

The Locusts of *Revelation*: Emergent Guilt Feelings

Zachary F. Lansdowne

The *Revelation of St. John*, the last book of the Bible, is sometimes called the *Apocalypse* or *Book of Revelation*. It has been a mystery ever since it first appeared about 2000 years ago because it is written entirely in symbols. This article uses a psychological approach of interpretation that takes every symbol as representing some aspect of an aspirant who is on the spiritual journey. Using this approach, we show that the locusts depicted in chapter 9 of *Revelation* can be interpreted as emergent guilt feelings.

Psychological Approach of Interpretation

The traditional interpretative approaches assume that the episodes in *Revelation* denote events that occur in the external world at definite past or future times. When using these approaches, many commentators consider the locusts of chapter 9 to be a plague of demonic creatures that will torment wicked people throughout the world at the end of the present era.

A few commentators, however, have used a psychological approach to interpret *Revelation*. For example, Helena P. Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical Society, made the following point: "The fact is . . . the whole *Revelation*, is simply an allegorical narrative of the Mysteries and initiation therein of a candidate, who is John himself."¹

Edgar Cayce, a well-known medium, made a similar point:

For the visions, the experiences, the names, the churches, the places, the dragons, the cities, all are but emblems of those forces that may war within the individual in its journey through the material, or from the entering into the material manifestation to the entering into the glory, or the awakening in the spirit.²

Blavatsky and Cayce interpreted only a few symbols in *Revelation*, and neither attempted a verse-by-verse analysis of any chapter. Based on the psychological approach, this article gives a detailed analysis of the first eleven verses of chapter 9 and shows that the grotesque locusts depicted there can be interpreted as emergent guilt feelings. Before the spiritual journey can be completed, such feelings must be faced, understood, and resolved.

Origin and Power of the Locusts

All Biblical verses come from the King James Version unless stated otherwise. The first verse in chapter 9 is:

Rev. 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.

Each sounding of an angel is taken as a milestone that defines the start of a new stage on the spiritual journey. Because there are only seven angels altogether, the sounding of the fifth angel indicates that the aspirant has reached a relatively advanced stage. In this verse, earth is interpreted as the personality, and the falling star as the light of self-observation. This star falls from heaven, and so the aspirant is able to observe his personality with divine discernment. *A Commentary on the Book of the Revelation* considers the bottomless pit to be the "subconscious mind" or "area of repression."³ These quotations are interpretations that a study group made based on Cayce's messages, and so they are not from Cayce himself.

Thus, Rev. 9:1 has the following meaning: *After reaching an advanced stage on the spiritual journey, the aspirant observes his personality with divine discernment. This detached observation is the key to opening the subconscious nature, because any resistance to the emergence of a subconscious feeling can be observed and removed, allowing the feeling to move up to the level of consciousness.*

Rev. 9:2. 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.

Let's use the word "soul" as a synonym for the Divine Principle in a human being. The sun can be a metaphor for the soul, as in Malachi 4:2: "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." The light of the sun reaches us through air, just as the light of the soul reaches us through intuitions, and so air can be a symbol of intuitions. In addition, *A Commentary on the Book of the Revelation* considers the smoke to be "obscurity" or "confusion."⁴

Rev. 9:2 has the following meaning: *After detached observation has opened the subconscious nature, confusion arises out that nature, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the soul and its intuitions are blocked by the emerging confusion.*

Rev. 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.

Locusts are large migratory grasshoppers that cause great damage to crops wherever they swarm, and they are used as symbols of destruction in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 28:42). *A Commentary on the Book of the Revelation* interprets the locusts as “repressed negative emotions,” including “old regrets and guilt feelings.”⁵

Scorpions are common in the wilderness through which the people of Israel journeyed (Deuteronomy 8:15). This animal is about 4 to 6 inches long, with two claws and eight legs; its slender tail is usually curved upward and forward over its back and holds a venomous stinger. The sting of most scorpion species produces pain and swelling in human beings. The Old Testament figuratively uses scorpions to represent enemies (Ezekiel 2:6) and cruelty (1 Kings 12:11).

Rev. 9:3 has this meaning: *Long-repressed guilt feelings come out of the confusion into the personality. These feelings, like locusts, can devour inner peace and contentment. They have the power, like that of scorpions, to poison or corrupt thoughts and feelings.*

Rev. 9:4. 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.

The vital body is an energetic counterpart of the physical body and has been given many other names: “biofield” in alternative medicine, “golden bowl” in the Bible (Ecclesiastes 12:6), and “etheric body” in Theosophy. The vital body is discussed in several Hindu Upanishads, where its Sanskrit name is *pranamayakosha*. The Old Testament uses the color green to represent vitality and growth, as in Job 8:16, “He is green before the sun, and his branch shooteth forth in his garden.” Accordingly, “green” in Rev. 9:4 refers to the vital body.

In yoga philosophy, the Sanskrit word *chakra* denotes an energy center in the vital body, and the Sanskrit word *nadis* denotes an extensive and intricate network of energy channels in the vital body. A single nadi is a thin channel of force, so its form is similar to that of a blade of grass. Several Hindu *Upanishads* claim that there are 72,000 nadis in the vital body.⁶ Similarly, a lawn has many blades of grass. Thus, the “grass” in this verse is taken as the nadis.

The phrase “nerve tree” is sometimes used in articles on human anatomy to denote a nervous system, because the latter has the appearance of a tree. Jutta Bell-Ranske interprets the two trees in Rev. 11:4 as the “the ganglionic nerve-system.”⁷ Similarly, “any tree” in Rev. 9:4 is interpreted as any nervous system.

“Men” represents imagined pictures, or concepts, of oneself. Colossians 3:9 uses the word man in a similar way: “Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man

with his deeds." "Forehead" is a symbol of mind or consciousness, as in Jeremiah 3:3: "thou hadst a whore's forehead, thou refusedst to be ashamed." Thus, "those men who have not the seal of God in their foreheads" represent self-images based on pride, vanity, or some other form of illusion.

Rev. 9:4 has this meaning: *Detached observation keeps the emergent guilt feelings from operating through the nadis and chakras of the vital body, or through any nervous system of the physical body, so that these feelings cannot affect outer behavior. Instead, these feelings can hurt only self-images based on illusion.*

Rev. 9:5. 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.

The number five often appears as part of the legal requirements for punishment in the Old Testament. For example, Exodus 22:1 states, "If a man shall steal an ox, . . . he shall restore five oxen for an ox." The period of "five months," which the torment is said to last, is interpreted as the length of time that the aspirant is punished by his own folly.

Rev. 9:5 has this meaning: *Emergent guilt feelings do not destroy the self-images with which they conflict. Instead, the feelings cause torment for as long as the mind defends those images. This emotional torment is similar to the physical swelling that occurs from a scorpion's sting, because the mind responds to the guilt feelings with a flurry of excuses and justifications.*

Rev. 9:6. And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.

A Course in Miracles says, "Death is a thought that takes on . . . all forms in which the wish to be as you are not may come to tempt you."⁸ Repression denotes the forgetting process by which unacceptable ideas are prevented from entering the conscious mind. Death in this verse is interpreted as repression, because the latter is a wish to be as one is not. Sigmund Freud made the conscious recognition of repressed material the keystone of psychoanalytic therapy: "We can express the aim of our efforts in a variety of formulas: making conscious what is unconscious, lifting repressions, filling gaps in the memory—all these amount to the same thing."⁹

Rev. 9:6 has this meaning: *The aspirant is aware of his desire to repress his guilty memories, but his self-observation prevents him from doing so. Although he has a desire to repress, he has a stronger desire to continue his observation and gain the following insights.*

Characteristics of the Locusts

Rev. 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.

Job 39:19-24 describes a horse prepared for battle: "Hast thou given the horse strength? hast thou clothed his neck with thunder? . . . He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in *his* strength: he goeth on to meet the armed men. . . . He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage." A guilt feeling is like a horse prepared for battle, because it is always ready to attack. *A Course in Miracles* makes a similar point: "The guilty always condemn."¹⁰

In Jungian psychology, the term "shadow" denotes the sum of those personal characteristics that we wish to hide from ourselves. Carl G. Jung explains: "When [the patient] projects negative qualities and therefore hates and loathes the object, he has to discover that he is projecting his own inferior side, his shadow, as it were, because he prefers to have an optimistic and one-sided image of himself."¹¹ A crown of gold is a symbol of royalty (2 Samuel 12:30). In this verse, the crown represents the optimistic and one-sided self-image that a person obtains by projecting his or her shadow onto someone else.

Frederick (Fritz) Perls says, "We see guilt as projected *resentment*."¹² In this verse, each of the "faces of men" is a picture of someone whom the aspirant believes still resents him.

Rev. 9:7 has the following meaning: *A guilt feeling is always ready for battle, either to defend itself or to affix blame. Projecting guilt onto other people in the form of blame or judgment makes the aspirant feel superior, like a king wearing a crown. Guilt is projected resentment, because within every guilt feeling is a picture of someone whom the aspirant has harmed and whom he believes still resents him.*

Rev. 9:8. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as *the teeth* of lions.

1 Peter 3:3 (New Revised Standard Version) instructs Christian women, saying, "Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair." This exhortation acknowledges that the hair of women has the potential of being seductive. *A Course in Miracles* alludes to the seductive aspect of guilt: "Who would send messages of hatred and attack if he but understood he sends them to himself? Who would accuse, make guilty and condemn himself?"¹³

The teeth of lions symbolize destructive power. For example, Joel 1:6 states: "For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth *are* the teeth of a lion."

Rev. 9:8 has this meaning: *Guilt is seductive in that the aspirant has willingly increased it in himself by resenting or intimidating other people. A guilt feeling has the power to rip apart the aspirant's facade of self-righteousness and expose his underlying hypocrisy.*

Rev. 9:9. 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.

A breastplate is a symbol of protection (I saiah 59:17). Iron is a symbol of strength (Jeremiah 1:18).

Rev. 9:9 has this meaning: *A guilt feeling is impervious to all weapons that the personality may use against it—struggle, repression, projection, distraction, or argumentation. The various guilt feelings strengthen each together and attack together.*

Rev. 9:10. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power *was* to hurt men five months.

Psalms 32:5 (New International Version) states: "Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'—and you forgave the guilt of my sin." Jiddu Krishnamurti makes a similar point: "All the implications of guilt, all the implications of its subtlety, where it hides, is like a flower blooming. And if you let it bloom, not act, not say, 'I must do or must not do', then it begins to wither away and die."¹⁴

Rev. 9:10 has this meaning: *A guilt feeling stings like a scorpion, because the aspirant condemns himself with the same judgment used to condemn other people. A particular guilt feeling has power for only a limited time, because it will eventually disappear if the aspirant refrains from struggling with it.*

Rev. 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.

The Hebrew word *Abaddon* is used in the Old Testament to mean destruction (Job 31:12), place of destruction (Job 26:6), or personification of destruction (Job 28:22). The Greek word *Apollyon* means destroyer. Either word is taken as symbolizing the belief in separation. *A Course in Miracles* has a similar perspective: "The mind can make the

belief in separation very real and very fearful, and this belief is the 'devil.' It is powerful, active, destructive and clearly in opposition to God."¹⁵

Consequently, Rev. 9:11 has the following meaning: *Finally, all guilt feelings are essentially caused by the same belief—namely, that human beings are separate entities. This belief is powerful, active, and destructive.*

Conclusions

The *Revelation of St. John*, when seen through a psychological lens, is actually a veiled statement of an esoteric, or hidden, doctrine of early Christians. This esoteric doctrine provides detailed and practical instructions for the spiritual journey—a roadmap to the awakening of higher consciousness. In particular, chapter 9 of *Revelation* provides the following instruction: the need for raising repressed guilt feelings to the level of consciousness, the characteristics of these guilt feelings, and how emergent guilt feelings can be resolved.

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References

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