

# **BITTER HONEY: THE REVELATION**

Rodger Dalman

## CHAPTER 9: THE WOES EXPLAINED

### Verses 1-12

Revelation 7 promised that one last group of Jews would arise on the world's stage. Like Dan, these Jews would be Israel's rear guard. They would be the last group of God's people to battle man's empire. Revelation 8 set the stage for this conflict. When Babylon was destroyed, Israel's New Testament exile will be over. Then this last group of Jews will stand alone in Israel. Revelation 9 will describe the forces that would gather for Armageddon. The first half of Revelation 9 describes the armies of the Antichrist's Rome. The last half of the chapter will describe God's host. This great battle will be described in more detail later in Revelation 11:11-14; 16:14-16; 19:11-21, and 20:7-10.

John begins his discussion of the antichrist's new Rome with the first Woe, Babylon's fall. The fifth trumpet sounded, and John saw a star of heaven which had fallen to earth. This star was identified in Isaiah 14:12. It was a symbol for both Babylon and Satan. In verses 1-2, this star was given a key to the bottomless pit. He opened the pit, and smoke billowed into the air. This great black smoke darkened the sun and the air. These two verses are a review of Revelation 8. The smoke came from the fire of Babylon's burning. The first trumpet described the smoke darkened sky which is repeated here.

Satan opens the bottomless pit by destroying the new Babylon. The bottomless pit is the abyss, the place of the dead (cf. Romans 10:7). Satan opened the place of the dead, and locusts came forth on the earth. Locusts are a common symbol in the Bible. They almost always describe armies. This symbolism can be seen in Jeremiah 51:14, 27. Jeremiah was describing Babylon's fall. He said that God would fill Babylon with a population like locusts who would raise a shout of victory over her. Locusts are also used to symbolize armies in Joel 1; Nahum 3:17; Judges 6:5, and Jeremiah 46:23. What army would Satan loose on the earth by destroying the new Babylon?

The locusts from hell are the armies of the Antichrist's Rome. The first Roman Empire died. It was in Sheol through the whole period of mixed nations. After the new Babylon was destroyed, men formed another world empire, and Rome rose from the grave. This new Rome was the Antichrist's empire. It is described in Revelation 13:14 as the beast whose fatal wound was healed. In Revelation 17:8, John was told that the beast of Rome was, is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss to go to destruction. The same theme runs through 20:1-11. John saw a dragon who was Satan and Rome. Satan was bound so that he could not deceive the nations. He was thrown into Sheol for a millennium. This is the period of mixed nations when Satan can not unify the world against God. After this period, Satan and Rome are again released. After Babylon falls, the Roman Empire will rise from the grave. Then the armies of Rome will gather to fight with God's host.

Some of the locust's characteristics came from the prophet Joel. The locusts from hell had teeth like the teeth of a lion (Revelation 9:8). Joel also saw locusts with lion like teeth (Joel 1:6). The locusts from hell looked like horses prepared for battle (Revelation 9:7). Joel's locusts were described in the same way (Joel 2:4). The locusts from hell sounded like chariots rushing to battle (Revelation 9:9). Joel's locusts made the same sound (Joel 2:5). Revelation parallels the prophet Joel because both described Israel's conflict with man's empire. Joel saw four waves of locusts which swept over Israel. These four waves of locusts might represent the empires of Mesopotamia, Persia, Greece, and Rome. The locusts from hell pointed to the same empires in Revelation 9. They persecuted men for five months. The five months may point to the five time periods of Mesopotamia, Persia, Greece, Rome, and the mixed nations.

The five months and the parallels to Joel point back to man's first four world empires. Why would the new Rome be described in terms of the empires that preceded it? In prophecy, successive empires do not replace each other. They assimilate each other. This can be seen in Daniel 7:7. The fourth beast of Rome crushed and devoured the three beasts of Mesopotamia, Persia, and Greece. Daniel 7:12 said that these three beasts lost their dominion. However, they were given an extension of life by becoming part of

Rome. Rome did not replace the empires which preceded it. Rome incorporated the previous empires into herself. When Nebuchadnezzar saw his vision of history, he did not see a separate statue for each empire. Nebuchadnezzar saw the succeeding empires as one statue made up of five parts. Man's empire is one kingdom made up of succeeding governments (Daniel 2:31-35). This theme is carried over into Revelation 13:2. Here John saw a beast with seven heads and ten horns. This beast is Rome in all its forms. The beast in Revelation 13 had the characteristics of a leopard, a bear, and a lion. These three animals in Daniel 7 were the three empires of Mesopotamia, Persia, and Greece. All three became part of Rome. Revelation 9 points to this continuity in man's empire by allowing Joel's locusts to harm men for five months.

The locusts from hell had iron breast plates. Iron is probably used to identify these locusts as the armies of Rome. In Daniel's visions, iron symbolized Rome's strength. Nebuchadnezzar's statue had legs of iron and feet of iron and clay (Daniel 2:33). The statue's legs and feet were Rome and the mixed nations. Daniel's fourth beast in Daniel 7:7 had teeth of iron. This beast was Rome in all of its forms. The iron breast plates might also be a reference to Rome's destruction of the new Babylon. John could possibly be making a reference to Nahum 2:3. Nahum prophesied that Ninevah would be conquered by chariots enveloped in flashing steel. The armies which destroyed Babylon sounded like chariots (Revelation 9:9), and they were enveloped in iron.

The conflict between Israel and the Antichrist is also a conflict between God's kingdom and the kingdom of Satan. Revelation 9:11 noted that the locusts had a king, Satan, the angel of the abyss. As Satan's battle with Israel began, Satan's kingdom ruled the earth. The locusts wore golden crowns to symbolize this reign (Revelation 9:7). The symbol of crowns is often used in Revelation to show who had power at the moment. In Revelation 6:2, Babylon was given a crown because it was given authority over the world. In Revelation 12:3, John saw a beast with seven heads, ten horns, and seven diadems on its heads. Diadems were not ornaments. Diadems were blue headbands used in Persia to show sovereignty. They were a cloth crown. Diadems were also used to describe crowns in Isaiah 62:3. The seven diadems showed that sovereignty belonged to the beast's seven heads, so the beast was Caesar's Rome. In Revelation 9:7, the locusts wore crowns because the new Rome had sovereignty in the world. The nations had destroyed Babylon and had given their authority to the Antichrist. The new Rome was now preparing to do battle against God.

The locusts were told not to hurt the grass, the trees, or any green thing. They were to harm only those who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. The locusts were a symbol similar to the destroying man of Ezekiel 9:1-8. Like Ezekiel's executioners, the locusts were told not to harm those sealed by God. This continues the theme found in Revelation 7:1-3. The four angels had been restrained from harming the earth, the sea, or the trees until God's people were sealed. Then God's judgment began. As this chapter opened, the new Babylon was destroyed. However, God prevented further destruction for the sake of His children. The locusts could sting men but they could not kill anyone until God gathered men to Armageddon.

Before Armageddon, the locusts were not permitted to kill people, but they could hurt. The locusts had strange tails like scorpions that stung people. Men were tormented with these wounds and longed to die. Revelation 9:6 read, "And in those days, men will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, and death will flee from them." This verse seems to be grounded in Job 3:20-21. Job was complaining about his suffering. He said, "Why is light given to him who suffers and life to the bitter of soul. They long for death but there is none. They dig for it more than for hidden treasures." Job was tormented with personal loss, with terrifying dreams, and particularly with severe boils all over his skin. Job longed to die, but God kept him alive. Gentiles who survive Babylon's fall may have as much personal loss as Job. Some may have terrifying dreams. Some may also have a skin disease worse than Job's condition.

If Babylon is destroyed by nuclear weapons, her fall would cause skin cancer through the rest of the world. This skin cancer will not kill men because the Antichrist will only reign for a short time. So the

locusts' stings could be the skin cancer that they caused by destroying Babylon. This skin cancer may also be described in Revelation 16:2. The seven bowls of wrath are a repetition of the seven trumpets. Like the trumpets, they first five bowls of wrath describe Babylon's fall. The first angel poured out his bowl on the earth and it, "became a loathsome and malignant sore upon the men who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image." Cancer was caused by the new Babylon's fall. However, it would not appear until after the Antichrist had established his empire because it would take time to grow. So cancer could affect those who had the mark of the beast. Skin cancer would be the last result of Babylon's fall, and Revelation 9 ends its discussion of Babylon with this trumpet. Revelation 9:12 indicated that John was changing his subject. John said, "The first Woe is past. Behold, two Woes are still coming after these things." Babylon had fallen, and its destruction had produced the new Rome. The Antichrist's armies were now preparing themselves to attack God's people. John's perspective shifted to the second Woe of Armageddon. The battle was about to begin as God's forces appeared.

### **Verses 13-21**

The sixth trumpet sounded, and John heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar. John had shifted his perspective back to God's people. Old Testament Israel sacrificed to God on a golden altar with four horns (Exodus 30:2). In Revelation, John saw a copy of this altar before God's throne. In Revelation 6:9, John saw martyrs beneath the altar. These martyrs were praying that God would judge the earth. In Revelation 8:3, Christ stood by this altar. Christ joined the martyrs and added His prayers for judgment. In Revelation 9:13, the martyrs' prayers for judgment were heard and answered. A voice from Israel's golden altar commanded that Armageddon begin.

The voice commands that four angels be released who had been bound by the Euphrates. These are the same four angels seen in Revelation 7:1-3. Babylon was located by the Euphrates River. The four angels were bound until Babylon was destroyed. Then God's cherubim were loosed to gather the nations to Armageddon. The stage is now set for Satan's final battle with God's people. Before this battle begins, John assures God's people that their Lord is in complete control. The cherubim have been prepared by God for this hour, day, month, and year. God has held back man's violence until the very hour that He had decreed for His judgment.

The cherubim were prepared to kill one third of mankind. This verse is probably not talking about a percentage of men. Trumpets one through four and six destroy one third of something. The first trumpet burned a third of the earth and trees. The second and third destroyed a third of the oceans and rivers. The fourth trumpet darkened one third of the sky, and the sixth killed a third of humanity. These verses can not describe a percentage of the trees and seas because the trumpets are repeated as bowls of wrath in Revelation 16. When the second trumpet is repeated as the second bowl of wrath, it will destroy every living thing in the sea, not just one third. This is not a contradiction or a second outpouring of wrath on the oceans. The figure one third is drawn from the fact that there are three Woes. In each case, the destruction results from one third of God's wrath on the earth. The cherubim kill one third of mankind because Armageddon will be one of the three woes.

John describes God's army in a rather strange way. John saw two hundred million horsemen. The horses had heads like lions. They had tails like serpents. Fire, smoke, and brimstone came from their mouths. The horses' riders wore breastplates the color of fire and brimstone. What could these symbols mean? The key for understanding these verses comes from Revelation 7. All of God's people were sealed except one tribe. Dan would be Israel's rear guard, the last group of God's people to battle man's empire. When the sixth trumpet sounds, this last group of Jews prepares to fight Rome. These verses could be compared to Psalm 68:17 which claimed that God's chariots numbered 20,000, Zechariah 10:3 which claimed that Judah would resemble God's horse in battle, and I Chronicles 12:8 where David's soldiers had faces like lions. John described these Jews with symbols drawn from Old Testament descriptions of Dan. The horses' heads were like lions. This symbol probably came from Deuteronomy 33:22. Moses

called Dan a lion's whelp that leaps forth from Bashan. The horses also had serpents as tails. The symbol of a serpent appeared in Scripture as early as Genesis 49:16-18. As Jacob died, he told his sons what would befall them in the future. Jacob said to Dan, "Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a horned snake in the path, that bites the horse's heels, so that his rider falls backward." From Genesis, Dan was associated with serpents and loosely with horses. These verses in Genesis aptly describe Israel's conflict with the Antichrist. Israel's forces will be so small as to be insignificant beside the mighty world powers. Yet Israel will wait for the Lord's salvation. Through Israel, God will bite the Antichrist's heels causing his whole army to fall.

In Jeremiah 4:14-31, a voice from Dan proclaimed God's judgment. Jeremiah pointed beyond Israel's destruction to the final judgment. The voice from Dan was heard again in Jeremiah 8:16-17. The prophet wrote, "From Dan is heard the snorting of his horses. At the sound of the neighing of his steeds, the whole land quakes. For they come to devour the land and its fullness, the city and its inhabitants. For behold, I am sending serpents against you, adders for which there is no charm, and they will bite you." Jeremiah pointed to Dan. Then Jeremiah said that God would execute His judgment through horses and serpents. In Revelation 9, a voice was again heard from Israel, and Dan became an army of horses with serpent tails. So the horses may represent the new Dan, the restored Israel.

Two other verses about Dan may have a bearing on this final conflict. In Judges 18:27, Dan struck Laish with a sword and burned the city with fire. Laish was described specifically as a quiet and secure city. The Antichrist will rise to power because he offers an alternative to war. The Antichrist's cry will be "Peace and Safety." When the Antichrist rules, the world will be at peace as Laish was. Paul promises that men will suddenly be destroyed while they are saying, "Peace and Safety" (I Thessalonians 5:3). Perhaps Scripture uses Dan's conquest of Laish as a symbol for the last days. The Antichrist will be reigning securely until God executes His judgment through Israel. Another verse which may point to this time is Genesis 30:6. Rachel gave Dan his name, saying, "God has vindicated me. He has heard my voice and has given me a son." When the sixth trumpet sounds, Israel's voice will be heard. Then God will vindicate His people through judgment.

The horsemen are a symbol for two things at the same time. The precedent for this was set by Revelation 9:1. As this chapter opened, a great star fell from heaven. This star was a symbol for two things. It represented both Babylon and Satan. The horsemen in verses 13-21 are the same kind of double symbol. The horsemen represent Israel's conflict with the Antichrist. The horsemen are drawn partially from Old Testament prophecies about Dan and about God's host. The horsemen were colored red like fire and brimstone. These horsemen are seen in two places in the Old Testament. The first is II Kings 2:11-12. Elijah was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire drawn by horses of fire. Elisha saw this chariot and cried, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" The fiery chariots of Israel.