Revelation 9

The Abyss Opened: Locusts, Horsemen and Hearts That Will Not Repent

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION

"These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."
Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

Hell is let loose on earth — torment from the pit, then an army of destruction — and still God holds the key, sets the hour, protects His sealed ones and limits the damage. The most frightening thing in the chapter is not the locusts or the horsemen. It's the last two verses: people who have seen it all and still will not turn from their idols, drugs, sex and stealing.

Ed Smith · Started 20 October 2026

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00 The Text

REVELATION 9 (KJV), MARKED

Gold God — His character & actions
Green Command / instruction
Sky Key repeated word
Rose Sin / warning
Violet Promise / blessing
Amber Time / place / contrast

1 And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.

2 And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

3 And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.

4 And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.

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.

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 .

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.

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.

[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.

Marked in the text

- **v1** ⚠ a star fall from heaven unto the earth
- **v1** ▲ to him was given the key of the bottomless pit
- **v1** ⇄ bottomless pit *(every occurrence)*
- **v2** ⚠ as the smoke of a great furnace
- **v2** ⇄ smoke *(every occurrence)*
- **v3** ⚠ locusts upon the earth
- **v3** ⇄ scorpions
- **v4** ★ only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads
- **v5** ▲ they should not kill them
- **v5** ◷ five months *(every occurrence)*
- **v6** ⚠ shall men seek death, and shall not find it
- **v6** ⚠ death shall flee from them
- **v7** ◷ like unto horses prepared unto battle
- **v11** ⚠ the angel of the bottomless pit
- **v11** ⚠ Abaddon
- **v11** ⚠ Apollyon
- **v12** ◷ One woe is past
- **v13** ▲ the four horns of the golden altar which is before God
- **v14** ◷ Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates
- **v15** ▲ prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year
- **v15** ⇄ the third part of men *(every occurrence)*
- **v16** ◷ two hundred thousand thousand
- **v17** ⚠ fire and smoke and brimstone
- **v20** ⇄ repented not *(every occurrence)*
- **v20** ⚠ worship devils, and idols of gold
- **v20** ⚠ which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk
- **v21** ⚠ nor of their sorceries
- **v21** ⚠ nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts

Marks are drawn on the KJV text. Quotations in the notes are from the NASB95, so their wording may differ from the KJV above.

01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · REVELATION 9:1 (KJV)

[1] And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw ⚠ a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and ▲ to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.

Setting

The first four trumpets struck land, sea, water and light (ch. 8), and the eagle cried, "Woe, woe, woe" over the three trumpets still to come (8:13). Now the fifth and sixth trumpets sound — the first two woes. The judgments move from nature to the spirit world: the bottomless pit is opened, and an army is released from the Euphrates.

Structure

- vv1–6 — **fifth trumpet, the pit opened:** "I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him" (v1). Smoke rises "like the smoke of a great furnace," darkening sun and air (v2). Out of the smoke come locusts, and "power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power" (v3). They may not touch grass or trees, "only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads" (v4). "They were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months" (v5). "Men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them" (v6).
- vv7–12 — **the locusts described:** "like horses prepared for battle," with crowns like gold, and "their faces were like the faces of men" (v7); hair like women's, teeth like lions' (v8); iron breastplates, and "the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle" (v9); tails and stings, with "power to hurt men for five months" (v10). "They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon" (v11). "The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things" (v12).
- vv13–19 — **sixth trumpet, the army from the Euphrates:** "a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God" (v13) says, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates" (v14). They were prepared "for the hour and day and month and year," released "so that they would kill a third of mankind" (v15). The horsemen number "two hundred million; I heard the number of them" (v16). Breastplates of fire, hyacinth and brimstone; heads like lions; "out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone" (v17). "A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues" (v18); "their tails are like serpents and have heads" (v19).
- vv20–21 — **no repentance:** the survivors "did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk" (v20); "they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts" (v21).

Repeated words

bottomless pit / abyss (vv1, 2, 11); smoke (vv2, 3, 17, 18); scorpion(s) (vv3, 5, 10); power (vv3, 10, 19); five months (vv5, 10); hurt / harm (vv4, 10, 19); fire and brimstone (vv17, 18); plagues (vv18, 20); a third of mankind (vv15, 18); repent (vv20, 21); like (vv2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 17, 19).

Contrasts

those with God's seal (v4) ⟷ those without it. A key given (v1) ⟷ a pit that cannot open without one. Men who seek death (v6) ⟷ death that flees from them. Faces like men ⟷ teeth like lions (vv7–8). The golden altar of prayer (v13) ⟷ the release of destroyers (v14). A third of mankind killed (v18) ⟷ the rest who "did not repent" (v20). Idols that cannot see, hear or walk (v20) ⟷ the living God who hears from His altar (v13).

Chapter theme (my words)

Hell is let loose on earth — torment from the pit, then an army of destruction — and still God holds the key, sets the hour, protects His sealed ones and limits the damage. The most frightening thing in the chapter is not the locusts or the horsemen. It's the last two verses: people who have seen it all and still will not turn from their idols, drugs, sex and stealing.

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · REVELATION 9:5 (KJV)

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.

The fallen star (v1)

This "star" is a person — the key is given "to him," and NASB's "had fallen" shows he was already down when John saw him. Guzik lists the suggestions — Nero, Satan, a fallen angel, a good angel, the Word of God, even Jesus — and leans toward an angel. Whether good or evil depends on whether he is the same as "the angel of the abyss" in v11. Either way, the key is *given*. Guzik notes that the idea of Satan as master of hell is foreign to Scripture; this pit opens only by God's permission and for God's purpose (compare 1:18; 20:1).

The bottomless pit

The Greek *abyssos* is the prison of demons. The demons begged Jesus not to send them there (Luke 8:31; compare 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6). Guzik takes it as a real place, and he rejects spiritualized readings that make the star "the Word of God" and the pit "human nature" as far from the plain meaning.

Demonic locusts (vv3–11)

These are not ordinary insects. Ordinary locusts eat green things; these are told *not* to touch grass or trees, but people (v4). Walvoord, in Guzik: "A visual representation of the hordes of demons loosed upon the earth." Proverbs 30:27 says locusts have no king; these do (v11). Guzik reads the string of "like" comparisons as a picture of unnatural cruelty, not a description to be decoded part by part. Christians have read these locusts in many ways:

- **Demonic hordes in the tribulation** — Guzik's futurist view.
- **Historical armies** — historicists have identified them with Saracens, Turks and others; Guzik also notes they've been made heretics, monks, Jesuits and Protestants, and rejects all of these.
- **Modern weapons** — some recent writers see attack helicopters; Guzik calls this speculative and says it doesn't fit all the details.
- **Symbolic** — idealists see the torment that sin and the demonic bring on unbelievers in every age.

The Old Testament already used locust plagues as God's judgment (Exod 10:4–15; Joel 1:4; 2:1–11).

Limits on the torment (vv4–6)

Three limits: only those without God's seal (Guzik ties this to the 144,000 "and perhaps more"); no killing, only pain; and only five months. The purpose, Guzik says, is to bring people to repentance — which makes vv20–21 all the more tragic. A scorpion's sting is agonizing but rarely fatal. And verse 6 is one of the darkest verses in the Bible: death will not be an escape. Guzik contrasts it with Paul, who wanted to depart because to die was gain — to be with Christ (Phil 1:21–23).

Abaddon and Apollyon (v11)

Both names mean *destruction*. Guzik takes this king to be Satan himself or a high-ranking demon. The contrast is plain: Jesus came to give life (John 10:10); the king of the pit has only one name, and it is destroyer.

The voice from the altar (v13)

The voice comes from the horns of the golden altar — the altar of incense where the prayers rose in 8:3–5, whose horns were touched with atoning blood (Exod 30:10). Guzik notes again how large a role prayer plays in these events.

Four angels bound at the Euphrates (vv14–15)

These angels are bound, so Guzik takes them as evil — and yet they are held for God's exact moment: "the hour and day and month and year." He cites Newell's suggestion that while most of Satan's angels are free, some high-ranking offenders are kept bound. Guzik says they may or may not be the four angels of 7:1. The Euphrates is loaded with history — the river of Eden (Gen 2:14), the boundary of the land promised to Abraham (Gen 15:18), the region of Babel and Babylon (Gen 11:1–9), and the old frontier of Rome.

Two hundred million (vv16–19)

Is the number literal? Guzik notes that all the armies of World War II together peaked around 70 million. He cites Hocking's suggestion that the figure may mean an army beyond counting. Some see a human army from the east (compare 16:12); Guzik leans toward a demonic army, while allowing a modern, mechanized reading is possible. Fire, smoke and brimstone — the same elements as the final judgment (14:10; 19:20; 21:8) — kill a third of mankind. Add the fourth of the earth killed under the fourth seal (6:8), and by my count about half the world's people will have died.

They did not repent (vv20–21)

This is the point of the chapter. God's trumpets are meant to bring people to repentance, and the survivors refuse. Their sins come in two groups: against God — worshiping demons and lifeless idols (Ps 115:4–8; 1 Cor 10:20) — and against people — murders, sorceries, immorality, thefts. The word for "sorceries" is *pharmakeia*, from which we get "pharmacy." Guzik links it to drug use; in the ancient world sorcery and drugs often went together. Guzik also observes how quickly people go back to normal after a calamity. Pain alone does not change a heart.

Word study (Greek)

- **key — *kleis* (G2807):** a key; the authority to open and shut (1:18; 3:7; 20:1).
- **bottomless pit / abyss — *abyssos* (G12):** the deep, the prison of demons (Luke 8:31; Rev 20:3).
- **furnace — *kaminos* (G2575):** a furnace, kiln.
- **locusts — *akris* (G200):** locust, grasshopper.
- **scorpion — *skorpios* (G4651):** a scorpion.
- **torment — *basanizō* (G928) / *basanismos* (G929):** to torture; torture, torment.
- **stings — *kentron* (G2759):** a sting, a goad (Acts 26:14; 1 Cor 15:55–56).
- **Abaddon — (G3):** Hebrew "destruction" (Job 26:6; Prov 15:11).

- **Apollyon — *Apollyōn* (G623):** Greek "destroyer."
- **horns — *keras* (G2768):** horn; the corners of the altar, a symbol of power.
- **Euphrates — *Euphratēs* (G2166):** the great river of Mesopotamia.
- **brimstone — *theion* (G2303):** sulfur.
- **repent — *metanoeō* (G3340):** to change one's mind and turn.
- **demons — *daimonion* (G1140):** an evil spirit.
- **idols — *eidōlon* (G1497):** an image, a false god.
- **sorceries — *pharmakeia* (G5331) / *pharmakon* (G5332):** sorcery, magic arts, drugs and potions.
- **immorality — *porneia* (G4202):** sexual immorality of every kind.
- **thefts — *klemma* (G2809):** theft, stealing.

Cross-references

Gen 2:14; Gen 15:18; Exod 10:4–15; Exod 30:10; Job 26:6; Ps 115:4–8; Prov 30:27; Isa 14:12–15; Jer 46:10; Joel 1:4; Joel 2:1–11; Luke 8:31; Luke 10:18–19; John 10:10; 1 Cor 10:20; Gal 5:19–21; Phil 1:21–23; 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6; Rev 7:1–4; Rev 8:3–5, 13; Rev 16:12; Rev 20:1–3.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · REVELATION 9:4 (KJV)

4 And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but ★ only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.

Command to obey — repent now

The whole chapter turns on the words "did not repent" (vv20, 21). Every trumpet is an invitation to turn, and the worst thing is to sit through God's warnings unchanged. Today I'll name one thing God has been warning me about and turn from it — not later, now.

Sin to confess — sorceries

Pharmakeia is on the list right next to murder and immorality (v21). Drugs and alcohol are not a side issue to God; they are a spiritual bondage. The men I disciple know this better than anyone. And I have my own ways of numbing out instead of bringing my pain to God. I confess them.

Warning to heed — death is not an escape

"Men will seek death and will not find it" (v6). The enemy whispers to hopeless men that dying would end the pain. It is a lie. The answer to torment is not death but the Savior. For any man I meet who has thought about ending it — there is hope, and His name is Jesus, not Apollyon.

Promise to trust — the sealed are protected

The locusts could hurt "only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads" (v4). The pit opens only with a key God gives, and the angels move only at the hour He set (v15). The destroyer is real, but he is on a leash. If I belong to Christ, I am sealed by His Spirit (Eph 1:13).

Example to follow — the voice from the altar

The sixth trumpet starts at the altar of prayer (v13). Heaven's business moves on the prayers of the saints. I want to be a man of prayer who intercedes for others before the trouble comes.

Worship

Even with hell let loose, God is the One holding the key, setting the hour, counting the months and marking His own. I worship the God whose power has no rival and whose patience still calls people to repent.

Prayer

Lord God, You hold the key to the abyss and the hour of every judgment. Seal me as Yours. Free me and the men I love from every idol and every chemical chain. Don't let pain leave us unchanged — let it turn us to You. Give hope to the hopeless who think death is their way out, and let them find life in Jesus, the One who came that we might have life. Amen.