

Chapter nine of Revelation is meant to open our eyes to the destructive nature of evil and its strangle hold on humanity. The things of the world promise satisfaction while destroying in a torturous way those who indulge in it. The nature of Adam in which we were all born is not only susceptible to it, but mankind is born with it (Romans 5:12ⁱ). We readily believe its lies. I think the best image of it is to see the before and after pictures of meth addicts. In a matter of a few years a beautiful person looks like they are ready to die. But this nature can be just as ugly in a person who is beautiful on the outside. Throughout Scripture it is addressed as our tendency toward idolatry. We tend to think some physical thing will satisfy us. In turning from all God has for us and fixating on some physical thing, we desire more and more of it, because what satisfied in the past is not enough for the present (Ephesians 4:19ⁱⁱ). Whether it is drugs, pornography, relationships, money, approval, or any number of other things, we can never get enough. It drives us to ruin, and that is Satan's goal. We are voluntarily going to his torture chamber day after day, when all the while God is pleading for us to come to Him for life (John 5:40ⁱⁱⁱ). What will open our eyes?

This chapter tells us some of the harsher means that God must use to wake us out of our sin coma. Like all the judgments we have seen to this point, these are applicable to every age, but I believe will find their ultimate fulfillment in the final days before Jesus' return (Matthew 24:21,22^{iv}). The intensity of these judgments shows not only God's desire to see people turn from evil, but also His justice toward those who refuse His love, goodness, grace, and reject salvation in Christ.

The first four trumpets fell upon land, sea, fresh water, and sky. The following three directly affect the people on the earth. The star that falls is an angel to whom was given the key to the abyss or bottomless pit. Jesus had the key to Hades in 1:18^v. This means Jesus gave the authority to this angel for a specific purpose. Every time we read of a star falling, it is in reference to an evil angel. God is sovereign over them as well. They can only do what He allows them to do (Job 1:12^{vi}).

¹ And 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. ² He 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. ³ Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. Revelation 9:1-3 The abyss is a real place. It is described in Jewish literature as a narrow bottomless shaft and is also referred to as Hades. If you stand near an active volcano, gas like smoke seeps from the cracks in the ground from around it. Those gasses are often deadly. If we look at this in a literal sense, the release of the swarm of evil creatures in such volume could increase the debris in the atmosphere further darkening the sun.

John describes numerous strange creatures like locusts but with power to torment like a scorpion. Again, we have a similarity to a plague on Egypt only intensified (Exodus 10:4^{vii}). In Deuteronomy 8:15^{viii} poisonous snakes and scorpions are mentioned together. Unlike the plague on Egypt, these creatures only focus their attack on people. But like the Egyptian plague, the people of God are not affected. The attack lasts for five months,

which is the life span of a locust. It is so painful and persistent that people want to find a way to die.

Locusts are described in other Jewish literature as demonic beings that psychologically afflict the earth dwellers, meaning the unredeemed. Those they affect are so tormented that they want to die but are unwilling to commit suicide. I dealt with a woman in town who was experiencing something like this. She wanted freedom from the torment but was unwilling to reject the demonic spirit that tormented her because of what it did for her in the way of creativity.

The darkness described by reason of the smoke may be symbolic of the false teaching that arises and spreads throughout the earth. John's Gospel frequently refers to darkness as evil influences (John 3:19^{ix}; 1 John 1:5^x). If that is the case, it seems to already be spreading to diminish the light of the gospel so that right is deemed wrong and wrong is deemed right (Isaiah 5:20^{xi}). Criminals are given more rights than their victims. Cartels are rewarded for helping people violate laws. Corrupt politicians are rewarded with board positions in the companies they voted to benefit. The government prints our currency and passes it out to whatever ideology or groups they want favor from, destroying the currency and passing on the debt to our children and grandchildren in the process. I could go on and on. It is nothing new. It has always been this way. It is just that in our country we have seen that with the decline of faith and the increase of idolatry, our nation is rapidly losing the blessings that came from faith in God. We can point outward, but we must look within. What is our part? What are we doing to turn the tide? Are we praying? Are we speaking up?

⁴ They 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. ⁵ They 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. ⁶ And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them. Revelation 9:4-6 In chapter 7 we saw that the 144000 were sealed. I shared why I believe they are the same as the great multitude that came out of the great tribulation. The saints have the seal of God to keep us from being harmed by God's wrath on the wicked, just as the pattern in Ezekiel 9 and with the children of God in Egypt during the ten plagues. We are sealed with the seal of divine ownership (2 Timothy 2:19^{xii}; Ephesians 1:13^{xiii}). Revelation 14 verse 1^{xiv} says the 144,000 have their Father's name on their foreheads. In chapter 3 verse 12^{xv} we are told that the conquerors are promised to have the name of their God written on them. That seems to say those who conquer by staying faithful to the end and the 144,000 are the same.

⁷ In 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, ⁸ their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; ⁹ they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. ¹⁰ They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails. ¹¹ They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon. Revelation 9:7-11 Five verses are used to describe these horrible creatures. They appear battle ready which may imply some kind of armor. They have something golden in color on their heads that looks like a crown. Their faces are human-like. They have long hair and teeth

like that of a lion. There is iron hard covering of their undersides. The sound of their wings is like an army on the attack, a steady roar. Their tails have those scorpion-like stingers and the pain lasts for five months. Another translation would be their life cycle in which they hurt men lasts five months. Is John describing literal creatures or is he describing demonic influence as creatures? Pliny the Elder described a flying creature in his day that was snake-like but also had stinger like that of a scorpion.

There is a fish in the Caribbean called a scorpion fish. They look like a rock. If you step on them, they slap you with their tail resulting in intense pain that lasts for weeks. These creatures are worse! Like bees they operate at the leading of their leader. He is the angel of the abyss. His name means the Destroyer!

Are these some creatures we have never seen before? Or could they be the product of genetic manipulation? Some commentators believe this is an apocalyptic way of declaring the intensity of pain caused by a sin sick society. In African nations the scourge of AIDS and more recently Ebola had effects like this. Others believe these symbolize demonic forces that cause mental anguish. They believe the description is to help us grasp the torment by describing them in a physical way. They point to the seven-time use of the word *like* in those verses. In other words, these are not those things but are like them.

This would not be an unusual way to interpret the passage. In Joel chapters 1 and 2 there is a similar description of locusts which were symbolic of an invading army. The trumpet is blown and the sun and moon are darkened. There is a call to repentance and a recognition that the coming judgment of being conquered and the resulting famine are from God. The only means of escape was repentance and casting oneself on the mercy of God. The similarities are obvious.

Jewish tradition held that in *Sheol* there were “angels of destruction” who were in authority over thousands of scorpions. The sting of the scorpions was lethal. However, some of the stings do not kill, but only torment the inhabitants of hell.^{xvi} The king over that domain is probably the same fallen angel in verse one. Whether creatures or spirits, these creatures are led by the Destroyer. This may be Satan himself or one of his generals.

The Greek name Apollyon may be derived from the same root as the Greek god Apollo. Romans referred to Apollo as the tormentor. The Caesars thought of themselves as descended from Apollo. Domitian liked to play the role of Apollo in private dinner plays. It may be that this helped the churches that received this letter to see that the power behind Domitian was Satan who will be judged. Satan is also called the Destroyer. He acts in opposition to God the Creator or at God’s command in judgment. He kills and destroys (John 10:10^{xvii})!

¹² *The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.* Revelation 9:12 These last three trumpets are referred to as "woes". The prophets would pronounce a judgement of God to be dealt upon a people by declaring "Woe!" (Isaiah 5:8^{xviii}; Numbers 21:29^{xix}). The vision of the first was finished. Two more visions follow, the those of the sixth and seventh trumpets.

¹³ *Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God,* ¹⁴ *saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.”* Revelation 9:13,14 The earthly tabernacle was made after the pattern of the heavenly reality (Hebrews 8:5^{xx}). The golden altar is the altar of incense representing the prayers of God's people. Each of the four corners looked like a horn. In the letter to the Hebrews, we read

that it was inside the Most Holy Place instead of outside in the Holy Place (Hebrews 9:2,3^{xxi}). That may be because the veil was torn upon the death of Jesus so that we now have direct access to God through Jesus.

The voice that John hears comes from the horns on the golden altar of incense. This may be suggesting that the prayers of the saints are allowed to direct the next woe. We saw in 8:3-5^{xxii} that the trumpets were introduced with an angel throwing coals from the same altar onto the earth. That connects the voice from the horns of the altar to the prayers of the martyrs under this altar (6:10,11^{xxiii}). This would encourage those living under Domitian's persecution then or those being persecuted today that their prayers do have an effect. It may not be seen in their lifetime, but God's justice cannot be withheld forever. This indicates that the prayers of God's people bring on the trumpet judgments.

If these angels are bound, they must be demonic angels. They may be the four winds that are held back by four angels (7:1^{xxiv}). In chapter seven they seemed to be from the four corners of the earth but here they are at the Euphrates. The four corners of the earth may be a description of their actions affecting the whole world.

¹⁵ So 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. ¹⁶ The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number. Revelation 9:15,16
Following the locusts of the last trumpet is this massive army of two-hundred-million mounted troops. That is the same pattern we see in Deuteronomy 28, (see 49, 50^{xxv}) and in Joel chapters 1 and 2. Whether locusts preceded the army or were a metaphor for the army is not clear, but the pattern is the same.

They are held for this specific purpose and time to lead a two hundred-million-man cavalry attack on the unrepentant. Whether this is a multitude of demonic spirits or literal horses and soldiers, the results are a third of the world's population dies. Remember that the saints were crying out from under the altar for God to avenge them. He told them to wait a little longer (Revelation 6:10,11). Everything happens in God's set time. He is sovereign over every detail. We get upset when things do not happen when we would like but God has a plan. We worry about physical things and details when we should be trusting that God's sovereignty is over all His works and that the details are for our good and His glory.

If this were to happen in our day, it would mean the death of around 3 billion people. That would disrupt everything. Societies would have to restructure everything, but they would not have time, as another woe is coming.

¹⁷ And 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. ¹⁸ By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. ¹⁹ For 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. Revelation 9:17-19
Again we have such a detailed description of something never before seen. Is it literal or symbolic or both? Is each of the descriptions a way to describe the powers of Persian and Gaul forces that would eventually end the Roman empire or some kind of supernatural beasts that will be seen in the last seven years? Smoke and sulfur remind us of volcanic activity. Are the mouth and tails armies that come first and those that come later? Whatever the meaning, it is certain that Rome did fall, and all the

kingdoms of man will end. What seems so powerful today will be defeated in the future. In the end, only God's kingdom will stand (Daniel 2:44,45^{xxvi}). Everyone will face death or be caught up to heaven. Every persecutor will stand before God and be judged. As devastating as these two woes were and will be, there is yet one to come.

²⁰ The 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, ²¹ nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts. Revelation 9:20,21 One would hope that by this time the people who witness these things would think of their eternal destiny. That this is God's purpose in these afflictions is evidenced by these last verses at the end of this chapter which tells us they will refuse to stop worshiping Mammon/financial wealth, physical objects, nor will they stop murdering, practicing witchcraft, sexual immorality, or thievery. Their unwillingness shows they knew there is an alternative. John will mention this unwillingness to repent three more times in chapter 16 (16:9^{xxvii}, 11^{xxviii}, 21^{xxix}). Consider the extent to which God goes to turn people from darkness to light. Is that not true with each individual throughout time? I believe there will be no one in hell who would have turned had they been given more warnings, nor will hell convince them that they have made the wrong choice.

At the top of the news cycle when I first wrote this were the fires in California. Since then, we have seen enormous fires in Canada. These areas lead the way in liberal causes. I wonder if the majority of those affected are so hardened that the fire and smoke and loss will not be sufficient to cause them to consider their relationship with God. When the hurricane hit New Orleans and casinos on the southern coast, I wondered then too. Does anyone in our day consider that nature's devastation is allowed by God to turn us from our wicked ways? When I ask the question, even many believers seem unaware how the Bible describes what we call natural disasters as being sent by God. Our understanding of meteorology, as limited as it is, should in no way limit the fact that the Bible clearly teaches that God has in the past used what we call natural disasters to carry out His will. Man rejects the concept because man rejects God and His Word!

What do you think would happen to us if we carried signs in Sedona that declared "Sorcery and sexual immorality will be judged by God!" The consequences you imagine should tell you why the people who experience the six trumpets will not repent.

This should be a warning to all in our day. These forces are at work in the present. The CDC reported that 57% of teen girls felt persistently sad or hopeless.^{xxx} 57%! Our inner cities are battle zones. Politicians and the judiciary are ruling by ideology rather than the law. One of the names of the Antichrist is the Lawless One (2 Thessalonians 2:8^{xxxi}). It seems to me that the spirit of antichrist is on the rise around the world.

How do people become so hardened that even after facing devastating conditions they will not repent? Rejecting conviction does not start with crimes like murder. It starts in little ways, distorting the truth, slandering others to make ourselves look good, twisting the facts, and little by little we become callous to conviction until we find ourselves doing something we never thought we would do and justifying it in our minds. We slack off on godly habits and fellowship until it no longer bothers us like it once did. Little by little our hearts can develop a callous. If we are in Christ, it will probably result in some severe discipline to turn us back (Hebrews 12:5,6^{xxxii}). If you are not in Christ, like these people in our passage today, you will see the Holy Spirit as your enemy. Your gods become the

things your fallen nature lusts after. You will never repent because you do not think you need to. You have fallen for the first lie. “You will be like God” (Genesis 3:5^{xxxiii}). Pride is subtlest sin, thinking you do not need God. These two woes are only a foretaste of what follows.

As for me and my house, by God’s grace, we will serve the Lord (Joshua 24:15^{xxxiv}). Be sure you are among the sealed and can stand in that day knowing God has put boundaries on whom they can harm. Know the deceitfulness of sin and refuse to compromise. Be among those who will stand firm on the unshakable rock of Christ Jesus (Psalm 1:5^{xxxv}; Revelation 6:17^{xxxvi}).

Questions:

- 1 Why is man so prone to sin?
- 2 How do the last trumpets differ from the first four?
- 3 What might the darkening of the sun represent?
- 4 Who is protected? Parallel?
- 5 What is the similarity with Joel 1, 2?
- 6 Why are the last trumpets called “woes”.
- 7 What came from trumpet 5?
- 8 What came from trumpet 6?
- 9 Why would man not repent?
- 10 What is the warning to us?

ⁱ **Romans 5:12 (ESV)**

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

ⁱⁱ **Ephesians 4:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

ⁱⁱⁱ **John 5:40 (ESV)**

⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

^{iv} **Matthew 24:21-22 (ESV)**

²¹ For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. ²² And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

^v **Revelation 1:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

^{vi} **Job 1:12 (ESV)**

¹² And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.” So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

^{vii} **Exodus 10:4 (ESV)**

⁴ For if you refuse to let my people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country,

^{viii} **Deuteronomy 8:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock,

^{ix} **John 3:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

^x **1 John 1:5 (ESV)**

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

^{xi} **Isaiah 5:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

^{xii} **2 Timothy 2:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

^{xiii} **Ephesians 1:13 (ESV)**

¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,

^{xiv} **Revelation 14:1 (ESV)**

¹ Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.

^{xv} **Revelation 3:12 (ESV)**

¹² The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

^{xvi} G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 502.

^{xvii} **John 10:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

^{xviii} **Isaiah 5:8 (ESV)**

⁸ Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land.

^{xix} **Numbers 21:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ Woe to you, O Moab! You are undone, O people of Chemosh! He has made his sons fugitives, and his daughters captives, to an Amorite king, Sihon.

^{xx} **Hebrews 8:5 (ESV)**

⁵ They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain."

^{xxi} **Hebrews 9:2-3 (ESV)**

² For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place. ³ Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place,

^{xxii} **Revelation 8:3-5 (ESV)**

³ And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, ⁴ and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. ⁵ Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

^{xxiii} **Revelation 6:10-11 (ESV)**

¹⁰ They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" ¹¹ Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

^{xxiv} **Revelation 7:1 (ESV)**

¹ After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree.

^{xxv} **Deuteronomy 28:49-50 (ESV)**

⁴⁹ The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, ⁵⁰ a hard-faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young.

^{xxvi} **Daniel 2:44-45 (ESV)**

⁴⁴ And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, ⁴⁵ just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand,

and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.”

^{xxvii} **Revelation 16:9 (ESV)**

⁹ They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.

^{xxviii} **Revelation 16:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

^{xxix} **Revelation 16:21 (ESV)**

²¹ And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.

^{xxx} <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/p0213-yrbs>

^{xxxi} **2 Thessalonians 2:8 (ESV)**

⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

^{xxxii} **Hebrews 12:5-6 (ESV)**

⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

^{xxxiii} **Genesis 3:5 (ESV)**

⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

^{xxxiv} **Joshua 24:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

^{xxxv} **Psalms 1:5 (ESV)**

⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

^{xxxvi} **Revelation 6:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”