

**Readers Service: 25 Class 25 on the Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian--  
Chapter 9: The 5th Trumpet Judgment (The 1st Woe)**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In our last chapter on the Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian we covered the first 4 Trumpet Judgments, in which, 1/3 of the trees and grass were burned up, then 1/3 of the seas turned into blood killing all sea life within them and 1/3 of the ships destroyed, then 1/3 of the waters and fountains of waters were turned bitter causing many men to die, and lastly 1/3 of the stars were darkened along with 1/3 of the sun and 1/3 of the moon. But three more judgments are coming and all of them follow an eagle crying out *woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth*. Thus, from here things only get worse for the unrepentant through these next 3 woeful trumpet judgments. We will now look at the 1st woe:

Let me preface our lesson with the following words of wisdom from St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite: “May we preserve indwelling in our soul the Communion of the Holy Spirit and the Seal of Holy Chrism, which we received when we were baptized and became the Lord’s anointed. For if we guard this through the observance of the life-giving commandments, it will protect us in return from all harm of visible and invisible enemies. And just as the sheep that are sealed are not easily ensnared by perceptible wolves, so also if we Christians, the sheep of Christ the Chief Shepherd, preserve safe and whole in our soul the Seal of Grace that we received through Holy Chrism at our Baptism, we will not be ensnared by those noetic wolves, the demons. As Saint Gregory the Theologian says, ‘a sheep that is sealed is not easily ensnared’ -- but will be encompassed by the almighty right hand of the Most High and protected by the Holy Angels.”



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*Revelation 9:1. And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. 2 And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. 3 And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. 7 And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads. 5 And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man. 6 And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them. 7 And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men. 8 And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. 9 And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. 10 And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months. 11 And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon. 12 One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.*



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*Revelation 9:1. And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. 2 And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.*

Archimandrite Athanasios: “What is the star? Truly, the interpretation of the star will provide us with the key to comprehending this awfully complex, mysterious, and terrible plague. Saint Arethas writes, ‘The falling star is nothing other than the devil.’ This reminds us of Isaiah (14:12) where Isaiah refers to a historical person ... the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar who had turned Palestine [Israel] and the then known world into a wasteland. Then, the heart and soul of Nebuchadnezzar falls, but the devil is behind Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar is in the typology of the devil. Isaiah says, *How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn!* If you noticed, these words do not fit the Babylonian king very well, even though the prophecy points in that direction. It points toward, but does not stop at Nebuchadnezzar. It goes beyond him and refers to the devil. Isaiah is wondering at how it comes to pass that Lucifer--the one who brings the dawn, the Light-bearer of the dawn--falls from heaven. The actual meaning of Lucifer is *the light of dawn*, the morning star. He falls and is crushed on the earth. Of course, this fall is figurative because the devil is a spirit. He falls on the earth and is crushed by his ego, having fallen from the upper light, the light surrounding the glory of God.

“The Lord spoke these same words about the fall of the devil. *I saw Satan falling like lightning from heaven* (Luke 10:15). This “*I saw*” has great complexity. When did the Lord see Lucifer fall, before the creation of man or now that the Lord has come to earth incarnate? Or does this refer to a prophecy, as in the devil being condemned at the Last Judgment and thrown into a lake of fire? *Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’* (Matthew 25:41). When does the Lord see the fall of Lucifer--before, now, or in the future? There are three phases and the Lord sees all of them. The star falling from heaven has to do with the fall of Satan who will mobilize his evil and malicious activities on earth.

“*And to him was given the key of the bottomless pit* (9:1). As you know, Satan does not have any authority. He does *nothing* without divine acquiescence or concession. Remember what happened to Job. The devil enters into a dialogue with God and alludes that although Job serves God, his motives are based on materialistic self-interest. The devil says that since God gave him wealth, health, much prosperity, and happiness this is the reason Job praises and glorifies Him. God says that this is not true and that Job would glorify Him even if he were not wealthy. To this the devil responds that He should take away his wealth and then He will see if he will continue to glorify Him or to blaspheme His name. (Actually, Scripture never uses the word blaspheme; Scripture uses the word *bless*, even though the intended meaning is blaspheme.) God then tells the devil to go ahead and test Job. Satan asks if he has His permission. God permits the test, but Satan is not allowed to interfere with Job’s bodily health. My friends, in one day the devil manages to bring forth unprecedented destruction in Job’s life. You will be amazed (if you read the first chapter of Job) at how quickly the devil acts. In one day, the news reaches Job that all his flocks of sheep, herds of goats, donkeys, oxen, camels, the servants, everything are all gone! Worse yet, while his ten children were having a joyous

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gathering at the house of the elder brother, a great wind blows, the roof collapses and kills all the young people.

“If the devil were left free to act, he would literally turn the universe upside down. His malicious power is that horrific. The angels do not allow him to because, of course, God does not permit it. As we read in Scripture, the devil cannot even enter pigs without permission. When the demons were ordered to exit the demoniac of the Gergesenes, that suffering human being, they begged the Lord to send them *away into the herd of swine* (Matt. 8:31-32). And the Lord gives them permission.

“The question often raised is: Why does God allow the devil and the demons to cause harm to people? ... Nothing takes place without God’s knowledge and permission; and what does happen is due mainly to people’s lack of repentance. Christ allows the demons to enter the swine in the land of the Gergesenes in order to punish the Gergesenes because they were raising swine, thereby disregarding the prohibition of the Law of Moses ... God allows Lucifer to fall upon the earth so that all his animosity and maliciousness will pour out upon the unrepentant sinners. To go to the outer darkness prepared for the devil and his angels means to go with the devil. It doesn’t mean to go elsewhere, or to a separate area but to go join him. They are directed to go with the devil because they become his followers by disregarding the commandments of God.

[What is the bottomless pit? Literally, in Greek, *το φρεαρ της αβυσσου*, *the pit of the abyss*. It is a place where demons have been bound, a place they do not want to be or go to.] “When the Lord healed the demoniac of the Gergesenes, the demons entreated that Christ not order them to leave and enter the abyss. ... Lucifer is given the key to the abyss. It would seem that the pit had been sealed or locked, and now the key is given to the devil to open it, as if to find something. The something that he finds is the authority, given to him by God, to mobilize his malicious and destructive powers upon the earth, as punishment for people’s sins and rebellion ... Among the forms of evils with which the devil will infest the earth are: destruction of all kinds, wars, and absolutely frightful (horrors beyond imagination) that people living at that time will suffer ...It will be so horrific that people will wish to die, which is quite an unnatural feeling since people normally wish to live. In those days people will wish to die, but will not be able to. Father [now Saint] Justin Popovich one stated that people condemned God to death and this is not only on the cross, my friends. We must not always say that the Jews are at fault. No my friends, we Christians are also responsible, for as Saint Paul says, we re-crucify the Son of God (cf. Hebrews 6:6). How often do we say or think that God is dead? When I become an atheist, I proclaim the death of God. As people condemn God to death, so will God condemn people to deathlessness. There is nothing more horrible because if one dies, how could he be punished? He is punished with immortality. As we will see, people will exist on earth, but their existence will be absolutely frightful. This is the essence of this fifth and horrible plague ... ”

***Revelation 9:3 And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. 4 And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads. 5 And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the***

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*torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man. 6 And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.*

“This terrible plague, with its horrific consequences brings to mind the Egyptian plague in Exodus. The eighth plague against Pharaoh refers to locusts ... However there are some basic differences. First, the harm here specifically relates to people and not to man’s environment, like the plant kingdom. These locusts are told that they have authority to harm the *people only* and not the plant kingdom. Second, these locusts act like stinging scorpions, , which are torturous to people, whereas normal locusts do not sting people. Third, this harmful action is specified for those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. Fourth, the shape of these locusts does not correspond to the shape of typical locusts ...” [Rather, they are *demons* from the Abyss, the bottomless pit.]

***Revelation 9:7 And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men. 8 And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. 9 And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. 10 And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.***

***Revelation 9:11 And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.***

Archimandrite Athanasios: “As we know, natural locusts do not have a queen or king ... These strange and curious locusts seem to have a king”

*Abbadon* אַבְדּוֹן or *Apollyon* Ἀπολλύων. *Apollyon* is derived from the [Greek] verb ἀπολλυμι, which means intense destruction, slaughter. Therefore, Apollyon means one who destroys or slays by extreme means. The name of this particular locust king clearly reveals the destructive nature of these strange demonic entities.

St. Andrew of Caesarea: “It follows that the devil is to be regarded as their king, for he certainly destroys those who obey him.”

Abbadon is used in the Old Testament for the realm of the dead, the “*place of destruction*” (cf. Job 26:6, 28:22, 31:12; Ps. 88:11 MT, Prov. 15:11, 27:20).

***Revelation 9:12 One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter. 13 And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, 14 Saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. 15 And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men. 16 And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them.***

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*17 And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone. 18 By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths. 19 For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt. 20 And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: 21 Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.*

***Revelation 9:13 And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, 14 Saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. 15 And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men. 16 And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them.***

What is this golden altar? It is the heavenly Golden Altar of Incense. In the Tabernacle and the Temple in Israel this altar measured 1 cubit x 1 cubit x 2 cubits, roughly 18 inches square and 36 inches tall. It had a golden crown for a top and 4 golden horns at the corners. It was located in front of the veil, in front of the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant. Incense was burned upon it twice a day by the High Priest, and he placed the blood of atonement upon the 4 horns, once a year on the Day of Atonement. Again, in Scripture, the incense represents the fragrant prayers of the Saints arising before the Lord. This would be the same altar in the Temple in Jerusalem where the Angel appeared to Zechariah the father of John the Baptist and prophesied of the latter's birth to him and his wife Elizabeth.

For us Orthodox Christians, we have an altar on which the Holy Mysteries, the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are placed as a propitiation (appeasement)/expiation (the blotting out or removal of our sins and the renewal of communion with God) for our sins, and which are censured by the Priest during every Divine Liturgy. However, here in the book of Revelation, the altar is the location where the commandment of the Lord is given to the angels to release 4 other angels being held in bondage in the river Euphrates.

Who are these 4 angels? St. Andrew of Caesarea (AD 563-637): "Some say [referring to Eucumenius] that these four angels are Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, and Raphael. Although bound to the joy of the divine vision, on the day of judgment they will be loosed with innumerable angels for the condemnation of the wicked and through them one third of mankind will disappear. However, I think that these angels are the most evil of the demons who were bound at the coming of Christ and who, according to a divine command that comes from the heavenly altar ... will be loosed by a divine angel so that they might trouble the nations. They will fight not only against the Christians but also against each other, so that while some, like ripe wheat, might be

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made manifest as approved and faithful and worthy of the best rewards, and of the highest mansions and dwellings, others, like chaff, namely the wicked and the gross sinners and those unrepentant, might at that time be justly punished but receive at the judgment an even harsher condemnation.

“It is not strange that they are bound at the Euphrates. For according to the ordinance of God, some demons were condemned for a time to the abyss, others to swine [as we heard in our Gospel reading this morning], and others to other places, so that after the conclusion of their war against mankind they might receive eternal punishment. And perhaps the mention of Euphrates indicates that the antichrist will come from those regions.

“And we have no reason to doubt concerning the multitude of demons, for all the saints say that the air is replete with them.” [And if you ever wondered about the purpose of flies and other flying insect pests, consider that they fly around and annoy us, pester us, just as the demons do! So they are a visual, auditory and tactile reminder of the hoards of demons that surround us and do much greater damage to our souls and bodies.]

***Revelation 9:17 And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone.***

St. Andrew of Caesarea, “I think that these horses are either men who, like beasts, lust after women, or they are those who are submitted to demons and are ruled by them. For those who sit on others are those who govern them. It is common for these to use not only each other as servants but also to use evil people as instruments for plotting against people of a similar kind. We interpret *the breastplates of fire and of smoke and of sulfur* to signify the aerial nature of the evil demons and of their destructive work, and the heads of lions show their murderous and beastly nature. *The fire that proceeds with smoke and sulfur from their mouths*, through which one third of mankind is killed, signifies those sins that consume the fruits of the heart by means of the poisonous assaults and instigations of the demons. Or the fire signifies the devastation of cities by fires and by the shedding of blood, which God allows to be done through the hands of the barbarians [St. Andrew of Caesarea is contemporaneous with Mohammed and his conquest of Medina.] It aptly says that their tails are like serpents with heads, for that which demons sow has poisonous sin and spiritual death as its end result.”

***Revelation 9:18 By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths. 19 For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt. 20 And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: 21 Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.***

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St. Andrew of Caesarea, “This is dependent on the foregoing. For just above it said *by these three plagues a third of mankind were killed*, but in the middle some things are interjected and introduced. But the rest of mankind, who were spared and did not suffer these things, yet remained unrepentant. They will suffer these same things, since they did not keep themselves from idolatries and murders and fornications and thefts and works of magic. It is clear that the universal wrath comes from such things as these. These various deceits effect a frenzy in those nations that do not acknowledge the truth and that worship idols and the creature rather than the creator. And this is certainly so among those who confess to know God but deny him by their works and who wrap themselves up in the form of piety but deny the power of it. Paul labeled the service of mammon *idolatry* saying, *and greed which is idolatry*. May it be that we display the purity and authenticity of our faith in Christ by deeds so that we never hear those terrible words, *Truly, truly I say to you, I do not know you. Depart from me, you workers of iniquity*. Rather, may we hear this blessed invitation, *Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundations of the world*. For by grace and mercy Christ our God, willingly endured the cross for us, with whom be glory to the Father together with the Holy Spirit now and always and forever and ever. Amen.”

*Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Amen*