

October 1st: Revelation 9-11

Chapter 9

Vs. 1-12, The first Woe is a ravaging horde of locusts, who prey not on fields, but on humans! –Specifically on those humans not sealed by God. The Star that was thrown out of heaven recalls the “fall of Lucifer,” he’s now given the key to unleash holy hell on earth. These locusts sting like scorpions, but do not kill, they make the people wish for death (just like when they were begging the rocks to fall on them). The locusts in this passage recalls Joel’s image of the locust, which recalls ancient invading Parthian forces (who wore their hair long). This is a vicious, scary horde! Nothing can stop them! Their king is the scorpion king, the ruler of Sheol, Abaddon. Just like locusts, death has an insatiable appetite and can’t be outrun. Ironically, in Greek the name is Apollyon is a conglomeration of Apollo (the god whom Domitian modeled himself after), and the word for destruction. One of the symbols of Apollo was a locust, so ironically, the king of locusts (and the empire which worships him) is now being tormented by locusts.

Vs. 13-21, Parthia covered modern Iran and Iraq, and were Rome’s worst nightmare. They were terrified that Parthia would invade and take over their empire, they even believed that Nero would be resurrected and invade them from Parthia. The army that the angels lead in this passage are intentionally meant to imagine what a Parthian invasion would be like. While Rome had an army of 180,000 troops and was considered to be the largest army, Parthia is attacking them in this passage with 200,000,000! They are portrayed as the mythological creature, the chimera, and meant to remind people that the Parthians could kill people coming and going, as their archers could shoot forwards and backwards. They’re an unstoppable force, with unstoppable numbers. No one can outrun or hide from God’s judgment, which in this case is meted out by their enemies. They kill 1/3 of humankind, and yet still those affected do not repent and turn to God.

Chapter 10

Chapters 10 and 11 both speak to the people who are already sealed by God as to their mission during these trying times. Whether times are good or times are challenging, God’s church is called to prophesy and testify, just like Jesus who was the original testifier, who died for his testimony. In Chapter 10, an angel meant to convey the image of the Colossus of Rhodes brings God’s divine presence down from heaven and now presents a scrolls which John is now allowed to write down. There are some plans of God which must remain hidden for now, which humans just aren’t equipped to handle. The angel says that the time of the Lord has come, that the mystery of God which is already in heaven will now be manifested on the earth. The angel then commissions John as a prophet. He is told to “eat the scroll” (just as the prophet Ezekiel was told. The taste of God’s word is sweet, it nourishes us, but it can be painful to bear (especially to a world who doesn’t want to hear it). This is God’s word to the prophets from beginning to end, even though it’s bitter to the stomach, be nourished and sustained by the word of God, internalize the word of God and then boldly proclaim it!

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 serves as an introduction to the themes of the 2nd half of Revelation. John had been in Patmos, but now it seems somehow through his vision he's been whisked away to Jerusalem where his job as God's prophet is to measure the innermost parts of the temple (there should be no temple in Jerusalem, as the 2nd one was already destroyed) and also God's people who are inside it. This is a spiritual measuring, how do God's people measure up to God's expectations for them? Those who measure up are given divine protection, those in the outer courts who don't measure up are going to wreak havoc for 42 months (1260 days, 3.5 years = 1/2 of 7 which symbolizes completeness and perfection). This is the period of the beast's authority. People who measure up will enjoy God's protection, but there will be rampaging by those outside of protection. Two "Witnesses" or "Testifiers" embody what it looks like to be an old testament prophet in this new age. Sackcloth can be the apparel of mourning, but can also be a symbol of repentance. Those who hear the testimony should repent, but those who don't repent are going to mourn. The focus is not on the content of their testimony, but rather on the hostile reception in light of their testimony. These prophets could be Moses and Elijah returned, or could be two new prophets whom John is describing like Moses and Elijah. They characterize all of God's people, as lamps are churches and olive trees are Israel. They personify God's people who are both conquered and victorious. The beast mentioned in vs. 7 is a premature arrival, who doesn't REALLY show up in the story until chapter 13. Regardless, the beast implies that the forces opposed to God, also oppose God's prophets and seek to kill and conquer them. Vs 8, "the great city" is symbolically referred to as Sodom and Egypt, both places that opposed God. Their resurrection and assumption into heaven after 3 1/2 days (the time of evil) is their final testimony, that no matter what the world tries to do to them, they still possess the breath of life (the Holy Spirit) in their internal reality. There is hope for the world at the end of this passage, for though they don't explicitly repent, they are "terrified" and give glory to God.

Vs. 14-19, the 6 trumpets unleashed cataclysmic destruction, but the 7th trumpet unleashes a heavenly chorus proclaiming God's sovereignty over all. We're given through this chorus an interlude or reprieve from the woes, the 3rd woe is still to come. God's wrath is viewed as a positive thing by these saints in heaven, for it is meant as a tool for destroying those who have destroyed God's people and destroyed the earth. God destroys the destroyers in equal proportion to their deeds. The arch of the covenant is now visible, this is the holiest artifact of ancient Israel which was kept in the holy of holies and only seen by the priests. It never made it to the 2nd temple, but it's now fully visible in the heavenly temple for all of the saints to view. This is something like when the curtain was torn in two at Jesus' crucifixion, the traditional barriers between God and humans are destroyed.