

16. When God Speaks

Main Text: Revelation 8-9

Big Idea: God's warnings are acts of mercy. Throughout history, God has spoken through His Word, His prophets, and His judgments, calling people to repentance before final judgment comes.

1. Heaven Falls Silent

Revelation 8:1

Throughout Revelation, heaven has been filled with worship, praise, and proclamation. Suddenly there is silence.

Old Testament Background

- Habakkuk 2:20
- Zephaniah 1:7
- Zechariah 2:13

In Scripture, silence often precedes God's decisive action. This is not the silence of God's absence but the silence of anticipation.

Key Truth: Heaven is silent because God is about to speak and act.

2. The Prayers of God's People Matter

Revelation 8:2-5

Before the trumpets sound, John sees the prayers of God's people rising before God like incense.

Temple Background

- Exodus 30:1-10
- Psalm 141:2
- Luke 1:8-10

In the Temple, incense represented prayers rising before God.

The image reminds believers that God has heard every prayer, every cry, and every plea for justice.

Connection to Revelation 6 The martyrs cried: "How long, Sovereign Lord?"

Now heaven begins to answer.

Key Truth: Prayer is not preparation for God's work. Prayer is part of God's work.

3. Understanding the Trumpets

Modern readers often associate trumpets with music.

Ancient readers heard something very different.

Throughout Scripture, trumpets were used for:

- Gathering God's people (Numbers 10:1-10)
- Warning of danger (Ezekiel 33:1-6)
- Announcing God's presence (Exodus 19:16-19)
- Declaring a king's arrival (1 Kings 1:34)

A trumpet demanded attention.

It was an alarm.

It announced:

"Pay attention. God is speaking."

Key Truth: The trumpets are not merely judgments. They are warnings.

4. The Exodus Behind the Trumpets

The trumpet judgments intentionally echo the plagues of Egypt.

Exodus	Revelation
Hail and fire	Rev. 8:7
Water to blood	Rev. 8:8-9
Darkness	Rev. 8:12
Locusts	Rev. 9:1-12

John is not creating new imagery.

He is retelling Israel's greatest story of deliverance.

Why?

- Egypt appeared invincible.
- Pharaoh appeared unstoppable.
- Yet God exposed the weakness of Egypt's gods and delivered His people.
- Rome claimed similar power in John's day.

John reminds believers: **The God of Exodus still rules history.**

Important Parallel

Just as Pharaoh repeatedly hardened his heart despite warning after warning, humanity in Revelation continues to refuse repentance.

Key Truth: The greatest danger is not judgment. The greatest danger is a hardened heart.

5. Why "One-Third" Matters

A repeated phrase throughout these chapters is:

One-third

- One-third of the earth
- One-third of the sea
- One-third of the rivers
- One-third of the stars

The judgments are severe but limited.

This restraint points to God's mercy.

These are warning judgments, not final judgments.

Key Truth: Judgment is real, but mercy is still available.

6. Wormwood

Revelation 8:10-11

Wormwood was a bitter plant frequently associated with judgment and the consequences of sin.

Old Testament References

- Deuteronomy 29:18
- Jeremiah 9:15
- Jeremiah 23:15
- Lamentations 3:15

John's point is not identifying a specific object.

His point is that rebellion against God turns what should bring life into bitterness.

Key Truth: Sin corrupts the things that were meant to sustain life.

7. The Eagle's Warning

Revelation 8:13 - "Woe! Woe! Woe!"

To modern readers, an eagle is simply a bird. To John's audience, the eagle was one of Rome's most recognizable symbols.

The eagle represented:

- Imperial authority
- Military power
- Victory
- Loyalty to Rome

The eagle was also associated with Jupiter, Rome's chief god.

When John's eagle announces judgment rather than victory, Roman imagery is being turned upside down.

The very symbol Rome used to proclaim power now announces God's warning.

Key Truth: Every earthly power ultimately answers to God.

8. The Abyss and the Locusts

Revelation 9:1-12

The Abyss was understood in Jewish thought as a place associated with rebellious spiritual powers.

Notice something important:

- The key is given.
- Authority is granted.
- Even evil remains under God's authority.

Why Locusts?

For ancient people, locust swarms could destroy entire harvests and create famine.

John intensifies the image beyond natural locusts. The creatures become symbols of evil's destructive power.

Old Testament Background

Joel 2: The locust imagery reminds readers that sin ultimately destroys those who embrace it.

Key Truth: Evil never creates. Evil only corrupts.

9. The Euphrates and Rome's Greatest Fear

Revelation 9:13-19

The Euphrates River marked the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire. Beyond the river lay Parthia, Rome's most powerful rival. Many Romans feared a Parthian invasion.



Historical Background

In 53 BC, Roman forces suffered a devastating defeat against the Parthians at the Battle of Carrhae.

The loss became one of Rome's greatest military humiliations.

The Parthian Archers



- Parthian armies relied heavily on mounted archers.
- These horsemen could ride at full speed while firing arrows with deadly accuracy.
- One famous tactic became known as the "Parthian Shot."
- A rider would appear to retreat, then turn and fire arrows backward while galloping away.
- To the Roman world, Parthian cavalry represented danger, fear, and military power.

Why This Matters

For Jewish readers:

- Assyria came from beyond the Euphrates.
- Babylon came from beyond the Euphrates.

For Roman readers:

- Parthia lived beyond the Euphrates.

The Euphrates became a symbol of invasion, threat, and impending judgment.

Key Truth: John uses one of the most frightening images available to his audience to communicate the severity of God's warning.

10. The Tragedy of Unrepentance

Revelation 9:20-21

After all the warnings: "They still did not repent."

This is the climax of the passage.

The issue is not evidence. The issue is surrender.

Just as Pharaoh refused to listen, humanity continues to harden its heart.

Sins Mentioned

- Idolatry
- Murder
- Sorcery
- Sexual immorality
- Theft

These describe a life organized around something other than God.

Key Truth: God's warnings are intended to lead us to repentance.

The Call

The question of Revelation 8-9 is not: "When will these trumpets happen?"

The question is: "When God speaks, will we listen?"

God has spoken through:

- Scripture
- Conviction
- Consequences
- The Holy Spirit
- The witness of His people

The trumpets remind us that God continues to call people back to Himself before it is too late.

When God Speaks, Will We Listen?

Additional Resources

Video Study

Simplifying Revelation: How to Read the Book of Revelation *Shane J. Wood (RightNow Media)*

An excellent 11-session study focused on understanding Revelation in its historical, literary, and theological context.

Books

Revelation for the Rest of Us

Scot McKnight

Discipleship on the Edge

Darrell W. Johnson

Reading Revelation Responsibly

Michael J. Gorman

Revelation for Everyone

N. T. Wright

Revelation

Craig R. Koester