

Chapter Nine

Revelation 9:1 “*And the fifth angel sounded...*” This chapter begins with the last group of three trumpets, specifically the events which follow the blowing of the fifth and sixth one.

Since chapter 8 and 9 both deal with how judgment is meted out to both the righteous and the unrighteous, perhaps I need to clarify the concept of “judgment” as it is used in the bible. The word “judgment” doesn’t always point to “The Judgment Day.” It is mostly used in the sense of a penalty or punishment for either a single deed or for an ongoing lifestyle. These “judgments” have been happening since the establishment of the church and will continue until the end of time – the ultimate destruction of the earth. But again, this is apocalyptic symbolism, so what we read is not literally happening, the descriptions are symbols for events that do actually happen. For example, in Rev. 8:7 it is written, “*...and the third part of trees was burnt up.*” That could refer to a major forest fire caused by a lightning strike, similar to what we have seen in California in recent months. Or, in that same verse, the statement “*a great mountain burning with fire*” might be a particular volcanic eruption. The events seen in this book are for the purpose of warning people that something is wrong! Certainly, we should not believe that all natural disasters are punishments handed out by God, but some are!

Here in chapter 9, though, the focus shifts from the “physical” to the “spiritual” side of creation. The unrighteous – the focus of this chapter – will incur judgments that could be considered consequences of their lifestyle. The events described here are much more terrible than those preceding them, and longer lasting. Remember the angel that like an eagle? Three times he said, “*Woe, woe, woe!*” You’re familiar enough with the symbolism of the number “three” to understand that this last group of trumpets will be bad – so bad that it is almost incomprehensible. As before, carefully read the text and let the scene develop in your mind.

The sounding of the Fifth Trumpet – Verses 1 through 12...

“And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the

bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man. And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them. And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months. And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon. One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.”

When John heard the fifth angel sound his trumpet, he says a star fell from heaven unto the earth. That star was given the key to the bottomless pit. As you read, what did you see in your mind’s eye? I suspect most of us have looked into the night sky and have seen a falling star. Is that what you envisioned? Maybe for a few seconds, until you remembered that we are reading apocalyptic text. That literal picture is for those who are not intended to understand the true meaning of the book. We must not take apocalyptic symbolism literally! In Lesson 2, we discussed the first vision in which John turned and saw Jesus standing in the midst of the candlesticks. He had seven stars in His right hand and we learned that **“The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches.”** A little later in that lesson we came to understand that the stars

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represented the overseers of the churches – the elders of those congregations. You may have filed away in your mind the fact that, symbolically, a star represents one in power or control. Stars can also represent the head of a government, or even Satan himself, who is “head” of (the power behind) all that is evil.

Depending on the bible version you use, John either says ***“I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth,”*** (as in the KJV) or he says he ***“saw a star fallen from heaven,”*** past tense. Most of the Greek manuscripts have it in the past tense, therefore we should conclude that John did not see the star as it fell, but saw it after it had fallen to earth.

There is much speculation among scholars and commentators in regard to just who this “star” actually is. Some believe the “fallen star” is some apostate Christian teacher in the early church. Others suggest he is a particular emperor of the Roman Empire, while still others believe it is “just an ordinary angel” sent to earth to do a particular job. The better recognized commentators agree that it is Satan himself, or perhaps one of Satan’s helpers, an evil angel. From what John records, we must conclude this “star” was in heaven at one time. To have lived in heaven, he had to have been obedient to God at that time. Now, though, he has fallen – no longer that obedient servant. The most important clue to the identity of this “star” is given to us in this first verse of our text: ***“...and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.”***

We understand there is never a literal key mentioned in the bible, only what a key symbolizes, which is power or control over whatever the key opens or locks. Glance back to chapter 1:18, where Jesus says, ***“...I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.”*** You may recall in Luke 10:17-18, when the “seventy” returned to Jesus, they were joyful in reporting that ***“even the devils are subject to us through your name.”*** Jesus replied in verse 18: ***“I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven!”*** So yes, Jesus has ultimate power over life and death, but in this first verse of Revelation 9, He gives that power to Satan, albeit in a limited and temporary way.

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I call your attention to the book of Job 1:12. It reads: “...*there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came among them.*” If you are familiar with that passage, then you know that Satan had been “going to and fro” on the earth and had seen Job, God’s faithful servant. Satan was convinced he could get Job to denounce God if His blessings were withheld from him... In answer God told Satan, “...*all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.*” You know the outcome. In spite of all the havoc Satan was allowed to wreak upon him, Job remained faithful to God.

In the first part of Revelation 9, just as in Job’s case, there will be restrictions placed on Satan. Jesus has temporarily given him a limited amount of power over the earth, until He returns. But, as we see in verse 4 of our text, Satan is limited in the sense that he can not physically hurt the earth itself – anything “green.” We also see he can ONLY hurt those who are not sealed. Remember the 144,000 and the great multitude of the righteous, all of which are sealed. They are off limits, the unrighteous are the only ones he can touch and they are already his! Then we see in verse 5 that Satan is granted the power to torment the unrighteous for “five months” – a temporary power, in other words. Also, he cannot kill them, which establishes that he has limited power. All he can do is make them miserable... miserable enough that verse 6 says they shall seek death, but not find it.

[In the Bible class I taught, I was asked, “*Why was Satan only allowed to hurt the men?*” Verses 4-6 use the terms “man” or “men” when speaking of those that are hurt. But the Greek word used is “*anthropos*” which Thayer defines as: “*A human being, whether male or female, to generically include all human individuals.*” So, it isn’t just the men, it is all the unrighteous which are being hurt.]

Satan is given “*the key to the bottomless pit.*” Some bible versions call it “*the abyss.*” So, what is the “*bottomless pit*”? Is it Hell? I suppose by some definitions it might be so considered, but it is not the eternal “Gehenna” where all the unrighteous will exist for eternity. The abyss is the current abode of Satan and his angels. Here in chapter 9 we do not yet have all

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the information we need to discuss it fully, so we will save the bulk of the conversation concerning the abyss until we reach chapter 20. But for now I will say this: during Jesus' personal ministry, demons were allowed out of the abyss to torment some people. In Luke 8:31, for example, Jesus drove some demons from a man up near Galilee. The demons (called Legion) did not want to be put back into the abyss so Jesus sent them into the swine. Revelation 20 tells us that Satan was ***“bound and thrown into the abyss – for 1000 years”*** and when this earth is done, this “bottomless pit” will be done away with. By the way, don't view the 1000 years as an actual period of time. View it as a limitation of power, as we have just discussed above. It may be a little difficult to understand now, but by the time we're in chapter 20, you will understand much more clearly.

The crux, then, of what we see in these first verses of chapter 9 is this: Satan has been given a limited amount of power, but does not have complete power over man. We still make our own decisions. Satan is allowed to tempt us, that is a given, but he cannot make us obey him because of the restrictions God put in place. Each of us still controls our own mind.

We see in verse 2 that when Satan opens that abyss ***“there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.”*** The smoke fills the air and darkens the light. Notice the symbolism – it is not that the smoke actually was from a furnace – but LIKE it was... a dark, billowy smoke that clouded the sun and darkened the light. I want you to understand what is happening here, so follow the sequence of what I am about to show you. In the first chapter of the gospel of John, our author speaks of Jesus when he writes ***“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”*** In verses 6 -7 he continues ***“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John, the same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.”*** Then in verse 8, ***“He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.”*** John the apostle is confirming to us that John the Baptist was sent to establish that Jesus was the light.

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This brings us to point #2 of chapter 9. We have already seen that Satan and his goons can not directly harm the sealed. They are living in The Light. However, the “darkness” that is being spoken of in verse 2 can affect them. Satan has unlocked the door of the bottomless pit and the smoke billowing out is so thick that it appears to block out the light of the gospel. He is throwing up a “smokescreen,” if you will, in an effort to confuse the weak and cause them to be lured away from the truth. We have to make a conscious effort to continue to see through the smoke to know that Jesus is still there, leading us Home. Then, to make matters worse, out of the smoke come locusts. Keep in mind they cannot hurt the sealed, but the sealed can see them. Typically, locusts do their damage by eating crops and vegetation, but not these. They were given the **“power of scorpions.”** They could sting! They could not target the earth’s grass or any green thing, nor could they force those who were sealed to follow them. But they were targeting the unsealed. Their job was to inflict pain directly on that group of people. They were not allowed to kill those who were stung, just torment them for 5 months. Why would Satan open the abyss and release smoke and locusts only to sting the unrighteous – his own people – when he already has them under his control? Let's look a little further...

The five months is looked upon as the normal period of time (April to September) when locusts ordinarily plague the crops. However, we must not overlook the symbolism. The number “five” is most often considered to be the “teaching” number. (*Remember the 5 foolish virgins standing opposed to the 5 that came prepared?*) This 5 month length of time could very well represent the time necessary for the unrighteous, those who were being tormented by their master, to realize the foolishness of continuing to follow Satan. They could plainly see the righteous (those sealed) were not being harmed by the locusts. They were continuing in the Light. Even over his own followers, God would not allow Satan to have complete power. At any time, they could turn from the lure of the abyss and redirect themselves toward the Light. God, however, does have the power to destroy, and He will execute that power unless they recognize their wrong and repent.

I have a hard time understanding the difficulty that some commentators have with the symbolism in the book of Revelation. I’m sure they are all well-educated, both in secular as well

as scriptural material. Yet, reading some of their thoughts about the 5 months mentioned above lead me to wonder. One well-respected commentator says the 5 months represent “the Gothic rule of five years.” The Goths do not show up in history for another 200 years or so and, best I can tell are not related to this in any way. Another says if you take the number of months (5) and multiply it by 30 (the number of days in a month) you get 150 days. Then view the 150 days as years instead of days and you have 150 years, which is exactly the length of Mohammed’s Conquest (from 612 to 762). How could either of those happenings, which occur much later in history, have anything to do with this event? I can see no connection at all between the sounding of the fifth trumpet and the Goths or Mohammed!

What I do see in this vision involving the locusts is an opportunity for the unrighteous: a reality-check, if you will. They are being given time to repent and change their lifestyle. God is giving them another chance to get their lives on the right track, or else they will perish and be eternally in agony. It isn’t until after they inflict pain that we are given a description of the locusts:

1. Their shape was like unto horses prepared for battle.
2. On their heads were quasi crowns like gold.
3. Their faces looked like the faces of men, yet...
4. Their hair was the hair of women.
5. Their teeth were as the teeth of lions.
6. They wore breastplates of iron.
7. The sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots and many horses running to battle.
8. Their tails were like unto scorpions, and there were stingers in their tails.
9. Their power was to hurt men for five months.

They are shaped like a warhorse that had been dressed for battle. In that time period armies would protect the breast and front shoulders of their warhorses with plates of iron hanging from padded chains. Even though the general shape of the head was that of a horse, John saw a human countenance in the face. I believe that indicates intelligence. They wore

quasi crowns (*“stephanos,” representing the symbol of victory*). The Revised Version puts it this way: *“On their heads were what looked like crowns of gold...”* That renders any victory by the wicked a mere imitation of the genuine victory – neither lasting nor true! Their hair was long, like the hair of women. But they had teeth like lions – able to devour – even though the limits placed by Jesus did not allow it. The sound of their wings alerted their arrival, which should have been ample warning, but it went unheeded. And they came from the abyss where they were living with Satan, under his influence. This leads us to verse 11: They *“had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon:”* Their master is Satan! He is the ruler over the bottomless pit, and now for a short period of time, has been lent the key to this pit, the abyss. John tells us this “king’s” name in two different languages: “Abaddon” which is Hebrew for “destruction,” and in the Greek, “Apollyon” which means “the destroyer.” And after this John says *“one woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.”*

The text of the Sixth Trumpet:

“And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, ‘Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates.’ And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men. And the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred thousand, thousand: and I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone. By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt. And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and

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brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.”

When the sixth trumpet sounded John says he heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God. This is the altar of incense that we saw back in Revelation 8:3 (pictured right). John does not tell us whose voice he heard at the sounding of this sixth trumpet, but do you remember the angel with the golden censer that offered the prayers with the incense? He stood at the four horns, the corners of the altar of incense. Also, the prayers of the saints which were mixed with incense and offered to God (seen in chapter 8:4-5) asked for judgment to come on the unrighteous! Perhaps it is that angel, the one with the golden censer, which is commanding the sixth angel, the one with the trumpet, to release another four angels which were being held in the great river Euphrates. We've discussed the significance of the number 4, the "earthly" number indicating creation and universality. As for the Euphrates River, the Israelites viewed this river as their "safe" boundary. Any enemy would naturally come from beyond that river.



As recorded in verse 15, those other four angels were loosed, prepared at any year, month, day or hour, to slay the third part of men. These were God's angels and they had no restrictions placed on them! It is the systematic purpose of the four angels to be loosed to kill one-third of the unrighteous. Some view this as Judgment Day because of what might seem to be "the appointed time," but that is not the case. The mention of year, month, day, and hour in verse 15 simply means "at any instant" they were ready. So, when IS this happening? The answer is now...yesterday... tomorrow. In other words, ugliness in this world is on-going. Harm comes to the unrighteous because of their life decisions, but righteous people, too, suffer from witnessing this ugliness firsthand. The difference, of course, is in the mindset of the two groups. We have our eyes, our minds and our hearts focused on an eternity where sin and sadness no longer exists.

The vision instantly changes from “four angels bound in the Euphrates” to an army that consists of two hundred thousand, thousand horsemen. The horses’ heads were as the heads of lions. Astride the horses were men wearing breastplates of fire, jacinth, and brimstone. From the horses’ mouths spewed forth fire, smoke and brimstone, by which the third part of men were killed.

You will not be surprised to learn that there is more to this imagery than first meets the eye. John says that out of the mouths of the horses came fire, smoke, and brimstone. It is safe to assume the fire that came from the horses’ mouths was a fiery red color, the smoke a dark blue-ish purple with a bit of grey, and the brimstone a brilliant yellow – the color of sulfur. Spence says that this particular mix of colors, when used together, signifies the wrath of God and is always used with reference to either a judgment or punishment upon the wicked.

Then we have the heads of the horses described “*as the heads of lions.*” A lion stands for strength and fierceness, with the power to submit others to his will. Their tails, he says, were like serpents with heads from which could spew poisonous venom. Putting the symbolism of the colors with the characteristics of the lion signifies that the punishment, whatever it is and whenever it occurs, WILL be carried out. The locusts, remember, could sting, but not kill. Not so with this army! As it marched across the land it left many casualties in its wake, this destruction intended to convict men of their sin and convince them to change their ways before it is too late.

The symbolism suggests that the four angels had the permissions and the power to kill the third part of man. In this vision, I still believe the fraction 1/3 stands for “less than perfect,” even though some commentators want to take the number literally. Whichever is correct... of the remainder of men who were NOT killed by the fire, smoke and brimstone, not one of them repented of their works. They continued to worship devils and man-made idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood. They continued to sin. So, in modern words we could say this: the unrighteous on this earth go about their business as if no day of reckoning is coming even though

there are warnings galore. God wants no one to perish – hence the warnings – but, it is inevitable that many will turn a deaf ear.

So ends chapter 9... but let's take the time to organize what we have learned:

1. The four angels were powerful enough to carry out their mission, unimpeded.
2. The reason God has allowed Satan some limited power on this earth is to bring the unrighteous to repentance and obedience to God's word.
3. Even though the punishments were severe, those who were not killed did NOT repent.
4. Even when a further, stronger punishment was meted out to them for the same purpose, it too failed.

Understanding this chapter boils down to understanding the main purpose of the book of Revelation – to show the servants of Christ (of all generations) things which will shortly come to pass. This means the visions seen in the book have to have meaning for all readers, both in the first and the twenty-first century.

Therefore, the bottom line is this: there will be reward for the righteous and punishment for the wicked and unrepentant. The guarantee of victory should encourage the faithful to stand strong no matter what Satan does with his limited power on this earth. And likewise, the graphic description of what will become of the unrepentant should cause them to tremble in their boots and turn away from sin. Sadly, for many it will not.