

REPENT OR PERISH

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Revelation 9:13-11:14 describes the second of three woes that accompanies the blowing of the sixth trumpet as part of the opening of the seventh seal of the book (the third and final woe goes with the sounding of the seventh trumpet immediately thereafter). The third woe begins with the loosing of four angels and an enormous army that is to go forth and kill a third of humanity. The response of the survivors of this woe is very instructive, and reminds us of the necessity of repentance.

The judgment of God

In Revelation 9:13-14, “the sixth angel sounded” and John “*heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates.*” Once again, we have judgment coming from God and the Lord is in full control of everything. The four angels bound in the Euphrates River were then released in verse fifteen, and they were “*prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men.*” From the description of their wickedness in verses 20-21, it is clear that this judgment is again reserved strictly for the wicked. A third of them would be killed. It is doubtful that the time of the angels’ preparation and the number of wicked killed should be taken literally. It does demonstrate that God’s judgment is extensively planned and then precisely executed.

Four angels and 200 million horsemen

The four angels of the Euphrates River then brought an enormous and powerful army that killed one third of men. Verse 16 says, “*And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand,*” which is 200 million. It is far too large to be a literal army, but the number illustrates an irresistible force. Further emphasizing that point, the men on the horses are described as “*having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone*” (Rev 9:17). The effect of their power is revealed in verses 18-19. “*By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt.*” Undeniably, figurative language is being employed here to describe this vast army. But what does it represent? Some brethren suggest that this refers to an invasion of Roman territory by the Parthians from the East, beyond the Euphrates River, but,

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(continued)

again, we cannot be sure that a specific event is implied by these verses. And it is actually beside the point. The key point is found in the next two verses, and it is about repentance!

Repent or else

In Luke 13:3 (and also verse 5), Jesus Christ said, *“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”* Repentance is a requirement to even become a Christian, as Acts 2:38 says, *“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.”* But Christians who fall into sin must also repent. Simon is an example of this, who was commanded by the Apostle Peter in Acts 8:22: *“Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.”* Five of the seven churches of Asia were commanded in Revelation chapters two and three literally to *“repent or else.”* The unleashing of the second woe in Revelation nine also unmistakably teaches that man must repent of his wickedness or else face God’s wrath.

Revelation 9:20-21 says, *“And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.”* The plagues of the two woes in this chapter did not destroy all men, because they were designed to bring about the repentance of the wicked (which proves that this is not the final judgment of the wicked at the end of the world). God used Babylon as a “furnace of affliction” to bring the wicked of Israel to repentance (Isa 48:10; Jer 24:5-7; Ezek 6:8-10; 12:15-16). God uses many methods of punishment to try to bring the erring to repentance (Amos 4:6-11). But those who refuse to repent, the Lord warns, *“Prepare to meet thy God”* (Amos 4:12). The same situation is found in Revelation chapter nine. Those who survived the plagues refused to repent of their evil works. They did not repent of worshiping devils and idols, and they did not repent of their murders, sorceries, fornication or thefts (Rev 9:20-21). Their ultimate and eternal punishment was now in store for them. This chapter shows God’s protection and deliverance of His faithful servants, but firmly warns the wicked to repent or else face the consequences. As Acts 17:30 says, *“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.”*