

“APOCALYPSE SOON”

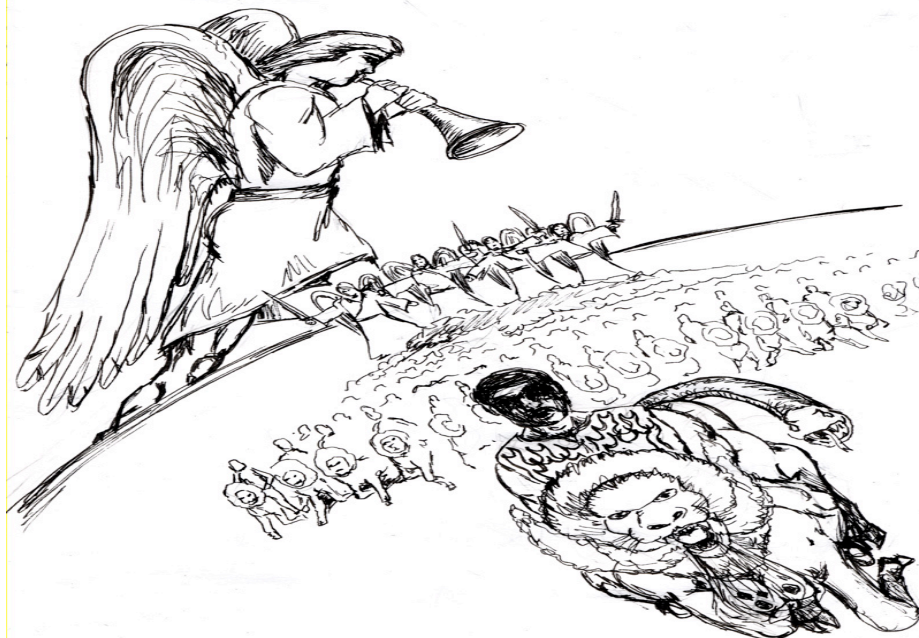
“Hell on Earth” (Revelation 9:1-12)

The 4th trumpet sounded and the following warning was uttered by the flying angel, *“Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!”* The worst is yet to come. Hell will now invade earth directly. This chapter is one of the most terrifying passages in the Word of God.

The first 4 trumpet judgments were unleashed from the natural world by God upon the earth and its inhabitants. Now the 5th trumpet will unleash a powerful spiritual dimension to the next series of judgments. God will use the forces of hell to judge the planet. The devil and his angels have been waging a fierce spiritual battle on this planet since the days of Adam and Eve. However, this battle will enter a more physical and tangible dimension in the GTP.

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. 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. 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. (v1-3)

The 5th trumpet is now sounded by the fifth angel and we are told the effect was, *“and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.”* This “star” was not an inanimate comet or meteor but clearly an angelic being. Often a star is used to symbolize a person (cf. Num. 24:17; Rev. 1:20; 22:16) or an angelic creature (cf. Job 38:7; Isa. 14:12-17). Many believe this star is Satan falling from heaven but it could just be an angel entrusted by God for this role.



This angelic being now opens the bottomless pit. Clearly, he had no power to do so before this point in time as he had to be given the key. The “*bottomless pit*” is the Greek word *abyssos*, which has the idea of “pit of the abyss” or “the underworld.” The opening of this pit releases vast quantities of smoke, *“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.” The atmosphere is polluted with a great haze by this corruption of hell, which diminishes the light of the sun.

From this darkness, John then suddenly saw a group of demonic angels spilling out of the pit, which he described with a number of visual descriptions. Later John will describe them as having the characteristics of horses, faces of men, hair of women, teeth of lions, and scorpions. Clearly they have supernatural qualities as we don't read that they can be killed by conventional methods of warfare. The imagery used initially is that of a locust plague, *“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.”* This swarm of locust-like creatures would also increase the darkness in the heavens.

There seems to be a category of fallen demonic angels that have been imprisoned already by God in judgment in this *abyssos*. We read of them in passages like Luke 8:30-31 and 2 Peter 2:4.

For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; (2 Peter 2:4)

These fallen creatures are incarcerated there until their final punishment in the eternal lake of fire (Rev. 20). It would appear that these are the most evil and perverted fallen angels such as those described by Jude,

And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. (Jude 6-7)

These wicked demonic angels will now be released as locusts to unwittingly carry out God's programme of judgment on fallen humanity. Doubtless, they are motivated to destroy as many people as possible at this time to reduce the numbers repenting and embracing Christ during the Great Spiritual revival that occurs during this period of the GTP. We can only imagine the horror and devastation such a terrible group of vile demons can do if released into the world of chaos at this time. John Phillips comments,

“Picture what the world would be like if we were to pen the doors of all the penitentiaries of earth and set free the world's most vicious and violent criminals, giving them full reign to practice their infamies upon mankind, something worse than that lies in store for the world. Satan, cast out of heaven, is now permitted to summon to his aid the most diabolical fiends in the abyss to act as his agents in bringing mankind to the footstool of the Beast.”

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. 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. And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them. (v4-6)

There is a clear statement made here of the limitations placed on this demonic locusts by the sovereignty of God. Revelation 4-5 began these future visions by reminding both John and his

readers that all subsequent events are planned and directed by a sovereign God. The language here in this awful scene reminds all that even the devil and his followers are subject to God's sovereign will. We are explicitly reminded from the beginning that their role and powers are delegated by God, "*and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.*" These demonic creatures were limited in time, location and effect by God alone, "*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. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months.*"

These creatures were forbidden by God to kill any person and were not even allowed to touch those who are sealed by God, which included the 144,000 Messianic Jews of Revelation 6. Just as God protected the Israelites from the plagues of Egypt (cf. Exod. 8:22; 9:4; 10:23) so the Lord will preserve His elect people in the GTP from these locusts. The believers may not feel safe or physically see God at work but He sees them and He will protect them. Someone once put it in a quaint way, "God's hand is invisible but He has an all-seeing eye." If we look with the eyes of faith at our lives, we can see God's fingerprints in everything. The devil may disrupt the peace of God's children but he can never destroy them. Ray Pritchard puts it well,

All the enemies of Christ have been defeated. They remain on the battlefield, but the end has already been written. We know how the story ends. Jesus wins—and we win with him. The devil cannot defeat us because we are united with the Ultimate Champion—the Lord Jesus Christ."

The locusts were limited in that they were forbidden to harm the vegetation of the earth, "*And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree.*" The implication is that this takes place some time removed from the first trumpet judgment of Revelation 8:7 when all the green grass "*was burnt up.*" It was also a sign to the unbelieving world that this was the finger of God, as locusts normally devour vegetation. Their prey is not plants but people! The lifespan of the locust is around 5 months so this judgment is limited in scope and time. It is not meant to destroy a person but to humble sinners and drive them to the Cross.

A scorpion's sting is excruciatingly painful and debilitating. Many species of scorpion are even capable of killing a human being. But these locusts had power to sting like a scorpion but not kill anyone, "*And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months.*" The 5-month period will be one of terrible physical, emotional and physical suffering for the unbelieving world. We can imagine the fear, despair and depression for those suffering who have lived through the apocalyptic judgments of the six seals, then the horrors of the first 4 trumpet judgments, and now with bodies racked in agony. It will be like hell on earth. Things will be so bad that we read they will desire to die, "*And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.*" John MacArthur observes,

"All hope is gone; there will be no tomorrow. The earth people have loved and worshiped will have been utterly devastated, the land ravaged by earthquakes, fires, volcanoes, the sea filled with the putrefying bodies of billions of dead creatures, much of the fresh water supply turned into bitter poison, the atmosphere polluted with gases and showers of heavenly debris. Then, worst of all, will come foul smoke from the pit of hell as the demons are released to spiritually and physically torment wicked people. The dream of a worldwide utopia under the leadership of the Antichrist (the beast of 13:1ff.)

will have died. Driven mad by the filth and vileness of the demon infestation, people will seek relief in death—only to find that death has taken a holiday. There will be no escape from the agony inflicted by the demons, no escape from divine judgment. All attempts at suicide, whether by gunshot, poison, drowning, or leaping from buildings, will fail.”

The orderly way that these terrible locusts are unleashed reflects that this is not coincidental but part of a sovereign directed plan of God. These demonic creatures will serve God’s purposes, even if they do so unwittingly. These sinners bitten by the demonic hordes will get an insight into what hell is really like. Even the fact that they want to die but cannot is part of the punishment in hell. This plague was an act of judgment but also one of grace to rebellious sinners. Here was a window of mercy for them to repent and trust Christ for salvation.

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. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. 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. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months. (v7-10)

John then provided a more detailed physical description of the locusts, which represent the demonic hordes attacking the earth. The Apostle used comparative language. It is like a scene from some science fiction novel. Swindoll explains,

“What a monstrous sight! Note the repetition of the word “like,” warning us not to take this description completely literally. John was using the vocabulary available to him in order to describe something virtually indescribable. However, based on the symbolic picture of these locusts, we can draw a general description of their character. They will be warlike, brutal, and fierce. Unstoppable, they will pursue their purpose of torment without flinching. They are intelligent creatures, perhaps even alluring, utilizing deception and persuasion to attract people. In the end, however, their goal will be to torture, to tear apart, and to destroy.”

So each of these comparative poetic descriptions provides us with insight into the character of this demonic plague. They are like powerful horses in galloping into battle, they have teeth like lions to rip their prey, they have powerful minds to reason like men, they have a sensual allurements of women, they have wings to emphasise their swiftness and nimbleness in moving around the earth, and they have breastplates like iron to reflect their invincibility from attack and insensitivity to the sufferings of humankind. The crowns speak of their power and victory – no one will be able to overcome these savage and vile creatures for 5 months. It is a truly terrifying season for fallen mankind. It is also a fearsome insight into the companions that will occupy hell for the lost.

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. One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter. (v11-12)

These locusts are no mere physical insects but spiritual, demonic creatures who are part of the devil’s kingdom of darkness. This is a kingdom with levels of authority. Paul explained, “*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*” (Eph. 6:12) An organised and powerful army of darkness opposes the work of God. It should never be underestimated.

The ruler in Satan's kingdom over these locusts is a fallen angel called *Abbadon* in Hebrew and *Apollyon* in Greek. Both these names mean, "the destroyer." There are some who think that Apollyon is the devil but it is not likely as Satan's abode is not in the bottomless pit during the GTP.

This part of the vision closed with another ominous warning, "*One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.*" Things are not going to get better yet for the unbelievers and this world. Worse is on its way. The world must make a choice – Christ or Antichrist and life or death. If they thought these 5 months of torment were bad, hell will be like the proverbial jumping from the frying pan into the fire! The 5 months of pain and suffering will give way to eternal agonies. The same reality needs to dawn on the hearts of sinners today. Seiss is right to observe,

"People are prone to persuade themselves that this world of sense and time is all that we need be concerned about, and hence have no fears of an unseen world of evil, and no decided or active desire for the blessings of an unseen world of good. They live only for earth, not dreaming that this brief life is only the vestibule to worlds of mightier and eternal moment. Their houses are built by the very margin of hell, and yet they rest and feast in them without a feeling of insecurity or of danger. The flame of perdition clamor after them beneath the pavements on which they walk, but they have no sense of fear or serious apprehension. God and angels are ever busy to win their attention to the ways of safety, but they turn a deaf ear and drift along as they list, crying, Peace! Peace!"