

Ministry of Grace

Revelation Chapter 9

¹And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. ²He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. ³Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. ⁴They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. ⁵They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone. ⁶And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them. ⁷In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, ⁸their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; ⁹they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. ¹⁰They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails. ¹¹They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.

¹²The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.

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

¹⁵So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind. ¹⁶The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number. ¹⁷And this is how I saw the horses in my vision and those who rode them: they wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. ¹⁸By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. ¹⁹For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails are like serpents with heads, and by means of them they wound.

²⁰The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, ²¹nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts. [ESV]

Revelation 9:1, 2

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

“star”

In the previous chapters of Revelation there have been several references to stars falling from heaven including stars falling into the sea and onto the rivers and springs of water. These are all best seen as heavenly bodies such as asteroids, meteors, and comets. In this case it is more likely that the reference is to an angelic being (a different kind of heavenly body). As an example of angels being referred to as stars, here's what God said to Job as He rebuked him:

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements--surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (**Job 38:4-7**) [ESV]

Satan, himself, was referred to as a fallen star by Isaiah.

"How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! (**Isaiah 14:12**) [ESV]

“fallen”

This word is in the perfect tense indicating past action with a current effect (current in terms of John's narrative). Therefore, this star fell at some time previous and as a result, he is now “fallen” from heaven to the earth. We could, therefore, translate this as “and I saw a star having fallen from heaven to earth” This implies that the fallen star now has the earth as his abode. The text does not specifically identify this fallen star as Satan, but it is clear that this is either Satan, as described by the Isaiah passage above, or it is one of his high ranking minions who fell with him.

Whether this is Satan or another fallen angel, the current reference to his fall may be a result of the “war in heaven” which is revealed to John in the 12th chapter of Revelation.

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (**Revelation 12:7-9**) [ESV]

This war in heaven and the casting out of Satan occurs in the middle of Daniel's seventieth week as evidenced by the following, which is also from the twelfth chapter of Revelation:

And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. (**Revelation 12:13-14**) [ESV]

Since Satan was kicked out of heaven at mid-trib and this 5th trumpet occurs during the second half of the tribulation, it is quite possible that the “star (having) fallen from heaven” is a reference to Satan.

“he was given the key”

The key was given to him by none other than Jesus Christ. Remember, Christ announced in the first chapter of Revelation that the keys of death and Hades are now in His possession.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and **I have the keys** of Death and Hades. (Revelation 1:17, 18) [ESV]

“shaft of the bottomless pit”

This is literally “pit of the abyss.” This is probably the same as “Tartarus,” where fallen angels have been bound. It is a place where demons (fallen angels) don’t want to go.

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell (*tartarus*) and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness ... (2 Peter 2:4) [ESV]

Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him. And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. (Luke 8:30, 31) [ESV]

“smoke of a great furnace”

The smoke may be a further indication that this is the abyss in Hades where fallen angels are incarcerated.

Revelation 9:3

³Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth.

These are not actual locusts as we will see in the following verses. These are demonic beings which John had a hard time describing. The swarming appearance of their ascension from the abyss resembled a locust swarm to John. Also, the fact that they were given the power of scorpions further indicates that these were not actual locusts.

Plagues of locusts are shown in scripture as judgments from God.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, so that they may come upon the land of Egypt and eat every plant in the land, all that the hail has left." So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night. When it was morning, the east wind had brought the locusts. The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled on the whole country of Egypt, such a dense swarm of locusts as had never been before, nor ever will be again. They covered the face of the whole land, so that the land was darkened, and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Not a green thing remained, neither tree nor plant of the field, through all the land of Egypt. (Exodus 10:12-15) [ESV]

What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten. Awake, you drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine, for it is cut off from your mouth. (Joel 1:4, 5) [ESV]

Revelation 9:4-6

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

These verses add detail to the form and function of the demonic ones. The fact that they were commanded not to harm plant life is further indication that they are not really locusts. Also, the fact that they are not allowed to harm those having the seal of God on their foreheads is an indication that these are spirit beings, as this marking appears not to be physical, but spiritually discerned.

It is not specifically stated that only the 144,000 are intended by the statement “**those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.**” However, the sealing of the 144,000 is the only mention of sealing in the book of Revelation. Therefore, it appears that all the inhabitants of the earth are tormented except the 144,000.

“torment”

This is from the Greek word *basanidzō* which means “to examine by torture” or “to afflict with pain.” It is interesting to note that during the dark ages, and particularly during the various inquisitions carried out by the leaders of the Catholic church, torture devices of unspeakable horror were devised by those claiming to be of the “church of God” and used on those whose only crime was a true faith in God and resistance to the false teachings of the followers of the Pope. God will turn the tables on those who reject His message during this torturous time in the tribulation.

“torment them for five months”

The typical life span of a locust invasion is five months from May through September, once again indicating the resemblance of these demonic beings to locusts. While some commentators have attempted to explain the five months as something other than a literal five months, nowhere in scripture is the word *mēnas* used to refer to anything other than a literal month.

“torment of a scorpion”

A scorpion sting is excruciatingly painful and can last for days on end. Some scorpions can inject powerful enough venom that death occurs after days of torment.

“people will seek death and will not find it”

The torturous pain inflicted by these demonic beings will be so overwhelming that people thus inflicted will seek death as a way out, but they will not be able even to commit suicide to escape the torture. And, even if they could die, they would only be giving up temporary torture for eternal torture!

Revelation 9: 7-10

⁷In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, ⁸their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; ⁹they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. ¹⁰They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails.

“like ... like ... like ... like ... like ... like ...”

Throughout John’s description of these beings, John uses the word *hōs* meaning “like” and various forms of *homoios* meaning “similar to” or “resembling.” The word *homoios* denotes a correspondence in feature, property, or nature, whereas a similar word *isos*, meaning “equal,” denotes a correspondence in measure, capacity, or position. This word is not used at all in this part of Revelation. John has never seen creatures like this before and uses comparative descriptions to describe the features of these creatures the best that he can.

“shape”

The word “shape” is translated from *homoios*, meaning “likeness.” Nothing specific is told us about the size of these “locust like” creatures. The fact that they are repeatedly compared to locusts, however, seems to imply that they are small. Though small, they are nonetheless shaped like horses ready for battle. This implies that these beings are aggressive. Upon their heads are something like crowns (*stephanos*) similar to gold. This seems to imply that their power (authority) had been given to them. The description of hair like women’s hair may imply that it was long rather than a short stubble. This could be an indication that these beings appear alluring and seductive at first. The description of their teeth indicates their fierceness and voraciousness.

“breastplates”

The word translated “breastplates” is *thorax*, meaning “the chest area.” The fact that their chests were like chests of iron implies that they were resistant to or even immune to destruction. This would make their torment even more frightening if they couldn’t be killed.

“noise of their wings”

The sonic pitch of their wings was apparently a low rumbling frequency rather than the high frequency that we are accustomed to hearing from most insects, as evidenced by the fact that they sounded like chariots and horses running into battle.

“stings like scorpions”

Their tormenting power is once again likened to that of scorpion stings. It is said that they had tails like scorpions and stings (literally “points”) in their tails. Notice that it is not “like stings in their tails” but “there were stings in their tails.”

Revelation 9:11, 12

¹¹They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon. ¹²The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.

“king ... Abaddon ... Apollyon”

Both the Hebrew word *abaddōn* and the Greek word *apolluōn* mean “destroyer.” Some commentators specifically identify this individual as Satan but the text does not say this. Nowhere else in Scripture are either of these names applied to Satan, and he is nowhere else described as the angel of the abyss. Instead, he is said to be the “**prince of the power of the air**” and is nowhere else even associated with the abyss until he is incarcerated there after the battle of Armageddon.

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while. (**Revelation 20:1-3**)

The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.

In spite of the fact that the inhabitants of the earth have undergone agonizing torture for five months, John reminds us that this is but one of the three woes predicted. There are yet two more, and the sixth and seventh trumpet judgments will be even worse than this one.

Revelation 9:13, 14

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

“a voice”

In the original Greek this is written “**one voice**.” There is a single unified voice giving the command to the sixth angel to release the four bound angels.

“from the four horns of the golden altar”

This is most likely the voice of God (probably the Lamb) coming from the altar of incense from which the hot coals were taken and thrown to the earth back in chapter eight. This may represent the fact that this judgment is in response to the prayers of the martyrs under the altar as described back in **Revelation 6:9, 10**.

“the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates”

Since good angels are never said anywhere in Scripture to be bound, these must be fallen angels (demons). The word “**bound**” is in the perfect tense indicating past completed action with current continuous effect. These angels were bound at some time in the past and, as a result, are now bound. The use of the definite article “**the**” indicates that these are four specific angels bound there.

According to John MacArthur in his *New Testament Commentary, Revelation 1-11*:

“Their precise identity is not revealed, but they may be the demons that controlled the four major world empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Daniel 10 provides insight into the warfare between holy angels and the demons that influence individual nations. In verse 13 a holy angel told Daniel that ‘the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia.’ Then in verse 20 he added, ‘Do you understand why I came to you? But I shall now return to fight against the prince of Persia; so I am going forth, and behold, the prince of Greece is about to come.’ Whoever they are, these four powerful fallen angels control a huge demonic army set to wage war against fallen mankind when God releases them to do so.”

Revelation 9:15, 16

¹⁵So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind. ¹⁶The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number.

“the hour, the day, the month, and the year”

The use of the definite article “the” indicates that this is not a timeframe during which they are released, rather a specific point in time; “The very hour of the very day of the very month of the very year ordained by God.” The significant thing is that these four powerful demons are totally under God’s control and are bound until the specific point in time that God determined to release them.

“to kill a third of mankind”

The result of the release of these four demons is that one-third of all of mankind still alive up to this point will be killed. You will recall back in **Revelation 6:8** the judgment of the fourth seal (death riding on a pale horse with Hades following along with him) resulted in one-quarter of the population of the earth being killed. From the three-quarters of the population that was left, one-third of those are now killed. Between these two judgments alone, one-half of the population of the earth is killed. And that does not include the many who were and are to be killed by the other judgments and those who will be killed for their testimony.

“The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand”

This is 200 million. This is the single largest specific number written in the New Testament. Often the term “myriads of myriads” is used in Scripture to denote an uncountable number. The fact that this is “two myriads of myriads,” however, coupled with John’s statement that “**I heard the number of them**” indicates that it is a specific number.

Revelation 9:17-19

¹⁷And this is how I saw the horses in my vision and those who rode them: they wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. ¹⁸By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. ¹⁹For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails are like serpents with heads, and by means of them they wound.

There is disagreement even among Biblical scholars, those who hold to a literal interpretation of the book of Revelation, as to whether this army is a human army or a demonic army. Some believe that the description given here of the horsemen and of their destructive power is a description of modern warfare, perhaps of tanks or airplanes. This argument is based on the description of “**by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths.**” However, the description of the power that is in their tails, “**like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm**” does not sound like modern tanks or planes. I think that it is best to think of these horsemen as demonic beings who have been given authority to kill mankind.

“horses in my vision”

Literally this is “**horses in the sight.**” The word translated “vision” is not the word normally used for a spiritual or prophetic “vision” but refers to “that which is perceived by the sense of sight.” Therefore, it appears that John actually saw some kind of horsemen, not military vehicles. The description of the horses and horsemen must, therefore, be of demonic hordes.

“**breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur**”

Literally this is “**chests fiery, hyacinth like, and sulfurous.**” It most likely refers to the colors red, blue, and yellow.

Revelation 9:20, 21

²⁰The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, ²¹nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

“sorceries”

This is a translation of the Greek word *pharmakeiōn*, from which we get our English word “pharmacy.” It is primarily a reference to the use of drugs and by extension to the acts of sorcery and witchcraft.

The most amazing part of this entire chapter is what is stated in these two verses, “**the rest of mankind ... did not repent ... nor did they repent.**” Even after the five month demonic torture of the locust-like beings followed by the annihilation of one-third of the human population by these demonic war creatures, mankind is so spiritually blind that they refuse to believe that God is willing to accept their repentance and save them. Instead, because of their total spiritual blindness, they steadfastly hang on to their pagan beliefs and demonic worship and refuse to give up their sinful acts in exchange for God’s mercy.

We are not told what criteria these demonic hordes will use to decide who to kill and who to spare. It is entirely possible that those who worship the beast and fully buy in to his satanically inspired religion are protected from the demon army and that those who are “on the fence” or

who are converts to the true faith are the ones who are killed. This would explain why those who remain are so unrepentant.

Whether this be the case or not, in the face of the witnessing of the 144,000, the two witnesses of Revelation chapter 11, and the testimony of the thousands of martyrs killed for their faith, the unrepentant earth dwellers are so tied to their own man-made, demon-worshiping, humanistic beliefs that they will refuse to submit to the mercy of a loving God and they will cling to their own pride, thus incurring the wrath of a righteous God.

That's incredible!

And yet, even Isaiah recognized that it is only through the power of God that a sinner can come to a saving knowledge of the Lord.

Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them." (John 12:39, 40) [ESV]

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