

The Facebook Commentary on Revelation Jon Paulien

Revelation Chapter 9

Rev 9 (Introduction)—

Chapter 9 of Revelation contains trumpets five (9:1-11) and six (9:13-22) along with a transition passage (9:12). The imagery of the first four trumpets has to do with the natural world, the earth, the sea, the springs of water and the heavenly bodies. In trumpets five and six the focus switches to human beings, along with images of the demonic. The first four trumpets are fairly brief, the fifth and sixth are quite extensive. Since the last three trumpets are designated as “woes” (Rev 8:13), there is the sense that the judgments in these trumpets are escalating. As the world approaches the end of time, a loving God raises His voice to get the attention of those in rebellion against Him before it is too late. Even though they have oppressed God’s people (Rev 6:9-10; 8:13), God’s “vengeance” within history is designed to redeem rather than destroy. Satan is the destroyer, not God (Rev 9:11).

One could debate whether the chapter division should be placed at 8:13 or 9:1. In other words, is 8:13 the conclusion of the fourth trumpet or the introduction to the fifth? I prefer to see Revelation 8:13 as a transition passage between the first four and the last three trumpets. In a sense, it stands by itself and should not be tied to either the fourth or fifth trumpet, which is how I am treating it in this commentary. But there is clearly a strong leaning forward in it. It speaks about the three angels who are “about to blow their trumpets” (Greek: *tôn mellontôn salpizein*). So while it is a transition passage, it leans forward toward the fifth trumpet. But however one places 8:13, with the arrival of chapter nine we have clearly entered the fifth trumpet.

Rev 9:1-11 (Introduction)—

A simple reading of Revelation 9:1-11 introduces the reader to what could be called a horror show. What relation does this horror show have to the “revelation of Jesus Christ?” Rev 1:1. How can one possibly find Jesus Christ in the midst of the many horrific images in the fifth trumpet? This question must be kept in the back of our minds as we work through this passage.

Children these days are almost illiterate Biblically. So whenever I get to tell a children’s story in church I tell one from the Bible. But I once made the mistake of describing the fifth trumpet as a children's story. I portrayed giant locusts with stingers in their tails flying around and stinging people from behind. As a consequence, two of the children who were present became ill afterwards and had to go home. While I learned that using the fifth trumpet as a children’s story is a really bad idea, it does raise the question: What on earth is this passage doing in the Bible? If nothing else, the fifth trumpet’s strong, powerful, and violent imagery grabs one’s attention!

The strongest Old Testament allusion in this passage has almost all the elements of the fifth trumpet. Note excerpts below.

"Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand--a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was or ever will be in ages to come.

"Before them fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste--nothing escapes them. They have the appearance of horses; they gallop along like cavalry. With a noise like that of chariots they leap over the mountaintops, like a crackling fire consuming stubble, like a mighty army drawn up for battle.

"At the sight of them, nations are in anguish; every face turns pale. They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. . . . "Before them the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The LORD thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey his command. The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?" Joel 2:1-11, NIV.

In Joel 2:1-11, a gigantic plague of locusts sweeps out of the desert as a consequence of Israel's failure to obey the covenant. This is what I would call a structural parallel. The elements in common between the fifth trumpet and Joel 2 are: a trumpet, darkness, horses and chariots, anguish, military imagery, locusts, etc. However, in Joel 2, the leader is portrayed as God and in Revelation 9, the leader is clearly Satan, the angel of the Abyss (Rev 9:11). But the events of the fifth trumpet are happening with God's permission (Rev 9:1, 3-5).

There are several other strong parallels between the fifth trumpet and the Old Testament. The burning of Sodom is alluded to in the smoke of the Abyss (Gen 19:28). There is a recollection, in language, of the smoke that surrounded Mount Sinai during the Exodus (Exod 19:18). Two of the Egyptian plagues are alluded to, the fifth (locusts) and ninth (darkness--Exodus 10). In addition, the sealed are protected by the judgments of God (Ezekiel 9:1-7) and Job longs for a death that does not come (Job 3:21).

In the New Testament, the clearest parallel to the fifth trumpet is in Luke.

"The seventy-two returned with joy and said, 'Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.' He replied, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'" Luke 10:17-20, NIV.

The passage describes God's protection from demonic harassment. Luke 10 and the fifth trumpet have six or seven major Greek words in common. Although the actual word "demon" is not used in Revelation 9, the language of the passage (when compared with Luke 10) clearly indicates a demonic plague is involved. The star that falls from heaven reminds us of Satan falling from heaven. So the theme of the fifth trumpet seems to be protection from demonic harassment for God's people. The torments of the trumpet are not allowed to harm those who are sealed (Rev 9:4). Elsewhere in Luke, the Abyss is a place where demons dwell (Luke 8:31). In the fifth trumpet demonic locusts come up out of the Abyss. The star that falls

from heaven (reminiscent of Satan in Luke 10) holds the key to the Abyss.

Rev 9:1—

“And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and *I saw a star, having fallen* out of heaven to the earth, and the key to the shaft of the Abyss was given to him.” According to Revelation 1:20, stars can represent angels or leaders of Christian churches. See comments on Rev 1:20. But the fact that the star was fallen (Greek: *peptôkota*) indicates that the “angel” here is evil rather than good. This is in contrast to the positive angel in Revelation 20:1, who does not fall (Greek: *epesen*), but comes down (Greek: *katabainonta*) from heaven and uses the key (Greek: *tên klein*) of the Abyss not to release demonic forces but to confine Satan in the Abyss for a thousand years. The angel of Revelation 20 is clearly on a divine mission, but that is not the case in the same sense in the fifth trumpet. Viewing the angel as evil here is also in contrast to commentators who have thought that the angel here is Christ. But in Revelation 1:18 Jesus does not have the “key of the Abyss,” but the “keys” (plural, Greek: *tas kleis*) of death and Hades, so something different is being referred to there.

The concept of an angel falling (Greek: *peptôkota*) from heaven recalls Isaiah 14:12, where Lucifer “fell” (LXX: *exepesen*) from heaven. As noted above, Jesus recalls Satan’s fall from heaven in Luke 10:17. Satan’s fall from heaven becomes a major theme of Revelation in 12:9-12, where he is depicted as defeated, fallen and filled with wrath against the inhabitants of the earth. So the fifth trumpet indicates that behind the “fall” of the church or the gospel in the third trumpet lurks the biblical figure of Lucifer or Satan. This is confirmed by Revelation 9:11, where the “angel of the Abyss” is called Abaddon and Apollyon, Hebrew and Greek terms for “the Destroyer.” While the Destroyer of this passage operates with God’s permission (see below), it is not God that causes the calamities of the fifth trumpet, rather it is Satan who is responsible. This is the first clue that there is a demonic element in this trumpet. Somehow the fact that the church has fallen from its true position, opens up the demonic powers on the world today. When Christians are not giving a clear faithful testimony, terrible consequences come to the world. The tragedy is that demons feel at home here.

The tense of “having fallen” here is more significant than usual. “Having fallen” translates a Greek perfect participle (*peptôkota*). The Greek perfect generally represents past action that has continuing implications for the present. A perfect participle also indicates relative time, action occurring before the action in the main verb. In this case the main verb is the visionary aorist “I saw” (Greek: *eidon*). As John writes, the vision that he is describing had already occurred in his past. What is more significant in this context, it that the perfect tense of “fallen” here is in contrast to the aorist tense of “fell” (Greek: *epesen*) in the third trumpet (Rev 8:10). The visionary aorist in Revelation 8:10 means the star fell at the time when the trumpet was blown. But John is not witnessing the falling of the star in this verse (Rev 9:1), it had already fallen at some point in the past. The star in this verse is apparently the same star that poisoned the rivers and springs in the third trumpet. That fall in the context of the third trumpet has continuing impact on the earth during the fifth. If the third trumpet represents the rise of a defective form of Christianity, the realities of the fifth trumpet are somehow connected to that “fall from heaven.”

The star in this trumpet is not being viewed as it falls, the reference is to a previous fall, likely that of the star in the third trumpet. This connects the third and fifth trumpets in some way.

"The **key** to the shaft of the Abyss was given to him." A key gives a person power to open and shut. Is there a relationship between the key here and the keys the Son of Man holds in Revelation 1:18? A major difference is that Revelation 1:18 does not speak about the "key to the Abyss," it speaks of the "keys (plural) of Death and of Hades." But the two concepts are similar enough that there may be a direct relationship. Since the key "was given" to the fallen star, the angel of the Abyss, it appears to be divine permission to allow Satan opportunity to show what his character is truly like. The "key of the Abyss" (Greek: *tên Klein tês abussou*) also appears in Revelation 20:1, where an angel from heaven binds Satan and locks him in the Abyss (Rev 20:1-3). It appears that God prefers to keep the Abyss locked up, but the fifth trumpet speaks to time when God's restraint of Satan is lifted for a time.

"The key to the shaft of the Abyss **was given** to him." The star "was given" the key. This shows, first of all, that the star is not to be taken literally. Real stars do not use keys to open doors, they vaporize them. The concept "was given" also seems to be a divine passive--to speak of God in the passive sense. There are several divine passives in Revelation 9 (verses 1, 3, 4 and 5). This was a common way within Judaism to avoid having to speak God's name. Ancient Jews considered God's name so sacred that they rarely uttered it, avoiding its public use as far as possible. Jesus Himself followed this practice when He said "kingdom of heaven" instead of "kingdom of God" (Matt 3:2; 4:17; 5:3, etc.). He was also familiar with the divine passive. For example, rather than saying that God would show mercy at the end He said, "Blessed are the merciful for they **will be shown** mercy." "Blessed are they that mourn, for they **shall be comforted**." The implication of these divine passives is that God is the one showing mercy and offering comfort. In the fifth trumpet, the fact that the key "was given" to the fallen star means that it was given by God. The divine passive asserts that evil in the world is not the result of God's action, blame for evil rests securely on Satan. But it also indicates that no matter how terrible the plague is, God is still in control. Satan is under God's restraint.

"The key to **the shaft** of the Abyss was given to him." The "pit" (Greek: *phreatos*) is associated with Lucifer in Isaiah 14:15. This Greek word is usually used for a well (Luke 14:5; John 4:11-12), as in "Jacob's well" (John 4:12). This use of the word is abundantly confirmed in the Greek Old Testament (LXX: Gen 21:30; 26:15, 20, 32; 29:2-10; Exod 2:15; Num 21:17-22; 1 Sam 19:22; 2 Sam 3:26). So "the shaft of the Abyss" (Rev 9:1, NIV) is a good translation of the Greek (*tou phreatos tês abusso*). It suggests a well-like shaft leading down from the earth's surface to an unfathomable depth or chamber below.

"The key to the shaft of **the Abyss** was given to him." The term Abyss (Greek: *abussou* here) expresses the depths of the earth in the natural sense, as with the oceans or any pit or chasm whose depth is not known. In the spiritual sense, however, it represents the abode of Satan and his angels. As such it can function as the opposite of heaven. The shaft (Greek: *phreatos*) connects this deep place with the surface of the earth.

In the Greek Old Testament, the Abyss referred to the pre-creation chaos-- "now the earth was formless and empty, and darkness was on the face of the abyss" (Genesis 1:2). An

Aramaic translation of the Old Testament says that the wicked will go into the Abyss when they are punished (Genesis 10:22; see also Revelation 20:1-3).

In the New Testament, demons don't want Christ to send them back to the Abyss (Luke 8:23-31). It is their abode, but they reside there against their will. Hence the imaging of confining or locking Satan and his angels in the Abyss (Rev 20:1-3). In the book of Revelation, the Abyss is also the source of the beast (Revelation 11:7 and 17:8). This is a different place than the lake of fire into which Satan and his angels are cast at the end of time (Rev 19:20; 20:10, 14-15).

The fifth trumpet describes a time in history when the door of the Abyss is unlocked. That action allows demonic forces a freedom of movement that they do not normally have. This is a demonic plague of epic proportions.

Rev 9:2—

“And he opened the shaft of the Abyss and smoke came up out of the shaft, like the smoke of a great furnace. The sun and the air were darkened by the smoke from the shaft.” Many ancient manuscripts omit the phrase “and he opened the shaft of the Abyss.” The meaning of the verse is not materially changed either way. In the most likely reading, the “star” uses the key to open the shaft of the Abyss. Smoke then comes out of the shaft “like the smoke of a great furnace.” This choice of language (Greek: *hôs kapnos kaminou megalês*) recalls the destruction of Sodom by fire in the book of Genesis (LXX of Gen 19:28-- *hôs atmis kaminou*) and the smoke on top of Mount Sinai during the Exodus (LXX of Exod 19:18-- *hôs kapnos kaminou*). In the case of Sodom, the smoke was a consequence of devastation. In the case of Mount Sinai, the smoke obscured the glory of God so the Israelites would not be as frightened by God’s presence. In Psalm 18:7-8, the smoke represents the wrath of God, which is usually expressed by God’s “giving people up” to the consequences of their evil choices (Jer 2:17-19; Hos 11:7-8; Rom 1:24-32). This idea fits well with the divine passives we explored in relation to verse one. Smoke is also associated with human anguish in Revelation 14:11, as is the case in the fifth trumpet (Rev 9:5-6).

“The sun, also the air, was darkened by the smoke from the shaft.” Both the sun and the air are darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. See similar dual expressions in Revelation 1:14 and 19:16. But the sun transmits its light through the air, so the air itself is not a source of light. As the air is filled with smoke, it obscures the light of the sun. That is why the word for darkening is singular rather than plural (Greek: *eskotisthê*). That the smoke turns into locusts recalls the darkening of Joel 2:2, and to a lesser degree Exodus 10:15 (different word for “darkness” in the LXX-- *ephtharê*). But here it is the smoke rather than the locusts that causes the darkness.

The smoke of the incense in Revelation 8:4 purifies the prayers of the saints. The smoke here darkens the minds and hearts of the earth’s inhabitants. This is in contrast with the fourth trumpet, where the darkness was caused by a smiting (Greek: *eplêgê*) of the sun, moon and stars. The cause of the darkening here, on the other hand, is external to these heavenly bodies. It lies in the smoke, which obscures the light of the heavenly bodies. While the light is weakened in the fourth trumpet, here it is completely obscured or blocked. The darkness of

the fourth trumpet is intensified in the fifth. Thick smoke blinds the eyes and hinders clarity of sight. Similarly, falsehood or “fake news” confuses the mind and blinds people to the truths of the gospel.

The fourth and fifth trumpets are parallel. The partial darkness of the fourth trumpet only affects a third of the heavenly bodies at a time, but the darkness has become total in the fifth. It is a total eclipse. But the fifth trumpet is clearly not to be taken literally. If you had any doubt that the book of Revelation was symbolic, I believe the fifth trumpet should dispel those doubts. The light of the sun represents the gospel and the darkness is of demonic origin. The kingdoms of this world will eventually become the kingdoms of the Lord (Rev 11:15), but before the final events of earth’s history, the outcome will at times appear in doubt to the eyes of earth. A major purpose of the book of Revelation is to draw back the curtain on the larger realities behind what is experienced on this earth. The fifth trumpet depicts a time when the gospel itself may seem to have failed and evil seems on its way to triumph.

Rev 9:2 (Spiritual Lesson)—A cosmic conflict approach to reality recognizes that God is at work in every religion, nation and political party. It also recognizes that Satan is at work in every religion, nation and political party. The decisive battles are not usually the ones fought in the public eye. The tide of the conflict at any time may not reflect the ultimate reality. As Ellicott writes, “faith disregards the back-flowing waves, for she knows the tide is coming in.” If we have read the trumpets correctly so far, they reveal that Christianity itself is a battle-ground between good and evil. It is marked by the manifestation of evils as well as the establishment of good. New Testament faith is intended to bring light to the world, and to darken the lights of worldly power, pride, position and prestige. But the enemy is also at work within the church, and often succeeds in taking the focus off the gospel and placing it on worldly power, pride, position and prestige instead. The “smoke of the pit” darkens and confuses even those who seek to follow the light. See my book, *Present Truth in the Real World*, for a detailed analysis of how secularism impacts both the church and the world.

Rev 9:3—

“And locusts came out of the smoke onto the earth. And they were given authority like the scorpions of the earth have authority.” The locusts “came out” (Greek: *exêlthon*) of the smoke from the Abyss. It is not clear from the verb if what appeared at first to be smoke turned out to be locusts, if the locusts accompanied the smoke out of the Abyss and were seen after the smoke dissipated, or if the smoke transformed itself into locusts. What is clear is that locusts appeared and the smoke is not mentioned again, hence was in itself not of major importance to the fifth trumpet. Locusts in the Old Testament are a symbol of divine judgment (2 Chr 6:26-31; 7:13-14; Isa 33:1-5; Jer 51:14, 27). A detailed description of these locusts is given in Revelation 9:7-10. Locusts normally feast on plants (Psa 105:35), but in this vision they are forbidden to harm the grass, the green plants, or the trees. Instead of their usual behavior they prey on human beings who do not have the seal of God (Rev 9:4-6). Once again, these images are clearly symbolic, literal locusts are being described here.

“And locusts came out of the smoke onto the earth.” Locusts are noted for the

irresistible destruction they leave in their wake (Deut 28:38; 2 Chr 7:13; Joel 2:25). They were renowned in the ancient world for their great quantity (Psa 105:34; Jer 46:23; Nah 3:15-17), they came like clouds and obscured the sun. They were used to symbolize large advancing armies (Prov 30:27; Joel 2:4-9). There is little reason to doubt that John would have connected this vision with the plague of locusts in Egypt during the Exodus (Exod 10:12-15). In Joel 2:25, four different Hebrew words are used for the locust, signifying either different types of locust or different stages of its development.

“They were given authority. . .” The “were given” (Greek: *edothê*) recalls the wording of 9:1, which is a divine passive, signifying that God is the one who permits the fallen star to open the Abyss and released the smoke and locust plagues. Here it is possible that the passive refers to the star itself, continuing to operate under the mandate of 9:1. But more likely this is again a divine passive, as that is clearly the case again in verse four. God is not the destroyer in the fifth trumpet (see Rev 9:11), but the evil one survives and functions only by God’s permission. In the large setting of the cosmic conflict, the revelation of evil and its consequences is part of God’s ultimate solution for the problem of sin and rebellion in the universe. The free inhabitants of the universe must be convinced that God desires only their good and their free response of love to His loving provisions for them. Only then can a free universe also be sin-free and rebellion-free. When all in the universe trust God and each other, there will be perfect love, joy and peace.

“And they were given authority like the scorpions of the earth have authority.”

Scorpions were common in the Sinai desert during the Exodus (Deut 8:15). Literal scorpions have a great deal of power to hurt people, but literal locusts do not. So scorpions function here as an analogy for the psychological harm that the locusts do to people in Revelation 9:5-6. Scorpions have stingers at the extremity of their tails that secrete a poison that maximizes the suffering humans experience when stung. This sting is very painful, but not usually fatal, which fits the theme of the fifth trumpet. Locusts symbolize quantity while scorpions symbolize harmfulness to humans.

There is no mention of the scorpions sting until verse five and the tail until verse ten. The power for harm in the fifth trumpet resides in the tail (Rev 9:10). In the sixth trumpet, the power resides in the mouth and the tail (Rev 9:19). We will explore the significance of these concepts when we come to those verses. In Luke 10:19 scorpions represent the power of Satan to hinder the work of the gospel and this seems to be the meaning also in the fifth trumpet. Calling them “scorpions of the earth” is in contrast to the locusts, which appear, not from earth, but from the abode of the demons, the Abyss.

Rev 9:4 (Introduction)— “And it was told to them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth or any green thing or any tree, only those men who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.” This verse contains further evidence that the plagues of locusts in the previous verse is not to be taken literally. Not only do these locusts prey on human beings rather than plants, they are able to distinguish between humans who have the seal of God and those that do not. Since God gives the seal to those that He knows belong to Him (2 Tim 2:19), the locusts in this text have divine discernment to distinguish between those who are inwardly faithful to

God and those who are not. Whatever this plague is, it does not harm the faithful people of God.

Many commentators through the course of history have suggested that the locusts in this passage represent the Islamic invaders of the Middle East, northern Africa, Spain and even France. But the Muslim attacks on Christendom were of a political and military nature, rather than being driven by the kind of spiritual discernment needed to fulfill this element of the prophecy. The plague in the fifth trumpet distinguishes between true and false believers in Jesus, it doesn't simply harm Christians or non-Christians in general. So I don't see a strong correlation in this passage with the Islamic expansion of the seventh and eighth centuries.

Rev 9:4—“*And it was told to them. . .*” This is another of the divine passives in this passage. See comments on Revelation 9:1 and 9:3. Neither human armies nor demons have the spiritual discernment required to distinguish between the true faithful of God and those who only profess to follow Jesus. So this is a divine passive like 9:1 and makes it likely that the passive in 9:3 is also divine, rather than a reference to the fallen star. God is the one who permits the locust plague but limits it to those who do not have the seal. In other words, the plague is more of a spiritual matter than a political, economic or military one. Under God's permission, the locusts are given divine discernment regarding the character of human beings. A supernatural interpretation of these locusts (demonic plague) is therefore likely.

“*Not hurt the grass of the earth or any green thing or any tree*” confirms that this plague is not one of natural locusts, which prey upon plants rather than people. The natural instinct of the locust is here supernaturally restrained. Trees are damaged in the context of the first trumpet (Rev 8:7), but are protected during the sealing time of Revelation 7 (7:1-3) and also here. Parallels between the fifth trumpet and Luke 10:17-20 confirm a spiritual interpretation in this instance. The plague is demonic in nature and demons cannot harm those who are protected by God. The demons are subject to God's control. But those that have aligned with them have removed themselves from God's protection and are clearly harmed in the two verses that follow. The natural instinct of Satan's kingdom is to destroy, but that instinct is limited by God's restraint and intervention.

“*Not hurt the grass of the earth or any green thing or any tree. . .*” In the natural world, grass is food for animals. But the meaning here is more likely figurative. God's care for the “grass of the field” in Matthew 6:30 is an analogy for the way God cares for those who believe in Him (see also Deuteronomy 32:2; 2 Samuel 23:3-4). So grass can represent God's faithful people. It also represents the fragility of life (Jam 1:10; 1 Pet 1:24, see also Psa 37:2; 103:15; Isa 40:6-8, etc.).

“Green thing” (Greek: *chlōron*) is often associated directly with grass (Greek: *chorton*), as in Revelation 8:7. The meaning there is “green grass,” grass that is fresh and healthy. Distinguished from both grass and trees, as here, it is likely the larger category of all the green plants that produce food for the human diet (Gen 1:30); such as vegetables, beans and tubers. Green things were harmed during the plagues of the Exodus (Exod 10:15). In a metaphorical sense, while grass can represent people in general, green things represent those who are spiritually alive (see also Ezek 20:45-48).

Trees also represent faithful people of God (Psa 1:3; Isa 52:8; Jer 17:8). Distinct from grass and green things, they could represent leaders of God's people (see such a usage in relation to Nebuchadnezzar—Dan 4:10-22). What is clear in this verse is that grass, green things and trees represent those who have the seal of God on their foreheads. These are images of God's faithful followers.

“Only those men who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.” For various possible meanings of “sealing” see Rev 5:1 (Excursus on the Identity and Contents of the Sealed Scroll) and comments on Revelation 7:2-3. The sealing of Revelation 7 is clearly different from the general sealing of God's people in the New Testament (Eph 1:13; 4:30; 2 Tim 2:19), it is a sealing of those who already are servants of God, they had already been sealed in the general New Testament sense. So the sealing of Revelation 7:1-3 is a mark of protection as much as a mark of ownership.

What connects the two types of sealing is hinted at in Ellen White's statement that the sealing is “settling into the truth . . . so they cannot be moved.” (4 SDABC 1161) This view of sealing is confirmed in Paul's letter to the Ephesians (location of one of the seven churches of Revelation), where followers of Jesus are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13; 4:30). The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to reveal to human beings what God is like (Eph 1:17, NIV—see also the role of the Spirit in the Gospel of John—14:7-9, 16:13). As we come to know God more and more we become settled into the truth about God's character to the point that we cannot be shaken away from it. Job is the biblical model for such trust in God (Job 13:15).

When we read this verse we should keep the double meaning of sealing in mind. It is both the assurance that we are right with God in general Christian experience and it is also a mark of God's protection at the End. What protects us from Satan is our connection to God. When we have unshakable trust in God, the demonic deceptions and power of Satan have no power over us (see also Luke 10:17-20). So genuine belief and trust in God may not always save us from accidents or injustice, but it always saves us from the worst that Satan can do. As we approach the End he will do his worst, but will be limited in relation God's faithful ones.

Does this double meaning of sealing require the fifth trumpet to be at the same time as the scene of Revelation 7 (end of history)? Not necessarily. As we will see, the strongest parallels between the sealing of Revelation 7 and the seven trumpets is with the sixth trumpet, which leads up to the close of human probation (Rev 10:7). The fifth trumpet represents an earlier period of human history. So the end-time protection of the sealed in Revelation 7 has an earlier application to the situation of the fifth trumpet. When the demons are unleashed on the earth in the fifth trumpet, they will not be allowed to harm the sealed, those who are chosen by God (Matt 24:22; Mark 13:22; 2 Tim 2:19; Tit 1:1).

Rev 9:5-6 (Introduction)--

“And it was given to them [the locust/scorpions] that they should not kill them [the unsealed] but rather that they should be tormented for five months. And their torment was like the torment of a scorpion, when it stings a man. And in those days men will seek death but they will not find it. They will long to die, yet death will flee away from them.” This passage describes the consequence of the locust attack on humanity. They are not allowed to kill the

unsealed, but instead to torture them for five months. The torture described herein is not political or economic but spiritual and psychological. This is torment of a kind so severe that death and the grave would be welcomed. One could call the reaction to the torture suicidal anguish. In the Greek Old Testament of Psalm 70:20 (71:20 in the English versions), the Abyss (LXX: *abussôn*) is a place of many afflictions (LXX: *thlipseis*) and evil actions (LXX: *kakas*). The evil actions of the Destroyer (Rev 9:11) produce many afflictions for those who follow him. In seeking to escape the control of God, people place themselves in a much worse situation. Satan demonstrates his character in the way he treats his followers.

In Joel 2 the imagery of locusts is used for an invading army (Joel 1:4-6; 2:1-11). That is also the initial impression one gets from the imagery here (see Revelation 9:7-9). But as noted earlier, the fifth trumpet cannot be referring primarily to a military or political scourge as armies are not normally designed to torment, but rather to wound and kill physically. The outcome of the locust attack in these verses is psychological, suicidal anguish. It is the ideological darkness descending on the world (which does not affect the sealed because they do not embrace it) that causes the torment in this passage, not a physical or military scourge.

Rev 9:5—

“And it was given to them that they should not kill them.” The first “them” and the “they” refer to the locust/scorpions of 9:3. The second “them” refers to the unsealed of 9:4. The locust/scorpions are not permitted to kill the unsealed, but they are allowed to torture them for five months. Once against there is a divine passive. The power of these demonic agents is not unlimited, their actions are limited by God. The prohibition here echos the limits God placed on Satan’s torment of Job. He was allowed to do whatever he would as long as he spared Job’s life (Job 2:6). It is perhaps relevant to repeat that the sting of the scorpion is very painful but rarely fatal. This passage also reflects Luke 10:19, where scorpions represent the “power of the enemy” (Satan), but that power is not permitted to harm Jesus’ disciples (Luke 10:17-20). So the theology of the fifth trumpet here is compatible with other locations in Scripture.

“Five months.” Many commentators suggest that the five months reflects the lifespan of the desert locust. Depending on conditions, the lifespan of the locust can be five months, but can range anywhere from two to six months, so that is probably not the source of this number. More likely, this is an echo of the biblical flood story, where a period of 150 days is mentioned twice (Gen 7:24; 8:3), during which the flood waters completely covered the earth for 150 days. Here the period of five months is also mentioned twice (Rev 9:5, 10). Here it is the unsealed which are tortured by the locust/scorpions. So the five months of this passage may signal an allusion to the Flood story as a model for the consequences of sin.

During the five months of the Flood, Noah and his family were protected from harm in the midst of the waters of the Flood. Similarly, the sealed of the fifth trumpet are protected from harm during the demonic harassment portrayed here. Genuine believers are not affected by this plague. So the Flood parallel is a relatively strong one. But that is not the only application of the five months that commentators have suggested.

“They should be tormented for five months.” The subject shifts here. In the previous

clause “they” refers to the locust/scorpions. Here it refers to the unsealed who are being tormented. Historicist commentators have frequently explored whether the year-day principle should be applied to the five months. See Rev 12:14-- (Excursis on the Year-Day Principle) for a detailed analysis of the principle and its applicability to the Bible in general and Revelation in particular. Applying the year-day principle to this text would lead an interpreter to look for a period of 150 years in history that might have some of the characteristics of this text.

Scholars in an earlier era looked for those 150 years in the history of Islam’s wars with the armies of Christendom. Supportive of this idea were the association of locusts with the Middle East in general and the assumption that the Abyss represented a place where few people live. In such a view, the fifth trumpet would be a judgment of God on Christendom by means of the Islamic expansion in the centuries after the prophet Mohammad. Suggested dates for the 150 years included 632-782 and 1299-1449.

In my view, the imagery of the fifth trumpet fits the secular age we live in now better than either islamic period. The period of 1789 (beginning of the French Revolution) through 1939 (beginning of World War II) was a time of transition from a world dominated by the Church to a world dominated by secular western culture. It seems to me, however, that the Year-Day Principle applies best to Scriptural passages where unusual numbers are mentioned, numbers that would not normally be used in real life. Numbers such as 1260 days, 70 weeks, and 2300 evenings and mornings are not normally used to describe the age of a child or other periods of time. So I lean to seeing the five months of the fifth trumpet as an allusion to the Flood story rather than a period of 150 years in history. See Rev 12:14-- (Excursis on the Year-Day Principle).

“And their torment was like the torment of a scorpion, when it stings a man.” While the scorpions are introduced in verse three as very powerful, the nature of their power is not spelled out until verse five. The power of the scorpion is in its sting, and this can inflict great pain on human beings. But it is only in verse ten that we are told what the ancient readers must have known by experience, the power of the scorpion’s sting is located in the tail. The opponents of the prophet Ezekiel are compared to scorpions (Ezek 2:6), so there is a history in the Bible of using scorpions as a metaphor for spiritual abuse or mockery. In the words of Ellicott, the scorpion represents “the malicious cruelty of the merciless.”

Rev 9:6—

“And in those days men will seek death but they will not find it. They will long to die, yet death flees away from them.” The concept of longing for a death that does not come recalls Job 3:20-21 (see also Job 7:15, see also Luke 23:30 and Revelation 6:15-17). The loss of Job’s family combines with his physical suffering to drive him to the place of suicidal anguish. During this dark time, Job was many times tempted to see God as the source of his suffering. But he does not know what the reader of the book of Job knows, that the source of his anguish was Satan, not God (Job 1:12; 2:6). This must be kept in mind in the fifth trumpet as well. While the trumpets are portrayed as judgments from the heavenly temple (Rev 6:9-10; 8:2-6), the destroyer of the fifth trumpet is not God, it is the fallen star, Satan (Rev 9:11). During the Exile to Babylon, many of the people of Judah went through a similar experience (Jer 8:3).

“In those days men will seek death.” This refers forward to the time in history when the events of Revelation 9:3-5 actually occur. It is, therefore, followed by the future tense “men will seek” (Greek: *zêtêsousin hoi anthrôpoi*), taking on the prophetic standpoint of John. The “men” here are the people on earth who are not sealed (Rev 9:4), those who are tormented for five months in the previous verse.

There have been many periods of history where circumstances were so distressing that death looked like a relief, a deliverance from suffering. So the language of this clause could apply to a number of points in history. A more specific interpretation would have to take into account the larger context of the passage.

The Holocaust in World War II was such a time of horror. Though the Nazis often cloaked their actions in Christian rhetoric, the main driving force was the godless philosophy of Nietzsche and others. The horrors of the Holocaust were not the actions of God, punishing those whose ancestors may have contributed to the death of Christ, they were the product of human beings inspired by demons and an extremely godless philosophy. The Holocaust is one example of what the world would be like if Satan’s actions were fully unrestrained (Rev 9:11).

“They will long to die, yet death flees away from them.” There is an interesting textual variant in the last clause of this verse. The full manuscript evidence supports the future tense for the first three verbs of this verse (“will seek,” “will not find,” “will long”). The majority text of the Greek tradition maintains that the “fleeing” is also in the future tense (“will flee”). But in the earlier, and usually superior, manuscripts the fourth verb switches to a present tense (“flees”). Since this is the more difficult and unexpected reading, it is more likely to be original.

Reading the fleeing as present tense gives graphic force to the description. The fleeing away of death is an immediate and gripping experience. The Greek word translated “long” (*epithumêsousin*) expresses extreme or vehement desire. It is a passionate longing to be no more. This graphic combination of images is reminiscent of a nightmare, where someone chases after a person or an object, but the desired goal is always just out of reach. Under normal circumstances, people fear and even hate death, but in circumstances like these, even death is to be preferred to the anguish being experienced.

Rev 9:7-9 (Introduction)—

“And the locusts were like horses prepared for war in appearance, and on their heads was something like golden crowns, and their faces were like the faces of men. Their hair was like the hair of women, and their teeth were like lions’ teeth. And their breastplates were like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of horse-drawn chariots rushing into battle.” The imagery here is built, to a considerable degree, on Joel 2:1-11. The locust/scorpions referred to here were introduced in verses 3-6, but here we get a detailed description of them. The imagery seems almost overkill. Horrific images are piled one on top of the other to represent the intensity and awesomeness of the demonic attack in the fifth trumpet. I have no doubt that John intended us to take every detail seriously and yet this piling on of images seems to resist clarity of understanding.

Perhaps the best way to handle this passage is to see these torments as coming from human beings inspired by Satan. This appears to be an exercise in hyperbole for effect. Human

beings and circumstances appear strong as horses, powerful as kings, cunning as the wildest man, and at the same time seductive as a beautiful woman. It is all flavored throughout with military imagery. This demonic army causes pain like that of scorpions. This plague is absolutely awesome and no one would want to experience it. We will look a little more closely at these images.

Rev 9:7—

“And the locusts were *like* horses prepared for *war* in appearance, and on their heads was something *like* golden crowns, and their faces were *like* the faces of men.” The comparison of locusts to horses is a common one in the Arabian context. This similarity is brought out in Joel 2:4 and alluded to in Job 39:20. That this passage is to be taken figuratively is evident from the repeated use of “like” (Greek: *homoiomata, homoia, homoiou*). The locusts are “like” horses wearing something “like” golden crowns, and they had faces “like” the faces of men. While natural locusts can look somewhat like horses, they have nothing on their heads that looks like a crown. This is figurative imagery. There is also a clear military reference in the use of “war” (Greek: *polemon*). This term is generally used literally (Gen 14:2, 8; Exod 13:17, Josh 4:13, etc.) in the Old Testament, but is used both literally (Luke 14:31; 1 Cor 14:8) and figuratively (2 Cor 10:3-5; Jam 4:1; 1 Pet 2:11) in the New Testament.

“ . . . on their heads was something like *golden crowns* . . . ” Many commentators have seen these “crowns” as polished military helmets. But a closer look at the biblical context may point in a different direction. The crowns the locusts wear (Greek: *stephanoi*) are victory crowns rather than royal ones (Greek: *diadēma*). “Victory crowns” normally apply spiritually and positively in Revelation. The twenty-four elders wear *stephanos* crowns (Rev 4:4, 10). Christ Himself wears a *stephanos* crown in Revelation 14:14. This same crown is the reward given to the overcomers in Revelation 2:10 and 3:11. The reference here is the one place in Revelation where the victory crown is clearly associated with something demonic or spiritually negative.

“ . . . on their heads was something like *golden crowns* . . . ” There is one use of *stephanos* that is ambiguous for our understanding of the fifth trumpet. That is the victory crown worn by the rider on the white horse in Revelation 6:2. But we have concluded for multiple reasons that the rider on the white horse represents Jesus and the conquests of the gospel. See details in the comments on Rev 6:2. In that case the image here is the reverse of the usual usage in Revelation. Something reserved for Christ and his faithful ones is here applied to the demonic forces from the Abyss. So an element of deception seems embedded here. Satan can appear as an “angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14-15). As we will see, the “tail” in verse ten is also a symbol of deception. In the book of Revelation, Satan operates by both force and deception. The surface imagery of Revelation 9:7-9 suggests force, but a deeper look into these images suggests deception as the primary intent of the passage.

“ . . . and their faces were like *the faces of men*.” Some have suggested that behind this image is the fact that the head of the locust bears a vague resemblance to a human head. Since the face expresses human intelligence, this image supports the overall sense that the plague of the fifth trumpet is not literal, but has to do with the destructive consequences of secular

ideology. While the word “men” here (Greek: *anthrôpôn*) implies a general reference to human beings as a whole, it can also be used in contrast with women. The mention of women in the next verse gives this word a more masculine impression. Benson suggests that “faces of men” may refer to beards, while women’s hair (next verse) tends to be long and flowing. Hair has often been the distinguishing mark between men and women. Something more than ordinary locusts is in view here. Since their faces were “like” the faces of men, these are not human, but since locusts do not sting either, these are not locusts. The sense of a supernatural enemy flows through this cascade of images.

Rev 9:8—

“Their hair was like the hair of women, and their teeth were like lions’ teeth.” Some commentators have tried to connect “like the hair of women” (Greek: *hôs trichas gunaikôn*) with the antennae of locusts, but the expression is generally taken to mean long and flowing hair. In ancient times women generally wore their hair longer than men did (biblical evidence for this is in 1 Corinthians 11:14-15), there is some ancient evidence that the Arabians and Persians were known for longer hair. If men did not commonly wear long hair in John’s day it is not surprising that this would be a distinguishing feature of these terrifying locusts. It is not clear whether this image was designed to express beauty and seductiveness or terror. To this day Muslims consider the hair of women to be seductive and thus it should be covered in public. On the other hand, the weight of imagery in the larger context is intended to evoke terror, so that is probably the intent with this image.

In Joel 1:4-6 locusts describe an enemy nation with teeth like lions’ teeth attacking Yahweh’s land, so this image is part of a larger structural parallel between the fifth trumpet and the book of Joel. The jaws and teeth of lions are designed to crush, tear and devour. In both Joel and the fifth trumpet this image points to the terrible destructiveness of the locusts.

Rev 9:9—

“And their breastplates were like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of horse-drawn chariots rushing into battle.” Many commentators note that this is military imagery, yet also a fair description of the desert locust. Many locusts have a chest structure like the plates of armor on a battle horse and, of course, wings.

The text is not saying that John is seeing horses drawing chariots and rushing into battle. He is seeing locust-like creatures that make a sound with their wings that is similar to the sound of horse-drawn chariots rolling into battle. One locust by itself may not be very loud, but a vast multitude of them gathered together can produce quite a racket. This part of the description is clearly based on the locust-army of Joel 2:5 (NIV): “With a noise like that of chariots . . . like a mighty army drawn up for battle.” The word translated “battle” (Greek: *polemon*) in this verse is the typical word for military conflict that can also be used for arguments or ideological conflicts (note the English word “polemics”).

There are many things going on at once here. The structural parallel to Joel 2:4-7 heightens the sense that the locusts of Revelation 9:7-9 represent an army. Yet the overall picture of the fifth trumpet is not a military plague, but an ideological one, utilizing both

insects and human armies as images to represent something larger and less tangible that will occur in John's future.

Rev 9:7-9 (Conclusion)—

Building on the imagery of Joel 2:1-11, this horrific piling up of images recalls particularly two things. First, the plagues of locusts that the ancients would have been familiar with and very much dreaded. And second, military images that would also be familiar to John's readers. In light of the fifth trumpet as a whole and Luke 10:17-20, however, these images are not to be taken literally, but represent the spiritual and emotional anguish that people experience in the absence of Christ and the gospel. In the New Testament, military imagery is often used to describe the internal conflict that occurs when the gospel counters our sinful human inclinations (prime examples would be 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 and Ephesians 6:10-17). Revelation is a New Testament book and needs to be read with Christ and the gospel in mind.

Rev 9:10 (Introduction)—

"They had tails like scorpions and stingers. And with their tails they had the authority to harm the human race for five months." The locusts of the fifth trumpet are three times compared with scorpions, in verses three, five and now here in verse ten. In this verse it becomes clear that the instrument of the torment in the previous verses is in the tail of the locust/scorpions. It is the action of the tail that leads to the psychological torment of verses five and six. The five months is a second reference to the period of time mentioned first in verse five. This recalls the 150 days when the Flood covered the whole earth in Genesis 7:24 and 8:3. The faithful people of God are protected during this plague just as Noah and his family were during the Flood.

Rev 9:10—"They had tails like scorpions and stingers. . ." Once again there is a signal of figurative language, the Greek word for "like" (*homoias*). Similar expressions occur in 2 Sam 22:34 and Psa 18:33 (in both cases: "He made my feet like the feet of a deer"). The images in this passage, and in most of the book of Revelation, cannot be visualized in any literal sense. The purpose of the imagery is other than a literal description. It would be unwise to put too much emphasis on the details, particularly in the fifth trumpet. This clause is not saying that the tails of the locusts looked like scorpions' tails, but that the locust tails had stingers in them, like a scorpion's does.

"And with their tails they had the authority to harm the human race for five months." What does the stinging tail of the locust/scorpions, the instrument with which they torment the unsealed, represent? The most helpful parallel is found in Isaiah 9:15: ". . . the elders and prominent men are the head, the prophets who teach lies are the tail." What causes the suicidal anguish of the unsealed is believing lies regarding the ultimate reality of the universe and the government of God. Although the language is a combination of military language with the description of a locust plague; it is false doctrine, rather than a military or insect scourge that causes the anguish. It is the deeper meaning, not the surface meaning, of the text which counts. The tail, which is the instrument of the attack, is false doctrine. Only those who buy

into the false doctrine are plagued, God's genuine followers are not affected by it. In the larger context of this trumpet, the prophetic lies being referred to here are something like the secular assumptions of Western society today.

The text does not say that the lifespan of these locusts was five months, but that their power to torment was granted for five months.

Rev 9:11—

“They had a king over them, the Angel of the Abyss. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek his name is Apollyon.” The reference to a king (Greek: *basilea*) further underscores that these locusts are not literal. In the Old Testament it was observed that locusts have no “king” (Prov 30:27); the actions of a swarm of locusts are co-ordinated by a herd instinct rather than a specific leader. On the other hand, the Septuagint (LXX—Greek OT) offers a strange reading of Amos 7:1 saying that a particular locust was “Gog the king.” Coming back to this verse, the “king” is further defined as the “Angel of the Abyss” (Greek: *ton angellon tês abussou*). Some commentators connect the Angel of the Abyss with the strong angel of Revelation 20:1-3 and thus see the angel of this verse as an agent of God’s judgment. That angel binds Satan in the Abyss with a great chain. But in the context of the fifth trumpet, the Angel of the Abyss oversees the torments of the unsealed and should rather be connected to the star which had fallen from heaven and unlocked these torments (see comments on Rev 9:1). That star “was given” the key to the shaft of the Abyss, a divine passive. So the Angel of the Abyss is under God’s control or restraint. Seeing the Angel of the Abyss here as Satan fits the context best. God withdraws His restraint in the fifth trumpet, allowing Satan a freedom of action that he has not had in the past. As the world approaches the End, Satan is given opportunity to manifest his true character as never before. Those who do not accept the lordship of Christ will end up suffering under the lordship of Satan (see 2 Thess 2:8-12).

“His name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek his name is Apollyon.” The word Abaddon (Greek: *abaddôn*) is a Greek rendering of the Hebrew word *abaddon*. In that form it is normally an abstract noun meaning “destruction” (see various English translations of Proverbs 15:11). *Abaddon* is based on the root Hebrew verb *abad*, which means “to perish” or “to destroy.” Forms of this verb are frequent in the Old Testament. As a name or title it represents “the one who destroys.” In Jewish literature of the time *Abaddon* was one of the compartments of hell or *gehenna*, the place of burning (see Job 26:6; 31:12 [ESV] for early versions of this). The Septuagint frequently translates Abaddon as *apôleia* (Deut 4:26; Job 26:6; 28:22, etc.). In the Greek, *Apollyon* (transliterated from the Greek *apolluôn*) is a participle form based on the root verb *apoluô/apollumi* which means “to destroy.” So Apollyon would mean “the one who destroys” or “the Destroyer.” It is the personification of “destruction.”

The sense of destruction is heightened here by the use of words for destruction in two different languages. While the words and their contexts are very different, they mean the same thing. “Abaddon” (Hebrew) is the one who destroys, and “Apollyon” (Greek) is also the one who destroys. The essence of these two names is destruction--the angel of the Abyss is the destroying one who ruins those who follow him and the earth on which they dwell. The Gospel of John contains frequent examples of double naming, which could be seen as evidence for

common authorship of the Gospel and Revelation (John 1:38: rabbi and teacher; 1:42: Simon and Cephas; 4:25: Messiah and Christ; 9:7: Siloam and “sent”; 19:13: Stone Pavement and Gabbatha; 19:17: Place of a Skull and Golgotha).

Rev 9:11 (Spiritual Lesson)—

The angel of the Abyss is Satan, the leader of the demonic forces in view here. Satan attracts people with temptations of something better than they now have. But when they buy in to those promises, he rewards them in the end with torment. That torment can be physical, mental, social or emotional. An analogy in contemporary experience is recreational drugs. Life is hard and often very broken. Recreational drugs have a powerful effect on the feelings and may seem a harmless escape from the challenges of life. But over time the addiction gets stronger and stronger and the payoff is less and less. A person ends up in a horrific cycle of needing the drug just to feel slightly normal. That kind of destructive cycle is triggered whenever people embrace sin as core to their identity. At first it seems a better way of life, but at the end it leads to anguish and destruction. While God is the giver of life, Satan’s core identity is summed up in the term “destroyer.” Those who abandon God find themselves in slavery to sin and Satan and the result is a “tortured” existence.

Rev 9:1-11 (Conclusion)—

We conclude where we began. Where do you find Christ in the horror show that is the fifth trumpet? The basic theme of this trumpet seems clear; it concerns a time in history when God permits demonic forces to plague the earth, but the plague is not allowed to affect the righteous, it is limited to the unsealed (Rev 9:4). Because of the nature of the demonic attack, the genuine followers of Jesus are not hurt by them (Luke 10:17-20).

In the New Testament, "light and darkness" have to do with the gospel. Christ is light and darkness is the taking away or blotting out of the gospel. While there was partial darkness in the fourth trumpet, in the fifth trumpet, there is an intensification of that darkness. The absence of the gospel and the pervasive presence of its opposite, atheism and secularism, is in my view, the central theme of the fifth trumpet.

"The triumph of secularism" is one way that I have summarized the fifth trumpet. While religion in various forms is fighting back, today the dominant philosophy of the Western world, at least, is to seek truth through science and secular philosophy. The presence of God in public life is no longer assumed and it is often mocked should anyone dare to bring the subject up. Through the media and the entertainment industry, secularism has spread beyond the Western world and is increasingly found even in the developing world. There has been a corresponding increase drug abuse, addictions of various kinds and a general sense of anxiety. The world we live in today seems very well represented by a contextual understanding of the fifth trumpet. In other words, the fifth trumpet speaks to our present experience.

In what sense is it true that God's faithful people are not hurt by secularism? Secularism would seem to be tremendously damaging to Christian faith and witness. It claims that it doesn't matter if there is a God or not. What matters is what you can detect with your five senses--what you see, hear, taste, touch, and smell. Anything beyond that is a figment of one's

imagination. While the products of secular culture are more and more amazing all the time, they serve as a distraction to spiritual life and can lead to a sense of emptiness and even suicidal anguish. But secularism cannot distract you from God when you know and walk with Him. This is well illustrated by the saying: "God is not dead; I talked to Him last night." Secularism cannot hurt the spiritual walk of anyone who truly knows and experiences God.

There is a sense in which secularism is a blessing to people of faith. The atheism of the Soviet Union led to a great hunger for the gospel after the fall of Communism. The secular overthrow of coercive government led history for the first time to a respect for religious liberty and freedom of conscience. Open societies have offered golden opportunities to spread the gospel. At the same time, there is a sense that secularism is a curse. The prevailing culture does not support faith, and a walk with God seems an increasingly isolated experience. One is tempted to ignore abundant evidence of God's presence and gracious care for those willing to invite Him into their lives. But the prevailing culture need not affect genuine followers of Jesus who see through the "clouds" to the "sun, moon, and stars." So secularism is both a blessing and a curse to faith.

If I have rightly understood the seven trumpets, and their difficulty suggests a strong element of caution in their interpretation, the rise and dominance of secularism in the Western world is related to the failure of the Christian church to bear a clear witness of the gospel. This failure of the church was anticipated by the imagery of the third trumpet. The same star that fell in the third trumpet is cited as the precipitating factor in the fifth. People looked to Christianity for life and often did not find it there. Secularism and atheism may not have reached their present state if the church had remained true to its mission. The excesses of the Dark Ages were a precipitating factor in the philosophical developments that led to the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, as well as the atheism of the French Revolution and eventually the Communist revolution. So the imagery of the fifth trumpet fits reasonably well with the philosophical developments in the Western world today.

As we will see, the imagery of the sixth trumpet seems to represent a pendulum swing away from secularism back toward distortions of genuine Christian faith that we have seen before. The vision moves from the language of Egypt and its avoidance of God back to the language of Babylon and its embrace of forms of religion that oppose God. If the third trumpet depicted the rise of religious opposition to the gospel, the fourth depicted the rise of secularism, the absence of the gospel. In the fifth trumpet we have seen the dominance of secular philosophy as the world moves toward the End. The sixth trumpeter portrays the end-time revival and dominance of Babylon, the religious alternative to the gospel. These two opponents of the gospel are seen again in Revelation 16 and 17, interacting with each other to blot out faith from the earth. The final outcome of the end time battle (Armageddon) is more clearly laid out there.

The interaction of the fifth and sixth trumpets seems to me parallel to the last portion of Daniel 11 in the Old Testament. I will quote Daniel 11:40-45 in the New International Version: "At the time of the end the king of the South will engage him in battle, and the king of the North will storm out against him with chariots and cavalry and a great fleet of ships. He will invade many countries and sweep through them like a flood. He will also invade the Beautiful

Land. Many countries will fall, but Edom, Moab and the leaders of Ammon will be delivered from his hand. He will extend his power over many countries; Egypt will not escape. He will gain control of the treasures of gold and silver and all the riches of Egypt, with the Libyans and Nubians in submission. But reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many. He will pitch his royal tents between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain. Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him."

The final events of earth's history are portrayed in Daniel 11 as a battle between the kings of the north and south. It is an apocalyptic passage that is as obscure and difficult as the trumpets. The King of the South is Egypt (a nation south of Israel) and the King of the North is Babylon (a nation that was reached by traveling north of Israel and around the Fertile Crescent to the east). The battle of Daniel 11 ultimately affects the people of God on His mountain. The early victories in the battle go to the King of the South. But later the King of the North comes roaring back to overwhelm the King of the South, after which the entire world under Babylon's control turns on the people of God. The fifth and sixth trumpets similarly portray the move from the dominance of secularism/atheism (the King of the South/atheism) to the dominance of institutional religion (the King of the North/Babylon). In other words, before the End, secularism will create a spiritual longing that demons will rush in to fill.

So if we have correctly understood the fifth trumpet, secularism will not last forever. With the rise of New Age thinking and eastern religions in the West, and a resurgence of Islam in Africa and Asia, we may detect a transition between the secularism of the Twentieth Century to a more religiously-oriented world, a foretaste of end-time Babylon.

Rev 9:1-11 (Spiritual Lessons)—1) Beware of secular drift. No one suddenly wakes up one morning and chooses to become a secular person. Secularism among believers is the result of a slackening of attention to the daily pursuit of relationship with God through prayer, Bible study, communal worship, and active participation in the work of the church. When the river of our culture flows strongly downstream, it requires effort to swim against the tide and maintain a connection with God. See the analysis in my book *Present Truth in the Real World*.

2) The fifth trumpet is a warning to those who toy with evil. There is no joy in rejecting God because secular life has its own torments and anguish. To live a life in the absence of God is not the solution to our problems. There is no grand and glorious conclusion to secular life but rather an emptiness that will often be filled by the powers of the abyss.

3) In the midst of a secular culture, there is comfort offered to those who seek to remain faithful to God. When error and evil seem to have triumphed, there is perfect security in Christ (Rev 9:4). The demons have no power over the redeemed (Luke 10:17-20). While a life of faith in a secular culture may be hard, the rewards far exceed the challenges. This theme reminds me of Romans 8:35-39 (NIV): "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate

us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:35-39. In my view, that is the theme of the fifth trumpet.

Rev 9:12—"The first woe has gone away. Behold, two more woes are coming after this." The original has a cardinal number ("one"-- Greek: *mia*) rather than an ordinal number ("first"), but that cardinal number clearly plays the role of an ordinal number in this context (for other NT examples see Matt 28:1; 1 Cor 16:2; Tit 3:10). Most translate that the first woe is "past," but the Greek is literally "gone away" (*apêlthen*). From the standpoint of the interlude between the fifth and sixth trumpets, two more woes are yet in the future ("are coming"—Greek: *erchetai*).

"After this" (Greek: *meta tauta*) occurs frequently in Revelation for things that will happen in the future with reference to something else. For example, in Revelation 1:19, the book of Revelation consists of "things which are" (Greek: *eisin*) and "things which will happen after this" (*meta tauta*). The "after this" or "after these things" begins with Revelation 4:1. See comments on Rev 1:19 and 4:1. In this verse the "after these things" means after the completion of the fifth trumpet.

Three woes were anticipated in Revelation 8:13. It was not clear there what relationship the three woes would have to the fifth, sixth and seventh trumpets. The words here, however, are not the words of the vulture in Revelation 8:13, they are a parenthetical remark by the author. The relationship of the woes and the trumpets, however, are somewhat clarified here. The end of the fifth trumpet is also the end of the first woe. The first woe is fulfilled and, accordingly, in the past. The second and third come after the first. The second begins with the onset of the sixth trumpet. Revelation 11:14 clarifies that each of the three woes is equated with one of the last three trumpets. The second woe is the sixth trumpet, the third woe is the seventh.

Rev 9:13-21 (Introduction)—

The "horror show" of the fifth trumpet continues in the sixth. In the fifth trumpet, conditions reached the stage where a great number of people seek death. A third of humanity is granted that wish in the sixth trumpet. There are several key structural parallels to the sixth trumpet in Revelation that help us understand the passage.

"After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: 'Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.' Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel." Revelation 7:1-4, NIV.

In both passages, there are four angels, divine restraint, and the comment, "I heard the number". Also, notice the exact opposite of the sealed in Revelation: the two-hundred-million man army of Revelation 9:16 is the alter-ego of God's end-time people, the 144,000. So both passages are located at the same time in history; the final years or even months before the End.

Another structural parallel to the sixth trumpet in Revelation is found in chapter 20. "When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth--Gog and Magog--to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them." Revelation 20:7-9, NIV.

The gathering of people in this passage is against the New Jerusalem at the end of the millennium. There is a strong parallel between the sixth trumpet and the end of the millennium in terms of world-wide military imagery, but the two events are not at the same time in history. The parallel affirms that the army of the sixth trumpet is made up of opponents of God and His people.

A third major parallel between the sixth trumpet and other parts of Revelation is found in the sixth bowl plague. "The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle of the great day of God Almighty.

"Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.

"Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon." Revelation 16:12-16.

The sixth bowl plague introduces the battle of Armageddon, which is completed in the seventh bowl and elaborated in chapters 17 and 18. We learn from this parallel that the gathering of the sixth trumpet is the marshaling of satanic forces for the battle of Armageddon. The sixth trumpet and the sixth bowl are parallel. Like Revelation 9, the sixth bowl combines military language, demons, and the Euphrates River. As the counterpart of the sealing of the 144,000 the gathering of the sixth trumpet may actually cover an extended period of time in the world of the end-time.

Rev 9:13—

"The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God. . . ." Except for the last two verses of the sixth trumpet, there are no major Old Testament allusions in this trumpet. There are a number of echoes, and we will point them out as we go through.

John "heard" (Greek: *êkousa*—a narrative aorist—the vision is described as a past event in the writer's experience) a voice, which is described in verse 14. In verse 17 and following he describes what he saw (Greek: *eidon*). It is not simply "a voice" in the Greek, but "one voice" (*phônên mian*). Most translations (ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV, RSV, NRSV) ignore this since an exact translation ("one voice") would be awkward in English. But the New English Translations expresses this beautifully: "I heard a single voice." I have chosen to follow the crowd on this one as there seems little impact on meaning to do so. It is not clear whose voice is the one

coming from the horns of the altar, Christian readers of Revelation would likely have assumed this was the voice of Christ, who both offers mercy and declares the consequences of rebellion against God.

“I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God. . . .” The manuscript tradition is unusually divided regarding the four horns of the altar, even in the Byzantine tradition, which is usually fairly united. These variations do not affect the meaning of the sixth trumpet greatly, but they are quite interesting. I have chosen to follow most translators in the reading “from the four horns” (Greek: *ek tôn tessarôn keratôn*), which has wide support among manuscripts in both quantity and quality. But almost as strong in quality and quantity is the reading that drops the word “four” (Greek: *tessarôn*), reading simply “from the horns of the . . . altar.” Since one voice from four horns is an awkward concept, this is likely a scribal “correction” to smooth out the reading. In addition, since the number four is significant in this part of Revelation (Rev 7:1-2, 11; 9:14-15, note also the four sins listed in 9:21), the standard reading is the most likely. There are also a number of unique readings. One early Coptic translation of this verse reads “from the horn (singular)” (Greek: *ek tou keratos*). The original reading of Sinaiticus leaves out “one from the four horns” (Greek: *mian ek tôn tessarôn keratôn*), reading simply “a voice from the golden altar.” And, finally, an Armenian translation reads quite differently: “from the four living creatures, which are before the altar of God” (Greek: *ek tôn tessarôn zôôn ha ên enôpion tou thusiasteriou tou theou*). In the standard reading, the single voice proceeds “out from” (Greek: “ek”), not just the golden altar, but from its four horns.

The Altar of Incense, which was before the veil in the Holy Place of the Hebrew tabernacle (Exod 30:6; 40:26), clearly came with horns, but that there were four of them is not mentioned (Exod 30:1-3). Of the Altar of Burnt Offering, on the other hand, it is clearly stated that there would be horns on the “four corners” of the altar (Exod 27:2-- Hebrew: *ârbâ pinnôtaw*), so one can presume the same for the Altar of Incense. Blood from the sacrifices in the outer court would be placed there (Exod 29:12). The altar in view here must be the same as that mentioned in Revelation 8:3—the golden altar which is before the throne. There it is the place where the incense mingled with the prayers of the saints is brought in the golden censer and offered to God (Rev 8:4). As in 8:5, this ministry results in negative outcomes (Rev 9:14-21), but the mention of the horns of the altar here implies that probation is still open for the human race, mercy is still being extended. The response to the cries of the souls under the altar (Rev 6-10), reaches its climax in the sixth trumpet. But, unlike the seven bowl-plagues, the judgment here is not without mercy. From a Christian perspective, this altar represents the intercession of Christ, which continues even in the midst of judgment.

“The four horns of the golden altar. . . .” In the Solomon narratives of Second Kings, two of his opponents sought mercy by entering the tabernacle compound and grabbing hold of the horns of the altar. As David became advanced in age and feeble, palace intrigue broke out as to which of his sons would succeed him. Adonijah was a son of David by Haggith, one of David’s less-known wives. When he went public with his desire to be king, David did not rebuke him, so with the support of Joab and Abiathar, he moved to declare himself successor to David (1 Kings 1:1-7). When Nathan and Bathsheba convinced David that Solomon should be king after him,

David declared Solomon king (1 Kings 1:8-40). When Adonijah's supporters heard this they scattered and Adonijah realized his life was in danger and he took hold of the horns of the altar to beg mercy from Solomon (1 Kings 1:50-52). After this David charged Solomon to deal also with Joab (1 Kings 2:1-6). When Joab heard of this and of the execution of Adonijah, he also entered the tabernacle complex and took hold of the horns of the altar (1 Kings 2:28). It is not clear which of the altars is in view in these passages, but it is most likely to have been the Altar of Burnt Offering, as only priests were generally allowed into the tabernacle itself. But in principle the horns seem to have served as a symbol of mercy.

As horrible as the sixth trumpet is, it is still possible for people to be saved because the golden altar of intercession is still in view. The voice from the center of the horns of the altar would be that of Christ and it is still possible to hear His voice and repent.

Rev 9:14—

“. . . saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound upon the great river Euphrates.” The one being commanded to release the four angels would be the angel of the sixth trumpet. This command would come to the angel from a superior, presumably Christ or a representative of Christ. In contrast to the four angels restraining the four winds in Revelation 7, the angels here are bound to the Euphrates River and when released, they go to the extremities of the earth. In both cases, the working of evil is restrained until the moment of release. This is what I call a thematic parallel. There is a strong correlation in the actions that take place at the beginning of Revelation 7 and the beginning of the sixth trumpet. But a different word is used for binding or restraining. In Revelation 7 the four angels “hold back” (Greek: *kratountas*) the four winds of destruction. In this passage the angels themselves are “bound” (Greek: *dedemenous*) until the moment of release by the command from the voice of the altar.

While the words and imagery of Revelation 7 and 9 are different, these two events have much in common. If the angels of this passage correspond to the winds of Revelation 7, we would be viewing a later stage of earth's history, when the forces of destruction sweep across the earth. In my view, the four angels of both Revelation 7 and Revelation 9 are demonic (whether or not they are the same four angels). The fact that the four angels are commissioned to kill a third of the human race and that the outcome of the army that follows is the death of a third of humanity demonstrates that the four angels and the army are parallel destructive images. The overall image in both Revelation 7 and the sixth trumpet is one of God's restraint on the outworking of evil being removed toward the End, so that Satan will have an opportunity to demonstrate to the universe what things would be like if he were in charge. The destructive winds of Revelation 7 correspond to the 200,000,000 man army of Revelation 9:16-19. Such a demonstration of Satan's leadership style (force and deception) is critical to a successful conclusion of the cosmic conflict. The sixth trumpet, therefore, likely portrays the gathering and execution of satanic activity just before the End.

The full extent of the Promised Land was from the River of Egypt in the south to the Euphrates River in the north-east (Gen 15:18; Josh 1:4). While such an extent may only have been only achieved briefly in the reigns of David and Solomon (2 Sam 8:3; 1 Kings 4:21; 1 Chr

5:9), the Euphrates River was considered the natural border of Israel, according to the promise. In the Old Testament, the Euphrates River was sometimes considered the origin of threat to the land of Israel. ". . . therefore the Lord is about to bring against them the mighty flood waters of the River--the king of Assyria with all his pomp. It will overflow all its channels, run over all its banks and sweep on into Judah, swirling over it, passing through it and reaching up to the neck. Its outspread wings will cover the breadth of your land, O Immanuel!" Isaiah 8:7-8, NIV (see also Isaiah 7:20). The waters rising up to "the neck" represented the Assyrian invasion that took over the whole land of Judah with the exception of the capital at Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:1 – 19:37). So waters can represent invading armies, as appears to be the case also here (Rev 9:16-19). The imagery here is drawn from Israel's national and geographic experience in the Old Testament. In the Christian context of Revelation, this attack would be a spiritual one seeking to intimidate or despoil the followers of Jesus from their mission. The River Euphrates would represent the "border" between spiritual Babylon and spiritual Israel (see Jeremiah 51:63-64).

Water as a symbol is used in three different ways in the book of Revelation. First of all, water can represent nourishment, as in drinking the water of life freely (Rev 21:6; 22:1; 22:17). Second, there is the theme of cleansing, water can be used for washing, although in Revelation this metaphor is often combined with the "blood of the Lamb" concept (Rev 1:5 [in some manuscripts]; 7:14). The third type of water imagery is destructive flooding. The dragon releases a flood of water from his mouth to destroy the woman, but the earth (desert) soaks up the flood and delivers her (Rev 12:14-16). It is the flooding and destructive side of water that is in view in the sixth trumpet. Releasing of the four angels releases the destructive army that threatens the people of God, much as the Assyrians once threatened Israel in the time of Hezekiah.

The sixth trumpet is modeled on the attacks that took place in the Old Testament. Just as the Abyss was the source of the demons in the fifth trumpet, now the Euphrates is the source of the demonic hoards that are restrained there and who will kill a third of mankind when let loose. Another divine passive.

Rev 9:15—

"And the four angels (by the great River Euphrates), who were prepared for that very hour, day, month, and year, were released in order to kill a third of the human race." The four angels were released (Greek: *eluthêsan*—aorist passive indicative) to accomplish their mission ("in order to kill"—Greek: *hina apokteinôsin*). How they do this is described in Revelation 9:17-18. Their release (Greek: *eluthêsan*) is a "visionary aorist," the vision is described as past, in John's past. The Greek purpose clause ("in order to kill") indicates that the release has a purpose. This does not mean that God is directing the killing, but that the demonic forces are freed to do what they have always wanted to do. The vision represents a time in earth's history when God's restraint of evil begins to be lessened so that Satan's character and government can be fully seen and understood. The divine passive indicates that these angels are not operating of their own volition, but were under the restraint of a higher power, namely God.

The fact that there are four angels does not seem directly related to the four units of time, the “hour, day, month, and year.” The word for “prepared” (Greek: *hêtoimasmenoî*) means making ready, suiting up, arranging for, something. The word is used for food preparation (Matt 22:4), preparation of the rewards for both the blessed (Matt 25:34) and the cursed (Matt 25:41) ones in Jesus’ eschatological parable, the “making ready” of the way of the Lord in Mark 1:3, the arrangements for the final Passover of Jesus’ ministry (Luke 22:13), Jesus’ preparation of the heavenly reward for His disciples (John 14:2-3), the adorning of a bride for her wedding (Rev 21:2), and reserving a place to stay for the night (Luke 9:52). The four angels in this verse are ready and willing for the task they will do after their release. It has been anticipated and prepared for. Whatever was needed for this task is already done, they are fully prepared.

In the Jewish eschatology of that time, the idea of destructive angels may also play a role. In Slavonic Enoch 10:1-3 there is a vivid description of the tortures of the wicked at the End. These tortures are supervised by “the angels fearful and merciless, bearing angry weapons, merciless torture. . . .” 2 Enoch (also known as Slavonic Enoch and The Book of the Secrets of Enoch) 10:1. It is not clear in this description if these tormentors are angels of God or demonic beings. There is also some scholarly question whether the medieval manuscripts of 2 Enoch (in the Slavonic language) fully reflect the presumed ancient original.

In Ethopic Enoch 76 there is a description of the twelve winds of heaven, four of which bring peace and blessing and eight of which bring punishment. 1 Enoch (also known as Ethiopic Enoch) 76:4. While angels are not mentioned in this chapter of Enoch, the association of angels and destructive winds is made in Revelation 7:1-3.

“The hour, day, month, and year” (Greek: *tên hôran kai hêmeran kai mêna kai eniauton*) have often been interpreted as a period of time, roughly thirteen months long, or its equivalent in terms of the year-day principle (391 years and two weeks). But such a reading would be more likely if the time periods were reversed (“a year, month, day and hour”) and/or if the article was dropped or added to each time period (“the hour and the day and the month and the year”). But the Greek of this time period (*tên hôran kai hêmeran kai mêna kai eniauton*) has a single article at the beginning, governing the whole phrase. This unites all four time periods into a single entity, hence my translation “that very hour, day, . . .” This is a Greek way of expressing a point in time rather than a period of time. The preposition (translated “for”—Greek: *eis*) at the beginning of the series of time elements can signify extent, when combined with duration of time. In combination with a point in time, it signifies the goal of the preparation, a particular point in time when the angels would be released to do what they had prepared for. The four angels were prepared for a specific point in history, presumably the same moment as the declaration of Revelation 10:6, “Time will be no more.”

That the order of these time periods represents a point in time can be illustrated from experience. If I were to ask a married person WHEN he or she got married, they would start with the smallest time period and move to the greatest: “Two o’clock in the afternoon on the 23rd of June, 1977.” The wedding is a point in time and the delineation of that point moves from hour to day to month to year. But if I were to ask how long the couple had been married, the order would be reversed: “Forty two years, one month, fifteen days and three hours.” So

the order of the time periods in Revelation 9:15, combined with the use of the article, means a point in time is in view here. An analogy in the Greek is found in Matthew 24:36, where Jesus speaks of the moment of His return as “that day and hour” (Greek: *tês hêmeras ekeinês kai hôras*). He is not saying that His return will last 25 hours, but is referring to it as a point in time in the future.

This (point in time) is a challenging observation for Seventh-day Adventists, who are accustomed to reading this time period as a 391+ year period because of the mention of this passage in Ellen White’s book *The Great Controversy*, page 343. There Ellen White described how this passage played an important role in the Millerite movement. Josiah Litch used this time period to predict the span of the Ottoman Empire and declared that it would come to an end on August 11, 1840. A major diplomatic concession to the western allies by the Ottoman Empire reported on that day caused a great deal of interest in the Millerite principles of prophetic interpretation. So that interpretation played a major role in developments that led ultimately to the founding of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Since I am a Seventh-day Adventist and believe in the prophetic inspiration of Ellen G. White, many have wondered why I differ from the above account of Revelation 9:15. This question deserves a more detailed response than would be appropriate in the context of a commentary. But let me give you the main points in a nutshell. First of all, Ellen White did not claim to be an expert in either history or biblical exegesis. She rarely does exegesis (and is not doing it in GC 343) and when she does, she is usually drawing her exegesis from a particular source. She brings Litch’s prediction into the story of the Millerite movement, because that story couldn’t be told without it. Second, Litch himself later on repudiated his interpretation of Revelation and history and no one has ever been able to duplicate his work successfully, although a number have tried. The Ottoman Empire did not fall in 1840, it fell in 1922-1924. The Greek of the text does not support a period of time and Ellen White herself encouraged people to base their conclusions about the Bible on their direct study of the Bible rather than her comments about the Bible.

If “Litch’s prediction” (Ellen White’s own cautious wording) was not based on the Bible, why did it seem to be fulfilled in the events of August, 1840? God will one day make it all plain to us, but I suspect that Litch’s confidence in his specific and detailed interpretation put the whole movement in jeopardy. Rather than see all the progress of the first nine years (Miller’s preaching from 1831-1840) go for naught, God intervened in such a way that the general populace felt Miller’s principles of prophetic interpretation were confirmed by current events and, as a result, they were willing to give the Millerite message a chance. In the long run, the events of 1840 do not seem as significant as Litch portrayed them, but at a crucial moment God arranged events in such a way that the movement survived and spawned a denomination that has grown into a world-wide movement today.

Rev 9:16— “And the number of the mounted soldiers was two hundred million. I heard the number of them.” This is the numbering of Satan’s army which can only be fully numbered at the very end of time. The army is described in verses 17-19. The phrase “the mounted soldiers” (Greek: *tôn strateumatôn tou hippikou*) translates the word for “armies” or “troops”

(*strateumatôn*-- plural) and the word for "horseman" (*hippikou*-- singular). Since "armies" is plural and "horseman" is single, a better interpretation of "horseman" might be the English collective "cavalry." The Byzantine Greek text has "horse" (*hippou*) rather than "horseman" (*hippikou*), hence literally "horse armies." The description in verses 17-19, in fact, focuses more on the horses than on those who ride them. This army is the way that the four angels kill a third of the human race.

In Greek, the two hundred million is stated as 2 X 10,000 X 10,000 (Greek: *dismuriades muriadôn*—literally twenty thousands of ten thousands). The army is organized into 20,000 brigades or divisions of 10,000 each. The number may be an expansion of Psalm 68:17 where the chariots of God are "twenty thousand (Hebrew: *ribbithayim*—the dual form of 10,000) thousands" (Hebrew: *alephey*-- plural). A similar figure is the ten thousands times ten thousands in Daniel 7 and Revelation 5 (see also Hebrews 12:22 and Jude 14). The number should not be taken literally, since there probably were not as many people in the whole earth in John's day as the number of this army. Even today, large armies number in hundreds of thousands rather than hundreds of millions. What is clear is that this army is an exceedingly great multitude. The numbers and their appearance suggests a demonic horde rather than a human army.

The phrase, "I heard the number, . . ." (Greek: *êkousa ton arithmon*) recalls the identical phrase in Revelation 7:4 (Greek: *êkousa ton arithmon*). The only appearance of this phrase in the entire book of Revelation is in 7:4 and 9:16, so they are deliberately connected. This means that the 144,000 sealed ones are somehow parallel to the 200,000,000 destroyers in the sixth trumpet. Since both passages portray end-time events (or the preparation for end-time events), these two "armies" are contrasting parallels. The 144,000 represents the end-time army of God and the 200,000,000 represent the end-time army of God's opponents (or the demonic powers that drive them). The army of the sixth trumpet is the counterpart of God's end-time people. The sixth trumpet portrays the gathering of the enemy forces for the battle of Armageddon (Rev 16:16).

As we work our way through the book of Revelation, we see a series of parallels between the people of God and those who oppose God and His people, the "wicked." The wicked called for the rocks and mountains to fall on them in the sixth seal (Rev 6:15-16) and, by contrast, the righteous were symbolized by the 144,000 and the great multitude (Revelation 7). So Revelation 7 is a contrasting parallel to the sixth seal. As we have just seen, the 144,000 are parallel to the 200,000,000 of the sixth trumpet. So Revelation 7 is parallel to the sixth trumpet as well as the sixth seal. But the two-hundred million that surge out under the sixth trumpet are also in parallel contrast with the righteous, symbolized by the two witnesses that must prophecy to the world again (Revelation 10-11). These same righteous in chapter 11 are paralleled by the description of the beast from the sea in Revelation 13. That beast is also parallel with the remnant, the 144,000, and the three angels and their messages in Revelation 14). So, over and over again in the book of Revelation, there are parallels and contrasts between the righteous and the wicked, which can be instructive both ways.

There is a sense in which, therefore, there are no sharp distinctions between good and evil in the book of Revelation. Sometimes parallels can be drawn between the forces of God

and the forces of evil. I suggest that the reason for this is that deception and counterfeit is such a central part of this book. The message that communicates is how easy it will be to accept the deceptions of the End-time.

Rev 9:17—

“And this is the way I saw the horses and the ones sitting on them in the vision: They had breastplates the color of fire, hyacinth and sulphur. The heads of the horses were like the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulphurous fumes.” With this verse John moves from hearing to seeing. We get a visual description of the destruction that was promised when the four angels were released from the Euphrates River. The description of the horsemen in 9:17-19 is quite similar to the description of the locusts/scorpions in the fifth trumpet. As it turns out, the sixth trumpet is an extension and expansion of the plagues in the fifth.

In a literal sense, the passage opens in the Greek with “and thus” or “and in this manner” (Greek: *kai houtos*). Hence I translated “this is the way I saw. . . .” *Houtos* (“thus”) refers here to what follows. John’s attention from here on is fixed on the visual description of this massive cavalry horde. The appearance of the horses and riders was unusual enough to garner his full attention.

The word translated “vision” (Greek: *orasei*) is used only one other time in Revelation (4:3), but for a different purpose there (translated “appearance”). The word appears several times in Ezekiel (LXX: 8:3; 11:24; 40:2) for a prophetic vision and is used similarly in Daniel 9:21 (LXX) to translate one of the Hebrew words for prophetic vision (*chazôn*—referring back to Daniel 8:3-12).

In Revelation 9:9 it is the horses that are wearing breastplates (Greek: *thôraikas*, 2x). Here it is not entirely clear whether it is the horses or the riders that are wearing the breastplates (*thôraikas*), but if it is one or the other, it would be referring to the riders, as they are the nearest antecedent. Later on in Greek the word for “breastplate” came to be used for defensive armor as a whole, but at the time of John, just the breastplate was in mind. The Greek is literally “having (Greek: *echontas*) breastplates the color of. . . .” Since “having” (Greek present participle) is plural, the breastplates probably refer to both the horses and their riders.

“They had breastplates the color of fire, hyacinth and sulphur. . . .” The breastplates of the horsemen anticipate the lake of fire with three adjectives; fiery (Greek: *purinous*), hyacinth-colored (Greek: *huakinthinous*), and something like sulphur (Greek: *theiôdeis*). All three terms are adjectives, modifying “breastplates.” These weren’t breastplates of fire, they were “fiery.” The breastplates are not made of hyacinth-stone (*huakinthos*—see Revelation 21:20), they are a dark, bluish-purple like the stone or the flower of the corresponding name. Neither are they made of sulphur or brimstone, rather they are “sulphurous,” like sulphur in appearance). The passage makes the most sense if these three descriptives refer to color only. The breastplates are fiery red, smoky blue, and sulphurous yellow. It is not clear whether all the horsemen wear three-colored uniforms, or if the horsemen have three divisions, each represented by one of the three colors. What comes out of their mouths later in this verse (fire, smoke and sulphur, Greek: *pur*, *kapnos*, *theon*) corresponds to the three earlier colors, respectively. A number of

commentators compare the overall description of these horsemen to the Babylonians in Habakkuk 1:6-10.

There are a couple of potential thematic parallels here to other parts of Revelation. The fire, smoke and brimstone coming out of the mouths of these horses anticipates the demons coming out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet (Rev 16:13). This parallel enhances the demonic nature of the description here. On the other hand, it is blasphemous words that come out of the mouth of the sea beast in Revelation 13 (13:6). If the sea beast is part of end-time Babylon (see Revelation 16:13, 19), the description here could anticipate the spiritual nature of the battle of Armageddon (see comments on Revelation 16:15).

Rev 9:18—

“A third of the human race was killed by these three plagues: by the fire, the smoke and the sulphurous fumes that came out of their mouths.” Fire, smoke and sulphur in combination are consistently linked with negative judgments on the wicked in the Bible (Gen 19:24, 28; Psa 11:6; Isa 34:9-10; Ezek 38:22; Luke 17:29; Rev 14:10-11; 19:20; 20:10; 21:8). This verse essentially repeats what has been said earlier, as a point of emphasis. Killing a third of the human race recalls verse 15, where that task is performed by the four angels released from the Euphrates River. Fire, smoke and sulphurous fumes recalls the fire, smoke and sulphurous fumes coming out of the mouths of the horses of verse 17. The one thing added by this verse is the fact that the fire, smoke and sulphurous fumes are, in fact, the agents that cause the death of a third of the human race. In this they are equated with the four angels released from the Euphrates. They appear to be two vastly different images symbolizing essentially the same thing, the gathering power of evil toward the end of human history. In the battle of Armageddon passage (Rev 16:12-16), the forces of evil are a combination of the demonic (the three frogs), institutional religion (the unholy trinity) and the civil and secular powers of the world (kings of the earth). The locusts of the fifth trumpet were forbidden to kill (Rev 9:5), the horsemen of the sixth are ordered to kill. The restraint of God is decreasing as the trumpets go on.

The prepositions in this verse are rather interesting, rather difficult to translate into English. In my translation “a third of the human race was killed BY (Greek: *apo*) these three plagues.” The Greek word *apo* is the first word of the Greek sentence, implying considerable importance for the writer. It can mean out of, away from, with, or by. It is not clear if the plagues are the place “from which” the killings come or “by which” the killing come. The use of *apo* here instead of other options would normally favor a directional interpretation; the human deaths came from that direction. Then in my translation “BY (Greek: *ek*) the fire . . . that came out of their mouths.” The Greek word *ek* also has a strong sense of source: out from or away from (the Majority Greek text reads *apo* here as well, probably attempting to smooth out the reading of the text), but it is odd that John uses two different prepositions in the same clause to mean roughly the same thing. So the Greek does not seem to imply what my English translation implies. People are not killed “by” the fire, smoke and sulphur, but these are the direction from which the destruction comes. “From” might be closer to the Greek, but sounds

awkward in this English context. Perhaps it is the army itself that does the killing. The fire, smoke and sulphurous fumes accompany that army in its mission.

Rev 9:17-18—

Stefanovic, in his commentary on Revelation, notes a hidden chiasm embedded in the Greek language of this passage; beginning with verse 17c and ending at the conclusion of verse 18. The chiasm begins and ends with the phrase “out of their mouths” (Greek: *ek tôn stomatôn autôn*). Second, and next to last, is a word for “coming out” (Greek: *ekporeuetai, ekporeuomenou*). Third, and third from last, are the words for fire, smoke and sulphur (Greek: *pur, kapnos, theion; puros, kapnou, theiou*). The middle of the chiasm, and the key point of the passage, is the sentence: “A third of the human race was killed by these three plagues.” This sentence is bracketed, fore and aft, by the same words in reverse order. The full chiasm is laid out here:

A from their mouths
 B were coming out
 C fire and smoke and brimstone
 D From these three plagues were killed. . . .
 C' fire and smoke and brimstone
 B' were coming out
A' from their mouths

Rev 9:19—

“For the authority of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails. For their tails were like snakes, having heads, and with them they did harm.” The word “authority” (Greek: *exousia*) plays a significant role in the book of Revelation. In Revelation 6:8 Death and Hades have authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with the sword, famine, pestilence and wild beasts (Rev 6:8). The locusts that came out of the smoke of the pit were given authority like that of scorpions (Rev 9:3). The locust/scorpions had authority to harm human beings with their tails (Rev 9:10). Jesus Christ has authority over the Kingdom of God as Messiah (Rev 12:10). The beast from the sea is given authority over every tribe and people and language and nation (Rev 13:5, 7). And, finally, those who have washed their robes have authority to eat of the Tree of Life and enter into the gates of the New Jerusalem (Rev 22:14). So authority can be both positive and negative in Revelation. In Genesis 1, the human race in the person of Adam is given authority over the beasts. In the fifth and sixth trumpets and in Revelation 13, the beasts are given authority over the human race. This fits the ongoing theme in the trumpets of the undoing or reversal of creation. That theme occurs first in the Bible in the Flood story (see my book *What the Bible Says About the End-Time*, 44-46). God's creation is turned on its head as a result of human sin.

But the authority to harm and destroy “was given” (Greek: *edothê*) to the forces of evil (Rev 6:8; 9:3; 13:5, 7). They are not able to destroy unless God allows it. They have no inherent authority of their own. While “was given” is not attached to “authority” in this verse, the same idea is implied in the releasing of the four angels in 9:14-15. The language of permission is not

used in the positive instances of “authority” (Rev 12:10; 22:14). But it is, in these instances, contingent. The salvation and authority of Jesus Christ was contingent upon God’s victory in the heavenly conflict and the casting down of Satan (Rev 12:7-10). The authority to eat of the Tree of Life was contingent on the washing of robes, an image of applying the gift of the gospel to the lives of believers (Rev 22:14). So that authority has a beginning point in each case. It is contingent upon the character of God and events on earth.

“For the authority of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails.” The “authority” of the locust/scorpions in the fifth trumpet was in their tails (Rev 9:3, 10). The “authority” of the 200,000,000 man army was in the fire, smoke and sulphur that came out of the mouths of the cavalry in 9:17-18. As noted by Stefanovic, the “mouth” (Greek: *stomatôn*) in Revelation is generally a weapon in the spiritual battle between good and evil. Christ makes war against the unrepentant with the sword that comes out of His mouth (Rev 1:16; 2:16, 19:15, 21). Fire comes out of the mouths of the two witnesses to kill their enemies (Rev 11:5). The mouth of the dragon pours out water to destroy the woman, who represents the church (see comments on Rev 12:6, 14-16). The sea beast uses its mouth to speak great things and blasphemies against God and against the inhabitants of heaven (13:5-6). The dragon, beast and false prophet produce frogs out of their mouths to persuade the kings of the whole world to gather for Armageddon (16:13-14). While the context in Revelation is often military, the mouth as a weapon is more verbal than physical. As we will see, when we come to Armageddon in chapter 16, the final battle centers more on the spiritual issues in the cosmic conflict than on the political and military conflicts of this earth.

In this verse the two images, the mouth and the tail, are combined. The horsemen have the authority of both the mouth and the tail (neither of which is natural for horses—the power of horses is in their hooves, not their mouths or tails). This means that whatever is implied by the locust/scorpions in the fifth trumpet, that power or authority is continued in the sixth trumpet and combined with the new menace arising out of the Euphrates River. The forces of evil introduced in the fifth and sixth trumpets are combined in the destructions of Armageddon. A similar image is carried out in more plain language in the sixth bowl-plague (Rev 16:12-16). The religious powers of the world (dragon, beast and false prophet) gather the secular, political and military forces of the world in service of their final attack on God’s faithful ones (see comments on Rev 16:12-16 and elaboration in comments on Rev 17:16 and context). In the sixth trumpet we see the gathering of enemy forces for the battle of Armageddon (Rev 16:16).

The imagery in 9:17-19 is not to be taken literally. Horses don’t belch literal fire, smoke and brimstone out of their mouths, although on a cold day their breath can seem like smoke. Horses don’t wield their tails as a weapon. Further evidence for this is the fact that in Isaiah 9:15, tails are used to represent prophetic lies: “The elder and honored man is the head, and the prophet who teaches lies is the tail.” The tail is a symbol of deception and false teaching. See also the concept of the “false prophet” in Revelation 13:11-18 and 16:13-14. As so often in Revelation, behind the military and destructive imagery of evil are lies about reality and about the character of God. Evil is attractive because it seems to be for our good, but proves in the end to be a lie. While human existence is full of literal and military conflict, there are deeper

issues that lie behind the conflicts of this earth. These are spelled out in more detail in Revelation 12, where the curtain is drawn back and the great controversy over the character and government of God is exposed. The images of Revelation may be bewildering at times, but there is a common thread running through all grounded in the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan.

“For their tails were like snakes, having heads, and with them they did harm.” The text does not say that each tail has a head, but uses the plural “heads” (Greek: *kephalas*), as if each tail has multiple heads. The ancient Greeks describe a two-headed snake they called *amphisbaena*. The tail was shaped like a head but didn’t function as one. The comparison with snakes anticipates the “ancient serpent” of Revelation 12:9 and 20:3, otherwise known as the devil or Satan. This further underscores the cosmic and demonic dimension of the plagues unleashed in the sixth trumpet. In a literal sense, snakes as a class have dual abilities to harm. The first is through the mouth, as with a cobra, which can bite and inject paralyzing poison, in many instances. But other kinds of snakes, such as the python, can harm with their bodies, squeezing the life out of the victim. But the combination of images clearly is not intended to be taken literally. The great conflict in the universe is portrayed in Revelation as a war of words rather than physical force (see comments on Rev 12:4, 9-11, see also comments on the battle of Armageddon—Rev 16:16). Paul has a similar kind of warfare in mind in 1 Corinthians 10:3-5 and Ephesians 6:10-17.

Rev 9:17-19 (Conclusion)—

The power of secularism in the fifth trumpet, modeled on ancient Egypt, was in the power of the tail. As we will see, the imagery of the sixth trumpet points more in the direction of ancient Babylon as a model. Here, the powers in both the mouth and the tail are in action against the people of God, making this plague the worst of both worlds. If I have understood this prophecy correctly, secularism, or something similar, will last until the End and will be used by the more-religious powers of the sixth trumpet for their own ends (in Revelation 16-17, we will see that even more clearly). God will permit Satan to bring out all the powers of hell and manifest them on the earth in the events leading up to the close of history. In so doing, Satan will fully demonstrate what the universe would be like were he in charge. And in so doing, he will bring the character of God into sharp relief.

Rev 9:20-21 (Introduction)—

“And the rest of the human race, those who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands in order that they might not worship demons or idols of gold, silver, brass, stone and wood. Such idols are not able to see, hear, or walk. And the rest of the human race did not repent of their murders, their magic arts, their acts of fornication, or their thefts.” There is a fascinating quadruple negative in these two verses. Those who were NOT killed by the plagues did NOT repent . . . in order that they might NOT worship demons . . . and did NOT repent of their murders. . . . The lack of repentance is mentioned twice. The first mention (9:20) concerns violations of the first table of the Ten Commandments, those related to the worship of God. They did not repent of worshiping demons instead of God or of idolatry.

The second mention of non-repentance (9:21) concerns violations of the second table of the Ten Commandments, they continued in murder, adultery and theft.

While there have been few Old Testament allusions in verses 13-19, there are several in this passage, two of which I will mention in this introduction. The purpose of these allusions is to compare the evil forces of the sixth trumpet with the stories of ancient Babylon and its fall. Just as ancient Babylon rose to great power and dominated God's people for a time and then fell in the attack by Cyrus, the sixth trumpet portrays end-time Babylon's rise to power (Rev 9:13-21, see also 16:13-16; 17:1-5), followed by the sufferings of God's people (Rev 10:1 – 11:13, see also 17:6), followed by the fall of Babylon at the drying up of the Euphrates River (Rev 16:12; 17:15). So the sixth trumpet describes end-time Babylon in its ascending phase, while Babylon's defeat is left to Revelation 17 and 18.

The language of idolatry in these verses recalls Daniel 5, where Babylon is described just before the drying up of the River Euphrates. At Belshazzar's feast, Daniel speaks repeatedly of the idols of gold and silver, wood, and stone (Dan 5:4, 23). Isaiah 47 also focused on the character and fall of ancient Babylon. The language of sorcery in verse 21 echos the language of Isaiah 47:9 and 12, NIV: "Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day: loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells. . . . Keep on, then, with your magic spells and with your many sorceries, which you have labored at since childhood. Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps you will cause terror." So the rise and fall of ancient Babylon is very much in John's mind as he writes out the vision he has received. The sorcerers remind us of ancient Babylon also. In spite of all the efforts of God (outlined in more detail in Revelation 10 and 11), the people refuse to repent (Rev 9:20-21). Therefore, they mark themselves as on the outside.

Rev 9:20—

"And the rest of the human race, those who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands in order that they might not worship demons or idols of gold, silver, brass, stone and wood. Such idols are not able to see, hear, or walk." This verse indicates the purpose of the plagues described in the previous three verses. Whether taken literally or spiritually, they are designed to provoke repentance. They serve as an appeal from God to the human race to recognize the consequences of sin and rebellion, but they do not have the effect that might reasonably have been expected, they bring about no repentance in two-thirds of humanity (Rev 9:18) who survive them. The rest of the human race continue worshiping demons and idols.

"And the rest of the human race, those who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands. . . ." The main sentence here is: "The rest of the human race did not repent" (Greek: *hoi loipoi tôn anthrôpôn . . . oude metenoêsan*). The "rest of the human race" refers to the two-thirds who were not killed by the plagues in the previous verses. The word for "rest" (Greek: *loipoi*) is the same as is often translated "remnant" in Revelation 12:17 (Greek: *tôn loipôn*). This word occurs eight times in the book of Revelation. Three of these designate the people of God in a positive way (Rev 2:24; 11:13; 12:17). Three other references designate opponents of God and His people (Rev 9:20; 19:21; 20:5). The other two

references (Rev 3:2; 8:13) refer to things rather than people. This is one of the negative people references. See comments on Rev 12:17 for further details.

The “remnant” here is defined by the subordinate clause: “Those who were not killed by these plagues” (the plagues of verses 17-19 rather than the plagues of all previous trumpets). This remnant did not repent “out of” (Greek: *ek*) the works of their hands. Whenever the Greek word for repentance (*metanoëô*) is followed by “out of” (*ek*) it means a moral change involving the abandonment of sinful works. In this case the “rest” of humanity did not take that course. They chose instead to continue breaking the commandments of God in their worship of other gods and acts of murder, sorcery, adultery and theft. The purview of this trumpet is not the fate of the righteous. Only the unrepentant are in view here. The view of the righteous occurs in chapters 10 and 11.

“The works of their hands” (*ek tôn ergôn tôn cheirôn autôn*) is a neutral concept in itself, but here the phrase is defined by what follows. In the narrow sense of the context, it refers to the construction of idols (Psa 115:4; 135:15; Isa 2:8; Ezek 22:1-4; Hos 13:2), a futile task mocked in detail by Isaiah (44:9-20). But in the broader sense, “the works of their hands” is the equivalent of sin; the attempt to perform for oneself what only God can or should do. The “rest” of humanity did not repent of their sins. They did not repent of demon-worship, idolatry, murder, magical arts, fornication or theft. The “works of their hands” here is clearly the equivalent of sin, defined further, from the examples in this passage, as breaking the commandments of God. So the repentance anticipated as a result of this plague is a turning away from sin and a turning toward God. But this repentance does not occur as a result of the plagues in the sixth trumpet.

“In order that they might not worship demons or idols of gold, silver, brass, stone and wood. . . .” The “not repenting” (Greek: *oude metenoêsan*) had a purpose; “in order that they might not worship demons or idols” (Greek: *hina mê proskunêsousin ta daimonia kai ta eidôla*). This somewhat awkward expression means that they intended to continue in their worship of counterfeit gods. In context this is a brazen determination to continue in rebellion against God. The word for “demons” (Greek: *daimonia*) is used in the LXX (Greek Old Testament) for the gods of paganism as well the demonic spirits or fallen angels. If it is the former here, the two expressions (“demons and idols”) mean essentially the same thing. If the latter, the worship of idols serves the interests of God’s primeval enemy, the Devil or Satan, a point made previously by the apostle Paul (1 Cor 10:20).

“Such idols are not able to see, hear, or walk.” Idols that cannot see, hear or walk seems to directly allude to Daniel 5:23: “You have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or know. . . .” A religion whose god does not see, hear or know is a futile religion. A common polemic against idol-worship, therefore, was to point out the absurdity of worshiping an object that the worshiper has shaped and created (Isa 44:9-20).

In Romans 1:18-32 Paul argues that it is rebellion against God that leads to idolatry and it is idolatry that leads to all kinds of sins and perversions. In the sixth trumpet that rebellion has hardened into settled commitment to that rebellion. The sixth trumpet portrays a hardening of humanity in rebellion that ultimately leads to the close of human probation (see

Rev 10:7) and exclusion from the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:8; 22:15). That close of probation is not portrayed as an arbitrary decree on the part of God, but as the natural progression of human rebellion. In contrast, the 144,000 (Rev 7:1-8) represent those whose sealing is the culmination of a growing commitment to the gospel and the God of Jesus Christ.

Rev 9:21—

“And the rest of the human race did not repent of their murders, their magic arts, their acts of fornication, or their thefts.” This verse begins with a repeat of verse 20, but now adds sins related to the second table of the Ten Commandments (the sixth, seventh and eighth commandments) with the addition of “magic arts” (Greek: *pharmakôn*) or sorcery (ESV, KJV, NASB, RSV, NRSV). This would appear to be a listing of the chief sins of paganism. The sorcery reference is parallel to the worshiping of demons in the previous verse. Sorcery (LXX: *pharmakeiais*) was the means by which the magicians of Egypt counterfeited the early plagues of the Exodus. It is also one of the sins for which Babylon came under judgment in the Septuagint (Isa 47:9, 12). Idolatry and sorcery (Greek: *pharmakeia*) are also associated together in Galatians 5:20, Revelation 21:8 and 22:15.

“And the rest of the human race did not repent of their murders, their magic arts, their acts of fornication, or their thefts.” The murders referred to here may have a general meaning, but in Revelation it is likely that it is referring to the martyrdom of the saints. The judgments of the trumpets are, after all, a response to the prayers of the souls under the altar for vengeance (see comments on Rev 8:2 [The Role of the Trumpets in Revelation]).

The fundamental meaning of the word translated “sorcery” (Greek: *pharmakôn*) is a drug, this is where the English word “pharmacy” comes from. But ancient drugs were closely related to poisons, which harm people like enchantment and spells do. Hence the word *pharmakon* developed the extended meaning of sorcery or magic arts.

Rev 9:13-21 (Conclusion)—

The sixth trumpet portrays the gathering for the battle of Armageddon, as seen in the multiple verbal parallels to the sixth bowl-plague (Rev 16:13-16). Satan gathers his forces for the final confrontation with the forces of the Lamb (Rev 17:14). Lurking behind the 200,000,000 man army is Babylon, with its religious power having co-opted the secular/demonic forces that dominated the world in the era of the fifth trumpet. In the final crisis of earth’s history, the atheists are “born again” and the secularists have a change of heart. The sixth trumpet suggests a world-wide revival of religion tying together people of every imaginable faith as we approach the End (see comments on Rev 16:13-16 and 17:1-6). The final Babylon will be a blend of truth and error, oppression, skepticism, ecumenism, and secularism in a great world-wide religious/secular unity. We live in a secular-dominated world today, but we are already seeing a movement back toward a more spiritual world, but not necessarily grounded in the Bible or the gospel. The sixth trumpet suggests that there will be an intensification of demonic activity toward the End, which will be perceived by much of the world as a spiritual revival. Those who do not have the seal of God are unprotected against

deceptive doctrines and their consequences as Satan demonstrates what the universe would be like if he were in charge.

What will God's faithful, gospel-oriented people be doing at that time? Here is where the parallel between the 200,000,000 and the 144,000 is significant. The sixth trumpet is not only the gathering of the opposition for Armageddon, it is the counterpart of the sealing work in Revelation 7:1-8. In both cases the binding and the loosing are related to four angels. In both sections the people are being numbered. And these are the only two places in Revelation where you have the phrase "I heard the number" (*êkousa ton arithmon*). If human probation remains open in the sixth trumpet and then closes with the sounding of the seventh (Rev 10:7), the sixth trumpet is the exact historical counterpart of Revelation 7:1-8. They are both in the context of the last proclamation of the gospel. There is further elaboration on that in 11:11-13 and 14:6-12. If the sixth trumpet is a view of the approaching end-time failure of rebellious humanity to repent, Revelation 10 and 11 portray the world-wide gathering of the righteous at the same general time. To those chapters we will now turn.

Rev 9:13-21 (Relation to the Seventh Trumpet)—

The sixth and seventh trumpets are separated by an interlude, which focuses on the fate of God's people during the sixth trumpet. The time location is signaled by Revelation 10:5-7. That text alludes to Daniel 8-12 in general and 12:7 in particular. The sixth trumpet arrives when the time prophecies of Daniel have run their course ("time no more" —Rev 10:6). Both the sixth trumpet and chapters 10 and 11 focus on a time when the book of Daniel is being studied and "unsealed" (Dan 12:4). Seventh-day Adventists understand the time prophecies of Daniel to have run out in the year 1844 (based on calculations related to Daniel 8:13-14 and 9:24-27). The early Adventists figured that the coming of Jesus was near because the time prophecies had run out. But, the end did not come. The disappointment they experienced in 1844, however, was already reflected in Revelation 10:8-10. Prophetic time would be no more (Rev 10:6), "but" the close of gospel proclamation would wait until the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Rev 10:7). See comments on Rev 10:7 for more detail. The seventh trumpet ushers in the final moments of earth's history, after the close of gospel proclamation and human probation.

As I understand it, Revelation 10:7 foreshadows a great final proclamation of the gospel just before the blowing of the seventh trumpet. God's people are proclaiming the gospel one great and final time just at the close of the sixth trumpet as the wicked are preparing for Armageddon. The final proclamation corresponds to the first angel flying in heaven proclaiming the everlasting gospel (Revelation 14:6-7). It will be made in the light of the time prophecies in the book of Daniel. The proclamation draws to a close just before the seventh angel sounds his trumpet. That means that the blowing of the seventh trumpet signals the close of human probation and the irreversible onset of the final events of earth's history.

The gospel has been presented through "His servants the prophets" (Rev 10:7-- see also Amos 3:7-8, etc.) for two thousand years, but in the last days of earth's history, the New Testament gospel is combined with the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. Bible prophecy

gives special urgency and relevance to the final gospel call. That's why it matters to study Revelation and that should be why you are reading these words.

The seventh trumpet (Rev 11:15-18) is the consummation of all things. It is the coming of the kingdom for which God's people have prayed for centuries: "Thy kingdom come" (Matt 6:10). There is a period of time between the close of probation and the end, between the final proclamation of the gospel and the second coming of Jesus--a horrific period of trouble. The nations are angry, God's wrath and His judgment are seen, and those who have been destroying the earth are destroyed themselves (Rev 11:18). See comments on Rev 11:15-18. The seventh trumpet gives a summary of the final victory of God, including everything yet to come in the book of Revelation (chapters 12-22). We will deal with that in detail when we come to the concluding verses of chapter 11.

Rev 8:2 – 9:21 (Conclusion)—

Some of the Bible's most difficult and spiritually dry material is found in Revelation 6-9. It focuses on the negatives more than on the positives. It focuses on the great trends and movements of nations rather than the individual spiritual struggle like Revelation 2-3 did. If you have stayed with me through the seven trumpets, you will not want to miss the material that follows.

Where do I think our place in history is located within the seven trumpets? In my Seventh-day Adventist tradition there is a tendency to want to locate everything exactly, and there are times when prophecy allows for this, such as the time prophecies of Daniel. But more often prophecy is a general picture with a lot of flexibility that allows God to interact with real situations and real people whose choices change the course of history. That is how I see the trumpets.

There are several markers in the biblical text that give us clues regarding our location in prophecy. First, Revelation 10:7 indicates that the sixth trumpet includes the final proclamation of the gospel leading up to the close of human probation. So it leans very much toward the end, but the gospel is still being proclaimed (Rev 9:13; 10:7; 11:11-12). This is compatible with where we are today. Second, the fifth and sixth trumpets may come in chronological order, but the fifth is incorporated into the sixth by the use of the tail (Rev 9:10, 19). So the two run concurrently toward the End. A neat distinction between the two (as might be suspected from what is said about the three woes—Rev 8:13; 9:12; 11:14), is not indicated. While the fifth trumpet comes first, in the end the two plagues are joined together, anticipating the woman riding the beast in Revelation 17. So elements of the fifth trumpet linger on after the sixth begins.

Third, the overwhelming focus in the fifth trumpet is a time in history when secular, non-religious forces dominate, which well describes the Twentieth Century, at least in the western countries. From the time of the Renaissance and Enlightenment through recently; scientific, secular thinking has increasingly affected the world, even non-western parts of the world. Fourth, but that dominance is fading as we experience a world-wide resurgence of religion today, not necessarily committed Christianity, but spirituality, God-talk, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism are all on the rise in today's world. This is the picture I see in the sixth

trumpet. End-time Babylon does not dominate today's world, but there are signs of a rise of religious expression and a strong pushback against Western materialism and secularism. So I would see elements of both the fifth and the sixth trumpets in today's world.

Fifth, the beginning point of the sixth trumpet is likely the close of Daniel's time prophecies signaled in Revelation 10:6-7 and referenced by the point in time of 9:15 (see comments on the time language of Rev 9:15). So the sixth trumpet runs from the close of Daniel's time prophecies (1844 in Adventist understanding) to the close of human probation. The parallel between the 200,000,000 (9:16) and the 144,000 (7:1-4) fits with this. And this picture will become even clearer when we get to chapters 16 and 17 of Revelation, where the woman and the beast seem to represent something similar to the fifth and sixth trumpets in the very last days of earth's history. So I would conclude that the sixth trumpet, in particular, focuses on Daniel's Time of the End, the period of history from the close of Daniel's time prophecies to the end of the final proclamation of the gospel (Matt 24:14; Rev 10:7; 14:6-12). That means that in a general sense we live in the final era of earth's history, but the duration of that final era is not given in prophecy.

Rev 8:2 – 9:21 (Spiritual Lessons)—

Can one find useful spiritual lessons in the violence and destruction that fills the first six trumpets of Revelation? If we have rightly understood the symbolism of the first, third and sixth trumpets, we have learned that just because something is religious doesn't mean it's right, beneficial, or honors God. A symbolic reading of Revelation sees judgment on the religious leadership that crucified Christ (Rev 8:7), the rise of opposition to God and His faithful people from within the church (Rev 8:10-11), and a great final outburst of counterfeit religion in the final days of earth's history. Just because a religion claims to be following God, or just because it once followed God does not mean that in its current form, it will be right, beneficial, or an honor to God. "Prove all things, hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess 5:21, KJV).

We have just seen that the gospel won't be available forever. The day is coming when probation will close for the entire earth, not as the result of some arbitrary decree on the part of God, but because the whole earth has polarized into two opposing camps. One side is more and more settled into the truth about God (sealing) and the other side is more and more settled into believing Satan's lies (the mark). Nevertheless, those who pass through that time may not know exactly when probation closes. It is more a matter of the inner life and commitments than something that is obvious to human observation. Given that reality, the psalm that says, "Today if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart" (Psa 95:7-8), is particularly relevant. It is unwise to feel conviction and do nothing about it.

The time of reward is coming that is both positive and negative. Knowing this can make all the difference. I remember a scholar friend speaking at a conference where most of the listeners had studied their Bibles professionally but had lost their faith in the Bible as the answer to the great problems of life. They accused him of talking like a "neo-fundamentalist." My scholar friend protested that no matter how you paint it, we live in an unjust world. If this life is all there is, there is no justice in the universe. He said, "If there is no such thing as resurrection or judgment, there is no justice in this world." We are to live life in light of the

judgment. Someday, God will set everything right. Those who have suffered and remained faithful will be compensated. Those who have oppressed others will be allowed to discover what it feels like to be on the receiving end. God will set everything right in the end.

The seven trumpets portray a God making down payments on His determination to bring justice to the universe. That justice may not always be visible to human eyes. His counteracting of the oppressor may seem ineffective and powerless. But the seven trumpets assure us that God has already launched into that activity. He is setting everything right and He **will** set everything right.