

Revelation — Lesson 13

Revelation 9:3-12 Continued...

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 master, Satan. (See 1 Corinthians 11:14-15.)

John reminds us often in these descriptions that what we are reading is symbolic and figurative. They have tails *like unto* scorpions. He uses "as" six times — *as* it were crowns of gold, *as* men's faces, *as* the hair of women, *as* the teeth of lions, *as* it were breastplates of iron, and *as* the sound of chariots.

The king of the locusts is called in Hebrew Abaddon and in Greek Apollyon. Abaddon is the Hebrew word for destruction, and Apollyon in Greek means "the destroyer." This is the only place in the New Testament where either name is found. Some commentators have noted the similarity between the Greek name Apollyon and the name of the Greek god Apollo. Domitian claimed that he was divine by virtue of being an incarnation of Apollo.

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 were released, who had been held

ready for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, to kill a third of mankind. 16 The number of the troops of cavalry was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number. 17 And this was how I saw the horses in my vision: the riders wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulphur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulphur issued from their mouths. 18 By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulphur issuing from their mouths. 19 For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; their tails are like serpents, with heads, and by means of them they wound.

The sixth trumpet depicts warfare as an instrument of God's judgment. Barclay: "This is a passage whose imagery is mysterious and whose details no one has ever been able fully to explain."

The four angels appear to represent the armies that God would use against Rome. That the angels are released by a voice from the altar tells us that they are under God's control and direction. 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.

Why *four* angels? As we know, four is the number of creation, but I think something more particular is in mind here. One reason that four is the number of creation is that there are four primary compass directions. The use of four angels here likely is intended to show that God will come at Rome from every direction. They feared an invasion from the east; they should fear invasions from every direction!

Why are they pictured as being allowed to cross the Euphrates river? The Euphrates was the ideal boundary for the territory of Israel.

(Genesis 15:18) Crossing the Euphrates was a vivid picture from the Old Testament that depicted the threat of military power. The Assyrians and Babylonians crossed the Euphrates river to attack the Jews. In Isaiah 7:20 and Isaiah 8:7-8, the river is used to depict military might. As for Rome, the warriors they most dreaded at this time were the Parthian cavalry that came from beyond the Euphrates.

The threat is also enforced by the huge number of invading horsemen that are seen. "Twice ten thousand times ten thousand" is 200 million. This vast number increases the atmosphere of terror and emphasizes the great power that God has at his disposal. Similar imagery is used in Ezekiel 38 and 39 with regard to Gog and Magog. (We will discuss those chapters later in our study.)

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

Why are the horses described in this vivid and frightening way? It increases the level of terror. The intent is to frighten. Joel 2:4-11 uses similar language in depicting the Babylonians invading Judah. Also, Habakkuk 1:8 uses similar language with regard to Chaldean horsemen (fiercer than evening wolves). In the Old Testament such pictures were intended to frighten and did not literally occur. We have the same situation here.

Is this language to be taken literally? No, even though many argue otherwise and have developed elaborate theories to explain it. But such theories are always inconsistent, taking some things literally and others things figuratively. One writer estimates that in regular formation 200 million soldiers would make a column one mile wide and 85 miles long! Those who pride themselves on taking each number in Revelation literally have a lot of trouble doing so with this number! Even so, Hal Lindsey, says this army depicts a *literal* army of 200,000,000 Chinese invaders, yet he says that the horses represent mobilized ballistic missile launchers. No one, not even him, takes everything in this book literally!

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 either see or hear or walk; 21 nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their immorality or their thefts.

These early judgments have been partial and have allowed for repentance. Those remaining alive, however, do not repent but instead continue with their idolatry and murder. Like the Sodomites they continued, even after being blinded by God, to look for a door to commit iniquity. The trumpets had not been able to convince them to repent. Later judgments will not give them any opportunity to repent.

As these judgments become increasingly severe, it would be natural to think that at some point the remainder of mankind would wake up and heed the warning, but that did not happen then, and it does not happen now. Without expressing an opinion as to whether the events of 9-11 were a divine trumpet call for us, I am sure you recall how the media in the aftermath of those events announced that we had been changed forever and would never again be as superficial and shallow as we were before those events. That great change was not very long lasting! Never underestimate the depth of our shallowness!

Rome did not repent, but rather continued to worship demons and idols, and it continued to commit murder, sorcery, immorality, and theft. As for murder, we know from Numbers 35:33 that “blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it.” When I read that I wonder about our own country and its abortion industry, with the current administration (while simultaneously trumpeting our “values” at every opportunity!) even leaving the door open to someday create disposable embryos for medical spare parts! I am also reminded of Isaiah 59:7 — “Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to

shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths.”

The word translated “sorceries” occurs only here and in Galatians 5:20, where it is translated “witchcraft” in the KJV. It indicates the use of drugs and incantations during an appeal to occult powers.

The question at this point is how will this unrelenting, powerful enemy ever be stopped? These judgments had an effect on Rome that was similar to the effect the plagues had on Pharaoh — he hardened his heart and increased his persecutions of God’s people.

God’s people need assurance and comfort, and the interlude that follows will provide just that.

Chapter Ten

Between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals, John was shown two visions intended to give comfort and assurance to the saints: the sealing of the saints prior to the judgment, and the rejoicing of the victorious saints following the judgment.

Now at the conclusion of the second woe and between the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpets, there is again an interlude intended to provide comfort and assurance to the saints. This interlude continues from 10:1 through 11:14. The seventh trumpet will sound in 11:15.

1 Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. 2 He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, 3 and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring;

when he called out, the seven thunders
sounded.

This angel is a very high ranking representative of God. Some commentators think that this angel may even depict Christ, and they point for support to the similar description of Christ in 1:12-16. Of course, we know that Christ is not an angel since angels are created beings and Christ is not a created being, but rather is the one who created all things. (Colossians 1:16)

But could Christ ever properly be called an angel? There is some evidence that “the Angel of the Lord” frequently mentioned in the Old Testament was really Jesus preincarnate — what is often called a “Christophany” or preincarnate appearance of Christ. For example, the Angel of the Lord told Hagar in Genesis 16:10, “I will so greatly multiply your descendents that they cannot be numbered for multitude.” Later in verse 13, Hagar remarked, “Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?” Who appeared to Moses in the burning bush? The Angel of the Lord (Exodus 3:2) and God (Exodus 3:4). See also Judges 6:11-14 and Judges 13:21-22.

The ministry of this Angel in the Old Testament is similar to that of Christ’s: The Angel of the Lord reveals God’s word in Exodus 3. He calls leaders in Judges 13. He is a deliverer in Exodus 14 and Judges 6. He is a protector in Psalm 34. He is an intercessor in Zechariah 1. He is an advocate in Zechariah 3. He confirms God’s covenant in Genesis 22. He is a comforter in Genesis 16. (Compare Matthew 11:28.)

Thus, although Jesus is not an angel, the term “angel” (which simply means messenger) may be used here to describe Jesus. However, the angel here is said to be “another” angel, which would seem to identify it with the other angels we have seen in this book. I also think it unlikely that this book, which is so opposed to the idolatrous worship of created beings would use the word “angel” to describe Christ. See, also, Revelation 19:10 — “And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testi-

mony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” In my opinion, this angel is not Christ; this angel is an angel.

That this angel stands on both sea and land indicates that he has or that he represents one who has total authority and great power. The entire description indicates he has a very special mission of unusual importance. For example, verse 1 tells us he is wrapped in a cloud. Of the 25 times the word “cloud” occurs in the New Testament, in all but three it is used in relation to deity or a divine appearance, often in judgment. This angel is clothed with a divine mission.

Only here and in 4:3 does the word “rainbow” (Greek *iris*) occur in the Bible. The word “bow” occurs in the Old Testament in Genesis 9 with the establishment of the covenant following the flood, and in Ezekiel 1:28 when the prophet saw the throne of God. Again, we see that this angel is on a divine mission of special importance.

What is the little scroll or little book? In Greek, the phrase “little book” is just one word (*biblaridion*) and could be translated “booklet.” Verse 2 tells us two important things about this book — it is small, and it is open. That it is small most likely indicates that it contains only one aspect of God’s plan, and that it is open means that John can read it and understand it and that what it contains has already been put into action. The booklet has not been sealed.

This little scroll is the commission to John. It represents both the message John is to relate and his responsibility to relate that message. By eating the book later in verse 9, John accepts that responsibility. Ezekiel is also pictured as eating a book in Ezekiel 2:8 and Ezekiel 3:3.

The angel calls out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When God warned the wicked in Jeremiah 25:30, he did so with a great roar. When God called his children in Hosea 11:10, he did so with the roar of a lion. In Joel 3:16, God roared so that the heavens and the earth shook. This angel wants everyone’s attention! He has a message from God! That message must be heard and heeded by all.

What are the seven thunders? Recall that thunder and earthquakes often accompany God’s judgments. Thunder was heard during the

plague of hail in Egypt (Exodus 9:23), and it accompanied the appearance of the Lord at Sinai (Exodus 19:16, 20:18). God used thunder as a weapon against the Philistines in 1 Samuel 7:10 —

And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.

And Job perhaps put it best in 26:14 — “But the thunder of his power who can understand?”

Why are there *seven* thunders? Some surmise it may be an allusion back to Psalm 29, in which David describes seven voices of God, and about one of which he writes, “The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD is upon many waters.” Others surmise that the seven thunders are the seven bowls that we will see poured out after the seventh trumpet sounds. We will see another idea in just a moment when we study verses 4-7. In any event, we know now what the seven thunders depict in a general sense because we understand what the symbols mean — God’s perfect (*seven*) judgment (*thunder*)!

4 And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down.” 5 And the angel whom I saw standing on sea and land lifted up his right hand to heaven 6 and swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there should be no more delay, 7 but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled.

The pronouncement of judgment by the seven thunders was not to be revealed at this time. John is told *not* to write down what they said. For some reason, God chose not to reveal everything about the coming judgment against Rome at this time. The details concealed here may have been revealed later in the book but we cannot know for sure, and as you can imagine there has been *much* speculation.

If in fact the judgment of the seven thunders was never revealed to us, then the situation reminds us of 2 Corinthians 12:4 where Paul said that during his trip to heaven he had heard things that it was not lawful for a man to utter. Despite what the humanists may tell us, some things are unknown and unknowable to mankind.

Perhaps the purpose of the seven thunders is to assure Christians that God has unrevealed weapons in his arsenal that will be used when and if needed to take care of future enemies of his people, but that are not needed to take care of Rome. God can, so to speak, take care of mighty Rome with one hand tied behind his back! This view would also explain why John was told to seal up this part of what he saw and heard. That is, it was to be sealed up for the same reason that Daniel was given in Daniel 8:26 — “seal up the vision, for it pertains to many days hence.” It is also possible that the seven thunders depict the final judgment of the world that is still yet to come, which again would explain why it was sealed up at this time. With each of these possibilities, we are reminded of the timeframe for this book — it concerns things that were shortly to come to pass (1:1, 1:3, 22:6, 22:10)

What does the angel do next? First, the angel lifts his right hand. This then, as now, was done when taking an oath. The raised hand signifies that what is being done or said is taking place in full view of Heaven and emphasizes the solemn and momentous nature of what is being said. Hailey: “A more solemn oath could not be imagined as the angel swears by the eternity and omnipotence of God.”

And what does the angel swear? The angels swears that there would be no more *chronos* — which either means no more time or no more delay. Those who say this book points to the end of the world understandably prefer that *chronos* mean time, but the Greek scholars (Vine, Arndt, Gingrich, Vincent) tell us it means delay. This interpretation

also fits perfectly with the context and the timeframe given elsewhere in the book. It also fits perfectly (as we will soon see) with what the angels actually says, and it fits perfectly with the description of the seventh trumpet in 11:14 — “behold, the third woe cometh quickly.”

Thus, this mighty angel stands on earth and sea, raises his right hand, and swears before God that there will be no more delay. In the seventh trumpet and the seven bowls that follow, the complete judgment of God against Rome will be fulfilled. What right does anyone have to insert a delay of 2000 years and counting? And what would such a delay say about this solemn oath appealing to the eternity and power of God and proclaiming no more delay?

What else does the angel say? Look at verse 7 — “but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled.” What is this mystery of God that was announced to the prophets?

As we discussed earlier, a mystery in the Bible is usually something that was formerly not understood but that has now been revealed. Which mystery is in view here?

One possibility is that this mystery concerns the conflict of the church with Rome, the terrors ahead for the church, and the church’s ultimate victory over Rome. A mystery is something unexpected and unknown to men unless it is revealed by God — and the triumph of the church over the mighty Roman empire certainly fits that description! But was that mystery ever told to the prophets? Yes. Daniel wrote all about it 600 years earlier.

Another possibility takes a *broader* view of the mystery, a term that is used elsewhere in the Bible to speak of God’s plan of redemption through Jesus Christ —

- **Ephesians 1:9-12** Having made known unto us the **mystery** of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ,

both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

- **Ephesians 3:8-12** Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the **mystery**, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.
- **1 Corinthians 2:7-8** But we speak the wisdom of God in a **mystery**, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
- **Colossians 1:25-27** Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; Even the **mystery** which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

We often say that Jesus can return at any time, and that is certainly true, but has that always been true? From the moment he ascended into Heaven in Acts 1 has it been true that he could return at any time? No. Jesus himself told them things in Acts 1:8 that had not yet happened, and he could not return until they did. Jesus had foretold the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 in Matthew 24, and he could not return until that event transpired. The Old Testament contained prophecies of things that had not yet come to pass in Acts 1, and Christ could not return until they did. For example, the eternal king-

dom that Daniel wrote about was not established until later in Acts 2. Jesus could not return to claim a kingdom that did not yet exist.

How about *after* Acts 2? Could Jesus have returned to claim his own on the day *after* Pentecost? No, not yet. Daniel also wrote about certain Roman kings (as we will see later in our studies of this book), and those kings had not yet come to power. (Paul also wrote about one of them he called the the son of perdition in 2 Thessalonians 2:3.) In short, Jesus could not come again until *all* that was written about in the prophets that was to occur on this earth had been fulfilled — and that happened (in my opinion) after Domitian was murdered near the end of the first century. (See Daniel 7:26.) It was sometime after that event (perhaps very shortly after depending on how we interpret the judgments in this book) that the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets, was finally and totally fulfilled. From that point on, Jesus could return at any time to claim his own.

Modern commentators like to say that the New Testament writers all thought Jesus was about to come back immediately, but they were obviously mistaken since he did not. But that is not what they thought at all! In fact, Paul said just the *opposite* in 2 Thessalonians 2:2-4 —

That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: **for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first**, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

Paul knew that Jesus could not return until all had been fulfilled, and that is what he told those Thessalonians who *mistakenly* thought Christ's return was imminent.

Talk about a message of comfort! Talk about a message of victory! This mighty angel is swearing that the mystery of God to redeem the world through Jesus Christ, which was “foreordained before the foun-

dation of the world” (1 Peter 1:20), would be finally and completely fulfilled without delay. From that point, no one could ever again say (as did Paul) “that day shall not come *except*,” but rather could say “that day can come at *any* time!”