

Unleashing Hell on Earth

Revelation 9:1-21

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May 23-24, 2026

Wasn't it great having Pastor Ray and Marlene at Edgewood last week? Ray did an outstanding job preaching through Revelation 8. Before the services he told me he was glad he was preaching that chapter because Revelation 9 is one of the most difficult chapters in the entire Bible. I asked him if he had any advice for me and he just laughed and said, "*Good luck with that!*" I thanked him for his reassuring words.

Ray took us through the first four trumpet judgments. Here's how he summarized them.

1. Land Burned.
2. Sea Bloodied.
3. Freshwater Poisoned.
4. Sky Darkened.

He added these words: "*These trumpet judgments impact the water, the earth, and the sky. Men and women suffer as a result. What's about to happen in these last trumpet blasts? The worst is yet to come. God's judgments are progressive, complete, and devastating.*"

Today, we'll consider the fifth and sixth trumpets from Revelation 9 (the seventh trumpet will sound in the second half of chapter 11). Before we jump in, I want to make six preliminary points.

1. **We can't pick and choose Bible passages to embrace and ones to avoid.** Since all Scripture is inspired by God, we are committed to preach the full counsel of God. Remember the promise of Revelation 1:3: "***Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.***" This promise applies to every verse of this book, including the difficult ones.
2. **We can't fully grasp grace and mercy until we understand God's holiness and justice.** The more we comprehend what we deserve, the more amazing God's grace becomes. *If we remove judgment from the Bible, we remove the urgency of the gospel.*

3. **Hell is a real place.** Jesus warned about Hell with great frequency and seriousness. Here's just one example from Matthew 13:50: "***And throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.***"
4. **If you're saved, there's no need to be afraid.** Someone texted me during the sermon last week and said she was "*spiraling with fear.*" This chapter is frightening but if you've been born again, 1 Thessalonians 1:10 says you have been delivered "***from the wrath to come.***" 1 John 4:4 declares, "***Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.***"

Even if hordes of demons are howling at the door, Christ is the door, and as Revelation 3:7 says, "***no one can open what he has shut.***" The Christian fights from victory, not *for* victory. We already stand clothed in Christ's righteousness, we're already seated with Him, and we've been declared "***more than a conqueror.***"

Through His death and resurrection, Jesus has defeated our depravity, death, and the Devil. Demonic powers still *operate*, still *harass*, still *tempt*, but they do so as defeated foes. They have no legal ground, no ultimate authority, no power to separate the believer from Christ.

David Jeremiah puts it like this: "*The horrors of Revelation are written not to frighten believers but to warn unbelievers.*" Let me be clear: *If you are saved, you do not need to live in fear. But if you are not saved, you should be scared because judgment is real and Hell is hot.*

5. **The symbols point to real events.** As we walk through this chapter, let's keep in mind what Pastor Ray said, "*This is both literal and symbolic.*" The symbols are real, and they point to real events and real judgments, often more terrifying than the symbols themselves.
6. **Revelation is all about Jesus.** This book is not primarily about beasts and bowls, terror and trumpets, demons or devastation. Jesus is the Lamb of God, who is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and is the coming King who conquers. Revelation 19:15-16 says, "***From His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the***

Almighty. On his robe and on His thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.”

In 1971, John Lennon released the song “Imagine” in which he invited the world to picture a different reality: “*Imagine there’s no Heaven...no Hell below us...above us only sky.*” Lennon believed that this might lead to lasting peace on earth.

But the Bible doesn’t ask us to imagine a world without Heaven and Hell. In Revelation 9, God pulls back the curtain to show us the opposite reality. Judgment is real. Hell is real. This is one of the most intense chapters in the entire Bible. Here’s the main point: *When Hell comes to earth, evil will be released, judgment will be rendered, and mercy will be rejected.* Time will not allow us to go deep into every detail, so we’ll focusing on the main points.

Each of the first four trumpet judgments will affect the physical universe, causing a major ecological disaster, but with the sounding of the fifth trumpet the focus shifts from the physical to the spiritual realm. John is no longer describing damaged rivers or darkened skies but is pulling back the curtain to reveal an unseen, but very real world. David Jeremiah writes, “*Revelation reminds us that what we see in the world is only the surface of a deeper, invisible war.*”

Someone else said it like this: “*The imagery is terrifying as the spiritual world invades the physical world and demons are unleashed to bring devastation, destruction, and death.*”

Let’s circle back to Revelation 8:13 to set the context: “***Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, ‘Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow.’***” Each of the remaining trumpets are associated with one of these three woes.

1. The Abyss Opens: Evil is Released (9:1-12). Listen to first two verses of chapter 9: “***And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft.***” While the word “*star*” referred to an object in the sky in chapter 8, here “*star*” refers to a spiritual being. We see this from the two uses of the pronoun “*he*.”

Since this star is ***“fallen from heaven,”*** it likely refers to Satan who was expelled from Heaven according to Isaiah 14:12. In Luke 10:18, Jesus declared, ***“I saw Satan fall like lightning from Heaven.”*** Revelation 12:9 says, ***“And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”***

We know from Revelation 1:18 that Jesus has ***“the keys of death and Hades.”*** Here we read that Jesus gave the ***“key to the shaft of the bottomless pit”*** to the devil, who opened the door, releasing unprecedented evil upon the earth. Let’s pause here to point out that Satan is *given* the key, he doesn’t steal it. God is in control, not Satan. The Lord sets time limits and parameters for judgment. We see this in other verses in this chapter:

- 9:3: ***“...they were given...”***
- 9:4: ***“They were told...”***
- 9:5: ***“They were allowed to torment them for five months...”***

The term ***“bottomless pit”*** literally refers to ***“the pit of the abyss,”*** which is used seven times in Revelation and refers to an extremely deep place. According to Jude 6, the abyss was where the vilest demons were incarcerated. 2 Peter 2:4 says, ***“For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into Hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.”*** This place was so bad that the regular demons didn’t want to end up there according to Luke 8:31: ***“And they begged Him not to command them to depart into the abyss.”***

Revelation 11:7 tells us the Beast ***“arises from the bottomless pit.”*** Revelation 20:3 says that Satan will be bound in the abyss for one thousand years: ***“And threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.”***

Darkness in Scripture consistently signals the withdrawal of God’s order and blessing. As dark smoke billows and belches out from the abyss, countless locust-like demons are released in verse 3: ***“Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the scorpions of the earth.”*** This is an echo of the 8th plague. People in the Middle East feared locusts because they were known to devour everything in their path. According to verse 4, these demon locusts were not allowed to harm the grass or those belonging to God: ***“They were***

told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.” The swarming demons cannot touch those who have been sealed. Have you been saved and sealed by the Savior?

Next, John does something unusual as he slows down to describe these creatures in disturbing detail. Warren Wiersbe writes: *“John is heaping image upon image to force us to feel the horror of this judgment.”* Notice how John struggles to find the right words to describe what he saw as he used the word **“like”** nine different times.

- Like the torment of a scorpion.
- Like horses prepared for battle.
- Like crowns of gold.
- Like human faces.
- Like women’s hair.
- Like lion’s teeth.
- Like breastplates of iron.
- Like the noise of many chariots.
- Like scorpions.

Listen to verses 5-12: ***“They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone. And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them. In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, their hair like women’s hair, and their teeth like lions’ teeth; they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails. They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon. The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.”***

According to the book of Joel, locusts were a sign of God’s judgment, and they normally did their ravaging work from May to September. These demon locusts are deliberately limited by divine decree, which shows once again that God is in control. The crowns suggest authority. The human faces speak of intelligence.

The lion's teeth represent ferocity and purposeful torment. The word **"torment"** means to *"harass, afflict, and torture."*

They could sting like a scorpion, causing incredible, unrelenting pain. The most venomous scorpion in the Middle East is ominously called "the deathstalker." One source describes a scorpion's sting like this: *"A scorpion's victim often rolls on the ground in agony, foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth in excruciating pain."* According to verse 5, there will be no relief for five months and the torment will be so severe that people will long to die, but death itself will flee from them.

Unlike natural locusts, which have no king according to Proverbs 30:27, these demon locusts have a ruler over them. Verse 11 tells us: ***"They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon."*** Both names mean *Destroyer*. Some commentators even note this might be an indirect attack on the false god Apollo and the Emperor Domitian, who thought of himself as Apollo incarnate. Interestingly, the locust was one of Apollo's symbols.

This is not a minor demon but a commanding and deadly figure who rises from the abyss itself. The fact that we're given both the Hebrew and Greek names is significant, showing that this evil being is unleashed upon every person, every language, every nation, to the Jew and to the Greek. No one is outside his reach, except those who are sealed. The Destroyer's appetite is insatiable according to Proverbs 27:20: ***"Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied..."***

Here we see the true nature of Satan's agenda laid bare as Jesus said in John 10:10: ***"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy."*** Behind every addiction, every broken home, every culture of death, every system that grinds people down is a Destroyer who is dedicated to destruction. He doesn't come to inconvenience you. He comes to ruin you.

When Hell comes to earth, evil will be released, judgment will be rendered, and mercy will be rejected.

2. The Army Advances: Judgment is Rendered. The next woe is wickedly catastrophic as we're introduced to an evil demonic army advancing upon the earth in verses 13-14: ***"Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.'"***

The “**voice**” from the four horns of the golden altar literally reads, “*the one voice,*” referring to the Lamb Himself. The horns on the altar were emblems of strength and salvation, as Zechariah declared about Jesus in Luke 1:69: “**He has raised up a horn of salvation for us.**” This is the same altar where the prayers of the martyrs rose before God in chapter 6. This altar of incense was associated with mercy, but now from that same place of prayer, the command to release the four angels goes out. As we learned last weekend, judgment and intercession are not opposites.

This judgment is localized “**at the great river Euphrates.**” According to Genesis 2:14, the Euphrates was one of the four rivers connected to Eden. From the very beginning, this region became associated with humanity’s rebellion against God. It was east of Eden that fallen humanity spread. The first murder took place in that broader region when Cain killed Abel. After the flood, the plains of Shinar near the Euphrates became the site of the Tower of Babel, where mankind united in arrogant defiance against God. It was also there that Nimrod established an early kingdom connected to rebellion and false worship.

Later, in Genesis 15:18, the Euphrates marked the eastern boundary of the land God promised to Abraham. That same region would eventually become the location of Israel’s captivity in Babylon, a nation synonymous with idolatry, pride, and opposition to God. And, as we will see later in Revelation 17-18, Babylon will become the symbol of the world’s final rebellion before God’s judgment falls. This is where man began and where man will end. The Euphrates region is not a random geographic detail. Throughout Scripture it’s been a staging ground for human rebellion, false religion, oppression, and divine judgment.

Before the trumpet sounds, God had stationed four angels, bound and waiting. Verse 15 says: “**So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind.**” The definite article “**the**” tells us this will happen at a precise and specific time in the future as we read in Isaiah 34:8: “**For the Lord has a day of vengeance, a year of recompense for the cause of Zion.**” Revelation 14:7 says, “**Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come...**”

A third of the remaining population of the world will be annihilated in the greatest military slaughter in human history. Verse 16 gives us the size of this army: “**The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number.**” That number is two hundred million soldiers. Remarkably, when

John wrote these words, the entire population of the earth was estimated at only 200 million. He was describing an army the size of the whole world! The point is clear: this is judgment on an unimaginable scale.

This helps us understand the warning in Daniel 12:1: ***“And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.”*** Jesus echoes the same reality in Matthew 24:21: ***“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.”***

After describing the size of troops, in Revelation 9:17-19, John gives a description of what the horses looked like: ***“And this is how I saw the horses in my vision and those who rode them: they wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur, and the heads of the horses were like lions’ heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails are like serpents with heads, and by means of them they wound.”***

Did you hear the repeated use of fire, sulfur, and smoke? This imagery echoes scenes of divine judgment throughout Scripture. The King James translates it as “fire, smoke, and brimstone.” Sulfur is often called brimstone in the Bible and is a yellow mineral that burns with an intense flame, emitting a choking, rotten-egg odor. In the ancient world, it was associated with destruction, fire, and judgment and makes us think of Sodom and Gomorrah.

A couple weeks ago, Beth and I drove past some refineries in Joliet, and the sulfur smell was nauseating. It was thick, putrid, and impossible to ignore, but at least we were able to get away from it. This scene in Revelation 9 is intended to portray the terrifying reality of God’s intense judgment.

I think of how Job 41:19-21 describes the Leviathan: ***“Out of his mouth go flaming torches; sparks of fire leap forth. Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke, as from a boiling pot and burning rushes. His breath kindles coals, and a flame comes forth from his mouth.”*** And lest we think this imagery is unique to apocalyptic literature, Jesus Himself uses similar language in Luke 17:29-30: ***“But on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and destroyed them all—so will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed.”***

Even the tails of these horses are described as serpents. It is as though the army is a multiplied manifestation of the original serpent from Genesis 3, the ancient deceiver bent on unleashing destruction and death.

While many today dismiss demons and Satan as mythology, demonic forces are real and active and Hell is a real place of unrelenting and eternal torment. This is not symbolic language meant merely to scare us. It is a warning meant to prepare us. Every trumpet blast is another merciful call from God to repent before final judgment comes. Even in wrath, God is extending mercy, giving people opportunity after opportunity to turn to Him. And yet, as we are about to see, that mercy will be met with the most heartbreaking response possible: people will still refuse to repent.

When Hell comes to earth, evil will be released, judgment will be rendered, and mercy will be rejected.

3. The Arrogance Remains: Mercy is Rejected. As terrifying as the trumpet judgments will be, what is most frightening is the stubbornness of the human heart. Judgment does not automatically produce repentance because the heart of the problem is always the problem of the heart. A hardened heart can see suffering and still refuse the solution. We see this in verses 20-21: ***“The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.”***

Notice that the text does not say they *couldn't* repent; it says they ***“did not repent.”*** Observe what it is they hold on to: the works of their hands, demon worship, idolatry, murder, sorcery, sexual immorality, and theft. This is not just a catalogue of individual bad choices; it's the portrait of a civilization in full collapse.

- **Demon worship.** What was once practiced in the shadows is now celebrated in the open. Just this week, I watched a self-described Satanist wearing devil horns give the invocation at a Nevada commission meeting, openly urging people to “eat the fruit from the tree.” It was a chilling reminder that what began in Eden is still being repeated today. Satan's strategy has never changed. Witchcraft is one of the fastest-growing spiritual movements in the Western world today. Wicca, the occult, and neo-paganism have exploded in popularity, particularly among young

people. The Satanic Temple has been leading a Satan Club in our own community.

- **Idolatry.** At its core, idolatry is simply this: anything that takes the place of God. It does not require a golden statue or a shrine. An idol is whatever you trust most, treasure most, and turn to first.
- **Murder.** Murder is the deliberate, premeditated taking of innocent human life, and in the end times, it will be breathtakingly common. A culture that has legally ended over 65 million unborn lives since 1973, that celebrates euthanasia as compassion, and that increasingly devalues human life at both ends of the age spectrum is already moving in this direction.
- **Sorcery.** We get our word pharmaceuticals from this Greek word. Drugs were often used to induce a religious state of communion with the gods. The global drug crisis is not merely a public health emergency; it is a spiritual one. Millions are numbing themselves into oblivion, and an entire industry of chemical escapism has been normalized, even celebrated. When people refuse to face God, they will reach for anything that will help them avoid Him. If you need help in this regard, Celebrate Recovery meets every Friday night.
- **Sexual immorality.** The Greek word is *porneia*, which is a broad term that covers every form of sexual sin outside of God's design: fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. What John describes as a characteristic of the end times is already one of the defining features of our cultural moment.
- **Theft.** People will fight for the increasingly scarce supplies of food and water by taking what does not belong to them.

Someone said it like this: *“Taken together, these six sins are not a random list. They are the predictable destination of any civilization that turns its back on God. Remove God, and you get demon worship and idolatry to fill the void. Remove the sanctity of life, and you get murder. Remove accountability, and you get sorcery and escapism. Remove the covenant of marriage, and you get sexual immorality. Remove love of neighbor, and you get theft. This is not just a prophecy about a distant future. It is a warning to us, right now, about the road we are already on.”*

This makes me think of Judges 21:25: ***“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”*** Apart from the grace of God, and the restraining power of the Holy Spirit, every one of us would run headlong into the same darkness.

Someone said it well: *“When people turn from God, the path leads downward to idolatry and immorality.”* This takes us back to Revelation 2:21 when Jesus described how He was ready to extend mercy to even someone like Jezebel: ***“I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality.”*** The Book of Exodus tells us Pharaoh hardened his heart after seeing unmistakable miracles and acts of judgment. Revelation 16:10-11 says: ***“People gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.”***

And yet even here, the door is not closed. The very fact that John records their refusal to repent implies that repentance was still possible. Ezekiel 33:11 says, ***“As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?”***

A man was driving late at night down a mountain road. It was dark and foggy, and he couldn't see very far ahead. Suddenly, as he rounded a curve, he noticed a truck parked sideways across the road. The driver had jumped out of the truck and was waving his arms frantically while screaming, *“Stop! Stop!”*

But the approaching driver was annoyed and thought, *“Why is this man blocking the road?”* Instead of slowing down, he began honking his horn. The man kept waving his arms, desperately trying to get him to stop. But the driver ignored him and sped past the truck. Just seconds later his headlights revealed the horrifying truth: The bridge ahead had collapsed.

The man waving his arms wasn't trying to ruin his night. He was trying to save his life.

Most people think someone must do really terrible things to end up in Hell. But the gospel truth is this: if a person does *nothing* – meaning they never believe, never repent, and never receive Christ, they will end up there. Everyone is on the highway to Hell until they repent and receive Jesus Christ, who is both Lamb and Lord.

C. S. Lewis put it plainly: *“There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, ‘Thy will be done.’”*

As Pastor Ray said last weekend, *“Heaven is God’s prepared place for prepared people. Hell is God’s prepared place for unprepared people.”* The locusts of Revelation 9 could not touch those who bore the seal of God. That seal is available to you today and is applied by grace through saving faith in Jesus Christ.

You don’t need luck. You need a Savior who is both Lamb and Lord.

Right now, God is offering a way to safety and salvation through Jesus Christ. He is the bridge that will never collapse. The question is simple: Will you listen to the warning, or will you stay on the path you’re on only to end up in the eternal abyss?

Listen to what Jesus said in John 5:24: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”* Romans 10:9 promises: *“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”*

When you repent and receive Him, He will save you from Hell...and He will save you for Heaven.

Invitation