

We have seen so far in this part of the book of Revelation that the trumpets correspond to the plagues of Egypt. The first trumpet, for example, had hail mixed with fire and blood, just like in Egypt. The second one turned water into blood, just like in Egypt, and so forth. But this sixth trumpet doesn't seem to correspond to any of those plagues. It doesn't seem to have anything that matches it in the plagues of Egypt. Except that it does. Because there's something else that it points back to in the book of Exodus, and that is Pharaoh himself. Because in Exodus, as each of the plagues happen, we're told after each one that Pharaoh's heart was hardened. It became harder and harder for him to turn away from his sin. He was persistent. He was stubborn. And it continued to be hardened until he was finally destroyed along with his army in the Red Sea. And that's very similar to what's happening here, Christians. What we see here is the rest of mankind, as John calls them, holding on to their sins, even in the face of a terrible judgment.

Now, what is that judgment? John says, beginning in verse 13: "Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.'" Now these four angels being bound at the river makes them very similar to the previous trumpet, where the abyss was closed in. So these four angels, then, are most likely demonic powers which had been imprisoned until this time.

But why the river Euphrates? What's the significance of that? It's because the river Euphrates was the furthest and the most natural eastern boundary of the world for Israel. That was kind of the edge of the world to them, the end of the world. They knew that there was something beyond it, but they weren't really quite sure what. The only thing that ever came across the Euphrates was enemies seeking to destroy them. Now, I know we may not be able to fully understand this in our day of maps and GPS and stuff like that, but we can actually understand it if we think about it. Because if you were to take away your maps, take away your GPS, the world around you after a while just kind of becomes fuzzy. Take Kansas, for example. Kansas is just six hundred miles away, and that's about the distance from Jerusalem to the Euphrates, about six hundred miles. If you didn't have a map, would you be able to tell me anything about how to get around in Kansas? Or even Canada. Canada is just a hundred and fifty miles to the north. If you didn't have anything to look up, would you be able to tell me anything about Canada, just off the top of your head? I'm sure it's certainly not like what you can tell around here where you know every road, every approach, everything. You know this part of the world very, very well. It was the same way for them. That was the world that they knew. And beyond the borders of that world, it was uncertain and fearful. And so these angels, then, are bound at what was basically the edge of the world, waiting to be released in judgment.

But now the picture changes after the angels are released. Either they are transformed into this great army, or they lead the great army. I don't think it really matters either way. But what we see here is a great cavalry army of twice myriad by myriads, twice ten thousand by ten thousand. It's the same way that John describes the angels surrounding the throne of God. It's meant to be an uncountable number, a number beyond our ability to reckon. But even if you just take it at face value, that's two hundred million soldiers. Two hundred million! And there is no army, either then or now, that can come even close to matching that number. In Roman times, for example, the Romans had two hundred and fifty thousand soldiers, tops. And with those two hundred and fifty thousand soldiers, they conquered the area around the Mediterranean, and they managed to hold onto it for a fairly long time. This army is eight hundred times that size. Even today, the

U.S. military currently has active service members, 1.3 million, so it's two hundred times larger than our own military today. And even if you were to put all of the armies of the world together into one, they still wouldn't measure up to this gigantic army. This is an army that is world-ending, an army that can destroy everything. And on top of it too, Christians, I think it's pretty reasonable to estimate that only two hundred million people were alive at the time that the book of Revelation was written. So you're looking at an army large enough that you have one soldier for every person living. That's an army big enough to destroy everything without even breaking a sweat. The fact that it only kills a third of mankind shows that God is holding it back.

But what do we learn about this army? John goes on to say in verse 17: "And this is how I saw the horses in my vision and those who rode them: they wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths." So the riders are described as having breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur, basically like red and blue and yellow. But these are meant to correspond to the things that are coming out of the mouths of the horses: the fire and the smoke and the sulfur. Sapphire and smoke actually go together because you could translate that word "sapphire" as "hyacinth," and hyacinth is more of a blue-gray kind of color, the color that smoke sometimes is when we see it. So the point is that these two things are closely tied together. They all point towards same thing, and that is, they point towards judgment. Because you'll remember back in the previous trumpet how we referred to Sodom and Gomorrah. The same thing is happening here too, Christians. In Genesis chapter 19, we are told: "The Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven." And Abraham saw the smoke of Sodom go up into the sky like the smoke of a furnace. All three of them are there: the fire, the smoke, and the sulfur. So all three of them together are a picture of judgment coming on to the world.

But how are they doing this? How are they attacking? How exactly are they bringing judgment? You'll notice that John focuses so much on their mouths throughout this passage. He says that the fire and the smoke and the sulfur come out of their mouths. And he goes on to say in the first part of verse 19 that "the power of the horses is in their mouths." So the fact that this is focusing on their mouths shows that it is their words that are their weapons. It is their words that they use to attack. So that when they speak, they speak lies in order to deceive and to lead astray. And I think the reason we can say this too, Christians, is because so much of what we see about these horses reminds us of Satan. Jesus says in John chapter 8 that Satan "was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies." So they lie just like Satan does. And Satan is also described in 1 Peter as a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. And these horses are described as having heads like lions. And they're also described as having tails like snakes, and Satan is explicitly called a snake in the book of Revelation. In Revelation chapter 12, he is called the ancient serpent, the deceiver of the whole world. So they look just like Satan, in other words. And just like Satan, they speak in order to deceive. Because they lead men to believe their lies, and by believing in their lies, they are led further and further into judgment. In other words, they kill spiritually and not just physically.

But what's the result of all of this? What's the outcome of this attack? They're hardened in their sins. John says, starting in verse 20: "The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshipping demons and idols of gold and

silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts." So they're hardened in their sins. They are continuing in them, just like Pharaoh did. Because God sent the plagues on Egypt to deliver Israel, yes. That was part of why he sent them in the first place. But he also sent them in order to harden the heart of Pharaoh, so that it became harder and harder for him to turn away from sin. And he was finally hardened so much that God brought judgment down upon him at the Red Sea when he and his army were destroyed in those waters. And so it's the same thing that's happening here. Men are continuing in their sins, and they become their own judgment.

In fact, this is true of all sin, Christians. If we continue in sin, it becomes harder and harder to stop doing it. Anything that you do repeatedly, it's a lot harder to stop doing it down the road, especially when it's something bad for you. And it's especially true for sin. If I continuously do the same sin over and over again, I might find it very difficult to even want to try to stop doing it altogether. And if I continue long enough in that sin, God may hand me over to judgment. He may hand me over to that sin itself, so that the sin becomes its own judgment. I become my own worst enemy, the means of my own destruction. Like Paul says in Romans chapter 1: "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves." And being hardened in sin, Christians, God uses that to bring judgment, until he will bring final judgment and bring it to an end.

So what should we take away from this? What should we as Christians learn from a passage like this? We need to be on guard against all of our sins. Because sin is dangerous. It is always dangerous. It will lead us into judgment. But a sin that we do repeatedly is far, far more dangerous, because either it's going to lead me to think that it's not a sin at all, that I don't need to worry about it, or it's going to lead me to think that, well, I just don't care! I don't care that I'm sinning against God, and I'm going to continue doing it anyway. And then, if we continue in that sin long enough, God may hand us over to it, so that we become our own judgment. Let us always take sin seriously!

So Christians, let us fight against it. Let us turn away from it with all that we have. Let us wage war against our sins, either in prayer or in fasting or whatever it may be. Let us fight against it with all that we have. But let us also turn to Jesus and confess those sins. And Jesus, who is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins and lead us to new life in him. Because we will be washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. We will be set free from the power of sin. We no longer are bound to do it. We can quit these things through the power of God, because the blood of Jesus breaks the cycle. The blood of Jesus sets free. So call on Jesus, Christians, and walk in him in newness of life. You will find true freedom from all of your sins.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, who has set us free from the power of sin by giving us your Son, strengthen us by your Holy Spirit to resist all evil and to fight against every sin, so that we may walk with you in purity and in newness of life; for you live and reign with the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.