

FREE GRACE BIBLE STUDY

Revelation 9

The Fifth and Sixth Trumpets



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Revelation 9

How to use this study

Here's a simple path through Revelation 9:

1. **Read the passage.** Begin by reading Revelation 9:1–21. Take your time with it.
2. **Work through the questions.** Short excerpts from the Commentary will guide your thinking, and there's room to write your answers.
3. **Go deeper.** When you want more, turn to the verse-by-verse Commentary at the end of this study.

Revelation's Purpose

Jesus is coming, so faithfully live to get the reward that He will give.

Introduction

When I was about nine years old, I was digging in the yard. My brother saw me with the shovel and said, “If you keep going, you’ll reach China.” He probably meant this as a joke, though I wouldn’t put much confidence in either of our understanding of geography or plate tectonics at the time. I abruptly stopped, finding it disturbing to imagine people from another part of the world crawling up out of my favorite hole project.

At various times throughout childhood, I would return to the dream of digging a really deep hole. When we were eleven or twelve, we attempted to dig a hole big enough to be a boy’s bunker. For the uninitiated, this is like a clubhouse, but just way more subterranean. We never got deep enough to make the bunker, but we had one fantastic mud day, when my younger brother had the idea of filling our in-progress hole via the garden hose.

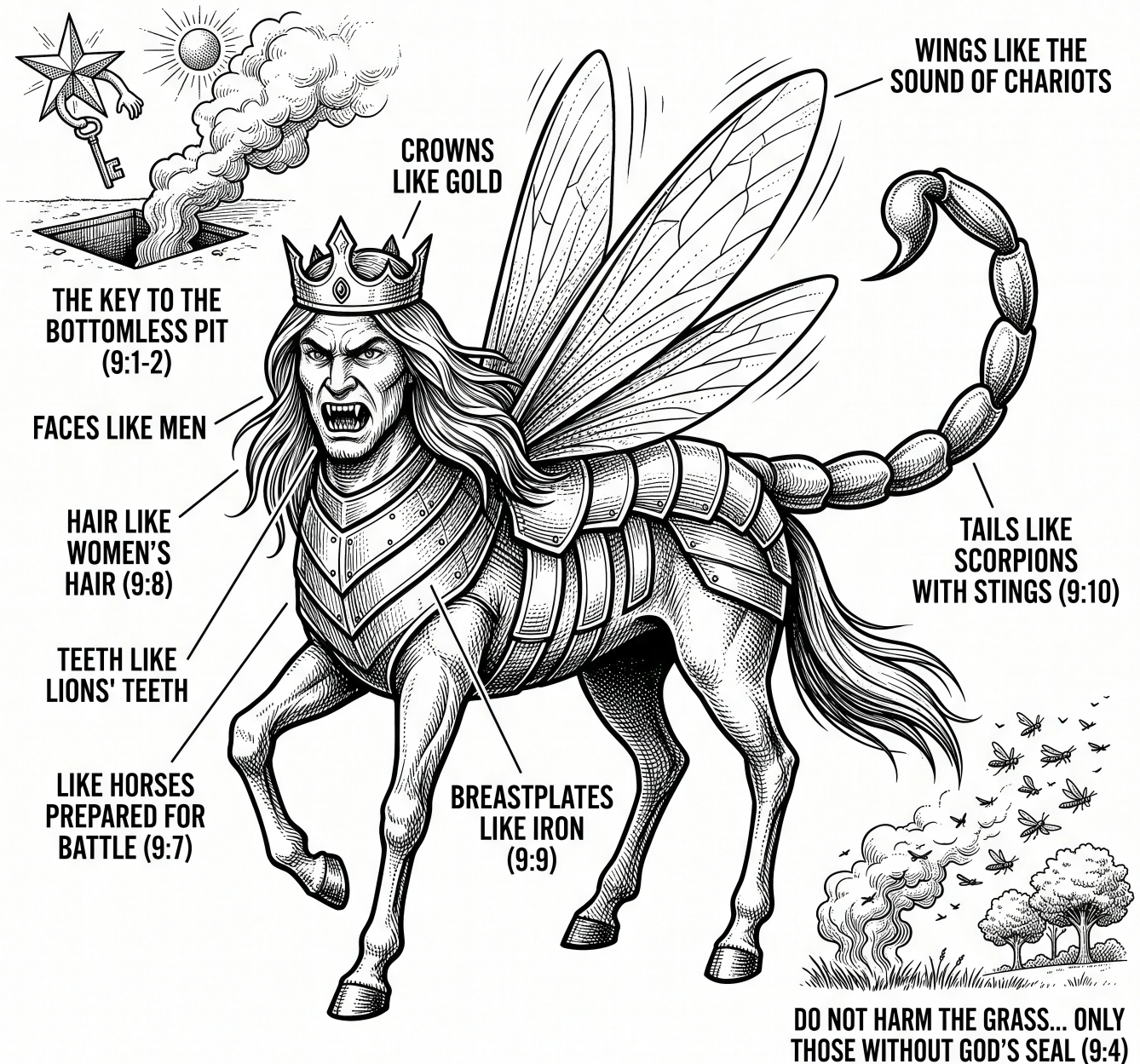
The deepest hole I have ever seen was actually a cavern, one of those where you can pay a little money and they will take you down into the dark. Although this one was rigged with lights, the tour guide turned them off at one point and let us just experience the dark silence.

Later in the tour, he turned the lights off again and said, “If you were to walk ten steps in the direction of my voice, you would fall forever. Or at least that’s what the first explorers down here thought.” He went on to explain that there was an underground overlook that the previous century’s spelunkers had discovered. When they had thrown a rock over the edge to gauge the depth, they never heard the crash. They wondered if they had truly found a bottomless pit. It turned out that they didn’t hear the crash because the not-so-bottomless hole was lined, a few hundred feet below, with a deep layer of guano. That’s bat poop. Centuries’ worth of it. The rock had landed with a soft, silent plop. It certainly wasn’t bottomless, but it wasn’t the kind of bottom you’d want to find either.

In this chapter of Revelation, we discover a pit so unfathomable that the author calls it the abyss, or in some translations, the bottomless pit.

THE LOCUSTS FROM THE BOTTOMLESS PIT

— R E V E L A T I O N 9 —



THEIR KING: ABADDON / APOLLYON (9:11)

Bible Study

Read Revelation 9:1–21

These demons are torturers, not executioners. They inflict pain but are not allowed to kill.

(See the Commentary on 9:5 to go deeper.)

1

Revelation 9:4–5

The fifth trumpet unleashes demonic entities from the abyss that are given permission to torment, but not kill, those who do not have the seal of God. When you experience prolonged seasons of suffering or torment in your own life, how do you determine if it is a result of living in a broken world or a specific discipline from God?

These demonic entities inflict such intense pain that people long for death, but for some reason, they cannot die.

(See the Commentary on 9:6 to go deeper.)

2

Revelation 9:6

These demonic “locusts” inflict such intense pain that people actually long for death, yet death flees from them. How does this terrifying image of inescapable suffering change the urgency with which you view the eternal reality of hell for those without Christ?

This seal is not likely a literal tattoo or brand but is symbolic of those who have believed in Jesus. They are saved and sealed for the day of redemption, as described in Ephesians 4:30.

(See the Commentary on 9:4 to go deeper.)

3

Revelation 9:4

The demonic locusts are specifically instructed not to harm anyone who has the seal of God on their forehead. How does the knowledge that God can and does place a protective boundary around His people give you confidence when facing spiritual warfare?

The scale of destruction is staggering. A third of mankind will be killed, adding to the previous loss of life during earlier judgments.

(See the Commentary on 9:14–16 to go deeper.)

4

Revelation 9:14–16

The sixth trumpet releases four bound angels and an army of 200 million that ultimately kills a third of the remaining human population. When reading about such staggering, apocalyptic death tolls, how do you reconcile God's profound love for humanity with His severe, unyielding judgment against sin?

In Western cultures, especially where Christianity has a strong influence, it can be easy to forget that idolatry is a worldwide, history-spanning phenomenon that will persist until the end of the world.

(See the Commentary on 9:20–21 to go deeper.)

5

Revelation 9:20

In spite of surviving these horrific plagues, the majority of humanity still flatly refuses to repent of their demon worship and idolatry. What are the specific idols of gold, silver, or brass (such as wealth, status, or technology) in your own culture that people stubbornly refuse to abandon, even when those things cause obvious harm?

It's astonishing that after all this suffering, the majority of people still refuse to repent.

(See the Commentary on 9:20–21 to go deeper.)

6

Revelation 9:20–21

The unrepentant survivors also refuse to turn away from their murders, sorceries, immorality, and thefts. Since severe punishment alone clearly isn't enough to change a hardened human heart, what is actually required to bring about true repentance in a person's life?

Some have speculated that John is seeing a gigantic fleet of modern war machines. Others think this is a force of 200 million demons, while still others believe this is a literal army of 200 million soldiers, which would be unprecedented in size.

(See the Commentary on 9:17–19 to go deeper.)

7

Revelation 9:17–19

Revelation often blurs the lines between literal and symbolic imagery, such as horses with lion heads that breathe fire and smoke. Rather than getting bogged down in deciphering the exact physical appearance of these judgments, what is the primary spiritual or moral lesson God wants us to take away from this terrifying chapter?

Commentary

Chapter nine begins with the fifth trumpet, and the result shifts the focus from what's above the earth to that which is below.

9:1

Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him. (Revelation 9:1)

This star is described as having fallen from heaven, but then it is referred to as him, indicating that this is not an inanimate object but some kind of angelic being. It's unclear whether this being is associated with the star Wormwood from chapter eight, but it is clearly not a meteorite or asteroid. This is an entity that is given a particular task.

9:2

He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit. (Revelation 9:2)

The term *bottomless pit* here is also translated as *the abyss* in some versions, and this will become significant as Revelation progresses. When the pit is opened, smoke billows out, darkening the sun and air.

9:3

Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. (Revelation 9:3)

Revelation often uses symbolic imagery, and this is a prime example. While the text refers to them as locusts, it becomes clear as the description continues that these are not literal insects. If they were just ordinary locusts, some of the following details would make little sense. Instead, these are some kind of demonic entities, described in terms that compare them to locusts.

These demonic beings are given power similar to that of earthly scorpions, but they are far more than mere locusts or scorpions. Their description will further clarify their nature as the chapter continues.

9:4

They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. (Revelation 9:4)

This passage reveals that during the tribulation, there will be people in the world who have the seal of God on

their foreheads. This seal is not likely a literal tattoo or brand but is symbolic of those who have believed in Jesus. They are saved and sealed for the day of redemption, as described in Ephesians 4:30. These individuals have eternal security and are protected by God.

9:5

And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man. (Revelation 9:5)

These demons are torturers, not executioners. They inflict pain but are not allowed to kill. The demonic entities unleashed during this time are not allowed to harm believers or any plant life. Their target is the unbelievers—those who will ultimately follow the beast. The pain they cause is so intense that their victims will want to die.

9:6

And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them. (Revelation 9:6)

This is a terrifying scenario. These demonic entities inflict such intense pain that people long for death, but for some reason, they cannot die. It is possible that the torment incapacitates them, preventing suicide. For five months, this agony is inflicted on those who do not believe in the Lord. It is a truly frightening time for anyone without faith in Christ. Now, John will tell us what they looked like, but this may be only their metaphorical look in the context of the vision. Whether this is their real-world appearance, or if they are even visible to the human population, we do not know.

9:7–10

The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads appeared to be crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. They had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle. They have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months. (Revelation 9:7–10)

It is possible that John's vision is symbolic and that these demons might be invisible to people. However, if they are visible, it will make this time even more

horrifying. Imagine seeing these creatures and suffering months of pain, yet being unable to escape through death. It seems that the only way to escape their threat is to believe in Christ, and yet so many will continue to resist. This period, called the Great Tribulation, is truly awful. The torment, suffering, and unrepentant hearts of many will make it the darkest time in human history. These locust demons are not wild vigilantes but instead are under the authority of a king, although this king is not an earthly lord.

9:11

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. (Revelation 9:11)

This horde of demonic creatures from the abyss has a king, referred to as Abaddon in Hebrew and Apollyon in Greek. Abaddon means *destruction*, and Apollyon means *destroyer*. This appears to be an angel, one who leads this group of demonic tormentors and is likely one and the same as the angel who was given the key of the abyss in verse one. Whether this is a fallen angel or one in good standing with the Lord, we do not know, but his locust horde is genuinely terrifying.

It is challenging to clearly distinguish between fallen angels and faithful angels in Revelation. Technically, fallen angels are still angels, but their role in the events described can be difficult to interpret. Some Bible teachers suggest certain angels are fallen because of the horrific nature of the actions they carry out. However, it's important to remember that if God commands an angel to act, it is not wrong for them to obey His command, no matter how severe the action may seem to us.

9:12

The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things. (Revelation 9:12)

At the end of chapter eight, an eagle announced that the fifth, sixth, and seventh trumpet judgments would be three woes (other translations, such as the NKJV, say it was an angel). Now, the first has passed, and two more (trumpets six and seven) are to come.

9:13

Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, (Revelation 9:13)

This is the altar of incense described earlier. In the Old Testament, the altar in the tabernacle and later in the

temple was built with horns on its corners. This heavenly altar represents the prayers of the saints, and here, a voice comes from it.

9:14–16

one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind. The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. (Revelation 9:14–16)

These should not be mistaken for the four angels holding back the four winds in chapter seven; they are a different group. These four angels are bound to wait at the river for the exact hour they are to be released. Under the fifth trumpet, the demonic army was not allowed to kill directly, but under this sixth trumpet, the four angels released at the Euphrates are at the helm of a tremendous force that will be permitted to kill.

A significant portion of the population will have already perished in earlier events, but a third of those who have remained until this point will die at the hands of the army these four angels lead. The scale of destruction is staggering. A third of mankind will be killed, adding to the previous loss of life during earlier judgments. John goes on to describe the soldiers of this giant army.

9:17–19

And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone. A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm. (Revelation 9:17–19)

Some have speculated that John is seeing a gigantic fleet of modern war machines. Others think this is a force of 200 million demons, while still others believe this is a literal army of 200 million soldiers, which would be unprecedented in size. Regardless of their makeup, they will bring tremendous death to the world.

You would think such devastation would turn people to God, but despite the catastrophe, the next verses show the unrepentant hearts of many:

9:20–21

The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, 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; and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts. (Revelation 9:20–21)

It's astonishing that after all this suffering, the majority of people still refuse to repent. The fifth trumpet brings an army of demons that causes pain, and the sixth trumpet brings this massive, destructive army, yet most of humanity remains hardened. This does not mean no one repents—some do—but the vast majority do not.

It's worth noting what they refuse to repent of. Idolatry. In Western cultures, especially where Christianity has a strong influence, it can be easy to forget that idolatry is a worldwide, history-spanning phenomenon that will persist until the end of the world. In Acts 17:30, Paul announces that God is calling all men everywhere to repent of idolatry, and yet after nearly two thousand years of heavenly patience and an increase in pressure to repent in the tribulation period, the vast majority of people will not let go of their idols. Paul revealed that idolatry is simply demon worship in disguise (1 Corinthians 10:20). God's attempt to root out this demonic practice is a hard-fought battle, but God is not done yet.