

## Revelation 9

### Three Trumpets, Three Woes

<p><b>9:1</b> “Fallen” is in the perfect tense, which in Greek emphasizes a past action with results continuing into the future. The tense aids in establishing the identity of this “star” which had long ago been ejected from the heavenlies. The star is Satan, whose precosmic fall continues to afflict the human family (cf. Is. 14; Ezek. 28). He is given a key (the power of release) to the bottomless pit. This “abyss” (see note in center column) is apparently a place of confinement for fallen spirits (fallen angels).</p> <p><b>9:3–12</b> The nature of these “locusts” is not that of a physical insect. They are expressly forbidden to inflict the kind of destruction which is characteristic of the insect (vv. 3, 4). Their humanlike faces and hair indicate that they are intelligent spiritual life (vv. 7–9). They do not kill, but the torment unleashed on the human family is so devastating that men seek death, only to find that, strangely, death flees away (vv. 5, 6). The best interpretation of this locust plague of the fifth trumpet is that these hideous, repugnant, and evil creatures are demonic in nature (v. 11). One of the ministries of the Holy Spirit in the present dispensation is the restraining of evil (2 Thess. 2:6, 7). This charitable ministry of restraining the onslaught of evil will be concluded just before the beginning of the Tribulation, and the end result will be a devastating invasion of the demonic in the lives of men. So stringent and devastating is this plague that John designates it the first of three woes (v. 12).</p> <p><b>9:11</b> The “king” or angel who rules over these dissident spirits is also assigned a name which is characteristic of his work. The Hebrew word <i>abaddon</i> and the Greek term <i>apollyon</i> both signify “destruction.” However, this should not be understood as annihilation. The word <i>apollyon</i> arises from <i>luōg</i> (Gk.), meaning “to loose,” and <i>apōg</i>, a preposition indicating movement away. The idea is that the destruction caused by Satan and sin is, in effect, the loss of all meaningful existence and is due to being loosed forever from God.</p>	<p><b>Revelation 9 (NKJV)</b></p> <p><sup>1</sup> Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit.</p> <p><sup>2</sup> And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit.</p> <p><sup>3</sup> Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.</p> <p><sup>4</sup> They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.</p> <p><sup>5</sup> And they were not given <i>authority</i> to kill them, but to torment them <i>for</i> five months. Their torment <i>was</i> like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man.</p> <p><sup>6</sup> In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them.</p> <p><sup>7</sup> The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces <i>were</i> like the faces of men.</p> <p><sup>8</sup> They had hair like women’s hair, and their teeth were like lions’ <i>teeth</i>.</p> <p><sup>9</sup> And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings <i>was</i> like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle.</p> <p><sup>10</sup> They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power <i>was</i> to hurt men five months.</p> <p><sup>11</sup> And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew <i>is</i> Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon.</p> <p><sup>12</sup> One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things.</p> <p><sup>13</sup> Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God,</p> <p><sup>14</sup> saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.”</p> <p><sup>15</sup> So the four angels, who had been prepared for the</p>
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<p><b>9:13–19</b> The sixth trumpet, the second woe, reveals an unprecedented armed assault from across the Euphrates River (vv. 13, 14). Interpreters differ extensively as to the significance of this plague. However, as one seeks to understand the text, it seems appropriate to see the reference to the Euphrates as the literal river. Since spiritual beings are not bound by any river, the more likely understanding is that an actual armed invasion of eastern powers numbering 200,000,000 will plunge the earth into a deadly conflict, resulting in the death of one-third of the earth’s population. The description of the horses is such that modern military machines could be intended.</p> <p><b>9:20</b> Nothing more astonishing could be concluded about the two woes thus far revealed than John’s observation that the remainder of the earth’s inhabitants are not drawn to repentance by these cataclysmic trumpet judgments. There are two specific categories of unrepentance mentioned: heretical worship (v. 20) and the immorality of men (v. 21). This failure of men to respond appropriately to the judgments of the Tribulation introduces the reader to a crucial aspect of theology. The purpose of the Great Tribulation is to demonstrate, over a seven-year period, the consequences of living under the judgment of God. The goal of such an appeal is to encourage men to repent in light of the certainty of God’s eternal retribution, foreshadowed by the seven tragic years of terrestrial wrath. The result of this last appeal in terms of judgment demonstrates the essential depravity of man. With full cognizance of the judgment of God, men still do not repent.</p>	<p>hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind.</p> <p><sup>16</sup> Now the number of the army of the horsemen <i>was</i> two hundred million; I heard the number of them.</p> <p><sup>17</sup> And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses <i>were</i> like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone.</p> <p><sup>18</sup> By these three <i>plagues</i> a third of mankind was killed—by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths.</p> <p><sup>19</sup> For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails <i>are</i> like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm.</p> <p><sup>20</sup> But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk.</p> <p><sup>21</sup> And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.</p>
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**Commentary:**

The well-known Bible scholar and Revelation expert Dr. Wilbur M. Smith writes: “It is probable that, apart from the exact identification of Babylon in chapters 17 and 18, the meaning of the two judgments in this chapter represents the most difficult major problem in the Revelation.” The angel in 8:13 promised three “woes” upon the earth, and these are sent with the sounding of the fifth (9:1–12), sixth (9:13–21), and seventh (11:15–19) trumpets. Review the suggested outline

of Revelation and you will see that we are now approaching the middle of the Tribulation, at which time several critical events will take place.

## **I. The Army of Hell Released (9:1–12)**

### *A. The star (vv. 1, 11).*

John did not see the star fall; v. 1 should read, “. . . and I saw a star having fallen . . . “ (at some time in the past). It is likely that this star refers to Satan. He is called “Lucifer,” which means “brightness” or “morning star.” Isaiah 14:12ff describes the fall of Satan in the dateless past, and Ezek. 28:11–19 completes the picture. Note also Luke 10:18. God gives Satan the “key to the abyss.” This bottomless pit is not Hades or hell; rather, it is a prison somewhere in the underworld, where demons are confined by God. (Read Luke 8:26–36 to see how the demons dread being sent into the pit.) In 1:18 we read that Christ holds all the keys; Satan must get his authority from Christ. This fallen star (Satan) is also described as a destroyer in v. 11. He is king over the demons of hell.

### *B. The smoke (v. 2).*

The smoke itself is not the demonic creatures, for v. 3 makes it clear that the creatures come out of the smoke. The underworld is a place of darkness and fire; it is here compared to a great furnace. People who joke about hell little realize how ignorant they are of its torments. This awful darkness reminds us of the plague in Egypt (Ex. 10:21–29) when the darkness could be felt. Satan is the prince of darkness. It is worth noting that this “bottomless pit” will release the Beast one day (11:7; 17:8) and that the devil will one day be cast into it (20:1–3).

### *C. The scorpion-like creatures (vv. 3–10).*

Scorpions are native to the Holy Land, with some species growing to six inches in length. Their main weapon is the sting at the end of their tails, and they are used in the Bible as a symbol of painful judgment (Deut. 28:38, 42; 1 Kings 12:11–14). These hellish creatures from the smoke are also compared to the locust, since plagues of locusts were common scourges in Israel (see Joel 2). That these are not literal locusts is clear from the warning in v. 4 (see 8:7), and from the fact that they have a king (v. 11, see Prov. 30:27). They are forbidden to torment the sealed Jews (7:1–3); their time is limited to five months. Their purpose is to torment, not to kill. In fact, people will want to die, but God will not permit it (see Jer. 8:3). It is likely that these are demonic creatures, released from the pit to torment men. This judgment parallels the eighth plague of Egypt (Ex. 10:3–20). The fact that the creatures have characteristics of beasts (horses, v. 7), men, and wild animals (v. 8) suggests that Satan is imitating the heavenly creatures of 4:7.

This is the first woe, and what a time of torture the population of the earth will endure! How much better it is to know Christ today and escape the wrath to come!

## **II. The Angels at the River Released (9:13–21)**

This is the second of the three “woes” promised in 8:13. The voice comes from the altar of incense because the prayers of the saints have gone up to God, asking Him to avenge their blood (6:9–11; 8:3). In 7:1–3 we saw four angels restrained by command; here we see four angels (undoubtedly fallen angels) commanded to be released. The Euphrates River has always held a notable place in history. It flowed from Eden, where history began; and it will figure in the events that will be the climax to history (16:12ff). Babylon was situated on the Euphrates (Rev. 17–18). These four angels are prepared for “the hour, day, month, and year” on God’s schedule; and it is their task to slay one-third of the earth’s population. In 6:8 we read that one-fourth of the

people were slain, leaving three-fourths for the judgments to come; after these angels had destroyed another third, one-half of the world's population had been killed.

Once released, these angels bring into battle armies of horsemen totaling 200 million soldiers! This satanic cavalry is not like any other army either in appearance or in the weapons it uses. Fire, brimstone, and smoke are their chief weapons; they also have serpent-like tails. This is not another description of the army discussed in vv. 1–12, since that army is forbidden to kill. This army is commissioned to slay one-third of humankind. This is one way God will answer the prayers of the martyrs in 6:9–11.

One would think that multitudes of people would repent of their sins and turn to Christ; but such is not the case. Those who (in God's mercy) are spared will only continue in their awful sins. The goodness of God in sparing them did not lead them to repentance (Rom. 2:4–6); therefore, they will have to endure greater judgments in the days to come, and ultimately the lake of fire.

Verses 20–21 give us a vivid picture of what life will be like after the church is taken to heaven. There will be widespread idolatry. Of course, idol worship is demon worship (1 Cor. 10:16–22). Satan has always wanted mankind to worship him (Matt. 4:8–10), and now he will receive that worship. Wherever you find idolatry, you will find ignorance and immorality; v. 21 tells us of the awful sins and crimes that will occur in those days. The word “sorceries” is *pharmakeia* in the Gk., the root for the English words “pharmacist” and “pharmaceutical.” It means “having to do with drugs.” This same word is translated “witchcraft” in Gal. 5:20 and “sorcerers” in 21:8 and 22:15. See also 18:23. The fact that sorcerers use drugs and potions in their devilish activities shows the connection between these words. John suggests that there will be a revival of witchcraft and an increase in the use of drugs in the latter days. Several organizations of witches exist worldwide, and spiritism is on the increase. As for the increase in the use of drugs, we need only read today's newspapers!

How does this chapter fit into the whole scheme of Revelation? It is likely that this huge army of 200 million horsemen will appear just before the middle of the Tribulation. The Beast is already the head of the revived Roman Empire, co-operating with the “world church” and the United Nations. God permits Satan to muster this huge army, possibly from Russia. We do know from Ezek. 38–39 that Russia will invade Palestine about the middle of the Tribulation period. It will try to conquer Israel, but the Beast will deliver the Jews and fulfill the seven-year covenant that he made to protect them. Ezekiel makes it clear that God judges Russia and sends the army home in defeat. Once in the Holy Land, the Beast will break his covenant, move into the temple, and begin to assume worldwide powers. Revelation 11:1–2 indicates that the Gentiles are in possession of the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem; and the rest of the chapter indicates that the Beast slays the witnesses who have been preaching for the first three and one-half years of the Tribulation. This huge army (v. 16) is not the Russian army that invades Israel, but the blowing of this sixth trumpet indicates the rise of military conquests and points to the Battle of Gog and Magog that will take place at this point. Review the prophetic timetable given in the introductory notes.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, Warren W.: *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1997, c1992, S. 372

**9:1** The **star fallen ... to the earth** may be a demon (v. 11), Satan himself (12:9), or an angel serving God (20:1). It most likely is Satan or one of his subordinates who is given authority to release a vast demonic host which had been imprisoned in the pit. Satan will launch one final massive effort to prevent the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. **The bottomless pit** is the interim jail for some demons (Luke 8:31). It is also the place of origin of the beast (11:7; 17:8). Furthermore, it will be the place where Satan will be imprisoned during Christ's reign (20:2, 3).

**9:2 Smoke** is an accurate visual description of a huge locust swarm seen at some distance. Since the smoke **arose out of the pit**, the swarm is undoubtedly demonic (11:7).

**9:3 Locusts**, or grasshoppers, were greatly feared in ancient agricultural societies because they devoured crops. In Ex. 10:12–15, a plague of locusts wiped out what was left of Egypt's crops. Joel 1:2 tells of an invasion of locusts that the Lord used to judge unrepentant Judah, which was a foreshadowing of the day of the Lord. Perhaps that passage is a basis of the imagery in vv. 2–10. **Scorpions** sting with their tails, causing great pain and even death (v. 10). The only point of comparison between the locusts and the scorpions is the "stings in their tails" (v. 10).

**9:4** God controls the locusts' actions, causing them to avoid those who **have the seal of God** (7:2–4). Since no **harm** is to be done to **the grass** or **any tree**—just unbelieving people who do not possess the seal of God—these insects are not ordinary locusts (vv. 7–10). A seal is placed on the 144,000 "of all the tribes of the children of Israel" (7:2–4) to protect them during "the great tribulation" (7:14). All those who have believed the gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ are "sealed with the Holy Spirit" (Eph. 1:13) until the final day of redemption and inheritance (Eph. 1:14).

**9:5, 6** The **torment** apparently lasts **five months** because that is the life span of a locust. Many unbelieving **men will seek death**, but unsuccessfully. The passage does not say how their death wish is frustrated. However, this time period is an additional opportunity for these unbelievers to repent before the Lord (vv. 20, 21) and to be saved through Christ.

**9:7** The phrase **like horses prepared for battle** may be further explained in v. 9 as "like breastplates of iron." If so, this means **the locusts** have some sort of armor. **Crowns ... like gold** may imply that the locusts have high status among the demons but still rank below their king, Abaddon or Apollyon (v. 11). **faces of men**: The locusts have some humanlike characteristics.

**9:8 Hair like women's** may refer to the long antennae of insects. **Teeth ... like lions'** suggests strength and cruelty, a description similar to that of the beast in 13:2.

**9:9–11** The organization of the locusts out of the bottomless pit (9:2) under a **king** and wearing crowns themselves (9:7) implies that these may be in a hierarchy like "principalities ... powers ... rulers of the darkness of this age" (Eph. 6:12). **The angel of the bottomless pit** is demonic and controls the demonic locusts (vv. 3–10). If this angel serves God, this is another instance where the activity of Satan or his demons is under the Lord's sovereign control (2 Cor. 12:7, 9). The **name** of the angel in **Hebrew** as in **Greek** means "Destruction."

**9:12** The first **woe** spoken of in 8:13 is the demonic locust plague that comprises the fifth trumpet (vv. 1–11). This implies that the **two** remaining **woes** are the sixth (vv. 13–21; 11:14) and seventh trumpets (11:15–19).

**9:13** The fact that John heard **a voice** instead of a symphony of the voices of all the martyrs (6:9, 10), and a voice of authority instead of an angel's voice (8:3–5), indicates that the speaker is the Lamb who was slain and has redeemed His people (5:9).

**9:14–16** The great river Euphrates is the eastern boundary of the land promised to Abraham and his descendants in Gen. 15:18, as well as the geographic area from which powerful enemies like Assyria and Babylon came to invade Israel (Is. 8:5–8). It may represent the seat of Satan’s former victory (in the Garden of Eden). The **release of the four angels** at the exact **hour and day** is in keeping with apocalyptic literature’s portrayal of God’s sovereign control of the timing of His plan (Dan. 9:24–27). **The army of ... two hundred million will kill a third of mankind**, under the command or influence of the four angels who were released. A third of humankind could number in the billions. Coupled with the former destruction of one-fourth of humanity, over one-half of the world’s population will have been killed. Some hold that *a third* here is merely a stylistic feature of the trumpet judgments (8:7–12). Note also that widespread killing had already visited a fourth of the earth during the opening of the fourth seal (6:8), and many died during the catastrophes of the first three trumpets (8:7–11), further reducing the world population.

**9:17–19** Although it is the horsemen for whom the number of two hundred million is given (v. 16), **the horses** they ride and their killing **power** are primarily described. There are similarities between the horses of the sixth trumpet judgment and the locusts shaped “like horses” (v. 7) of the fifth trumpet. The mention of **breastplates** (vv. 9), the comparison with **lions** (vv. 8), and the **power** in their **tails** (vv. 5, 10) could suggest that these two passages offer different perspectives on the same demonically inspired force. This is unlikely, however, because the locusts are not given authority to kill (v. 5), but only to torment, while the horses kill **a third of mankind**.

**9:20, 21** **The rest of mankind** who do **not repent** does not include those who “have the seal of God on their foreheads” (v. 4; 7:2–4). The unwillingness to repent despite the incredible devastation of the **plagues** is reminiscent of Pharaoh’s attitude toward most of the plagues that came upon Egypt (Ex. 7:22; 9:7). *Repent* here means to change one’s mind about ungodly **works**, to stop trusting **demons** and **idols** and to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith (Luke 24:47; Acts 26:20).

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<sup>2</sup>Radmacher, Earl D. ; Allen, Ronald Barclay ; House, H. Wayne: *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*. Nashville : T. Nelson Publishers, 1999, S. Re 9:1-21