

The Book Of Revelation

Study 46

Rev 9:13-21

13 Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God,

14 saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."

15 So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind.

16 Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.

17 And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone.

18 By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed--by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths.

19 For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm.

20 But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk.

21 And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

We are now going to look at the sixth angel who had the trumpet and the events that take place when he sounds the trumpet message:

This sixth trumpet heralds another, more severe demonic attack on sinful mankind.

This attack unlike the one before it will bring death with it.

It unfolds in three stages:

- 1. The release of the demons**
- 2. The return of death**
- 3. The reaction of defiance**

Rev 9:13-14

13 Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God,

14 saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."

In his turn, at the appointed moment, **the sixth angel sounded** his mighty trumpet. Immediately, John **heard a voice**.

The Greek text literally reads "one voice", stressing that John heard a single, solitary voice. The voice is not identified, but it is possibly that of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was pictured earlier standing near the throne (5:6) when He took the seven-sealed scroll from the Father's hand (5:7) and broke its seals (6:1), thus unleashing the series of judgments of which the sixth trumpet is a part.

Or this could be the voice of the angel whom John had seen standing near the golden altar of incense (8:3).

While identifying the source of the voice is not possible, its location is:

It came **from the four horns** (*small protrusions on each corner*) **of the golden altar which is before God.**

John had already seen this altar, the heavenly counterpart to the Old Testament altar of incense, twice before in his visions.

In the tabernacle and temple, this altar was a place where incense was burnt, symbolizing the peoples' prayer for mercy rising to God.

But in John's vision the golden altar became an altar of imprecatory intercession, as the martyred saints pleaded there with God for merciless vengeance on their murderers

Rev 6:9-11

⁹ When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

¹⁰ And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

¹¹ Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

Then in 8:5 it became an altar of judgment, as an angel took his "*censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth.*"

His action set the stage for the trumpet judgments, which followed shortly.

The original altar of incense is described in detail:

Exodus 30:1-10

¹ "You shall make an altar to burn incense on; you shall make it of acacia wood.

² A cubit shall be its length and a cubit its width--it shall be square--and two cubits shall be its height. Its horns shall be of one piece with it.

³ And you shall overlay its top, its sides all around, and its horns with pure gold; and you shall make for it a molding of gold all around.

⁴ Two gold rings you shall make for it, under the molding on both its sides. You shall place them on its two sides, and they will be holders for the poles with which to bear it.

⁵ You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold.

⁶ And you shall put it before the veil that is before the ark of the Testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the Testimony, where I will meet with you.

⁷ Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it.

⁸ And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.

⁹ You shall not offer strange incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; nor shall you pour a drink offering on it.

¹⁰ And Aaron shall make atonement upon its horns once a year with the blood of the sin offering of

atonement; once a year he shall make atonement upon it throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD."

The altar of incense was located in front of the veil that separated the Holy of Holies, where God's presence dwelt, from the Holy Place.

No one but the High Priest was permitted to enter the Holy Place. And was commanded to burn incense on the incense altar morning and evening.

While sacrifices were not normally offered on the incense altar, the high priest was required to offer a sin offering on it once a year.

Illustrating the important biblical truth that atonement provides the basis for prayer, worship, and communion with God.

No one whose sins have not been atoned for has access to God.

Now shockingly from the altar associated with mercy came words of judgment.

God is a merciful, gracious, compassionate God, yet His "*Spirit shall not strive with man forever*"
Gen 6:3

When this trumpet judgment occurs, the time for mercy will have passed: the altar of mercy will become an altar of judgment.

Sinful men will have finally and completely rejected God's gracious offer of salvation.

Heb 10:28-31

28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people."

31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The voice coming from the surface of the altar between the four protruding corners explicitly commanded **the sixth angel who had the trumpet, release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.**

Now that fact that the **four angels are bound** indicates that they are demons, since holy angels are nowhere in Scripture said to be bound.

Holy angels always perfectly carry out God's will, there is no need for Him to restrain them from opposing His will.

God's control over demonic forces is complete, they are bound or loosed at His command.

The perfect tense of the participle translated **bound** implies that these four angels were bound in the past with continuing results; they were in a state or condition of bondage until God's determined time came for them to be released to execute their function as instruments of divine judgment.

The site of the four angels' imprisonment is familiar, **the great river Euphrates**.

Rising from sources near Mount Ararat in Turkey, the Euphrates flows more than seventeen hundred miles before emptying into the Persian Gulf.

It is the longest and most important river in the Middle East, and figures prominently in the Old Testament.

It was one of the four rivers into which the river that flowed out of the Garden of Eden divided (Gen 2:14)

It was near the Euphrates that sin began, the first lie was told, the first murder was committed, and the tower of Babel (*the origin of an entire complex of false religions that spread across the world*) was built.

The Euphrates was the eastern boundary of the Promised Land (*Gen 15:18; Exod. 23:31; Deut 11:24*), and Israel's influence extended to the Euphrates during the reigns of David and Solomon.

The region near the Euphrates was the central location of three world powers that oppressed Israel: **Assyria, Babylon, and Medo-Persia**.

It was on the banks of the Euphrates that Israel endured seventy long, bitter, wearisome years of captivity (*Psa 137:1-4*)

It is the river over which the enemies of God will cross to engage in the battle of Armageddon

Rev. 16:12-16

12 Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared.

13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.

14 For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

15 "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."

16 And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

Now the use of the definite article suggests that these **four angels** form a specific group.

Their precise identity is not revealed, but they may be the demons that controlled the four major world empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.

Daniel 10:13

We have some insight in Daniel chapter 10

12 Then he said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words.

13 But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia.

In verse 20

20 Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? And now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I have gone forth, indeed the prince of Greece will come.

Whoever they are these four powerful fallen angels control a huge demonic army set to wage war against fallen mankind when God releases them to do so

Satanic forces, imagining they are doing the work of their leader the devil and aggressively thwarting the purposes of God, are actually God's servants doing exactly what He wants done.

THE RETURN OF DEATH

Rev 9:15-19

15 So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind.

16 Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.

17 And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone.

18 By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed--by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths.

19 For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm.

Death which had taken a holiday under the fifth trumpet now returns with a vengeance.

The four angels who had been prepared by God for this hour and day and month and year were released.

In the precise moment in the predetermined year, the month, and the very day and exact hour called for by God's sovereign plan.

They are released so He can use them in His ongoing judgment of the world.

Now the shocking and terrifying purpose for the release of these demon leaders and their hordes was **so that they would kill a third of mankind.** (those that dwell on the earth).

The judgment of the fourth seal killed one quarter of the earth's population (6:8); this additional **third** brings the death toll from these two judgments alone to more than half the earth's pre-tribulation population.

And that staggering total does not include those who perished in the other seal and trumpet judgments.

The repeated emphasis throughout the trumpet judgments on one-third demonstrates convincingly that these are controlled, precise divine judgments and not mere natural disasters.

The terrible slaughter will completely disrupt human society. The problem of disposing of the dead will be inconceivable. Mass graves will permeate the world for those that are buried and many others will just be burned.

Now how these demons inflict death is specifically revealed in v-18.

18 By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed--by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths.

To slaughter well over a billion people will require an unimaginably powerful force.

John reports that **the number of the armies of the horsemen was an astonishing two hundred million.**

He says *“I heard the number of them”*.

In addition to the demons who have roamed the earth throughout history, the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places, recently cast to earth and the innumerable bound demons released from the abyss at the sounding of the firth trumpet comes a new demon army two hundred million strong.

The use of the plural, **armies** may imply that the attacking force will be divided into four armies, each commanded by one of the formerly bound demons.

The riders of the horses are described first.

The riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone.

The color of fire is red

The color of hyacinth is dark blue, or black like smoke

The color of brimstone is a sulfurous yellow, describing the rock when ignited produces a burning flame and suffocating gas.

Those are the very colors and features of Hell (*14:10; 19:20; 20:10; 21:8*)

They paint a terrifying picture of God’s wrath poured out on the sinful world by these demons.

Horses are frequently associated with warfare in Scripture, but it is clear that these are not actual horses.

Using the descriptive language of his vision, John noted that **the heads of the horses** were **like the heads of lions.**

Like **lions** these demon forces fiercely, relentlessly, determinedly stalk and slaughter their victims.

John noted three ways that the demon horses killed their victims, all of which picture the violent, devastating fury of hell.

They are incinerated with fire. And asphyxiated them with smoke and brimstone.

John saw that the devastating result of this deadly demonic assault was to be a **third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths.**

The word plagues is used throughout the scripture and especially through the rest of Revelation and it is a term for the destructive final judgments.

As if the description already given was not frightening enough. John sees more about the deadly power of the demons.

He is made aware that not only is the **power of the horses in their mouths**, but also **in their tails.**

Having likened the horses heads to savage lions, John notes that their tails are like deadly, venomous serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm.

The horses tails were not actual serpents, because the horses were not actual horses. The horse was anointed with war force, the lion with vicious, deadly power, the serpent with deadly venom. These images describe the supernatural deadliness of this demon force in terms that are commonly understood in the natural realm.

Unlike the scorpion stings inflicted during the previous demonic assault (9:5), the snakebites inflicted by this host will be fatal.

But for all of this the people left alive will be filled with defiance.