

## ANGELS' TRUMPETS

Scripture Lesson: Revelation 9

Text: Revelation 9:1ff

Songs: F4; "Work for the Night Is Coming," R31; R5; "Make Me a Servant"

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus Our Lord,

John took just six verses to explain the first four trumpets. Now he devotes an entire chapter to just two woes. That is why one commentator says this chapter is where "All hell breaks lose." Let's see how.

"V. 1." When the third angel sounded his trumpet in Revelation 8:10 there was cosmic disturbance and a star fell. This "star" is a Divine agent, likely an angel. This living star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss.

You may have noticed that "Abyss" is capitalized. That is because for Jews "Abyss" was a place. It was the subterranean area where the demons all lived. In the Greek the word means "Bottomless." The Abyss is a place of infinite evil. This is now released on earth. Literally hell is allowed to come on earth.

"V. 2." The description is one that defies our imagination. Yet there are parallels. When a volcano erupts, the smoke and ash are so thick that for days it is almost like mid-night. Crops are stunted in their growth. That is only lava from the earth; this is hell itself unleashed. Joel 2:10 tells about a plague of locusts so intense it blackened the sun and the moon. In Revelation 8:12 the sun, moon, and stars were darkened by a direct act of God, but here it is due to the smoke that comes up from hell. This opening of hell is what Jesus speaks about in Matthew 12. There we read, "Matthew 12:41-45."

"V. 3." Frequently in Revelation we have seen how one thing flows out of another, and the second is always worse than the first. Out of the smoke come unusual looking locusts. The Biblical reference to locusts goes back to the plagues in Egypt and to Joel's description of destruction in chapters 1 and 2. Always in the Old Testament locusts are a symbol of destruction. Some of you who grew up the Dakota's remember stories of how when the hail did not destroy the crops, the locusts came and devoured them. Yet these are not the usual variety of locusts, the kind we read about in the Old Testament or people saw in the Dakotas. These locusts have the power of a scorpion.

"V. 4." In another twist on the usual these locusts do not eat vegetation. They are commanded not eat "grass, plant, or tree." Instead they only attack people without the seal of God on their foreheads, the seal of chapter 7. Notice that these verses are in the passive voice: "They were given power," "They were told." Who gives them their instructions and commands? God does. They are doing great destruction, but God is coordinating and controlling the destruction. Nothing happens here that He does not approve.

Today some teenagers and children, and certainly most adults, remember the last episode of "Little House on the Prairie." A man named Lassiter came and told the people that he owned the land. He had the legal proof that all the land was his. Do you remember what the towns' people did? Rather than have their hard-earned work on the town be turned over to this profiteer, they burned the town in a carefully controlled way. When he returned the town was burning. He told the cavalry to arrest the people who burned the property. The Officer said, "You own the land. They own the buildings. They can do what they want with their buildings." The producer of "The Little House on the Prairie", Michael Landon, had the last episode destroy everything that had been built. He feared future Hollywood filmmakers would use the set for videos and movies of which he did not approve. He burned everything to ensure "The Little House on the Prairie" set could never be used for immoral or unseemly films and videos. He controlled the destruction of what he had built. That is what God is

doing in Revelation 9. He made everything good. Sin ruined it. Now God is destroying it in preparation for a new heavens and a new earth. How God destroys is described in the verses that follow.

“V. 5.” These locusts stung people so severely they wished they could die, but they could not. The sting resulted in intense torture. How the people writhed in pain! John writes about it this way in the next verse.

“V. 6.” People will feel like committing suicide, but the same God who allowed the locusts from hell will not allow them to die. The torment for sin is excruciating, and these people are not even in hell yet. Indeed, hell has broken loose across the earth.

“V. 7.” These are among the most bizarre creatures in Revelation. The locusts looked like horses with human faces. On their heads it appeared they had a crown of gold. Their gold appearing crowns symbolized their kingly power to carry out their mission of destruction.

“V. 8.” The long hair here is not a feminine characteristic, but is connected to the long hair of rebellious Absalom and the longhaired Roman legions that pillaged the land. The lions’ teeth in a human face promote the impact of unnatural and awesome cruelty.

“V. 9.” The breastplates of armor made it so there was no way to attack them. Even if someone had the audacity to discover a vulnerable spot, they would be intimidated by the sound of their wings that were loud like horses and chariots running into battle—or buffalo stampeding. The description of Indians chasing the buffalo off the buffalo jumps is frightening: The dust and noise were deafening, the earth shook as the hoofs of buffalo beat the ground. Wanda grew up near one so we know the stories. This is worse than a buffalo stampede.

“V. 10.” John returns to the sting of the scorpion. There are many interpretations of the five months that are mentioned here and earlier in verse 5. Five probably refers to two things. First, there was five-month period when the Israelites had to fear the locusts. The locusts were one of their most powerful, natural adversaries. Second, the Israelite army always attacked in five-squad platoon formation. They thought that was the most powerful way to attack. So five likely comes from Israel’s history.

“V. 11.” Now we are introduced to their king. Abaddon in the Old Testament is the place of destruction. Likely the reason that name is repeated in the Greek, Apollyn, is because Roman Emperor Domitian wanted to be regarded as the incarnation of the greatest of all Roman gods, Apollo. Domitian authorized cruel persecution of Christians. Even in the English translation we can feel the shift from Abaddon, Hebrew, to Apollyn, Greek, reminding us of Apollo. Revelation is intentional that locust was the symbol of the false god, Apollo.

“V. 12.” This has been frightening for John to see, but this was only the fifth plague. There are two more coming up on the horizon. We know each one gets worse.

“V. 13.” The sixth angel sounds his trumpet and the voice comes from the horns of the altar. In the Old Testament the four horns of the altar were purified before each sacrifice. These horns were where the sacrificial animal lay. Out of the cleansing spot of Old Testament salvation comes this voice.

“V. 14.” That sounds like a strange command to us. The Euphrates River was the natural boundary that protected God’s people in the Old Testament times. It was the natural, geographical barrier between God’s people and the pagan tribes. It was as though God had guardian angels that stood at the Euphrates River and protected His people. Those angels are now released. That means all of Israel’s tormenters are free to storm in.

“V. 15.” Already many of the human race had been killed by the third angel’s trumpet in Revelation 8:11 when the star Wormwood fell on the earth and made the water bitter. Now a third of those left are killed.

“V. 16.” The NIV translation does not do us a favor here. It simply says there were two hundred million mounted troops. TIME Magazine reports that China’s army exceeds two hundred million soldiers. In the Greek

2

there were 10,000 times 10,000, a double myriad, which is an unimaginable number. John does not want us to think two hundred million; he wants us to think of the incomprehensibility of that number. There has never been an army so great? This number is to remind us not of the Chinese army, but of God’s army. This army comes from the purified horns of the altar. These are soldiers God has purified by the sacrifice of His Son.

“V. 17.” These horses are like giant dragons. Sulfur is from hell. The picture is meant to be inconceivable, horrifying, and even revolting. These creatures are not of earth. They are from the pit of hell. The Old Testament background is Job’s description of Leviathan, “Job 41:19,20.” Yes, all hell has broken loose.

“V. 18.” Again, a third of the people are killed by three separate plagues: Fire, smoke, and sulfur. If you did not die of burns, you succumbed to smoke inhalation, and if you survived that, there was still the sulfur.

“V. 19.” The imagery goes back to the power in the tails, like the locusts that stung people. The horses had a power in their mouths, but their tails were even more powerful because they had numerous heads which all writhed like snakes. Perhaps some of you remember pictures of the Greek hydra, the monster that had heads on the end of snake bodies. If you managed to chop off one head, there were many more to devour you. Here we have a hydra on the back of a horse. This was a depiction people clearly understood.

Now we come the two most sad verses in Revelation. “V. 20,21.” You would think that after all this, people would repent of their sin. But they did not. They went on living like there is no tomorrow. They see visions of hell, but don’t want heaven. What a lesson for us today!

The terrors described by John can be traced to events in the first century like Domitian’s persecution, but we know the Bible is an on-going Revelation. We have had frightful things happen in the last century. No one thought there could be anything worse than the nerve gas of World War I. Then World War II exceeded the agony of World War I. It ended with two Atom Bombs. We thought it was over. Then we discovered the holocaust that went on against the Jews. Now that we have nuclear weapons we fear any despot who gets “The bomb” because he can terrorize the world. Are people frightened into repentance and obedience? What are the morals of today: Sexting, porn, and middle school girls and boys experimenting with sex. People today are not frightened into repentance!

We are reminded of Jesus’ tale of the “Rich Man and Lazarus.” in Luke 16. “Luke 16:19-27 The Message.” No one is coming back from the dead. But we have Revelation. Will we repent? What a message for a month after we reflected on Christ’s suffering and death for His people!

