

Lesson 21

Last week we started Chapter 9, and we saw the sounding of the fifth trumpet in verse 1. When that trumpet sounded, a star (most likely, Satan) fell from heaven and was given the key to the bottomless pit. When that pit was opened, smoke and locusts came out of it. The locusts were commanded in verse 4 to hurt “only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.” The description of these terrible locusts continues in verse 5.

Revelation 9:5-6

5 And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man. 6 And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.

This fifth trumpet brings torment but not death. But the torment it brings is so extreme that those afflicted seek death. Gallus said, “Worse than any wound is to wish to die and yet not be able to do so.” And recall what Job said:

Job 3:20-22 — Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; Which long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures; Which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave?

Not only do these Romans seek death, but they are unable to find it — verse 6 tells us that **death flees from them!** That is a remarkable image — death on the run from those who seek it! When they don’t want death, death runs toward them; when they seek death, death runs away from them!

And God's people? They are not harmed by these scorpion locusts. But again, we must remember that what we are seeing here is a **spiritual** deliverance. Physically, the Christians were suffering, and the Romans were prospering — **but things were not what they seemed!** Daniel had prophesied six hundred years earlier that the church would destroy Rome, and that is what is happening here as the Christians remain faithful unto death. **Faith is the victory!**

And did Jesus perhaps have that earlier prophecy from Daniel and this later prophecy from John in view when he promised his followers that they would not be hurt by the enemy?

***Luke 10:18-20** — I beheld **Satan** as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and **scorpions**, and over all the power of the enemy: **and nothing shall by any means hurt you**. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because **your names are written in heaven**.*

Satan? Scorpions? Victory? No harm? Names written in heaven? The similarities with Revelation 9 are striking. And was the promise from harm a promise from spiritual harm or physical harm? We know that many died **physically** at the hands of the Roman oppressors. Jesus knew what was coming for his people and what was coming for Rome. It is very interesting to study Revelation and then go back and reread the gospel narratives. All sorts of connections come to light!

What do the five months in verse 5 depict?

It's possible that the five months are tied to the locusts and are just intended to make the image of the locust invasion more vivid and more immediate. Apparently, five months is the usual duration of a locust plague or the length of the dry season when the locusts generally come. We are also told that five months is the average lifespan of a locust so that what we have here is one generation of locusts.

Bullinger says that the number five depicts the grace of God in the Bible, in which case it may symbolize those who are marked during this time and are not the target of this judgment. (His case for the link between grace and the number five is not very good, however.) Swete thinks the number is used simply to give definiteness to the picture.

I agree that the number five here is symbolic, but I don't think it depicts grace. Instead, I think the number five depicts **incompleteness**, being half of ten (a broken ten), which is the symbol for completeness. Elsewhere we will see half of seven (a broken seven, where seven is the number for perfection) being used to depict imperfection.

If the number five depicts incompleteness, then the period of five months here is showing us something that we already know about these trumpets — they are not God's final and complete word when it comes to Rome. This judgment is not yet complete. More is yet to come.

Revelation 9:7-12

7 And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men. 8 And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. 9 And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. 10 And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months. 11 And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon. 12 One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.

Verses 7-10 describe the locusts in terms that are both beautiful and terrifying. They wear crowns like gold, they have faces like men, they have hair like

women, and they have teeth like lions. They have breastplates of iron, and their wings create a great noise.

Charles Manson read that description and concluded that these locusts were the Beatles — men with long hair playing noisy guitars that looked like breastplates of iron! That view is certainly ludicrous, but no more so than many other views of these verses that you can find printed in seemingly respectable commentaries. Once you toss the context and the time frame out the window, there is no end to what you can find in this book — some find the Beatles, while others find nuclear bombs, Cobra helicopters, and smart missiles.

The crowns on the locusts in verse 7 are from the same Greek word (*stephanos*) that was used to describe the crown of victory worn by the rider on the white horse in Chapter 6. As before, this victory crown denotes the defeat of Rome by a conquering invader.

The hair like a woman's in verse 8 is an intriguing addition to the picture that has led to much speculation in the commentaries. Some say having both male and female features means that the judgments would affect both genders. Others say that the long hair indicates that they are in subjection to their king, Satan.

John reminds us often in these descriptions that what we are reading are symbolic and figurative. We are told that they have tails **like unto** scorpions. Notice how often the word “as” is used in their description: “and on their heads were **as it were** crowns like gold, and their faces were **as** the faces of men. 8 And they had hair **as** the hair of women, and their teeth were **as** the teeth of lions. 9 And they had breastplates, **as it were** breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was **as** the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.” The text itself is telling us that we must look beneath the surface if we are to understand what is being described.

Verse 11 tells us that the king of the locusts is called in Hebrew *Abaddon* and in Greek *Apollyon*. **What does that mean?**

Abaddon is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word for destruction, found for example in Job 28:22 — “Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears.” Apollyon in Greek means “the destroyer.” This is the only place in the New Testament where either name is found. They are certainly accurate names for Satan, who is almost certainly the angel of the bottomless pit identified in verse 11.

Satan's objective is to destroy everything that God builds — and especially the eternal kingdom built without hands. Satan would like nothing better to destroy the church; that was true in the first century, and it remains true in this century. But there is great irony in using the title “Destroyer” for Satan. Why? Because this Destroyer will himself be destroyed, along with his works.

1 John 3:8 — For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

Hebrews 2:14 — That through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.

Why does verse 11 specifically tell us that Apollyon is in the Greek tongue if the entire book is in the Greek tongue?

I think the text is drawing attention to the Greek tongue as to Apollyon so that we will see in that name a reference to the false Greek god Apollo, the archer god. One of the emblems of Apollo was the locust, which has been prominent in this chapter.

Two questions: First, why is there a reference to Apollo? And second, what is the reference intended to convey?

In an earlier lesson, we talked about how the Romans adopted many of the Greek gods both as a way to unify the Roman empire and as part of the Greek's cultural conquest of Rome. (Remember the old saying — Rome conquered Greece, but Greek culture conquered Rome!) The Roman emperor Domitian (who was not yet emperor when this book was written, but who would reign very soon) claimed that we divine because he was the incarnation of the Greek god Apollo. Nero likewise connected himself with Apollo, and Domitian was thought by many Romans to be a resurrected Nero. Ancient coins show Apollo with both Nero and Domitian. So a reference to the Greek god Apollo strikes at both of the evil villains in this book — Nero (who had reigned and died by the time this book was written) and Domitian (who would reign very shortly after his father Vespasian and his brother Titus). Also, a reference to Apollo fits our context well for another reason — Apollo was the patron deity of Thyatira, one of the initial recipients of this book. That answers our first question — why is there a reference to Apollo?

Now back to the second question — what is the reference intended to convey? In a word — **ridicule**. Domitian thought he was the reincarnation of the god Apollo — but Apollo was the king of the underworld. Using that name for the king of the bottomless pit is likely intended to say both that Nero is there now

and Domitian will follow soon thereafter. Perhaps that is why this king is given **two** names in verse 11. As one commentator summed it up: “The last word about the fifth trumpet was a master stroke of irony: the destructive host of hell had as its king the emperor of Rome!”

Of the three woes announced by the eagle (or vulture) in 8:13, the first has now come to an end — and verse 12 tells us that the final two woes are yet to come.

Revelation 9:13-15

13 And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, 14 Saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. 15 And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men.

The sixth trumpet has been a source of much speculation, much of it wild speculation. Commentators have gone far afield in their discussions of these verses, and some have just given up in trying to understand them.

Barclay: “This is a passage whose imagery is mysterious and whose details no one has ever been able fully to explain.”

But the reason most commentaries have a problem with these verses is that by the time those commentators have reached Chapter 9, they have forgotten all about Chapters 1-3. They have forgotten the time frame in verses 1 and 3 of Chapter 1, and they have forgotten the context in Chapters 2-3. **This book concerns things about Rome that were to shortly come to pass!** The inspired text could not be any more clear on that point,. And if we ever forget it, then we too might go astray in our study of the text or have to just throw up our hands in despair as Barclay did.

So how do we tackle difficult verses such as these? First, we keep the time frame and context in mind, but second, we start by looking at the symbols that are used. **What symbols do we see in these verses?**

In verses 13-15, we see four horns, we see four angels, we see the great river Euphrates, we see an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, and we see the third part of men slain.

Let's start with the number four because we have seen that symbol many times already. The number four denotes the creation in general and the earth in particular — the four directions, the four seasons, the four elements.

So then what does it mean that these four angels are loosed? It means something else we have seen before — that God would judge Rome by bringing foreign armies against them. These four angels represent the armies that God would use against Rome.

And the number four may also be used here for another symbolic purpose — four may specifically depict the four primary compass directions. If so, then the use of the number four may be intended to show that God will come at Rome from every direction. We have already seen that Rome feared an invasion from the east, but the message here may be that Rome should fear invasions from every direction!

These four angels are released by a voice from the four horns of the golden altar that is before God. What does that tell us?

First, it tells us that these armies are under God's control and direction. God will use foreign armies against Rome just as God used the armies of Rome against Jerusalem. What goes around, comes around! It has been said that war made Rome. God is saying here that war will also **unmake** Rome. Gibbon reminds us that two of the primary reasons for the fall of Rome were external invasion and inner strife, which included civil war.

Second, the four horns on the altar remind us of the sovereignty of God. Horns denote kingdoms, both in Daniel and in Revelation, so the four horns on the altar are a reminder that the kingdoms of this earth are all under God's sovereign rule. These four horns are a reminder of what King Nebuchadnezzar learned the hard way!

Daniel 4:28-32 — All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built

*for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, **until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.***

As McGuiggan said, the king was bragging one second and munching the next! Why? So that he would learn the lesson in verse 32 — “that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.” That is what is being shown here in verses 13-15. That is what the four horns are telling us.

Why are the four angels pictured as crossing the Euphrates river? Again, we see an example where our knowledge of the Old Testament will help us understand this final book in the New Testament.

The Euphrates was the ideal boundary for the territory of Israel.

Genesis 15:18 — *In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.*

Crossing the Euphrates river is a vivid picture from the Old Testament depicting the threat of military power. The Assyrians and the Babylonians crossed the Euphrates river to attack the Jews. Isaiah used this river to depict military invasion.

Isaiah 8:7-8 — *Now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel.*

But if the Euphrates river in the Old Testament depicted an invasion of Jerusalem, then doesn't that mean that Jerusalem is also in view here in Revelation? No, not at all.

First, the symbol is the threat of military invasion, not the threat of military invasion against Jerusalem. Jerusalem was not the only city that feared what was on the other side of the Euphrates. We have already talked about Rome's most feared enemy — the Parthian army. That army was located on the other side of the Euphrates river.

But second, we know that this book is about Rome, and not about Jerusalem. How do we know that? We discussed that issue at length in our introduction, but briefly we know that because of when the book itself tells us it was written — late in the reign of Vespasian, which occurred after the destruction of Jerusalem. (In fact, he and his son Titus were the ones who destroyed Jerusalem.) Jerusalem was already in ruins when this book was written.

Also, we know that this book is about Rome because of the all-important context given to us in Chapters 2-3. If this book is about Jerusalem, then why does it begin with seven letters to the churches of Asia Minor? We'll have more to say on this point when we get to Chapter 11.

What does it mean in verse 15 that the four angels “were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year for to slay the third part of men”?

That phrase is telling us something we already know. In fact, that phrase is telling us something that the prophet Daniel knew and that the prophet Zechariah knew — or at least they wrote about it. What that phrase is telling us is that these events are not happening due to random events and unknown historical forces. These events are happening as part of God's preordained and prophesied plan for the church. Daniel had foretold the conflict between Rome and the church, and Daniel had foretold who would prevail in that conflict. Likewise, Zechariah had foretold the conflict between Rome and the church, and Zechariah had foretold who would prevail in that conflict. This was all part of God's plan, and everything is going and will go according to God's schedule — down to the day and hour. That is the message of verse 15.

So where are we at the end of verse 15? The sixth trumpet unleashes foreign armies that come against Rome from every direction, killing many, but not all, of the Romans. Again, although this trumpet hits the Romans very hard, it is not yet a final judgment. It is a warning of what is yet to come, and there is still time for repentance.

Verses 16-19 will show us what is let loose when the four angels bound in the great Euphrates river are let loose in verse 15. And what is let loose is described using some of the most fearsome imagery found anywhere in the Bible.

Revelation 9:16-19

16 And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them. 17 And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone. 18 By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths. 19 For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt.

The first thing we see let loose against Rome is a huge army of horsemen — “two hundred thousand thousand” is 200 million invaders!

Is this a literal army? Is this number intended to be understood literally? **No, it is not literal, and it cannot be literal.** What we are seeing here must be figurative. Why?

The so-called “rigid literalism” of the premillennialist really breaks down in this description of the invading army from the east. Someone had estimated that in regular formation 200 million soldiers would make a column one mile wide and 85 miles long! Can anyone even begin to imagine a literal army consisting of more people than the combined populations of England, France, and Italy? Can we really image a single army consisting of every person living in

the nation of Brazil? Or two thirds of the population of the United States? And worse yet — the premillennialists believe this gigantic army will fight a battle at Armageddon in the Holy Land! They would all have to be stacked up a mile high! And who would they fight? Presumably we would need another 200 million or so opponents to make it a fair fight!

Does anyone really believe that this description is literal? Well, yes and no. They try to take it literally, but not even the most rigid literalist is able to do so. Hal Lindsey, says this army depicts a literal army of 200 million Chinese invaders, but he says that the horses represent mobilized ballistic missile launchers! But that is still a problem for him, isn't it — verse 16 tells us we have 200 million horsemen, which means we would need 200 million missile launchers!

Why am I making such a point about this? Because if the 200 million in verse 16 is figurative (as it must be), then on what basis can anyone conclude that the thousand years we will see later in this book is literal? And if the thousand years is also figurative, then premillennialism collapses.

So, back to the text. What do we see in verse 16? We see a terrifying invasion of 200 million horsemen riding from the Euphrates in the east, the very direction from which the Romans had an irrational fear of a Parthian invasion. Of all the verses in Revelation, few of them would have struck more terror in the heart of a Roman than verse 16. It would be as if someone with an irrational fear of snakes was told that 200 million snakes were on their way! (In fact, snakes are mentioned in verse 19!) The language in these verses is vivid; it is figurative; it is symbolic; it is apocalyptic; it is intended to create an emotional reaction — and it does!

Why 200 million? Is there a symbolic significance to that number? Possibly no. 200 million may be intended here to be just what it is — an impossibly huge number of soldiers that is intended to frighten and overwhelm.

If there is a symbolic significance to the number, it comes from the number 2 — a symbolic thread that we have seen running throughout this entire book. We have already discussed that number, and we will see it used several times more in this book. In my opinion, the number two is being used in this book as a reference to Rome, which was, according to Roman mythology, founded by the twins Romulus and Remus. In the first century, we see another set of Roman twins — not physical twins, but twins according to their demonic nature: Nero and Domitian. Later in this book we will see Rome represented as two beasts. Whenever we see the number two, we should think of Rome.

Verses 17-19 continue that vivid description of these terrible horsemen. They have breastplates of fire; their horses have heads of lions and breathe fire; and their tails were like snakes. I would not like to have even one such creature headed my way — Rome is looking at 200 million of them coming over the hill!

What is the message to the church here? The church (or at least some in the church) likely thought they had been forgotten. The church thought that God did not know what all was happening to them. The church thought they would be destroyed after the mighty Roman empire ran over them. And God's response in these verses? In short, God turns to the church as says, "You think I have forgotten you? You think I don't know what Rome is doing? **Here, have a look at my sledgehammer!** This is what I have planned for Rome!"

Language very similar to what we see here is used in Ezekiel 38-39 with regard to Gog and Magog. We will have much to say about those two chapters from Ezekiel later in our study of Revelation.

As before, only a third is killed; that is, this judgment is only partial and allows for repentance. We will be told in verse 21 whether anyone heeds the warning and repents.

And think for just a moment about what this says. **What must be coming for Rome if these 200 million horsemen are just the preview!**

Revelation 9:20-21

20 And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: 21 Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.

Verses 20-21 confirm what we have been saying about the seals and the trumpets we have seen so far — they were not intended to be God's final word re-

garding Rome, but rather were intended to encourage the Romans to repent. These verses confirm what we have been saying about the earlier judgments that have been partial, striking just a third of whatever they were directed at. The “rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues” are those who were not killed by the earlier seals and trumpets. But let’s not forget that what we are seeing here and what we were seeing earlier is figurative language. There are not literally piles of dead bodies in Rome — at least not piles of dead **physical** bodies. What we have been seeing, and what we are seeing here, is a **spiritual** struggle. This will be confirmed later by a verse we haven’t gotten to yet:

***Revelation 12:11** — And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.*

How did they overcome? By, not one, but two deaths! By the death of Christ (the blood of the Lamb) and by their own death (they loved not their lives unto death). And one other thing — by the word of their testimony. Where is the atomic bomb? Where is the cobra helicopter? Where is the ballistic missile? While you’ll find those things in a book by Hal Lindsey, you will not find those things anywhere in the Bible. This is a **spiritual** battle, and 12:11 confirms it. “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal” (2 Corinthians 10:4).

We are seeing the church’s victory over Rome — and that victory came through faithfulness unto death. From a physical perspective, the dead bodies belonged to the Christians! But from a spiritual perspective, the dead bodies were Roman bodies. Remember our central theme — things are not what they seem! I am reminded of something Paul wrote:

***1 Timothy 5:6** — But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.*

That was the Roman condition — physically alive, but spiritually dead. That is why they needed to repent. Much of the confusion about Revelation would clear up if people would see this conflict for what it is — a spiritual battle rather than a physical battle.

Verses 20-21 tell us that Rome did not repent. Yes, we have seen a few that repented, something Zechariah had prophesied centuries earlier. But the vast majority of the Romans remained entrenched in their sin and in their opposition to God and his church.

What were the sins of the Romans? Before we answer that, notice what these sins are called in verse 20 — “the works of their hands.” That stands in stark contrast to the eternal kingdom made without hands (Daniel 2:44-45) and to our God who is not worshipped with men’s hands (Acts 17:25).

What were those sins? They worshipped devils. They worshipped idols. They were murderers. They were sorcerers. They were fornicators. And they were thieves.

A horrible list of sins — but God still loved them (John 3:16). God wanted them to repent (2 Peter 3:9). God did not want them to perish (2 Peter 3:9). God wanted to be able to say to them, “And such were some of you!” (past tense, as in 1 Corinthians 6:11) — but they would not have it. They refused to repent. Later we will see them when they no longer have that opportunity to repent.