

# Study 10: Revelation Chapter 9

## **Introduction**

“...These trumpets remind us of the plagues that God brought on Egypt and I believe that is how we are supposed to view them. The oppressor is being punished – brought to his knees. As it was in the days of Moses, so it is in the days of the Revelation period. The ungodly is badly hurt, but as it turns out, not hurt sufficiently to turn him from iniquity...”

## **Body of the Study**

### **Introduction**

### **The Fifth Trumpet**

### **The Locust Plague (first woe)**

### **The Sixth Trumpet**

### **Conclusions**

## **Homework and preparation for next week:**

*Re-read chapter 9*

*Read the notes as a review of the study*

*Read chapter 10 in preparation for the next study*

*The images describe internal corruption and external invasion. Yet neither of these has brought the opponents of God to repentance. How will God accomplish His task, and why doesn't God just do it once and sort things out once and for all?*

*Who were the ones who were not affected by the calamities? What assurance does that give us? What is the overall message for the Christians in Asia Minor? What is the message for us?*

## Notes for study 10: Revelation Chapter 9

“...These trumpets remind us of the plagues that God brought on Egypt and I believe that is how we are supposed to view them. The oppressor is being punished – brought to his knees. As it was in the days of Moses, so it is in the days of the Revelation period. The ungodly is badly hurt, but as it turns out, not hurt sufficiently to turn him from iniquity<sup>1</sup>...”

### **Introduction**

The storms are increasing. In the first four trumpets they have moved from natural events that have made life *uncomfortable*, to those that have hurt men but not killed them. It's rather like the way Job was inflicted. In this chapter, the battle intensifies. A great army is assembled, and millions are killed, and yet men still will not repent!

The opening of the seventh seal heralds the seven trumpets, which continue through chapter 11. The first four trumpets were revealed in chapter 8. In chapter 9, things get decidedly worse! The pestilence continues and intensifies, but God's people are preserved from the problems. God's purpose is to bring repentance from those who do not belong to Him.

### **The Fifth Trumpet**

When the fifth trumpet sounded, John observed a star that had fallen – he did not say that he saw it fall, but when he saw it it had fallen. “...*The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss...*” (9:1 NIV). This fallen star was given some power and authority. Stars usually represented people in powerful positions – in this case it was one of those who had fallen. He was given the key to the Abyss (bottomless pit KJV). It should be noted (and obvious) here that this cannot be something that literally happened on the earth. If it was a literal bottomless pit, then it would literally go right through the earth and out the other side! The next few verses make it clear that this is a place where Satan's workers are trapped, and they will be released under limited power.

The "Abyss" (GK G12) is also referred to in 11:7 and 17:8 as the place from which the beast arises. This word refers to the underworld as (1) a prison for certain demons (Lk 8:31; cf. 2Pe 2:4; Jude 6) and (2) the realm of the dead (Ro 10:7). When the Abyss is opened, huge billows of smoke pour out, darken the sky, and release horselike locusts on the earth. (NIVBC)

“...*When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss...*” (9:2 NIV). Recently there were severe bushfires in Victoria (“black Saturday”). The smoke spread right across the state, darkened the skies, and it became eerie with the sun a darkened colour and the moon turning red. In the same way, the effect of evil on the earth quickly and rapidly spreads, and the dark things from Satan inhabit the earth where there used to be light from God.

As if that wasn't bad enough, out of the darkness comes destruction “...*And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth...*” (9:3 NIV). Have you ever seen a locust plague? I have. They swarm like a cloud, leave a mess all over the front of your car, and are extremely destructive to anything green that is nearby. (As I write the revision for this study near the end of 2010, southern Australia is on the cusp of the worst locust plague in 75 years. There are frequent advertisements on how to deal with them, control them, and even how to drive through them).

Locust plagues are one of the severest plagues of humankind. The imagery of locusts, appearing like armies, advancing like a cloud, darkening the heavens, and sounding like

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<sup>1</sup> McGuiggan, p. 124

the rattle of chariots, goes back to Joel's vision of the locust army that came on Israel as a judgment from God (Joel 1:6; 2:4-10). But the locusts of the Apocalypse inflict agony like scorpion stings (vv. 3, 5, 10). This, together with the fact that they do not eat grass (v. 4), shows that these locusts are something other than ordinary earthly insects. Indeed, they have the special task of inflicting a nonfatal injury only on the beast worshipers, who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads (v. 4; cf. comment on 7:3). This may imply that these locust-like creatures are not simply instruments of a physical plague (as in Moses' or Joel's day or under the first four trumpets) but are demonic forces out of the Abyss from whom the true people of God are protected (cf. John's use of frogs to represent demonic powers in 16:13). (NIVBC).

The locusts have a sting in their tail. None of the Australian scorpions are deadly, but they can inflict a painful sting (I know – I've been stung!). In some parts of the world they can be fatal.

These locusts were given limited power “...*They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads...*” (9:4 NIV). The message is clear – God's people will not be harmed by these envoys of Satan. The reason is explained in the last verse of the chapter – it was because of sin in worshipping demons and idolatry, as well as occult practices and sexual immorality. God's people do not engage in these practices, and consequently are not subject to the physical consequences of these sins in their lives. But of course – there is a warning here that we (as God's people) need to learn – we need to flee from sin and not get caught up in these practices!

Satan's power was limited, firstly to those who did not belong to God (9:4), but he was also given limited power to those who did not belong to God “...*They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a man...*” (9:6 NIV). The period of five months is about the life span of a locust. It is more than sufficient time to inflict a lot of damage, but in terms of our lifetime, it is a relatively short period. God uses the period of conflict so that those people who do not belong to Him might repent and turn to Him. They will observe their condition of suffering which has been brought about by their own lifestyle with that of the Christians who are not suffering “...*During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them...*” (9:6 NIV). When you are in pain and suffering, death might seem like a good option. The key is that God is trying to bring these people to repentance.

#### ***Alternate Views of the Text***

Wallace (p.181) connects the fifth trumpet to events around the destruction of Jerusalem:

“ Seeking death – “In those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it” – 9:6

For comparison read Luke 21:26, Matthew 24:22, and Mark 13:12, 20 – the Lord's own predictions concerning these events. There could be no fitter application of these symbols than the tragic conditions attending the siege of Jerusalem, as described in the graphic language of Matthew, Mark and Luke.”

### ***The Locust Plague (first woe)***

John gives us an almost detailed description of the locusts “...*The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces...*” (9:7 NIV). They were like an army with horses dressed and prepared for battle. The implication is that they were powerful and prepared, and we should not underestimate them. They were also deceptive and came with an appearance of something that they were not. The crowns of gold had the appearance of victory (“If you follow us, you will gain the crown too”), and even though they had come as messengers from Satan, they had faces which appeared human.

The descriptions (and the deceptions) continue “...*Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. <sup>9</sup> They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. <sup>10</sup> They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months...*” (9:8-10 NIV). Notice how John uses symbolism in the descriptions:

- The locusts *looked like* horses prepared for battle
- On their heads they wore *something like* crowns of gold,
- Their faces *resembled* human faces
- Their hair *was like* women's hair,
- Their teeth *were like* lions' teeth.
- They had breastplates *like* breastplates of iron,
- The sound of their wings *was like* the thundering of many horses and chariots

The image is of destruction, power (although limited power) and deception. The root cause of the evil is Satan who is at work in the world, but with limited power “...*They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon...*” (9:11 NIV).

This description creates an image of the fearful onslaught of demonic powers in the last days. Therefore, their leader is called "Abaddon" (GK H11 & H13) in Hebrew and "Apollyon" (GK G661) in Greek. The Hebrew term means "destruction" or "ruin" (cf. Job 26:6; Pr 27:20) and more often "the place of ruin" in Sheol (cf. Job 26:6; Pr 15:11; 27:20), "death" (cf. Job 28:22), or "the grave" (cf. Ps 88:11). The Greek term means "exterminator" or "destroyer" and does not occur elsewhere in the Bible. Some understand Apollyon as a separate angel entrusted with authority over the Abyss. (NIVBC)

The eagle had announced three “woes” to the inhabitants of the earth (8:13). The locust plague was the first of these “...*The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come...*” (9:12 NIV).

### **The Sixth Trumpet**

The situation worsens as the sixth trumpet sounds “...*Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God...*” (9:13 NKJV). The image is of the altar from the Temple which had four horns (one in each corner Ex 30:2). The message was to release the powers of torment “...*It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."*...” (9:14 NIV). The river Euphrates points to the source of most of the threats to Israel (Babylon, Persia, and Assyria). Another powerful threat was to be released, like the times that God had brought judgement on Israel to bring them into line, so God would use powerful weapons to bring men to repentance.

The powers were ready to respond to God’s call “...*And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind...*” (9:15 NIV). Hailey notes<sup>2</sup>:

These four angels of judgement had been prepared for a time fixed in the mind of God, for He determines when the appropriate moment has come for judgement according to His purpose: “It is not for you to know the times or seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority” (Acts 1:7). With each sounding of a trumpet or group of trumpets the judgements become progressively intense. At the sound of the first four trumpets a third of each realm is affected; with the fifth trumpet men are tormented but do not die; now in this sixth judgement a third of mankind is killed.

The troops are mobilised on horseback “...*The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number...*” (9:16 NIV). Such a number is almost inconceivable – about the entire population of the USA. Hailey notes again<sup>3</sup>:

Summers estimates that in regular formation this number of men would make a column one mile wide and eighty-five miles long (p. 159). But we are not to think of this number

<sup>2</sup> Hailey, p. 235

<sup>3</sup> Hailey, p. 236

as a literal quantity, but as a symbol of a mighty host, full and complete – literally, two myriads of myriads (cf. Ps. 68:17; Dan 7:10). It is a grand total, sufficient to accomplish God’s purpose in any judgement at any time.

The NIV Bible Commentary adds:

At v. 16 a mounted army of some 200 million horses and riders is rather abruptly introduced. While some argue for a literal human army here, several factors point to their identity as demonic forces. First, the horsemen are not in themselves important but wear brightly colored breastplates of fiery red, dark blue, and sulfurous yellow, more suggestive of supernatural than natural riders. More important are the horses, which not only have heads resembling lions but are, rather than their riders, the instruments of death by the three plagues of fire, smoke, and sulfur that come from their mouths. Furthermore, these horses have tails like snakes that are able to kill (vv. 17-19), unlike the locusts’ scorpionlike tails that do not inflict death but only injury (v. 5). Finally, an army of 200 million could not be conscripted, supported, and moved to the Middle East without totally disrupting all societal needs and capabilities. Thus it seems better to understand the vast numbers and description of the horses as indicating demonic hordes. (NIVBC)

*“...The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. <sup>18</sup> A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths. <sup>19</sup> The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury...” (9:17-19 NIV).*

Whilst we could speculate about the meanings of the colours and descriptions, it is worth noting that the armies came breathing fire and brimstone which pronounce God’s judgement (as with the case of Sodom and Gomorrah Gen 19:24-25). God’s purpose was to bring repentance *“...The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood--idols that cannot see or hear or walk. <sup>21</sup> Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts...” (9:20-21 NIV).* Hailey notes<sup>4</sup>:

It is clear from this description of those affected that only the wicked, worldly, and rebellious against God are included in the one-third who were killed and the two-thirds who were not killed. In these trumpet judgements the saints have not been considered; they are not directly involved.

In any event, these judgements which God sent upon the world of the ungodly as warnings failed to impress them, for they repented not of the evil works of their hands.

And again<sup>5</sup>:

We are not to think of one physical army at a given point in history, but of God’s death-dealing judgements as He uses the armies of time to execute His wrath; here one-third of mankind is killed as a result of God’s judgement against idolatry and its fruit.

The full impact of the trumpet scene is difficult to grasp, but the following can help us to put it into perspective. Quoting from Albertus Pieters Hailey says<sup>6</sup>:

As for the great happening of the trumpet series, I do not take much interest in locating them here or there in history, for it seems to me I know them. Have we not seen ourselves twice, in 1914-1918 and again in 1939-1945 seen the bottomless pit opened, and the heavens darkened by swarms of evil things that issued from it? Has not the thunder of the

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<sup>4</sup> Hailey, p. 237

<sup>5</sup> Hailey, p. 239

<sup>6</sup> Hailey, p. 240

two hundred million hellish horsemen shaken the earth in our own day, so that we can never forget it? So it seems to me, as I see the pageant unroll act after act; and finally I turn away with profound confidence in the plans of Him that sitteth on the throne, written in the unsealed orders that are in the hands of the Lamb (p. 129-130).

### **Conclusions**

Whilst these plagues are somewhat confusing, some things are clear. They result from God's response to the prayers of the saints (not just the martyrs) (8:3-5), and they were intended to bring about repentance (9:21).

God's people were to be exempted from the attacks (9:4), which come from Satan and his henchmen (9:1-11), and Satan uses them in deceptive ways to confuse the world (9:8-10). When Satan was released on the earth, he darkened God's creation (9:2) but the people would not repent. Even when the conflict increased to the point when people were killed, they still wouldn't repent (9:20).

God has a huge military power (9:16) available to inflict punishment on the oppressors, and they will be released at His call.

The Roman armies invaded the world and forced people to worship the Roman gods as well as the emperor himself. Rome was corrupt, decadent, and immoral, and yet the people did not see the fallacy of what the Romans were doing to them, and engaged in the same practices themselves. The (Roman) world had the opportunity to repent and stop engaging with the immoral practices of Rome, but they went along with Rome without considering the consequences of their actions. Many were killed by the Romans, but still they did not see the fallacy of their actions.

God will bring about further judgments (the bowls of wrath), but before He does, John has to eat a little book (chapter 10).