

## Revelation Chapters 8 and 9 – John Karmelich

1. This lesson is called, "How God Gets Our Attention". I also call it "Understanding the Thirds".
  - a) I'll come back to those titles in a page or two. First, let me state, I'm going to attempt to get two chapters done in this lesson. Pray for me. ☺
  - b) These two chapters are in my opinion the darkest in the book. They deal with demonic forces and the death of multitudes people. The hard part to grasp about this destruction is that it is not instantaneous. It is much more tortuous and painful.
2. My key point and theme of Chapters 8 and 9 is not the "how" question, but the "why" question.
  - a) When you read the commentaries on Revelation 8 and 9, you are going to read lots of explanations of "this word picture really means this or that". Bible commentators spend a lot of time discussing possible meanings of the text, and avoid the all-important "why" question: Why is God doing it this way? That is my focus in this lesson.
3. Let's begin by reviewing Revelation as it leads up to Chapter 8. The purpose of Revelation is to "prepare" for Jesus Second Coming. That actual event does not take place until Chapter 19.
  - a) In Chapter 1, John gives an overview of the book. Chapter 1, Verse 19 states in effect that Chapters 2-3 are present tense, while Chapter 4 to the end of the book is future tense.
  - b) In Chapters 2-3, Jesus gives John a "status report" on seven specific churches.
  - c) In Chapter 4, John was somehow taken up to God's throne room. In this chapter, John spent the chapter describing the scenery of this room.
  - d) In Chapter 5, John focuses on a key item, which was a scroll in God's hand. Jesus takes the scroll and removes the seven seals on the scroll. What is written on the scroll is not stated. What was stated is Jesus is the only one worthy enough to open it. I believe the scroll has something to do with salvation since only Jesus is "worthy" to open it.
  - e) Again, there were seven seals on that scroll. In Chapter 6, six of the seven seals were removed. After each scroll is removed, "something bad" happens on earth. You get the idea that this earth-judgment is an overview of the damage that is described from Revelation Chapters 6 -19. This chapter mentioned widespread death, famine and wars.
  - f) Chapter 7 was a break from the destruction. The last sentence of Chapter 6 asked in effect, "Can anyone be saved from this?" The answer is yes, and the answer is Chapter 7. That chapter focused on two distinct groups that are or will be saved out of this "Great Tribulation" period. One group is the 144,000 Jewish-Christians and the other group is an unnumbered multitude of people from all nations.
4. This leads us to Chapter 8. We're back to the heavy destruction again. Let me give an illustration that may help to understand how God is listing these judgments in Revelation.
  - a) Here's the illustration: Imagine looking at a large water fountain. The top tier of the water fountain has a single source of water. That top tier then has seven separate waterfalls to a middle level. One of those seven waterfalls then separates into seven more waterfalls at a bottom level. In other words, it starts with seven waterfalls, and one of the falls splits into seven more, and one waterfall of the second group splits into 7 more falls.
  - b) That "waterfall effect" is what we have in Revelation. Chapters 6 mentioned the removal of seven seals. Six were removed in Chapter 6. Like the one waterfall breaking into seven waterfalls, the seventh seal "breaks" into seven more judgments, which scholars call "the trumpet judgments" because each judgment comes after an angel blows a trumpet.
  - c) Later in Revelation, the seventh trumpet "breaks" into seven more judgments, just as my fountain illustration as one of the seven second-tier waterfalls breaking into another seven. This last set-of-seven is called the "bowl" judgments.
  - d) Confused? Don't panic, we have a long way to go. ☺ Remember my cliché about how to eat an elephant: one bite at a time. Just know that in this lesson, we're focusing on the "second tier of my water fountain illustration" with seven "trumpet judgments".

- e) The reason I combine Chapters 8 and 9 is six of the seven "trumpet-judgments" take place in these two chapters. We then get another "destruction break" in Chapters 10 and 11.
  - f) In Chapter 6, we had John standing in heaven. He is still there. He is looking back and forth between what is happening in heaven and what is happening on earth. In Chapter 6, John would watch Jesus loose a scroll in heaven, and then "something bad" would happen on earth. That process is repeated with Jesus removing six of the seven scrolls.
  - g) Here in Chapter 8, we have Jesus removing the 7th seal, and this leads to seven trumpets being blown. After each trumpet blast, again, "something bad" happens on earth.
5. Now let's get to my second title for this lesson, "Understanding the thirds".
- a) One thing that is repeated over and over again in Chapters 8 and 9 is the word "third".
  - b) The word "third" is used eight times in these two chapters alone.
  - c) Some examples: A third of the trees are killed. A third of the ships are destroyed. A third of mankind is killed. A third of sun was struck (i.e., one-third less sunlight). A third of the moon and stars were struck (i.e., less moonlight and starlight). A third of the creatures in the sea die. Three is not the lucky number of these two chapters. ☺
  - d) OK, onto the big question: God is obviously emphasizing "three's" or "third's". Why?
    - i) Imagine you are watching cable news about all of the destruction and an "expert" comes on to point out an interesting pattern. That expert says, "We don't understand all of this destruction, but we notice a strange pattern. Everything is happening in thirds. All of the destruction is affecting one third of things."
    - ii) Suppose now you know God is "harming" everything, or at least the majority of the world believe it is God causing all of this destruction.
    - iii) There was a clue in Revelation 6:16 where people are hiding from God and from the "wrath of the lamb". Somehow, somehow, people understood that lots of bad things are happening, and somehow, it has to do with God and Jesus.
    - iv) This leads us back to "thirds": When people think of Christianity and think of the number "three" what do they think of? (This should be easy! ☺) The answer is the third day! Even the vast majority that doesn't accept Christianity knows the basic Gospel message that Jesus rose again on the third day.
    - v) Christianity is the only major religion with a heavy emphasis on the number three. We believe in a three-in-one God, of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
    - vi) What about the third day of creation? It was the day dry land first appeared and vegetation started. An interesting bit of trivia is that of the six days of creation, the third day is the only day where God says "it is good" two times! Christians see this as a subtle clue of the blessing of the third day. In some Orthodox Jewish circles, they like to get married on the 3rd day of the week (Tuesday) because of the double blessing where God said "it is good" twice.
    - vii) In other words, what God wants people living at that time to associate the "third day" with Christian salvation! As Chapter 7 taught, many people get saved during this time era. Hopefully, some will see the "three" pattern and get a clue!
  - e) There are other reasons for the "thirds" as well: Remember the big purpose of all of this judgment is to prepare the world for Jesus Second Coming. God is giving one big, last-call for salvation. By only killing "some" people, it gives a chance for others to repent.
  - f) As I've stated through these lessons, those of us who see this horrible period as one, big final event can recognize it when it happens because all of these terrible judgments have a pattern of "thirds". One can pick any one of these events and tie it to some period of human history. For all of them to occur, would be a sign of "Great Tribulation" occurring.
6. This leads to my other title for this lesson: "How God Gets Our Attention".
- a) One of the things to catch is that the world (i.e., nonbelievers) is somehow aware in this time period that God is in control of this action.

- b) Now let's peak ahead to the final verses of Chapter 9: "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. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts." (Revelation 9:20-21 NIV)
    - i) In other words, none of this destruction worked. As hard as God is trying to "get their attention", people would rather choose a sinful life over turning to God.
    - ii) I am convinced the number one reason people won't accept the Gospel has nothing to do with its truth, but with the refusal to change ones lifestyle.
  - c) If I had to pick the one event in bible history where God worked a miracle "on a large scale", it would be the 10 plagues of Egypt. Even with the events of Jesus at the cross, only a small group witnessed the event. The growth of the Gospel message came afterwards. The 10 plagues of Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea was the one time where God directly intervened in the affairs of the most powerful nation on earth in order to draw out a "nation" for himself. The only event that is bigger in geography is flood, but and in that situation too, God drew out a nation (Noah's family) for himself.
    - i) What's my point here? Revelation Chapters 6-19 is a rough model of the 10 plagues that God laid on Egypt. In both time eras, multitudes are being saved "out" of this judgment-oriented period of time. (Ref.: Revelation 7:14).
    - ii) During those plagues, people understood that God was involved. At the same time, the King of Egypt refused to repent. Even though all of this great destruction was occurring all around Pharaoh, he refused to do God's will.
    - iii) At the same time, the positive aspect that came out of the destruction of Egypt and the death of the first-born was the "birth of a nation". What comes out the Great Tribulation are untold millions, billions, or more of saved people who then spend eternity with God. The Great Tribulation is God's "wrap up" plan. It is God's final call to the earth to either turn to Him for salvation or be destroyed. Just as God had a beginning for the earth, so God has an ending. We're in it, here in this book.
  - d) Back to my title for this lesson: "How God Gets Our Attention".
    - i) A classic line in Christianity is "God loves us too much to leave us alone". If one has truly committed their lives to God, and still have some "sin" in our lives, I find that Christians (myself included) goes through our own "tribulation" in order for God to deal with that sin and cleanse us of it.
    - ii) My point here is that when disasters occur, God usually has a plan behind it. We may be privileged to learn of that plan, and we may not. It may be designed to teach someone else something, and not ourselves. At the same time, God will sometimes use bad situations to draw us closer to Him. Grant it, the Great Tribulation is the grand scale of bad days. ☺ Still, one needs to see Revelation as a reminder to the Christian that God is capable of allowing horrible things to occur for the purpose of drawing us closer to Him for all of eternity.
    - iii) On that happy note, we can start the destruction process. ☺
7. Chapter 8, Verse 1: When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.
- a) As I stated in the introduction, Chapter 8 and 9 is full of destruction verses on earth. The chapter opens with a "moment of silence" in heaven. John states it lasts for half an hour.
  - b) I wondered how John knew it was half an hour. Did John have a watch? ☺ The answer is John was just estimating, he didn't know the exact time.
  - c) This is the first of many verses where just the facts are given, without any explanation. Therefore, we have to speculate as to why this half an hour of silence.

- d) Whenever we have read about "life in heaven in Revelation, we get the impression it is not a quiet place, at least at God's throne room. It is stated that the four living creatures praise God day and night (Revelation 4:8). The 24 elders then join in.
    - i) Here in Revelation 8, we have the first and only mention of silence in heaven.
    - ii) Many suggest it is a "moment of silence" as if to get everyone's attention.
    - iii) If one is watching some sort of entertainment event, and there is all-quiet on the main stage for a good while, this builds the anticipation. People need "stimulus" unless we are sleeping. Such silence builds tension. I believe that's the idea here.
  - e) Back to the text itself: John is in heaven, and he is watching Jesus opening the seventh and final seal. This event ties to Chapter 6, where John says the "Lamb (of God)", i.e., Jesus, is the one opening seven seals on a scroll. After each seal is removed, John then turns his focus to something happening on earth. Six of the seven seals were removed in Chapter 6 and now we have the seventh and final seal removed in Chapter 8.
8. Verse 2: And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.
- a) In Chapter 4, John described what God's throne room looked like. There was God himself in the center of the throne room. Jesus was there as well, even though Jesus appeared "as a lamb who was slain". Chapter 4 then said that guarding the throne was "four living creatures". John then went on to say there were 24 "elders" around this throne.
    - i) Here in Chapter 8, John mentions as a matter of fact, "the" seven angels who stand before God. It is as if we should have known that. ☺ This is the first mention of these seven angels. All we know from the text is they were given trumpets.
    - ii) There is a Jewish tradition that seven angels guard God's throne. Apparently, this is true based on this text.
  - b) The bible is full of trumpet references. Trumpets are usually given to "sound the alarm". It is the idea to call attention to something. In Chapters 8-9, each angel will give a trumpet blast. Each trumpet blast will follow with some sort of earth-based destruction. The idea of the trumpet blast is to "call attention" to the damage being done.
  - c) Now combine the "half-hour silence" prior to the seven trumpet blasts. The silence adds to the drama and the "volume" of the trumpet blasts that are coming up.
9. Verse 3: Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. <sup>4</sup> The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand.
- a) Before we start the "seven angels with seven trumpet" stuff, which is the majority of these two chapters, we also have an eighth angel in focus in Verses 3-5. This 8th angel, offered up incense to God "along with the prayers of all the saints" (Verse 3).
  - b) In order to understand this, first we have to remember that God's throne room is similar in look to the tabernacle as described in Exodus. (See Hebrews 8:5). The tabernacle is an indoor "tent" that is located within an outdoor fenced area. There are several pieces of furniture in this tabernacle structure. Some are outdoors and some are indoors.
    - i) One of the outdoor pieces is an altar for sacrificing animals. (Exodus 27, et. al.)
    - ii) One of the indoor pieces was an incense altar. (Exodus 30, et. al.)
      - a) Incense is a sweet smelling substance that works when it is lit on fire.
      - b) A piece of coal was taken from the sacrificial altar and placed on the incense altar in order for the incense smoke to be lit.
  - c) The point is "the incense altar" is a model of prayer. Just as the sweet-smelling smoke of that altar rises up in the sky, it is a model of our prayers rising up to heaven. The coals are taken from the sacrificial altar. It is a model of the necessity of the blood sacrifice in order to approach God in the first place. The coal was transported from "Point A to Point B" via a container called a "censer".

- d) This leads us back to the text here in Revelation 8. This "8th angel" transfers some incense "mixed with the prayers of the saints" to the golden altar. This altar is where the incense is burned. The idea is the "prayer of all the saints" is being offered up to God.
  - e) Why doesn't the text just say, "Everybody prayed something"? ☹ Why have this "incense" word-picture? The idea is to understand how God is approached: Just because we pray something, doesn't mean God says "yes" to our prayer request. We can only approach God through the blood sacrifice of Jesus paying the price of our sins. In an Old Testament "word-picture" sort of way, that is what is in focus in these verses.
  - f) OK, so what is everyone praying about? If the text says this incense is "mixed with the prayers of the saints", what is that prayer? Don't know. The text doesn't say. The best we can do is read this in context of the verses. The rest of the chapter is lots of "bad stuff" happening on earth. Whatever this prayer is, if it is answered, the answer is judgment on the planet earth.
    - i) This leads to the conclusion that the prayer is about getting the world ready for Jesus Second Coming. Remember all of this "bad stuff" is in preparation for the return of Jesus. Why is it necessary? In order for Jesus to rule over the world, God first has to get "everyone's attention". The purpose of Jesus Second Coming to judge the world of its sin. This great negative period of time called "The Great Tribulation" in Chapter 7 is God's last-call out to anyone to be saved.
    - ii) Some Christians believe "The Great Tribulation" is a word-picture of the 2,000 year and counting history since Jesus. It is God's call to the world to be saved prior to one's death or Jesus Second Coming. The alternative view is that it is a specific final cluster of time where God gives one last chance to the world to repent prior to Jesus coming back.
    - iii) So when did you and I ever be a part of this prayer? It occurs every time we pray "Thy (Your) Kingdom Come" as part of the Lord's Prayer. (Matthew 6:10, Luke 11:2). It is a prayer for Jesus to come and reign on earth. It is a prayer for the Jewish Messiah to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies of a "promised king" to rule over the entire earth. It is that prayer Christians pray when everything is going wrong and we want Jesus to come back and "straighten it all out".
    - iv) That is why the text says, "much incense". It is a word-picture of lots and lots of people praying for Jesus to come back. That prayer is answered, but judgment of the world must precede the actual event of Jesus return. God, out of His love for people wants to give nonbelievers "one last chance" to come to Him.
10. Verse 5: Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.
- a) Reading this verse in context of the surrounding verses, we had prayers and incense mixed together. Here in Verse 5, some of the fire from the sacrificial altar was taken (via this censer, a bowl-like tool) and was thrown to earth. In the next bunch of verses, a lot of destruction takes place on earth.
  - b) I state this because we don't know what Verse 5 means all-by-itself. All it says was this fire was thrown at earth and then came, "thunder, rumblings... lightning... earthquake".
  - c) Again, let's go back to the opening verse of a half-hour of silence. Then we get a trumpet blast. Now we get all of the noise of thunder, lightning, earth shaking, etc. Whatever this is, it does not appear to be good. ☹ One can see the "drama tension rising" with each occurring verse in Revelation 8 to this moment.
  - d) It is almost as if God is going from "silence to rage" in a matter of verses through these word-pictures. The idea is God saying in effect, "I expect you people to live by My standards. I won't lower My standards just because you failed to live up to them. I have provided My son to take your punishment. If you refuse, punishment is coming." In these verses, we are seeing the tension build up prior to the beginning of the punishment.

11. Verse 6: Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them.
- The trumpet blasts have not happened yet. That is the remainder of Chapters 8-9.
  - All God is doing so far is "preparing" us for that event. We've had dramatic silence. We've had angels given these trumpets. We've had about-to-be answered prayer requests of "thy (your) kingdom come". We've had the rumblings of thunder and lightening. All of this dramatic tension is building up to these trumpet blasts.
12. Verse 7: The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.
- Now the action really begins. John sees a trumpet blast at God's throne room in heaven, and then John turns his attention to describe what is happening on earth.
  - It starts with "hail and fire mixed with blood" coming to earth.
  - We now have the start of the "third" references. We have a third of the earth burned up, a third of the trees and a third of the grass.
  - As I've stated in the introduction, there are volumes of books speculating as to what this "really" means. Some tie it to events in human history. Some compare the trees to people and grass to other people. Some talk of microscopic red germ-like substances that come from the dead ocean-like life. Whatever it is, it is not good.
  - Remember this is the first of seven "trumpet blast" judgments. In Chapters 8-9, we have six of the seven separate trumpet sounds going off, followed by six of the seven specific "bad things" happening on planet earth.
  - My personal view is I take this literally. If John wanted to say, "the trees represent people", he would do so. In fact, in Verse 8, John states a third of all living people die from the events of another trumpet blast. Given that, I tend to take this literally. I believe John is talking about literal trees and plant life burning up. Some bible scholars see this as word-pictures of people judgment, but I take it more literally, based on context.
  - OK, why punish the earth (land), the trees and the grass? They are not the ones sinning, people are! (That is why many people see this as symbolic). My answer leads back to the title of this lesson: It is God trying to get our attention. As they say in the Navy, "Fire a warning shot off the bow"!
  - Let me put it another way: People won't turn to God if they can "depend" on other things. Often, we don't pray to God for help when we have lots of money in the bank. We trust in our resources first, and God last. There is nothing wrong with having resources and God has often blessed us with such resources in preparation to use them when the bad times come. My point is the danger of trusting in "things" and not God.
    - This leads back to the "why" question of the first trumpet-judgment. God is going to harm our natural resources in order to get our attention. It is God's way to get people to fully trust in Him during this time era.
13. Verse 8: The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, <sup>9</sup> a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.
- First, notice the words "something like". John says that after the second angel blew this second trumpet, something like a fire-mountain was thrown in the sea. The sea then turned to blood. A third of all sea life died and a third of the ships were destroyed.
  - Again, the commentaries are full of speculation on the "what is it" question: Some say it is a meteor. Some say it is a nuclear weapon.
  - Another debate point is the size and scope of the damage. Notice the words "the sea" at the end of Verse 8. Some think it just refers to the Mediterranean Sea. In the bible, the word "sea" often just refers to the Mediterranean. Some see it as referring to all ocean life.
    - Whatever it is, it is not good. It causes a third (there's that word again!) of the sea life to die and a third of the ships to be destroyed.

- d) Let's go back to the first judgment: People could see this hail-fire like substance and try to explain it away as a natural phenomenon. They could say, "Well the earth is just having a bad day. ☺ We don't know for sure God is behind it."
    - i) Now comes "Judgment #2". A big comet or "something" comes out of the sky and destroys a lot of sea life. Hopefully a lot of people might think at this point, "OK, something's up. This is more than a coincidence".
    - ii) Hopefully the cable news network reporting all this will report the "strange coincidence" of how everything is being destroyed in "thirds". When bad things happen, people look for explanations. Hopefully the many "third" references get people to understand God the Father and God the Son are behind all of this.
  - e) Again, God is doing enough damage to get everyone's attention. If God only "zapped" say, 10 people, most of the world would shrug its shoulders and not care. By doing things in "thirds", God is getting the world's attention and trying to get people to repent.
14. Verse 10: The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water-- <sup>11</sup> the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter.
- a) Here we have the third angel's trumpet blast and the third "bad thing" of this chapter: In this judgment, fresh-water is targeted. In the second angel's judgment, the target was the sea and sea life. Here in Verse 10-11, we have a "great star" that fell on rivers and springs and a third of the waters turned bitter. The idea of bitter is poisonous. In the Middle East, there is a bitter plant called "wormwood" that is poisonous. That is the name of whatever it is that harmed the fresh water supply.
  - b) Again, the commentaries are full of speculation on this one. Some say it is a meter storm. Others say it is a nuclear bomb exchange. Some say it is a destructive angel. Whatever it is, it causes damage to the fresh water supply of the earth.
  - c) Now let's get back to my discussion of "Trusting in our resources as a priority over God". In "Trumpet Judgment #2", the focus was on sea life. Here in Verses 10-11, we have "Trumpet Judgment #3" which focuses on fresh water. In other words people can think, "OK, well our sea water was harmed, but at least we still have our fresh water supply". In other words, people won't turn to God as long as they have something else to depend upon. That is why I call this chapter "How God Gets Our Attention".
    - i) God will go to incredible lengths for us to do His will. It is often progressive, although not always on this massive of a scale. ☺ The point is God loves us too much to leave us alone and that can mean letting our life become more increasingly difficult in order for us to surrender our will to His will.
  - d) In the introduction, I compared these judgments to God's plagues on Egypt. One can see the comparison of a "mass-scale judgment" on a location. The purpose is to get that location to realize "God is the true god" and greater than anything we depend upon.
  - e) Meanwhile, back at destruction headquarters: ☺
15. Verse 12: The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night.
- a) Here we have fourth angel and the fourth judgment. In this one, the sunlight decreases by one-third, the moonlight and the starlight also decreases by one third.
  - b) Notice that the first four trumpet-judgments all focus on nature. In other words, God isn't directing His "lightening bolts" at humans, although human life is suffering due to all of this ecological damage. Again, God is working in "thirds" to get our attention.
  - c) How does the sun and moon give a third less light? The most logical answer is some sort of debris gets in the atmosphere that diminishes the light. Like the other judgments, we can speculate all day long as to its meaning. The key is to focus on what the text does say.

- d) The main point is the "why" issue: To get the world to focus upon God. It is the "last call" for salvation and God is trying to get the world's attention.
    - i) If all of this sounds harsh, remember God's purpose is to save as many as possible to eternal salvation. God cannot ignore sin and lower His standards. This "last call" destruction process is God trying to tell as many as possible that eternal damnation waits for those who refuse to turn to Him. This great set of judgments is God "turning up the volume" to get the world's attention before its end.
    - ii) When we get to the end of Chapter 9, we get the impression the world is aware God is behind all of this, but still refuses to change. Some people would rather live an immoral lifestyle, no matter what the eternal consequences. Another point of all of this destruction is to show "us" that no matter how extensive of God's warnings to the world, some people refuse to change.
16. Verse 13: As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!"
- a) Here was John, watching all of this destruction happen on earth. All of a sudden, John is "distracted" by a talking eagle! (I'll spare you the debate on whether or not this was a literal eagle. ☺) The eagle was flying in the air warning the inhabitants of the world of the last three angels (we've had four so far) are still to come.
  - b) Part of me is wondering, "Three woe's for what is to come? What about the "woe's" that have already happened?" Let me put it another way: Suppose a doctor says to you, "You have a really bad disease that is going to get more and more painful every day. It will get increasingly painful until you die. Then the doctor says, "And now, let me give you the bad news!" ☺ After all of the destruction that happens so far, now we are getting a warning of even worse things that are about to happen!
  - c) Notice the phrase, "Inhabitants of the earth". This is not all of humanity. It is warning to those who are not saved. Jesus said to His followers that our true home is in heaven. This is implied in John 8:23 and John 18:36. The idea of "inhabitants of the earth" refers to those who want to make the world their home and don't desire to join God in heaven.
  - d) One last thing: The word "woe" is repeated three times. It is done for emphasis. It is like when we say, "This food is very, very, very good!" There are three "woe's" given as there are three more trumpet blasts and three more judgments coming.
17. Chapter 9, Verse 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.
- a) We're on a new chapter, but we're on the same topic: There are still seven angels giving trumpet blasts one at a time. After each trumpet blast, something bad happens to the earth. Chapter 9 covers trumpet blast #5 and #6.
  - b) While trumpet blast #1 through #4 are focused on nature (i.e., damage to trees, the earth, water supply, etc.), blasts #5 and #6 focus on people and demonic creatures.
  - c) Again, this is God's attempt to get the world's attention. The damage to the environment didn't get people to repent. God is now going for the jugular. ☺
  - d) Onto the verse itself: In this verse, we have a star falling from the heavens (the sky) to the earth. This star was given a key to the "Abyss". I'll discuss the Abyss in a moment.
  - e) First, we know that this star is not a literal star. This star is given a key. If you recall back in Revelation 1:20, the term "stars" ties to angels. One of the keys to understanding Revelation is the word-pictures are consistent throughout the book.
  - f) A (trivial) classical debate among bible scholars is whether or not this angel with the key is a good guy or bad guy. Inside this "Abyss" is demonic creatures.
    - i) It is either a good angel in charge of letting the bad guys out, or a bad angel (Satan himself) leading the damage charge. You can argue it either way from the text.

- g) OK, what is the Abyss? The King James Version calls it, "The bottomless pit".
  - i) A "bottomless pit" is one, where every direction is "up". Many argue it is the center of the earth, as that location has no bottom as every direction is "up".
  - ii) This goes back to my theory (and the theory of many) that the spiritual world exists in more than three dimensions. We as humans exist "stuck in time" and have only three dimensions. God created this world and exists outside of it. The same with these spiritual beings. I never had a problem with the concept of demonic beings existing in the "center of the earth" as we know it, because their existence is more than "height, length and width" as we know it.
  - iii) Wherever it is, it's not good and I don't want to be there. ☺
- h) Before we get into more details of Chapter 9, I need to explain an important interpretation point: How people interpret Chapter 9 depends upon how "literal" one takes the text.
  - i) Many commentators take Chapter 9 very literally and see this as some sort of demonic creatures. John the writer did his best, using 1st Century language to describe the physical characteristics of these demonic beings.
  - ii) Others see Chapter 9 as word pictures tying to human warfare. They tie these verses to either historical battles or futuristic warfare.
  - iii) I find a lot (not all) of bible commentators base their opinions on their "agenda" for interpreting this chapter: If they believe the Great Tribulation is a single, futuristic event, they lean toward the "literal demonic creature" interpretation. If they believe the Great Tribulation describes human history since Jesus, they lean toward the historic warfare interpretation.
- 18. Verse 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.
  - a) In Chapter 9 Verse 1, we had this angel (called a "star") opening this Abyss. The first thing we read is so much smoke came out of it, it darkened the sky.
  - b) Whenever you read of "smoke" mentioned in the bible, it is not good. It is usually followed by some judgment or disaster. Just as the sign of smoke usually means fire is about to happen, so is this smoke coming out of this furnace.
- 19. Verse 3: And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. <sup>4</sup> 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.
  - a) An interesting thing to do is to read Chapter 9 and notice the word "like". It is used 8 or 9 times in most translations. The point is John was doing his best to describe these creatures using his vocabulary and knowledge. Does that mean these creatures were literal? That's not the point. The point is John was trying to describe things he's never seen before and was using "1st Century word-pictures" to describe what he saw.
  - b) Coming out of this abyss is "locusts". We know they are not the same type of locusts that we are familiar with because "normal" locusts eat only plant life. Verse 4 says these locusts do not touch the grass or plant life, but only harm those "who don't have the seal of God on their foreheads". More on that in a moment.
  - c) Let's back up a bit: The chapter opens with the 5th trumpet. All of a sudden, somebody opens up this shaft, to let out a bunch of "demonic locusts" that only harm people. (Gee, thanks there, buddy! ☺) Apparently, these locust-like creatures have been locked up since the world was created and have been "saved" for a special purpose.
    - i) These "demonic locusts" probably resemble real insects. We know these demonic locusts are "timeless" because they have survived in this abyss until "this moment". The only thing we read about them is they have been locked up until now, and we'll read they only do damage to humans. Sounds pretty demon-like to me.
    - ii) There are bible scholars who tie this to historical warfare and other things. The more I study the text, the more literally I see this as some sort of demonic creature.

- d) OK, why have these locusts? The point is God is trying to get the attention of the "unsaved". Verse 4 says they only harm those "who don't have the seal of God on their forehead". Who is that? That was the "144,000" mentioned in Chapter 7. That chapter also mentioned "multitudes" that were saved out of the Great Tribulation. We don't know if this multitude was sealed. The text does not say. Who knows, maybe some from that multitude had to be "stung" in order to give their lives to Christ.
- i) Remember my point of this lesson is that God goes through "progressively harmful things in order for us to turn to Him." The point of this verse is these locusts are used by God to "judge" those who won't commit their lives to Him.
20. Verse 5: They (the locusts) 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. <sup>6</sup> During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them.
- a) The locusts "function" were to harm people but not kill them. What we don't know is whether these locusts are some sort of literal demonic creature or represent some man made "warfare" objects. In other words, we don't know the "what", but we do know the "why". We don't know for sure what these creatures are, but we are told in the text "why" they exist: To harm, but not kill those who refuse to turn to God.
- b) Notice what is said in Verse 6: People who are stung by these locust-like creatures will seek death, "but not find it". That's strange to think about: Does that mean people will try to shoot themselves and miss? ☺ Does that mean they will jump off tall buildings and not be killed? What I personally suspect happens is that people will become so weak, they won't be able to move. At the same time, doctors won't do "mercy killings" because they know people will eventually recover in a five months time span. (Ref.: Verse 5)
- i) I've been told that if one is stung by a scorpion, it is tremendous pain for about a day, and then it goes away. Painkillers don't help. That is the type of situation here, except the agony goes on for five months as stated in Verse 5.
- c) Again, verse 5 says the pain lasts for five months. Why that time frame? We don't know, the text doesn't say. The most interesting possibility I've found is that it represents God's time frame for "suffering judgment". Back when God did the flood, the waters covered the world for 150 days (Genesis 7:24). That's a five-month period of time.
21. Verse 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. <sup>8</sup> Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months.
- a) Here in Verses 7-10, we have the physical description of the locusts. Notice the word "like" is all through these verses. Read this again and notice the word "like". It is used seven times just in these four verses! Go, ahead and reread it, I'll wait here. ☺ Again, John was doing his best to describe what he saw, using the vocabulary of his time era.
- b) Let me give you my conclusion of what these things are: I haven't a clue. The more I read and research, the more I'm convinced nobody has a clue as to what these things are. If you read a dozen commentaries, you'll get a dozen different opinions as to what these locusts "really are" or what this description "really means". Some say it is describing tanks and helicopters. Some say it is describing some futuristic war machine.
- c) Here is my conclusions after spending way too much time thinking about this: ☺
- i) Whatever John saw, it was literal to him. If God can manifest Himself as human flesh in Jesus, and angels can be manifested so people can see them, then demonic creatures can manifest themselves as some sort of strange creatures. This is what John saw in these verses. My view is that they are literal demonic beings.

- ii) My personal view is that the Great Tribulation is a future, single event. People who live through this time can recognize these creatures, because John spent four verses describing what they look like.
  - iii) People who argue the "Great Tribulation" represents all of Christian-history argue these are warfare-word pictures. I disagree only in that I've never seen a military device that can hurt people for five months and not kill them.
  - iv) Revelation is a book of prophecy (predictions). If a detailed description of literal locust-like creatures came one day, it would validate Revelation as the word of God. People would take it seriously, and then take God "seriously".
  - d) John gave us this detailed description of these demonic like creatures so people would recognize them when they do appear. With that said, I'm not going to analyze "piece by piece" what each description means. My personal conclusion is that no historical event matches these word-pictures. Therefore, this is tied to some future event.
  - e) The important part is the conclusion: They had the power to torment people for five months, but not kill them.
    - i) Let's think about that conclusion in context of these two chapters: The first four trumpet judgments focused on the ecology. God damaged plant life, then the sea then the fresh water. Since God is still "not getting everyone's attention", God now allows some sort of demonic creature to harm, but not kill people.
    - ii) Getting back to my opening theme, God goes to "incredible lengths and trouble" to get us to turn to Him. Those methods are progressively more severe. In fact, the next trumpet judgment involves demonic creatures killing people. What is important to note is the progressive severity of the punishments!
22. Verse 11: They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon.
- a) The "they" are these locust-like creatures. Verse 11 describes the fact they have a "king".
  - b) Proverbs 30:27 says "locusts have no king". When a storm of insect-locusts comes into an area, they don't have a leader. They just come in swarms.
  - c) The point of Verse 11 is that these locust-like creatures do have a leader. We have the name of this leader, which is Abaddon in the Hebrew and Apollyon in the Greek.
    - i) Both words mean "destroyer". They are not translated in the text.
    - ii) The obvious answer is Satan himself, or at least some "top demonic general" that rules under Satan.
  - d) Remember Satan's ultimate goal is to stop or slow down "God's game plan" from happening. Satan knows he will lose in the end. Therefore, his goal is to slow Jesus' return for as long as possible. Only "x" number of people are in heaven. If Satan can kill as many people as possible, it prevents that "x" person from declaring their allegiance to God. Therefore, He is motivated to harm and kill people. I'm not making Satan's power any less dangerous or painful, but to help you understand His motivation.
23. Verse 12: The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come.
- a) To put this verse in our vocabulary: One down, two to go!
  - b) Remember that this "stinging locust" is the fifth of the seven trumpet judgments. Verse 12 is saying in effect the last three (#5 through #7) are the really bad ones. Remember the first four focused on hurting the ecology and the last three focus on human life.
24. Verse 13: The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God. <sup>14</sup> It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." <sup>15</sup> 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.
- a) Now we get to the sixth angel blowing a trumpet. Then "some voice", presumably God, said to this angel, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates".
    - i) So, apparently, there are four angels who are somehow tied up by this river.

- b) Like just about everything else in this chapter, we don't much about these four angelic creatures. We don't know the "what", but do know their function: To kill a third of mankind. That is stated in Verse 15. Given that, our focus should be on their function, not on what they looked like, or just "what they are".
  - c) The text states they have been "kept ready" this very hour, day, month and year.
    - i) It is as if God has known from the beginning of time these four angels would be necessary. God created these four destructive angels "back then" to cause this terrible damage at a specific day and at a specific time.
    - ii) This supports the idea that God knows all things. God knows that no matter "how hard He tries", some people will rebel against Him, since God allows free will. It is almost as if God didn't want to have to do this, but knew since the beginning of time it was necessary. In other words, these four "death angels" don't come until now. God tried lighter punishments until this point, and now this is necessary.
  - d) The text tells us they are bound by the River Euphrates. That river runs through modern Iraq. It runs through ancient Babylon. It has been the traditional border between the "West" and the "East" of the European and Asian based world.
    - i) One has to remember the central focal point of the bible is still "The Promised Land". It is the main location where bible events take place. The second most described location in the bible is Babylon. We'll get much more into that location later in Revelation. In summary, Babylon represents the ultimate rebellion against God and His plans for our life. There is a "pun" in that the location of these death angels is the source location of all that rebel against God.
25. Verse 16: The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number.
- a) I have to admit, I've never understood the "progression" from Verse 15 to Verse 16.
    - i) In Verse 15, we are describing four angels who have the power to kill one third of mankind on earth.
    - ii) In Verse 16, we get introduced to something new: A group of 200 million troops.
    - iii) The progression of the verses is probably that the four angels aren't the ones who personally go around killing one third of mankind. They somehow, lead this demonic force or human force that consists of two hundred million troops.
  - b) So what are these two hundred million troops? Are they a single army of humans? Are they some sort of very large demonic force? Don't know. The text is not clear.
    - i) What we do know is that whoever or whatever they are, it causes the death of one third of mankind during this "Great Tribulation".
26. Verse 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. <sup>18</sup> A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths. <sup>19</sup> 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.
- a) Verses 17 through 19 describe what this 200-million army looked like. It gives the color of their breastplates. Their horses have heads that look like lions and out of the mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur.
  - b) Some argue this is tank warfare. Some argue it is some sort of futuristic war machines. Again, John was doing his best "first century language" to describe what He saw.
  - c) Could this be literal warfare? Can be. The number of allied troops in World War II was 70 million, so that wasn't it. Besides, one third of mankind was not killed in that war. If you go through all of the wars and holocausts of history, none exactly fit this description.
  - d) My conclusion after wrestling with these verses for a long time is again, to focus on what we do know and let God worry about the rest! What we do know is that "whatever" this is, one third of mankind gets killed by it. Let that one sink in for a bit!

- e) If this is a prediction of some sort of future warfare, I believe it will very literally come true one day. If you study the predictions that have been fulfilled in the bible, they usually get fulfilled in a literal manner. I trust this is also true with this prediction.
  - f) Getting back to my other title of this lesson, "Understanding the thirds", God is working in "three's" to get the world's attention on Him. Whether it makes one think about Jesus rising on the third day, or the Trinity, either way, Christianity is the only major religion with a heavy emphasis on the number "three". God is going to incredible length and trouble to get the world to realize He is behind it all and wants people to get saved. It is as if God is doing all He can to teach people that Jesus is the way to salvation and giving this blunt "three" clue in all the destruction that is happening.
27. Verse 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. <sup>21</sup> Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.
- a) Here is the tragic conclusion of these two chapters: Despite the fact of all of this "damage", the survivors did not repent of their sins. Imagine a survivor thinking, "OK, I've survived the ecological damage, now I can go back to my lifestyle. OK, it got worse, but I survived the locust-thing for five months, but it's over, now I can go back to my lifestyle. OK, a lot of my buddies have died, but it's over and now I can go back to my lifestyle". In other words, some people refuse to change, despite the pain God "causes" in order to get people to turn to God for the forgiveness of sins. That's the moral of these two chapters.
  - b) Jesus once said, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." (Luke 16:31 NIV). The point is miracles are not enough to convince people to turn to God because people don't want to change their lifestyle. The same applies to all of this violence from Chapters 8-9. The tragic point of these chapters is no matter how hard God tries to "get people's attention" (short of violating their free will), people refuse to repent.
  - c) It is important we stop and study "what" it is they refuse to repent of: "the work of their hands". The idea is that everybody has a "god". Find out where people spend their spare time and spare income and you'll find their god. This is not anti-hobby, but about one's all consuming passion. We all have one. Today, we don't have "bronze idols", we have sports cars. ☺ Other obvious examples would be fame, fortune, or just "achievement".
  - d) What about "Murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or thefts?" I would argue those are "outputs" of people trying to worship their gods. If one's god is power or money, one may sink to murder or theft to reach that goal. If one's god is pleasure, one would sink to sexual immorality to reach that goal. The term "magic arts" is actually associated with hallucinogenic drug use. One gets high to either achieve pleasure or avoid pain. Either way, one is avoiding the true god. We can also discuss the actual worship of demons, but that point is a little more obvious.
28. I wanted to end this lesson by "personalizing" it a little more:
- a) It's easy to read this lesson and think about "those poor unsaved people" who have to suffer in some future date. It's much tougher to turn one's focus inward.
  - b) My point is the same method of operation God uses to get the unsaved to turn from Him is the same method God uses in our lives. No, not death angels and locusts. ☺ My point is God loves us too much to leave us alone. If He has a desire for us to turn from some particular sin, God can and will go through progressive, negative "things" to get us to turn from that sin and get us to conform more in His image.
  - c) Let me put it another way: People become what they (and we) worship. God's goal is to get us to be more "Christ-like" in our behavior. The purpose of prayer is not to get our will done, but God's will to be done in our lives. We don't always know God's will so it is ok to pray for our requests. God has the right to say no, if it is not His will.

29. I'll end this lesson with the story of Jacob wrestling with God. There is a strange story in Genesis 32:23-28 where Jacob wrestles all night with the "angel of God". Jacob finally says in effect, "I'll stop wrestling with you if you bless me." In the course of the wrestling, the angel puts Jacob's hip joint out of place. Later the angel renames Jacob, "Israel", which means "wrestles with God".
- a) What we do as Christians is "wrestle with God". It is a lifelong battle of our will versus God's will. We generally don't surrender until we get God to bless our life. God does not bless our life until we surrender to His will. In other words, we have to "give up" our will (when it is contrary to God's will) in order for God to take over and bless our lives.
  - b) During that wrestling match, Jacob's hip was thrown out of joint. Jacob was going to meet his long lost brother Esau, who many years earlier threatened to kill Jacob. Jacob wanted to make a run for it in case Esau still wanted to kill him. By God putting Jacob's hip out of joint, Jacob could not make a run for it. Jacob is now more dependant upon God.
  - c) What does any of this have to do with Revelation 8-9? Glad you asked! ☺ God continued to do more and more damage in Revelation in order to get the world to turn to Him. For Jacob, God only had to go as far as the hip joint to get Jacob to succumb to God's will.
  - d) The question is, "How far does God have to go with you and me to get us to change our will to His will? As you can see from Revelation, God is willing to go "all the way" to get His will done for our lives. Hopefully we surrender before any further angels have to fire off some trumpet blasts! Here's the great thing: It is only after we surrender, that God blesses us. We can stop "wrestling" with God the moment we realize His will for our lives is the best thing for our lives. That's why I call this lesson, "How God Gets Our Attention". God "wrestles" with human lives to get us to focus upon His will.
30. Let's pray: Father, Give us discernment as to what You want for our lives. Help us to learn the lessons You want us to learn from the tragedies of our lives. Help us to remember that we live for eternity, and not just this lifetime. Help us to recognize the "idols" in our life that You want us to turn away from. Finally, we ask for the salvation of our unsaved loved ones. Help their hearts to be open to your truth and help them to realize Your salvation plan for their lives. Help them and us to recognize and turn to You before such extreme measures are necessary. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.