedge. They cannot touch those who belong to God with the seal of God in their forehead. They can torment the others, but not kill them. Each of these restraints represents God-ordained boundaries to the options of these demonic creatures.

Demons are not free to act in any way they please. There are spiritual rules that presently govern the universe. Even in the time envisioned by John, there are still spiritual rules that govern demonic behavior. For the Christian person, there is a great comfort in this. I don’t need to be constantly rebuking demons in and around me. They only have the freedom in my life that God grants them. If I will live as I should, God will deal with the demons. On the other hand, if I open the door, they will certainly take every advantage.

Fourth, it suggests that we be quick to repent because if you don’t you soon won’t care. Along the way, you will have frequent opportunity to repent. At the start of the Christian life we must repent. But there will be many additional times when we find ourselves falling short.

Fifth, we are reminded that “now is the day of salvation.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Sin has a way of hardening a person’s heart. In time, you stop caring. This is why it is urgent that you respond to God’s dealing in your heart when he is dealing with you. It is important to respond to God in the areas he is giving to you.

If I understand the timeline correctly, these events take place about midway through the seven year period after the rapture. At this point the devil is being increasingly allowed to do what he does. If people want to serve the devil they will begin to find out in this chapter what the devil is really like especially when God no longer protects all people. The hedge of protection is gradually being lifted which frees to devil to do his final call. Let’s consider the passages themselves that give this impression.

Opening the Abyss

*1 The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss.[[2]](#footnote-2) 2 When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss*.

The “star” is some messenger of God. We have no other definition of this entity other than to note the pronoun “he.” I presume this is an angel of God whose appearance upon his descent is like a falling star. The angel opens up the Abyss and all hell breaks loose. The “star” sets this destruction loose upon the earth by letting the devil’s forces do what they want with only minimal restrictions. If you want to know about the goals of the devil and how he operates, just read on.

John uses the term Abyss for the place from which these demons come. We know from the demons themselves the Abyss is their place. When Jesus went to the region of the Gerasenes on Galilee, he cast a “legion” of demons out of a man. The demons begged him repeatedly not to send them into the Abyss.[[3]](#footnote-3) Jesus responded by allowing them to go into the pigs instead and they promptly killed themselves. We know, then, that the Abyss is for demons.

It is also used in a different sense as a place for the dead. In Romans10:6-7, Paul writes, “*But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead*).” Since Jesus was not unrighteous, we know that this place had at least two compartments, one for the righteous and the other for the demons and, presumably, the unrighteous humans.

**The Destroyers Released to Torment**

*3 And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. 4 They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. 5 They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a man.6 During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them. 7 The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. 8 Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. 9 They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. 10 They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. 11 They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon,[[4]](#footnote-4) and in Greek, Apollyon.*

These dreadful creatures called “locusts” have a limited commission. They cannot destroy property or plants, nor can they kill humans. Their only power is to torment. As such they are not like the “locusts” currently affecting East Africa by the hundreds of billions eating everything in sight. The locusts of Revelation are strictly tormenting creatures.

Even at this late date, there is some semblance of a hedge of protection around the earth and its citizens. The restraint on evil power is called a hedge. They cannot touch those who belong to God with the seal of God in their forehead. They can torment the others, but not kill them. Each of these restraints represents God-ordained boundaries to the options of these demonic creatures.

This is an important concept. Demons are not free to act in any way they please. There are spiritual rules that presently govern the universe. Even in the time envisioned by John, there are still spiritual rules that govern demonic behavior. For the Christian person, there is a great comfort in this. I don’t need to be constantly rebuking demons in and around me. They only have the freedom in my life that God grants them. If I will live as I should, God will deal with the demons. On the other hand, if I open the door, they will certainly take every advantage.

Just as there are ranks among the angels, there is an authority structure among demons. In this case, we have the name of the head of this group of demons. His title says he is the destroyer. That is a description of every kind of demon.

**Death Angels are Released**

*12 The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come. 13 The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God. 14 It said 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 kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. 16 The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number. 17 The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. 18 A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths. 19 The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury*

Four angels are released to go way beyond the torment of the demons. These angels come to kill. They are death angels. They may well be like the death angel that God released on Egypt when they refused to let Israel leave the country.

The four angels apparently control 200 million creatures or horsemen who come to kill a third of mankind. Regarding the 200 million troops “it was vast, or it was such as to be reckoned by myriads, or by tens of thousands – *duo muriades muriadoon* - "two myriads of myriads."[[5]](#footnote-5) The presence of sulfur suggests these creatures may also be demonic. We are not told and it really does not change any realities. In the ultimate sense, God is passively in charge of it all. With the removal of the hedge the devil is free to operate and do what devils do.

In the past, some prophecy teachers have speculated these creatures to be the Chinese who were said to have 200 million people under arms when everyone was counted. Those who realistically assess military strength do not find this to be a particularly believable number. The emphasis seems to be more on the horses than on the riders so any actual humanity is barely present.

**Repentance Resisters**

*20 The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues* ***still did not repent of the work of their hands****; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood-- idols that cannot see or hear or walk. 21 Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts,[[6]](#footnote-6) their sexual immorality or their thefts*.

The goal of all the pain of Revelation is for people to repent. God finds no joy in destruction. What he cares about is repentance. However, some people are profoundly determined to continue in sin even when they know it is wrong. The five areas of sin mentioned are probably not the only areas of sin that people are unwilling to give up even if it means they will be lost.

1. I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation. (2 Corinthians 6:2) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. abussos (ab'-us-sos); depthless, i.e. (specially) (infernal) "abyss": deep, (bottomless) pit. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Luke 8:26-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Abaddon= "destruction" is defined as 1) ruin; 2) destruction; 3) the place of destruction; and 4) the name of the angel-prince of the infernal regions, the minister of death and the author of havoc on the earth. In Greek it means the same thing. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database Copyright © 1997, 2003, 2005, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. pharmakeus (far-mak-yoos'); from pharmakon (a drug, i.e. spell-giving potion); a druggist ("pharmacist") or poisoner, i.e. (by extension) a magician: KJV-- sorcerer. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)