

Chapter Nine

The 5th and 6th Trumpets

9:1 And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him.

Star from heaven: This is not the same star as seen in 8:10. Whenever Revelation mentions “a thing,” all future references are written as “the thing.” This is *a* star, not *the* star. ‘The’ points back to ‘a,’ a basic principle of grammar.¹ As already mentioned, stars are symbols of those in power; they are rulers. They reside in *heaven*, meaning their authority originates there. Though this ruling power has fallen, it is given limited authority, seen in the giving of a *key*.

Behold, the Lord is about to hurl you headlong, O man. And He is about to grasp you firmly, and roll you tightly like a ball, to be cast into a vast country; there you will die, and there your splendid chariots will be, you shame of your master’s house. And I will depose you from your office, and I will pull you down from your station (*star from heaven fallen to earth*) Then it will come about in that day, that I will summon My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, and I will clothe him with your tunic, and tie your sash securely about him, I will entrust him with your authority, and he will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, when he opens no one will shut, when he shuts no one will open. (Isa 22:17-22)

This situation is repeated in chapter 12, where John writes, “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and in the sea! For the Devil came down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has but a little time.” (12:12) Although people want to blame all the world’s troubles on God, they do not recognize that such things have their origin in Satan.

Key: Key’s represent authority to open and shut. (See notes on 3:7) God is the only One who authorizes activities in His creation, and so Christ hands over this key (See notes on 20:1). Satan may roam the earth and deceive people, but only within the parameters set by God.

Bottomless pit: This word means ‘depthless,’ and typically refers to the sea. The KJV translates it ‘the deep,’ the same place the devils begged Jesus not to send them. (Luke 8:31) Paul spoke of it as the place of the dead. (Rom 10:7) The beast comes out of the bottomless pit, (Rev 11:7) yet it also comes from the sea. (13:1) They are not two different kingdoms, but the same one described from different angles. While the sea (the ocean) is a geographical figure for the worldly nations, the bottomless pit (*Tartarus*) is a *spiritual* figure that describes the world’s association with sin and death. Both are ruled by the same power. The bottomless pit conjures up visions of Hell, so these scriptures suggest that it is closely related to the sea (nations). Satan is

¹ This is discussed more fully in chapter 20, where the thousand years are mentioned.

cast to *earth*, where he then opens the *pit*. He is not cast into punishment (Lake of Fire), but is essentially handed over to the earth's nations. The bottomless pit is found on the *earth*, among the kingdom of *men*, not in Hell.

So where would one likely find Satan if he was thrown into the nations? The ruling power at the time of John's writing was Rome, with Nero at the helm. Jesus said, "I saw Satan being cast from heaven like lightning." (Luke 10:18) Yet he is given power; authority (a key). This key gives the devil authority to cause great darkness and confusion upon the earth. Evil is shut up and chained inside of this pit and Satan seeks to release it. It is this spiritual darkness found in unrepentant and stubborn hearts that causes "smoke" to pour forth. It is described in another way in chapter 20, where Satan is bound for 1,000 years in the Bottomless Pit—limited in power to an earthly reign. The binding refers to the absence of persecution of the church. It is the same as the four winds being restrained from blowing (causing harm). At the end of this period (described as 1,000 years—an indeterminate time), Satan is turned loose for a "short time," during which time he attacks the church. (20:8, 9) He also destroys the Harlot, seen as the city of Jerusalem. (17:16, 17) One can see this in Nero, one of several Caesars who affected unrestrained violence upon Christians. Satan had been set loose. It was the time spoken of in chapter 6, where the souls under the altar were told to relax until the rest of their brethren had been martyred. (6:11; 7:14) The reason for the restraining of the four winds was to allow the Jews an opportunity to obey the gospel before the "great and terrible day of the Lord." (Malachi) This is symbolized in the sealing of the 12 tribes of Israel in chapter 7. When these were sealed, and the martyrs were killed, the four winds were set free (Satan loosed) and Rome destroyed Jerusalem.

9:2 And he opened the bottomless pit; and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit.

Smoke: Smoke obscures light, and also signifies total desolation and destruction of God's enemies. (Gen 19:28; Jud 20:40; Psa 37:20; Isa 34:10) Smoke (dust) precedes a destroying army, represented in the locusts. (Isa 14:31)

When the men of Ai turned back and looked, behold, the smoke of the city ascended to the sky, and they had no place to flee. (Josh 8:20)

Now the appointed *sign* between the men of Israel and the men in ambush was that they should make a great cloud of smoke rise from the city. (Judg 20:38)

That said, the context must be considered in order to properly understand the smoke's purpose. In Revelation, smoke appears twice, both times as a consequence of judgment. The pit, symbolizing the nations, is the origin of the smoke, which is like that from a *great furnace*. A vast amount of *obscurity* was belching forth from the land of the darkness, from the hearts of unrepentant men. The results:

Sun and air darkened: The sun is a symbol of truth and direction (See notes on 6:16). Air is a symbol of the spiritual realm. Truth and spiritual sensibility are darkened or *obscured*.

Air appears twice in the OT, (Job 41:16; Jer 14:6) though not in connection with prophecy. It is spoken of as the medium where Christ joins those "who are alive and remain." (1 Thess 4:17) There is also the "prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." (Eph 2:2) The word in Ephesians should be understood as *breath*. Thus, "...the prince of the power of

the breath of the spirit that is now working...” It is not referring to the atmosphere. It’s ridiculous to conclude that Satan somehow lives and rules in the earth’s atmosphere. His influence is mixed with the unrepentant spirits of men. God breathed into Adam’s nostrils the *breath* of life (Gen 2:7) and made man a living soul (*being* in some translations). The *breath* of all mankind is in God’s hand. (Job 12:10) The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are a mere *breath*. (Psa 94:11) “Stop regarding man, whose *breath of life* is in his nostrils.” (Isa 2:22)

The grass withers, the flower fades, when the *breath of the Lord* blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the *word of our God* (i.e., “breath of the Lord”) stands forever. (Isa 40:7-8)

In Ezekiel’s vision of the Valley of Bones, God told the skeletons, “Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life.” (Ezek 37:5) Air is the invisible medium that gives life. When the spirit (air) is obscured or darkened by false teachings (smoke from nations), true and abundant life becomes impossible.

God gave breath to the two witnesses (11:11), yet Satan duplicates it by giving breath to the beast’s image. (13:15) The air being darkened by the smoke then refers to the spiritual corruption taking place when this darkening arises from the nations, instigated by unseen forces. The spiritual medium is obscured by the false doctrines of Satan being promoted by men. (1 Tim 4:1) They are perhaps best understood as the pagan and Jewish legalistic influences that caused men to go astray.

9:3 And out of the smoke came forth locusts upon the earth; and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power.

The locusts come from the *smoke* not the abyss. They evolve from false teachings, and are reminiscent of Egypt’s judgment, which “covered the land.” (Exo 10) They cause widespread destruction and come in vast numbers. (Jud 6:5) The pagan nations were “as numerous as locusts.” (Jud 7:12) They utterly devour the land (2 Chr 7:13), being destroyers of men’s labors. (Psa 78:46) Joel spoke extensively of a locust plague that devoured the land as a judgment from God. (Joel 1)

Power was given to them...as the power of scorpions: This devouring horde was granted authority (power). Desert scorpions were a scourge to the Israelites. (Deut 8:15) The pain of their sting is worse than that of the whip. (1 Kgs 12:11) They are indicative of Satan’s power, (Luke 10:19) and are a symbol of death’s pain. (1 Cor 15:55) Their authority is given to kill. They originate from the darkness of false doctrine, and their teachings result in spiritual death to ones living on the earth. Some have interpreted these locusts as the Roman armies, but the context seems to suggest a spiritual situation.

9:4 And they were told that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

This is why the Roman army interpretation doesn’t fit. The Romans would not be so careful to distinguish Jewish Christians from other Jews. In 8:7, *all* of the common people (green grass) were judged (burned up), along with many leaders among the people (trees). Joel refers to the locust plague as fire:

To Thee, O Lord, I cry; for fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness (green grass), and the flame has burned up all the trees of the field. (Joel 1:19)

Joel also writes there was a lack of food for the animals, consumed by the locusts, which he calls 'fire.' The locusts of Revelation, however, are not allowed to consume the grass and trees, as they did in Joel's time, but only people rebelling against God.

Seal of God on their foreheads: As a reminder, note the verses here:

I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the *seal of the living God*; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "*Do not harm* the earth or the sea or the trees, *until we have sealed* the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads." (Rev 7:2-3)

Judgment was suspended *until* the righteous were marked. Once this was done, the locusts' mission was to hurt (sting) those who did not have this mark. These choose not to follow Christ.

He who believes in Him is not judged (sealed of God); he who does not believe has been judged already (without God's seal), because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness (smoke from the pit) rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. (John 3:18-19)

A similar marking takes place in Ezekiel, on those "who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in (their) midst." (Ezek 9:4) Those not marked were slaughtered, just as those who did not have the blood on the doorposts suffered terrible loss. (Exo 12:23)

9:5 And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man.

Those who are not God's people are allowed to live, as they were in the OT verses referenced above. However, their lives are in torment.

Torment of a scorpion: History tells that Roman soldiers tested their masculinity by deliberately allowing scorpions to sting them. The pain was great, and a soldier who cried out was considered weak in his peers' eyes.

In Revelation, 'torment' is used 10 times. It is the pain inflicted on men by the locust stings (9:5) and that suffered by the Great Harlot. (18:7) The two witnesses torment those living on the earth. (11:10) Those who worship the beast will be tormented with fire and brimstone. (14:10) Finally, Satan, the beast, and the false prophet are tormented in the final judgment. (Rev 20:10) Thayer translates the word as follows:

- To question by applying torture
- To torture
- To test (metals) by the touchstone, a black siliceous stone used to test the purity of gold or silver by the color of the streak produced on it by rubbing it with either metal
- To vex with grievous pains (used of body or mind), to torment
- To be harassed, to be distressed; used of those who are struggling at sea with a head wind

For five months: Literally, a short time. During the Roman siege of Jerusalem, Jewish zealots were a cause of great sorrow for the city’s inhabitants, a period lasting “nearly 6 months.”² A locust’s life span is 5 months. The siege on Jerusalem lasted 5 months, a time when the walls of the city and the zealots within prevented the Romans from entering. The resulting starvation, cannibalism, disease, and death can be seen as a time of torment, when men wished to die.

9:6 And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; and they will long to die and death flees from them.

In those days: During that time—whatever the 5 months represent—men not having God’s mark will desire relief from their agony, but none will come. Such is the state of those who are separated from God. They are in torment, unable to find the relief that can end their miserable condition. It is *hidden* from them. As the text says, it *flees* from them.

Why is light given to him who suffers, and life to the bitter of soul; who long for death, but there is none, and *dig for it more than for hidden treasures*; who rejoice greatly, *they exult when they find the grave*? Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, and whom God has hedged in? For my groaning comes at the sight of my food, and my cries pour out like water. For what I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me. *I am not at ease, nor am I quiet, and I am not at rest, but turmoil comes.* (Job 3:20-26)

This is a group who may have escaped the initial judgment of the four horsemen, yet now earnestly look for them. It is said that if the world suffered a nuclear war, the “lucky” ones would die first. The ones who remain face a lingering and painful death. Better to die than live in these conditions.

9:7 And the appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads, as it were, crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men.

The Holy Spirit backtracks a bit here. First, it describes the locusts’ mission: *to torture*. Now, a leisurely and detailed description of the locusts is provided. Modern-day “prophets” have interpreted them to be military attack helicopters.

Like horses prepared for battle: In other words, fitted with armor, as was the custom of ancient armies as they sought to protect their beasts from harm. Even without the benefit of armor, the sheer number of locusts makes them an unstoppable force. The armor reinforces their strength so that nothing will hinder the mission.

Crowns like gold: It does not say crowns *of* gold, but crowns *like* gold. Crowns are symbols of authority and kingship. They *seem* to have authority, and they *seem* to be made of gold. Being on their heads gives them supposed authority and leadership.

Faces of men: The sign of intelligence. The Greek word for ‘face’ means *presence*. (2 Sam 3:13; 2 Chr 7:14) Ezekiel’s cherubim had human faces (Ezek 1:10; 10:14), as did the four living creatures in Revelation 4. Again, the locusts were *like* horses (not horses), they had crowns *like* gold (presumed to be gold), and faces *like* men. They are caricatures representing a certain spiritual condition arising from

² *Wars of the Jews*, Book V –Josephus

the smoke of the abyss.

9:8 And they had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like that of lions.

Hair of women may be looked at a sign of something contrary to nature, but I don't see this as a valid interpretation. Prophets grew their hair long as the sign of a vow to God. The locusts are a mixture of human and insect parts, something from a horror movie. The long hair adds to their barbarian-like appearance. Jeremiah called the Babylonian invaders as "rough caterpillars" (Jer 51:27), probably referring to the horses' manes. Since Peter used Joel's prophecy of the locusts, speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem, John's vision should be interpreted in this context.

Faces of men refer to intelligence. John Darby wrote an excellent description of these locusts:

...they had the semblance of military imperial power, crowned, and with masculine energy, to those that met them; but they were, if seen behind and the secret disclosed, subject and weak: their faces were as the faces of men, their hair as the hair of women. But they were armed in a steeled conscience. They were the direct instruments of the power of Satan, and under his orders. The angel of the bottomless pit—he who rules the depths of Satan's wiles, as the ruler of the power of darkness—led them. We are too unbelieving as to the direct influence of Satan in darkening men's minds when permitted, when men are given up to his darkening influence. Cruel harassing torments, worse than death, with darkening of their minds, become the portion of the once beloved people.³

Teeth like lions: Teeth are symbols of words that devour and destroy. They relate to the tongue and spoken words. "My soul is among lions; I must lie among those who breathe forth fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword." (Psa 57:4) Unlike the tongue, which articulates speech, teeth symbolize words that rip and destroy. (Psa 58:3) In speaking of the locust invasion:

A nation has invaded my land, mighty and without number; *its teeth are the teeth of a lion, and it has the fangs of a lioness.* It has made my vine a waste, and my fig tree splinters. It has stripped them bare and cast them away; their branches have become white. (Joel 1:6-7)

There is a kind of man whose teeth are like swords, and his jaw teeth like knives, *to devour the afflicted from the earth, and the needy from among men.* (Prov 30:14)

9:9 And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle.

Breastplates were defensive pieces of body armor. They protected the vital organs, and is a NT symbol signifying Christian readiness. There are breastplates of righteousness (Isa 59:17; Eph 6:14) and faith and love. (1 Thess 5:8) The locusts' breastplates, however, are not so noble. They are like unbreakable iron. Daniel said that "there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron; inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters *all things*, so, like iron that breaks in pieces, it will crush and break all (nations) in pieces." (Dan 2:40)

Sound of chariots: A common OT phrase to vividly describe the approaching enemy. It was a

³ Excerpt from Darby's Revelation commentary.

rumbling sound, similar to that of many horses rushing to battle. That we are presented with a picture of war cannot be doubted. Again, referring to Joel's locust plague:

Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; and like war horses, so they run. With a noise as of chariots they leap on the tops of the mountains, like the crackling of a flame of fire consuming the stubble, like a mighty people arranged for battle. Before them the people are in anguish; all faces turn pale. They run like mighty men; they climb the wall like soldiers; and they each march in line, nor do they deviate from their paths. They do not crowd each other; they march everyone in his path. When they burst through the defenses, they do not break ranks. They rush on the city, they run on the wall; they climb into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief. Before them the earth quakes, the heavens tremble, **(the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle)** the sun and the moon grow dark, and the stars lose their brightness. And *the Lord utters His voice before His army*; surely His camp is very great, for strong is he who carries out His word. The day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it? (Joel 2:4-11)

9:10 And they have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months.

Tails: Here is their weapon. The tail was known in the OT as false prophets:

So the Lord cuts off head and tail from Israel, both palm branch and bulrush in a single day. The head is the elder and honorable man, and *the prophet who teaches falsehood is the tail*. (Isa 9:14-15)

The tail was also a sign of subservience, which may coincide with the long hair. The locusts were subservient to a master.

The Lord shall make you the head and *not the tail*, and you only shall be above, and *you shall not be underneath*, if you will listen to the commandments of the Lord your God, which I charge you today, to observe them carefully. (Deut 28:13)

The alien who is among you shall rise above you higher and higher, but *you shall go down lower and lower*. He shall lend to you, but you shall not lend to him; he shall be the head, and *you shall be the tail*. (Deut 28:43-44)

This is how they torment men—with false prophecy. Note Josephus' account of false prophets promising delivery to Jerusalem while the Roman armies were besieging the city:

The temple itself was set on fire. God had, for certain, long ago doomed it to the fire; and now that fatal day had come. Yet was the misery itself more terrible than this disorder; for one would have thought that the hill itself, on which the temple stood, was seething hot, as full of fire on every part of it, that the blood was larger in quantity than the fire, and those that were slain more in number than those that slew them; for the ground did no where appear visible, for the dead bodies that lay on it... **There was then a great number of false prophets assuring the people that God would deliver them**. Now a man that is in adversity easily believes such promises; for when such a seducer makes him believe that he shall be delivered from those miseries, then they are full of hopes of such his deliverance. Thus were the miserable people persuaded by

these deceivers, and not believing the signs that were so evident, which so plainly foretold their fate, but, like men infatuated, without either eyes to see or minds to consider, did not regard the denunciations that God made to them.⁴

In this, we can see how death would flee from men who were so thoroughly deceived by these charlatans.

Five months: A short time. “Therefore rejoice, heavens, and you who dwell in them. Woe for the earth (Judea) and for the sea (nations), because the devil has gone down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has but a short time.” (Rev 12:12) In chapter 12, Satan persecuted the woman (Israel) who birthed Christ. Then “the dragon grew angry with the woman (Israel), and went away to make war with the rest of her seed, who keep God’s commandments and hold Jesus’ testimony.” Satan’s wrath moves from the Jews to the Christians, and it was only for a short time. He went to war against the church, which is re-told from a different perspective in chapter 19. Afterwards, he is thrown into the Lake of Fire.

9:11 They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.

The bible says that locusts do not have a king. (Prov 30:27) But these are not physical insects destroying physical crops. They are spiritual destroyers and their leader is the spirit messenger of the abyss. He has been given a key (authority) to carry out his mission.

Abaddon: The Hebrew word for ‘destruction.’ The stem of the word denotes perishing, going to ruin, being in a ruined state, rather than that of being ruined or destroyed. The word occurs six times in the OT, always as a *place*, the same way Sheol is a *place*. In three instances Abaddon is parallel with Sheol. (Job 26:6; Prov 15:11; 27:20) It is paralleled with death, the grave, and Job’s miserable condition. (Job 28:22; Psa 88:11; Job 31:12) In Job’s passage (“...to root out my increase”) he meant that everything he cherished had *vanished*. Thus, the idea of *abaddon* means *loss*. Like death and the grave, it is a place of loss.

Abaddon also belongs to the realm of the mysterious. Only God understands it. (Job 26:6; Prov 15:11) In Abaddon, there are no declarations of God’s loving-kindness. (Psa 88:11) To a slight degree, certain scriptures personalize Abaddon. It is synonymous with an insatiable appetite. (Prov 27:20) In the NT, however, the word takes a sudden and sharp personality, and appears only in Revelation. Here, it is not the world of the dead, but the angel who rules over it. The Greek equivalent is rendered *Apollyon*. Since death and hell are seen in Abaddon, it is likely to be a further personification of Death and Hell.

Apollyon: The Greek word for ‘destroyer,’ from which the word ‘devil’ comes. The understanding of Apollyon is to be found in the fundamental meaning of Abaddon as *moral destruction in the underworld*, together with the occasional personification of similar OT terms. Although Apollyon is personified here, is he also Satan? Is the “star cast down from heaven” (9:1) also the locust king? Apollyon is the *figure* in an ideal picture of evil forces represented as originating in the world and allowed to operate destructively in human life. The locusts’ unreal description conveys an impression of great power and far-reaching destructiveness.

In the OT, the *place* of destruction is personified. In Revelation 9, personal forces *issue* from a

⁴ Wars VI, chap 5, para 1

place—the Abyss, presided over by Destruction. Such is the paradox when dealing with picture language. These are apt names for the ruler of these destroyers and devourers who set themselves upon the earth.

Paul called Elymas, the false prophet, a “son of the devil.” (Acts 13:8) He wasn’t born of some literal demonic seed, but sought to destroy others by turning truth into lies. Satan destroyed Adam and Eve by mixing truth with lies. He quoted scripture to Jesus in an attempt to destroy God’s plan. (Matt 4:1ff)

Important things to note are:

- The locusts represent a certain principle of internal unity.
- They possess the power of effective leadership.
- They have their origin in false doctrine (smoke) coming from the world (abyss).
- They represent a divine visitation upon men in order to “hurt” them.
- They possess a human *modus operandi*, seen in their faces.
- They were restrained at one time, but are now used by God as a form of punishment.

Concerning the last point, note the following verses:

If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Cor 4:3-5)

God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. (2 Thess 2:11-12)

These two scriptures show that the “god of this world” is blinding the hearts of unbelievers, but doing so by God’s authorization. Satan is merely a tool in God’s hand, carrying out His will.

9:12 The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things.

The first woe, or trouble, is finished. The locusts have come and gone. The 5-month period speaks to the period of time Jerusalem was under siege by the Roman armies. Now comes the second trouble.

9:13-14 And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.”

The angel announcing this warning also initiates the calamity. He sounds the warning, causing a voice from the golden altar of incense to command a release of four spirits. The judgments associated with the trumpets are answers to the prayers of the saints offered upon the golden altar and the censor in the angel’s hand. (8:3, 4) Three times, the Great Harlot of chapter 18 is given a “double” woe. Once to announce her judgment (18:10), and twice to announce the removal of her great wealth. (18:16, 19)

Four horns of the golden altar: Two things must be observed here. Most of the chapter, including

the locust plague, has special Jewish significance. Note:

- The mention of this altar indicates the temple was perhaps still standing at the time of John's writing. This would imply that Revelation was written *before* Jerusalem's destruction in 70 AD.
- The horns of the golden altar would have special significance to the Jews, a clue that Revelation may have been initially written to them as God's last effort to reconcile them.

Horns are symbols of kings, as found in 1 Sam 2:10—He will give strength to His *king*; and will exalt the *horn* of His anointed. The horn of the Lord meant protection, refuge, and strength. (2 Sam 22:3; Psa 18:2) A horn is also significant of pride. (Psa 75:4-5) In prophecy however, the symbol usually means 'king.' (Dan 7:20, 24; 8:20) Since Jesus is "King of kings," He is also called the "horn of salvation." (Psa 132:17; Luke 1:69)

The horns protruded from each corner of the altar, looking something like an upside-down table with curved legs. On the altar, where burnt offerings were sacrificed, the horns had a functional purpose in containing the slain animal and wood used for burning the carcass. However, the only golden altar mentioned in the OT is the altar of incense (Exo 40:5), which was a type of the prayers of saints. The voice coming from the horns speaks of these prayers. This coincides with the angel of 8:3 standing at the altar delivering up prayers to God.

Release the 4 angels who are bound: The number 4 signifies earthly messengers (4 = earth) It's not clear if these four angels are the same as the four angels who held back the four winds in chapter 7. While the angels in chapter 7 are restraining (preventing) certain events from occurring, these angels are themselves set loose. They were *bound*—the same word used in 20:2—where the Dragon was *bound*. Because we are dealing with spiritual concepts, we are probably seeing four angels releasing the four winds, which are actually, four *other* (or different) angels. In other words, these are messengers allowing other messengers to go ahead with the judgment upon Israel.

They had been *prepared* (vs 15) for this specific event, just as the great fish that swallowed Jonah was *prepared*, or *appointed* by God. (Jonah 1:17) Nothing takes place without God allowing it.

This binding takes place at a great river, as the Euphrates is sometimes referred to. (Gen 15:18; Deut 1:7; Josh 1:4)

The locusts were set upon men to cause *pain*. The very large army is loosed upon the land to *kill*. This very same picture is described in chapter 16, causing words to be loosed upon the land. Satan is also loosed upon the nations in order to deceive. (Rev 20:7) How does he deceive? Through words.

Euphrates river: Rivers define borders (Gen 15:18; Deut 3:16; Josh 1:4), supply water (Gen 2:10; Num 24:6), nourish (Psa 105:41), and bring prosperity (Isa 66:12) and peace. (Isa 48:18) They are generally benign or beneficial. In Revelation, however, rivers fall into the two categories of good and evil. They are either judged or deemed righteous. Note how judgment is pronounced upon rivers:

A great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and *it fell on a third of the rivers... many men died from the waters.* (Rev 8:10-11)

The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers...they became blood. (Rev 16:4)

On the other hand, we have a river of the water of life coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb. (Rev 22:1) In contrast, a river pours from the dragon's mouth as it tries to drown the woman in

its floodwaters. (Rev 12:1-2) As such, they represent a strong and overwhelming national influence. In OT prophecy, nations were defined as rivers which could “carry away” Israel into captivity. Note Isaiah’s illustration:

The wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be *carried away* before the king of Assyria...Inasmuch as these people have rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah...Now therefore, behold, the Lord is about to bring on them the strong and abundant waters of the Euphrates, *even the king of Assyria* and all his glory; and it will rise up over all its channels and go over all its banks. Then it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass through, it will reach even to the neck; and the spread of its wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Emmanuel. (Isa 8:4-8)

The prophecy speaks of Israel’s wealth and prosperity being “carried away.” The “strong and abundant waters of the Euphrates” is defined as the king of Assyria. The reason for this flood and cleansing of the land is because God’s people “rejected the gently flowing waters of peace.”

Jeremiah described the Euphrates River as being as great as the Nile, a symbol of the land of Egypt, which sought to cover the land with its greatness. (Jer 46:6-10) This too was indicative of Assyria, which was to “sweep into Judah and wipe out Israel.” (Isa 8:7-9) Drinking the water of the Euphrates was a metaphor describing a person who was traveling to Assyria for the purpose of carrying out an evil plan. (Jer 2:18) The symbol of the Euphrates was also associated with the starting point of God’s future redemption. (Isa 27:12-13) Note how the following passage seems to correlate with Revelation:

The Lord will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt; and He will wave His hand over the River (Euphrates) with His scorching wind; and He will strike it into seven streams, and make *men walk over dry-shod*. And *there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant of His people who will be left, just as there was for Israel in the day that they came up out of the land of Egypt*. (Isa 11:15-16)

With this background laid out, the next verses in Revelation show this same event—a huge army crossing over to strike mankind. Keep in mind that we’re witnessing spiritual conditions, not actual events.

9:15-16 **And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they might kill a third of mankind. And the number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.**

Note how the symbols shift here. The four *angels* are released, yet they are actually a very large *army*. Their mission or ministry is to kill many (1/3 = many) They are messengers in the form of a great army. This vision matches closely with the 4 angels in chapter 7 who control the 4 winds (persecution) that blow upon the earth (mankind). What is remarkable with this event however, is the number involved. Again, John *heard* (understood) the number.

According to the Population Reference Bureau, there were 150 million people living on earth when the apostle John was alive. This army is bigger than the entire world’s population at that time. Given its great size, however, they only kill a third of mankind. Since the “facts” don’t line up with scripture, we need to understand how this army is able to find anyone to kill, when the army itself is larger than the earth’s entire population at the time. When the bible refers to large numbers, terms such as “myriads of myriads,” or “as the sand of the seashore” are used. The point of the *spiritual* meaning is this: a vast

and uncountable army is unleashed to destroy many people.

Horsemen: Swift and sturdy harbingers of judgment. See notes on 6:2.

Hour, day, month, and year: A term found only in Revelation. The sense implies that this event was carefully planned long ago. The fact that the army's preparation was timed to a *year* shows long-term planning. That it is narrowed down to the very *hour* implies that no detail has been forgotten. From another perspective, *all times and seasons* are implied. These angels were ready at any and all time to carry out their mission.

I heard the number of them: The number is symbolic, and is an example of *quantity* used to express *quality*; it stands for a host of indefinite number and incomprehensible strength, beyond all hope of human resistance.⁵

The apostle could not have physically counted such a vast number; he *heard* it. John also “heard a voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and *the number of them* was ten thousands of ten thousands, and thousands of thousands.” (Rev 5:11) John “*heard the number* of those who were sealed, one hundred forty-four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the children of Israel.” (Rev 7:4) These are numbers that can only be comprehended by the mind, not seen with the eye.

Third of mankind: The war was prosecuted against the Jews in three stages: Galilee, Judea and the areas surrounding Jerusalem, and finally Jerusalem itself. The last third given to destruction died in the siege prosecuted by Titus.⁶

9:17 And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone.

Breastplates the color of fire, hyacinth and brimstone: Breastplates were pieces of armor arranged around the torso to protect the vital organs. The colors mentioned here are literally, red (fire), blue (hyacinth), and yellow (brimstone). Interestingly, red, blue and yellow are the three primary colors from where all other colors have their origin. Fire signifies judgment. Hyacinth—the name of a dark blue or purple flower—is the color of royalty, and was a predominant in the tabernacle. Sulfur (yellow) speaks of destruction. If you want to assign any symbolic meaning to them, the protection (breastplates) worn by these horsemen are shields of judgment, have a royal appointment, and speak of certain doom.

Heads of the horses are as lions' heads: Head = authority; horses = judgment/war; lion = kingly strength (See notes on 4:7). Thus, we see a judgment having some kind of leadership or authority behind its direction. This force is also descriptive of the locusts, whose power was in their tails (false prophets). Here, the power (authority) of the lion is in their teeth (words that destroy).

Fire and brimstone come from their mouths: These then, are words of judgment. Fire is a symbol of judgment, discernment, cleansing, or trial. The Greek word for ‘fire’ means *lightning*. Brimstone

⁵ *The Consummation of the Ages*, p. 200

⁶ *Consummation of the Ages*, p. 198

(sometimes translated *sulfur*) is a metaphor for final judgment. Where lightning strikes, the smell of sulfur follows, and literally means *fire from heaven*. It is the same judgment used on Sodom and Gomorrah, where it rained fire (lightning) and brimstone. (Luke 17:29) The Lake of Fire is a place of torment and the final judgment of God, consisting of fire and brimstone. These are essentially symbols illustrating how God totally overthrows and consumes men and their worldly institutions. Note:

The Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven, and He *overthrew* those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. (Gen 19:24-25)

All its land is brimstone and salt, a burning waste, unsown and unproductive, and no grass grows in it, *like the overthrow* of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, *which the Lord overthrew in His anger and in His wrath* (great army released). And all the nations shall say, “Why has the Lord done thus to this land? Why this *great outburst of anger*?” Then men shall say, “Because they forsook the covenant of the Lord, the God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. And they went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they have not known and whom He had not allotted to them. Therefore, *the anger of the Lord burned against that land* (lions with fire and brimstone coming from their mouths), to bring upon it every curse which is written in this book; and the Lord *uprooted them from their land* in anger and in fury and in great wrath, and *cast them into another land*, as it is this day.” (Deut 29:23-28)

Deuteronomy shows that when God’s chosen people do not obey Him, He will be angry, and eject them from any inheritance promised. The idea here is one of *destruction* and *removal* from His presence.

For Topheth has long been ready, indeed, it has been prepared for the king. He has made it deep and large, a pyre of fire with plenty of wood; the *breath of the Lord*, like a torrent of brimstone, sets it afire (*fire and brimstone come from their mouths*). (Isa 30:33)

In the NT, terms such as “day of the Lord,” “that day,” or similar expressions nearly always refer to the destruction of the Jewish nation. They were *removed* from His presence, and the church was ushered in as His new Bride. Note Jesus’ words concerning Jerusalem:

On the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. *It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed*. On that day, let not the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house go down to take them away; and likewise let not the one who is in the field turn back. (Luke 17:29-31)

Lot, a possible OT type of Christ, leaves the city of wickedness, a symbol of man’s depravity and disobedience. *At the moment of Lot’s departure*, the cities were destroyed. When Lot was in their midst, the city inhabitants wanted to harm he and his guests. (Gen 19) Jesus was in the Jews’ midst, and they sought to kill Him. (John 7:1) “On the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. *It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed*.” (Luke 17:29-30) Jesus ties Himself to Lot. The Gospel texts of Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 are clear references to the destruction of the Jewish temple and the end of their dispensation as God’s chosen people. Christ’s revealing took place at that time, shown in His words, “This generation

—the people to whom He was speaking—would not pass away” until those things happened.

Jesus spoke of fire and brimstone, the language poetic. The implication was *total* and *complete* judgment, using the simile of Sodom and Gomorrah that the Jews well understood. Jesus explained to the Pharisees, “The kingdom of God is not coming with *signs to be observed.*” What they did not realize at the time was that *on the day He left them*, their fate as a nation was sealed, just as Sodom’s was.

The huge army that John sees in this ninth chapter is a vivid illustration of the overwhelming judgment that God sends upon the land of the Jews for their disobedience. Remember from where the command came forth: *the four horns of the golden altar which is before God.* This is clearly Jewish language showing judgment on that nation, not on the world in general. Note the methods by which this army deals out its destruction:

9:18 A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone, which proceeded out of their mouths.

Note that whatever it is that kills many, it issues from mouths. These are pronouncements of judgment, not physical punishments. Three plagues destroy many (See notes on 8:7). As already seen, fire is symbolic of judgment, and scripture shows the reason for that judgment—God’s jealousy.

Put me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, jealousy is as severe as Sheol; *its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord.* (SOS 8:6)

Smoke: A visible and malodorous obstruction of truth. (See notes on 9:2)

Proceeded out of their mouths: Words of judgment.

9:19 For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads; and with them they do harm.

The language transforms again. Horses refer to judgment (war). Lions imply power and authority. The authority lies in the mouth and in the tail. Any symbol coming from a mouth is *always* indicative of words.

Tails like serpents: Tails are symbols of false prophets (See notes on 9:10), while serpents nearly always symbolize evil. The word ‘serpent’ (*ophis*) comes from the idea of very keen vision. It relates to the word *optanomai*, which means *to gaze with wide-open eyes, as at something remarkable.* It differs from simply voluntary observation, or mere mechanical, passive, or casual vision. This may be why the serpent is described as “more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made.” (Gen 3:1)

Serpents posed a life-threatening danger to man because of their poisonous bite. (Deut 8:15) They are also mentioned as instruments of God’s wrath upon rebellion or apostasy. (Jer 8:17) During the wilderness journey to the Promised Land, “the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people” due to their rebellion. (Num 21:5-6) Wicked and rebellious persons are called ‘serpents’ or are compared to snakes because of their poisonous influence. (Psa 58:4; Matt 3:7)⁷

⁷ All snakes in Palestine were of the poisonous variety, and refer to men that the bible calls “vipers.” Thus, the snake in

The picture of these horses is this: when they *come toward* their enemy (heads), judgment spews from their *mouth*. It goes ahead of the army. When they have *gone past*, the false prophets spew poison. They go behind the army. The result of God's judgment leaves people at the mercy of venomous doctrines that destroy men's souls.

This great army *kills* many, while the serpents *harm* many, much like the locusts. They are synonymous. When snakes bit the children of Israel in judgment, Moses held up a bronze serpent (a type for Christ), so that any who looked upon it were saved from the poison. In Revelation, there is no savior for those bitten by these false prophets.

God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie (false prophets), so that all those who do not believe the truth, but delight in unrighteousness, might be condemned (poisoned). (2 Thess 2:11-12)

9:20 And the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk;

Rest of mankind: Here we see the comparison made between those who are destroyed and those who are not. *One-third* is judged (bitten by snakes—taken in by false gospels), leaving *the rest of mankind*. Sinful man is divided into two camps: one-third and those remaining. The one-third typifies a visible judgment from God. However, those who “see” this judgment and the consequence of disobedience are not influenced by it. They “do not repent of the work of their hands.”

Although they *know* the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. (Rom 1:32)

This “work of the hands” implies deeds resulting in worship of demons and images. The Israelites' idolatry was worship of demons, whether they knew it or not. (Psa 106:37) John calls the person who ignores God's words “the spirit of error.” (1 Jo 4:6) Eve's error was two-edged; she not only trusted Satan's advice, but also chose to ignore God's command. Her trust moved from God to the devil. This is the essence of idolatry.

Neither see, hear, nor walk: A common description of idols in scripture:

They have mouths, but they cannot speak; they have eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but they cannot hear; they have noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but they cannot feel; they have feet, but they cannot walk; they cannot make a sound with their throat. Those who make them will become like them, everyone who trusts in them. (Ps 115:5-8)

Not only were the makers of these images doomed to become blind, deaf, and insensitive to truth, but also those who trusted in those images. This lesson is re-told in the 13th chapter.

scripture typically refers to poisonous speech, poisonous influence, etc.

9:21 and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts.

The first unrepentant attitude dealt with “the work of their hands.” This one addresses sinful deeds. Both attitudes show their unwillingness to change.

Murders: The fifth commandment violated.

How long will you assail a man, that you may murder him, all of you, like a leaning wall, like a tottering fence? They have counseled only to thrust him down from his high position; they delight in falsehood; they bless with their mouth, but inwardly they curse. (Ps 62:3-4)

Sorceries: The first two commandments violated. Sorceries involved evoking dark powers. (Isa 47:9) and soliciting the aide of demons to save them. The Greek word is *pharmakeia*. Drugs were and still are employed by satanists and demon worshipers to open up the subconscious to their influence.

Immorality: The 7th and 10th commandments violated. It involves lust, either spiritual (Ezek 23:8, 17) or carnal. (1 Thess 4:3; Jude 1:7) In connection with sorcery, those who practiced such things *lusted* after false gods.

Theft: The eighth commandment violated. Note the scripture here:

As the thief is shamed when he is discovered, so the house of Israel is shamed; they, their kings, their princes, and their priests, and their prophets, who say to a tree, “You are my father,” and to a stone, “You gave me birth.” For they have turned their back to me, and not their face; but in the time of their trouble they will say, “Arise and save us.” But where are your gods which you made for yourself? Let them arise, if they can save you in the time of your trouble; for according to the number of your cities are your gods, O Judah. (Jer 2:26-28)

The punishment and removal of the Jewish nation is a common OT theme, finding its end in Revelation, where God finally “divorces” her forever as a nation of chosen people. However, it would be foolish to think that the rest of the world—the nations who walked in ignorance—are excluded from the themes of the book. Paganism and the horrific practices borne from it blanketed the world in darkness, tormenting men and offering them no hope of peace or salvation.

The symbols in this chapter—smoke, locusts, torment, armies, and snakes—draw us a picture of destruction and doom. They all have as their focus humanity’s unrepentant heart. Man does not want to trust in God, choosing to worship something of his own design. This choice always has a Divine Consequence. God is not going to allow the human race to enjoy its idolatrous indulgence. As we sow, so shall we also reap. It is God’s great moral law that cannot be overturned, circumvented, nor softened.

The goal of ancient idolatry was to gain prosperity, be it crops, livestock, children, and so forth. They trusted in false gods to provide these blessings instead of trusting God to provide them. Today, we lay our trust in money, and believe the more we have leads to more blessings and comfort. Many possessions and much money do little good when the doctor tells us we have 6 months to live. Tragedy and destruction always loom on the horizon, and putting trust in this life finds its end at the Judgment Seat of God.