
Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation

Into Thy Word Ministries www.intothyword.org

Revelation 9:12-21: “The Sixth Trumpet”

General idea: The Sixth Angel now blows his trumpet, and brings about more judgment. On the surface, this looks like only doom and gloom, as it is for those who seek evil and refuse to repent. But, what many people choose not to see in this passage is that this is also the work of God’s patience and grace. Perhaps it is anticlimactic and our thirst for revenge outweighs our desire to see things set right. But God reveals His temperament by offering His forgiveness, thus allowing for humanity to repent and come to their senses. Nevertheless, they choose not the ways of God and life, nor do they choose the ways of goodness and virtue. Instead, they refuse His offer of grace and forgiveness and dig themselves further down in their sin and became entrenched in their debauchery. People from the past, present, and future (all of humanity) are bent on serving only the means and wants of self. They seek what is wrong—naturally and deliberately. These acts are continual throughout human history and are contemporaneous, remaining now and in the future, a result of our fallen, sinful nature (Rom. 1: 18-32; 3:23; 6:23).

Vs. 12-16: The Roman Empire was experiencing greater and greater problems with the *Parthians* in the eastern border area of Asia Minor, where John’s readers were. This region greatly feared attacks and/or an all out invasion by them. These *Parthians* were depicted as the enemy and propaganda waged an early “cold war” between them and Rome. There was even mythology that Nero would arise from the dead and lead these Parthians in his blood lust revenge against Rome, the Jews, and the Christians. Some Jews believed the *Parthians* would come and save them from the Roman occupation, hence why the war of 66-70 started against a far superior force. However, they did not receive the help, and the Jewish revolt failed, abruptly ending the Temple, the city, and the Jewish way of life. The first century Jews put their trust in war and a fabled, non-convicting messiah instead of the Living Lord!

- *Other woes.* “Woe” means “look out, terror is coming,” or a stern warning. John is not done yet; he is giving further warning, as more trouble is to come. This is indicative of Old Testament prophetic orators such as Jeremiah and Amos (Amos. 5:18-6:1; Rev. 6:10; 8:13; 10:1-11:14).
- *The horns of the golden altar* referred to the extensions at the four corners of the altar inside of the Temple. This calls to mind an image of worship, and the portrayal of God’s heavenly throne (Ex. 24:10; 27:2; Deut. 11:11; 1 Kings 7:23-25; 2 Kings 16:17; 2 Chron. 4:2-6, 15, 39; Psalm 11:4; Isa. 51:9-11; Jer 27:19; Ezek. 1:22; Rev. 8:3-5; 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:2-6, 8; 16:1, 17). This was also an image of refuge and a place of repentance to those fleeing judgment,

and/or providing safety measures from an avenging person. They could ask the priest for clemency before God by taking hold of the horns (1 Kings 1:50-53; 2:28; Amos 3:14).

- *Four Angels.* These angels are not mere messengers; they have authority from Christ to do His bidding, and they had influence over leaders of people (Dan. 10:13-21). The context and meaning here may denote that the angels are figurative and it will be human means that will create these plagues such as war or terrorism. But, they can also be supernaturally created angels in command of the demonic cavalry, or God using demons for His bidding.
- *Released.* Jewish traditions stated that God imprisoned angels who were destructive or who were “fallen,” usually in the depths of the seas or earth, to protect His people until such time as He desired to use them for His purpose.
- *Great River Euphrates.* This longest river in western Asia stretches for 1,700 miles. This was the boundary God gave Israel and also the boundary of the Roman Empire and the *Parthians* (Deut. 1:6-7; 11:24; Jos. 1:4; Isa 8:5-8; Rev. 16:12).
- *Very hour and day and month and year.* This is apocalyptic language that shows us that God acts according to His purpose and His timetable. It is not meant to be taken literally lest we read our versions, agenda, or timetable into it.
- *To kill a third of mankind.* These are “casualty statistics” also used by John to invoke fear and call wayward people to repentance. Such destruction can only happen if God allows it for His purpose; keep in mind the call for repentance that is being disregarded. Such judgment is merited and deserving, yet by God’s grace, He spares two-thirds!
- *Mounted troops.* Most likely referring to the *Parthians*, who were exceptional horsemen and brought war, with cavalry troupes (also known for being skilled archers on white horses), into play. They invoked total fear and chaos to the region. A battle with them would fit the cosmic images that John uses, but John is pointing to them not as just earthy threats in his time, but the real threats against our eternal souls to the entirety of all Christianity and the Church.
- *The number ...was two hundred million.* This is an incalculable number, not necessarily literal. Such a number is in “hyperbole language (intended exaggeration)” as this was more than the population of the entire world at that time. The entire armies of the world today would be under 10 million. China has 2.3 million, and Russia had three million at its highest (now a small fraction thereof). The largest assembled army during the first Gulf War, including 31 nations, was under one million (Psalm 68:17; Dan. 7:10; Rev

5:11).

The theme is the beckoning of the wayward to repentance; grace is offered, but will it be taken? These images indicate that all that exists is submissive to God's supremacy, He who reigns in all of history and time and has victory over all that oppose Him. In conjunction, this also means that He supplies us with all we need.

Vs. 17-21: This passage is as much about mercy as it is about judgment! The human desire is to remain in sin when we have in full view its destructive nature and how it hurts. It is not just mischief; it seriously maims us and all those around us. The idea of sin can confound the mind. Yet, it is our minds that are not conformed, neither is the soul of those who remain in sin. Sin is very, very powerful—not just a lure, but also a way of life that seems fulfilling, exciting, and desirable, even when it does not work and it kills us (Rom. 1:28-31).

- *Breastplates.* The breastplate at this time was a “coat of mail” of inner woven rings of brass laid over leather that protected the soldier; arrows could easily pierce it.
- *Out of their mouths came fire.* The *Parthians* used flaming arrows made from canvases and wood that easily destroyed villages (1 Kings 1:10-12; Rev. 11:5).
- *Fiery red, dark blue/sapphire.* This is the color of burning sulfur; these images are used to invoke fear, as fire especially in its ferocity is a “primal fear.”
- *Heads of lions.* Also a primal fear; No unarmed, normal human can meet a lion and live. Lions were a symbol of power and were also used as a means of God's judgment (2 Kings 17:25-26; 1 Chron. 12:8; 2 Chron. 9:17-21; Jer. 50:17).
- *In their tails.* May refer to the arrows of the *Parthian's* rear cavalry or an unknown means of delivery of God's judgment. This perhaps underscores the demonic source of the horses, over which God is still in control.
- *Like snakes.* This may refer to thievery and those who are a clear and present danger (Rev. 12:9).
- *They did not stop worshiping demons.* This metaphor also alludes to the worship of idols who can't move, talk, or respond, and who are made and controlled by man. Such idols and those who make and follow them are worthless and powerless and can do nothing but look pretty (Psalm 135:15-18; Isa. 46:6-7; 1 Cor. 10:20). This also refers to fallen angels working with Satan to bring and bear evil manipulation on humanity (Duet. 4:28; Psalm 115:5-7; 1 Cor. 10:20).

- *Still did not repent* indicates that the people are “stupid” and have no excuse. They had some warning, either by prophets, by the clear teaching of the Word, or by some supernatural pronouncement. They knew their deeds were wrong, yet they refused to acknowledge Christ or repent of their ways even in the face of catastrophes. In addition, if they repented, they would be spared their calamities, yet they refused... talk about being *hardheaded* (Ex. 7:22-23; 8:10; 9:14-29; 10:2; 14:4; Amos 4:6-11; Rev. 2:14; chaps 10-11; 16:9-11)!
- *Magic arts / sorceries* refers to any kind of witchcraft or sorcery being brought together. The word denoting magic arts also means, “mix in” (*pharmakon*) and is where we get our English word *pharmacy*. In Acts, there was some repentance of this, but not usually (Acts 19:19).

Sin is missing the mark that our Lord has for us. Sin is a violation against God and His people. It was a Greek archery term. The mark or target is God's righteousness, and because of sin, we can never hit the target. There is no "Robin Hood" that can ever hit God's target. Thus, all humans are sinners; we all have failed His law, either by our direct transgression or "commission," (that is deliberately disobeying, such as in adultery) or failure to conform to His standards, called "omission." Even if we are not aware of that aspect of the law, we have no excuse. As with the police, ignorance of the law is no excuse. We can't say, “hey, I did not know the speed limit!” or “I did not know it was not OK to steal that watch!” Every time we sin, we incur greater guilt and punishment than before. (Gen. 3:1-24; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 2:1-11; 3:10-26; 5:12-19; Titus 1:15; James 1:12-15; 1 John 1:8-10) Original Sin is explained by the Fall; it was not the first sin, but the term refers to the result of sin, that everything has become corrupted.

The lure of sin, occult practices, and idolatry is influential and controlling; it seeks its own and those who harbor it. This is not just the pagan idol of people past; it is anything we worship and place first in our life other than our Lord. It is all about crime and punishment of those who do not seek truth and justice; it is immorality and the choice to do and be evil. Sin can also seek fame, power, money, manipulation, and exploiting of others over all else. Sin is something we do in our minds and that translates to how we live our lives. It is the same as what we do with Christ; if we live our lives glorifying Him, how much more content would we be?

The Preterist view: They see this passage as God's vengeance, using the Roman armies to descend on apostate Israel and the destruction of Jerusalem in 66-70 A.D. Josephus recorded that the Euphrates is where the Roman troops, defending the eastern border, came from. “Very hour” refers to the precise nature of Roman attacks. This is also what Daniel prophesied in his “seventy weeks” (Deut. 28; Dan. 9:24; Mark 13:3; Luke 21:6-7, 20-32). “Two hundred million” is seen as the fearsomeness of Rome and the travesties of war. “Plague” refers to the locust plagues in 66 A.D. The lack of repentance is from the debased

reprobate mind (Rom. 1: 20-28). Josephus recorded massive insane evils by Jews to other Jews during this time including cannibalism; and still they refused to repent.

The Futurist view: They see this passage as about literal demonic angels who are invading or who are influencing the human invaders from the Orient in a great future battle (2 Kings 2:11; 6:13-17; Rev. 19:14). “Two hundred million” is what they see as the literal number of the armies. They see the “breastplates” as descriptions of modern military machines. The lack of repentance is from the hardening of the hearts, ignorance, and refusing to see the veracity of their situation (Eph. 4:17-19). They see “magic arts” from the word *pharmakon*, which in its English form is “pharmacy,” as drug abuse, civil decay, and sin during the tribulation. (This is an example of the improper use of exegetical methodologies; one should always seek the meaning from the actual original languages and context and also what it meant to the intended audience, then compare it to other passages such as, in this case, Daniel, to find the authentic meaning. This is proper “exegesis.” Never seek a meaning from modern vernaculars or hearsays—that is reading into the text, which is called “eisegesis” or sometimes referred to as “isogesis” (means “to lead in” as in to introduce into the text our own presuppositions, ideas and thoughts and ignore what is actually there to satisfy our own agendas and opinions)—because you will skew the intent that God has for us.) However, in this case drugs may be a possible application, as drug abuse is extremely destructive and may perhaps be a means that God uses; nevertheless the clear meaning here is “witchcrafts,” as this is what the text is clearly saying.

The Idealist view: They see this passage as symbolic; the means and aftermath of war as God’s judgment comes from using the metaphor of *Euphrates*, which indicates a boundary for God’s restraint and the protection of Israel. It now refers to the means of the destruction and judgment of those who persecute God’s Church (Psalm 33:16-17; Prov. 21:31; Isa. 31:1; Zech. 9:10). That only one-third are judged and killed is a representation of God’s grace and mercy, and the fact that He judges is the result of His hearing prayers and His faithfulness to the faithful (Rev. 5:8; 8:3-4). The judgments are from false beliefs and worldliness that create moral decay and bring about judgment to a society. When society breaks down, wickedness occurs; it is a result of sin without any restraint or repentance. In other words, people judge themselves and God wants us to be triumphant and joyful in Him with His percepts that are best. The lack of repentance is from man’s refusal to acknowledge God, the desire to remain in sin and pain, and a refusal for conviction.

The Historicist view: They see this passage as the age of the Byzantine Empire around 1000 A.D. They were under attack from the Tartars, then the Turkmans in 1055 A.D. and again in 1453 A.D. by the Turks who were all horsemen. All invaded from the Euphrates area. (This is a “micro” application of this view, overlooking the veracity of the meaning. Others have said the same of the two

world wars of the 20th century and all the chaos and calamity that resulted. Many in this camp have complicated and convoluted theories for the “very hour,” calculating precise days for their theories. This is an example of reading into the text what is not there.) The lack of repentance is from apostate churches that cater to their own sin and/or the corrupt Papacy in the Middle Ages that led to the Reformation.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. What are your “primal fears?” Have you greatly feared an attack before, such as a bully or a disgruntled person? How did you feel and how did this affect the way you lived your life then? How is this like the people to whom John was writing?
2. How do you feel knowing that our Lord is ready to release His judgment in whatever form He sees fit? What about that we as a Church are called to clearly understand the urgent need to repent? What do you and/or your church need to repent of?
3. Do you believe that those who seek evil will be deserving of the wrath of God’s judgment? How does this passage also show the work of God’s mercy, patience, and grace?
4. How does God reveal His temperament here? Have you ever felt that His grace to those who are sinners is anticlimactic? Does your thirst for revenge outweigh your desire to see things set right? How do you feel that God is offering His forgiveness to you? What about those whom you think do not deserve it? Remember, none of us deserve His grace!
5. Why do you suppose that people refuse the offer of His grace and forgiveness? Why would these people decide to dig themselves further down

in sin and become entrenched in their debauchery? How do Christians sometimes tend to do this?

6. Why do you think the first century Jews put their trust in war and a fabled, non-convicting messiah rather than the Living Lord? How do some Christians today do this? What is an example?
7. Of the four views that are expressed, is there one that is more appealing (or appalling) to you? If so, why? What do you think these events will look like when they are played out?
8. In the Old Testament, people could go to the altar and ask the priest for clemency before God by taking hold of the horns. How is this like a prelude to the grace we receive?
9. How can your faith become stronger by knowing that all that exists is submissive to God's supremacy, the God who reigns in all of history and time? How can your faith be reassured by knowing that He has victory over all that oppose Him? Do you fully believe that Christ supplies us with all we need? If not, what is in your way?
10. Why is the worship of idols that can't move, talk, or respond, and that are made and controlled by man, so appealing? What are modern examples of this? How have idols affected your life and church? What have you done to receive Him and remain faithful?
11. Why do you suppose the overarching human desire is to remain in sin even when its destructive nature and how it hurts is in full view? What can your church do to help people see the veracity of their sin and still be welcoming and nonjudgmental?
12. John is pointing people not to just earthly threats in his time, but the real threats that jeopardize our eternal souls to the entirety of all Christianity and the Church. So, what are the threats and tests you face? What can you do to relieve yourself of fear and combat the threats?