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June 29th, 2008

7 Trumpets: Revelation 8:6-9:21, 11:14-19

1. Introduction

- a. Who has ever noticed that unrighteous people seem to prosper while the righteous suffer?
 - i. This is dealt with in Job (where the major question is why Job is being afflicted)
 - ii. The Psalmists often beg God to end their suffering and bring down the wicked
 - iii. In everyday life, we see the greedy gain material comforts and the deceitful get what they desire
 1. Insider trading results in financial gain (as long as they don't get caught)
 2. Athletes who cheat break records and gain fame
 - iv. There is an undeniable temptation to think that God is not in control or that he is unjust
- b. Review of last week and place in redemptive history
 - i. Last week Derek showed us how the judgment of the 7 seals describes the church age as a whole and serves as judgment/punishment for the wicked and discipline/trial for growth for God's people
 - ii. It is important for us to understand that the 7 trumpets are not the next sequence of judgments chronologically, but a "recapitulation" of the same judgments we saw before → except in this description, the emphasis is on the judgment of non-believers
 - iii. Notice that this time the judgments are described as in direct response to the prayers of the saints
 1. Rev. 8:4 → *...and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel*
 2. The passage of Scripture we are working with today demonstrates God's activity in judging non-believers in response to these prayers
- c. Proposition
 - i. In this passage, the two primary themes to look for are that God is sovereign (in control) and His judgment is perfect and righteous [and these will ultimately effect the way we as Christians think and live]
 - ii. So then, because God's reign is sovereign and His judgment just, we must depend on Him alone to judge righteously

2. Background of imagery

- a. It is important to note that much of the imagery and symbolism utilized in this passage specifically relates to instances and images in the Old

Testament→we need to understand the OT occurrences before we can understand the significance of the images in Revelation

- i. Plagues in Egypt (Exodus 7-12)
 1. Demonstrations of God's sovereign presence
 2. Demonstrations of God's power over gods of Egypt¹
 3. John likely understands the plagues as foreshadowing of judgment on the ungodly in the church age² (just as the entire exodus account is a pattern of how God works in redemption, the plagues specifically are a pattern of how God judges the ungodly)
 - ii. Trumpets at Jericho (Joshua 6)
 1. In OT, trumpets usually indicate warning to repent, judgment, victory/salvation, enthronement of Israel's king, eschatological judgment/salvation, or the gathering of God's people³
 2. Blowing of 7 trumpets preceded the fall of Jericho
 - a. Here, the blowing of 7 trumpets heralds the judgment of the ungodly
3. Explanation of text
- a. 1st 4 trumpets [Physical judgment on earth and non-believers]
 - i. **Read** Rev. 8:6-12
 - ii. One commentator says of the first 4 trumpets that "God deprives the ungodly of earthly security b/c of their persecution and idolatry in order to indicate their separation from Him"⁴
 1. We have a multi-faceted description of the judgments God pours out on the earth and the ungodly during the church age
 - iii. Notice immediately the pattern of the Egyptian plagues
 1. 1st trumpet patterned from the plague of hail/fire (Ex. 9:22-25)→likely implies famine
 2. 2nd trumpet similar to plague where Nile turns to blood (direct allusion to Ex. 7:20)
 3. 4th trumpet partly based on Ex. 10:21 where God causes darkness to cover the land
 - iv. What about the more confusing images?
 1. V. 8→...*something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea...*
 - a. Jer. 51:63-64 discusses Babylon sinking down to never rise again after a woe is written against her, tied to a stone, and thrown into the sea

¹ Osborne, 339

² Beale, 467

³ Beale, 469

⁴ Beale, 472

- b. Rev. 18:21 refers to Babylon as a stone thrown into sea
 - c. This image refers to God's judgment on a kingdom(s)→the emphasis is that God is sovereign and powerful enough to cast down the ungodly kingdoms of the earth
 - 2. V. 10→...*and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood.*
 - a. Isaiah 14:12-15 describes the judgment of a king as related to the falling of a representative angel→this is likely the imagery John is using here [describing the judgment upon the kingdoms of the earth as the falling of a representative angel]
 - b. Why the name Wormwood?
 - i. This symbol is based on Jer. 9:15 and 23:15 where it is said that God “will feed [Israel]...with wormwood and give them poisoned water to drink.”⁵
 - ii. Wormwood is often symbolic in the Bible of suffering, bitterness, and death⁶
 - 3. V. 12→...*and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.*
 - a. One commentator understands this darkness as a theological metaphor for separation from God and inevitable final destruction (early Jewish literature uses darkness to symbolize this)⁷
 - b. Other commentators believe this refers to a more literal physical darkness⁸
- v. Putting the picture together
- 1. We have a general picture of God's judgment on creation and non-believers during the church age and leading up to the final judgment
 - a. Famine, destruction of kingdoms, judgment on things of the sea (creatures/ships), suffering/bitterness/death, and spiritual separation
 - b. But remember, everything is *limited* (repetition of 1/3)→God is not pouring out His full wrath

⁵ Beale, 479

⁶ Johnson, 145

⁷ Beale, 482

⁸ Osborne and Johnson

- vi. Application: Perhaps we need to check where our confidence lies (in kingdoms and the things of the earth, or in God)
 - 1. Some of us may be going to the Patriotic Celebration today or celebrating the 4th of July this week, but how does this text change the way we think about America?
 - a. We have seen the God has the power to throw down the burning mountain into the sea
 - b. The way we think about our own nation needs to be altered by the fact that America has no privileged position as the “nation of God” and that God may strike her down as He pleases
 - 2. This text shows us that the things of this world *cannot* be where we place our confidence and trust because God stands over all and has power over all → it is wise to hope in the righteous judge rather than that which will receive judgment
- 4. Final 3 trumpets (shift from physical to spiritual judgment)
 - a. 5th trumpet (spiritual oppression of non-believers)
 - i. **Read** Rev. 8:13-9:12
 - ii. Note the allusion to the plague of locusts from Ex. 10 (also Joel 1-2)
 - iii. This is an intense picture of demonic spiritual oppression
 - 1. We know they are demons because they are:
 - a. Released from the pit
 - b. Led by the angel of the bottomless pit
 - 2. They are commanded not to touch agriculture (like normal locusts), but only the non-believers who are not sealed by God
 - a. “Torment” in Greek refers primarily to spiritual and psychological pain⁹
 - iv. The demon-locusts are described as formidable creatures, but note:
 - 1. God is sovereign over their activity
 - a. He has allowed the oppression
 - b. He has placed limits/boundaries on their activity
 - i. 5 months (description of limited nature)
 - ii. Only on non-believers
 - b. 6th trumpet (ensured judgment of non-believers)
 - i. **Read** Rev. 9:13-21
 - ii. The number (twice ten thousand time ten thousand) refers to a multitude
 - iii. The power of the horses is in their mouths and tails which are like serpents → likely means that the demons wound by deception
 - 1. Serpent is symbol of deception
 - 2. Mouth is what is used to spread lies

⁹ Beale, 497

- iv. How are non-believers killed? Fire, smoke, sulfur from their mouths
 - 1. Symbolic of hell, eternal destruction
- v. The overall picture suggests that the demons ensure the ultimate destruction of non-believers by means of deception → they are deceived to the point of death and their judgment is sealed
- vi. The rest remain unrepentant
- c. 7th trumpet (consummated kingdom and consummated judgment)
 - i. **Read** Rev. 11:15-19
 - ii. This is no longer a picture of the church age, but of the consummated heavenly kingdom
 - iii. Voices extol the power of God, and the 24 elders bow down and worship (representative of the entire people of God)
 - iv. The non-believers will receive their final judgment and the people of God will live in the kingdom of God under the reign of God forever and ever
- 5. John assures us of God's sovereignty and righteous judgment, but what does this assurance of God's judgment accomplish in us?
 - a. Romans 12:19 → *Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."*
 - b. In the words of John Piper, the wrath of God does not pave the way for our wrath; the wrath of God paves the way for our mercy
 - i. Because we are promised that God will judge righteously and we have a picture of how He will execute His judgment on the ungodly, *we can be merciful*
 - ii. We need not add anything to God's judgment → it is sufficient
 - iii. Every sin ever committed will be justly punished, either on the cross of Christ or in eternal hell
 - iv. God has taken care of judgment, therefore *we can at all times show mercy*