

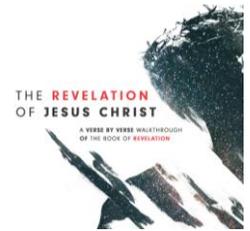
Title: Revelation, Part 17: Standing Upright in a Topsy-turvy World

Speaker: Charles Stone

Passage: Rev. 9:1-21

Big idea: 4 ongoing decisions can help us stand upright in an upside-down, confused world.

Memory verse of the month: Rev 7: 17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.



I'm somewhat of a news junkie. I like to stay informed about what's happening in the world. Anybody else a news junkie? A few times a day I briefly check a few news web sites to see what's happening in the world. I'm on some mailing lists of a few aggregators, organizations that cull world events into short summaries and then send them to subscribers.

The only problem with that is this: most news is negative. Negative news sells. And all this bad news makes it quite clear that we live in an upside-down, confused, messed up world. And as much as I like being in the know, I must also guard against letting all this negative stuff pull my attitude down.

I've also had guard my attitude as I've prepared these messages on the book of Revelation we are studying, that explain how world history (and the news) will get worse before Jesus returns to make things right.

We are wading into these difficult chapters, and this week's is one of those many to come.

Here is the [Big Idea: 4 ongoing decisions can help us stand upright in an upside-down, confused world.](#)

It feels like this upside-down house. What's right is wrong. What's wrong is right. What's up is down and what's down is up.

Let's review a bit where we've been.



In a prior chapter we learned about these images that appeared as Jesus opened each of 7 seals on this scroll which contains what the future holds. Each visual in these visions represents events that will occur as we approach the end times, including war between nations, civil war, famine, disease, and increased persecution of Christians.

John stopped before he described Jesus opening the final seal, seal 7 and there was a pause. But in last's week's chapter, we studied when Jesus opened the final seal and we see 7 angels blowing 7 trumpets that prelude more terrible calamities that will come on the earth. Last week we saw first four of what these 7 trumpets announced.

Here are some general thoughts to keep in mind about these calamities that we'll see in the weeks ahead.

[1. John explains similar calamities from different perspectives.](#)

Many biblical scholars say that these seals looked at the calamities from the perspective of believers and the trumpets from the perspective of unbelievers.

[2. World calamities will intensify over time.](#)

These are kinds of events that we see happen on an ongoing basis in the world but will be more common and more severe as the end times approach.

[3. These calamities judge both the wicked and call unbelievers to repentance.](#)

[4. These calamities don't symbolize God's final, final judgment.](#) They are meant to be serious warnings but not final doom. The trumpets warn and then we have later in Revelation 7 bowls of judgment that are poured out that reflect the final, final days.

We are beginning to see some repetition among the sevens. When the seven seals were broken and the scroll was read world calamities were revealed and we see similar calamities happen as these trumpets are blown. Remember that these 7's are giving us different perspectives of similar events in the same time period. It's like looking at something at a distance through a telescope from different places or angles.

Here are the calamities each of the 4 trumpet announces:

- **Trumpet 1: effects on the food supply** caused by famine, fire, and war.
- **Trumpet 2: effects on the ocean** which in turn effects food supply, commerce, and the economy.
- **Trumpet 3: effects on fresh water** making it toxic which causes sickness and death, perhaps related to famine.
- **Trumpet 4: atmospheric disturbance** perhaps a solar flare, meteorite, or something that diminishes the light we get which is very important. And the bible often uses darkness to refer to evil.

So now, the fifth angel sounds his trumpet to announce a different perspective of these world events.

Here is the **Big Idea: 4 ongoing decisions can help us stand upright in a topsy-turvy, confused world.**

I'm going to approach this a bit differently than I have in prior messages. I'm not going to read the entire passage, but summarize and explain what is happening in the sections of the chapter and then give those 4 ongoing decisions.

As a foundation, it's important that God is still in control and he has absolute sovereignty even over satan and other evil, fallen angels called demons.

Rev. 9.1-6

Rev. 9:1 The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and ... star that had fallen from the sky ... the Abyss. ... The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss... locusts... seal of God on their foreheads...torture them ... men will seek death..

Although this part of the image is not meant literally, it draws on the most terrible fears and images of that culture so that they realize how bad this will be.

A star that is a symbolic reference to either satan or a high-ranking evil angel. He opens this abyss which is some sort of prison house for fallen angels. When it is opened then begins a series of woes, tribulations on those who hate and reject God.

Out from the abyss come these creatures, demons, that are like what you do with a Mr. Potato Head. If you ever played with a Mr. Potato Head, you know you can attach all kinds of parts to make him look different. Well, this creature looked like a combination of a grasshopper, a scorpion, a horse, and a human.



That's certainly an interesting combination. But the main part of the combination creature is that of the locust, a kind of grasshopper. These odd-looking creatures are arrayed for war. They are allowed to torture for a limited time those who hate God. I think this probably refers to increasing mental health issues which is like a kind of a torture that makes you feel like you want to die.

During this time God will spiritually protect believers because we know how things will turn out, we have the holy spirit to guide us into all truth, we trust the Lord is working out his purposes during these tough times.

This locust woe recalls the eighth of the tenth plague in the OT, a similar plague of locusts.

To us, grasshoppers, they are harmless. Well, during biblical times and in other parts of the world today, a locust invasion was and is a dreaded thing. I did a bit of research on locusts and their swarms appear as a cloud in the distance, darkening the skies, with ominous sounds and they eat every piece of vegetation in their path.

They can travel 150 km in 24 hours and decimate crops, like the desolation a fire can leave. A swarm can be as large as 250 football fields and have 150 million insects. Swarms like this are happening in E Africa today. I watched some videos of these swarms and it's shocking what they do. You can imagine how frightening it would be if you were a farmer and you hear this steady roar and see this cloud in the horizon. You know what is going to happen. Nothing is going to be left.

In 1866 a plague of locusts invaded Algiers, and because of the destruction they left, 200,000 people died of starvation in the days which followed.¹

Locusts were emblems of desolation and destruction. These locusts, these woes to come, will not cause desolation to crops, but rather spiritual desolation and barrenness of people's souls.

I think this torture that many will experience as we approach the end times is not a physical sting or something particular to our bodies, but mental and emotional torture, a rise in mental health issues. We are seeing a dramatic rise in mental health issues today, and covid has exacerbated it.

In particular, I am going to step out on a limb here, I have great concern for our kids who live in an environment that encourages them to question their biological identity and sexuality. I believe that we are and will reap a terrible harvest of mental health issues with the direction our culture is going with its view of sex and gender.

And believers must speak truth in loving ways because we have truth on our side, both spiritual truth and scientific truth in these areas because all truth is God's truth. We must pray for our kids that struggle with sexuality and gender issues as these issues become mainstream in our youth culture. We must pray for our teachers and parents to wisely deal with kids who face these struggles. We must pray for the medical community to discourage kids from getting hormones put into their bodies to create a so called 'change of sexual identity' while they are still growing. The research tells us that this can have long term devastating effects on their bodies and mental health. We must pray for those in power who make educational and governmental decisions that they will be wise and not embrace unscientific, social constructs like denying genetic science and ignoring God-given DNA structure that makes us either male or female at birth and through life.

These are perilous times. To speak up in gracious and truthful ways and give a different perspective from what our culture believes on these issues is discouraged and often costly with those who present a different perspective being cancelled. Yet believers are to be salt and light by our words and our deeds to influence culture in positive, Christ-honoring ways. We have a good, hopeful, joy giving message in the gospel.

Last week I explained what the seal of a forehead meant.

It is not some physical marking on a human forehead but is spiritually symbolic of what a physical seal (like on an official document) represents...authenticity, authority, ownership (protection) and the privileges that go with such a seal. The Scripture tells us that God spiritually seals his followers as his by giving us his Holy Spirit at salvation.

God's seal of the spirit authenticates us as a true follower, and it includes all the blessings and privileges of being a Christian. It is His promise of protection from spiritual harm, not physical harm.

¹ Barclay, W. (2004). [*Revelation of John*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 56). Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press.

2 Corinthians 1:22 [He has] set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Then in verses 7-11 John gives more detail about how these grasshopper soldiers look and sound. He explains that they have a general in charge whose name means destruction, which is satan or a chief fallen angel. This points to increased activity of demonic powers in the last days.

12 The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come.

So one important event has occurred when the fifth trumpet was sounded and now the sixth and the seventh trumpet will reveal the next two woes. The world's troubles are to continue. The forces of destruction that the fifth trumpet announced were likened to locusts. Now these forces are likened to evil angels, demons, with more deadly power, the power not just to inflict pain, but to kill. They had been restrained to this point in time. Many people die toward the end and a great army of 200,000,000 is assembled that causes widespread desolation. I believe this is a spiritual army of fallen angels and not a physical army because the world's largest nation, China, only has 3 million soldiers including reserves.

I think what happens when this part of the end times occurs is that as our culture moves further and further away from biblical standards of right and wrong, the potential for evil that resides inside every person's heart that is somewhat checked when there is general agreement in the culture that this is right and this is wrong...but as we move further away, people's unchecked propensities for evil will give greater and greater power and control to the evil external to us, satan and his demons, which will result in an even greater topsy-turvy world and spiritual and psychological desolation.

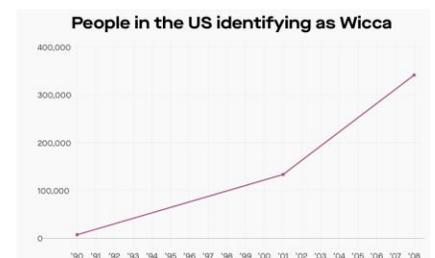
And that greater influence by satan will also come from false teachers in the church who approve of and even champion views in direct opposition to God's word. We see this today more and more in mainline churches in the west. Deception in the last days will be rampant and will come through false teachers who legitimize idolatry, sin, and disobedience.

As these things occur, the goal from God's perspective is that people turn to him. These events in the end times are meant to grab the attention of those far from God so that they see their need for him and turn to Christ. That is the heart of God. Behind these judgments is a heart of love. And to resist his will is to their own hurt and detriment.

You'd think that all this bad stuff would result in a massive turning to God. Quite the opposite happens.

20 The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk.²¹ Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Unfortunately, according to the vision God gave John, even with these world events happening, people will persist in behavior that is detrimental to them. Worship of false gods and satan will increase. Witchcraft and satanic worship is growing today. This is a 13-year old graph that shows the growth of people identifying themselves as part of Wicca. 4 years ago over 1.4 million people in the US identify themselves as witches, more than a Presbyterian denomination.



When he mentions magical arts, it's this Greek word *pharmakeia*. What does that word look like? Pharmacy, having to do with drugs. Drug use, legal and illegal is growing.

Sexual immorality from sex slavery to pornography to adultery and everything in between is growing and many of those sexual practices are lauded as good and even helpful. He talks about murder. In the states murder is on the rise.

He mentions thefts. Theft has always been a part of life but there is a new kind of theft that is on the rise. Cyber theft is one that is skyrocketing. But this image really shook me because it was so odd someone stealing in this way. This was a



still shot of a video taken of two guys walking out of a TJMax store in the US with their hands loading with stuff they were stealing. There was something so disconcerting about these guys brazenly, nonchalantly walking out of a store with their hands full of stuff they were stealing. Nobody stopped them.

Why would people not repent and turn to Jesus after seeing and experiencing all these things? Some people don't want to go to heaven. That's an idea hard for me to grasp as a believer in Jesus. But this side of heaven, the prospect for some people having to make themselves subservient to a God who has moral and ethical expectations and the prospect of not being able to live for what they want and for their pleasures and desires is just too much for them to give up. The pleasures of this life supersede the thoughts of an eternity of regret and sorrow in a real place called hell. And for others, it's easier to simply not believe there is an afterlife.

I'm not trying to scare you or overinflate the bad and minimize the good in our world. I am reinforcing the reality that Rev is not a book of fantasy. It warns us that turbulent times will increase. They are happening now. And we must be salt and light now in our world, point people to Christ, and prepare ourselves to respond in the most Christ-like way as things get worse in the days ahead.

Big Idea: 4 ongoing decisions can help us stand upright in an upside-down, confused world.



Decision 1: [Learn from the times](#)

This is another way to say be teachable. Don't put your head in the sand about what's going on in the world. Sometimes when I read the news I think, where can I get away from all this. Where do I need to live. I can't get away and as a Christian I am not supposed to. I am to be in the world but not of the world. Believers are called to season the culture, to flavor the culture with good, wholesome things. We are called to be light as well, to expose darkness.

Be aware of what's happening in our culture and government and educational systems so you can pray and act accordingly.



Decision 2: [Practice spiritual vigilance](#) (spiritual warfare)

This chapter uses these images for satan and fallen angels. We are in a spiritual battle. But we are not left without tools to fight this battle. And this battle between good (God) vs evil (satan) is not between two equals. All of these evil beings described in this chapter are ultimately under God's sovereign control, and he uses them in the final judgment days.

When I say practice spiritual vigilance it's because one of satan's tools is deception. The darkening smoke coming from this abyss reflects deception that satan uses against us. John mentioned snakes and scorpions which refer to deception.

Everything you read online or hear from others or what your friends tell you, or even what a person in spiritual authority says is not true. I encourage you to check me out. Read the scriptures yourselves and check out what I say. I promise I will never deceive you.

So, we must practice spiritual vigilance, not be fearful that there is a demon behind every bush, but aware and sensitive that we are in a battle, and that we must be spiritually vigilant.

In Ephesians 6 the Apostle Paul lists 7 pieces of spiritual armor that we can put on and use. At the end of that list he writes,

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert (Ephesians 6.18)



Decision 3: Resist [compromise](#).

He listed several of these sinful behaviors that even in the face of this tribulation, many just kept doing. Watch for those small compromises in your life (fudging on taxes/stealing a person's character by talking about them behind their back, taking something even small that is not yours, losing sensitivity to immorality, making things, people, or experiences an idol, murder in your heart that John describes as hating somebody).

When we compromise in little things, they lead to larger compromises. It's like the frog in the kettle syndrome. Put a frog in cool water in a kettle on a stove. He likes it. But slowly turn up the heat and he doesn't realize it and he ends up getting cooked.



Most of the time we don't decide to wake up and tell ourselves, "Well today feels like a great day to go and commit really bad sin." Our downfall happens when little by little we compromise, we become more and more insensitive to sin, we tolerate it more and more, and before long, wow, we are in deep.

Hebrews 3:12-13 See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Maybe for it, its language you use that you once didn't use. Maybe it's the movies you now watch with lots of sex and language that at one time really bothered you but now, not so much. Maybe it's fudging the truth with others which at one time you never did. Maybe it's harboring an unforgiving attitude toward someone which you didn't do before.

I don't mean being hyper vigilant about this. We can't second guess everything we do or constantly worry or ruminate, "did I just sin without realizing it." But pay attention to your life. Put good people around you. Get plenty of spiritual food by reading the Bible, praying, coming to church, being involved in a group. And when you know you stumble, immediately admit it to God and he will cleanse you. If you need someone to lovingly hold you accountable, find someone.

Small compromises lead to larger and larger compromises and spiritual, emotional, and relational loss.

I added one more that doesn't directly relate to this passage. But, it's important.



Decision 4: Engage in [cultural conversations](#) with grace and tact.

This relates to decision 1, learn from the times. Know what's going on, but at the same time, learn what would be a thoughtful, appropriate biblical response is so that you can intelligently engage with others in conversations about these issues.

1Peter 3:15 ...Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

Our tact and a lifestyle that matches our belief, gives us credibility.

I want to leave you with two questions.

Which one of these decisions should you give more attention to?

Decision 1: Learn from the times.

Decision 2: Practice spiritual vigilance.

Decision 3: Resist compromise.

Decision 4: Engage in cultural conversations with grace and tact.

Is anything upside down, topsy-turvy in your life? If there is, what might be a doable next step for you?

