

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

REVELATION 8-9

Herman Melville's famous novel, "Moby Dick" is the story of Captain Ahab's self-destructive obsession to hunt down the white sperm whale that bit off his leg.

Captain Ahab's unbridled lust for vengeance is countered by his first mate's desire to return safely home, to his young wife and child. His mate is a man called, "Starbuck" - *the coffee company's namesake*.

But there's a line in the novel that applies to our text... Starbuck is speaking to the ship's crew, when he says, "I will have no man in my boat who is not afraid of a whale..." According to Starbuck *some fear of the peril at hand* is healthy when encountering danger.

Giant sperm whales are lethal. And without *a proper fear*, a sailor won't be as vigilant as he needs to be in light of the risks involved in harpooning a killer whale.

In essence, this is what I hear Pastor John saying to the churches in these chapters. This Revelation was written to cultivate a healthy respect in the Lord Jesus.

As Proverbs states, "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord." Jesus is not a person with which to trifle. Moby Dick was the king of the sea; but the Bible calls Jesus "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." He is king of the jungle!... And in the words of Starbuck, "Everyone in his boat needs to have a healthy fear of that Lion."

Chapter 8, “When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.”

Up until now, the Revelation has described Heaven as a very loud and noisy place. People are falling down before God’s throne. They worship the Lamb. About the time one voice starts to fade another praise erupts.

But now a holy hush falls over the halls of Heaven.

For half-an-hour it’s so quiet you can hear a pin drop. It’s as if Heaven gasps over what’s about to happen...

Verse 2, “And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.”

Remember the structure of the judgments John sees in the Revelation... Seven seals are popped... Seven trumpets are blown... Seven bowls are poured out...

Later in 10:4, we’re also told Seven thunders rumble, yet John isn’t allowed to reveal their identity...

Here though, the seventh seal becomes the seven trumpets. Revelation 8 describes a second round of Divine retribution. The final seal sets off seven trumpet blasts. Like fireworks, *with a blast within a blast*, the seventh seal sounds out six more clusters of judgment.

“Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.

And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to

the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake.”

This heavenly angel is acting like a Jewish priest. In fact, what John refers to as an *“angel”* - *which in the Greek language is really just another word for “messenger”* - could actually be the Lord Jesus.

We know from Hebrews that Jesus is the Great High Priest who serves before God in the heavenly temple.

This angel grabs the bowl full of *our* prayers. These are prayers we’ve prayed for truth, and justice, and righteousness, and fairness - *prayers that were launched in response to the hardships and heartaches of your life - prayers prayed from our own desperation.* Prayers that right now you think are going unheeded.

Friends, this is a very personal passage! Think of the many prayers you’ve poured out to God - your deepest, heartfelt feelings - born of your life’s travails.

This angel has your prayers in a bowl. He mixes them with the fire of God’s wrath, and in that bowl, they turn to judgments. Like popcorn kernels in the hot oil of a frying pan, they start to pop and hop from the pan.

They fall to the Earth as thunder claps, and lightning strikes, and earthquakes - as divine judgments. **The censer will be emptied out to censure the wicked.** It's God's answer to our cry for a more righteous world!

Did you hear about Uncle Sid? After returning from the Korean War he was arrested on a burglary charge and was

found guilty. But before the judge passed sentence, Sid's lawyer tried one more tactic. *He said...*

"Your honor, my client did not break into the house. The living room window was open, so he inserted his right arm, and removed a few items. Now my client's arm is not my client, so I don't think you should punish him for an offense committed by one of his limbs."

The snooty judge replied, "Well, that's an interesting argument. Tell you what I'll do. I'll follow your logic and sentence the defendant's arm to one year in prison. He can accompany the arm or not. That's up to him."

That's when a big grin came over Sid's face. He calmly removed his artificial arm, handed it to the dumbfounded judge, and walked out of the courtroom with his lawyer. *The men laughed all the way home.*

There're a lot of folks like Sid who've learned how to beat the system. They always seem to avoid judgment.

They sin with impunity. Punishment always gets avoided... *But that'll end when these trumpets blow.*

God will see to it justice is served once and for all!

In verse 6 the angels warm-up, "So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound." The angels clear their throats. They take a deep breath... The reeds are put to their lips...

Verse 7, "The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was

burned up.” Is this an asteroid? Is it a nuclear bomb? *Did Iran make good on its threats?*

Did some terrorist get its hands on a loose nuke?

Some kind of firestorm is responsible for a third of the Earth’s trees and vegetation burning to a crisp. It’s estimated the detonation of just 25 thermonuclear warheads could scorch an area the size of mid-America - from the Appalachians to the Rockies.

A nuclear explosion compresses the humidity, shoots it into the upper atmosphere, where it freezes and falls back to Earth as ice. Thus the “*hail and fire*” of verse 7.

“Then the second angel sounded: And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood.

And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.” With each of these trumpets, judgment intensifies. These are global events that will rock our planet off its foundations - *and they’re prophetic*. God has written them into our future.

Here, the mountain thrown at the earth pollutes “a third of the sea” - which would amount to all the world’s oceans, with the exception of the Pacific and Indian.

In verse 8 John describes “a great mountain burning” tossed into the sea. *Is this an incoming meteorite?*

We talked about this briefly last week, but NASA is currently tracking as many as 4000 NEOs, or what’s called “near Earth objects,” streaking through space.

Almost monthly we hear of another potential strike.

Recently, I saw a National Geographic Special which referred to these projectiles in terms John and the Revelation uses, “mountains tumbling through space.”

According to the European Space Agency, of the 600,000 asteroids orbiting through our solar system, about 20,000 are considered NEOs, or “near earth.”

In recent years, the most significant of these NEOs exploded in the skies over a city in northern Russia. The meteorite bust-up occurred in February, 2013. The cosmic projectile was the size of a six story building.

Its blast equaled a nuclear detonation. The shock wave shattered glass and injured 1200 people. It would've been far more damaging had it hit the ground.

Donald Yeomans, an astronomer at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, has made this statement, “Space is filled with objects that threaten Earth... Earth runs its course about the sun in a swarm of asteroids. Sooner or later, our planet will be struck by one of them.” For now, it's as if God keeps firing warning shots across our bow to encourage us to repent.

In verse 10 another trumpet blasts, “Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven...”

Here again, the Greek word translated “star” is “astera” or “asteroid.” It refers to any heavenly body...

It plummets, “burning 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...” which means “bitterness.” “A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter.”

Whatever this star is, it has a devastating effect. It contaminates a third of the world's fresh water supply.

A third of vegetation scorched... A third of the oceans ruined... Now a third of the fresh water contaminated...

“Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night.”

If a giant comet or meteorite impacted Earth it could tip our planet further on its axis - and somehow alter our orbit; thus, reducing exposure to the sun by a third.

There is another way to think of these catastrophes...

At times the Bible uses **the language of observation**. It describes a phenomenon as it appears to the viewer.

We do this too, we speak of **a sunrise or a sunset**. The phenomenon is actually caused by a rotating Earth, but it appears to us as if the sun is rising and setting.

Here it could be that some obstruction - **a thick cloud perhaps** - blocks out our view of a third of the sky.

Verse 13, **“And I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!”** In short, the angel is warning the inhabitants of Earth, **“You ain’t seen nothing yet!”** Three more shrill trumpets remain...

What a contrast, in Heaven the angels sing, “Holy, Holy, Holy” - while on Earth they say, “*woe, woe, woe.*”

On August 20, last week, the high temperature in the city of Resolute, Canada was 35 degrees F. The low in Resolute dipped to 31 - a degree below freezing.

Whereas, on that same day the high temperature in Phoenix, Arizona reached 111 degrees - *in the shade, no less.* The low temperature in Phoenix was 89.

I'd said there was quite a contrast weather-wise between Phoenix and Resolute two Thursdays ago.

But that's nothing compared to the contrast that'll exist between Heaven and Earth in the final seven years prior to the return of Jesus to planet Earth. The atmosphere in heaven is dominated by warm praises and a sunny future - whereas, on Earth the storm and cold of God's fury rages. *That's when the fifth angel picks up his trumpet and blasts another judgment...*

Chapter 9, “Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth.” In Revelation 8 we saw “stars” or “celestial bodies” - meteorites and asteroids - fall to Earth. This is a different kind of star.

For notice the next line... “To him was given the key to the bottomless pit.” This “star” is a “him” not an “it.” This is not a “falling projectile,” but a “fallen person.”

And from what he holds, and by what he does, “he” seems to be an angel... We know from Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 that before Satan sinned he was an angel.

Jesus told His disciples in Luke 10, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” We also know that Satan led a third of the angels into rebellion. It seems the fallen angel here is a demon - perhaps Satan himself.

“And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit.” This “fallen star” lifts the lid on hell and a flume of hot smoke, laced with fiery embers, billows up.

Apparently, in Hell you don’t get a choice. There isn’t a “non-smoking section.” It’s “smoking” for everybody.

And this angel has the key to “the bottomless pit.”

This is the place of eternal torment that Jesus spoke of in Luke 16, in His story of Lazarus and the rich man.

Lazarus died and was comforted in paradise. The rich man died and went to the place of flame and thirst.

Here, the demon unlocks the pit of torment... “where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” And it’s like opening up a Pandora’s box full of evil...

Verse 3, “Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads...” That is, the 144,000 Jewish witnesses (or Hebrew Billy Grahams) we saw last week back in Revelation 7...

Here John sees “*locusts*” swarming onto the Earth.

The photo I’ve put up is of East Africa this year. 2020 has seen the worst locust swarms in generations.

But the locusts in Chapter 9 are not your run-of-the-mill locust. They have traits that distinguish them...

First, normal locust eat their veggies. They’ll strip a field bare. Yet these lay off greens, and feed on men.

Second, these locusts aren’t stifled by smoke. Whereas, you normally contain a locust swarm by fire.

Third, these locusts are intelligent and spiritually aware. They are aware of who God has sealed.

Fourth, unlike a typical locust, these bugs have stingers in their tails. These are very lethal locusts.

And **Fifth**, according to Proverbs 30:27, “The locusts have no king, yet they all advance in ranks...” Yet read ahead, verse 11, and these locusts clearly have a King.

These locusts will *bug* the entire human race!

Verse 5 speaks of these creatures, “And they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months. Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man.” Some Bible teachers believe these locusts are the demons who sinned in Noah’s day. We spoke of their sin in the book of Jude.

Genesis suggests they polluted the human gene pool by having sex with the daughters of men. Their perversion was so rampant God had to wipe out all of humanity, and start over with the family of Noah.

Jude referred to these demons as “the angels who did not keep their proper domain...” They crossed forbidden boundaries. These were hard-core felons.

And God had to lock them up in maximum security. 2 Peter 2:4-5 tell us, “God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment...”

Yet here as the fifth trumpet blows God unleashes these demons for five months - *not to kill but “torment.”*

It’s more than ironic that the floodwaters in Noah’s day covered the Earth for five months. This plague of locust lasts the same duration. In these five months, men learn what they should’ve learned after the flood. **That rebellion against God yields painful results.**

Here a pack of perverted demons driven by lust are let loose to do what they did prior to the flood. They’ve now been in lock-down for 4000 years, as their hatred for God and man has been brewing and seething. Now they’re released on the earth to ravage and torture.

Imagine, releasing every death row inmate in the world - the vilest of criminals - *men with no conscience, men with nothing to lose, men looking to take out their anger on any and everyone...* Yet they’d still look like a pack of Boy Scouts compared to this devilish gang.

This is why it’s naive to talk glibly about living through and enduring the Great Tribulation. This will be an unimaginably horrific time in human history.

People will go to bed at night in fear.

So what if you go into survivalist mode... you hoard food, and stockpile weapons, and install a security system - ***how do you protect against demons?***

It reminds me of the guy who jumped into a cab.

After a while, he tapped the driver on the shoulder to give him directions. But as soon as the driver felt his hand he lost control - the cabby swerved off the road.

The passenger apologized. But the driver explained, "Sorry, this is my first day on the job. For the last twenty years, I've been driving a hearse for a funeral home." It'll also be unnerving and frightening when hellish goons tap mankind on its collective shoulder.

Verse 6, "In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them." These demons will see to it that life is worse than death. Attempted suicides will sky-rocket.

People will want to die, but *death takes a holiday!*

Folks will blow their brains out, yet refuse to die.

They'll walk around like Zombies - with self-inflicted wounds. The Zombie Apocalypse will become a reality.

John gives us a physical description of these awful locust-like demons in verse 7... "The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of

chariots with many horses running into battle. They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power was to hurt men five months.”

The Renaissance concept of gargoyles and centaurs aren't far off from John's description of these hellish creatures. These demons are predators dressed for combat. Their purpose is to hurt men for five months.

And let me ask you a serious question... ever say to another person... “Go to Hell...” or “To Hell with that guy...” *After Chapter 9 you'll want to take it back...*

Hell, and it's belching smoke, and its locust torturers are nothing trivial. God's judgment is serious business.

Of course, you might not have been so profane. You may've just prayed, “Lord, give him what he deserves.” *But with each trumpet blast, you should think again...*

Even the hardest prosecutors - the tough-on-crime bunch - seldom have the stomach for judgments this stern. *We like to talk about justice*, but when we see what justice looks like for billions of brazen sinners who shake their fist in God's face, we might have pity!

For me, *after reading of what comes out of hell, and how the torturers of hell will treat mankind* - I for one, am not so quick to rush the world to judgment.

If a little mercy now allows a few more folks to avoid this terrible wrath, then my cries for justice can wait!

Verse 11, again takes us to Hell... “And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in

Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon."

Both names mean **"The Destroyer."**

And this is how Jesus refers to Satan in John 10:10.

The Lord calls the devil a thief, who seeks **"to steal, and to kill, and to destroy..."** It's Jesus who comes that we **"may have life, and... have it more abundantly."**

Verse 12, **"One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things. Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."**

The Euphrates River once ran through the Garden of Eden and fed water to the city of Babylon. Yet at the mouth of this river, there's a holding cell. **Under the waters, in a spiritual realm, demons are kept bound.**

*And could there be similar holding cells under other bodies of water in a different place on Earth? Remember, Jesus spoke of **"the gates of hell"** - He used the plural!*

Does hell have multiple gates, or passage-ways, or entrance portals? **Strange disappearances and unexplainable storms crop up in the Caribbean's Bermuda Triangle, and in the South Pacific's Devil's or Dragon's Sea. Could the mysterious activity associated with these geographical areas be explained by what we find here in Chapter 9? It's interesting speculation.**

Certainly, these angels are demon inmates. They're the baddest of the bad, *and they're very, very angry...*

“So the four angels (fallen angels or demons), who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind.”

The pale horse in Revelation 6:8 killed a fourth of the Earth's population. Now a third of what's left is killed.

God's judgments are thinning out the rebels...

In verse 16 these four angels take control of a vast army. “Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.”

Wow, 200 million troops is quite an army!

Some Bible teachers look for modern-day parallels and believe this army to be the Chinese - or some other yet unidentified alliance - *but that's not the point.*

To me, we're being told... In the midst of all the destruction and judgment, the whole world will be in the mood to fight. They'll *resist* rather than *repent*. Heaven is all about worship, while the Earth is all about war.

Verse 17, “And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone.” Of course, there are people who believe these horse-like locust sare more than demons. Their description here and back in verses 9-10, *could actually be a first century author's description of 21st century weapons and war.*

A horse-like locust with a metallic breastplate and fire flaming from its mouth and wings like the sound of chariots charging into battle - could be an F16 fighter jet or an Apache

helicopter. This could actually be a description of demons *in control of a modern army.*

Today we worry about terrorists getting their hands on a nuclear bomb, but what about demons in control of sophisticated weaponry and millions of trained soldiers.

Verse 18 gives another death count. “By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed - by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm.”

When a military plane emits a chemical or biological weapon it releases the spray from the tail to avoid harming the pilots in the cockpit.

Whatever John sees does harm from both ends!

You'd think by verse 20 earth's survivors would be on their knees - broken, repentant - pleading with God for mercy - *but that's not what happens...* “But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk.

And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.”

This is the trouble with sin. It blinds you to your own stubbornness. The antidote is in front of your face, but you're too proud to take it. Even after all this judgment haughty men stiffen their neck and resist God's rule.

Which brings us back to the words of Starbuck, “I will have no man in my boat who is not afraid of a whale...”

In other words, a healthy fear can be your salvation.

The Moby Dick story didn't end so well for Captain Ahab. He fearlessly and recklessly pursued his bitter enemy, until the killer whale drug him to the bottom of the sea. In the end, it was the Captain's stubborn pride, and lust for revenge, that insured his drowning.

And I wonder what vice or stubborn obsession in your life will guarantee your demise *if you don't repent?*

This will one day be the downfall of the earth's inhabitants. Despite the Lamb's warnings and judgments, rebellious men will refuse to repent.

They'll worship at the altar of idols, and pursue their sinful lusts, and in doing so ensure their downfall by refusing to respect the God who is greater than them.

The Revelation of Jesus is in a sense about fear - *a godly, healthy fear - a respect for an authority greater than our own wisdom and whims.* This book is a reminder to always bow our knee to the King of kings.

The Revelation is all about the Lion that became a Lamb, and the Lamb that has always been a Lion.

Revelation inspires *love for that Lamb*, but also *fear of that Lion*. May you and I go forward with both!