

### “Terrors to Come”

As we have seen before – what has happened thus far is as nothing; now come ‘three woes’ that surpass the other judgements in their severity and horror. We are here shown two woes, both of which should strike terror into any man’s heart. Even the Christian, whose salvation is secure forever should read these words with an awareness of the chilling power and awesome might of Almighty God.

He is a God of love, but also a God of judgement, whose commands and requirements are beyond our full comprehension. All His judgements are wise and legal, so we have no business defying, or fighting against, them.

Perhaps some readers will remember the first rule of proper interpretation: to read the text as it is written, looking for the plainest sense. Only after that do we need to check the whole of scripture to find other meanings. We will look at this chapter in the way we have done previously, with eyes free of past theories and denominational propaganda. To do this we shall read the text simply to see if it is meant literally or figuratively – or, as in the remarkable book of Isaiah, a combination of both.

We will refrain from the often staggeringly-grotesque and tortured meanings given to the text by people with their own theories in mind. Reading these texts is certainly not easy, but we should beware of giving inventive and intricate interpretations that John (or God) did not wish to give them.

***Even if some will not agree with the details of this article, I am sure that all can see clearly that God is giving to us a description of judgments so vast and horrific, that all men should fall on their faces in repentance!***

### The First Woe

#### Verse 1

1.

“And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.”

## The Revelation 9

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The partial obliteration of light is terrifying enough, but even worse is to follow when the fifth angel blasts on his trumpet...a blast that serves both as herald to what is to come and a warning of doom to those who are in their sin.

When he blew the trumpet, a star fell from heaven. (The primary meaning of 'star' is a literal star. It can also be applied to Christ as the 'morning star', to an angel, or to false teachers). It could be argued that the one who had the key to the pit was the angel who blew the trumpet, but this does not seem likely. Some insist that the star that fell was Satan, but this does not seem to be supported by the description, though it is possible it might have been someone acting on his behalf. The text simply says that 'he' (the star) was sent by God to open the 'bottomless pit'. What is this pit? Is it hell? The word 'fall' can mean to be cast down, but it can also mean to go from a higher to a lower place.

The one who had the key symbolically had the power and authority over the pit, but under God. Thus, whoever it is, it cannot be Satan, for he has no power *over* hell, only power to torment the inhabitants *in* hell. Also, Satan would not be given the power to open his own final place of incarceration. The one with the key, then, is likely to be an angel from God's own court, or one who is devilish, being given authority by God to begin an attack on God's people. Was it and is it the bands of atheists, even homosexuals, who now threaten us all? There is no final answer.

The 'bottomless pit'? The meaning in Hebrew/early Jewish thought is this: the 'pit' is the netherworld, which has a small opening but an ever-increasing size within, as it descends downward. 'Bottomless' is used to further reinforce the idea of the pit being unfathomed, of unknown size. (In logical terms, of course, no abyss or pit on earth can exceed the depth of the earth itself. Is this pit figurative or literal? We know that no man has examined what is at the earth's centre, but scientists guess that it is full of molten material and fire). Usually, this 'pit' is a name for Orcus, the place of the dead and demons... so it is a close rendition of 'hell'.

Personally I do not assume that the pit in this text is meant to describe the netherworld, or hell as being under the earth's crust, simply because, at the end of time, the earth will be burnt up with the rest of creation, and hell as the final place of the unsaved will continue for ever. So, this pit must be something else. It is unclear that this is the same place described in a later portion of Revelation. Whatever it is, the horrors within it are unleashed by an envoy from God. Who

## The Revelation 9

Written by K B Napier

Wednesday, 10 June 2015 16:29

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this envoy is depends on how we interpret 'fall': If it means to move from a higher to a lower place, there is no moral judgment involved, so the envoy could be an angel of God. But, if we choose to interpret as 'condemned' or as 'to perish', the person could be an evil angel, a demon. A clue will be found later in the text...

Thus, I see the description of terrors that follow as symbols of literal destruction. That is, though the bringers of destruction are symbolic in their appearance, they refer to very real acts of death and violence. It would be difficult to portray the fearful acts in ordinary terms, so the symbols are used to bring together many elements that combine to give a picture of what is really happening. Do not accept my words as a final interpretation of these events! They are but reasonable assumptions based on what I believe is being said and shown to me by the text; and I refuse to spiritualise!

### Verses 2-6

1.

"And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

2.

And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.

3.

And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.

4.

And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man.

5.

And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them."

## The Revelation 9

Written by K B Napier  
Wednesday, 10 June 2015 16:29

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The terrors that strike the inhabitants of earth are not fully revealed to us. All we know is that when the beings shown in the text are sent forth, they will bring fear and agony upon those they afflict.

As soon as the envoy opened the bottomless pit smoke arose from it and the description appears to fit that of a mighty explosion coming from an erupting volcano. In the Old Testament we read of the waters of the deep suddenly blasting upward from the sea-bed and the land, from their place under the surface of the earth.

We know that there still remains under the surface of both land and sea, huge reservoirs of water. We also know that under the earth there are huge reservoirs of boiling, burning matter of untold volume. We see evidence of these every time a volcano erupts. So, is the description here of one massive volcano, or several...if that is what it is?

It is quite possible for God to cause an unknown volcano to erupt, or to create a volcano where none existed before. Either way, there is no difference! We may remember how this or that volcano, on eruption, has spread dust so far that the sun has been blotted out, people have suffocated and plants are choked to ruination. The same kind of fate appears to be shown in this text. Hence, my present interpretation.

Out of this smoke came beings that were scorpion-like. They did not look like scorpions, but had their attributes of a 'sting in the tail'. I do not see these beings as literal, but as figurative. They have the bodies of horses, faces of people, teeth of lions, wings, and tails of scorpions, containing poison. Though the beings are referred to more as scorpions, they are first described as 'locusts'.

The locust description seems to describe the voracious appetite of the creatures, which spread like huge clouds, eating and destroying every green living thing in their path. In the orient people eat them, roasted or raw, with some salt! Anyway, the beasts shown here will spread just like locusts, sparing nothing. The destruction, then, will spread like a blanket of locusts and will have power to harm men. God commanded that these beasts (or, volcanic eruptions? Perhaps not, if they do not destroy plants) should not destroy the plants, but only human beings (something for

## The Revelation 9

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Arminians - who insist God is only a God of love - to ponder upon).

The 'plague' as such things are later called, would only affect those who do not have the 'seal of God upon their foreheads'. That is, people who have no proof that they are saved. This is very similar to the daubing of blood on door frames in Egypt before the angel of death flew over – he ignored dwellings that had the blood painted on them, and destroyed the first-born in homes that did not.

The people affected would not be killed by this God-sent plague, but would suffer pain and severe affliction for five months. Is this a reference to the burning of lungs, as would happen with hot ash, and the ensuing breathing problems that lead to panic? The word for 'torment' also means to 'question by torture', to test for the truth; to 'vex with distress'. If you have seen anyone with sudden breathing problems, you will understand what this means. Yet, we again cannot say this with certainty; we can only confirm that whatever happens, it is sent from God to destroy a large number of unsaved people.

Whatever the distress, the people affected would also be in great pain, as if stung by a scorpion. The same word has a root meaning of a torturer who uses a rack to elicit truth. Overall, we have the impression of a severe judgement of God that will cause great suffering for the unsaved... even AIDS can be hinted at. This will happen on earth, but it will be a mere token of what will befall them in hell.

The text then strongly suggests that the 'plague' will cause people to wish for death and to attempt suicide. But, death will elude them, for God will not allow them to die. They must suffer. It reminds us that though men may indeed suffer many privations and pain, they will continue in their evil ways and will refuse to repent. This is what happens in this case.

### Verses 7-12

1.

"And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men.

2.

And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions,

## The Revelation 9

Written by K B Napier  
Wednesday, 10 June 2015 16:29

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3.

And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.

4.

And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.

5.

And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.

6.

One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.”

It makes no difference to the people affected if the ‘plague’ consists of a volcanic eruption, or an attack by beasts that actually look like those described in the text, or some other ‘plague’, for the devastation will be the same. But, if we take the beasts to represent something else – what *could* they represent?

I suggest the following interpretation, which is my opinion based on examining similarly symbolic Biblical texts. Obviously, John used symbols of objects and beings then known to his peers; if he wrote today, he would likely refer to tanks, robotic missiles, and so on....

**‘Horses’.** In the text these are war-horses ‘prepared unto battle’ – fearsome, powerful beasts that struck terror into foot soldiers and cutting a swathe through armies, able to strike hard and move fast.

## The Revelation 9

Written by K B Napier

Wednesday, 10 June 2015 16:29

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**‘Crowns’**. ‘as it were’ and golden. This is a sign of royal authority and rank, and similar to those worn by victors in games and wars, as well as by Believers who are servants of God. Though these horses go forth to fight, they are already victorious, for God cannot lose. Sent as God’s servants to complete a task, they are victors.

**‘Faces of men’**. The human face portrays expression of judgement and intent and contains the eyes, which afford sight. Thus, the faces of the horses would show anger and the inward thoughts of God.

**‘Hair of women’**. This is an interesting one and difficult to answer. The hair of a woman is her ‘crowning glory’. Usually, before God, women’s hair should be covered, so that her glory is given instead to God. Perhaps from this we may assume that ‘hair as the hair of women’ refers to a glorious appearance that is under subjection to God.

**‘Teeth of lions’**. A lion is the ‘king’ of animals, but as a symbol it is a mighty hero, brave to the point of death. In God’s messengers there is no fear and the fullest of loyalties. The teeth, of course, can rip apart flesh, easily killing. Note, however, that when a lion catches its prey it usually kills not by cutting with its teeth, but by choking its victim to death. Is this a reference to the choking dust of a volcano? Perhaps not.

**‘Breastplates of iron’**. The breastplate (the Greek name is the one we use today for the chest – *thorax*) was a protection for the vital organs. Made of one of the toughest metals known at that time, iron, they were symbols of protection by God and inability to be harmed. ‘If God be for us, who can be against us?’

**‘Wings’**. These represent swiftness. Angels are often said to have wings, and so they are free of human walking. The wings were also used to instil terror, for when so many thousands beat in unison, their sound adds to the terror of the attack, rumbling like many chariots with their sharpened axle-knives and heavy weight, slashing and crushing bodies underneath, sounding like deafening rolls of thunder as they come closer and closer.

**‘Scorpion... stings’**. The horses had scorpion-like tails that carried a sting. But, the sting was stopped from killing - it could cause all the pain, but the victims had to remain alive to suffer. ‘Hurt’ is *adikeo*; to hurt and injure. Though the word is used to talk about a

## The Revelation 9

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Wednesday, 10 June 2015 16:29

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sinful wrong, it can also refer simply to hurt. God may hurt and cause suffering, as He has done in the past, with the fullest legal justification. Note that later we see God's purpose is to bring people to repentance – but they refuse. This is not a failure by God, nor does it suggest that men have the choice to repent. Predestination continues to operate even here; when God punishes He demands repentance, though He knows a person will refuse. In such a case that person is merely being shown his fate before God.

The legion of horses had a king over them, a leader, whose name is Abaddon or Apollyon. The Hebrew form, Abaddon, means 'ruin' or destruction. In this text he is an angel given charge of death and destruction. Ancient Hebrews made the name refer to the pit or abyss, but in Revelation it clearly refers to an angel, not the pit itself. Thus, Abaddon is the angel who controls the pit on behalf of God. This meaning is reinforced by the Greek rendering which is 'Destroyer'.

The word is rooted in another meaning, to perish or destroy, to kill and to declare that someone ought to be put to death...even to give someone over to eternal misery. Again, some have tried to make this angel into Satan, but this cannot be, for Satan has no power over eternal ends. He is able to guide someone along the path of evil, but he cannot send anyone to hell – that is in the province of God alone.

The reader can see the horror of what has happened in the vision, and which will happen, in reality, in the near future. But, that is only the first woe! There are two more to come.

### **The Second Woe** **Verses 13-15**

1.

"And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God,

2.

Saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates.

3.

## The Revelation 9

Written by K B Napier

Wednesday, 10 June 2015 16:29

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And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men.”

After these awful days, the sixth angel blew his trumpet, heralding yet another horror. Firstly, a voice came from the four horns on the golden altar that was in front of God’s throne. We are not told if the voice was that of God, or Christ, an angel, or even if it was a voice without form. The horns represent courage, strength and defence, and is used to speak of the Messiah, Who delivers from harm and destruction. The ‘horns’ themselves were the four corners of the altar. Thus the voice came from the whole altar.

The voice instructed the sixth angel to ‘Loose the four angels... bound in the great river Euphrates’. These angels were obliged to remain in the river (or, bound to wait in Heaven until their moment to act), awaiting God’s command. This river is associated with great moments in history, as well as with the Garden of Eden. We are not told why the angels were restricted to the Euphrates, so I will not speculate. All we know is that the four angels had a mighty and awful task to perform.

However, it seems reasonable to suggest that scripture describes them as ‘bound’ so as to emphasise to us that God controls our fate; it is He Who holds back disasters and woes until the proper time, and it is He Who unleashes them for His own purposes. More often than not, Christians lose sight of this simple fact, and ascribe their own disasters to their own problems or actions, or to ‘nature’, or to a medical condition. Whilst this ailing earth can induce such things in our lives, it is God, not the elements or microbes, etc., Who controls these matters. It is He Who decides whether or not we live our lives free of problems, or free of illnesses, etc., or if we should suffer pain and vexation. All is for His own purposes, predestined by Him.

The four angels are finally unleashed to bring mayhem to the earth. Strictly speaking, we are not told if these are ‘good’ angels or demonic. We know that they had a mission and had received instruction. Were they *instructed* for 13 months, one day and an hour, or did their *havo*  
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last for that period? I am not sure, but the havoc certainly came, no matter how long it took! It seems probable that the time period is for the havoc.

When these four were unbound they began their grim work of killing a third of all humanity. How

## The Revelation 9

Written by K B Napier  
Wednesday, 10 June 2015 16:29

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they did it is shown in the final verses of this chapter...

### Verses 16-21

1.

“And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them.

2.

And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone.

3.

By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths.

4.

For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt.

5.

And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk:

6.

Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.”

There is no way I can relish these words, nor can I applaud what happens. I can only read them

## The Revelation 9

Written by K B Napier

Wednesday, 10 June 2015 16:29

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with the fear of God and be thankful that I will not be subject to the same terrible end. The four angels had charge of an army of 200 million horsemen or, an unknown, vast number), whose sole intent was to kill human beings. The phenomenal number of horsemen is used to describe the enormity of the action about to take place, and to tell us that those to be affected would not escape, for there were too many assailants.

Again, we do well to remember that when God decrees our end, we have no escape and no second chance, nor may we appeal. This is the exact opposite end, but the same mechanism, which allows God to save whom He will... those who are predestined *will* be saved! This text, though, is about those who are destined to hell.

The noise of the army was tumultuous, even greater than the noise of the wings of the previous horses. The soldiers on horseback had breastplates of fire, or, that shone like fire, with a red so deep (as the flower, or precious stone, hyacinth) it bordered on looking black (*jacinth*), and the appearance of brimstone (sulphur – used as incense to ward off disease and to purify; with a link to ‘Godhead’ or Christ). Thus, they were protected from evil and destruction themselves. In this case the horses had heads like those of lions... the same meaning applies as was given above.

The lion-head mouths opened to send out fire, smoke and brimstone. Note how Sodom and the whole area around it was destroyed by the same elements. Between them, they are indicative of complete and utter destruction, and they (‘these three’) killed a third of all unsaved humanity. To emphasise the totality of the action, we are told that the ‘power’ was in their mouths and the horses also had tails like serpents with heads, that poisoned those they bit.

After this wholesale fearsome destruction we come to the saddest part of the text – even though God had destroyed so many, the unsaved people who remained alive refused to repent! We may deduce from this that humankind will be left in no doubt that God is behind the ‘plagues’ (heavy affliction/public calamity). Yet, they are resolute in their evil disregard for Him and refuse to repent! Rather, they turn back to their evil of worshiping idols and demonic beings. Here God repeats His taunting words of earlier texts in scripture, that tell us these idols cannot do anything at all, but are mute lumps of material.

Today, more than ever, men and women take up all kinds of religious stupidity, from New Age to old cults and occultisms. Some are even encapsulated in new versions that seem ‘harmless’ such as the wave of interest sparked by Harry Potter books and films, that encourage children

## The Revelation 9

Written by K B Napier

Wednesday, 10 June 2015 16:29

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and adults to look into and practice the occult. Spiritist teaching and practices are everywhere, even in the churches, charismaticism being a good example. God will destroy the lot at the end of time, which appears to be coming very soon. And, He will destroy those who follow after them.

Alongside these evil religious practices and beliefs are the cohorts of godless lives: murder, occultism of every shade, thieving and crime, and sexual sins (fornication includes all types of illicit sexual liaisons, from 'living together' to homosexuality, and the many perversions, as well as idolatry). People will continue to practice them all, even though they will know for sure that God hates them and will destroy them for enjoying their pleasures. And behind all this is atheism, the hidden movement spawned by Satan.

This situation shows us the harm done by Satan in the last days, in which we are *almost* now living (so close!). As time progresses toward the end, so people will enter into sin and stay there, refusing to repent or to give up their sins. Though God will destroy so many people, they will still continue as they were! Such is the power of sin in the heart, emphasising that only God can predestinate us to repentance and purity and heaven.

The actions above will come in the form of widespread fire and smoke, plus choking sulphur. (It happened to Sodom, so why not to the world?). This suggests that the 200 million horsemen are symbols of world-wide destruction, possibly by the unleashing of the volcanic elements under the earth, or by the elements raining down from the skies, as happened in the days of Sodom, or by some other horrendous agent. Either way the earth will come under sustained and horrific attack, by the direct command of God.

The disasters God will bring upon mankind are real and will occur, sometime soon. Do not be fooled by the symbolism into thinking it is just a myth. There will be world-wide destruction and loss of human life on a scale not yet seen – the disasters witnessed thus far in history will be as nothing by comparison.

Christians must, then, beware that they do not succumb to the same evils described in these texts, for God will not allow them to carry on in such sin. He *must* act and will certainly do so, in their lifetimes. Give up sin and get back to God, or suffer the consequences. That is the very clear message given in this chapter. Will you be one of those who refuse to listen and repent? Or, will you repent and turn back to God? Remember – only the Christian has a choice, to be holy or to commit sin (though the latter is condemned). Choose holiness and live!

## The Revelation 9

Written by K B Napier

Wednesday, 10 June 2015 16:29

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