

## Lesson # 32 The 5th Trumpet Judgment

## Revelation 9: 1-12

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The First Woe

**Revelation 9:1-12 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup>And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. <sup>2</sup>He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. <sup>3</sup>Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. <sup>4</sup>They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup>They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone. <sup>6</sup>And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them.

<sup>7</sup> In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, <sup>8</sup>their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; <sup>9</sup>they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. <sup>10</sup>They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails. <sup>11</sup>They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon. <sup>12</sup> The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come. ①

## I. The Star, the Key &amp; the Abyss vv. 1-2

Was this 5<sup>th</sup> Trumpet blows, John sees a star fallen from heaven to the earth. This is definitely not the same sort of star as those described in Rev. 6:13 & 8:10, which were heavenly bodies like meteorites or asteroids. This one, because of what "he" does is an intelligent being...a person of some sort.

As you can imagine, this verse is fodder for lots of conjecture as to who this person might be. Here are some examples – Mohammed, Antichrist, Satan, an angel, a man, etc. Mohammed is offered as a choice because of his apparent ability to gather armies to attack Christians and Jews, but there is no evidence that he originated in heaven or is there now. Since the origin of this 'star' is heaven, it seems likely that it is an angelic being of some sort. This leaves 2 options: a holy angel on a divine mission, or an evil angel ( perhaps Satan ) tossed out of heaven as a result of divine disapproval ( **Rev. 12:7-9; LK. 10:18** ). The romantic choice is that this is Satan himself, but it is more likely that it is an evil angel other than Satan. If it were Satan, this seems like a pretty benign way to present a huge event – instead – not naming this star tends to appear to point to a demonic being of lesser rank than Satan<sup>i</sup>.

No angel holds the keys to the bottomless pit or abyss, so the key had to have been given to this being for the purpose he uses it for – to open the lock holding those captives inside so they could make an escape. Their escape is controlled however, and they are not allowed to do their own will, but only what God allows them to do.

The word used here, translated, “shaft of the bottomless pit” is in the Greek, “abyssos” or abyss. Although used of very deep waters in the OT or the depths of the earth, its’ meaning is really “bottomless”. Here, it appears to be some sort of subterranean place connected to the earth’s surface by a shaft which is apparently locked and capped. That does not have to mean that this is a cap which some archaeologist or mining company may one day stumble upon, because it remains undisturbed until this ‘angel’ arrives with a key to open it. We are not told where on earth this capped shaft is hidden away.

This abyss contains demons ( spiritual beings ), and this king who will lead them and the Beast who arises out of the abyss – cf. **Rev. 11:7; 17:8**. If this abyss is the Tartarus of **II Pet. 2:4**, then this event does not completely empty this place. Some angels are chained until the judgment, but these ones are released for a time. This is not Hades or Hell itself being opened, but rather a place of incarceration for evil demons awaiting judgment – cf. **LK 8:31**.

In v. 2, this angel uses the key to open the shaft leading to this abyss and the release of smoke would seem to indicate that this lid has been closed for some time, and it is hot in there. This is not just a puff of smoke, but a great cloud, as if from a volcano – with enough volume and density to darken the air and the sun as it releases into the atmosphere. The previous trumpet judgment had weakened the sun’s ability to produce light, but this is an obscuration from earth now being depicted. This cloud is a harbinger of judgment to follow. ②

## II. Demonic Locusts / Their Power vv. 3-6

Out of this smoke come “locusts” onto the earth. We are not told how many there are, but if they parallel normal locusts, the swarm could be millions strong – a cloud in and of itself. This plague is a parallel to the 8<sup>th</sup> plague on Egypt ( Ex. 10:12-20 ) but those were real, regular locusts. These locusts here in the 5<sup>th</sup> Trumpet are not just locusts.

For one thing, they have a leader ( 9:11 ), which regular locusts do not have – cf. **Prov. 30:27; Hab. 1:14** – and while real locusts eat vegetation and do not harm animals or people directly ( no stinger; they do not bite ), these ‘locusts’ have scorpion-like tails with which they inflict incredible pain on people ( v. 3,5 ).

Locusts are found throughout the OT ( Ex. 10; Deut. 28:38; II Chron. 7:13; Joel 2:25; Ps. 105:34; Nah. 3:15 – in limitless numbers ). The passage in Joel is in the context of a precursor for the rapidly approaching Day of the Lord ( **Joel 1:4, 6-7; 2:1-11** ).

These locusts are different. Who or what are they? Some say this is depicting human armies, perhaps the Chinese or the Muslims ( & the passages we just read in Joel could support that view ). However, the description of these beings tends to point to something more sinister and supernatural. The evidence favours these being demons or fallen angels who have assumed locust-like form. They have a demonic leader ( v. 11 ); have come from the Abyss and they attack men, not vegetation. Although like locusts in their numbers and intensity of purpose, their appearance is decidedly different from normal locusts as we'll see in vv. 7-10. Later on in Rev. 16:13ff, demons take on the form of frogs.

These demonic locusts, released to express their own will ( to a limited extent ) are told that they must not exhibit true locust-like actions – they are not to eat the grass, any green plant or tree ( v. 4 ). Their prey is humans, and specifically only humans who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads, however, humans are not prey as in their food, but the intention is to torment them. This again speaks of God's sovereignty & is another clue that these locusts are demonic. This judgment is His terrifying design and He limits it to those who are not sealed by Him. This immediately raises a few questions.

- What seal on their foreheads?
- Does this mean that those who get saved in the Tribulation acquire a visible seal on their forehead as a result of that salvation?
- Does this mean that the elect, as yet unsaved, have some protection from this judgment too?
- Are the only ones protected those 144,000 sealed in Rev. 7:3-8?

Incredibly, the target of the evil locusts is only those who are themselves evil! This shows dramatically the lack of logic in Satan's realm. They attack the very ones they should be joining with to go against God's people. However, back to the questions.

Apparently, there is some sort of seal placed on the foreheads of those redeemed in the tribulation. It is at least visible to these locusts. The followers of Antichrist will have a mark ( forehead or hand ) – cf. Rev. 13:16-17 – which identifies them as loyal to the Beast, and so it follows that God's people will also have a visible mark to show that they follow Him. But the fact that such a mark is visible to the locusts does not ensure that it is visible to other enemies of the Cross. If it is visible to all, it would make believers an easier target for the forces of Antichrist who have not been given the mandate from God to avoid targeting believers.

In the fictional Left Behind series of books, the authors' envision this Christian 'mark' as a cross-shaped discolouration on people's foreheads visible only to other believers, which form only after one has been saved. In this record of John however, only the 144,000 are ever said to have received a seal which acts as a protective device against evil persecution for the duration of the Tribulation. In all preceding plagues, there has been no hint that Christians are exempt from the effects of the judgments, and until now, there is not a hint that other believers are protected from some of the plagues by some visible mark identifying them as God's children to someone other than God.

The unsaved elect are likely susceptible to this judgment. In fact, it could be this torment that leads them to Christ – as pain & suffering often do. Since the locusts are not allowed to kill anyone ( v. 5 ), there would be no reason to exempt those who were not yet believers, but whom God knows will be believers before Christ returns – cf. **II Pet. 3:9**.

This seal, if it is for all believers and not just the 144,000, is not going to protect against every judgment or deadly persecution because believers will continue to be martyred until the end ( Rev. 6:11 ), but it could serve as a protection against certain judgments like this one and as a means of recognizing fellow believers throughout the rest of the Tribulation period. It makes sense that such a mark would assist believers in locating & identifying other believers in a time when the inability to know who to trust could be fatal. We are not given enough information to be certain of this however.

In **Ezek. 9:4-6**, a type of parallel is provided, as only those loyal to God in Jerusalem are spared by their receipt of a mark on their foreheads before judgment falls on the city. In a few of the Egyptian plagues the Israelites were also spared the agony ( Ex. 8:22; 9:4; 10:23 ). In the 10<sup>th</sup> and final plague, they were given a remedy which would provide protection ( Passover Lamb ), but only those who obeyed the remedy provided were spared. Even an Israelite who did not put blood on the doorposts of his home would be susceptible to the death of the firstborn in that home.

These locusts – v. 5 - “were allowed” to torment people for 5 months only, but were not allowed to kill. The duration of 5 months parallels the usual season for locusts – May through September. Their torment, likened to a scorpion sting, which is said to be excruciatingly painful, describes acute pain...certainly physical, but probably with psychological implications too. This sort of pain would lead some to wish for death as an escape but these stings would not kill them. The 5 months mentioned is not necessarily the duration of the pain, but is the time given to these locusts to do what they do on earth. It is a literal 5 months – there is no warrant to see this as symbolic or metaphysical. This is a divinely appointed means of punishing sin, and the fact that it is not fatal, is God’s grace, because this leaves space for repentance.

In v. 6, despair is presented. A victim of the locust’s sting is in such pain and torment that they hope for death, yet they cannot die! For some, this pain may bring repentance, but for the bulk of those stung, only the desire to die is generated, not as a result of mental torment but to escape the mind-numbing pain. Note **Job 3:20-22; Jer. 8:3**. Death will not be difficult to find for these people – it will not be allowed – “it will flee from them”. It will be impossible – perhaps the sting is accompanied by some sort of paralysis which immobilizes the victim, making him or her incapable of even committing suicide.

### III. Demonic Locusts – Their Appearance vv. 7-10

John uses the word “like” 9 times in this section to describe these locusts from head to tail, and a broad range of interpretations has resulted. Here are the 3 main views<sup>ii</sup>:

1. This is an idealized depiction of a swarm of real locusts.
2. It is an idealized view of a huge army of men – in most views, probably Chinese or Islamic.
3. It is representation of demonic locusts.

While some of the comparative language allows for seeing these as natural locusts ( with some stretching of the imagination ), such things as the long hair and scorpion’s tails do not fit the natural picture, nor does the fact that they are not eating the vegetation. Since they are “like” locusts, it is not likely that they are men ( & men have no tails ). The demonic locusts view is the preferable choice.

This aspect of the vision is fraught with other fanciful ideas too, most not as fanciful as Hal Lindsey’s friend’s view, as recorded in his book, “There’s a New World Coming”. He writes the following;

*“I have a Christian friend who was a Green Beret in Viet Nam. When he first read this chapter, he said, “I know what these are. I’ve seen hundreds of them in Viet Nam. They’re Cobra helicopters!” That may be conjecture, but it does give you something to think about! A Cobra helicopter does fit the composite description very well. They also make the sound of “many chariots”. My friend believes that the means of torment will be a kind of nerve gas sprayed from its’ tail.”*<sup>iii</sup> ⑤

Nerve gas does not seem to match up with the singular and personal effect of the sting of one of these locusts, and does not account for how those sealed by God would escape the effects of such a weapon. No, it makes sense that these are demonic locusts, supernatural & terrifying. From the gospels, we know that demons can inhabit the bodies of animals or even mimic them. They ‘look like horses prepared for battle’, because they appear to be armoured, as many insects do. They look like they have crowns of gold on their heads for the same reason. They have a shiny armoured head like grasshoppers have, with antennae; and in fact on some locust species, these ‘antlers’ or antennae are yellow in colour. This is the natural description, but others see the gold crowns as gold turbans or helmets.

Having ‘faces like men’ simply denotes an intelligence not normally present in a locust, and in vv. 3-4, they are distinct from people. The long hair like women’s hair is on their heads, not their bodies, so this feature is a gruesome addition & unlike any locust we are aware of. While locusts do have teeth, those teeth are suited to cutting and chewing leaves and plants. Teeth like lion’s teeth are much different and suited for fierce attack and holding onto captured prey. However,

according to our text, in these creatures, the power to inflict pain does not come from these teeth, but rather from the power in their scorpion-like tails – cf. v. 10.

Two more battlefield metaphors are found here – breastplates like iron & wings like the sound of chariots rushing to battle. Again, insects have hard outer bodies ( exoskeletons ), which could resemble breastplates of iron in the right colour combination, especially if it is enhanced to resemble a human one. The sound of a massive army advancing adds a psychological aspect to their advance – invoking fear in all who are in the path of the swarm...especially after some people have experienced the sting.

Nothing is said about the size of these creatures, but if they are normal locust size ( which is likely in the absence of a descriptor about size ), they will have access to people who might be able to hide from an army of men, but cannot keep insects at bay except in an airtight container, especially when the attackers are intelligent insects led by a demonic king!

All of this description is leading up to the result of the judgment. The scorpion-like tails will sting their victims and inflict horrific pain. If the pain lasts 5 months ( possible ) this is extremely astonishing and horrible, but no matter how long the pain lasts, people will seek to die to escape the pain and will not be able to do so.

#### IV. Their King – One Woe is Past

vv. 11-12

Normal locusts do not have a leader or king. Whereas bees have a queen, and ants have a queen around which the life of the colony or hive thrives, locusts do not have one. We have already looked at verses which tell us this. Since these creatures are said to have a king, this is additional evidence that these are not mere locusts.

Their king is called “Abaddon” ( Hebrew ) or “Apollyon” ( Greek ). He is identified as an angel, in fact, the angel of the Abyss. The names mean “destroyer” or “I destroy”, and this is an appropriate designation for one who leads this swarm of creatures who intend to do all but kill their victims. In fact, they would probably love to kill their human victims, but do not have the authority to do so.

So who is Abaddon or Apollyon? It is probably not Satan, as some suggest. Satan is not necessarily the one who leads the demons who have been held captive in the Abyss for thousands of years. His association with the Abyss does not begin scripturally until Rev. 20:1-3 when he is held captive there for 1,000 years.

The best thinkers feel that this is an unknown fallen angel who is in command of the Abyss – certainly subservient to Satan ( Eph. 6: 12 -- principalities & powers ) – yet these locusts will follow his commands. We really don’t need to know exactly who he is to see his role in this judgment.

Verse 12 could either be a parenthetical statement from John or a continuation of the comments from the eagle in 8:13. One woe is now past in the terms of the vision, but 2 more will follow – Trumpets 6 & 7. There will be no relief in sight for those who refuse to call out to God in repentance. “Still to come” is telling us that the woes do not occur at the same time, but that they follow one another in sequence.

Next lesson – Lesson # 33 Sixth Trumpet: A Huge Army – Rev. 9:13-21

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<sup>i</sup> Robert Thomas; Revelation 8-22; p. 27

<sup>ii</sup> IBID, pg. 34

<sup>iii</sup> Hal Lindsey; There’s a New World Coming – A Prophetic Odyssey; Vision House; 1973, reprint 1974; pp. 138-139.