

Revelation Chapters 8 and 9 — The Seven Trumpets and Exodus Imagery

Session 14

Dr. Dave Mathewson

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Keywords

Seven Trumpets, Exodus Imagery, Revelation 8-9, Idolatry, Demonic Locusts, Euphrates River, Roman Empire, Judgment

Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Dave Mathewson examines Revelation chapters 8 and 9, exploring how John utilizes the Exodus motif and Old Testament imagery to interpret God's judgments upon a wicked empire. He demonstrates that the seven trumpet plagues, modeled after the Egyptian plagues, serve as limited, preliminary warnings aimed at exposing the futility and spiritual darkness of Roman idolatry and demonic worship. By analyzing the symbolic depiction of demonic locusts from the abyss and mounted troops from the Euphrates River, Mathewson emphasizes that the very pagan structures and demonic forces people revere ultimately turn on them in torment. Ultimately, the visions serve as a severe call to repentance both for the Roman world and for compromising churches.

Outline

I. Introduction to the Exodus Motif in Revelation 8–9

A. John's Use of Old Testament and Exodus Themes

1. Building on Exodus 19:6 and the overarching Exodus deliverance narrative
2. Influence of Isaiah's "New Exodus" (Isaiah 40–66) where Christ inaugurates redemption from sin, evil, and Roman oppression
3. God pouring out plagues on a godless empire prior to final inheritance in the new creation (Revelation 21–22)

B. Parallel Second Temple Apocalyptic Literature: The Apocalypse of Abraham

1. Chapter 30 enumeration of ten plagues affecting cities, rulers, and the earth
2. Precedent for expanding historical Egyptian plagues into broader universal end-time judgments

C. Theological Purpose of the Trumpet Plagues

1. Primary focus on interpreting the nature and meaning of God's judgment rather than literal mechanics
2. Targeted attack on Roman idolatry, imperial cults, and pagan pantheons, parallel to judgment on Egyptian gods
3. Exposing human idolatry and God's judgment on godless humanity and unrepentant churches

II. The First Four Trumpets: Plagues on Creation and Futility of Idolatry (Revelation 8)

A. First Trumpet: Fire, Hail, and Blood (Rev 8:7)

1. Symbolic nature of hail mixed with fire and blood
2. Resemblance to the seventh Egyptian plague (Exodus 9), expanded to affect the entire earth
3. Meaning of the "one-third" limitation:
 - a. Greater than the one-fourth associated with the seal judgments (Rev 6)
 - b. Represents limited, preliminary judgment functioning as a merciful warning before final judgment
4. Indication of severe ecological, physical, and spiritual famine

B. Second Trumpet: Burning Mountain Cast into the Sea (Rev 8:8–9)

1. Imagery rooted in Jeremiah 51:25 (burning mountain representing an evil destroying kingdom, applied to Rome)
2. One-third of the sea turned to blood, recalling the Exodus Nile plague
3. Destruction of one-third of sea creatures and ships: judgment on Rome's commercial dominance and underlying idolatry

C. Third Trumpet: The Falling Star "Wormwood" (Rev 8:10–11)

1. Great burning star falling from heaven, symbolically representing an angelic/demonic entity
2. Fresh waters turned bitter and poisonous ("Wormwood"), reflecting Exodus 7
3. Judgment on Roman economic sustainability and pagan religious institutions

D. Fourth Trumpet: Darkening of Celestial Bodies (Rev 8:12)

1. One-third of sun, moon, and stars darkened, reflecting ninth Egyptian plague of darkness (Exodus 10)
2. Symbolic depiction of spiritual darkness and complete futility of pagan idolatry (G.K. Beale)
3. Functions as a harbinger and warning of ultimate darkness and eternal separation from God (Rev 19–20)

E. Collective Significance of the First Four Trumpets

1. Systematic progression across creation: land, waters, and hebe cosmic heavens
2. Demonstrates the total vanity of relying on earthly resources and pagan systems
3. Urgent call to repentance for both Rome and compromising Christian congregations (Rev 2–3)

III. The Three Woes and the Fifth Trumpet: Demonic Locusts from the Abyss (Revelation 9:1–12)

A. Introduction to the Three Woes (Rev 8:13)

1. Eagle announcement introducing the final three trumpets (Woes 1, 2, and 3)
2. Woes drawn from Old Testament prophetic literature signaling horrific impending divine wrath
3. Structural shift: expanded narrative length and detail for trumpets 5 and 6 in chapter 9

B. Opening of the Abyss (Rev 9:1–3)

1. Fallen star (angelic being) holding the key to unlock the shaft of the abyss

2. The abyss as the prison and domain of evil, demonic, and satanic entities in apocalyptic literature

3. Smoke rising like a furnace, blotting out the sun and sky

C. Description and Activity of the Locusts (Rev 9:4–10)

1. Old Testament antecedents: Exodus 10 and Joel 1–2 (military locust invasion motif)

2. Unique features: do not harm vegetation, but torment unsealed humanity for five months (typical locust lifespan / limited duration)

3. Bizarre hybrid imagery: war horses, golden crowns, human faces, women's hair, lion teeth, iron breastplates, scorpion tails

4. Rejection of modern military interpretations (e.g., attack helicopters or nuclear warfare):

a. First-century readers could not have conceived modern military technology

b. Apocalyptic symbolism uses larger-than-life imagery to evoke spiritual reality and existential awe

D. Identity and Spiritual Reality of the Locusts

1. Symbolic representation of demonic onslaught and torment

2. Ruler of the abyss: Abaddon (Hebrew) / Apollyon (Greek) meaning "Destroyer"

3. Irony of idolatry: demonic forces behind pagan idols turn upon and torment their own worshipers

IV. The Sixth Trumpet: The Mounted Troops from the Euphrates (Revelation 9:13–21)

A. Heavenly Announcement from the Golden Altar (Rev 9:13–15)

1. Anonymous voice from the horns of the golden altar in heaven

2. Command to release four angels bound at the river Euphrates to execute judgment

B. The Four Angels and the Euphrates River Symbolism

1. Connection to the four angels holding back four winds of judgment in Revelation 7

2. Euphrates River in Old Testament prophecy (customary direction for invading northern armies)

3. Greco-Roman historical context: eastern frontier of Roman Empire and fear of Parthian cavalry invasions

C. The 200 Million Mounted Troops (Rev 9:16–19)

1. Fiery breastplates, lion-headed horses breathing fire, smoke, and sulfur

2. Serpent-like tails inflicting harm; symbolic depiction of overwhelming supernatural/demonic judgment

D. The Hardened Response of Idolatrous Humanity (Rev 9:20–21)

1. Survivors refuse to repent of worshiping demons and lifeless idols (gold, silver, bronze, stone, wood)

2. Persistent practice of murders, sorceries/magical arts, sexual immorality, and thefts

3. Highlights the tragic hardness of human hearts even under severe preliminary divine warnings

V. Conclusion and Theological Implications

A. Judgment as New Exodus and Call to Repentance

1. Preliminary trumpet plagues precede final judgment, displaying God's mercy and warning before destruction
2. Idolatry inevitably results in spiritual deception, demonic oppression, and ultimate futility

B. Pastoral Application to the Church

1. Urgent exhortation for Christian congregations to resist compromise with Roman idolatry and secular culture
2. Reassurance of God's absolute sovereignty over evil, demonic powers, and worldly empires