

# GOD'S MERCIFUL JUDGMENT

## Lesson 5

### Revelation 8:6–9:21 & 11:15–19



#### WELCOME

Have you ever experienced something hard or unpleasant that ultimately led you to something better? Describe your experience.

#### INTRODUCTION

The seven trumpets, which will be studied in this lesson, were revealed in the seventh seal (**Revelation 8:1–5**). Over the centuries, the distress and suffering in this broken world has caused God's people to cry out for justice. Thankfully, heaven heard those cries. When Jesus opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. A great incense burner whose smoke was mixed with the prayers of God's people was brought before the throne of God. God's response to their prayers was about to come in the form of the seven trumpets announcing His merciful judgment.

#### Tips for meaningful engagement with the Word:

- Remember the purpose of Revelation is not to lay out a chronological timeline. The vision of the trumpet judgments shows how God's merciful judgments play out, not necessarily when they will play out.
- There are many unusual images in these trumpet judgments. "When studying the seal, trumpet and bowl judgments, it's hard to avoid the interpretive question: Should we understand these judgments in a literal or symbolic fashion? John uses predominately figurative or picture language to communicate realities that have been (or will be) fulfilled in real ways in human history. The book of Revelation's main concern is not to satisfy our curiosity or to provide clues for solving an [end times] puzzle but to purify our hearts and deepen our devotion to the Lord of lords and King of kings."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Duvall, 140

- After the 6th trumpet there is an interlude in the text before the 7th trumpet is revealed, similar to the interlude during the breaking of the seals (**Revelation 7:1–17**). That interlude (**Revelation 10:1–11:14**) will be discussed in lesson 6.
- For this lesson, the seven trumpets are broken down into three sections. This is so we can look at each trumpet in a deeper way and interact with them. The verse numbers have been removed from the Scripture passages and footnotes have been inserted. These footnotes are intended to help clarify the passage and provide better understanding.



## WORD

*As you come to the Word, pause and ask God to make it come alive for you. Ask Him to make it understandable and transformational.*



### Revelation 8:6–12

*Then the seven angels with the seven trumpets<sup>2</sup> prepared to blow their mighty blasts. The first angel blew his trumpet, and hail and fire mixed with blood were thrown down on the earth.<sup>3</sup> One-third<sup>4</sup> of the earth was set on fire, one-third of the trees were burned, and all the green grass was burned.*

*Then the second angel blew his trumpet, and a great mountain of fire was thrown into the sea. One-third of the water in the sea became blood, one-third of all things living in the sea died, and one-third of all the*

<sup>2</sup> Trumpets are used throughout Scripture to signify different important events. In the Old Testament they were often used “to signal an attack or retreat in war, to sound an alarm, to announce a victory or good news, to enthrone a king [or] to celebrate sacred days.” (Duvall, 132) In the New Testament they were used most often in conjunction with the second coming of Christ. (Duvall, 132)

In this text, “the trumpet blasts have three purposes:

- 1) to warn that judgment is certain,
- 2) to call the forces of good and evil to battle, and
- 3) to announce the return of the King, the Messiah.” (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2183)

<sup>3</sup> Just as the angel threw down the incense burner to earth (**Revelation 8:3–5**), this “throwing down” symbolizes the judgment of God being released on earth as an answer to the prayers of believers who cried out for justice. (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2183)

<sup>4</sup> Throughout the seven trumpet judgments, the fraction one-third is used (**Revelation 8:7–12; 9:18**). This fraction signifies that the judgments recorded are not complete, only partial. (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2183) “The intensity has increased from the ‘one-fourth’ of the seal judgments, but has not progressed to the fullness of the bowl judgments, where no fractions are used.” (Duvall, 133)

*ships on the sea were destroyed.*

*Then the third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from the sky, burning like a torch. It fell on one-third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star was Bitterness.<sup>5</sup> It made one-third of the water bitter, and many people died from drinking the bitter water.*

*Then the fourth angel blew his trumpet, and one-third of the sun was struck, and one-third of the moon, and one-third of the stars, and they became dark. And one-third of the day was dark, and also one-third of the night.<sup>6</sup>*

1. What is your first reaction to these judgments?

2. God is perfectly holy and cannot tolerate sin. Yet, He graciously holds back judgment and provides a way to be reconciled with Him in perfect peace.<sup>7</sup> The use of the fraction in these verses shows mercy; God's judgment is not total yet. The trumpets are God's warning to the world that total judgment will eventually come.<sup>8</sup> Have you ever thought about God's judgment as an act of mercy? If so, in what way?

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<sup>5</sup> This star was named Bitterness; other translations call it Wormwood. Wormwood was a shrub or bush that produced a bitter oil. (Duvall, 135)

<sup>6</sup> "In the first four trumpet judgments [there are] clear parallels with the plagues of Egypt [**Exodus 8–11**], and this Exodus typology clearly demonstrates three realities. First, through the plague judgments God is demonstrating that he is Lord over creation and human history and will reign victoriously over every competing god or idol. Second, God responds to the cries of his people by punishing wickedness, but he does so in a manner that allows for unbelievers to repent [as he does in **Revelation 9:20–21**]. Third, the plague judgments also serve as a prelude to God's deliverance of his people." (Duvall, 135)

<sup>7</sup> **Ephesians 2:3–6; 2 Peter 3:9**

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, 194

3. Ultimately, judgment is good news. “For judgment says God cares. Judgment says we and our choices matter to God. Judgment says God takes evil and sin seriously. Judgment says God is not indifferent to, nor tolerant of, evil and sin. Judgment says that God moves against evil and sin.”<sup>9</sup>

How might this perspective affect the way you view God’s judgment?



**Revelation 8:13–9:21**

*Then I looked, and I heard a single eagle crying loudly as it flew through the air, “Terror, terror, terror to all who belong to this world because of what will happen when the last three angels blow their trumpets.”<sup>10</sup>*

*Then the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen to earth from the sky,<sup>11</sup> and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit.<sup>12</sup> When he opened it, smoke poured out as though from a huge furnace, and the sunlight and air turned dark from the smoke.*

*Then locusts<sup>13</sup> came from the smoke and descended on the earth, and they were given power to sting like scorpions. They were told not to harm the grass or plants or trees, but only the people who did not have*

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 193

<sup>10</sup> “Habakkuk used the image of an eagle to symbolize swiftness and destruction (see **Habakkuk 1:8**). While both believers and unbelievers experience the terrors described in **Revelation 8:7–12**, those ‘who belong to this world’ are the unbelievers who will meet spiritual harm through the next three trumpet judgements. God has guaranteed believers protection from spiritual harm (**Revelation 7:2–3**).” (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2183)

<sup>11</sup> The meaning of the star that fell from the sky is often debated. Some see it as an angelic messenger (Duvall, 139); some see it as Satan or a demon (Barton, 99; Fee, 129; Johnson, 197) and some see it as Christ. (Barton, 99) Regardless of who it references, the star was under God’s authority. (Barton, 99)

<sup>12</sup> This is also known as the “abyss.” It is the place where Revelation says the demon locusts (**9:1–2**), Apollyon, the king of locusts (**9:11**), the beast (**11:7; 17:8**), demons (**Luke 8:31**) and Satan (**20:1, 3**) reside. (Duvall, 139)

<sup>13</sup> The locusts may remind the reader of the locust plague in Exodus 10 and also the words of the prophet Joel when he foreshadowed the “day of the Lord” or God’s coming judgment using a locust plague in **Joel 1:6–2:11**. Every time, locusts brought destruction, usually to vegetation. Here they are told to not harm the vegetation, but they are allowed to harm the people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. Most likely these locusts were demons, ruled by Satan. (Barton, 100-101)

*the seal of God on their foreheads.<sup>14</sup> They were told not to kill them but to torture them for five months with pain like the pain of a scorpion sting.<sup>15</sup> In those days people will seek death but will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them!*

*The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. They had what looked like gold crowns on their heads, and their faces looked like human faces. They had hair like women's hair and teeth like the teeth of a lion. They wore armor made of iron, and their wings roared like an army of chariots rushing into battle.<sup>16</sup> They had tails that stung like scorpions, and for five months they had the power to torment people. Their king is the angel from the bottomless pit; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon—the Destroyer.<sup>17</sup>*

*The first terror is past, but look, two more terrors are coming!*

*Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice speaking from the four horns of the gold altar that stands in the presence of God. And the voice said to the sixth angel who held the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great Euphrates River." Then the four angels who had been prepared for this hour and day and month and year were turned loose to kill one-third of all the people on earth. I heard the size of their army, which was 200 million mounted troops.<sup>18</sup>*

*And in my vision, I saw the horses and the riders sitting on them.*

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<sup>14</sup> The seal of God on the foreheads of believers will be discussed further in Lesson 9 in the next study guide. This locust judgment was for those who did not belong to God. (Fee, 130)

<sup>15</sup> Like the use of the fraction, one-third, the five months represent a limited time period. (Duvall 140)

<sup>16</sup> "That they had human faces probably indicated that these were not mere insects but were intelligent beings [likely demons]. Their teeth, like the teeth of a lion, is also a description found in Joel's prophecy (**Joel 1:6**). These locusts had armor made of iron, making them invincible. No one would be able to fight them. Their wings had the roaring sound of an army of chariots rushing into battle. This was the most fearsome sound of warfare in the ancient world. No one could stand against chariots." (Barton, 102) The importance of these details is that they would have brought fear to those who heard them. (Duvall, 141)

<sup>17</sup> This is likely one of Satan's chief commanders, but may be Satan himself. (Duvall, 141; Barton, 103)

<sup>18</sup> "The word 'angels' here means fallen angels or demons (**Jude 1:6**). These four unidentified demons would be exceedingly evil and destructive. But note that they did not have the power to release themselves and do their evil work on earth. Instead, they were held back by God and would be released at a specific time, doing only what God allowed them to do. The four 'angels' seem to be in command of a huge horde of demonic horseman ... and were unbound and released to kill a third of mankind. Again, this affects only those who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. (**9:4, 20**)" (Barton, 104)

*The riders wore armor that was fiery red and dark blue and yellow. The horses had heads like lions, and fire and smoke and burning sulfur billowed from their mouths. One-third of all the people on earth were killed by these three plagues—by the fire and smoke and burning sulfur that came from the mouths of the horses. Their power was in their mouths and in their tails. For their tails had heads like snakes, with the power to injure people.<sup>19</sup>*

*But the people who did not die in these plagues still refused to repent of their evil deeds and turn to God. They continued to worship demons and idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood—idols that can neither see nor hear nor walk! And they did not repent of their murders or their witchcraft or their sexual immorality or their thefts.<sup>20</sup>*

4. Which of the judgments in these trumpets surprises or shocks you the most and why?

5. The trumpets are a warning—a call to repentance.<sup>21</sup> However, from **Revelation 9:20–21** it's clear that the judgments did not bring people to the repentance God wanted. "The trumpets show the wicked world being offered mercy. The offer is not accepted, and the world will not in fact repent (**9:20–21**); but let it never be said that God has not done all in his power, even to the devastation of his own perfect earth, in order to bring men and women to their senses."<sup>22</sup> How have you experienced God's merciful judgment, both in Scripture and in your own life, drawing you to repentance?

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<sup>19</sup> "The entire picture in this vision is horrifying. ... The main point to remember is that God released these demonic hordes to kill their own followers. This should warn those who refuse to repent." (Barton, 106)

<sup>20</sup> "God's judgments are not handed out arbitrarily or frivolously but are poured out on those who stubbornly refuse to repent. ... The message of the sixth trumpet also affirms the depths and deadliness of human sin. In spite of repeated invitations to repent and find life, sinful humanity remains hostile to God and his people. God's judgments are just." (Duvall, 147)

<sup>21</sup> Johnson, 199

<sup>22</sup> Wilcock, 53



## **Revelation 11:15–19**

*Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet,<sup>23</sup> and there were loud voices shouting in heaven: “The world has now become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.”*

*The twenty-four elders sitting on their thrones before God fell with their faces to the ground and worshiped him. And they said, “We give thanks to you, Lord God, the Almighty, the one who is and who always was, for now you have assumed your great power and have begun to reign.*

*The nations were filled with wrath, but now the time of your wrath has come.<sup>24</sup>*

*It is time to judge the dead and reward your servants the prophets, as well as your holy people, and all who fear your name, from the least to the greatest.*

*It is time to destroy all who have caused destruction on the earth.”<sup>25</sup>*

*Then, in heaven, the Temple of God was opened and the Ark of his covenant could be seen inside the Temple. Lightning flashed, thunder crashed and roared, and there was an earthquake and a terrible hailstorm.<sup>26</sup>*

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<sup>23</sup> The seventh trumpet wasn't revealed until one and a half chapters after the sixth trumpet judgment. The contents of **Revelation 10:1–11:14** will be discussed in lesson 6.

<sup>24</sup> “The nations of the world were angry, but Christ's wrath would subdue them; he would destroy those who destroy the earth.” (Barton, 131) This wording is very similar to wording found in Psalm 2.

<sup>25</sup> “God's wrath refers to his deliberate and intentional response to sin and evil based on his holy and righteous character. But judgment is not altogether negative, since it will include the rewarding of God's people.” (Duvall, 165)

<sup>26</sup> The Ark of the Covenant symbolized God's presence with His people. That John saw the ark also assured the readers of God's presence and protection in their coming trials. The flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm all indicate God's presence. These same indicators of God's presence were seen at the opening of the seventh seal (**8:5**). They will occur again at the pouring out of the seventh bowl (**16:18–21**). (Barton, 134)

6. Our God is the same yesterday, today and forever. Because all human beings are broken and sinful, we deserve God’s judgment. Yet, God has always provided a way for us to be rescued from that judgment. Note what you see about God’s character (both His judgment and His mercy) in the following Scriptures.

a. **Daniel 9:9–14**

*But the LORD our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him. We have not obeyed the LORD our God, for we have not followed the instructions he gave us through his servants the prophets. All Israel has disobeyed your instruction and turned away, refusing to listen to your voice. “So now the solemn curses and judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured down on us because of our sin. You have kept your word and done to us and our rulers exactly as you warned. Never has there been such a disaster as happened in Jerusalem. Every curse written against us in the Law of Moses has come true. Yet we have refused to seek mercy from the LORD our God by turning from our sins and recognizing his truth. Therefore, the Lord has brought upon us the disaster he prepared. The LORD our God was right to do all of these things, for we did not obey him.*

Your observations:

b. **Jonah 3:3–10**

*This time Jonah obeyed the LORD’s command and went to Nineveh, a city so large that it took three days to see it all. On the day Jonah entered the city, he shouted to the crowds: “Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!” The people of Nineveh believed God’s message, and from the greatest to the least, they declared a fast and put on burlap to show their sorrow.*

*When the king of Nineveh heard what Jonah was saying, he stepped down from his throne and took off his royal robes. He dressed himself in burlap and sat on a heap of ashes. Then the king and his nobles sent this decree throughout the city:*

*“No one, not even the animals from your herds and flocks, may eat or drink anything at all. People and animals alike must wear*



*garments of mourning, and everyone must pray earnestly to God. They must turn from their evil ways and stop all their violence. Who can tell? Perhaps even yet God will change his mind and hold back his fierce anger from destroying us.”*

*When God saw what they had done and how they had put a stop to their evil ways, he changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened.*

Your observations:

**c. Ephesians 2:2–6**

*You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else.*

*But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus.*

Your observations:

7. God is victorious over rebellion and sin and believers are safe in His eternal kingdom.<sup>27</sup> What comes to your mind and heart as you think about God being in ultimate control and protecting you and all who are His?

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<sup>27</sup> **John 10:28; Ephesians 1:12–14**



## **WORSHIP**

***Take a moment to enter into a time of worship—both on your own and with your community—to show praise, adoration and love for God.***

Talking and sharing about God’s mercy is a way to enter into worship.

Using a white board, Post-it notes or a piece of paper, write down several ways God has shown you mercy.

Share what you wrote with those around you, either in your group or with trusted friends and family. Take a few minutes to thank God together.



## WITNESS

*Believers are called to reflect Christ in the world. This section will help you engage with how to be a witness—reflecting Christ—this week.*

We share God’s mercy because His ultimate judgment is coming, and He doesn’t want anyone to experience that judgment.<sup>28</sup> When we tell stories of God’s goodness to us, thereby sharing His mercy, it opens the door to enter into spiritual conversations. This week, how and with whom can you share a story of God’s mercy in your life?

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<sup>28</sup> **2 Peter 3:9**

