

## Revelation 9:1-11

### "Are we suffering Revelation's great plague?"

"The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. 2 When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss.

"3 And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions" of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. 5 They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months.' And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a man.

"6 During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them. The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. 8 Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. 9 They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. 10 They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. 11 They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon."

In the past, *Revelation* chapter 9 gave me more difficulty than any other part of the Bible.

For decades, I thought I'd developed a sound theory for interpreting *Revelation's* structure.

Chapter 9 floated like a dead locust in my conjectural ointment.



Today's text kept me from wrapping my concept into a nice package.

It smoked my whole notion.

You've surely heard some fanciful interpretations of chapter 9.

TV and radio preachers' imaginations run wild.

Some speculated that the following verses (9 & 10) predicted the invention of airplanes:

"They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months."

Do these lines suggest modern aircraft?

Those verses by themselves might make a good case for prophesying bombers, but verse 8 reads: "Their hair was like women's hair."<sup>1</sup>

I'm not sure how the interpreters explain hairy airplanes.

---

<sup>1</sup> The locust imagery comes largely from the *OT Book of Joel*. The wording in Joel describes the locust attack as if an army were invading. Recent archaeological discoveries of a burial mound in western Russia suggest one intriguing explanation of the hair reference. Researchers found the remains of four Scythian women horse warriors from the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The Greeks both traded and fought with the Scythians. About 200 BC, a people known as the Sarmatians defeated and intermarried with the Scythians. They, too, utilized fierce, skilled (Amazon) women warriors. Some of the Sarmatians occupied the area of Pontus, mentioned in Acts 2:9. See *Archaeology*, May/June 2020, p 18 regarding the Scythian Amazon women.

**In addition, if these verses prophesied airplanes, they would have made no sense to first century Christians or to anyone prior to the mid-twentieth century.**

Missiles and other modern types of weaponry might soon outmode airplanes limiting them to our times.

**Some scholars think this chapter and other references teach that Satan was an angel, who rebelled and was cast out of heaven.**

**I suspect 90% of preachers and religious leaders agree with this view.**

**Was Satan once an archangel who revolted against God and got kicked out of heaven?**

On that subject, I am an agnostic.

I doubt we have enough info to say.



I find the evidence for the devil's once being an angel shakier than Mt. Vesuvius.

**Jesus said the devil: "was a murderer, from the beginning."<sup>2</sup>**

**Imagine receiving information about a mountain lion loose in your neighborhood.**

**The big cat has caused your loved ones and your neighbors great injury.**

**What would be a wiser use of your time?**

**Should you sit around speculating about how the mountain lion got loose?**

**Or should you take measures to keep everyone safe until experts capture the animal?**

**Preachers devise complex theories about the devil's origin.**

**They mostly base their assumptions, however, on symbolic language.**

Suppose you hear this shocking news tomorrow morning, get upset about it, and begin calling your neighbors:

**"Native Americans beat and pummeled a group of Texas law enforcement officers"?**

If Covid-19 hadn't disrupted major league baseball and I knew nothing about the sport, that's how I might interpret a sports' page headline tomorrow reading: **"the Cleveland Indians mauled the Texas Rangers last night."**

**Literally interpreting *Revelation's* cartoon-like language leads to similar silly conclusions.**

***Revelation* gives its message in coded words.**

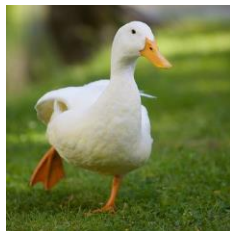
By taking symbols at face value, so-called scholars concoct crazy-wild theories.

**So what does *Revelation's* jargon mean?**

**Carefully assessing the signs leads us to hope and encouragement.**

<sup>2</sup> John 8:44 NIV

**Misread them and we waddle aimlessly like Daffy Duck.**



**Revelation's code comes from various sources including:**

- **The Old Testament;**
  - The New Testament;
    - **First century events.**

**Revelation's songs often stress the main message.**

The songs occur often barely disguised and emphasize these points:

- A) Honor God: He created the Universe and everything in it.**
- B) Praise his Son, Jesus the Lamb, who paid the penalty for the world's sin.**

**As you know, the world glorifies everything, but God.**

**Ask the next 100 people you meet how often they have honored God in the past 72 hours.**

**How many would say they honored God our Creator even once?**

**How many will say they've recently thanked Jesus for dying to forgive them?**

When we honor God and His Christ in this way, the world often labels us "fanatics."

**Revelation came about because Christians openly honored God our Creator and they praised Jesus for his crucifixion and his resurrection.**

**While refusing to conform to the world's lifestyle, without shame or hesitation, early Christians glorified God.**

**For doing that, the world persecuted them.**

Keep in mind God's plan for the world and us, and that He works in and through history.

**He watches over those who live and work according to his design.**

God holds all of us accountable.

He punishes those who work against him.

**The Old Testament makes these facts clear.**

- God tests both nations and individuals.
- God tolerates only a certain level of moral corruption before he destroys a nation.<sup>3</sup>
- God at times uses nations to accomplish his plans.
- Sometimes He uses evil nations to punish and test other people.

**Revelation 9 tells of a test, but uses symbolism.**

The Holy Spirit designed cartoon language to protect the Christians who openly honored God.

---

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 15, Deuteronomy 28.

**Let's go step by step:**  
"I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth."



**John did not see the star fall.**

**He saw the star after it fell.**

Before the invention of electric lights, folks spent lots of time at night observing the stars.

They thought meteorites were falling stars.

We still colloquially refer to those objects that way.

**Many scholars think *Revelation's* symbolism came from apocryphal and other apocalyptic literature (that is, non-Biblical books that focused on sudden doom and cataclysmic events).<sup>4</sup>**

I question this theory

I doubt the *Revelation* writer would have employed symbols and references from those apocalyptic sources because those who wrote them often promoted far-fetched notions.

**Christians at the time knew the *Old Testament*, Jesus' words, and the Apostles' teachings.<sup>5</sup>**

In addition, Rome's Emperors kept citizens aware of their edicts.

---

<sup>4</sup> The Book of Enoch, e.g.

<sup>5</sup> See Acts 2:42, e.g. Paul extensively referenced Old Testament incidents in his letters (Romans 9-11, 1 Corinthians 10. Note also the extensive use of the OT in Hebrews.

**Intimacy with the Old Testament helped church people understand *Revelation's* symbolism.**

The prophet Isaiah used coded language, for example, when he spoke of powerful Babylon.

God used Babylon's king to punish Israel.

Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar

destroyed Jerusalem and its great Temple

**Even before Nebuchadnezzar's birth, Isaiah wrote about what would happen to him.**

**Rulers and ordinary people often grow proud; Nebuchadnezzar's ego bulged.**

The prophet Daniel told how Nebuchadnezzar walked on the roof of his palace bragging:

**"Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"<sup>6</sup>**

Isaiah the prophet predicted the king's and Babylon's fall: **"How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations."<sup>7</sup>**

**No king of Babylon ever made it to heaven; not Nebuchadnezzar or any other.**

---

<sup>6</sup> Daniel 4:30 NIV

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 14: 9-15 NIV



Nebuchadnezzar I -Wikipedia disobedience and failure:

**“He has hurled down the splendor of Israel from heaven to earth.”<sup>8</sup>**

**God regularly humbles human pride and our refusal to honor him.**

**Many think the above Isaiah 14 passage refers to Satan’s expulsion from heaven.**

Here is why I cannot support that conclusion:

- First, Isaiah chapters 13 and 14 were clearly addressed to the King of Babylon.
- No New Testament writer ever quoted Isaiah 14:12 in a context linking it to the devil.
- Numerous authors and preachers assume that Jesus’ statement in Luke 10: 18 teaches that Satan fell from heaven. That is probably not what Jesus meant. He simply compared Satan’s sudden loss of power to a lightning strike from heaven.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Lamentations 2:1 NIV

<sup>9</sup> Luke 10:18 reads literally in Greek: “I saw Satan fall as lightning strikes from heaven.” Jesus compared the devil’s fall to a bolt of lightning that strikes from out

**Let’s move forward 700 years to another great line of rulers—the Caesar’s in Rome.**

**Rome’s first emperor Octavian took the name Augustus, “exalted one.**

**Later, “Emperor Domitian claimed he was God.** When John, the *Revelation* writer, saw the star fall, I think he foresaw the eventual collapse of Rome’s rulers, but before the emperors would fall they would bring about immense suffering.

**“I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss.”**

**The star (probably the emperor(s) “was given” the key to the shaft or well and he unleashed ugly, terrible forces.**

**Question? “Who gave them the key?”**

**The word translated “gave” appears in many noteworthy Bible verses.<sup>10</sup>**

You know about Jesus’ trial by the Roman governor, Pilate.

**Pilate wielded far more power than the governor of any U.S. state.**

**In Israel Pilate represented Rome.**

of the sky. When Jesus resisted Satan’s temptations, as no other had since Adam and Eve, the devil suffered a sudden loss of power.

<sup>10</sup> See *The Apocalypse, an Introductory Study of St. John the Divine*, Edward White Benson p – 149, *Discussions on the Apocalypse*, W. Milligan, 1893, p 191. The *Apocalypse of St. John*, H.B. Swete, pp. 114, 115

### Jesus' silence at the trial mystified Pilate:

"Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"

**Do you recall Jesus' answer?**

**"You would have no power over me if it were not "given" you from above"?<sup>11</sup>**

The words translated "gave" and "given" come from the same Greek verb.<sup>12</sup>

**The power given the star that fell from the sky in Revelation and Pilate's power came from the same source—from our Creator.**

**All rulers wield power because God gives it to them—allows them to have it.**

**God sometimes uses evil people to fulfill his purposes:**

**"The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. (2) When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace."**

The above resembles the wording in Genesis 19:28 that describes the aftermath of Sodom's and Gomorrah's destruction.

**Continuing in Revelation 9:**

**"The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. (3) And out of the smoke locusts came**

**down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions" of the earth."**

When the Lord gave Israel its laws through Moses, He solemnly warned them to obey.

Consequences of disobedience included: "swarms of locusts will take over all your trees and . . . crops."<sup>13</sup>

**Israel proved unfaithful in keeping those laws.**

They forgot God and grew careless about worshipping Him.

Centuries after Moses, the prophet Joel predicted a punishing, massive locust invasion on Israel.

As an efficient army, the locusts would assault.

**God warned Israel to repent.<sup>14</sup>**

He meant Israel to be a Kingdom observing his laws.

**They did not obey him.**

Kings and commoners disobeyed.

They lost their kingdom—to locusts and to nations that God gave power for brief times.

**Jesus brought a new kind of Kingdom.**

It has no geographical borders or national identity.

**God's kingdom exists in the hearts and minds of folks who fully commit to Jesus.**

<sup>11</sup> John 19:10, 11

<sup>12</sup> Διδῶμι, pronounced Dídōmē

<sup>13</sup> Deuteronomy 28:42

<sup>14</sup> Joel 2, 3

They know God created them; they know Jesus died to pay for their mistakes; and they know Jesus arose to defeat death, the penalty for sin.

**God's people openly, unashamedly honor Him, and they praise Jesus for saving them.**

They work to let God control their lives; they know they are helpless without God.

They love and forgive as Jesus did.

**But putting God first often puts us at odds with the world.**

At times, even our families don't understand.

**That's why Jesus said: "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."**

**Sharp social conflicts developed between Christians and other parts of society.**

**This was especially true in pagan areas.**

In the early church, slaves and free brothers and sisters ate and worshiped together.

That did not happen in "polite" Roman society.

**Most Romans treated slaves as "brute beasts."**

**Christian husbands were to be faithful to their wives.**

Roman author and philosopher Seneca (died 65 AD) wrote: "No woman need blush to break off her marriage since the most illustrious ladies have adopted the practice of reckoning the year, not by the names of the consuls, but by those of their husbands. They divorce in order to marry and they marry in order to divorce."<sup>15</sup>



Culture of Ancient Rome -Wiki

J.M Houston reviewed other immoral aspects of Roman society.<sup>16</sup>

They did not worry about what "keeping what happened in Las Vegas in Las Vegas."

**Romans openly practiced immorality.**<sup>17</sup>

Infanticide became commonplace; women's liberation grew rampant; parents spoiled their kids.

**These influences took their toll on early believers; even some whom the apostles taught:**

**Locust-like plagues often affect societies but the locusts in *Revelation 9* adversely affect human beings, not green plants.**

<sup>15</sup> Quoted by J.M. Houston, "An Environmental Background to the New Testament" *New International Bible Commentary*, p-1029

<sup>16</sup> Paul outlined much of it in Romans 1.

<sup>17</sup> Keep that in mind when you read Ephesians, where Paul cautioned Timothy, who was preaching in Ephesus.

The language leads me to think the locust "attacked" the consciences of human beings.

**Ever have your conscience torture you for a bad mistake?**

The reason we succumb to temptation is that we have idolized someone or something other than God:

"They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon."



**Abaddon is Hebrew and Apollyon, Greek meaning "destroyer."**

**Only by placing ourselves under God's rule can we escape the destroyer.**

**Did you notice in this text that the people having trouble were those: "who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads"?**

**How do we get God's seal?**

After the Lord freed them from Egyptian slavery, He expected the Israelites to remember what He did for them by celebrating Passover.

**He wanted Israel to annually celebrate Passover.**

As Exodus 13:16 reads:

"It will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the Lord brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand."

Most Israelites forgot what God did for them and began behaving badly.

Just before the destruction of Jerusalem's first Temple by the Babylonians, Ezekiel tells us that the Lord sent a messenger with a writing kit throughout the city.

That messenger was to put a: "mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in" Jerusalem.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, when we renounce the world's enslaving enticements and join Christ in baptism, God seals us with his Holy Spirit.

*Revelation's* first readers understood that.



<sup>18</sup> Ezekiel 9:4



Thus Paul jogged the memories of church folks in Ephesus about what happened when Jesus freed them from their slavery to sin:

**“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.”<sup>19</sup>**



Ephesus was once one of the world's greatest cities, but they refused to honor God. This is what's left of their world famous Library of Celsus.

Ephesus is the first church mentioned in *Revelation*; the other six churches were in the vicinity.

***Revelation 9* reminds that we find security from plagues and other threats only in God and His Christ**

**We exalt God and trust him.**

**We act as Christ did and honor him.**

**Are you united with his Son, honoring God and glorifying Him?**

**If not it's time to change.**

**Nothing else will endure.**

Bob Blair  
PO Box 176  
Cleghorn, IA 51014



What remains of the theatre.

**In Christ, God brings peace!**

**[www.robertblairbooks.com](http://www.robertblairbooks.com)**

<sup>19</sup> Ephesians 1:13, 14 NIV