

Home Group Study, Revelation 9

The Abyss, the Trumpets and the Refusal to Repent

Context, Historical, Cultural and Biblical

Revelation 9 continues the trumpet visions that began in Revelation 8. The first four trumpets affected creation: the earth, the sea, the waters and the heavenly lights. Now the fifth and sixth trumpets move more directly towards humanity. The eagle's warning at the end of chapter 8 was, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth," and Revelation 9 contains the first two of those three woes.

As with earlier chapters, Christians understand these visions in different ways. Some read Revelation 9 as describing future events that will unfold in a more literal or concentrated way before the return of Christ. Others understand the trumpets as symbolic visions of the judgments and spiritual realities that mark the whole period between Jesus' ascension and return, with intensification as the end draws near.

Either way, the main message is clear. Revelation 9 unveils the spiritual darkness behind a rebellious world. Humanity is tormented by evil, deceived by idols, and yet still refuses to repent. But even here, evil is not sovereign. The key is given. The locusts are limited. The angels are released only at the appointed time. The Lamb still reigns.

The chapter is full of Old Testament echoes. The locusts remind us of the plague of locusts in Egypt and the locust army in Joel. The abyss connects with biblical language about the realm of demonic imprisonment and judgment. The Euphrates was a significant biblical boundary, associated with Eden, Babel, Babylon, Assyria and the eastern edge of Israel's promised land. Revelation uses all this imagery to show that the powers of evil are real, destructive and terrifying, but also restrained by God.

1. The Fifth Trumpet and the Fallen Star, v1

The "star" is most likely a personal being rather than a literal star, because he is given a key and acts with purpose. Some understand this fallen star as Satan or a demonic figure. Others see it as an angelic being permitted by God to open the abyss for the purposes of judgment. The wording "fallen" does suggest something dark or sinister, though the emphasis is still on divine permission.

The key is important. The star does not own the abyss and does not act independently. The key is given. This means that even the release of darkness happens under the limits of God's sovereignty.

The abyss means the bottomless pit or depthless place. In Luke 8, the demons called "Legion" begged Jesus not to command them to go into the abyss. That moment is important because it shows that the demons know the abyss, fear it, and know that Jesus has authority over it.

Revelation 9 therefore reminds us that the spiritual world is real. Evil is not merely psychological, social or political. There are dark spiritual powers at work behind the rebellion of the world. But those powers are not equal to God. They fear the authority of Jesus.

Questions

Why is it important that the key to the abyss is "given"?

What does Luke 8 show us about Jesus' authority over demonic powers?
How can we take spiritual evil seriously without becoming fearful or obsessed with it?

2. The Abyss Is Opened, v2

The imagery is dark and suffocating. Smoke rises, light is blocked, and the air is darkened. This is a picture of spiritual pollution, deception and judgment. What comes out of the abyss does not bring life, clarity or freedom. It brings darkness.

The language may remind us of places like Sodom and Gomorrah, where smoke rose from the land after judgment, or Mount Sinai, where smoke and fire surrounded the mountain. But here the smoke is not the glory of God's holy presence. It is darkness rising from below.

Some read this as a future literal opening of the abyss and release of demonic forces. Others read it symbolically as a vision of spiritual darkness being released into the world. In either view, Revelation is showing that when God gives people over to evil, the result is not freedom but darkness. This is one of the frightening truths of the chapter. Sin promises light, knowledge and liberation, but when the abyss is opened, the world becomes darker, not brighter.

Questions

What does the smoke from the abyss suggest about the nature of evil?
Where do we see darkness being presented as freedom or enlightenment today?
How does Jesus bring light into the darkness?

3. The Demonic Locusts, v3-10

These are not ordinary locusts. Ordinary locusts destroy vegetation, but these are forbidden to harm grass, plants or trees. Their target is humanity, especially those who do not have the seal of God.

This links Revelation 9 back to Revelation 7. God's people have been sealed. That does not mean they are removed from all suffering, but it does mean they are spiritually protected and belong to God. The torment in this trumpet falls on those who are not sealed.

The locust imagery echoes the plague of locusts in Exodus 10 and the locust army in Joel. In those passages, locusts are a sign of devastating judgment. Here the image is intensified into something demonic and terrifying.

The description of the locusts is deliberately unsettling. Their appearance combines images of military power, false beauty, intelligence, predatory violence and torment. They look organised, powerful and impressive, but their work is destructive. Evil often presents itself as strong, attractive or victorious, but its fruit is torment.

The five months may connect with the normal lifespan or season of locust activity. Symbolically, it shows that the torment is limited. They cannot do whatever they want, for as long as they want. Even judgment through demonic powers is restrained by God.

People long for death, but death flees from them. This is a terrible reversal. For Paul, to die is gain because he belongs to Christ. But for those under judgment, death is not hope. It is not escape. The only true hope is repentance and life in Christ.

Questions

Why is it significant that these locusts do not harm plants but torment people?

What does this vision show us about the true nature of evil?

How does the seal of God give comfort to believers, even in a dark world?

4. The King of the Abyss, v11–12

Proverbs 30:27 says that ordinary locusts have no king, yet all march in ranks. These locusts are different. They do have a king, and his name means destroyer. This tells us something important about evil. Evil is not creative. It does not bring life. It destroys. It may disguise itself as freedom, pleasure, power or progress, but its direction is always destruction.

Some identify Abaddon or Apollyon with Satan himself. Others see him as a high-ranking demonic ruler under Satan. Either way, the point is that the forces released from the abyss are organised under destructive spiritual leadership.

But again, Revelation does not present evil as equal with God. The destroyer destroys only within the limits God permits. The Lamb, not Apollyon, holds history. The first woe has passed, but the warning continues. The chapter is escalating, showing the seriousness of rebellion and the urgency of repentance.

Questions

Why is “destroyer” such a fitting name for the leader of these locusts?

How does evil disguise its destructive nature today?

Why must we remember that Jesus, not the destroyer, has ultimate authority?

5. The Sixth Trumpet and the Voice from the Altar, v13–15

The voice comes from the golden altar, the altar associated with incense and the prayers of the saints. This links back to Revelation 8, where the prayers of God’s people rose before God before the trumpets sounded. The judgments in Revelation are not detached from the prayers of the suffering Church.

The four angels here should probably not be confused with the four angels of Revelation 7. Those angels held back the winds and were not described as bound. These angels are bound and then released for judgment, which suggests dark or fallen angelic powers.

The Euphrates is significant. Geographically, it was one of the great rivers of the ancient Near East. Biblically, it is associated with the region of Eden, with the world of Babel and Babylon, and with the great empires east of Israel. It also marked a boundary connected with the land promised to Abraham. For Israel, danger often came from beyond the Euphrates. Assyria and Babylon came from the north and east as instruments of judgment. So the release of destructive powers at the Euphrates carries the sense of ancient enemies, spiritual rebellion and judgment breaking in.

The timing is precise: hour, day, month and year. This is not random destruction. However we understand the vision, literally, symbolically, or both, the point is that judgment operates according to God’s timing.

Questions

Why does it matter that the voice comes from the altar?

What does the Euphrates represent biblically and historically?
How does the precise timing remind us that evil is not in control?

6. The Terrifying Cavalry, v16–19

The number describes an army beyond human counting. The point is not probably mathematical precision, but overwhelming scale. John wants us to feel the terror and vastness of what he sees. The imagery is nightmarish. Lions' heads suggest ferocity. Fire, smoke and sulphur suggest judgment, perhaps echoing Sodom and Gomorrah. Serpent-like tails connect the vision with deception and demonic harm.

Some have tried to identify these horses and riders with particular weapons, armies or technologies. A more cautious reading recognises that Revelation is using apocalyptic imagery to unveil spiritual realities behind earthly horror. War, violence, terror and death are not merely political events. They reveal a deeper spiritual disorder in a world resisting God.

For those who read this more futuristically, this may point towards an intensified final judgment involving vast destructive forces. For those who read it more symbolically, it represents the recurring devastation of demonic and militarised evil throughout this age. Both readings should lead us to the same place: horror at evil, reverence before God, and urgency about repentance.

A third of humanity is killed. As with the earlier trumpets, the judgment is severe but still partial. The world is being warned before the final end.

Questions

Why do you think the imagery of this army is so terrifying?

What does this vision reveal about war, violence and demonic destruction?

How can we avoid unhealthy speculation while still taking the warning seriously?

7. Humanity Refuses to Repent, v20–21

This is the most tragic part of the chapter. The judgments are warnings, but people still refuse to repent. Even severe suffering does not automatically soften the human heart.

Idolatry is at the centre of the problem. Humanity worships what it has made. Gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood are lifeless, yet people give their hearts to them. This echoes Old Testament mockery of idols, especially in Isaiah and the Psalms. Idols cannot see, hear or walk, yet people still trust them.

Behind idolatry there is something darker. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10 that pagan sacrifices are offered to demons, not to God. Revelation 9 makes that connection explicit: idol worship is not spiritually neutral. False worship opens people to dark powers.

The list of sins that follows, murder, sorcery, sexual immorality and theft, shows that worship and behaviour belong together. When people worship false gods, their lives become disordered. What we worship shapes what we become.

The word translated “sorceries” is connected with magic, occult practice and deceptive spiritual power. In the ancient world, magic, charms and spiritual manipulation were common. In our own day, people may not always use the same language, but the desire to control life apart from God remains very much alive.

The chapter ends without repentance. That should sober us. Judgment alone does not save. Signs alone do not change the heart. People need the mercy of God, the witness of the Church, and the saving work of the Lamb.

Questions

Why do you think people still refuse to repent, even after judgment?

What idols do people trust today, even if they are not made of gold or stone?

How does worship shape the kind of people we become?

Link to Our Vision

Be with Jesus

Revelation 9 teaches us to be with Jesus by taking refuge in His authority over every dark power. The demons in Luke 8 knew that Jesus had authority over the abyss, and Revelation shows that even the most terrifying forces are still limited by God. Being with Jesus means we do not have to live in fear, fascination or denial of evil. We stay close to the Lamb who reigns.

Learn from Jesus

Jesus teaches us to see the world spiritually. Behind idolatry, violence, deception and destruction there are deeper powers at work. But He also teaches us that judgment is a merciful warning. The trumpets call the world to wake up, turn from idols, and repent before the final end.

Become like Jesus

As we follow Jesus, we become people who resist idols, reject darkness and live as faithful witnesses in a world that often refuses to repent. We learn to pray, endure and proclaim the hope of the gospel. We become people marked by God, shaped by worship, and committed to the Lamb rather than the powers of this world.

Final Reflection

Where do you see the destructive power of idolatry in the world today?

Are there any false securities or idols that God may be calling you to turn from?

How can we live this week as people sealed by God and faithful to the Lamb?