

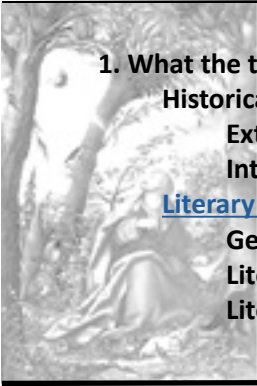


THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Bible Study 25

Text: Rev. 9:12-21

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1 Αποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀγίου καὶ τοῦ ἀληθοῦς Ἰησοῦ ἡν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἃ οὐκ ἀρτῶνται διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τοῦ λέγοντος Ἰωάννην, 2 ἵνα ἀρτῶρῃσεν τὸν λόγον τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς τοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀγίου καὶ τοῦ ἀληθοῦς Ἰησοῦ ὅσα εἶδεν. 3 Μακάρι οἱ ἀκούοντες καὶ οἱ ἀκούσαντες οὗς ἡ γέγραμμένα

QUICK LINKS

1. What the text meant.
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2. What the text means.

Trumpet Six

Greek NT

12 Ἡ οὐαὶ ἡ μία ἀπῆλθεν· ἰδοὺ ἔρχεται ἔτι δύο οὐαὶ μετὰ ταῦτα.

13 Καὶ ὁ ἕκτος ἄγγελος ἐσάλπισεν· καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν μίαν ἐκ τῶν [τεσσάρων] κεράτων τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου τοῦ χρυσοῦ τοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ, 14 λέγοντα τῷ ἕκτῳ ἀγγέλῳ, ὁ ἔχων τὴν σάλπιγγα· λύσον τοὺς τέσσαρας ἀγγέλους τοὺς δεδεμένους ἐπὶ τῷ ποταμῷ τῷ μεγάλῳ Εὐφράτῃ. 15 καὶ ἐλύθησαν οἱ τέσσαρες ἄγγελοι οἱ ἠτοιμασμένοι εἰς τὴν ὥραν καὶ ἡμέραν καὶ μῆνα καὶ ἔνιαυτόν, ἵνα ἀποκτείνωσιν τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀνθρώπων. 16 καὶ ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν στρατευμάτων τοῦ ἵππικοῦ δισμυριάδες μυριάδων, ἤκουσα τὸν ἀριθμὸν αὐτῶν. 17 Καὶ οὕτως εἶδον τοὺς ἵππους ἐν τῇ ὄρασει καὶ τοὺς καθημένους ἐπ’ αὐτῶν, ἔχοντας θώρακας πυρίνους καὶ ὑακινθίνους καὶ θειώδεις, καὶ αἱ κεφαλαὶ τῶν ἵππων ὡς κεφαλαὶ λεόντων, καὶ ἐκ τῶν στομάτων αὐτῶν ἐκπορεύεται πῦρ καὶ καπνὸς καὶ θεῖον. 18 ἀπὸ τῶν τριῶν πληγῶν τούτων ἀπεκτάνθησαν τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ τοῦ καπνοῦ καὶ τοῦ θείου τοῦ ἐκπορευομένου ἐκ τῶν

La Biblia de las Américas

12 El primer ¡ay! ha pasado; he aquí, aún vienen dos ayes después de estas cosas.

13 El sexto ángel tocó la trompeta, y oí una voz que salía de los cuatro cuernos del altar de oro que está delante de Dios, 14 y decía al sexto ángel que tenía la trompeta: Suelta a los cuatro ángeles que están atados junto al gran río Eufrates. 15 Y fueron desatados los cuatro ángeles que habían sido preparados para la hora, el día, el mes y el año, para matar a la tercera parte de la humanidad. 16 Y el número de los ejércitos de los jinetes era de doscientos millones; yo escuché su número. 17 Y así es como vi en la visión los caballos y a los que los montaban: los jinetes tenían corazas color de fuego, de jacinto y de azufre; las cabezas de los caballos eran como cabezas de leones, y de sus bocas salía fuego, humo y azufre. 18 La tercera parte de la humanidad fue muerta por estas tres plagas: por el fuego, el humo y el azufre que salían de sus bocas. 19 Porque el poder de los caballos está en su boca y en sus colas; pues sus colas son semejantes a serpientes, tienen cabezas y con ellas ha-

NRSV

12 The first woe has passed. There are still two woes to come.

13 Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar 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 were released, who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, to kill a third of humankind. 16 The number of the troops of cavalry was two hundred million; I heard their number. 17 And this was how I saw the horses in my vision: the riders wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur; the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. 18 By these three plagues a third of humankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. 19 For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they inflict harm.

20 The rest of humankind, who were not killed by these

NLT

12 The first terror is past, but look, two more terrors are coming!

13 Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice speaking from the four horns of the gold altar that stands in the presence of God. 14 And the voice spoke to the sixth angel who held the trumpet: "Release the four angels who are bound at the great Euphrates River." 15 And the four angels who had been prepared for this hour and day and month and year were turned loose to kill one-third of all the people on earth. 16 They led an army of 200 million mounted troops -- I heard an announcement of how many there were. 17 And in my vision, I saw the horses and the riders sitting on them. The riders wore armor that was fiery red and sky blue and yellow. The horses' heads were like the heads of lions, and fire and smoke and burning sulfur billowed from their mouths. 18 One-third of all the people on earth were killed by these three plagues -- by the fire and the smoke and burning sulfur that came from the mouths of the horses. 19 Their power was in

στομάτων αὐτῶν. 19 ἢ γὰρ ἐξουσία τῶν ἵππων ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν καὶ ἐν ταῖς οὐραῖς αὐτῶν, αἱ γὰρ οὐραὶ αὐτῶν ὅμοιαι ὄφεσιν, ἔχουσαι κεφαλὰς καὶ ἐν αὐταῖς ἀδικοῦσιν.

20 Καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, οἳ οὐκ ἀπεκτάνθησαν ἐν ταῖς πληγαῖς ταύταις, οὐδὲ μετενόησαν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν, ἵνα μὴ προσκυνήσουσιν τὰ δαιμόνια καὶ τὰ εἰδῶλα τὰ χρυσεῖα καὶ τὰ ἀργυρεῖα καὶ τὰ χαλκεῖα καὶ τὰ λίθινα καὶ τὰ ξύλινα, ἃ οὔτε βλέπειν δύνανται οὔτε ἀκούειν οὔτε περιπατεῖν, 21 καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν ἐκ τῶν φόνων αὐτῶν οὔτε ἐκ τῶν φαρμάκων αὐτῶν οὔτε ἐκ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῶν οὔτε ἐκ τῶν κλεμμάτων αὐτῶν.

cen daño.

20 Y el resto de la humanidad, los que no fueron muertos por estas plagas, no se arrepintieron de las obras de sus manos ni dejaron de adorar a los demonios y a los ídolos de oro, de plata, de bronce, de piedra y de madera, que no pueden ver ni oír ni andar; 21 y no se arrepintieron de sus homicidios ni de sus hechicerías ni de su inmoralidad ni de sus robos.

plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands or give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk. 21 And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their fornication or their thefts.

their mouths, but also in their tails. For their tails had heads like snakes, with the power to injure people.

20 But the people who did not die in these plagues still refused to turn from their evil deeds. They continued to worship demons and idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood -- idols that neither see nor hear nor walk! 21 And they did not repent of their murders or their witchcraft or their immorality or their thefts.

INTRODUCTION

With the fifth trumpet came hideous looking locusts who inflicted injury on the non-believing people on earth for five months. Now with the sixth trumpet comes the release of an army of two hundred million apocalyptic soldiers mounted on fire breathing horses which slaughter a third of mankind living on the earth. God's wrath upon evil people is indeed becoming a hugely serious issue! And yet those not killed by these plagues do not repent and turn to God in the face of all the suffering and death around them. Evil indeed has a huge grip on the hearts of people.

Interestingly, the mechanism for activating actions on the earth shifts somewhat here. A voice (of God) speaks from inside the circle of the four horns of the golden incense altar before the throne of God to the angel who blew the sixth trumpet. He is told to release four angels who are bound at the large Euphrates River on earth. When they are allowed to take action out comes an army of two hundred million soldiers riding horses who breath out fire, smoke, and sulfur from their mouths rather than the soldiers doing anything. The consequence is the death of one third of mankind on earth.

The scenarios painted by John become more fascinating and stranger with each new one put on the table. By this point the initial readers of this text at the end of the first Christian century must have been sensing something of the awesomeness of God's power and might. Hopefully you are sensing this as well. When one steps out of the puny world that we live in and into the full dimensions of God's world, the first impact will

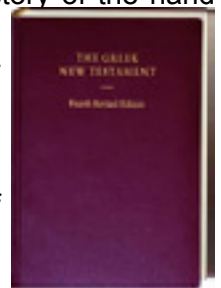
be the sense of complete "overwhelmedness" at how unbelievably powerful our God is. To those first readers at Ephesus the massive temple of Aphrodite must have seemed so tiny and unimpressive in comparison to their God's power and might. To those in Pergamum who lived "where Satan's throne is" in the midst of so many massive and impressive pagan temples, the power coming out of the throne of God was so much greater than all these pagan gods and goddesses as to not be comparable. To so many believers in the modern world who live surrounding by countless temples to pagan idols and supposed deities, this expression of God's power in Revelation makes these phony gods and goddesses seem nothing in comparison.

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

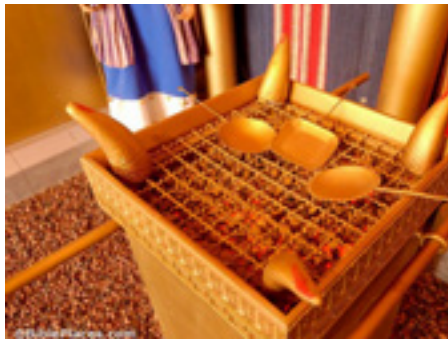
As always, the relevant background issues need to be carefully analyzed before analyzing the content of the text itself.

Historical Aspects:

External History. In the history of the hand copying of this passage of scripture, the editors of *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev. ed.) considered only one of the variations of wording in the passage to be sufficiently important to impact the translation of the passage. It is found in verse thirteen with the phrase τῶν [τεσσάρων]



κεράτων, the (four) horns.¹ The issue centers over the inclusion or exclusion of the number four. Its translation impact is not significant since a rectangular top to the altar would



have had four corners with a horn at each corner, and whether or not this is explicitly stated or implied does not alter the meaning of the text.² The evidence both externally and internally is rather evenly balanced. Thus τεσσάρων was included but placed in brackets to indicate uncertainty about its inclusion.

In the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (N-A 27th rev ed.) some 32 places with word variations are listed.³



¹{C} ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων κέρατων 209 1006 1841 1854 2329 2351 Byz [P 046] vgcl syrph Andrew; Cyprian Tyconius Primasius Beatus // ἐκ τῶν κέρατων P⁴⁷ κ¹ A 0207 1611 2053 2344 it^{ar}. g^{ig} v^g w^w. st syr^h cop^{sams}. (sams), bo eth // omit μίαν ... κέρατων κ*

[Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

^{2c}The variant reading is not very significant for translation since the altar will be understood to have four (horn-shaped) corners whether the word ‘four’ is original or not. The external evidence is almost evenly divided between the presence and the absence of τεσσάρων. Among internal considerations, on the one hand, it is possible that the word was added in order to make a contrast with φωνήν μίαν (one voice) and a parallelism with τοὺς τέσσαρας ἀγγέλους (the four angels) of v. 14. On the other hand, it is possible that the word was accidentally omitted in copying when the eye of the copyist passed from the article τῶν to the last letters of τεσσάρων. In order to indicate uncertainty regarding the original reading, τεσσάρων has been put in brackets. Several modern translations follow the shorter reading. REB (also NIV and TOB) says ‘I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar.’ It is not clear whether the FC translation ‘coming from the corners of the golden altar’ is based on the reading in the text or the variant reading.” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 534.]

³Offenbarung 9,12-13

* 2 4 κ* (the sequencing of Η οὐαί ἢ μία varies)

| -2 4 P⁴⁷ κ¹ 2053^{txt} pc

* -χονται 046* M^A; Tyc (the 3rd sing. ἔρχεται ἔτι is replaced by the 3 pl with or without ἔτι)

| -χονται ἐτι κ¹ 046c. 0207. 2053. (2329). 2344 pc lat sa

*¹. M. τ. και (° 046). 1006. 1854. 2329. 2351 M^K (the punctuation and wording of μετὰ ταῦτα. Καὶ varies)

| . M. δε τ. κ. 0207

| μ. τ. P⁴⁷ κ 2344 pc sy^{ph} sa bo^{mss}

| και 2053txt; Prim

| txt A 1611. 1841 M^A lat sy^h; Cyp

*² 1-3 5 P⁴⁷ (κ¹) A 0207. 1611. 2053. 2344 pc lat sy^h co (the inclusion of τεσσάρων in μίαν ἐκ τῶν [τεσσάρων] κέρατων varies)

| - κ*

| txt m vgcl syph

Offenbarung 9,14

* -ουσαν P⁴⁷ 0207. 1611. 2053 M^A (alternative spellings of λέγοντα)

| -ουσης κ¹

| -οντος 1006. 1841. 1854. 2329. 2351 M^K

| txt κ* A 2344 pc gig; Cyp Tyc Prim Bea

* A 0207; Vic (ἔκτω is omitted)

*¹ P⁴⁷ (τέσσαρας is omitted)

Offenbarung 9,15

* κ. εις την ημ. 2351 M^K (καὶ ἡμέραν is replaced)

| - κ pc

* μη κ (μῆ is inserted after ἴνα)

Offenbarung 9,16

* ιππου M^K (ἵππικουδ is replaced)

* μυριαδες μ. 1006. 1611. 1841. (1854). 2053. 2329 M^K sa^{mss};

Tyc (μυριάδων is replaced)

| δυο μ. μ. P⁴⁷ bo

| δυο -δων -δας(!) κ

| txt A 2344. 2351 M^A sa^{mss}; Cyp Bea

Offenbarung 9,17

* 2329 pc sy^h; Prim (οὕτως is omitted)

* επανω P⁴⁷ κ (ἐπ’ is replaced)

Offenbarung 9,18

* 1 al (πληγῶν is omitted)

*¹ P⁴⁷ (τούτων is omitted)

* απο M^K (ἐκ is replaced)

* bis εκ P⁴⁷ (C) 1006. 1841. (2053, 2329) M^A (ἐκ is inserted και twice)

*² P⁴⁷ (αὐτῶν is omitted)

Offenbarung 9,19

* ην γαρ η P⁴⁷ (ἦ γὰρ is replaced)

* M^A (καὶ ἐν ταῖς οὐραῖς αὐτῶν is omitted)

* ομοιοι 2053 pc (alternative spelling for ὅμοιοι)

| - C*

* εχουσαις κ(*) P 2053 al (alternative spelling for ἔχουσαι)

Offenbarung 9,20

* αυτων P⁴⁷ κ (αὐτῶν is inserted after πληγαῖς)

* ου C 1006. 1841. 1854. 2351 M^K (οὐδὲ is replaced)

| ουτε A 1611 M^A

| και ου 2329 pc

| txt P⁴⁷ κ 046. 2053txt. 2344 al

* -σωσιν P115c M (alternative spelling for προσκυνήσουσιν)

| txt P⁴⁷.115* vid κ A C pc

* P⁴⁷ sa^{mss} (καὶ τὰ εἰδωλα is omitted)

*¹ M^K vg^{mss}; Tyc (καὶ τὰ χαλκᾶ is omitted)

* P⁴⁷.85vid 1854. 2329 pc (τὰ before ξύλινα is omitted)

*¹ δυναται P⁴⁷ 1611 M^K (alternative spelling for δύνανται)

Offenbarung 9,21

*† -κειων A 046. 2053. 2329. 2344. 2351 M^A (φαρμάκων is replaced)

| txt P⁴⁷ κ C 1006. 1611. 1841. 1854 M^K

* πονηριας κ* A pc (πορνείας is replaced)

* P⁴⁷ vg^{mss} sy^{ph} sa (οὔτε ἐκ τῶν κλεμμάτων αὐτῶν is omitted)

[Eberhard Nestle et al., Universität Münster. Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Page 530

Careful examination of each of these variations reveals dominantly efforts to update the style of the expression to a form of Greek more common at the time of the work of the copyist. The ideas in the text are not altered by any of the variations.

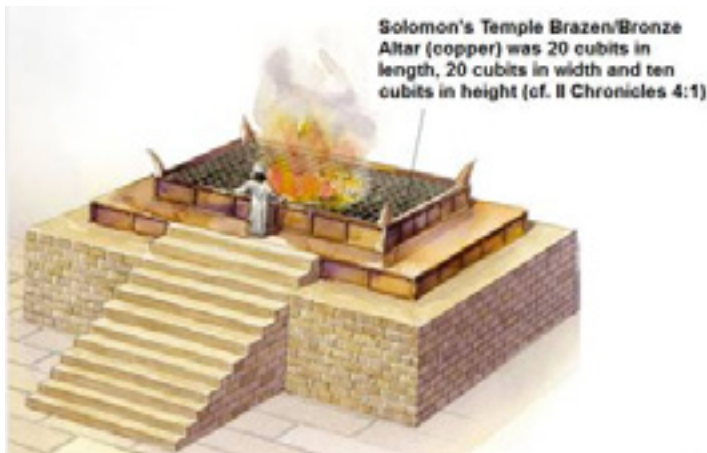
Thus we can exegete the adopted reading of the scripture text in full confidence of it being the original wording of what John composed.

Internal History. In the background history of some ideas inside the passage a few items merit consideration. In these references, John is clearly alluding to an earthly counter part as the point of association for his apocalyptic item. Understanding this earthly item enhances our ability to grasp the significance of the heavenly item.

a) **Golden altar of incense.** A reference to



an altar in heaven is found in Rev. 6:9; **8:3,5**; **9:13**; 11:1; 14:18; and 16:7. Of the eight instances to a θυσιαστήριον four of them reference the altar of incense (8:3 [2x],5; 9:13) and four of them the altar of burnt offerings. The altar of incense (#4 in diagram) was located in the inner court of the temple just in from of the



Solomon's Temple Brazen/Bronze Altar (copper) was 20 cubits in length, 20 cubits in width and ten cubits in height (cf. II Chronicles 4:1)

curtains across the entrance to the Holy of Holies.⁴ On

Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 649–650.]

⁴Remember that the instructions in the Torah for constructing first the Tabernacle and then later on the temple in Jerusalem were based on the assumption of these earthly worship centers were to be modeled after the eternal design of God's temple in heaven. Thus the depictions in Revelation of parts and items in the heavenly temple had an earthly counterpart in the Jerusalem temple.



the other hand, the altar of burnt offering (#7 in diagram) was located in the outer court of the priests. The golden altar of incense was associated with the prayers of the people of God, while the altar of burnt offering was the place where animals and various grains were burned as a sacrifice in dedication to God.

Specifications for the altar of incense in the tabernacle and then in the Jerusalem temple are provided in Exod. 30:1-10.⁵ Just as the heavenly altar was la-

And on occasion such as with the incense altar there were counter parts in many of the Greco-Roman religious temples in the region of Asia.

⁵Exodus 30:1-10. 30 1 Καὶ ποιήσεις θυσιαστήριον θυμιάματος ἐκ ξύλων ἀσήπτων· καὶ ποιήσεις αὐτὸ † 2 πήχεος τὸ μήκος καὶ πήχεος τὸ εὖρος — τετράγωνον ἔσται — καὶ δύο πήχεων τὸ ὕψος· ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἔσται τὰ κέρατα αὐτοῦ. † 3 καὶ καταχρυσώσεις αὐτὰ χρυσίῳ καθαρῷ, τὴν ἐσχάραν αὐτοῦ καὶ τοὺς τοίχους αὐτοῦ κύκλῳ καὶ τὰ κέρατα αὐτοῦ, καὶ ποιήσεις αὐτῷ στρεπτήν στεφάνην χρυσοῦν κύκλῳ. † 4 καὶ δύο δακτυλίους χρυσοῦς καθαρούς ποιήσεις ὑπὸ τὴν στρεπτήν στεφάνην αὐτοῦ, εἰς τὰ δύο κλίτη ποιήσεις ἐν τοῖς δυοῖς πλευροῖς· καὶ ἔσονται ψαλίδες ταῖς σκυτάλαις ὥστε αἶρειν αὐτὸ ἐν αὐταῖς. † 5 καὶ ποιήσεις σκυτάλας ἐκ ξύλων ἀσήπτων καὶ καταχρυσώσεις αὐτὰς χρυσίῳ. † 6 καὶ θήσεις αὐτὸ ἀπέναντι τοῦ καταπετάσματος τοῦ ὄντος ἐπὶ τῆς κιβωτοῦ τῶν μαρτυρίων, ἐν οἷς γνωσθήσομαι σοι ἐκεῖθεν. † 7 καὶ θυμιάσει ἐπ' αὐτοῦ Ἀαρὼν θυμίαμα σύνθετον λεπτὸν· τὸ πρῶν πρῶν, ὅταν ἐπισκευάζῃ τοὺς λύχνους, θυμιάσει ἐπ' αὐτοῦ. † 8 καὶ ὅταν ἐξάπτη Ἀαρὼν τοὺς λύχνους ὄψέ, θυμιάσει ἐπ' αὐτοῦ· θυμίαμα ἐνδεδλεχισμοῦ διὰ παντὸς ἔναντι κυρίου εἰς γενεὰς αὐτῶν. † 9 καὶ οὐκ ἀνοίσεις ἐπ' αὐτοῦ θυμίαμα ἕτερον, κάρπωμα, θυσίαν· καὶ σπονδὴν οὐ σπείσεις ἐπ' αὐτοῦ. † 10 καὶ ἐξιλιάσεται ἐπ' αὐτὸ Ἀαρὼν ἐπὶ τῶν κεράτων αὐτοῦ ἅπαξ τοῦ ἔνιαυτοῦ· ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ καθαρισμοῦ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν τοῦ ἐξιλιασμοῦ ἅπαξ τοῦ ἔνιαυτοῦ καθαριεῖ αὐτὸ εἰς τὰς γενεὰς αὐτῶν· ἅγιον τῶν ἁγίων ἐστὶν κυρίῳ. †

30 You shall make an altar on which to offer incense; you shall make it of acacia wood. 2 It shall be one cubit long, and one cubit wide; it shall be square, and shall be two cubits high; its horns shall

beled τὸ θυσιαστήριον τὸ χρυσοῦν, the golden altar, (Rev. 8:3), so also the incense altar in the Jerusalem temple was overlaid with pure gold (Exod. 30:3). The altar was to be fitted with four ‘horns,’ one on each corner of the top of the altar.⁶ These were symbolic of the divine presence and power of God, but so far as can be determined they had no functional use. The incense that was burned in the pan on the top of altar had to be made of a specific combination of woods and spices, which are indicated in Exod. 30:34-38.⁷ Thus the men-

be of one piece with it. 3 You shall overlay it with pure gold, its top, and its sides all around and its horns; and you shall make for it a molding of gold all around. 4 And you shall make two golden rings for it; under its molding on two opposite sides of it you shall make them, and they shall hold the poles with which to carry it. 5 You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. 6 You shall place it in front of the curtain that is above the ark of the covenant, a in front of the mercy seat b that is over the covenant, c where I will meet with you. 7 Aaron shall offer fragrant incense on it; every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall offer it, 8 and when Aaron sets up the lamps in the evening, he shall offer it, a regular incense offering before the Lord throughout your generations. 9 You shall not offer unholy incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; and you shall not pour a drink offering on it. 10 Once a year Aaron shall perform the rite of atonement on its horns. Throughout your generations he shall perform the atonement for it once a year with the blood of the atoning sin offering. It is most holy to the Lord.

⁶“At Tell Arad and Tell Beer-sheba, large altars of burnt offerings from the First Temple period have been uncovered. Much smaller horned altars were also found in Iron Age Palestine, several in private houses, which have been identified as altars of incense.

“In OT literature, ‘horns’ symbolize strength and denote political power, imagery drawn from the force exerted by the bull’s forward thrust (Deut 33:17). In prophetic symbolism, ‘horns’ signify kings or military powers (Dan 7:8; 8:21). The reference in 1 Kgs 1:50; 2:28 attests that fugitives seeking asylum clung to ‘the horns of the altar.’ These were horn-shaped protuberances on the four corners of the altars, the original purpose of which is now lost to us.

“The common assumption that the design was handed down to the altar of incense, where the horns served as a means of supporting the incense bowl, remains conjecture. There are no pictorial representations of horned altars supporting a bowl; no bowls have been uncovered in this position, nor has it been proved that bowls found nearby were used in this manner.”

[Mervyn D. Fowler, “Incense Altars,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 409.]

⁷**Exod. 30:34-38.** 34 καὶ εἶπεν κύριος πρὸς Μωσῆν Λαβὲ σεαυτῷ ἡδύσματα, στακτὴν, ὄνυχα, χαλβάνην ἡδυσμοῦ καὶ λίβανον διαφανῆ, ἴσον ἴσῳ ἔσται· † 35 καὶ ποιήσουσιν ἐν αὐτῷ θυμίαμα, μυρεψικὸν ἔργον μυρεψοῦ, μεμιγμένον, καθαρὸν, ἔργον ἅγιον· † 36 καὶ συγκόψεις ἐκ τούτων λεπτὸν καὶ θήσεις ἀπέναντι τῶν μαρτυρίων ἐν τῇ σκηνῇ τοῦ μαρτυρίου, ὅθεν γνωσθήσομαι σοι ἐκεῖθεν· ἅγιον τῶν ἁγίων ἔσται ὑμῖν· † 37 θυμίαμα κατὰ τὴν σύνθεσιν ταύτην οὐ ποιήσετε ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς· ἁγίασμα ἔσται ὑμῖν κυρίῳ· † 38 ὃς ἂν ποιήσῃ ὡσαύτως ὥστε ὀσφραίνεσθαι ἐν αὐτῷ, ἀπολεῖται ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ· †

34 The Lord said to Moses: Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (an equal



tioning of the voice coming out of the top of the golden altar in Rev. 9:13 both signals the presence of God and also links this action commanded from the altar to the prayers of the saints in the smoke of the incense from the altar in 8:3-4 (cf. 5:8). God is responding to pleas of His people for Him to demonstrate His justice and holiness by punishing evil people on earth.

b) Euphrates River. The mentioning of τῷ ποταμῷ τῷ μεγάλῳ Εὐφράτῃ, the large River Euphrates, evokes allusions to this critically important river in the northern and eastern Fertile Crescent region. This alludes to the territory of the Parthians in the first Christian century, which earlier was known as the Persian empire. Before that as the Babylonian Empire, and even earlier as the Assyrian Empire.

In the first century the Euphrates river marked the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire, and the [Parthians](#) were on the other side of the river. The Parthians stood as the major barrier to Rome developing significant trade with the Han Empire of China via the Silk Road. Although many efforts were made, the Romans were never able to subdue the Parthians who remained a thorn in the Romans’ side from the late republic era through the empire era of the Romans. The Romans were forced to do trading with the Chinese via developing sea routes from the Red Sea to the Chinese coasts and then hauling their goods overland to the Mediterranean ports of Alexandria etc. to be shipped on to Rome.

In 53 BC, the Parthians had humiliated the Romans in battle just east of the Euphrates river at the [Battle of Carrhae](#) (53 BC), and again in [AD 62](#). The

part of each), 35 and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy; 36 and you shall beat some of it into powder, and put part of it before the covenant in the tent of meeting where I shall meet with you; it shall be for you most holy. 37 When you make incense according to this composition, you shall not make it for yourselves; it shall be regarded by you as holy to the Lord. 38 Whoever makes any like it to use as perfume shall be cut off from the people.

military prowess of the Parthians over the Romans was legendary, as envisioned in First Enoch 56:5-8 which paints the picture of the Parthians and the Medes being stirred up by evil angels and then invading Palestine like lions and hungry wolves.⁸ Throughout much of the Israelite history in the OT, the destroying armies that came against Israel came from this region.⁹ Thus the eastern fertile crescent region did not signify anything good either for the Jews or for the Romans. This provided John a really good background image for his depiction of his apocalyptic army.

c) Calvary Soldiers. The depiction of a huge army of two hundred million mounted soldiers coming out of the river confirms the image of the Parthi-

⁸5 And in those days the angels shall return
And hurl themselves to the east upon the Parthians and Medes:

They shall stir up the kings, so that a spirit of unrest shall come upon them,
And they shall rouse them from their thrones,

That they may break forth as lions from their lairs,
And as hungry wolves among their flocks.

6 And they shall go up and tread under foot the land of His elect ones,
[And the land of His elect ones shall be before them a threshing-floor and a highway:]
7 But the city-of my righteous shall be a hindrance to their horses.

And they shall begin to fight among themselves,
And their right hand shall be strong against themselves,

And a man shall not know his brother,
Nor a son his father or his mother,

Till there be no number of the corpses through their slaughter,
And their punishment be not in vain.

8 In those days Sheol shall open its jaws,
And they shall be swallowed up therein,

And their destruction shall be at an end;
Sheol shall devour the sinners in the presence of the elect.'

[Robert Henry Charles, ed., *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2004), 222.]

⁹“That they [the 4 angels] have been held at ‘the great river Euphrates’ evokes the OT prophecy of an army from beyond the Euphrates (from ‘the north’) whom God will bring to judge sinful Israel (Isa. 5:26–29; 7:20; 8:7–8; 14:29–31; Jer. 1:14–15; 4:6–13; 6:1, 22; 10:22; 13:20; Ezek. 38:6, 15; 39:2; Joel 2:1–11, 20–25) and other ungodly nations around Israel (Isa. 14:31; Jer. 25:9, 26; 46–47; 50:41–42; Ezek. 26:7–11; cf. Assumption of Moses 3:1; Amos 7:1 LXX speaks of an army like locusts ‘coming from the east’).” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 506.]

ans as standing in the background of John’s description.¹⁰ They perfected the use of a mounted calvary in military battle and became famous for their superior use of a special breed of horses just for this, along with the ‘Scythian bow’ that was particularly suited for calvary use. When representatives of the Han Dynasty from China finally managed to get possession of some



Ceramic plaque of a mounted archer
British Museum, London
(WA 1972-2-29,1 /135684)

of these horses, they renamed them “Heavenly Horses” because of their superior abilities in battle. Thus during the first few Christian centuries any mention of a mounted soldier on a horse is almost certainly going to allude to the Parthian mounted cavalryman. They provided John an excellent background image from which to develop his even more fierce depiction of the apocalyptic cavalymen, which in this case was two hundred million strong.

Literary Aspects:

Again literary aspects play a role in the interpretive process and thus need some attention prior to exegeting the text itself.

Genre: The broad genre of apocalyptic vision continues to define the fundamental nature of this passage. Thus we are looking depictions of reality that lay beyond human history and experience. Although bits and pieces of human based description are gathered up from existing written depictions in his day by John in order to express in understandable human language something that lies beyond human experience, John fundamentally seeks to communicate with his targeted readers a reality that goes so far beyond human experience on planet earth so as to defy full and complete description.

In the series of the seven trumpets no previously established literary pattern exists exhibiting repetitive traits that would provide a literary genre for John to use. In Hebrew literature the ten plagues of the Exodus come the closest to providing a pattern to follow. And unquestionably in Jewish apocalyptic writings various lists of plagues with wide ranging numbers of them sur-

¹⁰For a very helpful history of the Parthian use of horses and mounted cavalymen in military battle, see “Parthian Horses -- Parthian Archers,” Parthia.com.

face and play an important theological role in the message of each of the Jewish writings. But none of them incorporate a list of seven trumpets to introduce such plagues.¹¹ Thus John's list of seven trumpets -- along

¹¹“The list of cosmic catastrophes that will accompany the day of judgment is such a common phenomenon in Jewish and early Christian apocalyptic that it should be considered a literary form within the larger and more encompassing literary genres in which it is set. Within Judaism, such lists probably originated with theophany imagery, i.e., the atmospheric and seismic phenomena (e.g., earthquake, thunder, lightning, smoke, and darkness) associated with the revelation of God at Sinai. The phenomenon of darkness (Amos 8:9), for example, may have been elaborated as the darkening or destruction of the sun, moon, and stars (Joel 2:30–31; Isa 13:9–10; 34:4; Ezek 32:7–8). More general lists of cosmic catastrophes are also a commonplace (Sib. Or. 2.196–213; 3.81–92, 669–701; 4.171–78; 7.118–29; 8.225–43, 336–58). Some of these lists are very similar to Roman prodigy lists (Sib. Or. 3.796–808; cf. Jos. J. W. 6.289–300).

“A second early Jewish apocalypse that enumerates a series of eschatological plagues is 2 Apocalypse Baruch. According to 2 Apoc. Bar. 27:1–15, history will be divided into twelve periods (cf. 4 Ezra 14:11–12; Apoc. Abr. 29.2), and during each period a particular type of tribulation will afflict humanity before the appearance of the Messiah (2 Apoc. Bar. 30:1): (1) the beginning of commotions, (2) the slaughtering of the great, (3) the fall of many into death, (4) the drawing of the sword, (5) famine and drought, (6) earthquakes and terrors, [(7) missing,] (8) the appearance of ghosts and demons, (9) the fall of fire, (10) rape and violence, (11) injustice and unchastity, and (12) disorder and a mixture of all the preceding calamities.

with the seven seals and seven bowls -- remain distinctive to Revelation as a literary form.

Literary Setting: Rev. 9:12-21 forms the sixth trumpet in the series of seven trumpets found in 8:6-9:21 and 11:15-18. The trumpets are linked to the series of seven seals (6:1-8:1) with the seven trumpets coming out of the seventh seal in 8:1-2. In similar fashion the seven bowl of wrath (16:1-21) will emerge out of the seventh trumpet in 11:15-17).

The sixth trumpet is a part of the 4 +3 structure of four closely linked trumpets follow by three with a closely linked structure as well. It has a particularly close connection to the fifth trumpet in content and theme emphasis.

Literary Structure: The block diagram in excessively literal English reflects as far as possible the core internal structure of the Greek text. The visual representation is intended to facilitate an easier understanding of how the primary and secondary ideas inside the text are connected to one another.

“Apocalyptic literature, in addition to transmitting lists detailing the destruction of the cosmos, also transmits lists of a quite different character, which focus not on the destruction of the cosmos but on the chaotic character of the cosmos (1 Enoch 80:2–8; Sib. Or. 2.6–26; 2.154–64; 5.447–83; 8.178–93; 4 Ezra 5:4–13). The individual catastrophes associated with the arrival of the eschatological day of judgment could easily be associated with the tradition of the plagues of Egypt as the author of Revelation has done.”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 506–507.]

285 ^{9.12} **The first woe has passed;**
Behold

286 **two woes are still coming.**

^{9.13} And

287 **the sixth angel blew;**
and

288 **I heard a single voice**
out of the four horns
| of the altar
| golden
| before God,

^{9.14} saying to the sixth angel,
having the trumpet,
Release the four angels
/-----|
who are chained
at the large river the Euphrates.

^{9.15} And

289 **were loosed the four angels**
who are prepared
for the hour and day and month and year
in order that they may kill the third of men.

^{9.16} And

290 **the number of the soldiers (equals) two hundred million,**

291 I heard their number.

9.17 And
thus

292 I saw the horses
in the vision
and
those sitting
on them
having breastplates
of fiery red
and
of hyacinth blue
and
of sulphur,

and
293 the heads of the horses (were)
like heads of lions,

and
out of their mouths
294 are coming fire and smoke and sulphur.

9.18
295 were killed the third of men,
from these three plagues
out of the fire and the smoke and the sulphur
which is coming
out of their mouths.

9.19
296 the authorization of the horses...is
For
in their mouths
and
in their tails,

for
297 their tails (were)
like serpents
having heads,

and
with them
298 they do harm.

9.20
299 the rest of the men . . . do not repent
And
who were not killed |
by these plagues |
out of the works of their hands,
lest they will worship the demons

and
the idols
gold
and
silver
and
bronze
and
stone
and
wood

/-----|

which things are able neither to see
nor to hear
nor to walk

9.21 and
300 they did not repent
from their murders
301 neither (did they repent)
from their sorceries
302 nor (did they repent)
from their fornication
303 nor (did they repent)
from their thefts.

Analysis of Rhetorical Structure:

In assessing the divisions of thought in this passage a twofold division emerges as clearly how the materials are divided. Statements 285 through 298 clearly focus on the trumpet signal that releases the four angels to kill a third of mankind on earth using their vast army of apocalyptic soldiers. Then statements 299 through 303 assert that the remainder of those not killed persist in unrepentance clinging to their demons and idols.

In the first division, #s 285 - 298, the introductory statements about woes come first (#s 285-286). This is followed by the actions triggered from the blowing of the sixth trumpet (#s 287-298).¹

In the second division, #s. 299-303, a twofold division clearly emerges also. Statement 299 centers on their religious rejection of God, while statements 300 - 303 center on sinful actions coming out of the religious rejection of God.

Exegesis of the Text:

The above twofold division of the text naturally emerges as the correct approach to exegeting the passage. Two subdivisions under each primary division are also highlighted. Further subdivisions that naturally are contained in the text will be noted in the exegesis as well. By following the more natural text divisions we can hopefully understand John's words correctly.

A. The blowing of the sixth trumpet, vv. 12-19.

Rev. 9:12-21 stands as another complicated text in that numerous things are connected to the blowing of the sixth trumpet.

John signals clearly that there are three woes that are coming to humanity on the earth.¹² Thus the tone

¹²“At the start of an oral statement, the Gk ouai, ‘woe,’ denotes pain, discomfort, or unhappiness. It is then followed by an indication of the person/thing (in the dative, nominative, or accusative case) to whom the unpleasant reality relates. Woes are found in biblical and extra-biblical literature, including intertestamental and rabbinic texts. Thirty-seven woes are found in the NT, especially in the gospels of Matthew (13 woes) and Luke (15 woes).

“With the exception of Matt 18:7 (the world), Luke 10:13 (Chorazin and Bethsaida = Matt 11:21), and Rev 18:10, 16, 19

and character of these last three trumpets is set against the backdrop of an ancient οὐαὶ, which will be explored below.¹³

Then the blowing of the sixth trumpet triggers a different sequence of actions from the previous trumpets. Four angels already on earth have been bound and need to be released. Their release triggers the action of a massive army, greater than the known population of the world at that time. A third of the earth is killed off by this army. But the remaining ones not killed stubbornly refuse to repent and cling to their idols and sinful ways.

a) The three woes, v. 12

12 Ἡ οὐαὶ ἡ μία ἀπῆλθεν· ἰδοὺ ἔρχεται ἔτι δύο οὐαὶ μετὰ ταῦτα.

12 The first woe has passed. There are still two woes to come.

Two statements are made here. One woe has passed in that it is identified with the contents of the fifth trumpet. The sixth and seventh trumpets are then

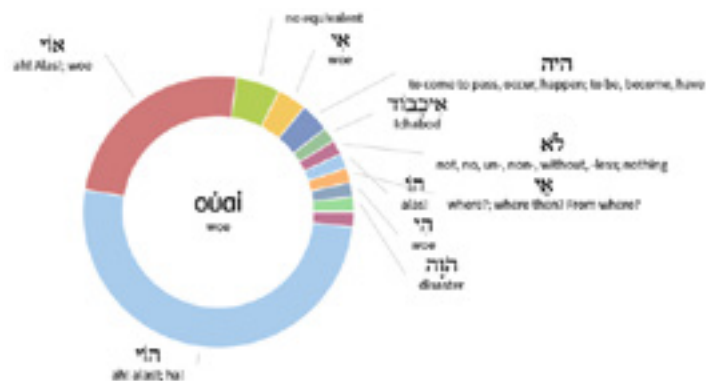
(Babylon), the NT woes are directed to persons or groups of persons. Paul's hapax use of a woe (1 Cor 9:16) is the only NT woe that is directed to the speaker/writer himself.”

[Raymond F. Collins, “Woe,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 946–947.]

¹³“The use of ‘woe’ in the book of Revelation — none are found in the other books of the Johannine corpus—is also unique. Revelation contains the only NT woes where the initial interjection is doubled for emphasis’ sake (Rev 18:10, 16, 19; and 8:13, where ouai is trebled), a rhetorical device also attested outside the bible.

“Ouai is used as a noun only in Revelation (four times, twice each in Rev 9:12 and 11:14). In each instance the noun ouai is qualified by an ordinal. The first woe is described in Rev 8:12–9:12, a series of plagues on the inhabitants of the earth, introduced by a blast of the fifth angel's trumpet. The second woe is described in Rev 9:13–21 where, at the sound of the sixth angel's trumpet, three additional plagues are let loose upon humankind. The third woe is yet to come, but, according to the apocalyptic vision of the seer, it is to come soon (Rev 11:14). These enumerated woes are introduced by an announcement from a screeching eagle, ‘woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth’ (Rev 8:13). The triple ouai may not only be a case of repetition for emphasis' sake; it may also serve as an announcement that three woes are to follow.”

[Raymond F. Collins, “Woe,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 947.]



μετὰ ταῦτα, the first woe has passed; behold there comes still two woes after this.

11:14. Ἡ οὐαὶ ἡ δευτέρα ἀπῆλθεν· ἰδοὺ ἡ οὐαὶ ἡ τρίτη ἔρχεται ταχύ, the second woe has passed; behold the third woe comes quickly.

This shift in grammatical function does not change the meaning of the woe, but the substantival use does stress the οὐαὶ as a package of calamities to be thrust down upon humanity on the earth. An οὐαὶ is pretty much the same thing as a πληγή, **plague** (cf. 9:18, 20; 11:6; 15:1, 6, 8; 16:9, 21; 18:4, 8, 9; 22:18). The difference is that a woe is a prayer wish that God would put a curse on someone or a group of people. The three woes mentioned here represent God answering the prayers of the martyrs in the fifth seal (6:9-11) for justice from God.¹⁵

As the above chart illustrates, the LXX οὐαὶ translates several Hebrew words, but mainly they come off of stem הו' (*hōy*). Among the OT prophets it developed into a particular kind of oracle in their preaching.¹⁶ The

¹⁵“In the OT, the cry of woe as lament or esp. as threat is found primarily in prophetic usage (Hos 7:13; Isa 1:4; 10:5; Jer 23:1; Ezek 24:6; Isa 5:8–22 sixfold woe; with blessings, Isa 3:9–11; Eccl 10:16f.; Tob 13:12, 14; see also 2 Bar. 10:6f.); 1 Enoch 94–100 has several series of woes: 94:6ff. threefold; 95:5ff. fivefold; 96:4ff. fivefold; 97:7f. twofold; 98:9–99:2 eightfold; 99:11ff. fivefold; 100:7f. twofold; in 99:10 a contrasting blessing is found.” [Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 540.]

¹⁶“OT “Woe” Oracles 1. *Forms and Usage*. This distinctive form of prophetic speech is often found accompanying an accusation or threat which immediately preceded an announcement of judgment. The particle *hōy* occurs approximately 50 times in the OT. It is closely related to the less frequently occurring *’ōy*, as well as the particle *hāh*. All three particles are onomatopoeic in origin, expressing a sharp outburst of feeling, sometimes of anger, sometimes of grief, and sometimes of alarm. In its most striking occurrences in prophecy *hōy* is followed by a descriptive definition, frequently couched in participial form, of the persons and activities against which this feeling is directed. It is characteristic, therefore, that the woe cry should be used in an impersonal formulation expressing intense anger and directed against certain types of activity which are strongly disapproved of: ‘Woe to those who do ...’ We may cite Isa 5:8 as a typical example of the prophetic use of the formula:

Woe to those who join house to house,
who combine field with field,
until no more room is left,
and you are left, dwelling alone in the midst of the land.

“The judgment that is merited by such anger, which is expressed prophetically as conveyed by the mouth of God, is then set out in the pronouncement which follows (v 9 see also Mic 2:1–3).

“Accepting this to be the fullest and most typical form of the prophetic woe oracle, we can note the following features. It is an intense outburst of invective directed against wrongdoers, conveying a note of threat, which is then more fully spelled out in the pronouncement that follows.

“Problems have arisen in connection with the woe oracles because this full form is not adhered to in any uniform way. Attempts to draw all the main occurrences under a single heading

identified with the second and third woes.

What is an οὐαὶ?

We were first introduced to an οὐαὶ in 8:13,

Καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἤκουσα ἐνὸς ἀετοῦ πετομένου ἐν μεσουρανήματι λέγοντος φωνῆ μεγάλης· οὐαὶ οὐαὶ οὐαὶ τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐκ τῶν λοιπῶν φωνῶν τῆς σάλπιγγος τῶν τριῶν ἀγγέλων τῶν μελλόντων σαλπίζειν.

Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew in midheaven, “Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!”

These woes are announced to the inhabitants on earth by an eagle flying across the sky. He identifies them with the last three trumpets to be blown by the angels. Thus the content of each woe will be defined by the actions triggered with the blowing of each of the three trumpets.

Grammatically, οὐαὶ normally functions as an interjection and thus an independent grammar element in Greek sentences.¹⁴ Normally the construction is Οὐαὶ followed by the dative case. But here we have Οὐαὶ followed by the accusative case. This is its function in 8:13, οὐαὶ οὐαὶ οὐαὶ τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, **woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants on the earth**. The same grammatical role in 12:12 exists, οὐαὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν, **woe to the earth and to the sea**. A more natural interjection role is Οὐαὶ in the vocative case (1 Kings 13:30), perhaps then followed by the nominative case, as in 18:10, οὐαὶ οὐαὶ, ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη, **woe, woe, the great city**. This is repeated exactly in 18:16 and 18:19. This follows the LXX pattern of Amos 5:18, Οὐαὶ οἱ ἐπιθυμοῦντες τὴν ἡμέραν κυρίου, **woe to those desiring the Day of the Lord**.

But in 9:12 and 11:14, οὐαὶ is used substantivally.

9:12, Ἡ οὐαὶ ἡ μία ἀπῆλθεν· ἰδοὺ ἔρχεται ἔτι δύο οὐαὶ

¹⁴“In both the OT and the NT ‘woe!’ is an interjection, an exclamation of grief or a denouncement. The Greek is *ouai*. There are a number of short Hebrew exclamations that may be so translated (*’ōy*, *’ōyāh*, *’i*, *’allay*, *hōy*, and *rāzī*). The last word occurs only two times in the OT and means ‘wasting,’ or ‘leanness’ (both in Isa 24:16).” [Lawrence O. Richards, *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words: Based on the NIV and the NASB*, Zondervan’s Understand the Bible Reference Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 631.]

ἦν introduced the pronouncement of God's judgment upon the Hebrew people of God. It is against this background of OT prophetic usage that these three woes in Revelation connected to the final three trumpets is used.¹⁷

Woe thus means God's judgment and punishment. The details of the blowing of each trumpet defines the content of that divine punishment to be dished out upon humanity. Thus John declares that one of these has passed with the contents of the fifth trumpet. But two remain yet to happen to the inhabitants of the earth

b) The sixth trumpet blown, vv. 13-19

13 Καὶ ὁ ἕκτος ἄγγελος ἐσάλπισεν· καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν μίαν ἐκ τῶν [τεσσάρων] κεράτων τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου τοῦ χρυσοῦ τοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ, 14 λέγοντα τῷ ἕκτῳ ἀγγέλῳ, ὁ ἔχων τὴν σάλπιγγα· λῦσον τοὺς τέσσαρας ἀγγέλους τοὺς δεδεμένους ἐπὶ τῷ ποταμῷ τῷ μεγάλῳ Εὐφράτῃ. 15 καὶ ἐλύθησαν οἱ τέσσαρες ἄγγελοι οἱ ἠτοιμασμένοι εἰς τὴν ὥραν καὶ ἡμέραν καὶ μῆνα καὶ ἑνιαυτόν, ἵνα ἀποκτείνωσιν τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀνθρώπων. 16 καὶ ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν στρατευμάτων τοῦ ἵππικοῦ δισμυριάδες μυριάδων, ἤκουσα τὸν ἀριθμὸν αὐτῶν. 17 Καὶ οὕτως εἶδον τοὺς ἵππους ἐν τῇ ὁράσει καὶ τοὺς καθημένους ἐπ' αὐτῶν, ἔχοντας θώρακας πυρίνους καὶ ὑακινθίνους καὶ θειώδεις.

have proved difficult to maintain. Similarly most modern English translations have found it impossible to establish any uniform English equivalent; the use of "Woe to ..." has sometimes appeared archaic, with a consequent concern to avoid using it as far as possible (so NEB), and there is disagreement whether *hōy* and *ōy* should be regarded as identical in significance (Wanke 1966). Most of all, however, uncertainty has arisen over whether the prophetic usage is to be connected with the use of the *hōy* cry in a funerary lamentation (Janzen 1972: 3–39).

"The prophetic usage of the *hōy* cry as a threat appears in three major clusters: Isa 5:8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22; 10:1; Amos 5:18; 6:1, 4; and Hab 2:9, 12, 15, 19. In the book of Isaiah there are other instances of the *hōy* cry evidencing a somewhat different usage and significance (Isa 1:4; 10:5; 17:12; 18:1). The LXX usually translates with *ouai*, but occasionally varies this by using *ō*. Janzen (1972: 18) comments that 'Biblical *ouai* does not occur outside of the LXX and the New Testament.' Ugaritic includes the interjection *y* and *ya* which appear to be closely related to the Hebrew *hōy* (cf. also Akkadian *u'a*). Both in Ugaritic and Akkadian the cry is followed by a vocative, as it is in the biblical funerary lament (e.g., Jer 22:13–15)."

[Ronald E. Clements, "Woe," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 945–946.]

¹⁷The seven woes of Matt. 23:13–33, paralleled by Lk. 11:42–52, which Jesus pronounced upon the Pharisees reflects something of the same tone of divine condemnation upon these Pharisees. Luke's ingenious attaching four woes to the four beatitudes in Lk. 6:21–26 reflects the judgment of God upon those on the opposite side of the blessed ones in each of the beatitudes in antithetical formulation. This follows a similar pattern found in Ecclesiastes 10:16–17.

καὶ αἱ κεφαλαὶ τῶν ἵππων ὡς κεφαλαὶ λεόντων, καὶ ἐκ τῶν στομάτων αὐτῶν ἐκπορεύεται πῦρ καὶ καπνὸς καὶ θεῖον. 18 ἀπὸ τῶν τριῶν πληγῶν τούτων ἀπεκτάνθησαν τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ τοῦ καπνοῦ καὶ τοῦ θείου τοῦ ἐκπορευομένου ἐκ τῶν στομάτων αὐτῶν. 19 ἡ γὰρ ἐξουσία τῶν ἵππων ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν καὶ ἐν ταῖς οὐραῖς αὐτῶν, αἱ γὰρ οὐραὶ αὐτῶν ὅμοιαι ὄφεσιν, ἔχουσαι κεφαλὰς καὶ ἐν αὐταῖς ἀδικοῦσιν.

13 Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar 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 were released, who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, to kill a third of humankind. 16 The number of the troops of cavalry was two hundred million; I heard their number. 17 And this was how I saw the horses in my vision: the riders wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur; the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. 18 By these three plagues a third of humankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. 19 For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they inflict harm.



The standard formula Καὶ ὁ ἕκτος ἄγγελος ἐσάλπισεν, and the sixth angel blew, introduces the contents that are to follow with this activation signal. But what then happens is unique to this trumpet in the series.

In a somewhat similar manner to the fifth trumpet (καὶ εἶδον, and I saw, v 1), John says, καὶ ἤκουσα, and I heard, (v. 13). What John heard was φωνὴν μίαν ἐκ τῶν



[τεσσάρων] κεράτων τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου τοῦ χρυσοῦ τοῦ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ, *one voice out of the four horns of the golden altar before God*. Was this God speaking? Or, someone else? Earlier in 8:3-5 at the seventh seal, a particular angel took up a position at the altar¹⁸ and then was given a golden censer containing the prayers of all the saints. Is this voice coming from that angel? It does appear that the voice from the altar that stood distinctly from the throne of God but before it is different from God speaking. The other option is that this voice mysteriously originates from the space marked off on the top of the altar of incense by the four horns at each corner. The truth of the matter is that which ever identification of the voice that is adopted, ultimately the authorization spoken by the voice originates from God Himself. The symbolism of the complete power of God by the four horns¹⁹

¹⁸“The term θυσιαστήριον occurs eight times in Revelation, four of which refer to the heavenly counterpart of the Israelite incense altar (8:3[2x], 5; 9:13), and four to the heavenly counterpart of the altar of burnt offerings (6:9; 11:1; 14:18; 16:7).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 536.]

¹⁹“‘Four’ connotes completeness and ‘horns’ represent power (though usually in connection with animal metaphors). People sometimes expressed a desire to seek safety and protection from others by holding on to the horns of the altar (1 Kgs. 1:50–51; 2:28–34). Could the ‘four horns of the golden altar’ here refer to the full power of God that will be expressed in answering the cry of the saints by judging the wicked in the following trumpets?⁸⁷ A positive answer to this question is suggested by 14:18, where the altar is directly linked to power over judgment: ‘another angel came out from the altar, the one having power over fire.’ The Vulgate develops this line of thought by paraphrasing ‘the golden altar that is before God’ with ‘the golden altar that is before the eyes of God.’ This apparently refers back to 5:6, where the ‘horns’ of the Lamb are pictured together with his ‘seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God, having been sent out into all the earth.’ This link with 5:6 is appropriate, since there the OT background of the ‘eyes’ refers to God’s omnipotence in supporting his people, which is linked to temple imagery (e.g., Zechariah 4; see above on 5:6b). Indeed, though ἐνώπιον (‘before,’ ‘in the presence’) occurs many times in the Apocalypse, it appears seven times in connection with explicit reference to some aspect of God’s presence in the

But what is both unique and fascinating is what the voice said and to whom it was spoken: λέγοντα τῷ ἕκτῳ ἀγγέλῳ, ὁ ἔχων τὴν σάλπιγγα· λῦσον τοὺς τέσσαρας ἀγγέλους τοὺς δεδεμένους ἐπὶ τῷ ποταμῷ τῷ μεγάλῳ Εὐφράτῃ, *saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.”* Only here does one of the angels blowing the trumpets then become an active participant in the actions signaled by his blowing of the trumpet.

He is instructed to release four angels who are bound already on earth. Who are these four angels? Are they the same four angels holding the four corners of the earth who are mentioned in 7:1-3?²⁰ Many commentators think so, but there are some very important distinctions between them that suggest probably not: a) the location on earth is different; b) the first group are not chained but the second group is; c) the first group are restraining the four winds of the earth while the second group are not holding anything back; d) the first group are told not to damage the earth or sea or heavenly temple: 4:5 refers to the notion of judgment coming from the divine presence in the temple, 5:8; 8:3–4; and 9:13 are linked by the theme of cultic prayer concerning judgment before God’s presence, and 7:15 and 11:4 are linked by the idea of protection in God’s cultic presence, though 11:4 also includes the motif of judgment against persecutors (see below on 11:1–6). These links also point to 9:13 as an allusion to God’s power to judge in response to the saints’ prayers.

“Some mss. include τεσσάρων (‘four,’ e.g., *M*), but the evidence points to its omission (e.g., P⁴⁷ A 0207 1611 2053 2344 and some versions and fathers). The word could have been omitted accidentally by a copyist skipping too quickly to the following word κεράτων (‘horns’), which has similar characters.⁸⁸ Or an overzealous scribe might have wanted to clarify the identification of the altar with the altar in the OT tabernacle, which had four corners with four horns (cf. Exod. 27:2). Or τεσσάρων might be original as part of the vision or as John’s attempt to make the identification more explicit.”

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 506.]

²⁰**Rev. 7:1-3.** 1 Μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδον τέσσαρας ἀγγέλους ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τὰς τέσσαρας γωνίας τῆς γῆς, κρατοῦντας τοὺς τέσσαρας ἀνέμους τῆς γῆς ἵνα μὴ πνέῃ ἄνεμος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς μήτε ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης μήτε ἐπὶ πᾶν δένδρον. 2 Καὶ εἶδον ἄλλον ἄγγελον ἀναβαίνοντα ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς ἡλίου ἔχοντα σφραγίδα θεοῦ ζῶντος, καὶ ἔκραξεν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ τοῖς τέσσαρσιν ἀγγέλοις οἷς ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἀδικῆσαι τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν 3 λέγων· μὴ ἀδικήσητε τὴν γῆν μήτε τὴν θάλασσαν μήτε τὰ δένδρα, ἄχρι σφραγίσωμεν τοὺς δούλους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν.

1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth so that no wind could blow on earth or sea or against any tree. 2 I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to damage earth and sea, 3 saying, “Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads.”

trees while the people of God are being sealed, while the second group has been bound for a very specific moment when they will kill one third of humanity. Interestingly also is that no groups of four angels of punishment are ever mentioned in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition, although groups of four angels with other roles are found.²¹

The binding (τοὺς δεδεμένους) of this second group of four angels is significant. Many are convinced with some justification (cf. Rev. 20:2; Tobit 3:17; 8:3) that this signals ‘evil angels’ rather than ‘good angels’ as in chapter seven. Their already having been chained (the perfect tense of δεδεμένους) suggests an unwillingness to obey the divine command until forced to at God’s timing. This would not be true of any of the angels in heaven.

These ‘angels’ have been held in captivity ἐπὶ τῷ ποταμῷ τῷ μεγάλῳ Εὐφράτῃ, [at the great river the Euphrates](#). The mentioning of the Euphrates evokes memories of the armies of the east being used of God to punish the Israelites for their sins during the era of the prophets in the OT.²² The evil armies that oppose God

²¹“Apart from Rev 7:1–3 and 9:14–15, no groups of four angels of punishment are known in Jewish apocalyptic literature (see Comment on 9:15b). Other groups of four angels that function quite differently are mentioned, however. There are occasional references to a group of four archangels: 1 Enoch 9:1 (Synellus) mentions οἱ τέσσαρες μεγάλοι ἀρχάγγελοι, ‘the four great archangels,’ Michael, Ourael, Raphael, and Gabriel, while in the Ethiopic MS tradition of 1 Enoch 20:1 they are simply named: Michael, Gabriel, Suriel, and Uriel. In 1 Enoch 40:1–10 and 71:9–13, a group of four angels (differing somewhat in content and order from 20:1) is simply listed: Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, and Phanuel. A similar group of four is mentioned in 1QM 9:15–16 — Michael, Gabriel, Sariel, and Raphael—and in Apoc. Moses 40:4 — Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, and Raphael (the same list of four in this order occurs on a Jewish amulet; see Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols* 2:229; vol. 3, plate 1052). In an unrelated tradition, 3 Apoc. Bar. 8:4 mentions four angels who daily take the crown of the sun to heaven for renewal. Ezekiel reports a vision of a group of six ‘men’ (presumably angels; b. Šabb. 55a understands the ‘man’ who marks people with the taw as Gabriel, and the group of six ‘men’ are called ‘destroying angels’) who kill all those not marked with a taw on their foreheads (Ezek 9:1–7), a passage alluded to in both Rev 7:3 and 9:4.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 537.]

²²“That they have been held at ‘the great river Euphrates’ evokes the OT prophecy of an army from beyond the Euphrates (from ‘the north’) whom God will bring to judge sinful Israel (Isa. 5:26–29; 7:20; 8:7–8; 14:29–31; Jer. 1:14–15; 4:6–13; 6:1, 22; 10:22; 13:20; Ezek. 38:6, 15; 39:2; Joel 2:1–11, 20–25) and other ungodly nations around Israel (Isa. 14:31; Jer. 25:9, 26; 46–47; 50:41–42; Ezek. 26:7–11; cf. Assumption of Moses 3:1; Amos 7:1 LXX speaks of an army like locusts “coming from the east”).

“The strongest OT echo comes from Jeremiah 46, which portrays the coming judgment on Egypt: the army of horsemen from the north are like serpents, innumerable locusts, wearing breastplates (cf. 46:4, 22–23) and standing ‘by the Euphrates River’ (LXX ἐπὶ τῷ ποταμῷ Εὐφράτῃ, 26[46]:2; likewise 46:6, 10). In

seem to originate in this region in the Bible, perhaps because of the history of Israel with the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians, and then of the Romans as well with the Parthians. [First Enoch 56:5](#) reflects this background with angels stirring up the kings of the East into a gigantic battle with the people of God. The Enoch text casts this as a remake of the [Gog prophecy](#) of Ezekiel thirty-eight and thirty-nine (cf. Rev. 20:8 also).

The angel holding the trumpet is commanded λῦσον τοὺς τέσσαρας ἀγγέλους τοὺς δεδεμένους ἐπὶ τῷ ποταμῷ τῷ μεγάλῳ Εὐφράτῃ, [release the four angels bound at the great river the Euphrates](#). This parallels the [sixth bowl of wrath in 16:12–16](#).²³ [There the evil angels](#) John’s time the Parthian threat from beyond the Euphrates was identified with this OT tradition; this invasion was also to be instigated by angels (1 En. 56:5–8; in 2 Bar. 6 four angels representing the Babylonians stand at the four corners of Jerusalem prepared to destroy the city at the appointed time). Mention of the Euphrates here anticipates the battle of the sixth bowl, where the Euphrates is again mentioned (16:12).⁹⁰ Indeed, the sixth trumpet and sixth bowl describe ‘the same event from different points of view’⁹¹ (on this link see further on 9:19).

As in the OT parallels of the invader from the north, so here it is God who ultimately unleashes the corrupt angelic invaders. These angels could be identified as the angelic counterparts to the wicked nations who dwell at or beyond the Euphrates (e.g., Dan. 10:13, 20–21). Therefore, they may be wicked angels, as in Rev. 9:1, 11. They have been ‘bound’ by God, and now he releases them, the command to ‘release’ them coming from the altar in heaven. These four angels could be the ones mentioned in 7:1,92 but most commentators think otherwise, presumably because the angels in 7:1 hold back destructive forces, whereas those here do not restrain but are restrained and are those who are to carry out destruction.”

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 506–507.]

²³**Rev. 16:12–16.** 12 Καὶ ὁ ἕκτος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν ποταμὸν τὸν μέγαν τὸν Εὐφράτην, καὶ ἐξηράνθη τὸ ὕδωρ αὐτοῦ, ἵνα ἐτοιμασθῇ ἡ ὁδὸς τῶν βασιλέων τῶν ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς ἡλίου. 13 Καὶ εἶδον ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ δράκοντος καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ ψευδοπροφήτου πνεύματα τρία ἀκάθαρτα ὡς βάτραχοι· 14 εἰσὶν γὰρ πνεύματα δαιμονίων ποιοῦντα σημεῖα, ἃ ἐκπορεύεται ἐπὶ τοὺς βασιλεῖς τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης συναγαγεῖν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν πόλεμον τῆς ἡμέρας τῆς μεγάλης τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ παντοκράτορος. 15 Ἴδου ἔρχομαι ὡς κλέπτης· μακάριος ὁ γρηγορῶν καὶ τηρῶν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ, ἵνα μὴ γυμνὸς περιπατῇ καὶ βλέπωσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην αὐτοῦ. 16 Καὶ συνήγαγεν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν τόπον τὸν καλούμενον Ἑβραΐστι Ἀρμαγεδών.

12 The sixth angel poured his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up in order to prepare the way for the kings from the east. 13 And I saw three foul spirits like frogs coming from the mouth of the dragon, from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet. 14 These are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. 15 (“See, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and is clothed, a not going about naked and exposed to shame.”) 16 And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew

are clearly identified as 13b πνεύματα τρία ἀκάθαρτα ὡς βάτραχοι· 14 εἰσὶν γὰρ πνεύματα δαιμονίων ποιοῦντα σημεῖα, *three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are spirits of demons doing signs.*

This he does as implied clearly by the text in v. 15: καὶ ἐλύθησαν οἱ τέσσαρες ἄγγελοι οἱ ἠτοιμασμένοι εἰς τὴν ὥραν καὶ ἡμέραν καὶ μῆνα καὶ ἔνιαυτόν, ἵνα ἀποκτείνωσιν τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀνθρώπων, *So the four angels were released, who had been held ready for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, to kill a third of human-kind.* Interestingly, John specifies a date about as precisely as possible in the ancient world without projecting it on to a calendar of some kind. These angels, he says, had been held in preparation to be released on a certain date, referenced here as an hour, a day, a month, and a year. This stresses the total control of God over the unfolding of events.

Their assigned objective is ἵνα ἀποκτείνωσιν τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀνθρώπων, *in order that they might kill the third of men.* We have seen an emphasis on τὸ τρίτον, *the third*, through the trumpets:

a) First angel with trumpet (8:7): “hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were hurled to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.”

b) Second angel with trumpet (8:9): burning mountain thrown into sea and “a third of the sea became blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.”

c) Third angel with trumpet (8:10-11): blazing star fell on a third of the rivers and springs and “a third of the waters became wormwood, and many died from the water, because it was made bitter.”

d) Fourth angel with trumpet (8:12): “a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light was darkened; a third of the day was kept from shining, and likewise the night.”

And now these dark angels are given permission to kill off a third of humanity.²⁴ This is somewhat like the permission given to the locusts who were given authorization to ‘sting’ only people without the seal of God and only for five months (9:4-5). Thus the evil people are hammered twice by the stings of the scorpion tailed locusts and the snake tailed horses of the army of these dark angels. The locusts couldn’t kill people, but the military horses could. But as the series of trumpets is called *Harmagedon*.

²⁴One challenge here is the fourth seal in **Rev. 6:8**.

καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἵππος χλωρός, καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ ὄνομα αὐτῷ [ὁ] θάνατος, καὶ ὁ ἄδης ἠκολούθει μετ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἐξουσία ἐπὶ τὸ τέταρτον τῆς γῆς ἀποκτείνειν ἐν ῥομφαίᾳ καὶ ἐν λιμῷ καὶ ἐν θανάτῳ καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν θηρίων τῆς γῆς.

I looked and there was a pale green horse! Its rider’s name was Death, and Hades followed with him; they were given authority over *a fourth* of the earth, to kill with sword, famine, and pestilence, and by the wild animals of the earth.

pets stress, the destruction at this point in the unfolding drama is not total. That will come later, but not yet. So the emphasis in the six trumpets is on partial judgment rather than total judgment.

God in His mysterious ways chooses to inflict partial punishment upon the evil world at times. But it is not yet the total punishment that is yet to come at the very end of human history. Perhaps, as vv. 20-21 stress there is hope of μετενόησαν, *repent* (2x). But as these verses stress such hope is futile for wicked people will not turn to God no matter how severe their punishments become. The example of the pharaoh and the Egyptians with the ten plagues lies always in the background here.



With no forewarning,²⁵ verse 16 introduces us to the army under the command of these four dark angels. Considerable text variation surfaces in the copy-

²⁵“There is an apparent gap in the narrative (or the narrative logic) between v 15 and v 16, for there is no obvious connection between the four angels whose task it is to kill one-third of all humanity and the ravages of the enormous demonic cavalry described in vv 16–19 (Wellhausen, *Analyse*, 13), except the repetition of the phrase ἀποκτείνειν τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ‘to kill one-third of humanity,’ in vv 15 and 18. It would perhaps make greater sense if the demonic army, rather than the four angels, were ‘bound at the Euphrates’ (cf. 16:12–14), for the Euphrates marked the carefully guarded frontier between the Roman and the Parthian empires. Commentators often assume that the four angels act as instigators and leaders of the demonic cavalry, but this is not made at all explicit in the text in its present form. It is therefore quite possible that 9:14b–15 is a redactional modification of an earlier schema in which the angels explicitly functioned to incite the kings of the east to gather their armies and attack Israel.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 538.]

ing of the number of the soldiers in this army, in large part because of changing ways to express numbers in ancient Greek.²⁶ Most likely the number two hundred million was intended, but one can't be absolutely certain. John's second statement, ἤκουσα τὸν ἀριθμὸν αὐτῶν, *I heard their number*, stresses confidence in this large number of cavalrymen. This compares to the ἦν ὁ ἀριθμὸς αὐτῶν μυριάδες μυριάδων καὶ χιλιάδες χιλιάδων, *their number was myriads and thousands of thousands*, regarding angels around the throne of God in 5:11. Interestingly these numbers would have exceeded by far the total population of the Roman empire at the end of the first century.²⁷

Who were these soldiers? John provides an apocalyptic depiction of them in verse 17: Καὶ οὕτως εἶδον τοὺς ἵππους ἐν τῇ ὁράσει καὶ τοὺς καθημένους ἐπ' αὐτῶν, ἔχοντας θώρακας πυρίνους καὶ ὑακινθίνους καὶ θειώδεις, καὶ αἱ κεφαλαὶ τῶν ἵππων ὡς κεφαλαὶ λεόντων, καὶ ἐκ τῶν στομάτων αὐτῶν ἐκπορεύεται πῦρ καὶ καπνὸς καὶ θεῖον. *And this was how I saw the horses in my vision: the riders wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of*

²⁶“Just as the articular phrase ‘the four angels’ in v 15a assumes that these angels are known to the readers (note the definite article in ‘the angels’ in 1 Enoch 56:5, quoted above), so the phrase τῶν στρατευμάτων, ‘the soldiers,’ is articular and therefore an entity the author assumes his readers recognize. Obviously, the author intends us to understand that these angels have been restraining the armies of various nations from devastating the civilized world. In 5:11 the author was apparently dependent on Dan 7:10 (μύρια μυριάδες παρειστήκεισαν αὐτῷ, ‘ten thousand [times] ten thousands stood before him,’ though he avoids the numbers χίλια and μύρια: μυριάδες μυριάδων καὶ χιλιάδες χιλιάδων, ‘ten thousands of ten thousands and thousands of thousands.’ Numbers compounded with χιλιάδες or μυριάδες can mean either (1) ‘x thousand’ or ‘x-ty thousand,’ or (2) ‘thousands of,’ or ‘ten thousands of,’ while χίλιοι and μύριοι carry the meaning ‘one thousand’ and ‘ten thousand,’ respectively (Mussies, Morphology, 223). The number δισχίλιας, ‘two thousand,’ occurs just once in the LXX in 1 Macc 9:4 (var. lect. MS A). Mussies (Morphology, 224–25) proposes that Rev 9:16 alludes to Ps 68:17(MT 18), ‘With mighty chariotry, twice ten thousand [רבת־ריבת־רבתי ribbotayim, a dual numeral], thousands upon thousands [אלפי־שנא .alpê šin.an], the Lord came from Sinai into the holy place,’ suggesting that δισμυριάδες is a literal way of rendering the Hebrew dual form רבת־ריבת־רבתי ribbōtayim. If this suggestion is correct, it means that the phrase δισμυριάδες μυριάδων should be translated not ‘twice ten thousands of ten thousands’ but ‘ten thousand times tens of thousands.’ Further, the phrase should not be translated ‘two hundred million’ or ‘one hundred million’ (if the δῖς is regarded as a mistranslation of the Hebrew dual), since the round number ten thousand implies a complete army.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 538–539.]

²⁷ Estimates during the reign of Augustus at the beginning of the first century range from 56.8 million to 46.9 million in 1 AD to 39.3 million in 350 AD. “There are many estimates of the population for the Roman Empire, that range from 45 million to 120 million with 55–65 million as the classical figure. More modern estimates place this number at the higher end (80–120 million).” [“Classical demography,” wikipedia.org]

sulfur; the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths.

He describes both the horses and their riders: Καὶ οὕτως εἶδον τοὺς ἵππους ἐν τῇ ὁράσει καὶ τοὺς καθημένους ἐπ' αὐτῶν, *and thusly I saw the horses in my vision and those sitting upon them*. Cavalrymen play an important role in Revelation beginning with the horse and rider with the bow and the crown in first seal (6:1-2), which was in the form of the Parthian cavalryman. References are found to horses and chariots (18:13), and especially to Christ riding a white horse leading a great army mounted on horses (cf. 19:11, 14, 19, 21).

Almost as a side reference John adds ἐν τῇ ὁράσει, *in my vision*, between the references to the horses and their riders. The term from ὄρασις is only used four times in the entire Greek NT (Acts 2:17; Rev. 4:3 [2x]; 9:17) with either the meaning of appearance (Rev. 4:3) or vision (Acts 2:17; Rev. 9:17). In this latter meaning it is virtually a synonym with ὄραμα and ὄπτασία, all three of which in this meaning category reference “an event in which something appears vividly and credibly to the mind, although not actually present, but implying the influence of some divine or supernatural power or agency.”²⁸ What John seems to be emphasizing with the insertion of this phrase is the nature of οὕτως εἶδον, *thusly I saw*, at the beginning of the sentence. Although the verb εἶδον is very common, he takes the opportunity here, in light of the tremendously great size of the army (v. 16), to remind his readers that this ‘seeing’ is of an apocalyptic army rather than an army made up of humans.

John provides only a brief depiction of this army first with reference to the soldiers and then to the horses. But the nature of these two depictions comes close to merging horse and rider into a single monstrous image, which some commentators assume.

Regarding the soldiers, they are ἔχοντας θώρακας πυρίνους καὶ ὑακινθίνους καὶ θειώδεις, *possessing breastplates of fire color and sapphire color and*



²⁸Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 444.

sulfur color. Although differences of opinion as to the modifying role of the accusative plural participle ἔχοντας exist as to either τοὺς ἵππους, **horses**, or τοὺς καθημένους, **riders**, the weight of grammar evidence favors the latter so that the breastplates are on the soldiers rather than on the horses. But both horse and rider could have easily had on this breastplate.²⁹ Roman soldier breastplates, known as **lorica segmentata** in Latin, came in a wide variety of sized and shapes as illustrated in the above chart, but none looked quite like these on these soldiers in v. 17 which gave off the color tones of fire and hyacinth and sulfur. These three color tones of the breastplates match the πῦρ καὶ καπνὸς καὶ θεῖον, **fire and smoke and sulfur**, coming out of the mouths of the horses (v. 17b). All through Revelation, the repetition of fire and sulfur stresses divine judgment upon ungodly idolaters (14:10; 21:8) and upon the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (19:20; 20:10).³⁰ Beyond the breastplate nothing more is said about the riders on the horses.

Regarding the horses, they said to have αἱ κεφαλαὶ τῶν ἵππων ὡς κεφαλαὶ λεόντων, **heads of the horses like heads of lions**. This matches somewhat the heads of the locusts who possessed teeth like lions' teeth, οἱ ὀδόντες αὐτῶν ὡς λεόντων, v. 8. The lions' heads on the horses stresses their fierceness. Also ἐκ τῶν στομάτων αὐτῶν ἐκπορεύεται πῦρ καὶ καπνὸς καὶ θεῖον, **out of their mouths comes fire and smoke and sulfur**.

²⁹Different translations adopt one of these three options for translating ἔχοντας θώρακας. Either on the riders or on both have the greater grammatical evidence.

³⁰“This lethal power is emphasized by the repetition of ‘fire and sulfur’ (πῦρ καὶ ... θεῖον) for both the breastplates and what comes from the horses’ mouths. Elsewhere in the Apocalypse the same phrase is always used in references to the final judgment of ungodly idolaters (14:10; 21:8) and of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (19:20; 20:10).

“Therefore, 9:17 speaks of a similar judgment, but one that precedes the final punishment. Likewise in the OT ‘fire and sulfur,’ sometimes with ‘smoke,’ indicate a fatal judgment (Gen. 19:24, 28; Deut. 29:23; 2 Sam. 22:9; Isa. 34:9–10; Ezek. 38:22). ‘Proceeding from their mouths’ (ἐκ τῶν στομάτων αὐτῶν ἐκπορεύεται) heightens the destructive nature of this judgment, since John figuratively uses the identical phrase with this emphasis on other occasions. The idea of God’s judgment of his enemies is figuratively expressed in 2 Kgdms. 22:9 (= Ps. 18:8) LXX by the similar phrase καπνὸς ... καὶ πῦρ ἐκ στόματος αὐτοῦ (‘smoke ... and fire from his mouth’). In Rev. 11:5 the expression ‘fire proceeds from their mouth’ refers to the punishment that the two faithful witnesses execute against their persecutors. Fire is a metaphor for their ‘prophesying’ and ‘testimony’ (11:6–7). The rejection of their testimony commences a spiritual judgment of the persecutors and lays the basis for their future final judgment (see further on 11:5–6).”

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 510–511.]

Once again divine judgment comes from their mouths with a deadly force.³¹

But these two depictions of the horses is supplemented by a third in verse 19: ἡ γὰρ ἐξουσία τῶν ἵππων ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν καὶ ἐν ταῖς οὐραῖς αὐτῶν, αἱ γὰρ οὐραὶ αὐτῶν ὅμοιαι ὄφεισιν, ἔχουσαι κεφαλὰς καὶ ἐν αὐταῖς ἀδικοῦσιν. **For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they inflict harm**. Here the horses have tails but these tails look like poisonous snakes with heads.³² Thus the horses have a twin striking

³¹“Proceeding from their mouths’ (ἐκ τῶν στομάτων αὐτῶν ἐκπορεύεται) heightens the destructive nature of this judgment, since John figuratively uses the identical phrase with this emphasis on other occasions. The idea of God’s judgment of his enemies is figuratively expressed in 2 Kgdms. 22:9 (= Ps. 18:8) LXX by the similar phrase καπνὸς ... καὶ πῦρ ἐκ στόματος αὐτοῦ (‘smoke ... and fire from his mouth’). In Rev. 11:5 the expression ‘fire proceeds from their mouth’ refers to the punishment that the two faithful witnesses execute against their persecutors. Fire is a metaphor for their ‘prophesying’ and ‘testimony’ (11:6–7). The rejection of their testimony commences a spiritual judgment of the persecutors and lays the basis for their future final judgment (see further on 11:5–6).

“That the image of fire proceeding from a mouth is figurative is apparent from the parallels in Rev. 1:16 (cf. 2:12, 16) and 19:15, 21, which portray Christ judging his enemies by means of ‘a sharp sword proceeding from his mouth.’ 2:16 alludes to some form of temporal punishment, whereas 19:15, 21 has to do with the defeat of Christ’s enemies at his parousia. Like the fire in 11:5, the sword in Christ’s mouth is figurative and probably refers to the condemnation of sinners through his word (as implied from 19:10–13). The figurative interpretation of all these references is supported by the explicit parallel in 4 Ezra 13:37–39. There the vision of the Son of man burning the wicked by fire proceeding from his mouth (13:10–11) is interpreted as his ‘rebuking’ them, ‘reproaching them ... with the tortures with which they are destined to be tortured’ and ‘destroying them without labor by the Law’ (so likewise Pss. Sol. 17:24–26; cf. 1 En. 62:2).”

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 511.]

³²“The description of these monsters is segmented in vv 17b–19, but they are a combination of three creatures, with the body of a horse, the head of a lion, and the tail of snake heads. The closest approximation to such a creature in antiquity is probably the **Chimaera** slain by the hero Bellerophon with the aid of Pegasus as described in Greek and Roman mythology. The Chimaera is consistently described as having the head of a lion, the tail of a dragon or serpent, and the body of a goat and belching fire (Iliad 6.181–82; Hesiod Theog. 319–24; Euripides Ion 203–4; Electra 474–75; Apollodorus 2.3.1; Lucretius De rerum natura 2.705; 5.905–7; Hyginus Fabulae 57.2). The extensive iconographic tradition is extremely consistent, depicting the Chimaera as a lion with the head of a goat coming from the top middle of its body, with a long snake’s body and head for a tail (LIMC 3/1:249–69; 3/2:197–217). The similarity to the monster horses of 9:17–19 is sufficiently close to suggest that the widely distributed depictions of the Chimaera may have served as a model for these trimorphic

power with the fire coming out of their mouths and the snake bits from their tails. In the background here most likely is the rich and diverse traditions of fire breathing monsters such as the Leviathan found in Job 41:19-21 (=LXX 41:11-13).³³

The heart of vv. 17b-18 is the first statement of verse eighteen as shown in the chiasmus structure below:³⁴

A 17b from their mouths

B proceeded

C fire and smoke and sulfur

D 18a From these three plagues a third of humanity was killed,

C' 18b from the fire and smoke and sulfur

B' which proceeded

A' from their mouths

At the beginning of the actions of the sixth trumpet the

monsters.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 539–540.]

³³“In a context that deals with an interpretation of the plagues of Egypt, Wis 11:18 mentions that God did not send bears or lions or unknown monsters to plague the Egyptians, “such as breathe out fiery breath, or belch forth a thick pall of smoke, or flash terrible sparks from their eyes.” This may be connected with an isolated tradition concerning a fire-breathing Leviathan found in Job 41:19–21 (LXX 41:11–13):

From its mouth go flaming torches; sparks of fire leap out. Out of its nostrils comes smoke, as from a boiling pot and burning rushes. Its breath kindles coals, and a flame comes out of its mouth.

“Fire-breathing monsters are comparatively rare in Greco-Roman mythology, but far more common than in the Israelite-Jewish tradition. There are three main mythical monsters with this characteristic in Greco-Roman mythology: (1) The brazen-hooved bulls conquered by Jason in Colchis reportedly breathed fire from their nostrils (Pindar Pyth. 4.225; Apollodorus 1.9.23; Apollonius Rhodius 3.1302–5; Ovid Metam. 7.104–5; Vergil Georgics 2.140; however, in the iconographic tradition the bulls are never shown breathing fire; cf. LIMC 5/1:631–32; 5/2:427, plates 17–30). (2) Other mythological creatures occasionally described as breathing fire are the cannibalistic horses of Diomedes, conquered by Hercules (Euripides Alcestis 493; Lucretius De rerum natura 5.29), though this detail is more frequently omitted (Apollodorus 2.5.8; Diodorus Siculus 4.15.3), as it is in the iconographic tradition (LIMC 5/1:67–71; 5/2:81–82, plates 2414–54). (3) The Chimæra is described as belching fire (see above under Comment on v 17b). In addition, there is a giant boar depicted as having lightning flashing from its mouth and breath hot enough to scorch vegetation (Ovid Metam. 8.289), and there are occasional descriptions of horses that snort fire (Vergil Georgics 3.85; Silius Italicus 6.228; Nonnus Dion. 29.19).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 540.]

³⁴“Note the use of inclusio that characterizes vv 17b–18b and gives this passage a poetic flavor: v 17b, ‘from their mouths proceeded fire and smoke and sulfur’; v 18b, ‘from the fire and smoke and sulfur which proceeded from their mouths.’ This inclusio gives the passage a chiasmic arrangement.”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 540.]

four angels were given authorization ἵνα ἀποκτείνωσιν τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀνθρώπων, so that they might kill the third of men (v. 15c). In in verse 18, ἀπὸ τῶν τριῶν πληγῶν τούτων ἀπεκτάνθησαν³⁵ τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ τοῦ καπνοῦ καὶ τοῦ θείου τοῦ ἐκπορευομένου ἐκ τῶν στομάτων αὐτῶν, By these three plagues a third of humankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths.³⁶ This

³⁵“Do the three plagues ‘kill’ people physically or in some figurative or spiritual manner? Most of the Apocalypse’s uses of ἀποκτείνω (‘kill’) outside 9:15–20 appear to refer to literal death (about nine times). Whereas the locusts are ‘not permitted to kill,’ the horses from beyond the Euphrates are permitted to kill. They kill the whole person, both physically and spiritually. They carry out not the final judgment but one that is linked to it and that prepares for it. They cause the physical death of idolaters, compromisers, and persecutors of the church, who are all already spiritually dead (cf. 3:1–2; recall that 8:13 has called the recipients of the last three trumpets idolatrous “earth dwellers”; see on 9:6, 20–21).

“This plague of death includes all the forms of death that the ungodly undergo (from illness, tragedy, etc.). The death stroke against their bodies makes certain their spiritual death for eternity, since those who physically die in an unbelieving state remain in that condition forever. In this sense, it can be said that death here is both spiritual and physical. ‘Fire and sulfur’ (πῦρ καὶ ... θεῖον), found three times in 9:17–18, is used elsewhere in the Apocalypse exclusively of the final and eternal judgment of ungodly idolaters (14:10; 21:8) and of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (19:20; 20:10). This connection with final judgment in other passages of the book implies that the execution of death by the demonic horses here is a kind of first act securing unbelievers for their great judgment in 14:10 and 21:8, for which they must wait.

“The concept of trials plaguing the wicked in contrast to the faithful as a first installment on their final judgment is also found in Pss. Sol. 15 in connection with the ‘sealing’ in Ezekiel 9 (see also above on 7:2–3). Particularly striking is the parallel between Pss. Sol. 15:6–13 and the fifth and sixth trumpets (e.g., 9:4ff.), the former of which includes: ‘the flame of fire ... against the unrighteous will not touch him ... for the mark of God is on the righteous so that they may be saved.... Famine, sword, and pestilence [will be] far from the righteous, ... but will pursue sinners and overtake [them] ... for the mark of destruction is on their forehead. And the inheritance of sinners is destruction and darkness.... Sheol beneath ... sinners will perish forever in the day of the Lord’s judgment.’

“Beckwith observes that the ‘hyacinth’ on the breastplates in v 17 is meant as a metaphorical synonym of the ‘smoke’ in the last two clauses, since both are a purple-blue color. This means that ‘fire and sulfur’ are really part of a threefold clause, emphasized by its threefold synonymous repetition in vv 17–18.¹⁰⁶⁷

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 511–512.]

³⁶“Fire, smoke, and sulfur are all mentioned in Philo’s highly stylized account of God’s destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Mos. 2.55–58). The number ‘one-third’ is used in Sib. Or. 3.544 of the survivors rather than the victims: ‘one-third of all mankind will survive’ a plague of fire (see v 15). The motif of judgment of a city or a land by fire and brimstone is a fixed notion in the OT and early Judaism for which the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

authorization was then carried out by these monstrous horses. The actions of these four angels leading this apocalyptic army is rather similar to that of the swarm of apocalyptic locusts in the fifth seal (cf. v. 5-6). The main difference is that the locusts could harm men but not kill them, while the horses execute one third of mankind.³⁷ Notice, however, that the execution of one

by fire and brimstone narrated in Gen 19:24 is prototypical (Deut 29:23; Ps 11:6; Ezek 38:22; Isa 30:33; 34:9; Sib. Or. 3.53–61, 689–92; Luke 17:29; 1 Clem 11:1). Fire and sulfur are frequently mentioned in Revelation as vehicles of divine judgment (9:17–18; 14:10; 19:20; 20:10; 21:8).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 540–541.]

³⁷“The combination of serpents (9:19) and scorpions (vv 3, 5, 10) reflects a broader linkage in biblical and ancient thought, where the combination was metaphorical for judgment in general and deception or delusion in particular (e.g., Deut. 8:15; Sir. 39:30; CD 8.9–11; Luke 10:19; m. Aboth 2.10; Midr. Rab. Num. 10.2). In Num. 21:6 and Deut. 8:15 the reference is to “fiery serpents,” which is similar to the threefold repetition of fire in connection with serpents in Rev. 9:17–19. In Num. 21:6 the serpents’ bite, as here, kills a significant portion of the people because of unbelief. Sir. 39:27–31 provides a striking parallel with Rev. 9:3–4, 15–19: ‘All these things are for good to the godly; so to the sinners they are turned into evil. There are spirits created for vengeance, which in their fury lay on sore strokes; in the time of destruction they pour out their force, and appease the wrath of him that made them. Fire and ... death ... all these were created for vengeance ... scorpions [and] serpents ... punishing the wicked to destruction ... they will be prepared on earth, when need is; and when their time is come, they will not go beyond his word.’ These afflictions occur generally throughout all ages.

“Likewise, John understood that the sufferings he was narrating were already occurring and were not to be limited to a period immediately preceding the parousia. This is also hinted at by another conspicuous parallel, Luke 10:17–19, where ‘the demons’ are called ‘serpents and scorpions and ... the power of the enemy,’ over which Christians presently have power, but which can still ‘harm’ unbelievers. The harm associated with the two repellent creatures is sometimes metaphorically expressed as deception, which is undoubtedly implicit in the Lukan text. Ps. 57(58):4(3)–7(6) refers to the “lie” that sinners ‘speak’ as ‘venom ... like that of a serpent, as that of a deaf asp ...’; these liars also have ‘the cheek teeth of the lions’ (cf. Rev. 9:8–10, 17; cf. also Sir. 21:2). CD 8.9–13 compares the High Priest in Jerusalem and the Roman authorities with ‘the poison of serpents and the head of asps.’ This metaphor explains the harm of false teaching and deception that the High Priest had caused (cf. also CD 1.14–15). Jesus calls the Pharisees ‘serpents, ... brood of vipers’ partly because they were ‘blind guides’ to others (Matt. 23:15–33). In CD 5.12–14 those participating in the same false teaching are compared to ‘kindlers of fire and lighters of brands’ and to spiders and adders. Similarly, Targ. Pal. Deut. 32:33 refers to the ‘evil counsels ... [and] wicked thoughts’ of idolatrous Israelites as being ‘as serpents’ heads’; likewise, Targ. Jer. Deut. 32:33 speaks of ‘their malice like the head of asps.’ Targ. Onk. Deut. 32:32–33 affirms that the ‘plagues’ on Israelite idolaters ‘will be evil as the heads of serpents, and the retribution of their works like their venom,’ and then compares this punishment to that of Sodom and Gomorrah, as does Rev. 9:18.

third of mankind happens in consequence of all three plagues, rather than by just one of the three: ἀπὸ τῶν τριῶν πληγῶν τούτων (v. 18a).

The powerful images here stress the awesomeness of God’s wrath unleashed at times and with varying degrees of intensity, even as human history moves to its ending point. John reached back to a variety of OT and Jewish precedents in order to find the best language and concepts for describing more correctly what he had seen and heard in this part of the apocalyptic vision.³⁸

Midr. Rab. Num. 10.2 says that God’s judgment of the idolatrous nations persecuting Israel will be like ‘the basilisk [who] severs man from life,’ and God’s judgment on the wicked within Israel is compared to ‘a bee sting and a scorpion bite.’ Those suffering the latter affliction will have ‘their minds ... deranged, and their heart will utter confused things.’ We see here that serpents and scorpions may have been used to signify doctrinal deception because their bite or sting can cause mental delusion leading to death. Prov. 23:32–33 is adduced to supplement the imagery.

“In Proverbs the harm of too much wine is likened to ‘bites like a serpent and stings like a viper’ resulting in the eyes seeing ‘strange things’ and the ‘mind ... uttering perverse things.’ Consequently, again, in the Midrash and Proverbs the serpent-scorpion metaphor concerns a woe of delusion (cf. Prov. 23:29; not coincidentally, the severity of the judgment in the Midrash is compared to that of Pharaoh in Exodus). In 1QH 3 (11).16–18, 25–27; 5 (13).27 the ‘pit’ and ‘abys’ open and spit out billows, arrows, and ‘the spirits of the Asp’ against hardened hypocrites, ‘leaving [them] no hope.’ This affliction arising from the pit is interpreted as deceptive influences (especially false teaching) affecting the ungodly but not those truly loyal to God (2[10].12–34; 4[12].5–22). In b. Aboth 2.10 the words of the wise exponents of Torah do harm to those who do not obey them, and, in apparent contrast to the preceding imagery, describes this harm as ‘the sting of a scorpion ... the hiss of a serpent ... coals of fire.’ Yet this is similar to Rev. 11:5 and overlaps generally with some of the above imagery in its emphasis on judgment through the infliction of harm. Indeed, the reference associates closely the metaphors of scorpions and serpents with teaching, though in this case the focus is on the results that true teaching has for those responding wrongly to it.”

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 515–516.]

³⁸“The description in Job 40–41 (LXX) includes numerous parallels with Rev. 9:17–19. Job 40 opens with ‘send forth angels with wrath, and lay low every proud one’ (40:11[6]). The cosmic sea monster is described as ‘chief of the Lord’s creation’ (40:19[14]), the ‘dragon’ (40:25[20]), ‘king over all the sons of pride’ (41:26 MT), as having ‘the appearance of the morning star’ (41:10[9]; cf. Isaiah 14), with a metal ‘breastplate’ (41:5–7[4–6]), a large tail (40:17[12], 31[26]), and ‘power lodged in his neck’ (41:14[13]). ‘Terror is around about his teeth’ (41:6[5]); he ‘wages war with his mouth’ against God (40:32[27]–41:2). There is a repeated metaphorical stress on ‘fire proceeding out of his mouth’ and similar phrases (41:11[10]–13[12]: ἐκ στόματος αὐτοῦ ἐκπορεύονται ὡς λαμπάδες καιόμεναι ... ὡς ... πυρός. Ἐκ μυκτῆρων αὐτοῦ ἐκπορεύεται καπνὸς καμίνου καιομένης πυρὶ ... Ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ ἄνθρακες, φλοῶξ δὲ ἐκ στόματος αὐτοῦ ἐκπορεύεται).

B. The rebellion of those rejecting God, vv. 20-21.

One would think that in the face of such awesome expressions of divine wrath, even the worst sinner would realize the error of his evil ways and repent from them in the face of such overwhelming judgments of God. But no, such is not the case. Repentance does not happen. Instead, evil people cling even more to their evil ways. Thus although somewhat surprising, the inclusion of the single sentence in vv. 20-21, is not really surprising, in the realization of the hardness of those devoted to evil living. And when evil living is linked to bad religion it is exceedingly hard to turn loose of, as is depicted here.

John stresses two points in this sentence both built off the common verbal expression οὐδὲ μετενόησαν ἐκ... / οὐ μετενόησαν ἐκ..., **they did not repent.**³⁹ The

“The imagery of Rev. 9:17–19 also has precedents in Wis. 16:5, where the Egyptians are said to have been plagued with the ‘horrible fierceness of beasts ... and they perished with the stings of crooked serpents.’ They were also destroyed by ‘serpents,’ ‘lions,’ and ‘unknown wild beasts, full of rage ... breathing out either a fiery vapor, or filthy scents of scattered smoke, or shooting horrible sparkles out of their eyes’ (Wis. 11:15–19). In Job 20:15–16 (LXX) the judgment of the unjust oppressor is described similarly: ‘an angel [‘of death’ in codex A] will drag him [the wicked] out of his house. And let him suck the poison of dragons, and let the serpent’s tongue slay him.’ Here, as in Rev. 12:3–9 and 20:2, δράκων (‘dragon’) is made synonymous with ὄφις (‘serpent’; so likewise Isa. 27:1; Sir. 25:15–16). This background also testifies to the evil nature of the intermediary divine agents who judge ungodly people.

“A similar trajectory of thought to 9:17–19 also occurs in Targ. Jeremiah 8, where deceived (v 5) Israel is punished for not repenting (vv 5–6, 22) from idol worship (vv 2, 16, 19) by being ‘killed’ by ‘poisonous serpents’ (vv 14, 17), which metaphorically represent armies God is ‘letting loose on’ Israel. This death is referred to as a ‘plague’ (v 22).”

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 516–517.]

³⁹“While it is possible that vv 20–21 are intended to form a conclusion to the entire series of six trumpet plagues in 8:7–9:19, the fact that the term ‘killed’ is used here suggests that it is primarily a conclusion to the slaughter inflicted by the demonic army that composes the sixth trumpet plague. The motif of repentance appears here quite unexpectedly. Nowhere in the narrative of the seven trumpets (8:2–9:20; 15:15–18) is there any mention of the purpose of the trumpet plagues, whether as divine punishment for earlier transgressions or as attempts to ‘encourage’ general repentance on the part of the people of the world. In fact, the motif of repentance occurs only rarely in Rev 4:1–22:5, and only in the context of a negative reaction to the eschatological punishments sent by God (9:20, 21; 16:9, 11). This repentance motif is a formal motif that has been derived by the author from the plague story in Exodus (Exod 7:13, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 34–35; 10:1, 20; 11:9–10; 14:4), where it is couched in such a way that there is no doubt that a change of mind on the part of the pharaoh of Egypt was never considered a real possibility. In the parenthesis of Rev

first point was their idolatry and the second point their evil actions.

a) The rejection of God in favor of idols, v. 20

20 Καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, οἳ οὐκ ἀπεκτάνθησαν ἐν ταῖς πληγαῖς ταύταις, οὐδὲ μετενόησαν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν, ἵνα μὴ προσκυνήσουσιν τὰ δαιμόνια καὶ τὰ εἰδωλα τὰ χρυσᾶ καὶ τὰ ἀργυρᾶ καὶ τὰ χαλκᾶ καὶ τὰ λίθινα καὶ τὰ ξύλινα, ἃ οὔτε βλέπειν δύνανται οὔτε ἀκούειν οὔτε περιπατεῖν,

20 The rest of humankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands or give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk.

The first half of the sentence in v. 20 both identifies who these individuals are and asserts their unshakable devotion to paganism (see statement 299 in [above diagram](#)).

First, they are οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, οἳ οὐκ ἀπεκτάνθησαν ἐν ταῖς πληγαῖς ταύταις, **the rest of men, who were not killed in these plagues.** The demonic army was authorized to kill off one third of humanity, minus those with the seal of God on their foreheads. That left two-thirds of the evil world stung and injured by both the scorpions and the horses, but still alive.

How did they respond to all the suffering they both experienced and the death they saw taking place all around them? John’s answer is simply οὐδὲ μετενόησαν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν, **not even did they repent from the works of their hands.** ⁴⁰**He gives an em-** 2–3, however, μετανοεῖν occurs eight times in contexts in which the Christian community is called upon to repent (2:5[2x], 16, 21[2x], 22; 3:3, 19; see Comment on 2:5).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 541.]

⁴⁰“The majority of the Apocalypses’s uses of ‘repent’ (μετανοέω) are in chs. 2–3 (seven occurrences), the rest here (vv 20–21) and in 16:9, 11. In the letters (chs. 2–3) the prevailing problem from which the readers were to repent was compromise with pagan culture, especially idolatry (e.g., see on 2:6, 9–10, 13–15, 20–22; 3:4). ‘Repent’ here could be linked with ‘repent’ in the letters, especially in 2:21–23, where the word occurs three times in a challenge to repent from idolatry, which is referred to there as ‘fornication’ (πορνεία). There also is the only explicit reference in the letters to failure to repent, the penalty for which is death. If such a link exists between the letters and ch. 9, the point would be that there are many in the churches who will not repent from their compromising attitude toward the idolatrous culture. The warning to the indecisive is that horrible demons stand behind the idols that they are tempted to worship. They are to know that idols are the tools employed by demons to keep people under the anesthetic effects of spiritual ignorance. The gruesome parabolic description of the demons is intended to shock the true people of God out of their complacent condition, as they realize what spiritual specters really

phatic denial of their willingness to undergo change. The phrase τῶν ἔργων τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν, works of their hands, is a Jewish stereotypical expression for idols.⁴¹

That John has idols in mind is made clear by the negative purpose statement ἵνα μὴ προσκυνήσουσιν τὰ δαιμόνια καὶ τὰ εἰδῶλα τὰ χρυσᾶ καὶ τὰ ἀργυρᾶ καὶ τὰ χαλκᾶ καὶ τὰ λίθινα καὶ τὰ ξύλινα, ἃ οὔτε βλέπουν δύνανται οὔτε ἀκούειν οὔτε περιπατεῖν, lest they give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk.⁴²

lurk behind the idols (see on 2:7)."

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 520.]

⁴¹"The phrase τὰ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν, 'the works of their hands' or 'the products of their own manufacture,' is a stereotypical Semitic phrase that often refers to idols as lifeless, impotent, manufactured objects (Deut 31:29; 1 Kgs 16:7; 2 Kgs 22:17; 2 Chr 34:25; Isa 2:8; 17:8; Jer 1:16; 25:6–7; 32:30; Mic 5:13; Acts 7:41; Justin 1 Apol. 20.5; Dial. 35.6). This meaning is clear in Ps 115:4 (LXX 113:2; with a doublet in Ps 135:15[LXX 134:15]): 'Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands.' The equivalent Greek term χειροποίητος, 'handmade, artificial,' is occasionally used for idols also (Sib. Or. 3.606, 722; 4.28a; Justin 1 Apol. 58.3; Dial. 35.6; Athenagoras Leg. 17.3). The phrase 'the works of their hands' can also be used of people's deeds (Pss 28:4; 90:17; Isa 65:22; 1 Enoch 100:9; Pss. Sol. 4:16; 6:2; 9:4; 16:9) or of the creative work of God (Pss 8:6; 19:1; 138:8; 142:5; Isa 45:11; 60:21; Adam and Eve 33:5; Pss. Sol. 18:1; Gk Ap. Ezra 1:10)." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 541–542.]

⁴²"The term δαιμόνιον, a faded diminutive form of δαίμων (the latter occurs only once in the NT in Matt 8:31), occurs three times in Revelation (9:20; 16:14; 18:2). Charles (1:254) observes that this text 'carefully distinguishes demons and idols.' But is that so? It is probable that καὶ here is exegetical or explanatory and that the phrase should be translated 'that they might not worship demons, that is, idols' (see Theophilus Ad Autolyicum 1.10, where he says of the Olympians, 'For they are not gods, but idols [εἰδῶλα] ... and [that is,] unclean demons [καὶ δαιμόνια ἀκάθαρτα]'). How are demons worshiped? In 1 Cor 10:19–20, Paul says that idols are nothing (cf. 1 Cor 8:4, 11), but that pagans actually offer sacrifices to demons and not to gods (a notion probably derived from Deut 32:17). There was a conviction expressed several places in the OT that pagan gods are really demons (Deut 32:17, ἔθυσαν δαιμονίοις καὶ οὐ θεῷ, 'they sacrifice to demons and not to God'; see Ps 95:5, πάντες οἱ θεοὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν δαιμόνια, 'all the gods of the nations are demons' [a passage quoted by Trypho in Justin Dial. 55.2]; Ps 105:37[LXX 106:37]), a view that persisted in early Judaism (Jub. 1:11; 11:4–6; 22:17; 1 Enoch 19:1; 99:7; T. Judah 23:1). The early Christian apologists were similarly convinced that the 'gods' were really evil demons (Justin 1 Apol. 5.2; 9.1; Tatian Oratio 8.1–4; 12.4; Tertullian De spect. 9; Apol. 23.4; De idol. 4; 15.5; De test. an. 2; Ad Scap. 2; Clement of Alex. Protrepticus 2; Strom. 6.3). Celsus thought that people should pray and sacrifice to idols even if they are daimons (Origen Contra Celsum 8.24). Of course for Celsus, as well as for the Greeks generally, the term 'demon' or 'daimon' was simply a term for a minor type of deity. Some Greeks

identified some of the gods of Greek mythology with daimons, a term used nonpejoratively (Plutarch De def. orac. 421C–E; see Brenk, In Mist Apparelled, 85–112). Origen thought that some cult statues were inhabited by daimons (Contra Celsum 8.41). The notion of worshiping demons is mentioned in Tatian Oratio 16.2. In Acts of Bartholomew 6 (Lipsius-Bonnet, AAA 2/1:142), a demon conveniently confesses, 'We are worshiped [προσκυνούμεθα] by them [i.e., 'pagans'] as gods, but we are actually demons' (on this motif, see Pohlenz, Zorne, 140ff.). In the late Greco-Roman period, there was a widespread belief that demons fed on sacrifices (1 Cor 10:20; Philo Decal. 74; Porphyry De abst. 11, 42; Oenomaus in Eusebius Praep. evang. 5.21.5 [213b]; Origen Contra Celsum 3.28; 7.6; see Iliad 4.49; 9.500; 24.70), in continuity with the ancient belief that the gods were nourished by sacrifices.

"Jewish and Christian denunciations of idolatry frequently include a list of the materials out of which pagan deities were constructed (e.g., gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, stone, clay), with the implication that this is incompatible with the belief that they are living beings (Hab 2:18–19; Dan 5:23; Ps 115:4–6; 3 Macc 4:16; 2 Macc 2:3; Wis 15:8–9; Ep Jer 8–9, 30, 50, 57, 70; Acts 17:29; 4QPrNab; 4Q267 = 4QDb 17 ii 8–9; 4Q268 = 4QDc 1 ii 8–9; 4Q270 = 4QDe frag. 7, lines 20–21).

"Surprisingly, in Revelation the general denunciation of pagan idolatry occurs only here and as part of a vice list in 22:15, though specific forms of idolatry are mentioned, such as eating meat sacrificed to idols, a problem within the Christian communities (2:14, 20), and the worship of the dragon, the beast, or his image, an issue involving people generally (13:4, 14–15; 14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). Denunciations of idolatry occur frequently in the OT, where the influences of pagan worship within the land or people of Israel are regarded as a threat to the worship of Yahweh. In Hellenistic Jewish literature, particularly in apologetic contexts in which Jewish monotheism is being defended, idolatry was frequently derided as foolish and ridiculous (Philo Spec. Leg. 1.28; Leg. 139, 290; Decal. 72–79; Ps.-Aristeas Ep. 134–39; Ant. 19.290). The LXX translation of Exod 22:28 was very influential in the toleration of pagan worship advocated by some Hellenistic Jews. While the translation of Exod 22:28[MT and LXX 27] reads 'You shall not revile God [לֹא תִבְזֶה אֱלֹהִים, *ēlōhīm*],' the LXX reads θεοὺς οὐ κακολογήσεις, 'You shall not revile the gods.' This reading is cited several times in Philo and Josephus, where it was interpreted to mean that it was all right for Gentiles to worship pagan gods (Philo Spec. Leg. 1.53; Mos. 2.203–5; Quaest. in Exod. 2.5; Ant. 4.207; Ag. Ap. 2.236–37; see Le Boulluec-Sandevoir, L'Exode, 230–31; Delling, Klio 43–45 [1965] 263–69). However, only occasionally were Jewish writers concerned that Gentiles give up their own forms of worship in contexts in which Jews were unaffected (M. Goodman, Proselytizing, 40–59). Those few sources that sharply denounce pagan forms of worship generally (Wis 13–15; Sib. Or. 3.545–72, 601–7; Rom 1:18–23), often linking such worship with divine punishment, presuppose a universal eschatology in which all people will abandon their traditional forms of worship and turn to the worship of the true God (Tob 4:6; Philo Mos. 2.44; see Comments on 21:24–26). Therefore, the general denunciation of idolatry in Rev 9:20 and 22:15 is one aspect of the author's Christian universalism (for other aspects, see Comments on 14:6–7).

"There was clear Jewish antagonism to idolatry in Palestine (1 Macc 2:23–28; Ant. 12.344; Ag. Ap. 1.193), and there is some evidence that when a Jewish community was relatively strong they might attack pagan shrines (1 Macc 5:68; 10:84; Jos. Ag. Ap. 1.248–50; cf. Bel 1:1–22). One basis for a Jewish denunciation

Here John follows a well established pattern in both ancient Judaism and early Christianity that linked demons and idols.⁴³ To worship an idol was to worship a demon. John uses the terminology of Psalm 115:4-7 (=LXX 113:12-16) to assert the inability of these human products to see, hear, or walk.⁴⁴ In a thoroughly polytheistic world such as the late first century Rome,

of pagan idolatry was presumably the tradition of the ‘Noachic laws,’ which Jews believed were incumbent on all Gentiles, who, like the Jews, were descendants of Noah (they may be reflected in Acts 15:19–21, 28–29). The earliest form of these laws occurs in a section of the Tosephta called ‘Aboda Zara, ‘alien worship,’ where seven Noachic requirements are discussed: (1) setting up courts of justice, (2) idolatry, (3) blasphemy, (4) fornication, (5) bloodshed, (6) thievery, and (7) limbs cut from living animals (t. ‘Abod. Zar. 8.4–6). However, there are other strands of Hellenistic Judaism that, though they might denounce gentile homosexuality, are soft on idolatry (Testament of Abraham; Ps.-Phocylides Sententiae; see Goodman, *Proselytizing*, 54). Prophetic critiques of idolatry are particularly frequent in Deutero-Isaiah, reflecting internal conflicts in the post-exilic Jewish community (Isa 40:18–20; 42:17; 44:9–20; 45:16, 20; cf. Jer 10:1–16; Ps 115:3–8).

“Antagonism to idolatry is also expressed in the NT (1 Cor 14:15), and critiques of idolatry (often borrowing from Hellenistic Jewish apologetic) are also found among the early Christian apologists (Tatian Oratio 4.2; Theophilus Ad Autolycom 1.9–10; 2.2). Celsus charged that Christians cannot bear to see temples, altars, and images (Origen Contra Cels. 7.62). It is important to recognize that there was also a critique of ‘idolatry’ expressed by Hellenistic intellectuals (Ps.-Heraclitus Ep. 4.; see H. W. Attridge, *First-Century Cynicism in the Epistles of Heraclitus*, HTS 29 [Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1976] 13–23, where there are a number of references to ancient sources). Plutarch (De Iside 379C–D) observes that some Greeks speak of the bronze, painted, and stone effigies as gods, rather than as statues (ἀγάλματα) of the gods, which is what they really are (see Acts 19:26; cf. v 23). Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, reportedly thought that the making of temples and images was unnecessary, for such human products are not worthy of the gods (von Arnim, SVF vol. 1, frag. 264 [quoted in Clement Alex. Strom. 5.12.76]).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 542–544.]

⁴³Remember that in the Greco-Roman world the demon (often spelled as damon) represented not supernatural evil but a second tier of deities to be worshiped along side the primary deities of the state religion.

⁴⁴**Psalm 113:12-16.** 12 τὰ εἰδωλα τῶν ἐθνῶν ἀργύριον καὶ χρυσίον, ἔργα χειρῶν ἀνθρώπων· † 13 στόμα ἔχουσιν καὶ οὐ λαλήσουσιν, ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔχουσιν καὶ οὐκ ὄψονται, † 14 ὄτια ἔχουσιν καὶ οὐκ ἀκούσονται, ῥίνας ἔχουσιν καὶ οὐκ ὀσφρανθήσονται, † 15 χεῖρας ἔχουσιν καὶ οὐ ψηλαφήσουσιν, πόδας ἔχουσιν καὶ οὐ περιπατήσουσιν, οὐ φωνήσουσιν ἐν τῷ λάρυγγι αὐτῶν· † 16 ὅμοιοι αὐτοῖς γένοιτο οἱ ποιοῦντες αὐτὰ καὶ πάντες οἱ πεποιθότες ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς· †

=**Psalm 115:4-8.** 4 Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. 5 They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. 6 They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. 7 They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; they make no sound in their throats. 8 Those who make them are like them; so are all who trust in them.

this condemnation takes on a special sting against the paganism dominating the world of John’s first readers, many of whom had come out of this religious world in order to become Christians.⁴⁵

b) The clinging to evil ways, v. 21

21 καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν ἐκ τῶν φόνων αὐτῶν οὔτε ἐκ τῶν φαρμάκων αὐτῶν οὔτε ἐκ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῶν οὔτε ἐκ τῶν κλεμμάτων αὐτῶν.

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

In the second part of this lengthy sentence John turns to actions by these idolatrous people and indicates the same unwillingness to repent from their evil actions.

The evil actions mentioned here follow the fifth, sixth, and seventh commandments of the Decalogue (cf. Exod. 20:13-15; Deut. 5:17-19). These three sinful actions are typically found in the vice lists of the NT.⁴⁶ Most of them also show up in the two other longer vice lists in Rev. 21:8 and 22:15.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Ps 115:4–6 may also be alluded to in this statement from an Aramaic incantation bowl (Naveh-Shaked, *Amulet*, bowl 6, line 4): ‘In the same way as you have eyes but do not see, as you have ears but do not hear, so shall you give me a stone from you to silence from me.’ Jewish and Christian critiques of idolatry often mention that pagan images lack the sense perceptions of living beings (Dan 5:23; 3 Macc 4:16; Wis 15:15; Ep Jer 8–9; Sir 30:19; 1 Cor 12:1).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 544.]

⁴⁶The mention of murder, immorality, and theft reflects concerns of the fifth, sixth, and seventh commandments of the Decalogue (Exod 20:13–15; Deut 5:17–19); the same three vices are mentioned in Rom 13:9 (together with covetousness) and also occur in the longer vice list in Mark 7:21–22. The term φάρμακον occurs only here in 9:21, while φαρμακεία, ‘sorcery,’ occurs in 18:23, and the cognate noun φάρμακος, ‘sorcerer,’ occurs twice in the plural in the other two vice lists in Revelation (21:8; 22:15). These φαρμακ- cognates all occur in lists, with the exception of 18:23. While φάρμακον can mean medicine, in pejorative contexts such as this it means either ‘poison’ (Ant. 15.89; J. W. 1.581–83; cf. PGM VIII.33; note the close proximity of the terms φόνος, ‘murder,’ here in 9:21, and φονεύς, ‘murderer,’ in 21:8; 22:15) or ‘magical spell’ (Jos. J. W. 1.571; POxy III.472; PGM IV.2176; VIII.33; XIII.253). The practice of magic was widespread in the ancient world and was particularly prevalent in Asia Minor and Egypt.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 544.]

⁴⁷“A synoptic comparison of the three vice lists in Revelation is instructive:

Rev 9:20–21	Rev 21:8	Rev 22:15
[εἰδωλολατρία] [idolatry]	δειλοί cowards	
	ἄπιστοι unfaithful	

The one item perhaps needing amplification is τῶν φαρμάκων. In a positive text it can mean medicine but mostly it is used in the NT negatively in the sense of sorcery or possibly witchcraft.⁴⁸ This practice was especially wide spread in the province of Asia and in Egypt in the first century Roman empire.

Also one should remember the umbrella nature of πορνείας⁴⁹ as covering all kinds of sexual activity outside of marriage and labeling them as evil before

	ἐβδελυγμένοι abominable	κύνες dogs
φόνοι murders	φονεῖς murderers	
φάρμακα sorcery		φάρμακοι magicians
πορνεία immorality	πόρνοι immoral	πόρνοι fornicators
κλέμματα thefts	φάρμακοι sorcerers εἰδωλολάτραι idolaters	φονεῖς murderers εἰδωλολάτραι idolaters
	πάντες οἱ ψευδεῖς all liars	πᾶς φιλῶν καὶ ποιῶν ψεῦδος everyone who both loves and practices lying

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 545.]

⁴⁸“The term φάρμακον occurs only here in 9:21, while φαρμακεία, ‘sorcery,’ occurs in 18:23, and the cognate noun φάρμακος, ‘sorcerer,’ occurs twice in the plural in the other two vice lists in Revelation (21:8; 22:15). These φαρμακ- cognates all occur in lists, with the exception of 18:23. While φάρμακον can mean medicine, in pejorative contexts such as this it means either ‘poison’ (Ant. 15.89; J. W. 1.581–83; cf. PGM VIII.33; note the close proximity of the terms φόνος, ‘murder,’ here in 9:21, and φονεύς, ‘murderer,’ in 21:8; 22:15) or ‘magical spell’ (Jos. J. W. 1.571; POxy III.472; PGM IV.2176; VIII.33; XIII.253). The practice of magic was widespread in the ancient world and was particularly prevalent in Asia Minor and Egypt. Modern anthropologists, following E. E. Evans-Pritchard, have distinguished between sorcery, which manipulates magical techniques and substances, and witchcraft, which is an inborn quality in which adepts use hereditary psycho-physical skills to attain their objectives (Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande [Oxford: Clarendon, 1976] 63–64, 176; see L. Mair, Witchcraft [New York; Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1969] 7–32). The term βασκαίνειν, ‘to bewitch,’ connected with the evil eye in the LXX and Greek literature and used by Paul in Gal 3:1, fits this definition of witchcraft (see J. Neyrey, “Bewitched in Galatia: Paul and Cultural Anthropology,” CBQ 50 [1988] 72–75).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 544–545.]

⁴⁹“The term πορνεία is a generic term for various forms of ‘sexual immorality,’ including homosexuality (Balsdon, Romans, 225–27).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 545.]

God.⁵⁰

All through the OT and the NT the assertion is that idolatry and sinful conduct are deeply connected to one another. In the religious traditions of the Canaanites in the OT and the Greco-Roman era of the NT, the fertility base of most of the religions blended sexual immorality with religious worship. Thus how these two aspects of human existence, religion and morality, could be inner connected was not hard to see. And this would be particularly true for the monotheistic traditions of Judaism and Christianity who worshiped a God considered to be utterly holy and completely intolerant of anything or anyone unholy.

Thus John’s initial readers would have seen this link as very natural and normal Christian teaching. This was true even though some in the seven churches were having difficulty turning loose of the immorality inherited from their paganism, as chapters two and three make very clear. It’s clear why the demand for repentance in Revelation centers in these chapters of two-three and nine. The difference between the two sets of chapters is that actual turning away from such sin is expected in chapters two-three because the demand is made upon professing Christians. The total unwillingness to repent in chapter nine comes from pagans deeply devoted to their idols and under the spell of demons.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

What does Rev. 9:12-21 have to say to us today? The blowing of the sixth trumpet signals more punishments of God falling upon evil people. This time their severity is more than before, but it is not as severe as it is going to get.

The Bible is very realistic about the death grip that evil gains over the lives of many people. That strangle hold usually comes through the deception of bad religion, which in turn produces all kinds of immoral behavior. Although Christ died for all sinners, there are some individuals who will cling to their idolatry and sinful ways even as they slide into the pits of Hell and eternal damnation. The Israelite people knew this from the Exodus onward, and early Christians also recognized this truth.

We do well to acknowledge this reality, and then to concentrate on those who are open to the Gospel and willing to consider repenting and turning to Christ.

⁵⁰“οὔτε ἐκ τῶν κλεμμάτων αὐτῶν (‘nor from their thefts’) was omitted in some mss. because of confusion with the preceding similar wording (homoeoteleuton). Some mss. (x A pc) have πονηρίας (‘evil’) instead of πορνείας (‘fornication’), which is preferable, since all the other vices in the list are specific and not general, and fornication was characteristic of idolatrous activities.” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 520.]