



## Revelation - Chapter Nine

### IV. Revelation 8:1-11:19 - The angels and the trumpets: warnings of coming wrath (continues)

#### IV.b Revelation 8:6-11:19 - Angels sound seven trumpets (continues)

#### IV.b.i Revelation 8:6-9:21 - The Seven Trumpets (continues/concludes)

#### Summary of Chapter Nine

Judgement continues with the sounding of the fifth trumpet. When the angel sounded the fifth trumpet John saw a star fall from heaven to earth, and it was given a key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. The fallen star is probably Satan who opened the bottomless pit and released locusts that were given power, not to kill, but only to torment for five months those without the seal of God on their foreheads.

Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet and four angels who were bound at the great river Euphrates were released to kill a third of mankind. Thousands of troops were released to kill a third of mankind by their fire, smoke and sulphur. Even after all of this those who were not killed refused to repent.

#### Introduction to Revelation 9:1-12

Whereas the star that fell at the third trumpet symbolised the polluting effects of ancient and modern warfare on rivers and springs, the star fallen from heaven to earth (v.1), when the fifth trumpet sounds, is considered by some to be Satan, the angel of the bottomless pit, whose names mean 'Destroyer'. This vision shows the increase of demonic activity, plunging rebellious humans into desperation, as the era of God's patient restraint draws to a close. Others view this as a further messenger from God wreaking destruction on those who continue to oppose him.

<sup>1</sup> And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit; <sup>2</sup> he opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. <sup>3</sup> Then from

the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given authority like the authority of scorpions of the earth.

### Revelation 9:1-3

The star that had fallen from heaven to earth is Satan according to some commentators, whom Jesus saw fall to earth as a result of his disciples' ministry: <<*He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning'*>> (Luke 10:18). Three chapters later in Revelation, John will see the 'dragon', whom he identifies as Satan, cast down from heaven to earth: <<*The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world – he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him*>> (Revelation 12:9). Other commentators see this as a further messenger from God bringing even greater judgement on unbelievers.

Those who hold that this star is Satan indicate that this fifth trumpet, unlike the first four, does not signify judgement from above but from below, orchestrated by the greatest opponent of both God and mankind.

The fact that the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit or Abyss was given to him shows that Satan can do nothing apart from God's permission, i.e. 'were told' in v.4. This viewpoint is in keeping with the story of Job, where Satan could only act in accordance with instruction from God (Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-6). However, many scholars think that this star represents a good angel, and that this verse, in connection with 20:1, marks the beginning and the end of the middle section of the book.

From the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. The imagery here is like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: <<*Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord; and he looked down towards Sodom and Gomorrah and towards all the land of the Plain, and saw the smoke of the land going up like the smoke of a furnace*>> (Genesis 19:27-28).

When the fallen star unlocked and opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, locusts emerged in billowing smoke that darkened the sky. It is an echo of the eighth plague on Egypt: <<*The locusts came upon all the land of Egypt and settled on the whole country of Egypt, such a dense swarm of locusts as had never been before, nor ever shall be again. They covered the surface of the whole land, so that the land was black; and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left; nothing green was left, no tree, no plant in the field, in all the land of Egypt*>> (Exodus 10:14-15). This infestation of locusts also recalls the swarm summoned by trumpet to strip the land bare on: <<*the great and terrible day of the Lord*>> (Joel 2:31b). However, unlike the locusts in the Egyptian plagues, these are not natural insects as the following passage will show.

They were given authority like the authority of scorpions of the earth. The horrible locust-like creatures have authority just like the authority scorpions have through their natural design. Scorpions have the ability to sting, which results in extreme pain and possibly death. This type of ability is not normally referred to as

authority. Yet, this is John's meaning here. As the God given ability of the scorpion is to hurt, so will be the authority of the horrible locust-like creatures from the smoke.

<sup>4</sup> They were told not to damage the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> They were allowed to torture them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torture was like the torture of a scorpion when it stings someone. <sup>6</sup> And in those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will flee from them.

#### Revelation 9:4-6

What John sees as locusts are no threat to earth's vegetation, i.e. its grass, green growth, or any tree, which would be the target of normal locusts, nor can they harm those people who bear the seal of God on their foreheads. Their strange composite appearance (vv.7-9) gives the impression of symbolism. Therefore, it seems that these invaders are not literal insects but demonic spirits, with Satan as their leader (v.11), released to torment their own worshipers (v.20), who serve their king, the 'Destroyer'. Thus their scorpion-like stings cannot inflict death, which would bring relief to their victims. Others think these locusts represent military forces, and still others consider them to be actual locusts but with their destructive power described in figurative imagery.

Five months signifies the divinely imposed brevity of their power to torture even those who oppose the Lamb.

And in those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will flee from them. As with 6:15-16, where the people hid in the mountains and caves, calling for rocks to fall on them rather than face the wrath of God, people will seek death rather than continue in the torment of these locusts but they will not be permitted to die. This was a theme familiar to readers of the OT: <<*Why is light given to one in misery, and life to the bitter in soul, who long for death, but it does not come, and dig for it more than for hidden treasures*>> (Job 3:20-21), and: <<*Death shall be preferred to life by all the remnant that remains of this evil family in all the places where I have driven them, says the Lord of hosts*>> (Jeremiah 8:3).

<sup>7</sup> In appearance the locusts were like horses equipped for battle. On their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, <sup>8</sup> their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; <sup>9</sup> they had scales like iron breastplates, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. <sup>10</sup> They have tails like scorpions, with stings, and in their tails is their power to harm people for five months. <sup>11</sup> They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.

## Revelation 9:7-11

In appearance the locusts were like horses equipped for battle is reminiscent of the battle described by the prophet: <<*They have the appearance of horses, and like warhorses they charge*>> (Joel 2:4).

The locusts' visible similarities to horses, human faces, lions, and scorpions caution against reading John's visions as physical descriptions. Rather, these images show demons to be powerful, swift, intelligent, fierce, and capable of inflicting intense mental and spiritual torment.

On their heads were what looked like crowns of gold. Such crowns would normally signify royalty. However, these crowns are not literal gold crowns, but give the appearance as gold. Perhaps, they simply shine like gold.

They had hair like women's hair. This continues the descriptive portrait. Perhaps, John's point here is the length of the hair on these creatures and its beautiful appearance.

Their teeth like lions' teeth. This focuses attention on the destructive capabilities of these creatures. It is the sting of these creatures that man will fear; however, their appearance is not encouraging. These creatures have the ability to kill, but they are not permitted to do so.

They had scales like iron breastplates. This may be a reference back to the animal-like characteristics. As horses prepared for battle, these creatures have a covering across their chest.

The noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. This continues John's focus on the tremendous number of these creatures; every intent is taken to terrorise mankind.

They have tails like scorpions, with stings, and in their tails is their power to harm people for five months. A scorpion has a distinctively shaped tail that allows it to strike quickly and accurately, causing great pain to its victims. These locusts are not authorised to kill but they can hurt and damage those whom they sting. The duration was commented on in vv.4-6.

They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. This statement fits with those who believe the fallen star in v.1 to be Satan.

Abaddon, Apollyon. In Hebrew and Greek respectively, these words refer to 'destruction' and the 'one who destroys'. Satan's demonic hordes wage war against his own human subjects. Later the enemy will be called the 'accuser', as his Hebrew and Greek names, Satan and Devil, signify; refer to 12:9-10 and the associated comments.

Abaddon is particularly related to the destruction and death of people: <<*Sheol is naked before God, and Abaddon has no covering*>> (Job 26:6), <<*Is your steadfast love declared in the grave, or your faithfulness in Abaddon?*>> (Psalm 88:11), and: <<*Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the Lord, how much more human hearts!*>> (Proverbs 15:11).

Apollyon was often linked with the Greek God of prophecy, Apollo, and was therefore linked with false prophecy in the early church. This is perhaps what John is shown here.

<sup>12</sup> The first woe has passed. There are still two woes to come.

### Revelation 9:12

The first woe has passed. As devastating as the judgement resulting from the fifth trumpet blast may have been, the warning is of greater judgements soon to be unleashed: There are still two woes to come (8:13).

### Introduction to Revelation 9:13-21

The cavalry revealed with the sixth trumpet resembles the demon swarm of the fifth, like horses and lions, with breastplates and venomous power in their tails. Yet these warriors are authorised to take human life on a massive scale, unlike the locusts who are 'not to kill' (v.5), showing that Satan is waging war against his own followers. These warriors, with their origin beyond the Euphrates, suggest that John now sees the carnage wrought by military aggression and warfare. Yet, devastating as the bloodshed is, God still imposes limits: a third of mankind was killed (v.15 and v.18). This is the last limited judgment and warning blast, for when the seventh and last trumpet sounds, 'the mystery of God will be fulfilled' <<*Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed*>> (1 Corinthians 15:51-52), and: <<*For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first*>> (1 Thessalonians 4:16), and the opportunity to repent will be past (vv.20-21).

<sup>13</sup> Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, <sup>14</sup> saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.'

### Revelation 9:13-14

I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God. There is no way of knowing whose voice this is. It is not God speaking because it is someone who stands before God. The horns were part of the altar: <<*He made the altar of incense of acacia wood, one cubit long, and one cubit wide; it was square, and was two cubits high; its horns were of one piece with it*>> (Exodus 37:25). The impression is that the altar itself is speaking but this is symbolic in the same way as the slaughtered saints cried out from under the altar (6:9-10).

The golden altar before God. These woes come in answer to the saints' prayers, offered as incense on that altar (8:4-5). Ancient Israel's captors, Assyria and Babylon, had come from the great river Euphrates, which had been determined by God to be one of the boundaries of the Promised Land: <<*From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory*>> (Joshua

1:4). In John's day it also marked the eastern boundary of Rome's influence, beyond which barbarian powers such as Parthia threatened the empire's peace. This river represents that which keeps civil chaos and wanton violence at bay. As noted in the comments on 7:1-3, judgement is once again seen to come from the east.

The sixth trumpet signifies the release of four destructive angels here and, like the drying of its waters in 16:12-16, unleashes unprecedented bloodshed and suffering.

<sup>15</sup> So the four angels were released, who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, to kill a third of humankind.

<sup>16</sup> The number of the troops of cavalry was two hundred million; I heard their number. <sup>17</sup> And this was how I saw the horses in my vision: the riders wore breastplates the colour of fire and of sapphire and of sulphur; the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulphur came out of their mouths. <sup>18</sup> By these three plagues a third of humankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulphur coming out of their mouths. <sup>19</sup> For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they inflict harm.

### Revelation 9:15-19

Two hundred million is an incredibly large army but not as great as the countless multitude that worships the Lamb (7:9). This cavalry, like the locusts from the Abyss (vv.1-12), consists of demons. Their horses have heads like lions' heads and tails like serpents, and with them they inflict harm. However, God's faithful servant can trample both of these deadly enemies underfoot: <<***You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot***>> (Psalm 91:13). Satan is the 'ancient serpent' as noted in Revelation 12:9.

Red fire, blue smoke, i.e. like sapphire, and yellow, rancid sulphur spewing forth from the horses' mouths reflect the colours of their riders' breastplates. What proceeds from the mouth represents the power of words, either to judge justly or to deceive and destroy, as when the Euphrates reappears in Revelation 16:12-14.

The demonic horsemen kill by deluding human armies into war. These three plagues of fire, smoke and sulphur will become basic elements in John's subsequent visions of eternal punishment.

Some think these two hundred million troops of cavalry represent a very large actual human army. However, these horses and their riders are described together as one complex and terrible creature, like the centaur of Greek mythology. They are not human but demonic, and their job is to carry out the commission of the four angels from the Euphrates to kill a third of humankind.

<sup>20</sup> The rest of humankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands or give up worshipping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which

cannot see or hear or walk.<sup>21</sup> And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their fornication or their thefts.

### Revelation 9:20-21

The rest of humankind, who were not killed by these plagues refers to unbelievers who had not yet succumbed to the wrath of God.

Did not repent of the works of their hands or give up worshipping demons and idols. God had specifically warned the Israelites about making idols to worship and that he would punish them for doing so: *<<and I will cut off your images and your pillars from among you, and you shall bow down no more to the work of your hands>>* (Micah 5:13). For the first time, John gives full attention to the human response to these divine judgments. He has mentioned the human response twice before, but only in passing, as a way of dramatising the severity of the judgments themselves; first in 6:15-17, where people hid in caves and cried out to the mountains to fall on them, and second in v.6, where they desired death but did not find it. This time the human response is in spite of the severity of the judgment, not because of it. The point is made twice that these terrible judgments did not bring about repentance or a change of heart among those who were not killed. Although those rebelling against God have been tortured by the very demons they worshiped, the survivors will take no warning from these final trumpet blasts. This shows the total depravity of the sinners. Every time Christ offers them repentance, they reject his offer and prefer to follow Satan.

Idols, which cannot see or hear or walk. Senseless and impotent, images of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood cannot protect or rescue, as Daniel told King Belshazzar on the night that his life was taken and his kingdom seized: *<<You have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know; but the God in whose power is your very breath, and to whom belong all your ways, you have not honoured>>* (Daniel 5:23b); and reflected in Psalm 115:4-8 and 135:15-18, and Isaiah 44:12-20.

They did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their fornication or their thefts. The vices John lists are characteristic of the Gentile world. John is at one with Judaism in his sharp denunciation of Greco-Roman society. His list is based in part on the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17), which explicitly forbid idolatry, murder, adultery and theft. He stands squarely in the tradition of the prophet Jeremiah, who ridiculed idolatry in Babylon (Jeremiah 10:1-16), and of the apostle Paul, who condemned Gentile idolatry and immorality (Romans 1:18-32), and equated idol worship with the worship of demons (1 Corinthians 10:19-20).

In terms of human history and the view of many in the Christian church is that Christ's return and God's judgement is long overdue, but God clearly has a different agenda as another apostle had indicated: *<<But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance>>* (2 Peter 3:8-9). God's plan will be fulfilled according to his timing alone, as Jesus had said: *<<He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority>>* (Acts 1:7).