

Chart: The Sixth Trumpet: #13

PREFACE

We now come to the sixth trumpet, and, because by now we are well aware of how these judgments are ordered, it is, in practical terms, the *last* trumpet in the series, for the seventh will do nothing more than reveal the seven *bowl* judgments. Perhaps the most prominent question to be answered about the sixth trumpet is, *Does the narrative describe an army of supernatural demons or the machines and soldiers of modern warfare?* That may be one of the more interesting debates over this judgment, but there are clues scattered throughout the passage that will lead us, inevitably, to one conclusion. I would contend, however, that in the final analysis it makes little difference. The outcome is the same.

Read Revelation 9:13-15.

v13-14

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

Adam Clarke—he of our last session’s opinion regarding the locust’s “long hair,” that “No razor passes upon their flesh. Their hair long, and their beards unshaven”—states that this verse “is another...indication that the Jewish temple was yet standing.” It is pretty obvious that the locale for the scene in vv13-14 is not on earth at all, but in heaven. As vv1-2 of Chapter Eight make clear, the seven trumpet angels “stand before God” and are handed their instruments after 30 minutes of silence “in heaven.”

Further, most commentators associate the “golden altar” referenced here with the altar mentioned twice earlier—each time in the precincts of heaven. This is the heavenly original for the earthly copy, the altar of incense that was positioned just outside the partition separating the holy place, where only priests could go, from the most holy place and the ark of the covenant, where only the high priest could go, once a year on the Day of Atonement ([Exodus 30:6](#)). On earth this altar was where incense was burned, symbolizing the prayers of the people for mercy rising upward to God.

Its heavenly version seems, as implied here, to be associated similarly with the prayers of the saints for God to judge those inflicting them with persecution and death. This is thought to be the same altar referenced under the fifth seal.

Read Revelation 6:9-10.

Walvoord: The inference is that this judgment like those preceding is partially an answer to the prayers of the persecuted saints on earth and a token of divine response and preparation for their deliverance.

and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God,

We don't know the source of this voice, which, from the wording, seems to come from all four horns of the altar. It could be the voice of Christ, but we cannot be sure of that. The voice from the altar issues the command to the angel with the trumpet to

“Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.”

We are not told *why* these four angels have been bound at the Euphrates river (the KJV has “in” the river), but from this we can deduce that they are evil angels in Satan's camp, for nowhere in Scripture are *God's* (good) angels “bound.” These have been bound, perhaps for some time, awaiting their release. They are Satan's angels, but they are ultimately under the authority and command of holy God. They have been waiting in readiness for the precise moment—“the hour and day and month and year”—according to the Lord's will.

It is not inconsequential that these angels are imprisoned at the “great river Euphrates.” This historic river

- was one of the four rivers dividing the water flowing out of the garden of Eden ([Genesis 2:14](#));
- so it was near the Euphrates that sin in man began, the first lie was told, the first murder committed, and the tower of Babel was erected;
- the river was the eastern boundary of the land promised to Abram ([Genesis 15:18](#));
- in this region was located three world powers that oppressed Israel: Assyria, Babylon, and Medo-Persia;
- and over its dried riverbed will cross God's enemies to engage in the battle of Armageddon ([Revelation 16:12](#)). (John MacArthur)

v15

And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind.

MacArthur: Shockingly, from the altar associated with mercy [come] words of judgment. God is a merciful, gracious, compassionate God, yet His “Spirit shall not strive with man forever” ([Genesis 6:3](#)). When this trumpet judgment occurs, the time for mercy will have passed; the altar of mercy will become an altar of judgment. Sinful men will have finally and completely rejected God's gracious offer of salvation.

One clue that these are demonic angels is that they do not receive a *command* to kill (or at least we are not so informed); all it takes is for them to be released and they immediately go forth to kill.

Read Revelation 9:16-19.

v16

The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.

The first thing I find fascinating in this much debated verse is that there is no transitional text leading into it. The four angels are unbound—and suddenly, out of nowhere, there is an army of two hundred million! We may infer from this that this army, too, has been waiting in readiness for the moment to arrive. It was not required for the army to be collected and formed; it, like the angels, is already prepared and chomping at the bit.

The second fascinating aspect of this army is its sheer size. The literal Greek is *dyo myriades myriadon*. Now, the Greek *myrias* (in English “myriad”) can be used to represent any unspecified, vast number, but typically means “ten thousand”—here, two myriads of myriads, or, in the KJV, “two hundred thousand thousand,” (twice ten-thousand times ten-thousand) or, as in many of our later versions (except ESV and NIV), “two hundred million.”

Quite a few commentators are quick to dismiss this very high specific number, claiming it is simply hyperbole because it would be impossible to support and manage an army of such vast size. In this they assume it is a *human* force. If we assume a *supernatural* force, then those misgivings are allayed. [More on this in a moment.](#)

It seems as if the apostle himself anticipates the scholars’ skepticism, for he immediately adds, “I heard the number of them,” as if to say, *Yes, that is precisely what was told me. Don’t doubt me.*

v17

And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone.

A few months ago I wrote myself a note and added it to the pile of notes on my desk. I wrote it after some discussions in class and during a time when I was, to a certain extent, vacillating about when and how much to follow the literalist approach to interpreting these passages in Revelation.

At the time I was creating Chart #11, The Trumpets, and finding images to incorporate into the chart. At the same time I was reading some opinions—even from those predominantly in the “literalist” camp—that suggested the army John presents under the sixth trumpet could very well be his attempt to describe engines of modern warfare. As I said in class at the time,

The Sixth Trumpet unleashes another group of bizarre, evil, supernatural manifestations, horses and riders who will kill one third of all mankind—or these may be just John’s way of describing modern machinery and weapons of war. Stay tuned. (from Session 18)

In other words, at the time I wasn’t sure. I was vacillating. In any case I was up against the deadline for Chart #11 and, knowing I would have no hope of finding images to support the bizarre descriptions in the text, I created a melange of war images that included marching ranks of WW1 soldiers and WW2 tanks firing.

In the reminder note to myself I wrote something along the lines of, “Don’t you think John would know what a horse looks like?” In other words, Would the apostle—even if he couldn’t identify what he was looking at—would he call a massive, lumbering, steel machine spewing flames a “horse”? He might refer to it as a “beast”—I would—but a *horse*? Of course not; *everyone* in the first century knew what a horse looked like, and could tell the difference between it and other machines of war, e.g., catapults and scorpions, siege ramps, the Roman “turtle.”

Just as with the so-called locusts under the fifth trumpet, John grabs at the first, most likely image available to him to describe what he is seeing. And just as the earlier beasts were not literally locusts, those before us now are not literally horses, but fantastical beasts conjured in the pits of hell for service to their master, Satan, and his angels. Thus they are able to appear instantly, and do not require the massive support of a human army.

the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone;

John first describes the riders, but really only by the colors in their armor: the color of fire (red), of hyacinth (dark blue or black), and brimstone (a sulfurous yellow)—in other words, the same colors of the poison that would be spewed from the mouths of the horses; “... and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone.”

J. A. Seiss: They have riders, and yet the riders are parts of themselves, to whom no separate actions are ascribed. It is not the riders but the horses which do all the mischief. They are covered with coats of mail, the colors of which are the colors of fire, and hyacinthe, and sulphur, answering to the elements which they emit from their mouths.

and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions;

While in Kenya in 1982, Linda and I saw, firsthand, lions in the wild. Heretofore our experience had been with the lions at the San Diego Zoo and its Wild Animal Park. In the *true* wild, however, the cats looked rather different; having to defend one's territory and hunt for one's food leaves marks. The female lions, who do the hunting for the pride, were often skinnier than their captive counterparts from, first, the exertion of the chase and, second, from the low rate of success. The males, who get first crack at the captured prey, were better fed, but covered in scars because they are the ones who do battle with other cats for territory and food. Beyond that, the head of a male lion, especially with jaws and teeth agape in battle, is *huge*—and far more menacing and effective than the head of a horse. But these “lions” kill by other means.

and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone.

Keying off something in the next verse, I would suggest that the lethality of these beasts is two-fold. First, there is *direct* assault: anyone in close proximity to individuals in this army would be either burned alive by the fire, or quickly asphyxiated by the smoke or brimstone fumes coming forth from the mouths of the horses. Second, however, because in vv18 & 20 John refers to this army's effect as “plagues,” I take this to mean that there is a *lingering* assault, as well. By that I mean that the literal fumes from hell emanating from these “horse's” mouths overwhelm earth's immediate atmosphere to the extent that people will die simply from lingering exposure to this lethal smog. How many will be killed is stated in v18.

v18

A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths.

The population of the earth is presently fast approaching eight billion people (the population of the U.S. is just over 335 million). The result of the sixth trumpet will be that greater than one half of the world's population will be dead: one fourth killed under the fourth seal; one third killed under the sixth trumpet, which equals one half of the earth's population, not counting deaths from the other judgments. Thus, based on today's population, at least four billion people will have been killed over the course of approximately four or five years. When one adds to the deaths the fact that society will no longer be in a good condition to *process* all those dead bodies, we can add one more reason not to be around to experience these days.

For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm.

This verse supplies more details about the weaponry of the horses. These monsters will sport tails utterly unlike the tails of true horses. Though unlike in design, the use and effect of the tails are similar to those of the aforementioned “locusts,” whose tails could sting but not kill. Here I favor the position of Seiss over MacArthur; the latter claims that the horses’ tails kill, but the Greek is *adikousi*, “they do harm,” hurt, do wrong, damage. Seiss concurs: “As to the serpentine tails, nothing is said of power to kill, but only of power to injure, to lame, maim, sting, or hurt.” So it would seem that the tails are there to compound the misery inflicted on the populace by this army, leaving the weaponry of the mouth to inflict fatalities.

Read Revelation 9:20-21.

The sin nature is the most tenacious characteristic of man. It has been part of every human being’s DNA since Eden. It is not just tenacious, but incredibly strong, for it is nurtured, it is sustained, it is fed and encouraged by the very enemy of God.

This sin nature in man is so strong, so pervasive, that it even overwhelms another strong characteristic of man: self-preservation. Most sane people will do just about anything to live, to survive—or their conscience will demand at least a high and righteous reason to sacrifice their own life, such as giving their life in exchange for the life of a loved one.

By the time of the Great Tribulation during the last things, at least three to four years into the period immediately after the church is removed from the earth, every person still walking this tortured earth will have had ample opportunity to know—or at least to hear—that salvation, peaceful, joyous eternal life with God is available in Christ Jesus. They also will have had ample opportunity to sample the alternative, for life on earth by this point will have been reduced to a quite literal hell on earth. They will *know* from experience what an eternity in perdition will be like.

Read Matthew 13:36-43.

We may marvel at the stubbornness of man; we may stand agog at the utter stupidity of clinging to a lifeless idol over choosing life eternal with the only true God, but the evidence is clear—not just in the final chapters of Scripture, but as we can see and experience even in the world around us—that there will be those who, to the very end, reject the grace and forgiveness proffered by God in Christ.

By the sixth trumpet the Lord God will have given everyone on earth a sample of hell, yet those not killed by this demonstration will tenaciously cling to their sin, unrepentant to the end.

We have seen that through the seven seals and the subsequent six trumpet judgments God, in a crescendo of violence, has heaped burning coals onto the inhabitants of this globe. Will He be justified? Does He have the right to do such things? Yes, He is sovereign God, but is this fair? Is this justice from a loving God?

For at least four to five thousand earth years, perhaps longer, God has demonstrated His longsuffering, His patience, His forgiving response to repentance. Along with that, however, He has repeatedly warned about the price to be paid by man's unrepentant rebellion against Him. On top of that, knowing the nature of man since Eden, His unbounded love caused Him to offer Himself, in the person of the Son, as a final blood sacrifice for the sins of man. Man was incapable of saving himself, so God did it for Him.

So is He justified in pouring out the judgments of the seals and the trumpets, and finally, the seven bowls of wrath? Of course. For thousands of years God has warned that this was coming. Now, in this narrative, it has arrived.

The Day of the Lord.

[Let me close by reading what Jude, the brother of Jesus, wrote.](#)

Read Jude 1:5-15.

[In our next session we will begin an examination of the second parenthetical vision, between the sixth and seventh trumpets, in Chapters Ten and Eleven.](#)

THE TRIBULATION

The Sixth Trumpet

Revelation 9:13-21



Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind.

The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone. A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm.

The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts.

