

The Fifth Trumpet Blast, or First Woe  
Chapter 9:1-12

Verse 1

The fifth trumpet sounded. John saw "a star having fallen (*peptokōta* - perf. part - the star is already down, it is not in the process of falling) onto the earth, and was given to it the key of the shaft (*phreatos* - a long shaft leading to an abyss; (John 4:6 - Christ at the well uses the term *pēgē* or foundation, and at John 4:11 the term *phrear* is used), of the abyss." Often these well-shafts were not locked in first century Palestine, but John's readers would have understood the imagery when he spoke of a covered and locked shaft leading to the well or deep hole proper. There is no Greek word here that could be translated as "the bottomless pit" as we find in the K.J. (See Charles, *Eschatology*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, p. 198, for discussion of the imagery of the abyss in the Book of Enoch.)

We must be clear that God is still sovereign over the universe, and that the key to release further destruction "was given" (*edothē* - 1st Aor. Passive, ind. - the passive voice means that someone (God) gave the key to the star, probably Satan) to Satan. God is *permitting* the coming events to occur!

Verse 2

"And he opened the shaft of the abyss; and smoke went up out of the shaft as smoke of a great furnace". . . . This smoke was so dense that he darkened the whole atmosphere (Genesis 19:28; Ex. 19:19).

Verse 3

"Out of the smoke came forth locusts to the earth". . . . The imagery comes from the eighth Egyptian plague (Exodus 10:14f) Joel 2:1ff). The fifth trumpet brings a scourge that does extensive harm, but the sixth trumpet brings actual destruction. The locust (9:1-12) and the horsemen (9:13-21) signify a worsening situation which is coming upon the earth.

God permitted them to have "authority as the scorpions of the earth." The torment of these scorpions came from their sting. Their sting was not lethal as is apparent from vs. 5 and 6. (Probably power here in both places. The Greek word

means both authority and power, but the authority is grounded in the power.)

Verse 4

"And it was said to them in order that (*hina* clause - for the purpose that) they shall not harm the grass of the earth, nor every (any) greenstuff, nor every tree, except (*ei mē* - but only) the men who have not the seal (*sphragida* - mark of distinction) of God on the foreheads." The personification of the scorpions is clear. They were told not to kill, but to torment men.

Verse 5

God gave them permission to torment men. John said "in order that they shall be tormented (*basanisthēsontai* - future indicative passive voice) give months;". . .the suffering was to be limited. The nature of the suffering is now defined. "The torment is as the torment of a scorpion, whenever it stings a man."

Verse 6

The suffering will be so intense, that "men will seek death and by no means will they find it, and they will long to die" (*epithumēsousin* - fut. act. - this is a form of *epithumēō*, the word for lust or intense desire.) Men shall desire death more than any thing else, but there is no release from their suffering because even "death flees" (*pheusesei* - present, ind. continuously flees from them) - as though men are chasing it, but cannot catch it.

Physical death cannot bring them relief from their suffering, because it is spiritual suffering caused by their not having God's mark on the foreheads.

Note: See the present author's *Death Be Not Proud!* in the Christian Standard, Cincinnati, Ohio, April 6, 13, and 20, 1963. Contemporary man is preoccupied with two things: (1) The problem of death; (2) Rejecting the biblical view of man and death. In the above popular statement an attempt was made to direct the attention of every N.T. Christian to consider the insight into *Death* the areas of *Anthropology*, *Archaeology*, *Literature*, *Philosophy*, *Psycho-Sociological*, *False Doctrines*, and the *Biblical view of man and the phenomenon of death* can provide. The brief section on *The Biblical Doctrine of Man and Death* are included as an appendix in this present volume.

## Verse 7

John describes the locusts as "like horses having been prepared for war, and on their heads as (*hōs* - as or like - John does not say that they actually had crowns) crowns like gold, and their faces as (*hōs* - same as above) faces of men." We have here imagery of war horses. (See Joel 2:4ff). The imagery of crowns probably signifies war helmets, because John's language makes it very plain that they did not wear actual crowns.

## Verse 8

The appearance of the locusts is further described. "They had hairs as (*hōs* - as or like) hairs of women". . . . This imagery probably represents the antennae of the locusts. "And their teeth were as of lions" (See Joel 1:6).

## Verse 9

The locusts were so large that they resembled horses wearing battle armor. There were so many of them that John's imagery comes from "the sound of many horsed chariots." This was a large chariot carrying many men or a very fast charger chariot pulled by many horses. The rustling wings of the locusts sound like the shuffle of the feet of the infantry charging in battle.

## Verse 10

The "tails like scorpions" were to sting men and the sting "is to harm men five months." In Palestine certain species of locusts are born in the spring and die in late summer or early fall. This is a period of about five months. The imagery would have been immediately recognized by John's readers.

## Verse 11

At this point the realism of the imagery breaks down. Real locusts have no leader, but these have "a king, who is the angel of the abyss." (Not bottomless pit as the King James translates.) His name in Hebrew (*Hebraisti* - used only in Johannine literature - John 5:2; 19:13, 17, 20; Rev. 19:16) *Abaddon* (means Destruction, see Job 26:6, Psalm 88:1) and in the Greek his name is *Apollyon* - destroyer. (The Septuagint regularly translates the above Hebrew term by *Apoleia* - one form of destruction.) It is impossible to settle the question of whether John's personification is Death or Satan. But the general picture is clear.

## Verse 12

This hideous imagery tells only of the first woe. There are two more to follow, and they will be progressively worse!

Note: The Principalities and Powers. Ours is an age when men deny the existence of Satan and his angels of darkness. Baudelaire describes Satan extremely well in these weighty words. "The Devil's cleverest vile is to convince us that he does not exist." Paul says "he turns into an angel of light."

The evil which has come upon the earth is inexplicable apart from the power of darkness! Thanks be to God light shall prevail! (See Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology*, Van Kampen Press, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois, 1952).

Note: John Bunyan's *Apollyon*. Bunyan's great work, *Pilgrim's Progress* reveals what baptized imagination can do in portraying great biblical themes. When Christian leaves the Palace Beautiful he descends into the Valley of Humiliation. There Bunyan's Christian does battle with *Apollyon*. Bunyan's imagery departs somewhat from the biblical data, but he brilliantly points Christian's encounter. (Read *Pilgrim's Progress*, and for an excellent interpretative work see Henri Talon, *John Bunyan, The Man and His Work*, Rockliff, London, 1951.

## SECTION 31

## Text 9:13-21

13 And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the horns of the golden altar which is before God, 14 one saying to the sixth angel that had the trumpet, Loose the four angels that are bound at the great river Euphrates. 15 And the four angels were loosed, that had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, that they should kill the third part of men. 16 And the number of the armies of the horsemen was twice ten thousand times ten thousand: I heard the number of them. 17 And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates as of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone: and the heads of the horses are as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceedeth fire and smoke and brimstone. 18 By these three plagues was the third part of men killed, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone, which proceeded out of their mouths. 19 For the power of the horses is

in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails are like unto serpents, and have heads; and with them they hurt. 20 And the rest of mankind, who were not killed with these plagues, repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not 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: 21 and they repented not of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.

#### Initial Questions 9:13-21

1. Where is the river Euphrates located?
2. The river Euphrates is the Eastern boundary of what Empire?
3. Where did John get the exact number of the armies of horse-men which he gives in vs. 16?
4. How did the rest of mankind respond to the devastation of the plagues - vs. 20?
5. What spiritual condition of mankind does this section of scripture reveal?
6. What are some of the relationships between the tragedies which come upon mankind and his willingness to repent?

#### The Sixth Trumpet Blast or the Second Woe Chapter 9:13-21

##### Verse 13

"And the sixth angel trumpeted" and John heard "one voice" speak to the sixth angel. What did he say?"

##### Verse 14

The angel was authorized to "loose (*luson* - 1st aor. active, imperative - commanded - to release at once) the four angels having been found at the great river Euphrates." (See Genesis 15:18 for extent of the hand of promise). Beyond the Euphrates, to the east, lay the great Empires of The Assyrians and Babylonians (The great river is also mentioned in 16:12). The flooding waters of the Euphrates is symbolic of the judgment of God (see Isaiah 8:5-8; Jeremiah 17:13).

##### Verse 15

God's control over the universe is again declared by John. The having been prepared (*hetoimasmenei* - perfect, passive