

INTRODUCTION to REVELATION chapter 9

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1 THE THEME

GOD'S CONTINUAL WARNING TO REPENT THROUGH THE SEVEN TRUMPETS OF JUDGEMENT - continued

2 THE STRUCTURE

a. [See the Structure of Revelation chapter 8](#)

b. [Section 3 closes with the final judgement](#)

Chapter 9 only contains the fifth and sixth trumpet judgements. The seventh trumpet judgement depicts the final judgement day (11:15-19) and closes section 3 of the book of Revelation (chapters 8 to 11).

3 THE CONTENTS

a. [The last three trumpet judgements](#)

The seven trumpet judgements have a certain order.

The first four trumpet judgements (chapter 8) affected nature and *indirectly people*.

The last three trumpet judgements (chapter 9,11) affect *people directly*.

The fifth trumpet judgement affects only the people who do not have the seal of God in their *spiritual* being (9:4).

The sixth trumpet judgement dumps all humanity *body and spirit* into war (9:15). The resulting destruction, terror and misery become indescribable.

The seventh trumpet judgement brings the final judgement to all humanity: to reward all the servants and saints of God and to destroy all the destroyers of the earth (11:18-19; 10:7).

These last three trumpets are called 'woes' (8:13; 9:12; 11:14), because woes are terrible pains that affect people before the promised future is born (11:15; cf. Matthew 25:34).

b. [Wars: a comparison between the fourth seal and the sixth trumpet](#)

The fourth seal (6:7-8) represents wars, famines, plagues and wild beasts, which all non-Christians and Christians alike suffer throughout the period from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming. These wars will break out again and again in world history. These wars are one of Christ's *means to prepare people's hearts for receiving the gospel* (the first seal). Under the fourth seal 'wars' are one of the trials which Christians suffer together with the rest of the world.

The sixth trumpet (9:13-19) also represents wars. But these wars are God's *means of judgement on the wickedness, godlessness and impenitence* of people in world history (9:20-21). Under the sixth trumpet 'wars' are a *punishment and a serious warning* for non-Christians. The sixth trumpet also depicts how wars will rage especially towards the last days before the end of world history that comes with the seventh trumpet (10:7; 11:15). In the book of Revelation, there is progress in revelation of God's principles concerning divine, human and demonic activity.

c. The message of Revelation chapter 9

The message of this chapter is that God's warning judgments in the history of the world will strike people directly. Demons will strike people directly in their soul (spirit) and wars will strike them in their lives. Christians must be prepared to face *spiritual warfare against demons* and *physical warfare between nations*.

4 THE BACKGROUND

a. The locusts and scorpions

The locusts.

Locusts breed in the desert. They invade cultivated areas in search of food. They may travel in a column thirty meters deep and up to six and a half kilometres long, leaving a land stripped bare of all vegetation. In Italy the swarms of locusts were so bad that a law was passed that war should be made on them three times a year by crushing the eggs, then the grubs and finally the fully grown insects. Every man that did not participate in the destruction of locusts was punished as a deserter¹.

The sound of the wings of locusts.

The locusts fly with such a noise of wings that they are believed to be birds. And they obscure the sun, making the nations gaze upward in anxiety lest they should settle over all their lands².

Stings like scorpions.

Pliny also describes the use of many superstitions and magical practices to bring about healing³, one being that snake bites and scorpion stings are relieved by intercourse⁴.

The locust plague is a symbol of destruction throughout the Old Testament.

b. The locust plague in Joel⁵

The writer, recipients and date of the book of Joel.

Note. Some Bible translations of Joel have a different division of chapters and verses.

Joel is the second of the twelve Minor Prophets. The name 'Joel' means *the LORD is God*. Joel was most probably a citizen of the southern kingdom of Judah. He worked in what was formerly the southern kingdom of Judah, but because he called Judah *Israel* (Joel 3:1-2) he directed his prophecies against all the tribes of Israel. The majority of scholars think he prophesied after the exile, between 500-400 B.C.

The main elements of the end-time (eschatological) expectation of Israel.

Shortly before, during and after the exile the main elements of the end-time expectation of Israel were:

- The day of the Lord (Joel 1:15; 2:1; 3:14)
- The return from exile (Joel 2:32; 3:1-2)
- The restoration of the city and land (Joel 3:1)
- The outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-29)
- The genuine salvation of the survivors (remnant)(Joel 2:32)
- The judgement of the nations (Joel 3:2,12)
- The great changes in nature (Joel 2:30-31; 3:15-16)
- And finally the new heaven and new earth described in terms of the glorious fruitfulness of the land (Joel 3:18), the eternal inhabitation of the New Jerusalem and new Israel (Joel 3:20) and the Lord dwelling in Zion forever (Joel 3:17).

The book of Joel is therefore regarded as the forerunner of the Jewish end-time apocalyptic literature of the last centuries before Christ.

¹ Pliny. Natural History xi-xxxv, 105

² Pliny. Natural History xi-xxv, 104

³ Pliny, Natural History xxviii

⁴ Pliny, Natural History xxviii-x, 44

⁵ J. Ridderbos, De Kleine Profeten, Joël

The main messages of the book of Joel are the following:

The locust plague points to the day of the Lord and motivates people to repentance.

Chapter 1 describes a plague of locusts that had already come over the land. Chapter 2 describes the plague of locusts as a threat to the city of Jerusalem, which was happening or about to happen and which eventually coincides with the day of the Lord. Thus, while the plague of locusts was a real plague, *the description took on end-time (eschatological) elements* in Joel 2:10-11 and became a warning concerning the day of the Lord (Joel 1:15; 2:1). The prophet Joel threatens Israel with the day of the Lord, because he wants to shake them awake.

Repentance will result in the termination of the plague.

Joel 2:18-27 is not a historical description, but a prophetic message. The prophet Joel predicts what would happen if Israel repented. The prophesied termination of the plague was intended to motivate Israel even more to repent. God would be zealous for the land and take pity on his people if Israel repented (Joel 2:18).

The day of the Lord begins with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Joel motivates Israel to repent by prophesying the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord would begin with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. According to Acts 2:1-33, this was literally fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. From then onwards, the gospel of salvation was preached and is still preached. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will certainly be saved (Joel 2:32; Romans 10:12-13).

The day of the Lord ends with the final judgement.

Joel motivates Israel to repent by prophesying the final judgement. Only in Jerusalem and only for those who called on the name of the Lord there would be salvation, because all the nations would be destroyed in God's final judgement.

The Old Testament prophecies about Israel and the nations in the light of the New Testament teachings.

Because Old Testament prophecy did not know God's *mystery or plan concerning the Gentiles* (Ephesians 3:2-6), the prophets could only describe the future glory of God's kingdom as happening *in and through Israel* and its institutions. The Old Testament prophets described the following:

- the coming Messiah in terms of his coming for the nation of Israel
- the future salvation in terms of the restoration of the nation of Israel (Joel 3:1,20)
- the future kingdom of God in terms of Israel, Zion or Jerusalem
- the future worship of God in terms of the Old Testament temple and its ceremonies
- the future judgement in terms of the judgement of the Gentile nations (Joel 3:2,12,14)
- and the future new earth in terms of the renewed land of Israel (Joel 3:17-18)

The Old Testament revelation was therefore limited by the national character of the nation of Israel, which regarded Israel as 'the people of God' and the other nations as 'not the people of God'. The other nations were regarded as enemies, because they promoted idolatry and tried to destroy Israel (Deuteronomy 7:1-6; 18:9-12). The prophet Joel prophesied that Israel would be restored, but the nations would be judged in the valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:2,12,14). In the light of the New Testament revelation, the Old Testament 'nations' are *a type* of the New Testament 'evil world' as described in John 15:18-25. And the Old Testament 'Israel' is *a type* of the New Testament 'people of God' who are gathered from every nation in the world, as taught in Revelation 5:9. The word 'church'⁶ or 'assembly' or 'congregation' is used of the Old Testament Israel in Judges 20:2, Psalm 22:22 and 2 Chronicles 28:29. And the same word 'church' is used of the New Testament Church in Matthew 16:18.

The Old Testament prophecies about the day of the Lord in the light of the New Testament teachings.

Old Testament prophecy saw all the end-time events together as one great event on 'the day of the Lord' or 'the last days' or 'the end of the ages', as the prophet Joel clearly shows. They saw the restoration of Israel as immediately connected to the day of the Lord. God stands above created time on earth (2 Peter 3:8). Therefore what happens in human history over a period of many centuries is like one day, the day of the Lord, in divine biblical history.

⁶ εκκλησια

New Testament prophecy views the whole New Testament period as 'the last days' or 'the end of the ages'. 'The day of the Lord' or 'the last days' or 'the end of the ages' began with the first coming of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:26) and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:17) and will end with the second coming of Jesus Christ, the resurrection (John 6:39-40), the final judgement (John 12:48) and the renewal of everything (2 Peter 3:10-12). Thus, the whole New Testament period is the last days! And we are now living in the last days!

All the centuries of human history must be viewed from the point of view of God's judgements and salvation. Or as Joel said, the locust plague is a present judgement of God and warns that the final judgement of God is at hand!