

Lesson 20

Last week we looked at the opening of the seventh seal in Chapter 8. We saw that inside the seventh seal were seven trumpets, which began to be blown after a half hour of silence in heaven and after an angel scattered fire from the altar onto the earth. We also saw (again) that these judgments against Rome were coming in response to the prayers of the saints.

If we are ever tempted to doubt the tremendous power of the praying church, then we need to study Revelation. The early church had the faith to move mountains, and last week verse 8 showed us that their prayers moved the mountain of Rome right into the sea!

In verses 7-12, the first four trumpets were blown. The fifth trumpet will sound in 9:1, and the sixth trumpet will sound in 9:13. The seventh trumpet won't be sounded until 11:15. Verse 13 of Chapter 8 previews those final three trumpets.

Revelation 8:13

13 And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!

Where the KJV has “angel” in verse 13, most translations have “eagle,” which seems to have better textual support.

Barclay: “Here we have a dramatic and eerie picture of an empty sky and a solitary eagle winging its way across its zenith, forewarning of the doom to come.”

Phillips: “A solitary eagle flying in midheaven, crying out in pity for the inhabitants of the earth, is out of its context bizarre but set as it is it is almost unbearably poignant.”

But the Greek word translated “eagle” can also mean “vulture.” For example, the same Greek word is found in Matthew 24:28, where in the KJV we read, “For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the **eagles** be gathered together,” but in the ESV we read, “Wherever the corpse is, there the **vultures** will gather.”

Why do many translations use “eagle” here in verse 13 but use “vulture” in Matthew 24 for the same Greek word? Because it is not *exactly* the same Greek word — one is singular and the other is plural. Eagles typically fly alone, while vultures typically do not. (By the way, a group of vultures is called a kettle, a committee or a wake.) One rarely hears of a lone vulture, but if a lone vulture is what was intended here then the image in verse 13 moves from being eerie to being **incredibly** eerie! John may have seen a lone flying vulture crying, “Woe! Woe! Woe!”

This imagery may be pointing us back to a prophecy from Hosea directed at Israel.

***Hosea 8:1** — Set the **trumpet** to thy mouth. He shall come as an **eagle** against the house of the Lord, because they have transgressed my covenant, and trespassed against my law.*

Although Rome rather than Israel is the target here, very similar imagery is used to show God’s judgment against those who are opposed to him.

What is the purpose of this lone eagle or this lone vulture? The same purpose as the trumpets — it is providing a warning of what is yet to come. Specifically, this flying bird is warning of the final three trumpets that are about to sound, which are themselves also warnings. **When you are getting a warning about the coming warnings, then you should really know that something terrible is about to happen!** These warnings are layered on top of each other!

Why all of these warnings? We have already talked about one reason — they provide a final opportunity for Rome to repent. Another reason for the trumpets is so that no one can ever say to God, “I did not know.” And that is a message for us as well.

We also have been given many warnings about the judgment to come. With so many people in this world starving for the truth, I shudder to think about those who sit in worship assemblies of the Lord’s church week after week and yet stubbornly refuse to obey the gospel. **How many trumpets have they**

heard? How many warnings have they failed to heed? What will they say to Jesus?

Notice the phrase in verse 13 — “the inhabitants of the earth.” That is the group to whom these warnings are directed. As we have already discussed, that is how the ungodly Romans are pictured in this book — as dwelling on the earth — while the faithful Christians are pictured in this book as dwelling safely in heaven even while still literally present on the earth.

When used in this way, heaven and earth depict **states** rather than **locations**. Isn't that exactly what Paul described?

Colossians 3:1-3 — If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

In that sense, God's people “dwell in heaven” even while still on this earth! Our minds and our hearts are set on things above. Yes, some day we will dwell in heaven **literally**, but for now, we dwell in heaven **spiritually**. That's how Revelation depicts the early church, and that's what the Bible tells us is true of all Christians: “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.”

Chapter 9

Revelation 9:1-2

1 And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. 2 And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

With the fifth trumpet, we see the first of the three woes proclaimed by the eagle or vulture in 8:13. The previous trumpets included terrors from nature, but we now begin to see terrors from **beyond** nature. This trumpet is also the first trumpet that **directly** affects man. The first four trumpets affected man only **indirectly** through his environment.

The star fallen from heaven in verse 1 is described as someone who has been given the key of the bottomless pit. We have already discussed what it means to have a key to something. It means that this fallen star has been given authority over the bottomless pit. Clearly the authority is just a delegated authority because he has been **given** the key.

What does he do with this authority? He opens the bottomless pit, releasing smoke that causes darkness to cover the sun and the sky.

Who is this fallen star? Sometimes in this book, the obvious answer turns out to be the correct answer, and I think that is the case here. Most likely this fallen star is Satan. In Luke 10:18, Jesus said, “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.”

Lenski disagrees, arguing instead that the star is simply the personification of the judgment that is coming from God. But, in my opinion, this fallen star is Satan — who was the power behind Rome.

We see something similar in Isaiah 14. Verse 4 tells us that that chapter is a “proverb against the king of Babylon.” And yet what follows seems to be a description of Satan.

*Isaiah 14:12-15 — How art thou fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down
to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For
thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into
heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God:
I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in
the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights
of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou
shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.*

So who is being described in Isaiah 14 — the king of Babylon or Satan? I think the answer is both. Why? Because Satan was the power behind the throne. God was addressing the king in Babylon in Isaiah 14 by looking past him to who was really pulling Babylon’s strings.

We see something similar in Ezekiel 28, which verse 12 tells us is directed toward the king of Tyre, but that, like Isaiah 14, seems to be describing someone else.

Ezekiel 28:14-15 — *Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.*

Again, I think that Ezekiel 28 is directed at both the king of Tyre and Satan, who was the power behind the throne.

I think we see something similar here in Revelation. Sometimes God will address Rome by looking at the power behind the throne — Satan, who was using Rome against the church. But, of course, this book will show Satan for what he is — a defeated enemy.

The bottomless pit or the abyss is where the demons and the ungodly are consigned.

Isaiah 24:21-22 — *And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth. And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the **pit**, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited.*

Luke 8:30-31 — *And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him. And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the **deep**.*

What do we know about Satan?

First, we know that Satan has been judged and cast out.

John 12:31 — *Now is the judgment of this world: **now** shall the prince of this world be cast out.*

John 16:11 — *Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.*

Second, we know that Satan is called the ruler of this world and the prince of the power of the air.

John 12:31 — Now is the judgment of this world: now shall **the prince of this world** be cast out.

John 14:30 — Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for **the prince of this world** cometh, and hath nothing in me.

John 16:11 — Of judgment, because **the prince of this world** is judged.

Ephesians 2:2 — Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to **the prince of the power of the air**, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.

Third, we are told that Satan has (or, at least, had) the power of death.

Hebrews 2:14 — Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy **him that had the power of death, that is, the devil**.

Fourth, we are told that Satan is actively at work in this world.

1 Peter 5:8 — Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, **walketh about, seeking whom he may devour**.

So what can we conclude from those scriptures? We can conclude that although Satan **has** (past tense) been defeated, Satan still retains some power, and Satan remains active in using that power to pursue objectives that are opposed to God — such as, for example, trying to use the Roman empire to destroy the church while it was still in its infancy during the first century.

Some people leave the book of Revelation with a very misguided view of Satan, so let's make one thing very clear right from the start: **Nothing we read about Satan in Revelation is going to contradict anything we know about Satan from the rest of the Bible.** If the Bible tells us that Satan is **active** (as it does), then this book will not tell us that Satan is **inactive**. If we think it does, then we have made a wrong turn somewhere.

Yes, Satan has some power, but Satan has that power only because God allows it. But, why? **Why does God allow Satan to operate in this world?** Because Satan has a role to play in God's plan to undo the damage that Satan caused in the Garden. And I think another reason Satan is allowed to operate is so that men can more clearly see who is and who is not on God's side.

***1 Corinthians 11:19** — For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.*

And perhaps Satan is allowed to operate so that God's people can be strengthened by overcoming Satan's temptations.

***James 1:12** — Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.*

But do you mean that God has power over Satan? Absolutely! In fact, look at what we see right here in verses 1-2. Satan is given a key, and Satan then uses that key to carry out God's instructions for the fifth trumpet. God is using Satan to carry out His (God's) plans.

Just as God used Babylon in his judgment of Judah, just as God used Assyria in his judgment of Israel, just as God used Babylon in his judgment of Assyria, just as God used Persia in his judgment of Babylon, just as God used Greece in his judgment of Persia, just as God used Rome in his judgment of Greece, and just as God used Rome in his judgment of Jerusalem, God is here using Satan in his judgment of Rome. Satan is a defeated enemy! Satan is doing what God commands! If Satan has any power, it is power granted him by God. **Yes, Satan is active, and yes Satan is a roaring lion, but Satan is a roaring lion on a leash!**

Satan is not omnipotent; he has never had that power, and he certainly does not have that power today after the cross. In fact, we saw in our study of Zechariah that one of the things that would occur in the first century was a diminishment of Satan's powers.

***Zechariah 13:2** — And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets **and the unclean spirit** to pass out of the land.*

Isn't that diminishment what we see here as well? Look at verse 1 here in Chapter 9. It says that Satan "was **given** the key of the bottomless pit." Satan was permitted to open that pit, but he could not have done so absent that permission from God. **Satan does not even have the key to his own house unless God gives it to him!** Satan cannot unleash unclean spirits onto the world — he can open that door only with permission.

Yes, these images are figurative, but I think those figures are teaching us some important lessons about Satan and his forces of darkness that are arrayed against the church.

The world often views God and Satan as equals who are locked in a cosmic battle between good and evil. **That view is completely false.** Satan in his pride may have aspired equality with God, but Satan is a creature; Satan is not the creator. God is as far above Satan as God is above the rest of his creation.

This book of Revelation is not describing a battle between God and Satan in which the outcome somehow remains uncertain. **There are no cliffhangers in this book!** Satan had already been defeated when this book of Revelation opened. Satan and his evil minions were defeated at the cross.

*Colossians 2:14-15 — Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, **triumphing over them** in it [the cross].*

Jesus' death judged the world — not Jesus. Jesus' death defeated Satan — not Jesus. Satan was defeated by an event that he probably, at least for a moment, thought was going to be his greatest triumph. We know that Jesus was not what the Jews expected. **I don't think Jesus was what Satan expected either!** Things are not what they seem!

One of the biggest misconceptions about Satan involves how Satan works in this world today. For example, does Satan supernaturally cause people to act one way or another, as in the old saying "the devil made me do it?" No.

Satan does not supernaturally override the will of the ungodly any more than the Holy Spirit supernaturally overrides the will of the godly. Man has free will — and that goes for both the righteous and the unrighteous. Isn't that what James told us?

James 1:14 — *But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of **his own lust**, and enticed.*

The fish retains free will — bite the worm or don't bite the worm. But once that fish clamps down on the hook, while the free will remains, **the choices do not**. And that is how it is with all temptation, and that is why sin is so dangerous.

So how does Satan operate in the world? One way that Satan operates in the world today is through his children in the world, just as one way that God operates in the world today is through his children in the church. You mean Satan has children? Yes.

Ephesians 2:2 — *Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, **the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.***

John 8:44 — *Ye are of **your father** the devil, and the lusts of **your father** ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*

And that verse from John 8 shows us another way that Satan works today — he keeps people from hearing the truth.

Mark 4:15 — *And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, **and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.***

How does Satan do that? How does Satan take away the word sown in someone's heart? We know how that happens. That happens when Satan creates confusion and presents temptations and distractions to that person that replace the word that was sown in that person's heart. That process is **not** a supernatural operation — it is something we see all around us and that we ourselves struggle against daily.

Why does Satan need supernatural powers when he has a television set and an Internet connection?

Why does Satan need supernatural powers when our Bibles are covered with dust?

Why does Satan need supernatural powers when he has a legion of false teachers who are “handling the word of God deceitfully” and who are twisting the Scriptures “unto their own destruction”? (2 Corinthians 4:2; 2 Peter 3:16). Why does Satan need supernatural powers when he has tinpot dictators in Asia and the Middle East who ban Bibles and evangelism on penalty of death? Why does Satan need supernatural powers when Planned Parenthood performs over 300,000 abortions every year?

Some people read this book of Revelation and conclude that Satan is bound up and no longer active in the world today. They base that false view on a misinterpretation of Revelation 20:2, which we will study later. **But do we really need to wait until we reach Revelation 20 to know that Satan is active in the world?** How can anyone look around today and conclude that Satan is not active? There are not many false doctrines that can be disproved just by watching the evening news, but surely that is one of them! The spirit that was **now working** in the children of disobedience in Ephesians 2:2 is **still working** in the children of disobedience, and we can see evidence of that all around us.

It is true that Satan is not operating today as he did in times past (through demon possession, as we discussed, for example), but it is false to say that Satan is not operating at all today. The evidence of Satan’s operation is all around us, and the Scriptures confirm that Satan is active.

We see one way in which Satan operates today right here in verse 2 of Chapter 9. There we see Satan release smoke that darkens the sun and the sky.

*2 Corinthians 4:3-4 — But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: **In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not**, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*

*Ephesians 4:18 — Having the understanding **darkened**, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the **blindness** of their heart.*

Satan blinds people’s minds to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel. How does Satan do that? By operating directly on that person? No. By operating on the gospel? No. **Satan blinds that person’s mind by placing a blinding**

smoke between that person and the gospel. Our mission is to cut through that smoke!

I think the smoke in verse 2 represents the spiritual and moral blindness that Satan creates in this world. But notice something very important about this blinding smoke in verse 2 — this blinding smoke is a punishment from God!

When we studied Zechariah 12:4, we saw that God sometimes uses blindness and confusion to punish the enemies of his people. I think we are seeing something similar here.

And doesn't the darkness in our own society show us the terrible effect of such a punishment? Moral and spiritual blindness is a disease that destroys the heart of a person or of a nation. But just as the prodigal son was allowed to sink into that pig pen, sometimes God allows an entire nation to sink into a pig pen with the hope that perhaps, having at last struck bottom, they will wake up, come to themselves, and repent.

Romans 1:24–28 — *Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.*

2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 — *And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

What we see in verses 1-2 of Revelation 9 is a vivid picture of moral and spiritual decay. Does that picture fit with what happened to Rome? According to Gibbon one of the four primary reasons behind the eventual collapse of the Roman empire was **inner decadence**.

Here is how Francis Schaeffer described it:

As the Empire ground down, the decadent Romans were given to a thirst for violence and a gratification of the senses... Apathy was the chief mark of the late Empire... As the Roman economy slumped lower and lower, burdened with an aggravated inflation and a costly government, authoritarianism increased to counter the apathy. Since work was no longer done voluntarily, it was brought increasingly under the authority of the state, and freedoms were lost. For example, laws were passed binding small farmers to their land. So, because of the general apathy and its results, and because of oppressive control, few thought the old civilization worth saving. Rome did not fall because of external forces such as the invasion by the barbarians. Rome had no sufficient inward base; the barbarians only completed the breakdown—and Rome gradually became a ruin.

The lowering of moral standards contributed directly to the decline and fall of the Roman empire. Schaeffer says that Rome fell because it did not have a sufficient inner base. Daniel told us the same thing six hundred years earlier when he described the inner weakness of the yet future Roman empire:

***Daniel 2:41-42** — And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken.*

What does this all say to us today? Is the moral base of our country growing stronger or is it weakening?

***Proverbs 14:34** — Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.*

Are we being exalted by righteousness? Or are we suffering under the reproach of sin?

As we study the judgment of Rome, we should pause to notice the growing similarities between Rome and our own country, from the sexual promiscuity to the glorification of violence and greed. Rome began as an instrument for God to use in the proclamation of the gospel, as did our own country. We had a similar beginning in the plan of God. Will we face a similar end? Perhaps our study of warning trumpets is more relevant than we care to think!

Revelation 9:3-4

3 And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. 4 And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.

From out of the bottomless pit comes a terrible invasion of locusts. Here is how Barclay describes it:

The devastation locusts can inflict and the terror they can cause is well-nigh incredible. All through the Old Testament the locust is the symbol of destruction; and the most vivid and terrible description of them and of their destructiveness is in the first two chapters of Joel... Those two chapters of Joel should be read in full and set beside the description in Revelation.

Barclay also tells us some important facts about locusts and locust invasions:

The locusts breed in desert places and invade the cultivated lands for food. They may be about two inches in length, with a wing span of four to five inches... They will travel in a column a hundred feet deep and as much as four miles long. When such a cloud of locusts appears, it is as if there had been an eclipse of the sun and even great buildings less than two hundred feet away cannot be seen. The destruction they cause is beyond belief. When they have left an area, not a blade of grass is to be

seen; the trees are stripped of their bark. Land where the locusts have settled looks as if it had been scorched with a bush fire; not one single living thing is left. When they move, they move inexorably on like an army with leaders. People have dug trenches, lit fires, and even fired cannon in an attempt to stop them but without success; they come on in a steady column which climbs hills, enters houses and leaves scorched earth behind.

But these locusts in Chapter 9 are not ordinary locusts. Ordinary locusts attack **vegetation**, but these locusts are specifically told to attack **men** instead. In fact, in verse 4 they are instructed **not** to attack vegetation, but rather to attack only those men who have not received the seal on their foreheads.

Who are these people without the seal on their foreheads? These are the people who did **not** receive the seal from God in Chapter 7. These are the people who are **not** part of the 144,000. **And who are the 144,000?** They are **ALL** of God's people — that is what the beautiful symbol 144,000 means. So then who are these without the seal and outside the 144,000? They are the people outside the church, and particularly, in this context, the people of Rome who were outside the church. They do **not** have God's protection. They do **not** enjoy the blessings of Revelation 7:13-17. They will **not** come out of the great tribulation. They have **not** washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. They will **not** be sheltered from hunger, thirst, and tears with the Lamb in their midst.

One big problem with those who say that 144,000 are not the entirety of God's people is that they end up with **three groups** of people! They have the 144,000, they have the ungodly, and then they have the godly who are not in the 144,000 (which I suppose would be 144,001 and up!). That doesn't make any sense at all. Revelation is telling us the same thing the rest of the Bible is telling us — ultimately there are **only two groups** of people in the world: those on God's side and those who are not on God's side. Those in the faithful remnant and those not in the faithful remnant. Those in Christ and those out of Christ. Those in the church and those not in the church. **There is no third group!**

But what about all of the **neutral** people? Aren't they a third group? Where are all of the Romans who didn't choose sides?

***Luke 11:23** — He that is not with me is against me:
and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.*

The reason the text here does not describe the neutral people is because there are no neutral people. Everyone is either on God's side or on the side of Satan. Now certainly not everyone is **actively engaged** in the battle, but being less evil than others is not an excuse! If that were an excuse then I suppose only Hitler and Stalin would end up in hell, as I suspect many people believe. **No one is neutral in this war.** There is no church of Switzerland! Either our robes are white in the blood of the Lamb, or they are not — there is no middle ground.

Notice that these locusts are not operating on their own. Verse 3 tells us that they are **given** power, and verse 4 shows them being **commanded** what to do and what not to do. These locusts are fulfilling God's judgments.

But verse 11, which we'll get to shortly, tells us that the angel of the bottomless pit (almost certainly, Satan) is the king of these locusts. **So who is in charge of these locusts — God or Satan?** God is in charge. These locusts are coming out of the pit in response to a trumpet call from heaven. Yes, Satan is involved, but God is using Satan to punish Rome, just as God will one day use Satan to punish everyone who is ungodly. Satan is being used here as God's instrument of punishment and judgment.

So do these verses mean that Satan and his minions can do whatever they want? That is not what we see here. These locusts are not allowed to harm those who were sealed by God. **In fact, verse 5 tells us that Satan and his agents do not have unlimited power even over evil men! They can torment them, but they cannot kill them.** As bad as this situation now is for Rome, it could still be much much worse.

The day may come when Satan is given free reign over evil men, but that day has not yet come — **and is there any better description of hell than the place where God at last turns his back completely on the ungodly and allows Satan free reign to do with them whatsoever Satan wills?** What a horrible thought!