

REVELATION

Chapter 9

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

The Fifth and Sixth Trumpet-Angels Demons from the Abyss and the Last Battle

The revelations of the fifth and sixth trumpet-angels are called woes (8:13; the third "woe" applies to the seventh trumpet-angel's revelation in 11:15–19). This sets them off from the plagues revealed by the first four trumpet-angels and indicates their greater seriousness. Moreover, the descriptions of the locusts and of the fearful calamities that will be visited on the earth's human inhabitants are given more attention, more detail. In addition, unlike the four horsemen in Revelation 6 and the natural forces and heavenly bodies in Revelation 8, the images and symbols that confront John in the scenes of the fifth and six trumpet-angels are other-worldly and not from earthly reality. For the locust-like creatures introduced by the fifth trumpet-angel and the cavalry-like creatures with both human and animal features following the sounding of the sixth trumpet are not visible except to the human imagination. This means that whatever the fifth

and sixth scenes all involve, what they portray and symbolize is not within natural human understanding and experience but is of the supernatural and thus understood only within the spiritual realm. (CC p 235)

9:1 *a star had fallen*. The star in 8:10 was part of a cosmic disturbance; here the star is a divine agent, probably an angel (cf. 20:1). (CSB)

Satan. Stars often represent angelic beings, and Satan is a fallen angel. (TLSB)

At the trumpet sound of the fifth angel, John sees a star that had fallen out of the skies, and it is given the key of the abyss. This star is not the same as the star in 8:10–11 (named “Wormwood”) which fell into the waters and embittered and poisoned them. For this star in 9:1 is not merely a “mass of molten material” but rather also represents a personality.¹⁴ The star, as a stand-in for the one who has the key of the abyss and who is a ruler (βασιλεύς), has a *personal* name (Hebrew מִן־בְּרָאָה or Greek Ἀπολλύων) and is identified as the “angel of the abyss” (ἄγγελος τῆς ἀβύσσου, 9:11). The identity of this star is unmistakable, for it is the same personality that is embodied by the dragon in 12:3 and who is identified as the devil and Satan (12:9). (CC pp. 235-236)

Jewish tradition sometimes depicts the fallen angels as fallen stars. For example, in 1 Enoch 21:1–6 seven fallen, burning stars represent angels who had “transgressed the commandments of the Lord” and thus now are bound. Such imagery may have been derived from Judg 5:20, which describes how the stars fought against Sisera, but probably more likely from Is 14:12, which speaks of a star that had fallen from heaven and typified the fall of the king of Babylon, and then, by way of analogy, the casting of Satan out of heaven (Is 14:11–15; cf. Rev 12:7–9). 1 Enoch 86:1–6 describes a star which had fallen to the earth and had disturbed the earth so as to cause terror among its inhabitants. And in 1 Enoch 88:1 this fallen star is bound and thrown into the abyss. This tradition of a fallen star is similar to the picture in Lk 10:18, where Jesus said that he saw Satan falling from heaven like lightning (cf. Rev 12:3–4, 7–9; 20:1–3). (CC p. 236)

Satan, the devil, is here introduced into the prophetic message of Revelation. He will play a prominent role throughout the remainder of the message. Here in Revelation 9 he appears as a star and is identified as the angel of hell and the king of the demons who come out of the abyss. In Revelation 12, he will appear as the dragon, the archenemy of God and Christ and the church on earth. His minions and cohorts are represented by the two beasts of Revelation 13 and by Babylon, which consists of the first beast and the harlot (Revelation 17–18). He is the perpetrator of Armageddon in Revelation 16 and of Gog and Magog in Revelation 20. Finally, at the second coming of the Lord Christ, he will be cast forever into hell (Revelation 19–20). (CC p. 236)

The fallen star, the angel of the abyss, unlocks the depths of hell and from its hellish interior comes forth a smoke as from a large furnace of fire. The smoke is so widespread that the entire earth and its atmosphere are enveloped. It is so dense that the sun is unable fully to penetrate it and so appears darkened. The smoke and its darkness graphically portray the spiritual darkness that is perpetrated by the angel of the abyss, a darkness that covers the entire earth and its human population (cf. Gen 19:27–28; 2 Cor 6:14; Eph 2:2). (CC p. 236)

bottomless pit. Conceived of as the subterranean abode of demonic hordes (see 20:1; Lk 8:31). The Greek word means “very deep” or “bottomless,” and is used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT) to translate the Hebrew word for the primeval deep (see Ge 1:2; 7:11; Pr 8:28). Seven of the nine NT references are in Revelation. (CSB)

A realm forsaken by God – the realm of the demons, previously referred to as Hades (6:8). Later a demonic beast will emerge from this hellish pit. (TLSB)

9:2 *opened the shaft of the bottomless pit* – Unleashing demonic forces. (TLSB) LSB – 656 v. 3

smoke from the great furnace – Evokes memories of the smoldering remains of Sodom and Gomorrah and thus symbolizes God’s wrath against evil. (TLSB)

Out of the rising smoke from the pit of hell (cf. 1 Enoch 21:7) come locust-like creatures who have the authority and power of scorpions on the earth. Their purpose is to afflict the human race, not the grass or trees or plant life. The trees and plant life and other natural entities important for sustaining life were afflicted by the plagues introduced by the earlier four trumpet-angels. Now out of the human race those who do not bear “the seal of God” (Rev 9:4) are singled out for affliction (see 7:1–8). (CC p. 236)

9:3 *locusts*. For background see the plague of locusts in Ex 10:1–20. Joel 1:2–2:11 interprets the locust plague as a foreshadowing of the devastations that accompany the day of the Lord. Locusts traveled in enormous swarms and could strip a land of all vegetation. In 1866, 200,000 people died in a famine in Algiers following a locust plague. (CSB)

Evokes another plague upon Egypt. Such locust infestations left vegetation stripped bare and the people famished. (TLSB)

ἀκρίδες—These are locusts or grasshoppers. The LXX used the word primarily to translate אַרְבֵּי הָאָרֶץ, the most common word for locust in the OT, though other words were used (e.g., אַרְבֵּי הָאָרֶץ). While locusts were used for food (Lev 11:21–22; Mt 3:4), they were most noted as “one of the severest evils [plagues] of mankind.” And to this day in natural cycles, every so often, they plague the Near East and parts of Africa, devouring all vegetation and leaving the earth a barren wasteland (cf. Joel 2:2–5). (CC p. 232)

scorpions. Large spider-like organisms that injure or kill by means of a poisonous barb in the tail. (CSB)

Emblematic of satanic power (cf. Luke 10:18-19). (TLSB)

9:4 *were told* – Though the agent of this verb is not given, it is understood to be the Lord. This is an example of the “divine passive,” a literary device employed at many points in Scripture (cf. v. 3). The Jewish people did not use the name of the Lord (Yahweh) if at all possible – Adonai. (TLSB)

not to harm – Creation is spared, but the godless are effectively targeted. (TLSB)

people who did not have the seal of God. The first woe does not affect the “servants of God” (see 7:3). Cf. the Israelites, who were protected from the Egyptian plagues (Ex 8:22; 9:4, 26; 10:23; 11:7). (CSB)

Preserves the godly from the plague. (TLSB)

Locusts have long been a natural phenomenon which often plagues vegetation and as a result causes loss to human commerce and food production. Swarms of such locusts can wipe out entire crops and thus the livelihood of people. In Ex 10:1–20 a plague of locusts descended on ancient

Egypt and destroyed the vegetation of all the land. Joel 1:1–2:11 paints a terrifying, graphic picture of an invasion of locusts. All plant life before the horde of these creatures is wiped out (Joel 1:2–4). In Joel the locusts and the destruction they wreak portend the coming fury of God’s judgment (Joel 1:13–15; 2:1–2, 11). Just as no human can stop and reverse the swarm of locusts and their devastation, so no one can abide and endure the dark and dreadful day of the Lord (Joel 2:11). Jesus in his earthly ministry also spoke of scorpions as representatives of the power of the enemy and his forces who oppose Jesus’ ministry and that of his followers (Lk 10:17–20; cf. Lk 11:12). (CC p. 237)

As the locusts in Joel, so also the locust-like creatures here in Rev 9:3–4 embody something of the evil spiritual realm. In Joel they are a frightening phenomenon of nature to portray the terror of God’s coming judgment. Here in Revelation 9 they portray the hordes of demons from hell which fall upon the human race. In John’s vision the locusts have the ability to injure people as scorpions do. While locusts do not directly injure human beings, these locusts in John’s vision do injure mankind because they are like scorpions. And while scorpions do not swarm and thus by their numbers darken the sky, these scorpions do so because they are like locusts. (CC p. 237)

These demons from the abyss afflict only those of the human race who do not belong to God, who have not been sealed as his own (see 7:1–8). In the same way that the children of Israel were protected from the plagues that hit the Egyptians (Ex 8:20–23; 9:1–7, 25–26; 10:21–23), so now in this scene John hears the word that these locust-like scorpions are not to touch God’s own people. This does not mean that God’s people will not suffer at all from the onslaught of Satan and his hordes of demons. But that suffering will be pictured and emphasized later in Revelation in the warfare of the dragon against the church (12:13–18; 13:1–18). Here in Revelation 9 Satan is set loose to afflict only those who are not followers of the Lamb. God permits this to happen in order to move people to repentance (9:21). Consequently, Satan and his demons cannot kill but only injure. The warfare of the dragon against the church on earth is different. (CC p. 237)

Who gives to these locust-like, scorpion-like demons authority at this time to injure those not sealed with God’s name? Behind the passive voice “was given” (9:3) stands the agency of God. If their king and ruler—the angel of the abyss, the devil himself—had his way, he would do much more than injure some people. As in the case of Job (1:6–12; 2:1–6), it is God who permits these demons to strike, in this case those who lack God’s name. The demons and their king can go so far and no farther, for it is God’s will that no sinner should die but that all should come to the knowledge of the truth (Ezek 18:23; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9). (CC pp. 237–238)

9:5 not to kill them – The demons and their king can go far and no further, for it is God’s will that no sinner should die, but that all should come to the knowledge of the truth (Ezek 18:23; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9) (CC p. 238)

five months. A limited period of time suggested by the life cycle of the locust or the dry season (spring through late summer, about five months), in which the danger of a locust invasion is always present. (CSB)

Though most numbers in Revelation have an obvious symbolic value, this case is different. Perhaps five months corresponds to the length of a devastating locust infection. (TLSB)

For a period of “five months” (Rev 9:5) unbelieving mankind is to be tormented. This time period may be modeled after the life cycle of locusts and thus suggests that the sufferings caused by the demons are not a constant continuum. At any given time throughout the period covered by Revelation’s message (from Christ’s ascension to his return), those not marked with the seal of

God will suffer the anguish of these demonic torments, whether of a mental or physical kind. These sufferings will not always be present in a particular unbeliever's life, and when they are, they will not necessarily last an entire lifetime. The pain and suffering is likened to the sharp pain resulting from the sting of a scorpion. While not deadly, the pain and suffering inflicted by these demons, of whatever nature, will bring excruciating anguish—so severe that people will desire death. But no matter how much these unbelievers will long for death, thinking that death would bring release from the torment inflicted upon them, death will not come. This hinderance which blocks death from coming to them must be viewed as part of God's will. For God does not permit this torment in order that this demonic affliction should *kill*, but rather that it (painfully) bring people to an awareness of their lost condition—as people who do not belong to God. (CC p. 238)

9:6 *seek death, but will not find it.* Cf. Hos 10:8 (quoted in Lk 23:30). Cornelius Gallus, a Roman poet living in the first century B.C., wrote: “Worse than any wound is the wish to die and yet not be able to do so.” Cf. Paul's attitude toward death in Php 1:23–24. (CSB)

Job similarly speaks about one longing for death in the midst of physical torment, yet not finding it. Great is the desperation of those without Christian hope. (TLSB)

Job 3:20–26 is a graphic expression of the anguished cry of the soul which longs for death—death which never comes. The despairing soul searches for death as for a hidden treasure (Job 3:21). He keeps longing for the grave as a time of rejoicing (Job 3:22). But instead, as death and the grave continually recede, all the soul has is fear, restlessness, and despair (Job 3:26). In the case of Job, who was a man of God, relief would come not in death, but in earthly restoration. His longing for death was not primarily for relief from the torments of Satan, but the desire to be reconciled to and present forever with his Savior God. The release would come in God's good time (Job 19:23–27; cf. Phil 1:21–23). However, here in Rev 9:6 it is the ungodly person who is being so tormented. His belief that death would bring relief is a delusion, for without the sealing of God, physical death will bring “the second death” (20:6, 14; 21:8). Death flees from him so that he may have time to repent as he bears his torments and sufferings (cf. 9:20–21). (CC p. 238)

9:7-9 *like horses...lions' teeth...the noise of many chariots* – These unnatural characterizations emphasize that this is no ordinary disaster, but rather punishment from God's hand. (TLSB)

The locust-like, scorpion-like creatures resemble cavalry horses made ready for battle. They are prepared to rush forward against the human race like a cavalry charge against a battle line. Upon their heads are crowns that *appear* to be of gold, indicating that in their battle thrust against their prey they will have what will appear to be victory. However, the fact that their crowns only *seem* to be of gold indicates that they are not *true* warriors of God; they are warriors of Satan who are, nevertheless, *employed* by God for his own good purposes. Their overall appearance is grotesque and terrifying. Certainly “they have to be reckoned among the more bizarre creatures in the Apocalypse. The total impact is one of unnatural and awesome cruelty.” The description of them is reminiscent of that of the locusts swarming over the land before the day of Yahweh as pictured in Joel 2. Joel depicts them as a large army of horse cavalry (Joel 2:2–4). Before them the nations are terrified, for everything in their path is overwhelmed as stubble is consumed by fire (Joel 2:5–10). Thus the demon-like creatures of John's vision here in Revelation 9 will overwhelm the human race, in particular the ungodly. (CC pp. 238-239)

These three images most likely suggest a reference to human authorities or royalty that are sources of evil beyond themselves, especially because the otherwise humanly pictured creatures have teeth like that of lions. (Joy in our Weakness – Marva Dawn)

9:7 *on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold* –Since others surrendered their crowns in 4:10, these crowned beasts probably represent an unwillingness to submit to God’s rule. (TLSB)

human faces. The locusts appear to have the cunning of intelligent beings. They do not simply use brute force. (CSB)

These demons have faces like humans and hair like that of women. They will act with human intelligence in cunning deception as well as with human beauty in cruel attraction. Their teeth are like those of lions. In Joel 1:6, when the invading locusts are likened to an invading nation, they are pictured with teeth of a lion and fangs of a lioness. The demon-like creatures here in Revelation 9 will be ferocious and savage in their attack, though they will not physically tear asunder their victims. However, the fierceness of their attack in the mental and spiritual dimensions, which could affect one’s physical health as well, will be as if the victim were being torn apart, but not fatally so. (CC p. 239)

9:8 *women’s hair.* Perhaps a reference to long antennae. (CSB)

lions’ teeth. Cruel, inhumane. (CSB)

9:9 *breastplates.* The breastplate was a coat of mail that protected the front. (CSB)

like breastplates of iron. Probably thin iron pieces riveted to a leather base. (CSB)

Their armor is that of a foot soldier. Their scaly backs and flanks perhaps reminded John of the scaly breastplates of a Goliath (1 Sam 17:5). But more likely the breastplates of a Roman soldier would come to mind. Thus in their attack these evil creatures from the abyss would be protected from counterattack. Their defenses make them impervious to their victims no matter how much the victims might lash out at these devilish attackers. The noise of their attack, as sounded by the loud buzzing of their wings, was in human ears like the noise of chariots and horses rushing into battle. Whether taken as a physical noise of numerous chariot wheels and horses’ hoofs, which could be deafening the closer they approached, or whether this noise is taken as a metaphor, the fear alone caused by even the rumor of their approach will instill terror in the intended victims. (CC p. 239)

9:10 *stings* – This is emblematic of satanic power (cf Luke 10:18-19). The sting these beats inflict is ultimately a spiritual pang (1 Cor 15:56). (TLSB)

Like scorpions, these locusts dressed in battle armor have tails in which are embedded stings by which they torture their prey. While the sting of the venomous tail of a scorpion is usually not lethal to humans, it can be torturously painful. Again, their ability to torment mankind is for the period of “five months” (Rev 9:10). As in 9:5, this period of time suggests an on-again, off-again ordeal to which these demons subject their victims. Like a cat playing with a terrified and helpless mouse, so the human victims of these hordes from hell are playthings of their craft and cunning. For a period of time they may break free from their torture, only to succumb again later. But all the while fear stalks every moment of the unbelievers’ lives, to a greater or lesser extent. (CC pp. 239-240)

9:11 *king over them* – Proverbs 30:27 observes, “The locusts have no king, yet all of them march in rank.” In contrast, this spiritual pestilence obeys the command of Satan and is therefore more dreadful. (TLSB)

The locust-like, scorpion-like creatures have over them a recognized leader, a king who directs and rules their actions. He is identified as “the angel of the abyss” (τόν ἄγγελον τῆς ἀβύσσου, 9:11). This angel of the abyss is pictured in 12:3–9 as the dragon who attempts to destroy the Child of the woman but fails. In 12:7–9 he is the leader of the rebellious angels and is identified as “the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan” (cf. 20:1–3). He bears the name “Destroyer” (Ἀβαδδών, Ἀπολλύων) here in 9:11. This is the only instance in the Bible where “Destroyer” is a personal name of the devil. His more common name is Satan (ὁ σατανᾶς) (E.g., Mt. 4:10; Acts 5:3; Rom. 16:20; 2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 12:9) -, which means “the Adversary.” Both names, “Satan” and “Destroyer,” define the devil’s character and purpose. He attempts *to destroy* all that is holy and godly. His most grievous attempt was the destruction of the Christ Child (Rev 12:3–4; cf. Mt 2:16–18; 4:1–11). But now his destructive powers are used against the church, God’s people on earth, the body of Christ (Rev 12:13–18). The devil also attempts *to accuse* God’s people in such a manner that they would believe that their sins are not forgiven. This accusing function is inherent in the label ὁ διάβολος, “the slanderer/accuser, the devil.” (E.g., Lk. 8:12; 1 Jn. 3:8; Rev. 2:10; 12:12; 20:10; cf. LXX Job 1:6, 7, 9, 12; 2:1, 1, 2,4,7) While God’s saints on earth are to acknowledge their transgressions in daily repentance, the fact that they still sin because of their evil nature does not mean that their sins are not forgiven (see Rom 7:7–25). But the devil, as the adversary, is always attempting to accuse falsely God’s saints of unforgiven sin and guilt. No longer can he so falsely accuse them before God in heaven as he once did (Rev 12:10–12). But now he continues to accuse falsely God’s people on earth, pitting their own consciences against their faith. For this he is rightly named “Satan,” “Adversary,” or “(False) Accuser.” (CC p. 240)

angel of the bottomless pit – Satan later reemerges from this pit (11:7). (TLSB)

Here in 9:1–11, however, the victims of the angel of the abyss and his demonic hordes in their attempt to destroy and accuse are not God’s saints, but rather the ungodly portion of the human race. The attempt of the devil and his minions to destroy and falsely accuse the Christians will be visually portrayed from 12:13 onward. But here in the fifth scene of the second earthly vision, as introduced by the fifth trumpet-angel, the devil and his servants are set loose so as to attack human beings not sealed with the seal of God. The emphasis here in Revelation 9 is on his *destructive* character rather than his slanderous accusations. His ultimate purpose is the destruction of the human race, that people not believe the Gospel and so not enjoy the fruits of Christ’s victory. But he and his demonic, locust-like monsters are restrained from achieving the complete destruction of these human beings. God permits them only to injure and torment, but not to kill (9:3–5). The Lord Christ is still in control. (CC pp. 240-241)

Abaddon. A personification of destruction. (CSB)

Luther: “The Lord exalted His holy One’ (Ps. 4:3), and is ‘wonderful among all His saints’ (Ps. 68:35) that He destroyed the devil, not by a work of God but by a work of the devil himself (the cross). For this is the most glorious kind of victory, namely, to pierce the adversary with his own weapon and to slay him with his own sword, as we sing: ‘He fell prostrate on his own darts.’ For in this way God promotes and completes His work by means of an alien deed, and by His wonderful wisdom He compels the devil to work through death nothing else than life, so that in this way, while he acts most of all against the work of God, he acts for the work of God against his own work with his own deed. For thus he worked death in Christ, but Christ completely swallowed up death in Himself through the immortality of His divinity and rose again in glory” (AE 29:135). (TLSB)

He is called the angel of the abyss, and his names in Hebrew and Greek are Abaddon and Apollyon. These two names mean “Destruction” and “Destroyer,” respectively, but for the early Christians to who Revelation was first written the latter name would have been much more specific. Indeed, the emperor Domitian (most likely the one persecuting first readers of this book) claimed to be an incarnation of the Greek god Apollo. (Joy in our Weakness – Marva Dawn)

9:12 *first woe*. “The first woe has come and gone” (9:12). Of the final three woes introduced by the last three trumpet-angels, the first dire warning has sounded; two more are to come. But the time is short (1:3). (CC p. 241)

9:13 *horns of the golden altar*. See 8:3–5. The horns were projections at the four corners of the altar (Ex 27:2). Those fleeing judgment could seek mercy by taking hold of the horns. (CSB)

Projections at each corner of the OT altar, mentioned only here in the NT. (TLSB)

At the sound of the trumpet of the sixth angel, John hears “one voice” coming “from the four horns of the golden incense altar which is before God” in heaven (9:13). “From the four horns” indicates that the voice comes from the altar, that is, it is a voice that is associated with the altar of incense. It could be the voice of the angel of the altar who has a censer of incense which represented the prayers of God’s saints (8:3–5). Or the voice could be that of the souls of God’s saints who are beneath the incense altar, that is, the collective voice of their prayers to God (6:9–11). Most likely it is both. The voice of the angel of the altar now speaks for the collective voice of the saints. These two sources of the voice are in harmony, so united they comprise “one voice” (9:13). For the prayers of the saints implore God to judge the people on earth who had caused their suffering (6:10), and the smoke from the censer of the angel at the altar, together with the prayers of the saints, rises to God as he is about to show his anger and judgment on the inhabitants of the earth by way of the trumpet-angels (8:4–5). The voice speaks under the authority of God and for the sake of his people. (CC p. 241)

9:14 *sixth angel who had the trumpet* – The voice instructs the sixth trumpet-angel, who has already sounded his horn, to “release the four angels who have been bound at the great river Euphrates” (9:14). The first five trumpet-angels blew their horns and thus introduced the respective scenes of the second earthly vision. But they had no part in the action that each scene depicted. Here in the sixth scene the trumpet-angel not only introduces the scene by the blast of his horn, he also is part of the action that is displayed. If the seven trumpet-angels are the angels of the seven churches, then the angel of the sixth church is also this sixth trumpet-angel. This angel not only is the herald of the second woe of God’s pending judgment, the sixth scene of the second earthly vision,²⁸ but he is also a participant, acting on behalf of God’s people and acting for God in his answer to their prayers. (CC pp. 241-242)

The sixth church is the church in Philadelphia. In the letter to the angel of that congregation (3:7–13), the exalted Son of Man says that he has the key of David, which opens doors—opportunities for service (3:7–8). He states furthermore that in the hour of the “trial” (πειρασμός) which will come upon the whole earth, and which thus will “test” (πειράζω) its inhabitants, those who have kept his Word will be kept safe (3:10). And then the Lord says that he is coming quickly (3:11). The contents of that sixth letter fit and relate to what is now to be revealed to John by way of the sixth trumpet-angel. For in the sixth scene John will see intense testing of the inhabitants of the whole earth as the four angels are let loose, the “trial” (3:10) that will take place just before the End at Christ’s return. Rev 9:13–21 does not speak specifically of God’s people, but when this “trial” envelopes the earth, they too will experience it (see 20:7–10), and (according to 3:10–11)

they will be kept safe no matter how much they suffer. The sixth trumpet-angel is the angel who, under God's authority, *controls* the forces that are to be let loose so that they cause much affliction (as described in this sixth scene) but do not overturn God's ultimate plan of salvation. (CC p. 242)

four angels. Apparently in charge of the demonic horsemen (vv. 15–19). (CSB)

Who are “the four angels” (τοὺς τέσσαρας ἀγγέλους, 9:14) who are held back—restrained—at the great river Euphrates? They have been prepared (ἡτοιμασμένοι) for their particular task (9:15). They stand ready to be unleashed at a certain predetermined time. Whatever they represent and whatever they will do, these four angels are not operative all through the time period covered by the message of Revelation (from Christ's ascension to his return). Rather, they will be set in motion and will work in a set time defined as an “hour and day and month and year.” (CC p. 243)

The article τοὺς, “the,” suggests that these four angels are a definite, particular group of four. Various identifications have been suggested. Andreas (sixth century) in his commentary says that while some identified these four angels as Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, and Raphael, he himself thought they were the most evil of demons (πονηροτάτους δαίμονας). Their association with the evil forces that will assault the human race could lead one to conjecture that they were demonic, fallen angels. But that is not likely, for the word ἄγγελος (“angel”) throughout Revelation always refers to the holy angels of God, unless identified otherwise. Rather, these four angels are a definite group of holy angels acting under God's will. The only other place in Revelation where four angels are mentioned is in 7:1–3. In 7:1 four angels hold back the four winds (representing the four horsemen of 6:1–8) until God's people on earth are sealed. In accord with God's forbearance, the four angels of Revelation 7 restrained the four horsemen until the sealing was completed; then, in accord with God's will to permit it, let them loose to afflict the earth as pictured in 6:1–8. Here in 9:14 the four angels have a similar task, that of holding back the forces of evil until the appointed time of their release, when the evil forces would afflict the human race. The definite article here in 9:14–15 could indicate that they are the same angels who held back the four winds in 7:1–3. The four angels holding back the four winds, that is, the four horsemen of Revelation 6, are first introduced without the definite article (7:1), but when the four angels in 9:14–15 are introduced the article is present, suggesting the strong possibility of an identification. Perhaps here the identification is that of roles rather than of persons. That is, the four angels of 9:14–15 have a similar role to play—that of restraining evil forces—but are not necessarily the same angels as those in 7:1–3. (CC pp. 243-244)

The four angels in 7:1–3 and also here in 9:14–15 are angels of judgment and punishment. In chapter 7 it was the judgment and punishment of God *inflicted by people* against other people as represented by the four horsemen. In chapter 9 it is the judgment and punishment of God *inflicted by the demonic forces of evil*. Within Judaism the idea of angels meting out punishment on behalf of God is not uncommon. For example, in 1 Enoch 53:3–5 angels dispense plagues and punishment on the earth (cf. 1 Enoch 62:11). In 1 Enoch 56:1 such angels are called “the angels of punishment,” and in 1 Enoch 63:1 they are referred to as “the angels of his [God's] punishment” (cf. also 2 Enoch 10:1–3; Testament of Levi 3:3). This tradition of angels of punishment is most likely derived from Gen 19:1–29, which describes how angels, on behalf of God, punished and destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. also 2 Ki 19:35–36; 2 Chr 32:20–21; Is 37:35–37). The four angels here in Rev 9:14–15, who are held back and then released, act under the authority of God, as indicated by the fact that the angel of the incense altar is the one who gives the command that they be released. And the fact that the sixth trumpet-angel is the one who, at that command, actually releases them demonstrates that their release is for the aid of the church and her mission (see 8:1–5; 10:8–11). (CC pp. 244-245)

The four angels are prepared and will act during a definite time period—not the whole period from Christ’s ascension to his second coming, but rather a period of time within that greater length of time. Several time periods are mentioned in Revelation, all of which have a significant meaning: ten days (2:10); 1,260 days (11:3); three and a half days (11:11); three and a half years (12:14); forty-two months (13:5). The time period of an “hour and day and month and year” in 9:15 appears only here in Revelation. The fact that it is introduced with the definite article (τήν) suggests that it is a specific period. Nowhere else in the Bible, however, is a time period circumscribed in this way: the year, the month, the day, and even the hour or moment. There are, of course, expressions that point to an exact chronological time in which an event took place. In Num 1:1 the time is given when God spoke to Moses in the tabernacle before Sinai: the first day of the second month in the second year after Israel had departed from Egypt (cf. also Ezek 1:1; Hag 1:15; Zech 1:7). But no such circumscribed period of time is ever given in a prophecy or vision dealing with something in the future, or in an eschatological sense, as here in Rev 9:15. (CC p. 245)

Euphrates. The longest river in western Asia (about 1,700 miles). It marked the boundary between Israel and her historic enemies (Assyria and Babylon) to the east (cf. Isa 8:5–8). (CSB)

From OT times, it represented an eastern boundary, beyond which lay hostile powers and renowned horsemen (cf. v. 16) (TLSB)

At the instruction of the angel of the incense altar, the sixth trumpet-angel releases the four angels who up to this moment have been bound, held inactive, at the River Euphrates. This river in Mesopotamia, together with the Tigris River, ran through the territories of Assyria and Babylonia, Israel’s ancient enemies. God had promised to Abraham the land from the Nile in Egypt to the Euphrates (Gen. 15:18; cf. Deut. 11:22-25; Josh. 1:1-5; 1 Chr. 5:7-9). From the northeast, across the Euphrates, the enemies of Israel often came to afflict her, and if possible, to destroy her (Is 8:1–10; 2 Ki 25:1–26). Thus the enemies of Israel are frequently described as coming from the north (Is 43:5–6; Jer 1:13; 4:5–6). Nebuchadnezzar was the enemy who came from the north, destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, and initiated the Babylonian captivity (Jer 25:8–11). At the time of John, the River Euphrates was also the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire; on the other side of it were the dreaded Parthians. (CC pp. 242-243)

Because the Euphrates and the north were the place and direction from which the *historical* enemies came to bring fear and destruction to Israel, this area came to be used also as a symbol for the place from which the *eschatological* enemies of God’s people would come. So Ezekiel prophesied that Gog of the land of Magog would come from “the far north” and with his hordes advance against Israel and cover the entire land like a dark cloud (Ezek 38:15–16). The attack of Gog and his forces of evil would be so violent that the earth would shake the land of Israel with a violent earthquake. All the creatures of the land and sea and air would quake in terror, and the mountains would be turned upside down (Ezek 38:17–20). The prophets also referred to rivers as flooding and sweeping away in similes of God’s judgment (e.g., Is 8:7–8; Jer 47:2). All this would happen by God’s permission, according to his will in judgment. When that judgment had accomplished its purpose, God would then turn on Gog and destroy him as he rescued his people (Ezek 38:21–23; 39:1–8). So here in Rev 9:14 the River Euphrates is used as a symbol of the place from which will come the eschatological hordes of evil that will be unleashed upon the human race. (CC p. 243)

9:15 *hour ... day ... month ... year.* Apocalyptic thought views God as acting according to an exact timetable. (CSB)

Whatever this expression may mean, it certainly points to a definite time within the whole period covered by the prophetic message of Revelation (from Christ's ascension to his parousia). And the fact that it is mentioned in the sixth trumpet-angel's revelation could indicate that this time period may be just before the end of earthly time, which will be described in what the seventh trumpet-angel will reveal (11:15–19). In his Latin commentary, Primasius (sixth century) states, "Step by step days are filled with hours, and months with days, and years certainly with months" ("horis gradatim dies, et diebus menses, et mensibus certum est annos impleri"). The time period could thus suggest that the sufferings perpetrated by the evil forces let loose on the human race will occupy every moment of every day, every day of every month, and every month of each year in the evil times just before the Lord's return. (CC p. 245)

killed a third – The evil forces let loose from under the angels' control, by permission of the will of God, will destroy a third of the human race. Up to now, the elements and forces of nature on earth and the elements and natural bodies above the earth have been struck (as revealed by the first four trumpet-angels, 8:6–13) and as a result have caused mankind to suffer. Also the human race was tormented by the demonic spirits from the abyss (as revealed by the fifth trumpet-angel, 9:1–11). However, no one of the human race was killed by such natural and demonic assaults (cf. 9:5). But now a large portion—one-third—of the human race is killed. When in the fifth scene John saw the locust-like demons tormenting mankind, people sought death but it eluded them (9:6). Now death seeks them out and grasps them as a result of the evil forces released on the earth. While only a third die, the number of people killed will be staggering. The remaining two-thirds, while escaping death, will live under its terror (cf. Heb 2:15). (CC p. 246)

9:16 *twice ten thousand times ten thousand*. The reference is most likely general, intending an incalculable host rather than a specific number (cf. Ps 68:17; Da 7:10; Rev 5:11). (CSB)

Symbolic. It is 10 doubled and then multiplied to the eighth power. Multiples of 10 signify exponential intensification. (TLSB)

As in the fifth scene (9:1–12), the forces of evil that wreak such havoc upon the human race in this sixth scene are demonic in character, as attested by their number and grotesque appearance (9:16–19). They number in the millions, an unimaginable, countless force of cavalry that invades the earth. Such a vast number is reminiscent of the tens of thousands upon thousands of holy angels and chariots which attended God when he left Sinai for his sanctuary, as declared in Ps 68:17 (MT 68:18; cf. Deut 33:2; Dan 7:10). Such a number would be staggering, but John attests that he actually heard their number (Rev 9:16). The horses in their visionary appearance had heads like lions, demonstrating that they would terrorize and conquer all before them. In 9:8 the locust-like demons had teeth like those of lions, by which they would torment but not kill. Here these demonic creatures have heads of lions by which they not only torment but also kill. For from their mouths they breathe out fire and smoke and brimstone, by which they plague and kill a third of the human population. Those who sat on these fire breathing monsters had breastplates which matched the fiery smoke and brimstone of the lion-like mouths of the beasts they rode. This cavalry force is invincible as it invades and kills. Those who are not killed by the plague of fire are killed by the plague of smoke and by the plague of brimstone. Did this bring to John's mind the rain of fire and brimstone that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24–28)? Most likely John would have remembered the destruction of Pompeii in A.D. 79 by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius as a possible illustration of the devastation these demonic-like monsters would unleash on the entire human race. (CC p. 246)

9:17 *breastplates*. The colors of the riders breastplates correspond to the colors of hell that came out of the horse's mouths in 9:2. This may indicate the cooperative attack of evil angels and their human representatives to tempt people and teach false doctrine. (CSB)

Their colors roughly correspond to the destructive forces mentioned later: red = fire, blue = smoke, yellow = sulfur. These elements anticipate the lake of fire, into which Satan and his hosts will be cast in the end (20:10). (TLSB)

The authority and power of these cavalry-like demons to attack the human race is in their mouths, which spew fire and smoke and brimstone. But their power is not confined to their mouths, for by their tails they also strike people. Their tails have heads and are like serpents. By the three plagues of their mouths they kill; by their serpent-like tails they injure and torment people. This suggests that the two-thirds of humanity that is not killed is nevertheless tormented and made to suffer. And when their frontal attack by their mouths has come and gone, and as a result left countless dead, they attack again, this time with their tails. Just when one horrible wave has passed and people begin to look for relief in a temporary calm, the demonic hordes strike again, but in a different way, leaving behind a different kind of suffering: the torment of their tails (compare 9:19 to 9:10). Evidently the whole human race will be struck by these demonic legions, some to be killed, and others to be injured. None will escape their fury. (CC pp. 246-247)

heads...like lions – Conveying the impression of great courage and strength, coupled with a quick readiness for violent and bloody action. (Poellot)

sulfur came out of their mouths. Cf. the two witnesses in 11:5. (CSB)

9:18 *fire, smoke, sulfur* – These elements anticipate the lake of fire, into which Satan and his hosts will be cast in the end (20:10). (TLSB)

9:19 *tails were like serpents with heads*. Emphasizes the demonic origin of the horses (cf. 12:9). (CSB)

Satan's hosts will lie and deceive. AS the pen is mightier than the sword, so also the most destructive spiritual forces are those that speak convincingly against the truth of God's Word. (TLSB)

Through the serpent's forked tongue, temptation entered the world. (TLSB)

9:20 *rest of mankind* – Apart from those sealed (7:3), people are not moved to repentance by the destruction they witness. (TLSB)

Tragically, those who temporarily evade death do not repent of their works (9:20). Even though they see their fellow human beings fearfully killed and even though they themselves suffer, they do not heed this dreadful warning. Rather, in their brazen attitude they continue unrepentant. They do not let themselves be turned away from worshiping "the works of their hands" (9:20). "The works of their hands" (9:20) is an expression denoting the full range of human activities in life, particularly occupations and livelihoods (Cf. Gen. 5:29; Deut. 14:29; 30:9; Rev. 16:9, 11). It can also, as here in 9:20, refer to idols (See also Deut. 4:28; 2 Ki. 19:18; Is. 2:8; Jer. 1:16; 25:6-7) which people have fashioned and set up before themselves. The idols of gold and silver and other materials are the lifeless objects of their worship (cf. Is 44:9-20; 1 Sam 5:1-5), worship inspired by demons. As a result of their idolatry they are really worshiping demons, whether knowingly or unknowingly. Repentance would have led the people of the earth to forsake their demonic

worship, but instead they continue to idolize the works of their hands. Pagan idolatrous worship throughout the Bible is attributed to demons, and such worship is also offered to demons (Deut. 32:15-18; Jn. 8:39-44; 1 Jn. 3:7-10; Rev. 13:3-4, 11-15). In Ps 106:36–38 the psalmist complains that the people worshiped idols, and as a result they sacrificed their sons and daughters to demons on the altars of their false gods. In 1 Cor 10:19–20 Paul equates idolatry with the worship of demons. Such idolatrous, demonic worship comes from a mind that is unfit and ruined because it ignored and rejected the knowledge of God the Creator (Rom 1:18–25). The intended purpose of idolatrous worship is always the betterment of one’s own fortunes in life. Therefore it seeks to glorify creatures, in particular human beings, instead of God, their Creator and Redeemer. Of this worship the people did not repent. (CC p. 247)

demons. Spiritual beings in league with Satan and exerting an evil influence on human affairs (cf. Dt 4:28; Ps 115:5–7; 1Co 10:20). (CSB)

9:21 *Nor did they repent.* † See 16:9, 11. God’s people are not to expect a mass conversion of mankind. The great majority of people will always turn a deaf ear to God’s call to repentance. Even physical pain will not change the rebellious heart. (CSB)

Matthew 22:1-14, 14 “ For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

their sorceriues. Involved the mixing of various ingredients (the Greek for this phrase is *pharmakon*, from which comes the English “pharmacy”) for magical purposes. Believers at Ephesus publicly burned their books of magic, valued at 50,000 drachmas (Ac 19:19). (CSB)

These sins, which are prohibited by the Second Table of the Law, naturally follow disregard for the First Table of God’s Law (v.20). (TLSB)

Therefore any alternative to Christ and to faith in him alone is idolatry (1 Jn 5:21). The idols fashioned by people can never respond to their worship, heed their prayers, or sustain and save their life. For these idols have no heart, no love, no ears—no preserving or redemptive ability. The complaint of God in the OT against his people is that they have erected gods who cannot see or hear or speak. In Ps 115:4–7 idols of silver and gold are described as human creations, idols that cannot speak or see or hear or smell or walk even though they have feet and noses and ears and eyes and mouths (cf. Ps 135:15–18; 1 Ki 18:27–29). Those who create such deaf, mute, and blind idols are like their own creations, for the gods fashioned after their own human desires mirror themselves (cf. Deut 32:16–17; Ps 96:5). These manufactured idols are gods that can do no good, for they are like scarecrows in a field of melons (Jer 10:5). Idols are nothing in this world, for there is only one God (1 Cor 8:4; cf. 1 Cor 10:19; Deut 4:32–35). (CC pp. 247-248)

Of such idolatrous worship the people do not repent. Under the influence of the demons they worship, and hardened because of their lack of repentance, they commit murder and robbery of all kinds and indulge in witchcraft and all manner of sexual immorality. Idolatry leads to increasingly shameful acts, escalating guilt, and encouragement to sin all the more as they applaud each other in their degeneracy (Rom 1:24–32). The Greek word in Rev 9:21 for “witchcraft, magic” at the time of John’s writing of Revelation included any form of witchcraft and spiritism, occult or magical arts which included drugs, spells, rituals, ostensibly “good” magic, and discernment of the future. In both the OT and NT such vices are produced by idolatry (Ex. 22:18; Lev. 19:31; 20:6; 1 Sam. 15:23; 28:5-7). In Gal 5:20 in the list of sins of the flesh, witchcraft (φάρμακεία) is mentioned after idolatry, and in Rev 21:8 people who are engaged in witchcraft and idolatry do not enter the new heaven and new earth (cf. 22:15). (CC p. 248)

They have not yet repented of all their earthly sins – symbolized by the list of four (murders, sorceries, immorality, and thefts). (Joy in our Weakness – Marva Dawn)

The vision of the first six trumpets encourages all of us to spend time asking ourselves what trials God has allowed in order to spend time asking ourselves what trials God has allowed in order to call us back to himself. (Joy in our Weakness – Marva Dawn)

This sixth scene (9:13–21) in the second earthly vision (8:6–11:19), of the demonic hordes unleashed from the control of the four angels, is related to the scene which the sixth censer-angel introduces (16:12–16) in the third earthly vision (15:1–16:21). Both are for a particular time period, and both are the sixth of seven scenes. The sixth scene of the third earthly vision depicts the battle of Armageddon just before the end of this world at Christ’s return. This last battle is also connected with the River Euphrates (16:12). Here in 9:13–21 John receives the first glimpse of that last battle, the last great affliction. In it he sees the forces of evil poised and ready to be unleashed. As they are released they afflict the human race with death and suffering. In 16:12–16 John sees again a view of this last battle, but not just a duplication of what he saw in 9:13–21. For in the second view of it he sees this same demonic host, pouring out from the Euphrates over all the earth, actually gathered for and engaged in battle at a place called Armageddon. This second view complements the first. Finally, a third time he will see this last battle just before the End when, in a vision, Gog and Magog appear (20:7–10). This third view of the battle depicts its conclusion and the final defeat of the evil forces involved in it. (CC p. 248)

8:6–9:21 In this vision, John describes catastrophes that will accompany the end times. With good reason, then, the apostle Paul commands us to “take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one” (Eph 6:16). Precisely because our sworn enemy is so cunning and powerful, it is comforting to hear that Christ has already overcome him and will defeat him once and for all on the Last Day. • “O Thou, whose coming is with dread To judge the living and the dead, Preserve us from the ancient foe While still we dwell on earth below.” Amen. (LSB 351:5)