

Lesson 22

Last week when we ended we were looking at the final two verses of Chapter 9. The trumpets and the seals that we have seen so far have all been partial judgments — most just affecting a third of what they touch. Why partial? So that the Romans would have an opportunity to repent of their wickedness and turn to God. In 2 Peter 3:9, God tells us that he does not want anyone to perish — and that includes the Roman persecutors of his church.

Did they repent? Or did they instead harden their hearts as Pharaoh did in response to the plagues of Egypt? We know from other New Testament books that a few Romans repented, but it seems to have been a very few. Most remained hardened in their sin and refused to repent. That is what verses 20-21 tell us.

What were the sins of the Romans? That question is where we left off last week.

First, verse 20 tells us that they worshipped devils.

Did Rome really worship devils? Absolutely they did. Last week we saw how Nero and Domitian were, through their association with Apollo, shown as rulers, not of Rome, but of the underworld. The suggestion there is clear — when the Romans worshipped Caesar, they were at least in that sense worshipping devils.

But there is a very interesting way in which Rome may have been **literally** worshipping devils. How?

Did you ever wonder where Greek mythology came from? What was the origin of all of those false Greek gods? There is a fascinating book called *The Parthenon Code* that suggests the Greek gods were based on a false view of the historical characters in the Bible. While the Bible presents the true history of mankind before the flood, this book argues that some men after the flood told a different story about the same historical figures but from a reversed perspective, and that this different story became the Greek mythology that we know today. A fascinating book, which if true, offers a remarkable historical confirmation of the truthfulness of the Bible.

But what does that book have to say about Rome **literally** worshipping devils? According to the theory in that book, the Greek goddess Athena arose from a

false view of Eve. When you see an image or a statue of Athena, she is very often shown with a snake or an owl. Owls then, as today, denoted wisdom. Athena may have arisen as a corrupted view of Eve, who obtained the knowledge of good and evil after listening to a snake. So when the Romans and the Greeks bowed down before Athena and her snake, they were literally worshipping Satan! It is an interesting theory, and it could be one explanation for why the worship of devils and the worship of idols are listed separately in verse 20.

Verse 20 is not unique in that description. The worship of false idols is often linked with the worship of demons in the Bible.

Deuteronomy 32:17 — *They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not.*

1 Corinthians 10:20 — *But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.*

And that leads us to the second sin listed in verse 20 — they worshipped false idols.

There is a paradox when it comes to idol worship. On one hand, idols are lifeless things made “of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood.” They “neither can see, nor hear, nor walk.” This description of idols occurs frequently in the Bible.

Psalms 115:4-7 — *Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat.*

And one of the funniest descriptions is found in Isaiah:

Isaiah 44:15-17 — *Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself; yea, he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea, he maketh a god, and worshippeth it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto. He burneth part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eateth flesh; he roasteth roast,*

and is satisfied: yea, he warmeth himself, and saith, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: And the residue thereof he maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me; for thou art my god.

So, on the one hand, idols are powerless.

But on the other hand, the Bible tells us that behind those lifeless idols are cosmic forces of terrifying power. Idols have the power to shipwreck our faith and place a blinding smoke between man and God. And that is the paradox — how can something so powerless be so powerful and so harmful?

We see the answer to that question in verse 20 — yes, the idols are powerless pieces of wood or metal, but the power behind those idols is anything but powerless. There is a roaring lion behind those idols that is trying to devour us!

But idolatry is just a problem of the past, right? We don't have to worry about idolatry today, right? Christians today aren't tempted to fall down and worship a false idol of Caesar while that very Caesar is trying to kill and torture them, right? Wrong.

I think a good case could be made that idolatry is more of a problem today than it has ever been in the past. The world is full of idols: money, possessions, power, popularity, pleasure, sex, success, fame, drugs, and we could go on and on. All of these things threaten to replace God in our lives, all of these things can be tools of Satan, and all of these things have tortured and killed those who pursue them and worship them.

What must our attitude be when it comes to such things? What must our attitude be with regard to idolatry. Let's let John tell us, but not from the book of Revelation. Let's listen to how John closed his first epistle.

1 John 5:21 — Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

And listen to Paul.

1 Corinthians 10:14 — Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.

The love of John and Paul for God's people is so clear in those two verses — "little children" and "dearly beloved." The inspired writers knew the terrible danger of idolatry. **Do we?**

If we don't think idolatry is a problem for us today, then we have done half of Satan's work for him. Idolatry was a problem in the first century — and it remains a problem in the twenty-first century.

Before we move to the next sin on the list, let's look at one final point about the two first sins on the list — worships of devils and worship of idols. We could also add one of the sins we will get to in a moment from verse 21 — sorceries. Were these sins committed by the **Jews**? Are these sins we associate with the Jews? The answer, of course, is no. In fact, riots and insurrections were the result when the Romans attempted to place idols in or near the Jewish temple. What does this mean? It means that this list of sins in verses 20-21 is a big problem for those who believe the focus of this book is Jerusalem rather than Rome. This book is describing Rome!

Third, the Romans were murderers.

We know from history that Rome was a culture of death. In fact, Tertullian records that he attended a play in which he saw a person (almost certainly a slave) being burned to death in the role of Hercules as part of the entertainment. We know about the terrible atrocities that occurred in the Roman Colosseum.

The Romans were certainly guilty of murdering Christians — we have already seen the martyrs beneath the altar in heaven. History tells us that Peter and Paul were murdered by order of the Emperor Nero. Rome had a lust for blood, and God will soon remind Rome of something God told his own people long before.

Numbers 35:33 — So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it.

Rome had a thirst for blood? Yes, and very soon in this book Rome will have more blood than it can handle. In Revelation 14:20, we will see enough blood pouring out of a winepress to create a river of blood two hundred miles long that comes up to a horse's bridle! Here's the message for Rome: be careful what you ask for!

Fourth, the Romans were sorcerers.

The word translated "sorceries" occurs only here and in Galatians 5:20, where it is translated "witchcraft" in the KJV. The Greek word used here is pharmakon, from which we get the word pharmacy. The word indicates the use of

drugs and incantations during an appeal to occult powers. Such magical practices were frequently linked to idolatry. In 18:23, this book will tell us that magic was one way in which Rome deceived the nations. In 22:15, we will see sorcerers in the list of those who are outside the beautiful city of God.

Sorcery was a major issue for early Christianity, and particularly in the Roman provinces to which the seven letters of Chapters 2-3 were directed. We recall what happened in Ephesus:

Acts 19:19 — Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

Is magic still a problem today? Sadly, it is alive and well. Horoscopes, superstition, nature worship, witchcraft, new age beliefs — those practices are all around us. Some of the modern day witchcraft may even seem innocent — but nothing connected with demons is innocent.

Fifth, the Romans were fornicators.

What is fornication? Let's listen as Jesus answers that question.

Matthew 19:4-6 — Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

So what is fornication? **IT IS EVERYTHING ELSE!** Jesus defined fornication by telling us what it is not. Just because the adults are consenting does not mean that God is consenting!

I have heard people say that Jesus never condemned homosexuality, to which I say NONSENSE! And I point them to Matthew 19 where Jesus condemned everything that is not a part of God's plan for his creation — and that certainly includes homosexuality. (Not to mention the many verses elsewhere in the Bible condemning homosexuality that, while not printed in red ink, are just as much the words of Christ as those verses that do appear in red ink!)

I don't think the problem that men have with fornication is an inability to define it! We know exactly what it is. And we know its consequences:

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 — *Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: **neither fornicators**, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.*

And our attitude? What must a Christian do when it comes to the sin of fornication? Two words:

1 Corinthians 6:18 — *Flee fornication.*

Or more than two words, if you prefer:

1 Thessalonians 4:3 — *For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.*

“Oh, but...” Stop. Stop right there. Whatever excuse or hypothetical we might raise is answered by the two words we just read: **Flee fornication**. The will of God is that we abstain from fornication.

Rome was steeped in fornication, as is our modern world today. But that must never be true of a Christian.

Ephesians 5:3 — *But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints.*

Fornication must not even once be named among us. That’s how far away we must stay from it.

Sixth, the Romans were thieves.

Money ruled the ancient world, just as it does the modern world, and the love of money was the same root of all evil then as it is today. We have already talked about idolators. In Ephesians 5:5, the Bible tells us that covetous man is an idolator. Money is his god.

The love of money leads to covetousness and theft. But worse, the Rome’s theft was often directed at Christians. We read about the economic persecution of the church in Chapters 2-3. Also, some Christians had their homes plundered.

Hebrews 10:34 — *For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully **the spoiling of your goods**,*

knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

Much of the persecution experienced in the Roman provinces came from those who sought to rid themselves of business competition by informing on Christians to the authorities. That made the informers guilty of theft along with their other crimes.

One last comment about this list of sins — notice that we have interpreted this list **literally** rather than figuratively. These sins — idolatry, theft, murder, sorcery, fornication — serve to explain and justify some of the vivid symbols we have seen, but the sins themselves are not symbolic; they are actual sins. This list is a rare example in this book where symbols are not being used. We will see examples later when an angel acts as a divine commentator to explain something John has seen — and, of course, we will take those divine explanations literally.

And the early church? Did any of these sins affect them?

Sadly, we know from Chapter 2-3 that at least several of these sins had infected the church. Notice the similarity between verses 20-21 of Chapter 9 and verses 20-21 of Chapter 2.

***Revelation 2:20-21** — Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.*

Idolatry was a major focus of the seven letters. The Nicolaitan cult, for example, involved participation in idolatry (2:14-15).

The pathway to victory for the church was to remain faithful unto death, but sadly some in the church were falling away. Why? **Because rather than seeking to change the world, they were being changed by the world.** That is the constant struggle for every child of God. How do we prevail in that struggle?

***Romans 12:2** — And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

That verse gives us the pathway to victory in Christ! That verse tells us how to remain faithful unto death! That verse presents the two paths — one path in which we are **conformed** to the **world**, and another path in which we are **transformed** by the **word**. There is not a third path.

So where are we at the end of Chapter 9?

The question at this point is how will this unrelenting, powerful enemy ever be stopped? These judgments had an effect on Rome that was similar to the effect the plagues had on Pharaoh, who hardened his heart and increased his persecutions of God's people. Even 200 million horsemen it seems are not enough to derail Rome. When will Rome be stopped?

God's people need assurance and comfort, and the interlude that follows next will provide that for them.

Chapter 10

Between the opening of the **sixth and seventh seals**, John was shown two visions that were intended to give comfort and assurance to the suffering Christians. First, John was shown the sealing of the saints **prior to** the judgment of Rome, and, second, he was shown the rejoicing of the victorious saints **following** the judgment of Rome. The church was going to be protected, and the church was going to be victorious. Not physical protection and not a physical victory — but spiritual protection and a spiritual victory. The sort of victory that comes from remaining faithful unto death.

Now between the sounding of the **sixth and seventh trumpets**, there is once again an interlude that is intended to provide comfort and assurance to the suffering Christians. This interlude starts in 10:1 and continues through 11:14. The seventh trumpet will then sound in 11:15.

Why do we see all of these interludes? What is their purpose? Their purpose can be summarized in three words — three words that were often spoken by Jesus while on earth, and that we are hearing from Jesus in this book as well: **Be not afraid!** How often Jesus said that!

*Matthew 14:27 — But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; **be not afraid.***

*Matthew 17:7 — And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and **be not afraid.***

Matthew 28:10 — *Then said Jesus unto them, **Be not afraid:** go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.*

John 14:27 — *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, **neither let it be afraid.***

That is the message of these interludes as well. God is telling his children, “Be not afraid!” Terrible things are in store for Rome, but wonderful things are in store for you! What we see in these interludes is a message of comfort from the God of all comfort.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 — *Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and **the God of all comfort;** Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*

One thing these interludes tell us is something that seems to have been overlooked by many of the modern day prophets of doom — **the book of Revelation was not intended to frighten Christians!** It was intended to do the exact opposite — the book of Revelation was intended to **comfort** Christians. Remember Jesus’ message to the church in Thyatira in Revelation 2:24 — “I will put upon you none other burden.” These poor Christians were suffering enough — this book was not written to add to their suffering!

Does the book of Revelation scare us? Does it frighten us? It shouldn’t. Yes, if we look at some of the countless modern sensationalistic commentaries or popular books or films about the book of Revelation, we might think we should be scared by this book. But that is not what the book of Revelation itself is telling us. This book is telling us, “Be not afraid!”

That’s what the book is telling us. What is the book telling Rome? Just the opposite — be very afraid!

Revelation 10:1-3

1 And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rain-

bow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire: 2 And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth, 3 And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices.

Who is the mighty angel from heaven in verse 1?

Some say that this mighty angel is Jesus. Of course, we know that Jesus is not an angel as that term is generally used. Angels are created beings, while Jesus is not created but is rather the creator all things (Colossians 1:16-17). “He is before all things, and by him all things consist.”

That fact about Jesus is a theme of this entire book. The choice between Caesar and Christ is a choice between the creature and the Creator! The Romans were among those who “worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator” (Romans 1:25). Only God is worthy of our worship. That is a central theme of this book.

So if that is a central theme of this book, and if angels are created, then why do some say that this angel in verse 1 is Jesus? Because the word “angel” has another broader meaning — it can just mean a messenger. We see that broader meaning in the word “*evangelism*,” which means good news or good message. While Jesus is not a created angel from heaven, Jesus is a messenger from heaven.

We saw this broader usage of the word “angel” frequently in our study of Zechariah. In that book we concluded that numerous references to the Angel of the Lord were in fact references to Jesus, God the Son, the messenger sent by God the Father. Zechariah 3 was just one of the many examples we studied.

Zechariah 3:3-4** — Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and **stood before the angel**. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, **I have caused thine iniq-

uity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.

But is that who we see here in Revelation 10:1? Is this Jesus? I think the answer is no. This angel in verse 1 is not the angel of the Lord we saw in Zechariah; this angel is not Jesus. Instead, I think this angel is an actual angel in the narrow sense.

Why? The primary reason is the fourth word in verse 1 — “**another**.” Yes, this angel is mighty; yes, this angel is clothed with a cloud; yes, this angel has rainbow on his head; yes, this angel has a face like the sun; and yes, this angel has feet as pillars of fire. But this angel is “another” angel — and “another” is not a word that could ever be applied to the only begotten Son of God! This angel is not Christ; this angel is just another angel (although certainly a very impressive one!).

The **uniqueness** of Christ is something we see throughout this book. We saw that in Revelation 5.

Revelation 5:4-5 — And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

We will see that uniqueness in Revelation 19.

Revelation 19:12 — His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

Christ is unique. The Roman emperors? They were a dime a dozen! In fact, between 235 and 284, a period of forty-nine years, the Roman Empire had twenty different emperors! In the single year AD 69, just a decade or so before the book was written, Rome had four different emperors. Not so with the eternal kingdom — we have one king and only one king, and we will never have another king until the day the kingdom is delivered up to God the Father and God is all in all (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). The eternal kingdom is nothing like Rome, and that fact is something that the **Roman** Catholic church should pause to consider. They are undeniably modeled, not after the church of New Testament, but after the old Roman empire!

Back to the angel in verses 1-2. What do these descriptions tell us about this particular angel? They tell us that this mighty angel represents great authority and great power and that this mighty angel has been sent on a mission of unusual importance. How do we know that? Eight reasons.

First, this angel is come down from heaven. Angels act as messengers for God, and this angel has come from the very presence of God to relay a message.

Second, this angel is clothed with a cloud. Of the twenty-five times the word “cloud” occurs in the New Testament, in all but three it is used in relation to deity or a divine appearance, often in judgment. This angel is clothed with a divine mission.

Third, this angel has a rainbow upon his head. Only here and in Revelation 4:3 does the word “rainbow” (Greek *iris*) occur in the Bible. The word “bow” occurs in the Old Testament in Genesis 9 with the establishment of the covenant following the flood, and in Ezekiel 1:28 when the prophet saw the throne of God. The rainbow recalls both events and further confirms that this angel is on a divine mission of special importance.

Fourth, this angel has a face like the sun. This reminds us of Exodus 34:29-30 in which we read that the face of Moses shone after meeting with God on Mount Sinai. Again, we see that this angel has come from the very presence of God to relay a message from God.

Fifth, this angel has feet like pillars of fire. This image recalls the pillar of fire that protected and guided God’s people in the wilderness during their exodus from Egypt. This speaks to the content of the angel’s message — that message will speak of protection for God’s people and judgment of God’s enemies.

Sixth, this angel is carrying a book. Verse 2 tells us two important things about this book — it is small and it is open. That it is **small** most likely indicates that it contains only one aspect of God’s plan, and that it is **open** means that John can read it and understand it and that what it contains has already been put into action. This book is not sealed. It is open!

Seventh, this angel has one foot on the land and one foot on the sea. That this angel stands on both sea and land indicates that he represents one who has total authority and great power. Yet again, we see that this angel has a very special mission from God of unusual importance, and that this message has behind it the full authority and power of God.

Eighth, this angel cries out with a loud voice like that of a lion, causing seven thunders to utter their voices as well. When God warned the wicked in Jere-

miah 25:30, he did so with a great roar. When God called his children in Hosea 11:10, he did so with the roar of a lion. In Joel 3:16, God roared so that the heavens and the earth shook. This angel wants everyone's attention! He has a message from God! That message must be heard and heeded by everyone.

What is this important message from God? We will find out soon, but first we need to ask another question: **What are the seven thunders in verse 3?**

Thunder and earthquakes often accompany God's judgments. Thunder was heard during the plague of hail in Egypt (Exodus 9:23), and thunder accompanied the appearance of the Lord at Sinai (Exodus 19:16, 20:18). God used thunder as a weapon against the Philistines in 1 Samuel 7:10. Perhaps Job put it best in Job 26:14 — "but the thunder of his power who can understand?"

But why are there **seven** thunders? Some suggest it may be an allusion back to Psalm 29, in which David describes seven voices of God. One of those voices is described this way in Psalm 29:3 — "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters: the God of glory **thundereth**: the Lord is upon many waters."

Others suggest that the seven thunders are the seven bowls that we will soon see poured out after the seventh trumpet sounds.

We will say more about the seven thunders in just a moment. But we know now what the seven thunders depict at least in a **general** sense because we understand what the symbols mean — the seven thunders depict God's **perfect** (seven) **judgment** (thunder)!

Revelation 10:4-7

4 And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not. 5 And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, 6 And sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and

the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer: 7 But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.

Verses 4-7 are both difficult and very important in our understanding of this book, so we need to proceed carefully.

At the end of verse 3, the powerful angel from God cried out with a loud voice, and the seven thunders uttered their voices. What did they say?

John was about to tell us, but in verse 4 he is told instead to “seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.” In verse 6, John tells us what the angel said, but he does not tell us what the seven thunders said.

Do we ever find out in this book what the seven thunders said? We can't say for sure. The details concealed here may have been revealed later in the book but we can't say for sure either way, and, as you can imagine, there has been **much** speculation.

If in fact the judgment of the seven thunders was never revealed to us, then the situation reminds us of 2 Corinthians 12:4 where Paul said that during his trip to heaven he heard things that it was not lawful for a man to utter.

Perhaps the purpose of the seven thunders is to assure Christians that God has unrevealed weapons in his arsenal that will be used when and if needed to take care of **future enemies** of his people, but that are not needed to take care of Rome. God can, so to speak, take care of mighty Rome with one hand tied behind his back!

This view would also explain why John was told to seal up this part of what he saw and heard. That is, it was to be sealed up for the same reason that Daniel was given in Daniel 8:26 — “seal up the vision, for it pertains to many days hence.” It is also possible that the seven thunders depict the final judgment of the world that is still yet to come, which again would explain why it was sealed up at this time.

With each of these possibilities, we are reminded of the **time frame** for this book — it concerns things that were shortly to come to pass (1:1, 1:3, 22:6, 22:10). Perhaps the voices of these seven thunders were not revealed in this book because these seven voices concern things that were **not** shortly to come to pass.