



A not so nice word—or is it?

The word judgement carries negative overtones for a good many people in our liberal and post-liberal world Throughout the Bible God's coming judgement is a good thing, something to be celebrated, longed for, and yearned over. It causes people to shout for joy and the trees of the field to clap their hands. In a world of systematic injustice, bullying, violence, arrogance, and oppression, the thought that there might come a day when the wicked are firmly put in their place and the poor and weak are given their due is the best news there can be. Faced with a world in rebellion, a world full of exploitation and wickedness, a good God must be a God of judgement.¹

This is exactly the point of Revelation 8 & 9. In review, the Apostle John has entered the dramatic throne room scene in chapters 4 & 5. He sees Jesus—the only qualified person to serve as the Father's executor—take the scroll and open its seals. In the opening of the first 6 seals, there are: (1) the dramatic display of evil, (2) the absolute security of God's people, and (3) the final condemnation of God's enemies at the coming of Christ. Then in Revelation 7, there is an intermission where John shows us the saints of God in corporate heavenly worship!

Revelation 8:1 begins with the slitting of the seventh seal; and heaven was absolutely silent for about a half an hour. It's the shortest time amount in Revelation. The idea is that there is this hushed anticipation of what God is going to do next. What follows in Revelation 8 & 9 are 7 trumpets.² John hears the trumpets, which are the kind used in warfare when commands were issued by the generals. One bugle sound meant, "Charge!" Another, "Retreat!" etc.

The prayers of the saints help sound the trumpets of judgment

Can you see that in vv. 2-5? The prayers of the saints (see Revelation 5:8) are symbolized as incense wafting before the throne of God. The prayers of the saints in Jesus' name are stored up until the allotted time, and not one of them is lost. When you pray, "*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,*" God remembers and then acts on it.

¹ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 137.

² Some think that the 7 trumpets follow the 7 seals chronologically. And that the 7 bowls (Revelation 16) follow the 7 trumpets chronologically. I'm not so sure. I agree with my teacher, Grant Osborne, who said that the seals, trumpets, and bowls occur *concurrently*. In other words, they go over the same events from different perspectives (like that movie, "Vantage Point"). With each cycle, though, God's judgement intensifies, like a mother in labor. That's why the fraction one-fourth becomes one-third; and then one-third becomes final and complete.

The first four trumpets

These belong in a group, much like the first four seals in chapter 5. These cataclysmic images of destruction (fiery hail, blood, darkness, bitter water, etc.) should remind you of the plagues in Exodus. John draws from his Hebrew heritage as he receives this other-worldly vision. The point of the plagues was to make crystal clear that God is God and Pharaoh is not. John's readers could also recall recent events in Rome's history (3:8-9 and the eruption of Mt Vesuvius) as they grasp for images in their own culture that help them understand the enormity of what God is doing to punish evildoers. Every plague, every disaster, and every act of evil is a call from God to turn to God! (Luke 13:1-5)

The talking vulture in v. 13, "Woe! Woe! Woe!"

Most translations use the word eagle but the word can also mean, "vulture." Both eagle and vulture are birds of prey but the latter hints more at "impending doom." God is continually trying to get our attention! He is patient; not wanting any to perish but all to receive eternal life. Will we listen or not? The threefold "Woe! Woe! Woe!" is a play on the threefold, "Holy! Holy! Holy!" God's holiness demands that he call people to account. I found it easy to be confused with trumpets and woes; so remember this: The fifth trumpet is the first woe. The sixth trumpet is the second woe. The seventh trumpet is the third woe.

The fifth and sixth trumpets

When the fifth trumpet is sounded, a horrendous, demonic swarm of locusts appears and afflicts evil-doers (not the saints!); notice in vv. 4-5 that "they were told" and "they were given power"—Satan can do nothing without the permission of God. Don't miss the point of these celestial, science-fiction like images: "Demons turn on the very people who follow them and show their utter contempt and incomparable cruelty by torturing their worshipers." (Osborne) You never find in sin what you go in sin to find!

The demonic cavalry from the sixth trumpet is symbolically numbered at 200 million. If you consider that the Roman Empire's entire population at the time of Revelation was approximately 60 million; you can figure out who is going to lose! But not the saints! Yet, did you notice how these demonic hordes only destroy 1/3 of the brutal bullies on earth? What should have been an entire annihilation turns out to be limited because God is in control. God is exercising patience so that people will turn to Him.

Some people just don't get it

The saddest truth is in 9:20-21, "*They still did not repent.*" Addicted to their demons and idols, they refuse the only Source of life. Some people are not the repenting kind. In 50 million years Satan will be no more repentant than he is today. They refuse to follow the One who himself satisfied the judgment of God, the slain Lamb standing!

There was only one, and there will not need to be another, who bore the full weight of the divine judgement upon sin and bore it so as to end it. The lost will eternally suffer in the satisfaction of justice. But they will never satisfy it. Christ satisfied justice.³

³ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 77.