

Sermons
The Seventh Seal & the First Six Trumpets (Part 3)
Revelation 8-9
April 3, 2022

Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas

Well, we continue our journey through John's last book, the book of Revelation, and to see what lies before us in the future, what God has in store for this planet. We find ourselves in Revelation 8-9. In these two chapters, the Lamb breaks the seventh seal on the scroll, the title deed to the earth, and in breaking the seventh seal, He initiates seven trumpet judgments.

So far in our study of these two chapters, we have studied the breaking of the seventh seal in the first two verses of chapter 8, then the saints' prayers because, as we learned, it is in response to the prayers of the saints that God initiates these judgments. Then, beginning in chapter 8:6 and running through chapter 9, we have the first six trumpets.

Last time, we looked at the first four of those trumpets. The first trumpet in that judgement - a third of earth's vegetation is burned up. In the second trumpet, a third of the oceans on this planet are destroyed. In the third trumpet, a third of the freshwater is poisoned. And in the fourth trumpet, a third of the sun, moon, and stars are darkened. So, the first four trumpets are God's getting earth's attention, that in His goodness, He has given us this planet with all of its plenty and bounty, just to show us who He is and to call us to repentance. And because man, as we saw in Romans 1 this morning, neither glorifies Him as God nor He gives Him thanks for those things, God, here in these judgements, puts His finger on these blessings and reminds man that it's an expression of His own good character that has allowed them to come. And He now judges those things that man has, rather than giving God thanks for, has set his heart on and even worshipped in many cases. Those four trumpets are followed by a brief interlude in verse 13 where there is a single eagle that flies in mid-heaven, pronouncing three woes - three woes that signal the three trumpets yet to come.

Now, tonight, we begin chapter 9 and the fifth trumpet. Chapter 9 and the fifth trumpet. Let's read together the first 11 verses of Revelation 9. You follow along with me as I read.

“Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him. He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit. Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man. And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them. The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads appeared to be crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. They had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle. They have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months. They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.

As I mentioned in a moment ago, the first four of the trumpet judgments produced catastrophic results on the environment on this planet. But the three trumpets that were yet to come, at the end of chapter 8, are going to be much worse. In chapter 8:13, that eagle flying in mid-heaven announces three woes for each of these final three judgments. And notice verse 13 of chapter 8 says these judgments are “on those who dwell on the earth”. In Revelation, that term occurs a number of times. It is a technical term for all of the unsaved, unregenerate people alive on this planet at that time. And these final three trumpet judgments are not directed against earth’s environment, as the first four was, but against its people.

What’s the backdrop for what we have just read together? Scripture presents this globe, on which we live, as the stage on which the great drama of redemption unfolds. And this planet and the humans on it, all of whom are made in the image of God, they are the objects of God’s special attention and eternal plan. Because this planet and those made in the image of God are the attention of God, Satan and his fallen angels, who are engaged in a cosmic war with God,

they have made this world and its people their main battleground. The brunt of their attack is against humanity. Tonight, in the fifth trumpet judgment, God removes the facade, and He allows mankind to see the hatred and contempt that Satan and his demons actually have for mankind.

There are two points of emphasis that lie beneath these verses. The first is that God is in control of all things, including the demons, their location, whom they're permitted to hurt, for what duration that occurs, with what results, and to what divine end. In these 11 verses, it is not the demonic locusts who are in charge; it is God.

Secondly, we discover in these verses that the fallen angels, who left heaven in rebellion along with Satan (demons, as we call them) they are in fact cruel, murderous beings who have nothing but contempt for humans and who find sadistic joy in torturing, ironically, their own followers.

Let's look at these verses together and sort of unpack this fifth trumpet judgment. It is, by far, the most bizarre description that we've come to yet in our study of this book. But, again, taking what I've described all along, is a normal hermeneutic. We sometimes refer to it as a literal hermeneutic. That can be confusing because there are figures of speech and there are metaphors and similes. But a normal hermeneutic, the same kind of hermeneutic you would use in looking at any written document, if we use that, we can discern what's going on here. So, let's look at it together.

First of all, notice in verse 1 through the first half of verse 3, the source of these locusts. The source. And by source, I mean that in two senses. First of all, their ultimate authority, that is, who is over, ultimately, what these locusts will do? Notice verse 1: "Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth..." So, when this fifth angel blows his trumpet, announcing the next judgment, John saw a star which had fallen to the earth from heaven. Now, clearly, unlike the previous trumpet judgments, this star is not a meteor, it's not an asteroid. Why do I say that? It has to be a person. Notice the end of verse 1: "...and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him." Verse 2: "He opened..." So, this star is not a celestial object that falls to the planet. Instead, it is a person.

There are three common identifications of who this star is. Some say this is Satan and they point to chapter 12 where the dragon and his angels are cast out of heaven to earth, and they say, “You know, here’s this same picture.” They also point to Luke 10:18 where Jesus says, “I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.” So, some say this star is Satan.

Some say this star is not Satan but one of his demons. Now, it’s hard to explain why either Satan or a demon would be coming from heaven. In addition, this would be the only time in the book when God uses a demon to directly carry out His will. He does so indirectly, as we’ll see even tonight, but directly this would be the only time. Perhaps the biggest problem with this view of this star being a demon is giving a demon the keys to his own prison.

The third view and the one that seems most likely to me, and I’ll show you why in a moment, is this is a holy angel. It’s interesting that this expression “falling from heaven” is used synonymously with an expression “descending from heaven” in the apocryphal book of 1 Enoch so that the Greek expression can be used in a different sense than we normally think of “fallen from heaven”, you know, in sort of a negative sense. It can simply mean “having descended from heaven”.

And I think the clincher is - turn to Revelation 20. Revelation 20 and we see an almost identical thing happening. Revelation 20:1: “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss...” Clearly, this is a holy angel and the wording, the expressions, are almost identical. And so, it seems likely that the angel in chapter 20, who has the keys to the abyss and binds Satan for the duration of the Millennium, that that is the same angel here in chapter 9:1.

Verse 1 goes on to say, “...and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him.” “Was given to him” underscores God’s sovereignty over both this angel and the place called the abyss. But who gave him this key? Likely, it was Christ Himself. You remember back in chapter 1:18? Jesus says, “I have the keys of death and of Hades [the grave].” And so, Christ here, gives this

holy angel - literally, what the text says is, “He gave him the key to the shaft of the abyss.” And then He sends him from heaven on a divine errand.

Now, let’s take a moment and look at what this is. The Greek word translated “abyss” originally described, as we often use it, the fathomless depths of the ocean. In Genesis 1:2, the Septuagint uses the word abyss in the expression, “the surface of the deep”, the surface of the abyss, meaning the ocean. This word became an idiom eventually, for even a deeper place than that is the place of the dead. For example, the expression, “the depths of the earth”, meaning where the dead go, is used in the Psalms. Eventually this word, however, came to be used for the pit or the prison in which fallen angels were imprisoned. It’s used this way several times in the apocryphal book of 1 Enoch. In the New Testament, this word occurs only two times outside of Revelation. It occurs in Romans 10:7 for the place of the dead, and it occurs in Luke 8:31 for the prison of evil spirits. This word abyss occurs seven times in Revelation, twice here in our text. In chapter 11:7, we’re told that the beast comes out of the abyss. In chapter 17:8, again, the beast is described as having emerged from this place, the abyss. In chapter 20:1, as we read a moment ago, an angel has the key to the abyss and in chapter 20:3 the angel throws Satan into the abyss where he is imprisoned for 1000 years. So, it’s very clear that when we talk about the abyss, we’re talking about hell.

Now, you’ll notice that here, specifically, it says the shaft of the abyss in the Greek text. The word shaft simply refers to a vertical shaft. The term is sometimes used of a well that’s been dug to get down to water. In this case, this is the shaft that opens down into the prison itself.

Now, what is going on here? Who are these who are imprisoned in the abyss? Two New Testament passages tell us that some of the demons who rebelled with Satan have been imprisoned in the abyss, have been imprisoned in hell. In 2 Peter 2:4, it says, “...God did not spare angels...” In fact, look there with me. I want you to see this. 2 Peter 2:4: “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned [so, clearly, we’re talking about the demons who left with Satan], but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment...”

It's interesting. The Greek word that Peter uses here for "cast them into hell" comes from the Greek noun Tartarus. In Greek thinking, secular Greek thinking, this word was used for the place where the worst sinners were punished in Greek mythology. Peter uses this term, not because he's saying that Greek mythology is true, but as a reminder that because of the horrific sin of certain fallen angels, God has imprisoned them in the place of severest torment and isolation. They are in maximum security. They are imprisoned there until their final sentencing and eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire, in some cases. Clearly, the demons that God has imprisoned in the abyss, unlike those roaming the planet, those that are imprisoned in the abyss, are uniquely, profoundly wicked and vile.

And apparently from time to time, God is still sending demons to the abyss because, you remember in Luke 8:31, some of them begged Jesus not to command them to go away into the abyss. Jude seems to describe some of these angels. Turn to Jude chapter... or Jude, verse 6. He said, "And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire."

Now, there's so much about this I'm not going to take time to unpack for you. But there - clearly, there were demons - they were fallen angels - who involved themselves in patterns of sin so wicked that God, you'll notice, they are eternally bound and held until the final judgment. So, there are some demons imprisoned in the abyss who will never get out and, at the final judgment, will be condemned to the Lake of Fire. But in Revelation 9, we discover that this bottomless pit also can be a temporary place of incarceration for other demons because they're going to be released under God's direction.

But before I leave this point, as far as their ultimate authority, I don't want you to miss the big point. The ultimate authority over these demonic hordes is God Himself. He has locked them up and it's under His authority that they will be released.

Now, as we think about the source of these locusts, let's also consider their current location. Verse 2 says, "He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace..." At Christ's direction, this holy angel uses the key and opens the bottomless pit. Immediately, a huge column of smoke ascends into the sky. It resembled the smoke coming out of a great furnace. In the gospels, Jesus connected smoke to the fires of Gehenna, which was a picture of the fires of hell. In Revelation, smoke is connected to the Lake of Fire in Revelation 19 and Revelation 20. But in this case, it's the smoke pouring out of the shaft of hell itself.

And notice the smoke was so dense, verse 2 says that "the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit." The smoke that ascends out of the abyss, out of the bottomless pit like a great furnace, reminds us that these demons have been suffering in the fire of hell and that they come straight from hell itself. John MacArthur writes, "The smoke polluting the sky, symbolizes the corruption of hell belched forth from the abyss to pollute the world."

Verse 3 goes on, "Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth..." So, undoubtedly, that huge, mushrooming, threatening cloud of smoke that rises up out of the shaft of the abyss, darkens the sky and I'm sure causes widespread panic. But then, out of that smoke, a new terror emerges. Out of the dense smoke, ascending from the flames of hell pours (notice what we're told here) a stream of locusts who come to land on the earth.

Locusts were a familiar image in the Middle East - still are. They're mentioned on a number of occasions in Scripture. They were, interestingly enough, one of the very few insects that the Israelites were allowed to eat according to Leviticus 11. One of the plagues that God brought on Egypt was swarms of locusts in Exodus 10. And, of course, swarms of locusts can be incredibly devastating. Just to give you a couple of examples, in Algiers in 1866, there were swarms of locusts 4 miles long and 100 feet deep. 200,000 people died in the famine that followed that swarm of locusts. In 1889, a swarm of locusts over the Red Sea reportedly covered 2000 square miles. An eyewitness account of a locust plague in Palestine in 1915, describes it like this: "Swarms of locusts flew overhead for five days, darkening the sky and leaving droppings everywhere." In 1951 and 52, the worst modern locust infestation struck the Middle East. All vegetation, across hundreds of thousands of square miles of the countries of Iran, Iraq, Jordan,

and Saudi Arabia - all the vegetation was destroyed. Locusts are totally destructive. They not only eat leaves and the heads of grain, but they eat even the stocks, right down to the ground level. When the swarm lifts from what was once a greenfield, it's become a desert. There's only desolation as far as the eye can see. The prophet Joel describes a great locust plague in Joel 1 and 2, and he compares it to the devastation of what he calls "the great and awesome [dreadful] day of the LORD comes [that's coming]" in Joel 2:31.

But the locust plagues of history pale in comparison to this one because these are not actual locusts. Like locusts, they cannot be counted and the destruction they leave is total, but these are actually demons disguised as locusts - in part, locusts. We know that these are not actual locusts because in verse 11 there king is described as, notice, as Abaddon, the angel of the abyss. And unlike locusts, they also have a stinging tail like a scorpion. These are demons released from hell itself, who've been assigned there because of their vileness, their wickedness and now, Christ gives an angel the key, allows it to be opened, and releases them.

John Phillips, in his commentary on Revelation, writes this: "Picture what the world would be like if we were to open the doors of all the penitentiaries on 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." So, the source of these locusts - ultimately, God is in control, but the source is hell itself.

That brings us, then, to the mission of these locusts. The mission. Let's begin with the power that's granted to them. Verse 3 says, "...and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power." Again, the expression "was given them", underscores that God is sovereign over these awful creatures. And God gives them power. The Greek word is "exousia". It's a word that can mean both power, as we tend to think of the word, and authority. And I think both are intended here. The specific power which God gives to them is the same power that the scorpions of earth have. That's going to be explained more as we work our way into this passage. But, again, don't miss the larger point. It was given to them. Demons can do nothing that God does

not allow. Osborne writes, “Everything Satan and his followers do in this book, can only be done after God gives permission. Even more than that, all the plans of the evil forces are part of the divine will, thus part of the divine plan. God is using these locusts to achieve His larger purpose.” So, their power is the power of a scorpion and it’s given to them by God.

Their target - verse 4: “They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree...” Now, immediately, this makes it clear that these are not ordinary locusts which, of course, only feed on vegetation. But God specifically directs these demonic swarms of locust-like creatures that they may not harm any of earth’s vegetation. Instead, all of their power to harm is going to be specifically directed, notice verse 4, to “only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads”. Notice not only are they not to harm the vegetation on this planet, but they’re not to harm anyone who has the seal of God on his or her forehead.

This is such a wonderful, wonderful passage. I love the comfort that this is because it means God protects His own. You know, in Egypt, He did that, right? In Egypt, God protected His people from the plagues that He showered on the land of Egypt to show that His mercy and His steadfast love are set on those who fear Him. So, again and again, in the account of the plagues, we learned that God protected His people from those plagues.

The same thing happened when God allowed Jerusalem to be captured by the Babylonians. In the same way, God marked and sealed those who were His own, who would be protected in the midst of the judgment. Listen to Ezekiel 9:4-6: “The LORD said to him, ‘Go through the midst of the city [that is the city of Jerusalem] ... and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst.’” In other words, “*I want you to mark those who love holiness, who love Me, and who hate the evil that is now taking place here in the city.*” In other words, “*Mark those who are truly Mine, whose hearts have been changed.*” He says, “*Mark them!*” “But to the others He said in my hearing, ‘Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity and do not spare. Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark...’”

The same thing will be true during the coming Tribulation. God will not allow the judgments that He will pour out on this planet, in the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls to harm His own. It will only be those who have declared themselves as His enemies. He will seal them. You remember back in chapter 7; the 144,000 Jewish evangelists are sealed by God in chapter 7:3-4. But it's also true of the rest of the redeemed. In Revelation 22:4, it speaks of all of the redeemed and it says, "they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads." Sealed - sealed by God as His own. And this seal will protect them from the outpouring of God's wrath upon the earth and from the harm that the demons that God will allow on the planet. And so, that's why we read back in chapter 3:10, He says to His people, "Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth." God's clear directive is that these demonic locusts are to direct their hatred and venom only against the men who have not the seal of God on their foreheads. They are to be the target of their virulent hatred.

But even so, God doesn't give these demons free reign. Instead, He sets clear boundaries. Let's look in verse 5 at their limitations: "And they were not permitted to kill anyone...", that is, permitted by God. Again, you see the control of God over all of this. But why weren't they permitted to kill anyone? What is the implication of that statement? The clear implication is that, given the chance to do so, these demons who have been incarcerated in hell for millennia would carry out their murderous rage against as many of humanity as they could. Doesn't this make sense? I mean, what did our Lord say about Satan in John 8:44? He said, "He was a murderer from the beginning..." Satan loves to kill. He's a murderer and so are his demons. And if God allowed these demons to kill at this point, they would slaughter mankind. But that would keep those who were killed from repenting. It would condemn them to eternal hell and so God intentionally, for now, restricts their power and authority in this trumpet. In the next, He's going to permit them to carry out their rage, but not now, and we'll see why in a moment.

Instead of killing, notice verse 5, they're given authority "to torment". This verb and its noun occurs 11 times in Revelation. The verb was originally used of testing metals. Sometimes in secular Greek it's used for judicial examination, but it came to be used, and this is a ridiculous concept but it's true in the ancient world, of testing people by torture. And then, eventually, it

came to speak of the torture or the torment itself. That's what they are permitted or given authority to do - "to torment [to torture] for five months". So, God not only sets a limit on them - they cannot kill - but He also sets a time limit on the torture that these demonic creatures can inflict on humanity.

Now, the five months is a bit ambiguous. It could mean that the pain of a sting lasts for five months - not likely, but possible. It could mean the lifespan of one locust was for five months. More likely, it means that the entire locust swarm - this demonic locust swarm - will be present on earth for five months. And that fits the normal life pattern of actual locusts. In Palestine, locusts tend to appear during the dry season from April to August. But regardless, don't miss the point here. The point is that God has set a strict time limit on the suffering that this demonic horde of locust-like creatures can inflict on mankind. Likely, the fact that they're not able to kill them and yet the suffering lasts for five months, listen carefully, is because God wants to give people more time to repent. We'll see that at the end of chapter 9. So, those are their limitations.

And what is the effect of their efforts. Verse 5 says, "...and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man." Scorpions, of course, are common in the Mediterranean world. They resemble tiny lobsters but belong to the spider family. They're four or five inches long. Their sting is extremely painful - can even be fatal to children but is rarely fatal to adults. Here we're told that God has given these demonic creatures, like locusts, the power of a scorpion that can cause intense pain by its sting.

The noun for "torment" here is one of the strongest Greek words for pain and suffering. One Greek lexicon defines it as "severe pain associated with torture". In chapter 20, the same word is used for the torment of Satan and the unsaved in the Lake of Fire forever. Their intense pain is caused by the scorpion-like sting of these demonic locust-like creatures.

The Greek word for "sting" here is literally "to strike", which powerfully pictures the strike of the tail of the scorpion. If you've never seen that, don't do it now, but later you'll have to Google and look at that. It's fascinating. It seems likely that people will even be stunned multiple times over that five-month period and yet survive.

Verse 6 says, “And in those days men will seek death and will not find it...” The pain, the terror, the despair caused by this worldwide plague will be so bad that people will seek death. The verbs used in this sentence describe a desire, almost even a demand, for death which likely means that people will attempt suicide and yet be unable to die.

Verse 6 - notice how it ends: “...they will long to die...” It’s a strong word. They will crave death, “...and [yet] death flees from them.” Literally, death keeps on fleeing. God will not let them die.

Isn’t it ironic that the very people on this planet who killed those who love God, who killed the martyrs in chapter 6, want now to die themselves but God will not allow it? Death takes a holiday. There’ll be no escape from the physical pain that these demons inflict upon mankind and there’ll be no escape from God’s judgment which lies behind it. Every attempt to end their lives will meet with abject failure. Osborne writes, “Those who have martyred the saints will be paid in kind and more. They have tortured, so they will now be tortured by the same malignant forces that goaded them into committing their awful deeds.” But you know, as I thought about this, it occurred to me the fact that they will try to die and won’t be able is actually a mercy of God, because their escape from earth and from the pain of that suffering would usher them into eternal torment in the Lake of Fire forever. So, there’s the mission of the locust.

Let’s move on to the appearance of these locusts. Verses 7 to 10 are dedicated to describing their appearance because it tells us something about them. These locusts have points of resemblance to actual locust, but they are clearly more than locusts. That’s why I keep saying they are demonic locust-like creatures. I mean, ten times in this passage, John uses the words “like” and “appeared to be”. He is clearly struggling for words to describe what he saw. So, it’s - these are not locusts. These are not scorpions. These are not warriors in an army. But he uses all of those images to somehow help us understand what he’s seeing.

Let’s begin, then, with their overall appearance in verse - the first part of verse 7: “The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle...” Again, John combines the sort of

pictures of locusts, scorpion, and the warriors of an invading army to describe these awful creatures. But their overall appearance is like a warhorse.

Now, there are some frightening ramifications of that description. It means that they are not likely to be tiny, little creatures like locusts. They will likely be larger, and they will be larger and powerful enough to strike fear even with their appearance. That's the concept behind this warhorse-like look. It's interesting, by the way, that the head of a real locust, if you look at it, appears, resembles a horse. The German word for locusts means hay horse and the Italian is little horse. A warhorse - that's what they will look like overall. In the ancient world, warhorses were an object of terror. The Romans bred warhorses that were huge. And in addition to the error caused by their size and their speed, the Romans taught their warhorses to bite, and they sharpened their hooves so that they could engage in the battle. These demonic locust-like creatures resemble war horses that have been outfitted and prepared for battle.

He goes on to be more specific. Next, he goes to their crowns. Verse 7 says, "...and on their heads [and, again, notice the words] appeared to be crowns like gold..." He doesn't say there were crowns of gold on their heads, but rather something that appeared to be crowns. The Greek word is "stephanos" in the plural. And they were "like gold". This may merely be a physical description. It may also imply that they wear the victor's crown, meaning that they are unstoppable and victorious in the pursuit of their mission.

"...their faces", verse 7 says, "were like the faces of men". Now, again, John does not say that they had human faces. He said their faces were like the faces of men. There are several possibilities for what that might mean, but many commentators, and I agree with this, land on the fact that the most likely scenario here is that rather than having the appearance of an unintelligent insect, when John looked into the faces of these demonic locust-like creatures, he saw intelligence, rationality, cunning, and cruelty.

Their hair, verse 8 says, was "like the hair of women". Again, this could describe a mere physical attribute. Maybe they have physical hair like the physical hair on the legs and bodies of

locusts. Or others say, no, it may imply a kind of seductiveness. Perhaps, they are like the sirens of Greek mythology. They will lure people in some way to their doom.

“...their teeth”, verse 8 says, “were like the teeth of lions”. Now, think about it. Lions and locusts - both are known for their insatiable appetites and they both tear at their prey in the same way. Of course, these locusts attacked with the stings in their tails, not with their mouths, but the point is that their appetite for their prey and their fierceness will be the same as if they were lions.

Their breastplates, in verse 9, are “like breastplates of iron”. The Greek word for breastplates is thorax, literally, transliterated into English. So, their thorax is like a thorax of iron. It was like a piece of armor. In the ancient world, some armies literally put a piece of armor on the chest of their warhorses to protect their vital organs. These locust-like creatures will have armor-like protection covering their vital organs. In other words, they’re going to be impossible to kill. They will be invincible. No weapons that man has will be able to extinguish them.

“...their wings”, verse 9 says, the sound of their wings “was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle.” Just like an actual locust storm, the sound that their wings make will be deafening and terrifying. It’ll be like the rumble of a huge number of war chariots and of hundreds of horses rushing into the battle. Terrifying.

Their tails, in verse 10 - “They have...” - literally, “they are having”. The implication is this is an ongoing reality that they’re inflicting pain and suffering. They are having “tails like scorpions”. Now, this is fascinating because now we learn that the likeness to scorpions is not just a figure speech. It’s not just a metaphor. They will actually have tails, not like locusts, but tails like scorpions.

And verse 10 says, “and stings”. Again, like scorpions, in their tails, they will have stings. The Greek word for sting, here, is used in several different ways in the New Testament. It’s used of the goad mentioned in Acts 26 - pointed stick. It’s used of the sting of death in 1 Corinthians 15.

It's used of the sting of the scourge, the Roman implement of torture. Clearly, this will be incredibly painful.

Verse 10 goes on to say, "and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months." Again, John reminds us that God has allowed this, and He's allowed them only to do it for five months. What is the purpose of this trumpet judgment? From the demons' perspective, it is always in their mind and heart to torture and to kill men and women. Why? Because we're made in the image of God, and they ferociously despise God.

I remember so vividly an illustration that my - one of my theology profs in seminary gave, and that's a lot of years ago. He took out a picture of his wife and he said (out of his wallet) and he said, "What would you think of me and what would you think of my relationship with my wife if I took this picture of my wife and I suddenly began to jab it with my pen, and cut into pieces, and tear it, and rip it, and throw it in the trash can? What would you think of? You would think there is a man who has a terrible relationship with his wife. Why? Because you're attacking the image of your spouse.

That's what these demons do. They can't get to God. But they hate Him so ferociously that they get to His image, and they do everything they can to destroy it. From God's perspective, God is going to allow this five-month period as another time during which the people on earth are given yet another chance to see the hatred of Satan and his demons and the mercy of God as He gives them time to repent.

Verse 11 introduces us to the leader of these locusts. Verse 11 says, "They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss..." Now, that's another remarkable statement that tells us that these are not really locusts, in the traditional sense, because Proverbs 30:27 says, "The locusts have no king, yet all of them go out in ranks..." But these demonic locust-like creatures have a king and, notice, he's described as "the angel of the abyss".

Again, there's debate about who this is, not much, but there's a little debate. Some say this is the holy angel who opened the pit, back in verse 2, but that can't be true when you see how he's

described in the rest of this verse. Some say this is Satan himself, but we meet Satan later in this book and he's described very clearly, not as an angel. More likely, this is one of Satan's leading demons who is in charge. This is a demonic king who executes the will of Satan and leads this demonic swarm to torment the people on this planet.

John gives this angel of the abyss his name both in Hebrew and in Greek. Verse 11 says, "...his name in Hebrew is Abaddon..." This is the Hebrew verb that means "destroy" but it's made into a proper name. So, his name is Destroyer. "...and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon." This name comes from the Greek word that also means to destroy. So, again, he wants to be clear, in Greek and in Hebrew, he is the destroyer.

What a remarkable passage? What are the lessons we learn from this passage. Let me just highlight a couple of them for you. And I don't have a slide for these, but I hope you'll jot them down and think about them.

Lesson number one. We learn the hateful, murderous heart of Satan and his demons toward mankind. The hateful, murderous heart of Satan and his demons toward mankind. Satan is called a destroyer, a liar, a murderer, and accuser. He's said to blind people to the truth. He tempts people to sin against God, their Creator. He devours people like a lion. You remember, what demons did, what his followers, the demons, do to people when they possessed them in the gospels? I mean, think about the demoniac at Gadara. Here is a man who lived among the tombs, who cut himself, who couldn't be bound by chains, who was in such constant misery that he just screamed at the top of his lungs throughout the tombs, day and night. Think about the young boy in Mark 9 who was demon possessed, who the demons kept prompting him to throw himself into the fire and into the water, in wanton acts of self-destruction. For five months, near the end of the Tribulation, demons will unleash their terror on the entire world of the unredeemed in the same way. Satan and his demons - think about this for a moment. They are constantly trying to convince the people of this world that God is their enemy, and that God is not good, that God is not generous but, instead, Satan and all that he offers them is generosity itself. But here, God pulls off the mask and He lets mankind see just what the reality is of their true nature. They hate and they want to destroy even their own followers.

Can I just speak directly to you, if you're here tonight without Christ? It's tempting to believe that God is your enemy, and He doesn't want what's good for you and that good is found everywhere else. What this passage reminds us is exactly the opposite, that the only one in this universe who truly loves you is God Himself and His people. The people of this world, Titus 3 says, are hateful and hating one another. And here we learn that Satan is a destroyer, a liar, a murderer. He is sucking you into the sin that has enslaved you, and he is finding joy and delight in that. He doesn't want your good. He wants to destroy you. And if you don't come to Christ, it will destroy you. Don't believe the lie. Satan has switched everything in your mind to make you think that everything this world offers, which Satan himself - the world system - he created it - that that's all good - winsome, has your best interests at heart. And God is the one who is out to get you, when in reality, the exact opposite is true. God overrules their destructive plans and uses their attempts at destruction to His much larger plan, a plan that is redemptive. Through the hateful and horrific torture of these demons, God works to lead people to repentance so that they can be redeemed, so that they can escape the horror of their sin and its ultimate penalty.

There's a second lesson here, and that is, God's sovereignty over Satan and his demons. There are some in the Charismatic Movement who act like Satan is in charge. Satan is not in charge. Like Luther said, "He's God's devil". God has him on a leash and he only goes as far as God allows. And one day, God will bind him in hell for 1000 years, release him for a short time, and then God will throw him in the Lake of Fire forever. This is not a question of who's going to win. God is sovereign over Satan and Satan has to ask permission to lift a finger on this planet.

Number three - third lesson. We learn in this story God's protection of His people. He protects some of His people through these events. Some are saved, you remember, during the seven-year period. So, they weren't raptured out at the beginning. They came to Christ during these seven years. And what does God do? He marks them and He says, even to the demons, "*Don't you dare touch My own!*" And for some of us, He raptures us out before it begins. But either way, He will protect His own.

And in the fourth and final lesson is the purpose, I think, in the five months and not allowing anyone to die, was to call them to repentance. We'll see it at the end of chapter 9 next time we study this book. That's God's purpose and goal. That was His purpose - will be His purpose then and it's still His purpose now. If you're here tonight without Christ, God has extended your life. He's given you life, your heart is still beating. You're still on this planet. And He's giving you time to repent and believe in His Son. My prayer is that you'll do that even tonight.

Let's pray together.

Father, as horrific as these circumstances are that we've just studied together, as difficult as it is to think about these things, Lord, we thank You for these powerful lessons. We thank You, Oh God, for the clear vision of Satan and his demons and their utter contempt for and hatred of and desire to destroy everyone who's made in Your image. Father don't let any of us believe the lie that Satan and his plans are good and You're the enemy. Father, thank You for the powerful lesson of Your sovereign control. And thank you, Oh Father, most of all, that You will protect Your own, that Your people will not experience Your wrath, whether it's directly inflicted or indirectly inflicted through allowing these demons to have certain powers. Father, we're so grateful that our Lord rescues us from the wrath to come. And Lord, I pray for those here tonight who are not in Christ. Oh Lord, I pray that You would bring them to true repentance as they think about what awaits this world and what awaits them outside of Christ. I pray that before their head hits the pillow tonight, they would repent of their sins and believe in Your Son - in His life, in His death for sin, to purchase forgiveness, and in His resurrection. Lord may that be true even tonight. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen!