

CHAPTER 9

"But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts" (9:20,21).

We have recorded in chapter 9 the fifth and sixth trumpets, also known as the first and second woes.

Fifth Trumpet - Hordes of strange creatures from the abyss, called locusts, are unleashed. This is the first of the three woes. It is worthy of notice that the 144,000 sealed by the angel of the sixth seal are alive at this time of the fifth trumpet, but they are not to be hurt. "The fifth trumpet (9:4) refers to people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads, which therefore presupposes an earlier sealing, that of 7:1-8."¹

What are these strange creatures? Demons? Some kind of supernatural creature kept in reserve in the bottomless pit until the time appointed for them to emerge? Possibly, but I myself have no problem picturing an insect that has, till now, been undiscovered. This insect has a narrow head and four long legs on an elongated body ("horses prepared for battle"), some golden tufted hairs on its head ("crowns of something like gold"), two eyes, nostrils, and a mouth ("faces like the faces of men"), long hairs on the body ("hair like women's hair"), tiny teeth ("lion's teeth"), scales of some kind under their lower jaws ("breastplates of iron"), large wings ("the sound of chariots"), and tails with stingers ("tails like scorpions"). Since they are let loose from the abyss by Satan, this might simply mean that God, in his perfect timing, allows them to be discovered for the first time during this period of the tribulation, when Satan is wreaking havoc on mankind. Perhaps the destruction of much of the earth and the waters has led to their emerging in such force, similar to the destruction of an animal's habitat leading it to come openly into neighborhoods. Perhaps noxious fumes from fires on the earth have routed them from hidden nests. It is perfectly reasonable to believe that with the destruction of their habitat and predators, they are enabled to multiply quickly and expand their range over all the earth. They are given the power to hurt men for 5 1/2 months (not that each man is hurt for the entire 5 1/2 months).

Many take these locusts to be symbolic of demon hordes, and they may be right. In either event, the visions are given in such a way that John can understand the significance. In other words, God uses words that we, in our finite capacity, can comprehend.

Walvoord thinks these are not ordinary locusts but are called locusts only because of their function as a judgment and plague from the Lord. "Inasmuch as demons do not have physical shape, what John is seeing must symbolize demonic possession."²

This fifth trumpet poses the most difficulty. Is it a trumpet describing Satan's wrath against believers or God's wrath against the beast and his followers? To my thinking, the latter appears more likely. The text states that those with the seal of God on their foreheads, the 144,000, were

1 Archer, unpublished class notes.

2 Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 162.

not to be harmed, and this would seem to indicate that God is controlling the Satanic means he himself has unleashed. These locusts have the angel of the bottomless pit, Satan, as king, it is true. But Satan is permitted to inflict only what God allows, much like the case of Satan persecuting Job.

Sixth Trumpet - This is the second woe. Here we have the army of horsemen numbering 200,000,000. They kill by fire, sulfur and brimstone, which comes out of their mouths. *"For their power is in their mouth and in their tails."* Surely this must be symbolic of modern-day warfare. In John's day his readers could not possibly have made sense of a literal description of nuclear weapons, exploding grenades, short-range missiles, land mines, etc. Some think that the number 200,000,000 refers to an actual army of soldiers. However, that idea seems almost incredible. Most likely the number is used to give the impression of "a vast and overwhelming army, one beyond human computation and exceeding by far any before witnessed."³

Johnson opts for demonic hordes, writing that

the horsemen are not in themselves important but wear brightly colored breast plates of fiery red, dark blue, and sulfurous yellow, more suggestive of supernatural than natural riders. . . . According to General William K. Harrison (an expert in military logistics), an army of 200 million could not be conscripted, supported, and moved to the Middle East without totally disrupting all societal needs and capabilities . . . As General Harrison brings out on this aspect of Revelation, God has made men with certain limitations; and the actual raising and transporting of an army of the size spoken of in v. 16 completely transcends human capability. All the Allied and Axis forces at their peak in World War II were only about 70 million.⁴

The horsemen are released by four angels. These four angels are evidently evil angels prepared beforehand to kill 1/3 of the remaining people on earth. They have been in chains, bound by God, and let loose at exactly the predetermined time to inflict their torment.

Frost's comments are helpful at this point:

As we are coming now within view of God's greater judgments, it will be well to point out a few facts--so that these may be in mind--about all of the divine judgments as they are described in the book of the Revelation. These facts are as follows: first, God's judgments begin with physical sufferings (6:11-17) and end with spiritual (19:20); second, they begin with men who are lesser sinners, that is, men in general (6:15), and end with those who are the greatest sinners, that is, with Antichrist and the false prophet (19:20); third, they begin in grace and mercy, that is, with the intention of leading men to repentance (9:20, 21), and end in wrath and torment, that is, in final punishment of sin (19:20; 20:10, 12-15); fourth, they begin with comparative lightness (6:12-17) and end with terrible intensity (20:10; 21:8); and lastly, they begin in time (6:1-8) and end in eternity (20:10-15; 21:8). As we go on with our study we cannot fail to note this progress in judgment,

3 Walter Scott, *Exposition of The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 211.

4 Johnson, *Revelation*, pg. 494.

for the manifestation of it is plain and impressive. There is an important distinction, however, which we need to keep in mind, especially in view of the fact that the saints are involved in those judgments which occur upon the earth. Both tribulation and wrath are the portion of the wicked (Rom. 2:8, 9; 1 Thess. 1:6-9). Tribulation is the portion of the righteous (Acts 14:22; 1 Thess. 3:4; Rev. 7:14), but wrath never is (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9). As to tribulation, it is to be remembered that outwardly it may be much the same in respect to the righteous (Matt. 24:21, 22; Rev. 6:9) as it is in respect to the wicked (6:12-17; 9:18). There is, however, an essential difference as between the two classes affected by it: the cause in the case of the righteous is devotion to Christ (6:9; 12:11) and the result, a greater godliness and rewarding (Rom. 5:3; 8:35; 12:12; Rev. 7:14); while in the case of the wicked the cause is sin and the result is further sin, settled despair, and destroying judgment (6:16, 17; 9:20, 21; 19:19-21).⁵

Milligan's assessment of the trumpets is as follows:

Finally, the description given at the end of the sixth Trumpet of those who were hardened rather than softened by the preceding judgments leads directly to the same conclusion: *And the rest of mankind which were not killed by these plagues repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and the idols of gold, and of silver, and of brass, and of stone, and of wood.*

These considerations leave no doubt that the judgments of the Trumpets are judgments on the world. The Church, it is true, may also suffer from them, but not in judgment. They may be part of her trial as she mixes with the world during her earthly pilgrimage. Trial, however, is not judgment. To the children of God it is the discipline of a Father's hand. In the midst of it the Church is safe, and it helps to ripen her for the fulness of the glory of her heavenly inheritance.

In verse 9:12 John recorded, *"One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things."* Then in 9:13-21 we read of the second woe. We do not read of the third woe until 11:14: *"The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly."* What falls between 9:21 and 11:14 are chapter 10, where John eats the little book, and the beginning portion of chapter 11, where the two witnesses are introduced, killed, and resurrected.

⁵ Frost, *Matthew Twenty-Four and the Revelation*, pp. 185-186.