

The Locusts of the *Revelation*: Repressed Guilt Feelings

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Abstract

The Revelation of St. John, sometimes called the *Book of Revelation* or the *Apocalypse*, is the last book of the Bible. It has been a mystery ever since it first appeared about 2000 years ago, because of its obscure and perplexing nature. Chapter 9 of the *Revelation* contains some of its most bizarre figures: creatures called locusts come out of smoke, are armed with the deadly sting of scorpions, and sting people who do not have the seal of God in their foreheads. This article interprets Chapter 9 by using an allegorical method: every object is taken as a symbol representing some aspect of an aspirant who is on the spiritual journey. As a result, Chapter 9 is seen as portraying the cleansing of the subconscious realm, and the locusts as signifying repressed guilt feelings.

Traditional Method of Interpretation

The Revelation of St. John gets its title from its first verse: “THE Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified *it* by his angel unto his servant John.” *Angel* is a translation of the Greek word (*aggelos*) that can also be rendered as “messenger,” “envoy,” or “one who is sent.” In this first verse, the angel of Jesus can be interpreted as inspiration that imparts instruction from Jesus, so the *Revelation* is traditionally regarded as an inspired book.

Stephen Hunter describes the difficulty of interpreting the *Revelation*:

The Revelation is the most difficult book to interpret of any in the New Testament canon. Its meaning is often involved in

much obscurity, and the interpretation of eminent scholars has differed so widely in the past that we cannot always be sure, especially in the more difficult portions, that the particular view which appears to us the more satisfactory or convincing is certainly the correct one. This divergence of opinion has had the unfortunate effect of disparaging the worth of the Apocalypse as a part of the Word of God in the mind of many earnest students, who have come to regard its meaning as so obscure, and hidden in such hopeless perplexity, that any further attempt to interpret it is entirely fruitless.¹

This article is concerned only with Chapter 9 of the *Revelation*, which Peter Williamson characterizes as being probably its most bizarre and terrifying chapter:

We have now reached the chapter of Revelation whose imagery is probably the most bizarre and terrifying of all. It is the stuff of our worst nightmares. If we look for a comparison in the world of cinema, Rev 9 resembles a horror movie.²

The traditional method of interpreting the *Revelation* could be called “external-temporal,” because it construes the figures and episodes as representing events that occur in the external world at definite times, either in the future or

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in the past. When using the traditional method, many commentators consider those figures and episodes to be literal descriptions of future events. As an example, with regard to the locusts that appear as demons in Chapter 9, Robert Vacendak makes the following prediction: “The demons will be like a huge army of locusts in that they will cover the earth to wreak havoc, not on vegetation, but on unregenerate sinners.”³

Other commentators, even though they use the traditional interpretative method, identify the figures and episodes differently. For example, the popular writer Hal Lindsey considers the bizarre images to be the attempts by a first-century writer to use the phenomena of his ancient time for the purpose of portraying the technical marvels of our modern time. In particular, Lindsey says, “the locusts might symbolize an advanced kind of helicopter.”⁴

Some commentators consider the figures in the *Revelation* to be depictions of past events. For example, David Chilton says, “the locust plague ... may refer in part to the actions of Gessius Florus, the procurator of Judea, who for a five-month period (beginning in May of 66 with the slaughter of 3,600 peaceful citizens) terrorized the Jews, deliberately seeking to incite them to rebellion.”⁵

None of the interpretations yielded by the traditional method seems consistent with what the *Revelation* says about itself. According to Revelation 1.1, its purpose is to show “things which must shortly come to pass.” Likewise, Revelation 1:3 states, “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.” Thus, according to its own verses, the *Revelation* deals with the *present* time—that is, with the present time of whoever may be reading it—so it contains instruction that any reader can apply immediately to become blessed.

Allegorical Method of Interpretation

Helena Blavatsky (1831 – 1891), founder of the Theosophical Society, makes a key distinction: “Every ancient religious, or rather

philosophical cult consisted of an esoteric or secret teaching, and an exoteric (outward public) worship.”⁶ Blavatsky also says, “All esoteric truths were given out to the public by the Initiates of the temples *under the guise of allegories.*”⁷ James Pryse (1859 –1942), a theosophist and colleague of Blavatsky, says that the *Revelation* is an esoteric doctrine of early Christianity given out under the guise of allegories:

Incomprehensible as the book may seem to the exoteric scholar, however great his intellectual attainments, keen his mental acumen, and vast his store of erudition, to the mere tyro in the sacred science the general meaning of the *Apocalypse* is perfectly clear. It is unintelligible to the conventional scholar simply because its subject-matter, veiled in symbolical language, relates to the Mysteries of the early Christian Society, the esoteric teachings which it was not lawful to reveal.⁸

If the *Revelation* were an esoteric teaching given out under the guise of allegories, then deciphering the allegories would reveal the hidden teaching. Roy Zuck describes the interpretative method of allegorizing scripture:

Allegorizing is searching for a hidden or secret meaning underlying but remote from and unrelated in reality to the more obvious meaning of a text. In other words the literal reading is a sort of code, which needs to be deciphered to determine the more significant and hidden meaning. In this approach the literal is superficial, the allegorical is the true meaning.⁹

Lynn Dunston mentions the criticism that is sometimes made regarding allegorizing scripture:

The fundamental problem with allegorizing Scripture is that it assigns a “deeper” meaning to the text that the original author never intended to convey ... When seeking the meaning of any given passage of Scripture, it is vital that the author’s *intended* meaning be sought rather than a “deeper” allegorical meaning.¹⁰

If Pryse were correct concerning the *Revelation*, then its intended meaning would be the “deeper” allegorical one, so the foregoing criticism would not apply to an effort of allegorizing it.

Several commentators provide hints regarding the allegorical meaning of the *Revelation*:

Blavatsky states: “The fact is ... the whole *Revelation*, is simply an allegorical narrative of the Mysteries and initiation therein of a candidate, who is John himself.”¹¹

Edgar Cayce (1877 – 1945), a mystic noted for answering questions while in a trance, characterizes the *Revelation* in this way: “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.”¹²

Paramahansa Yogananda (1893 – 1952), founder of the Self-Realization Fellowship, writes: “Certainly in the Revelation of St. John we are led by means of metaphor into the profound insights of the yoga science in which Jesus initiated his advanced disciple John, and others, whose consciousness thereby ascended to the exalted Self-realized state of the kingdom of God within.”¹³

Let us convert these hints into corresponding principles of interpretation. First, according to Blavatsky’s quotation, the *Revelation* portrays the experiences of an aspirant on the spiritual journey. Second, according to Cayce’s quotation, every object in the *Revelation* symbolizes an aspect of an aspirant’s inner life. Third, according to Yogananda’s quotation, the *Revelation* contains metaphors that signify the insights of yoga science, which is the science behind the yoga practices that originated in ancient India. Blavatsky, Cayce, and Yogananda, however, interpreted only a few symbols in the *Revelation*, and none of them attempted a verse-by-verse analysis of any chapter.

This article attempts to decipher the allegorical meaning of the first twelve verses of Chapter 9, denoted as Revelation 9:1-12, while adhering to the three foregoing principles of interpretation and using clues found principally in three sources:

Earlier Sacred Scriptures. Gerhard Krodel, a Bible scholar, reports that the 404 verses of the *Revelation* allude 518 times to earlier sacred scriptures.¹⁴ These earlier scriptures include books of the Old Testament, New Testament, and Pseudepigrapha. The latter books are biblical in character but are not considered canonical.

Alice Bailey (1880 – 1949), a member of the Theosophical Society before leaving it to pursue her own activities, shows high regard for the *Revelation*: “In the *New Testament*, John, the beloved disciple, was privileged to gain a cosmic picture and a true prophetic vision which he embodied in the Apocalypse.”¹⁵

A Course in Miracles (ACIM), a modern system of spiritual psychology, describes the meaning of the *Revelation* in this way: “The first step toward freedom involves a sorting out of the false from the true. This is a process of separation in the constructive sense, and reflects the true meaning of the Apocalypse. Everyone will ultimately look upon his own creations and choose to preserve only what is good, just as God Himself looked upon what He had created and knew that it was good.”¹⁶

By using the allegorical method of interpretation, along with the foregoing principles and sources of clues, this article shows that Chapter 9 of the *Revelation* portrays, in Bailey’s words, “the psychological cleansing of the subconscious to which individuals submit themselves.”¹⁷

Revelation 9:1-12

Revelation 9:1-12, based on the King James Version of the Bible, is as follows:¹⁸

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.
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 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.

Origin and Mission of the Locusts

Verses 1 through 6 describe the origin and mission of the locusts. Each verse is

considered separately and is repeated in bold print.

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.

Verse 1 begins by saying, “And the fifth angel sounded.” The first principle of interpretation, which was described earlier, regards the *Revelation* as portraying the experiences of an aspirant who is on the spiritual journey. This principle suggests that the sounding of an angel signifies a milestone that defines the start of a new stage on the spiritual journey. There are seven angels altogether, so the sounding of the fifth angel indicates that the aspirant has reached a relatively advanced stage.

The verse divides the universe into three parts: “heaven,” “earth,” and “bottomless pit.” Exodus 20:4 and Philippians 2:10 also divide the universe into three similar parts: “heaven,” “earth,” and “under the earth.” According to the second principle of interpretation, which was also described earlier, the three parts of the universe symbolize three aspects of an aspirant’s inner life, so it is necessary to correlate these three parts with the appropriate inner aspects:

Heaven. According to the third principle of interpretation, the *Revelation* contains metaphors that signify the insights of yoga science. The notion of the *causal body* can be found in yoga science, where its Sanskrit name is *karana sarira*; *karana* means cause and *sarira* means body.¹⁹ Let us compare Matthew 6:20, “But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,” with Bailey’s statement, “The content of the causal body is the accumulation by slow and gradual process of the good in each life.”²⁰ These two statements would be similar if heaven signified the causal body.

Earth. Wikipedia states, “Earth is one of the four classical elements in ancient Greek philosophy and science. It was commonly associated with qualities of heaviness, matter and the terrestrial world.”²¹ Bailey sometimes uses the term “matter aspect” as a synonym for the personality,²² which is the threefold lower self consisting of the

physical body, emotional body, and mental body.²³

Bottomless Pit. The bottomless pit, or the abyss, is mentioned in Luke 8:31 and Romans 10:7. *A Commentary on the Book of the Revelation*, which was written by a study group based on Cayce's messages, considers the bottomless pit to be the "subconscious mind" or "area of repression."²⁴ Bailey uses a similar image to depict the subconscious realm: "The subconscious realm is like a deep pool from which a man can draw almost anything from his past experience, if he so desires, and which can be stirred up until it becomes a boiling cauldron, causing much distress."²⁵

Consequently, the three parts of the universe, "heaven," "earth," and "bottomless pit," are taken as signifying these inner aspects: the causal body, personality, and subconscious realm, respectively.

The middle clause states, "and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth." The celestial *stars* appear to us as points of light, because they are very far away, so their apparent diameter is very close to zero. In other contexts, Bailey says, "The star is but a point of light,"²⁶ and speaks of "the light which streams from the Observer."²⁷ Correspondingly, in the middle clause, the falling star is taken as the focal point of the light that streams from the Observer. The first principle of interpretation implies that the pronoun *I* denotes an aspirant who has reached the portrayed stage on the spiritual journey. The clause says that the aspirant sees the "star fall from heaven unto the earth," which means that he or she sees the focal point fall from the causal body unto the personality, so the aspirant's center of consciousness must have shifted from the personality to the causal body. Bailey also mentions this shift: "the transference of the polarisation from the Personality ... into the causal body."²⁸ Thus the clause implies that the aspirant is observing the personality in a detached way, because he or she is observing it from the vantage point of the causal body.

A *key* is a symbol of authority and release (Isaiah 22:22). In verse 1, "the key of the bottomless pit" signifies the key to the entire process of cleansing the subconscious realm. What might that key be?

Proverbs 28:13 states, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper," which indicates that repressing unpleasant memories does not pay off. Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939), founder of psychoanalysis, makes the conscious remembrance of repressed material the basis of his 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."²⁹ *ACIM* describes the needed recognitions:

The escape from darkness involves two stages: First, the recognition that darkness cannot hide. This step usually entails fear. Second, the recognition that there is nothing you want to hide even if you could. This step brings escape from fear. When you have become willing to hide nothing, you will not only be willing to enter into communion but will also understand peace and joy.³⁰

As suggested by the preceding quotations, the key to the entire process of cleansing the subconscious realm is this recognition: there is nothing in that realm that is desirable to hide.

What faculty in the aspirant would have the preceding recognition? I. K. Taimni, a theosophical writer, says, "The first function of the Causal body is that it serves as the organ of abstract thought."³¹ In contrast, the mental body, which is sometimes called the "lower concrete mind," serves as the organ of concrete thought.³² Wikipedia says, "*Abstraction* in its main sense is a conceptual process by which general rules and concepts are derived from the usage and classification of specific examples."³³ The preceding recognition is a rule or concept that has been derived from experience, so it would come from the causal body.

The verse's final clause is: "and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit." The

pronoun “him” refers to the falling star, which in turn signifies the observation of the personality from the vantage point of the causal body, so the clause depicts the causal body as giving its recognition to this observation.

In summary, verse 1 has the following meaning: *After reaching a relatively advanced stage on the spiritual journey, the aspirant observes the personality from the vantage point of the causal body. The causal body gives to this observation the following recognition: there is nothing in the subconscious realm that is desirable to hide.*

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.

Verse 2 introduces several new symbols, so let us consider their meanings. A *smoke screen* is defined as “an action intended to conceal or confuse or obscure.”³⁴ *A Commentary on the Book of the Revelation* considers *smoke* to be a symbol of “confusion” or “obscurity.”³⁵ Accordingly, “smoke” in verse 2 signifies, in Bailey’s words, “the form of a black cloud of emotional matter, of some dark emotion that seems to imperil all stable vibration and plunges the bewildered student into a blackness of despair.”³⁶

Although the word *soul* has various meanings, it is used in this article to denote the inner divine voice in a human being, which is how Bailey generally uses it.³⁷ Malachi 4:2 uses the sun as a metaphor for the soul: “But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.” Bailey also speaks of “the soul, the inner

sun,”³⁸ so “the sun” in the verse is taken to be the soul.

Air is a symbol of intuitions.³⁹ Bailey mentions “the intuitions which are sent to you from your soul,”⁴⁰ which indicates that the light of the soul reaches us through intuitions. The light of the sun reaches us through air, just as the light of the soul reaches us through intuitions, so construing “the air” in the verse to be a symbol of intuitions is consistent with construing the sun to be a symbol of the soul.

The final clause of the verse is: “and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.” The meaning of this clause is similar to Bailey’s description of “the casting over the disciple of a cloud of emotional or mental matter which suffices to hide the real, and to temporarily obscure that which is true.”⁴¹ Here, the “real” and the “true” refer to the soul and its intuitions, respectively.

Consequently, verse 2 has the following meaning: *After the preceding observation and recognition have opened the subconscious realm, emotional confusion arises out of that realm, like the smoke of a great furnace, and the soul and its intuitions are obscured by the emerging confusion.*

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.

The first clause of verse 3 is: “And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth.” Locusts are large migratory grasshoppers that cause great damage to crops wherever they swarm. In the Old Testament, a devastating locust plague is sometimes used as a symbolic representation of an invading army that brings

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destruction (Judges 6:5, Joel 1:1–2:27). According to the second principle of interpretation, the locusts symbolize an aspect of the aspirant's inner life, but what could it be?

The Old Testament portrays guilt as a burden that destroys one's inner peace, such as in Psalm 38:6: "I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long." *ACIM* also says, "Peace and guilt are antithetical,"⁴² so guilt feelings destroy inner peace like locusts destroy crops. Freud describes the emergence of "an unconscious sense of guilt" into "a conscious sense of guilt"

The battle with the obstacle of an unconscious sense of guilt is not made easy for the analyst. Nothing can be done against it directly, and nothing indirectly but the slow procedure of unmasking its unconscious repressed roots, and of thus gradually changing it into a conscious sense of guilt.⁴³

Repressed guilt feelings that emerge into consciousness are like an invading army that brings destruction, so the locusts in verse 3 are construed as depicting such feelings, because such feelings are like what locusts depict elsewhere in the Bible. *A Commentary on the Book of the Revelation* also interprets the locusts as "repressed negative emotions" that emerge into "old regrets and guilt feelings [that] are activated."⁴⁴ As before, "smoke" and "earth" signify emotional confusion and the personality, respectively, so the first clause has this meaning: Long-repressed guilt feelings come out of the emotional confusion into the personality.

The second clause is: "and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power." Scorpions are common in the wilderness through which the people of Israel journeyed (Deuteronomy 8:15). This animal is about four to six 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 Old Testament figuratively uses scorpions to represent enemies (Ezekiel 2:6) and cruelty (1 Kings 12:11).

Bailey describes how a thought-form can act as a poisoning agent and thereby be like a venomous stinger:

A thought-form can also act as a poisoning agent, and poison all the springs of life ... A violent dislike, a gnawing worry, a jealousy, a constant anxiety and a longing for something or someone may act so potently as an irritant or poison that the entire life is spoilt, and service is rendered futile.⁴⁵

Accordingly, verse 3 has this meaning: *Long-repressed guilt feelings come out of the emotional confusion into the personality. These feelings destroy inner peace like locusts destroy crops. They have the power to poison or corrupt thoughts and feelings, which is like the venomous power of scorpions.*

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.

Verse 4 begins by saying, "And it was commanded them," but the verse does not identify the associated commander. As shown by the rest of the verse, this command implements the recognition, depicted by "the key" in verse 1, that there is nothing in the subconscious realm that is desirable to hide. According to verse 1, this recognition comes from the causal body after the aspirant's center of consciousness has shifted from the personality to the causal body. When such a shift occurs, the personality becomes the instrument of the causal body, as Bailey explains: "The vehicle which seems of paramount importance can become and should become of secondary importance as it becomes simply the instrument of that which is higher than itself."⁴⁶ Thus the command in verse 4 comes from the causal body and is directed at the personality.

Verse 4 alludes to Exodus 10:14–15, which describes a plague of locusts destroying all vegetation in Egypt:

And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt ... and they did eat every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left: and there remained not any green thing in the trees, or in the herbs of the field, through all the land of Egypt.

In contrast, the locusts of verse 4 seem remarkable, because they are told *not* to harm three kinds of vegetation: “the grass of the earth,” “any green thing,” and “any tree.” Our attempt to allegorize this verse is based on both the second principle of interpretation to which the three kinds of vegetation symbolize three aspects of the aspirant’s inner life, and the third principle of interpretation, according to which some metaphors signify the insights of yoga science.

In yoga science, the dense physical body has an underlying vital body, or energetic counterpart, that has the Sanskrit name, *pranamaya kosha*. Here, *prana* means energy, *maya* means appearance, and *kosha* means sheath.⁴⁷ This vital body, however, is acknowledged and called other names elsewhere: “golden bowl” in the Bible (Ecclesiastes 12:6);⁴⁸ “etheric body” in theosophy; and “biofield” in alternative medicine. 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.” Consequently, “green” in the verse signifies the vital body.

In yoga science, 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.⁴⁹ Similarly, a lawn has many blades of grass. Hence, the “grass” in the verse is taken as the nadis. In yoga science, the Sanskrit word *chakra* denotes an energy center in the vital body,⁵⁰ so “any green thing” is taken as any chakra.

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, a theosophical writer, interprets the two trees in Revelation 11:4 as the “the ganglionic nerve-system.”⁵¹ Similarly, “any tree” in the verse is construed as signifying any nervous system.

According to the preceding significances, the verse lists the nadis, chakras, and nervous

system together, as though these three parts of the human constitution were somehow related. Bailey indicates that the nadis and chakras activate the nervous system:

The etheric body is the mechanism of vital, pranic life, and “sub-stands” or underlies the outer, familiar equipment of the nervous system, which feeds and actuates all parts of the physical organism. The relationship existing between the centres, the nadis and the entire nervous system comprises the field of the new medicine and indicates the new major field of research.⁵²

Mental Health Daily states, “In some cases, individuals may experience a traumatic event that triggers such a potent stress response via the sympathetic nervous system, that memory of the event becomes repressed.”⁵³ By combining this statement with the previously indicated relationship between the vital body and nervous system, the following conclusion is obtained: the nadis and chakras can act through the nervous system to bring about repression.

In the verse, the verb “hurt” is the translation of a Greek word (*adikeo*) that is often rendered as “do wrong” in other biblical verses, such as Matthew 20:13. Although “hurt” has the connotation of inflicting pain, “do wrong” need not involve pain but has the connotation of acting unjustly. In the verse, “that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree” is construed in this way: that the emergent guilt feelings should not trigger a stress response—from the nadis and chakras acting through the nervous system—that results in repression.

Bailey describes the step depicted in the verse:

The disciple puts himself into the positive or conditioning environment wherein the trials and the disciplines are unavoidable and inevitable. When the mind has reached a relatively high stage of development, the memory aspect is evoked in *a new and conscious manner* and then every latent pre-disposition, every racial and national instinct, every unconquered situation and every controlling fault rises to the surface of consciousness and then—the fight is on.⁵⁴

By concluding with the phrase, “the fight is on,” this quotation indicates that progress is made by moving from a false peace, brought about by repression, to conscious inner conflict.

After the repressed guilt feelings rise to the surface of consciousness, with what do they conflict? Bailey speaks about the self-image:

Being created by the lower personal self and not by the soul, it [this “image”] is impermanent and is simply held together by the man’s lower energy. When the man begins to function as the soul this “image” he has created, through his “fancy” or his reaction to delusion, is dissipated by a supreme exertion. It has no real existence once there is nothing in the aspirant to feed it, and the realization of this enables him to free himself from its thralldom.⁵⁵

Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895 – 1986), a member of the Theosophical Society before leaving it to pursue his own activities, says that the self-image can be hurt:

What is hurt? The image that you have built about yourself, that has been hurt. Why do you have an image about yourself? Because that is the tradition, part of our education, part of our social reactions. There is an image about myself, and there is an image about you in relation to my image. So I have got half a dozen images and more. And that image about myself has been hurt. You call me a fool and I shrink: it has been hurt.⁵⁶

In verse 4, “men” symbolizes self-images, as in Colossians 3:9, “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.” Ezekiel 9:4 provides the background for sealing in the forehead: “And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.” Accordingly, “the seal of God in their foreheads” signifies the presence of truth in their minds. Thus, in

the verse, “those men who have not the seal of God in their foreheads” represent self-images based on the lack of truth, such as pride, vanity, or some other form of illusion.

In summary, verse 4 has this overall meaning: *The causal body commands that the emergent guilt feelings should not trigger a stress response—from the nadis and chakras acting through the nervous system—that results in repression. Consequently, the guilt feelings rise to the surface of consciousness and hurt only the self-images based on illusion.*

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 first phrase of verse 5 is: “And to them it was given that they should not kill them.” Here, the first “them” refers to self-images, and the second “them” to guilt feelings. To *kill* means “to deprive of life,”⁵⁷ so the repression of a guilt feeling has the purpose of killing it. Moreover, Melanie Erceg, a psychologist, says, “we needed ... to repress/disown/kill some of our feelings,”⁵⁸ so she treats “repress” and “kill” as synonyms. Let us substitute “repress” for “kill” in the first phrase so that it obtains this meaning: the command was given to the self-images that they should not repress the guilt feelings after these feelings have risen to the surface of consciousness. This command comes from the causal body, as in the preceding verse.

The second phrase is: “but that they should be tormented five months.” In other words, the self-images, which are denoted by “they” in the phrase, need to go through a period of being “tormented.” The phrase, however, uses the passive grammatical voice, so it does not disclose the actual source of the torment. We might think that the torment comes from the risen guilt feelings, but that is not the case. *ACIM* provides this explanation:

Defense is frightening. It stems from fear, increasing fear as each defense is made. You think it offers safety. Yet it speaks of fear made real and terror justified.⁵⁹

Consequently, the second phrase depicts the step in which the aspirant defends the self-images from attacks by the risen guilt feelings, so the aforementioned torment actually comes from the aspirant's own defense.

Eventually the aspirant gains the understanding that the guilt feelings must simply be observed without any defense, as *ACIM* also explains:

No one can become an advanced teacher of God until he fully understands that defenses are but foolish guardians of mad illusions. The more grotesque the dream, the fiercer and more powerful its defenses seem to be. Yet when the teacher of God finally agrees to look past them, he finds that nothing was there. Slowly at first he lets himself be undeceived. But he learns faster as his trust increases. It is not danger that comes when defenses are laid down. It is safety. It is peace. It is joy. And it is God.⁶⁰

William Smith, a noted theologian and scholar, observes that, in the Old Testament, "*Five* appears in the table of punishments, of legal requirements."⁶¹ For example, Exodus 22:1 states, "If a man shall steal an ox ... and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox." Other examples of the number *five* appearing as a part of a punishment can be given.⁶² In the second phrase, "five months" signifies the length of time that the aspirant is tormented by his or her own defense, which is the length of time that he or she needs before gaining the understanding that the guilt feelings must simply be observed without any defense. The *Wisdom of Solomon* (12:23) speaks of this torment: "Wherefore, whereas men have lived dissolutely and unrighteously, thou hast tormented them with their own abominations."

In particular, the aspirant typically uses reasoning as a defense, the consequence of which Bailey describes as follows:

Ancient suffering, dire memories, haunting miseries, deep-seated in the subconscious rise to the surface frequently and cause a condition of fear and of distress which no amount of reasoning seems able to quiet.⁶³

Chris Argyris, a theorist who studies learning processes, provides more information about defensive reasoning:

The consequences of defensive reasoning include escalating misunderstanding, self-fulfilling prophecies, and self-sealing processes. All these escalate because the logic used is self-referential, which does not encourage the detection and correction of error. When these conditions are combined, a generic syndrome against learning is created.⁶⁴

Defensive reasoning is said to be "self-sealing," because it obscures its own existence.⁶⁵ In other words, defensive reasoning has the purpose of protecting self-images but denies having such a purpose. Argyris says, "Self-referential logic means testing a claim by the same logic that generated it in the first place."⁶⁶ For example, if the aspirant were to use self-referential logic in a defense, then after deducing that a particular self-image were true, he or she would use the same reasoning to test that deduction.

The third phrase of verse 5 is: "and their torment *was* as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man." Wikipedia reports, "Most scorpion stings vary from small swelling to medically significant lesions in severity."⁶⁷ The preceding Bailey quotation mentions "a condition of fear and of distress which no amount of reasoning seems able to quiet," so defensive reasoning compensates for its perceived ineffectiveness through what Argyris calls "escalating misunderstanding, self-fulfilling prophecies, and self-sealing processes." Accordingly, the torment from defensive reasoning increases through the escalation of associated features, so it is like the torment from a scorpion's sting, which increases through the swelling of associated tissues.

In summary, verse 5 has this overall meaning: *The causal body gives the command that the self-images should not repress the risen guilt feelings, even though the self-images will be tormented as long as a defense is used against these feelings. The aspirant typically uses reasoning as a defense, the torment from which increases through the escalation of features associated with the reasoning, so it is like the torment from a scorpion's sting, which*

increases through the swelling of tissues associated with the sting site.

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.

Verse 6 mentions “death,” which generally signifies a terminating event in the physical world. According to the second principle of interpretation, however, death symbolizes an aspect of the aspirant’s inner life, but what could it be? *ACIM* states,

Death is a thought that takes on many forms, often unrecognized. It may appear as sadness, fear, anxiety or doubt; as anger, faithlessness and lack of trust; concern for bodies, envy, and all forms in which the wish to be as you are not may come to tempt you.⁶⁸

The above quotation provides a notion of death that satisfies the second principle, because it says, “Death is a thought that takes on ... the wish to be as you are not.” Let us consider two examples of such death thoughts. Repression denotes the forgetting process by which unacceptable memories are prevented from entering the conscious mind. Thus the wish to repress is a death thought, because it is, in the words of the quotation, “the wish to be as you are not.” *ACIM* also states, “Reality opposes nothing. What merely is needs no defense, and offers none. Only illusions need defense because of weakness,”⁶⁹ so the fact that the self-images need defense shows that they are not real but are mere illusions. Thus the wish to defend self-images is another death thought, because it is also the wish to be as you are not: in this case, the wish to be illusionary self-images.

Verse 5 incorporates the two death thoughts described in the preceding paragraph. If verse 6 referred to only one death thought, then its second clause would needlessly repeat its first one, so our commentary assumes that the two clauses refer to two death thoughts. If verse 6 referred to the same two death thoughts that are incorporated into verse 5, then it would be an outgrowth of verse 5. Our commentary assumes that verse 6 does refer to the same two death thoughts, and that “men” signifies the

aspirant. Consequently, verse 6 portrays the aspirant as tempted to carry out both death thoughts but refusing to do so, which means that he or she refuses to repress the guilt feelings and refuses to defend the self-images. Put differently, after learning the lesson depicted in verse 5, which is that torment comes from defending self-images, the aspirant reaches the step depicted in verse 6, which is making the effort to, in Bailey’s words, “stand aside and observe with dispassion.”⁷⁰

Krishnamurti also encourages the dispassionate observation of guilt:

Is it possible to observe the thing in its entirety, wholly, and in the very observation of that totality, see the ending of it? Is it possible to observe your hurt or your anxiety or your guilt, totally? Suppose I feel guilty. Can I look at that guilt, see how it arose and what was the reason for it, see how I am dreading more of it, see the entire structure of guilt, and observe it wholly? Of course I can, but I can observe it wholly only when I am aware of the nature of being hurt. I can be aware of it if there is no direction or motive involved in that awareness.⁷¹

Consequently, verse 6 has the following meaning: *The aspirant is tempted to repress the risen guilt feelings but refuses to do so, because he or she understands that such repression would continue bondage to subconscious forces. The aspirant also is tempted to defend his or her self-images from attacks by the guilt feelings but refuses to do so, because he or she understands that such defense would bring ineffectual emotional torment. Consequently, the aspirant observes the guilt feelings with dispassion and gains the following insights.*

Attributes of the Locusts

Verses 7 through 12 describe the locusts’ attributes. Each verse is considered separately and is repeated in bold print.

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.

Robert Mounce, in his commentary on the *Revelation*, introduces verse 7 as follows:

Up to this point we have learned of the origin and mission of the demonic locusts. Now John describes them. Long-haired, horse-shaped, flying locusts with scorpion tails and golden crowns above human faces marred by lions' teeth, they have to be reckoned among the more bizarre creatures in the Apocalypse. The total impact is one of unnatural and awesome cruelty.⁷²

Given that the locusts signify guilt feelings, their bizarre attributes symbolize the characteristics of guilt. What are those characteristics?

The first clause of verse 7 is: "And the shapes of the locusts *were* like unto horses prepared unto battle." 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." *ACIM* says, "The guilty always condemn, and having done so they will still condemn."⁷³ Accordingly, a guilt feeling is like a horse prepared for battle, because it is always ready to attack other people with condemnation.

Our analysis of the remainder of verse 7 uses the concept of *projection*, which Todd Feinberg defines as follows:

In psychoanalytic terms, projection is an unconscious process wherein unacceptable thoughts, feelings, or motivations are *rejected* and *projected* outside of the self, typically onto other persons. In this fashion, one's own thoughts and feelings do not become conscious self-attributes, but are experienced as aspects of the external world.⁷⁴

Bailey indicates that projection is a problem faced by aspirants: "he [an aspirant] knows too that at present they [fellow aspirants] cannot help but see in him and even in their Master

the very qualities which are dominating them. For, my brother, we see in others what is in us, even when it is not there at all or to the same extent."⁷⁵

The second clause is: "and on their heads *were* as it were crowns like gold." Carl Jung (1875 – 1961), founder of analytic psychology, gives this description: "When he 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."⁷⁶ A crown of gold is a symbol of royalty (2 Samuel 12:30). In the clause, the crown represents the optimistic and one-sided self-image that one obtains by projecting one's guilt onto someone else.

The third clause of verse 7 is: "and their faces *were* as the faces of men." Frederick (Fritz) Perls (1893 – 1970), developer of Gestalt therapy, says, "We see guilt as projected *resentment*."⁷⁷ Given that the locusts signify guilt feelings, the "faces of men" are pictures of people whom the aspirant has harmed and whom the aspirant believes still has resentment for it.

Thus verse 7 has the following meaning: *A guilt feeling is like a horse prepared for battle, because it is always ready to attack other people with condemnation. Projecting guilt onto other people in the form of blame or judgment enables one to have an optimistic and one-sided self-image, like wearing a golden crown. Guilt is projected resentment, because within any guilt feeling is a picture of someone whom one has harmed and whom one believes still has resentment for it.*

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

The first clause of verse 8 mentions "the hair of women," about which 1 Corinthians 11:15 states, "But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her." This statement acknowledges that women's hair can be attractive to look at. Other verses of the Bible make the same acknowledgement, as recounted by Nancy Tischler:

In the Song of Songs, the Shulammitte's flowing locks thrilled Solomon (Song of Solomon 4:1, 6:5). The art of braiding was noted in several places in Scripture (Isaiah 3:24; 2 Samuel 14:26; Judges 13). Women's hair was considered so beautiful that it was a snare even for the angels, causing Paul to insist that women keep their heads covered [1 Corinthians 11:5-6]. In early Christian (or Roman) fashions, the women wore their hair waved, curled, frizzed with irons, arranged in tiers, and twined about the head like a high diadem with locks reserved to fall over the forehead and on the temples ... This elaboration of hair styles may have been part of Paul's concern about the distractions women's uncovered hair brought to the worship service.⁷⁸

As indicated by the above quotation, the female protagonist in the Song of Solomon (6:13) is denoted as "the Shulammitte," perhaps because she came from an unidentified place called Shulem.⁷⁹

The first clause of verse 8 is: "And they had hair as the hair of women." Given that "they" and "hair of women" signify guilt and attractiveness, respectively, the clause has this meaning: Guilt, when projected upon other people, is attractive to look at, like the hair of women. *ACIM* describes this attraction of guilt:

The attraction of guilt produces fear of love, for love would never look on guilt at all. It is the nature of love to look upon only the truth, for there it sees itself, with which it would unite in holy union and completion ... Fear is attracted to what love sees not, and each believes that what the other looks upon does not exist. Fear looks on guilt with just the same devotion that love looks on itself. And each has messengers which it sends forth, and which return to it with messages written in the language in which their going forth was asked. Love's messengers are gently sent, and return with messages of love and gentleness. The messengers of fear are harshly ordered to seek out guilt, and cherish every scrap of evil and of sin that they can find, losing

none of them on pain of death, and laying them respectfully before their lord and master.⁸⁰

Consequently, fearful people find guilt to be so attractive to look at that they seek out and cherish every scrap of guilt that they can find in someone else. The biblical story of King David illustrates this attraction of guilt. After committing adultery with Bathsheba, David is attracted to finding guilt in someone else, as described in 2 Samuel 12:1-7:

And the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich *man* had exceeding many flocks and herds: But the poor *man* had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, *As* the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this *thing* shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. And Nathan said to David, Thou *art* the man.

The second clause of verse 8 mentions "the teeth of lions," which is a symbol used in earlier scriptures. 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." John Kitto, a noted biblical scholar, provides this explanation: "A nation having the teeth of lions, and the cheek-teeth of a great lion, denotes one which devours with irresistible force."⁸¹ Sirach 21:2 states:

Flee from sin as from the face of a serpent: for if thou comest too near it, it will bite thee: the teeth thereof are as the teeth of a lion, slaying the souls of men.

In other words, sin bites the sinner with irresistible force. The second clause of verse 8, “and their teeth were as *the teeth* of lions,” has a corresponding significance. The possessive adjective “their” assigns the possession of the “teeth” to guilt feelings, so the clause has this meaning: Guilt feelings punish the guilty person with irresistible force, like the teeth of lions.

As support for the foregoing significance, *ACIM* states, “Guilt asks for punishment, and its request is granted. Not in truth, but in the world of shadows and illusions built on sin.”⁸² Several research studies show that self-punishment arises from the feeling of guilt.⁸³ Moreover, Freud finds that illness in his patients comes from their self-punishment that arises from their sense of guilt:

In the end we come to see that we are dealing with what may be called a “moral” factor, a sense of guilt, which is finding its satisfaction in the illness and refuses to give up the punishment of suffering. We shall be right in regarding this disheartening explanation as final. But as far as the patient is concerned this sense of guilt is dumb; it does not tell him he is guilty; he does not feel guilty, he feels ill. This sense of guilt expresses itself only as a resistance to recovery which it is extremely difficult to overcome. It is also particularly difficult to convince the patient that this motive lies behind his continuing to be ill; he holds fast to the more obvious explanation that treatment by analysis is not the right remedy for his case.⁸⁴

Thus verse 8 has this meaning: *Guilt, when projected upon other people, is attractive to look at, like the hair of women. Guilt feelings punish the guilty person with irresistible force, like 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.

The first clause in verse 9 is: “And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron.” A *breastplate* is a symbol of protection, as in 1 Thessalonians 5:8, “But let us, who are of the

day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love.” *Iron* is a symbol of strength, as in Job 40:18, “His bones *are* like bars of iron.” Given that “they” denote the locusts, which in turn signify guilt feelings, the first clause indicates that a guilt feeling cannot be harmed by any defense that might be used against it. What are these defenses?

Otto Fenichel (1897 – 1946), a prolific writer on psychoanalysis, states, “There is a group of defenses against affect that deserve special attention because of their clinical importance: the defenses against guilt feelings.”⁸⁵ He also lists some of these defenses:

Guilt feelings may be *repressed*. Frequently rationalizations as to the necessity of committing a forbidden deed secure a repression of guilt feelings.

Frequent in occurrence are attempts at *projecting* guilt feelings. “Someone else has done it, not I” is the leitmotiv of many a neurotic character.

There are different types of *quasi-projections* of guilt feelings. Any guilt can be borne more easily if someone else has done the same thing. For the sake of the feeling of relief that can thus be attained, persons who either have done something about which they feel guilty or wish to do such a thing are searching for another person in the same situation; they feel greatly relieved if they succeed in finding anyone who does or has done the same deed. They may even provoke other persons to do things about which they feel guilty.

Certainly there are many *reaction formations* to guilt feelings. People may behave extremely and provocatively nonchalant and carefree, may even be proud of “having no conscience scruples,” only to learn in analysis that their attitude needs a great amount of counteractiveness to hold severe guilt feelings in check.

An *isolation* of guilt feeling is a frequent occurrence in compulsion neurotics; they do things without any guilt feeling, and experience an exaggerated feeling of guilt

on some other occasion without being aware of the connection.⁸⁶

How successful are these defenses against guilt feelings? Fenichel gives this answer:

Defenses may be more or less successful; they may work under certain circumstances and be insufficient under others. All the minutiae of everyday life are perceived either as temptations for repressed impulses or as warnings of possible punishments, and may thus disturb the equilibrium anew. Certain experiences may evoke the return of what has been warded off in the defense, which may in turn necessitate defenses against the defenses. There are reaction formations against reaction formations. Conditions favorable and opposed to the objectionable impulses arise, so that many contradictory layers develop; however, the layers are not placed evenly one above the other but are full of rifts.⁸⁷

Consequently, these defenses conceal, or ward off, the guilt feelings but do not actually eliminate them, so these defenses provide only an illusion of escape. *ACIM* asks, “Yet what advantage has an illusion of escape ever brought a prisoner? His real escape from guilt can lie only in the recognition that the guilt has gone.”⁸⁸

The last part of the verse portrays the locusts in this way: “and the sound of their wings *was* as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.” This portrayal is facilitated by three facts that Robert Chisholm lists: (1) “The heads of locusts and horses are similar in appearance.” (2) “Both locusts and human armies advance swiftly.” (3) “The locusts’ buzzing wings resemble the sound of chariot wheels.”⁸⁹

Given that the locusts signify guilt feelings, their portrayal as an attacking swarm suggests that the various guilt feelings strengthen one another and attack together. Psalm 38:4 has a similar notion: “For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: As an heavy burden they are too heavy for me.” Fenichel makes a similar observation:

Actually, defensive conflicts are more complicated than this [preceding] description indicates. An isolated conflict between one particular drive and one particular opposing anxiety rarely occurs. More frequently there are complex and powerful interactions between many drives and many anxieties.⁹⁰

Thus verse 9 has this meaning: *A guilt feeling cannot be eliminated by any defense that might be used against it—such as repression, projection, quasi-projection, reaction formation, or isolation. The various guilt feelings strengthen one another and attack together.*

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

The first clause of verse 10 is: “And they had tails like unto scorpions.” Richard Myers gives this account of a scorpion’s tail:

When a scorpion is about to strike it curves its tail and stinger forward over its body, delivering the sting toward the front rather than toward the back or side ... A scorpion can go from a relaxed position to striking position very quickly.⁹¹

According to the *Random House Roget’s Thesaurus*, “*Anger* is the general term for sudden violent displeasure accompanied by an impulse to retaliate.”⁹² When its tail goes very quickly from a relaxed position to a striking position, a scorpion seems to display a sudden violent displeasure accompanied by an impulse to retaliate.

Leon F. Seltzer, a clinical psychologist, describes how guilt feelings can give rise to anger:

What I’d like to clarify in this post is that a good deal of our anger is motivated by a desire not to experience guilt—and *beyond* this, the distressing emotions of hurt and fear. It’s by now generally agreed upon that anger, as prevalent as it is in our species, is almost never a primary emotion. For underlying it ... are such core hurts as

feeling *disregarded, unimportant, accused, guilty, untrustworthy, devalued, rejected, powerless, and unlovable*. And these feelings are capable of engendering considerable emotional pain. It's therefore understandable that so many of us might go to great lengths to find ways of *distancing* ourselves from them.⁹³

In the first clause, the pronoun "they" refers to guilt feelings, so "they had tails like unto scorpions" has this meaning: Guilt feelings can give rise to a sudden violent displeasure, or anger, towards someone or something else, just as a scorpion's tail can go very quickly from a relaxed position to a striking position.

The second clause is, "and there were stings in their tails." *ACIM* mentions the "sting of guilt,"⁹⁴ which is self-condemnation, so "stings in their tails" are taken as multiple condemnations brought about by guilt. What is the meaning of this explanation? In another context, Nabil Hagag mentions such condemnations: "anger at guilt feelings disrupting peace of mind."⁹⁵ Even though anger is an emotion, it is also a defense, so the clause is given this meaning: One can have anger at one's own guilt feeling as a way of defending oneself from it.

The third clause is: "and their power was to hurt men five months." As explained in the commentary for verse 5, "five months" signifies the length of time that one is tormented by one's own defense. In the context of verse 10, "five months" is the length of time that one has anger at a guilt feeling. In practice, this length of time might be five seconds, five minutes, or five days, depending upon how long one takes to collect oneself and to observe the feeling without anger. The clause indicates that the hurtful power of a guilt feeling continues as long as one has anger at it. *ACIM* provides this explanation: "For

attack makes guilt real, and if it is real there is no way to overcome it."⁹⁶

The third clause also indicates that a guilt feeling loses its power as one observes it without anger. Krishnamurti provides this explanation:

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. Please understand this ... If you discover it, you see that it is so, then psychologically it is an enormous factor that frees you from all the past and present struggles and effort.⁹⁷

In summary, verse 10 has this meaning: *Guilt feelings can give rise to a sudden violent displeasure, or anger, towards someone or something else, just as a scorpion's tail can go very quickly from a relaxed position to a striking position. One can have anger at one's own guilt feeling as a way of defending oneself from it. While one has anger at a guilt feeling, one has no way to overcome its hurtful power; but as one observes it without anger, one finds freedom from its power.*

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 first phrase in verse 11 is: "And they had a king over them." According to the second principle of interpretation, everything in this phrase symbolizes an aspect of the aspirant's inner life. A *king* is a ruler and so is responsible for what is ruled. The pronoun "they" signifies guilt feelings, so their "king" symbolizes the inner aspect responsible for guilt feelings. What is that aspect? Bailey writes,

It would be wise to remember that the entire problem we are considering can be traced back to the outstanding human weakness, the great sin or heresy of separateness. There is surely no greater sin than this; it is responsible for the entire range of human evil. It sets an individual against his brother; it makes him consider his selfish, personal interests as of paramount importance; it leads inevitably to crime and cruelty; it constitutes the greatest hindrance to happiness in the world, for it sets man against man, group against group, class against class and nation against nation.⁹⁸

Guilt feelings are included within the range of human evil, so “the great sin or heresy of separateness” can be inferred as their “king” in the sense of being responsible for them. *ACIM* corroborates this inference: “For separation is the source of guilt.”⁹⁹ Moreover, Bailey mentions “this great illusion of separateness,”¹⁰⁰ so this sin or heresy is actually an illusion.

The second phrase is: “*which is the angel of the bottomless pit.*” *Angel* is the translation of the Greek word that can also be rendered as “messenger,” and the “bottomless pit” refers to the subconscious realm, so the illusion that governs guilt feelings also governs the message of the subconscious realm.

The third phrase is: “whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.” John McKenzie says, “It is a widespread cultural phenomenon that the name is considered to be more than an artificial tag which distinguishes one person from another ... but it is thought to tell something of the kind of person he is.”¹⁰¹ The Bible often uses a personal name as an indication of the bearer’s nature. For example, 1 Samuel 25:25 says: “for as his name *is*, so *is* he.” A change in the personal name often indicates a change in the person, such as the change from Abram to Abraham (Genesis 17:5). Consistent with such usage, *A Commentary on the Book of Revelation* interprets *name* as “nature.”¹⁰²

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. Given that a personal name is an indication of the bearer’s nature, either the Hebrew or Greek name can be inferred as having this significance: the illusion responsible for guilt has a destructive nature. *ACIM* corroborates this inference: “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.”¹⁰³

Consequently, verse 11 has the following meaning: *All guilt feelings are governed by the illusion of separateness, which also governs the message of the subconscious realm. When accepted as being true, this illusion is powerful, active, and destructive.*

12. One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.

The first clause in verse 12 is, “One woe is past,” which indicates that the aspirant’s problem of dealing with the subconscious realm is no longer current. In other words, the aspirant has successfully cleansed the subconscious realm and found freedom from guilt. How was that accomplished?

Krishnamurti describes a general principle about understanding: “When we are free to look, to explore what the problem is, then out of that observation, that exploration, there comes understanding. And that understanding itself is action, not a conclusion leading to action.”¹⁰⁴ Bailey also says, “If there is right understanding, there will necessarily be right action.”¹⁰⁵ Krishnamurti, however, distinguishes between an intellectual comprehension of words and the understanding of their content:

The understanding of words which is called intellectual comprehension is utterly empty. You say, “I understand intellectually, but I cannot put it into practice,” which means, really, that you do not understand. When you understand, you understand the content

... Hearing the words is not the understanding of their content. The word is not the thing. The word is not understanding.¹⁰⁶

The point is that one cannot find freedom—from the subconscious realm and guilt—simply by reading the words of this article. Instead, one must gain right understanding by accomplishing the preceding steps.

The second clause is: “*and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.*” Bailey writes, “Each expansion of consciousness, each step upon the ladder, but opens before the Initiate another sphere to be embraced, and another step ahead to be taken.”¹⁰⁷ In other words, the spiritual journey seems boundless, because each solution of the most apparent problem leads to the awareness of subtler problems that still remain. In the clause, “behold” is used in the imperative mood for the purpose of calling attention, and “two woes more hereafter” refer to subtler problems that must be solved in the future.

Consequently, verse 12 has this meaning: *Through the understanding gained by accomplishing the preceding steps, the aspirant cleanses the subconscious realm and finds freedom from guilt. Afterwards, he or she becomes aware of subtler problems that still remain and must be solved in the future.*

Conclusions

The Revelation of St. John is actually a veiled statement of an esoteric, or hidden, doctrine of early Christians. When interpreted allegorically, the first twelve verses of Chapter 9 depict the cleansing of the subconscious realm:

1. After reaching a relatively advanced stage on the spiritual journey, the aspirant observes the personality from the vantage point of the causal body. The causal body gives to this observation the following recognition: there is nothing in the subconscious realm that is desirable to hide.
2. After the preceding observation and recognition have opened the subconscious realm, emotional confusion arises out of that realm, like

the smoke of a great furnace, and the soul and its intuitions are obscured by the emerging confusion.

3. Long-repressed guilt feelings come out of the emotional confusion into the personality. These feelings destroy inner peace like locusts destroy crops. They have the power to poison or corrupt thoughts and feelings, which is like the venomous power of scorpions.
4. The causal body commands that the emergent guilt feelings should not trigger a stress response—from the nadis and chakras acting through the nervous system—that results in repression. Consequently, the guilt feelings rise to the surface of consciousness and hurt only the self-images based on illusion.
5. The causal body gives the command that the self-images should not repress the risen guilt feelings, even though the self-images will be tormented as long as a defense is used against these feelings. The aspirant typically uses reasoning as a defense, the torment from which increases through the escalation of features associated with the reasoning, so it is like the torment from a scorpion’s sting, which increases through the swelling of tissues associated with the sting site.
6. The aspirant is tempted to repress the risen guilt feelings but refuses to do so, because he or she understands that such repression would continue bondage to subconscious forces. The aspirant also is tempted to defend his or her self-images from attacks by the guilt feelings but refuses to do so, because he or she understands that such defense would bring ineffectual emotional torment. Consequently, the aspirant observes the guilt feelings with dispassion and gains the following insights.
7. A guilt feeling is like a horse prepared for battle, because it is always ready to attack other people with condemnation. Projecting guilt onto other people in the form of blame or judgment enables one

- to have an optimistic and one-sided self-image, like wearing a golden crown. Guilt is projected resentment, because within any guilt feeling is a picture of someone whom one has harmed and whom one believes still has resentment for it.
8. Guilt, when projected upon other people, is attractive to look at, like the hair of women. Guilt feelings punish the guilty person with irresistible force, like the teeth of lions.
 9. A guilt feeling cannot be eliminated by any defense that might be used against it—such as repression, projection, quasi-projection, reaction formation, or isolation. The various guilt feelings strengthen one another and attack together.
 10. Guilt feelings can give rise to a sudden violent displeasure, or anger, towards someone or something else, just as a scorpion's tail can go very quickly from a relaxed position to a striking position. One can have anger at one's own guilt feeling as a way of defending oneself from it. While one has anger at a guilt feeling, one has no way to overcome its hurtful power; but as one observes it without anger, one finds freedom from its power.
 11. All guilt feelings are governed by the illusion of separateness, which also governs the message of the subconscious realm. When accepted as being true, this illusion is powerful, active, and destructive.
 12. Through the understanding gained by accomplishing the preceding steps, the aspirant cleanses the subconscious realm and finds freedom from guilt. Afterwards, he or she becomes aware of subtler problems that still remain and must be solved in the future.

As can be seen from this list, verses 1 through 12 depict steps that provide instruction in a progressive way. Bailey makes a similar point about her own series of rules: "Each of these rules holds in it the seed of that understanding which must be evoked before the next rule can

be mastered. All that is given is ever based on that which has gone before."¹⁰⁸

Verse 11 portrays the recognition of illusion. Victims of illusion have difficulty in recognizing that they are such victims, however, as Krishnamurti explains:

Ignorance of the ways of the self leads to illusion; and once caught in the net of illusion, it is extremely hard to break through it. It is difficult to recognize an illusion, for, having created it, the mind cannot be aware of it.¹⁰⁹

Bailey writes, "It is the soul itself which dispels illusion, through the use of the faculty of the intuition,"¹¹⁰ so the aspirant would need the intuitions of the soul to have the recognition portrayed in verse 11.

Verse 2 portrays the step during which emotional confusion obscures the intuitions of the soul. How can these intuitions be regained? Bailey speaks of the effort to "rightly practice true discrimination and that dispassion which bring the controlled astral and mental bodies under the guidance of the soul."¹¹¹ Here, "astral" is a synonym for emotional.¹¹² Verse 6 portrays the step during which the aspirant observes the risen guilt feelings with dispassion and thereby regains the intuitions of the soul. Thus verses 7 through 11 portray the resulting series of steps during which the intuitions of the soul reveal insights about guilt.

The steps portrayed by verses 1 through 5 are actually the lower correspondences of the steps portrayed by verses 6 through 10, thereby illustrating Bailey's comment: "All growth is cyclic and one progresses from step to step in spiral fashion and this ever involves a retracing (apparently) of one's steps."¹¹³ The steps portrayed by verses 11 and 12 assimilate and consolidate the earlier steps, so they are what Bailey calls "periods of quiet unemotional growth and assimilation":

For you, there come now some months of inner consolidation. You have heightened your vibration since I last instructed you and have learnt and realised much of what the inner path of reality signifies. Such

cycles of realisation must inevitably be succeeded by periods of quiet unemotional growth and assimilation. During these months, the high moments may perhaps cease and the work will go on with no realised tensions and, consequently, with no moments of startling import.¹¹⁴

As the foregoing analysis has shown, *The Revelation of St. John*, through its bizarre and perplexing images, provides detailed and practical instructions for the spiritual journey—a roadmap to the awakening of higher consciousness.

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