

The Fifth Trumpet: Locusts Came Down Upon the Earth and Were Given Power Like That of Scorpions 9: 1-12

DIG: For what purpose would the Lord allow an invasion of demon-possessed locusts? What power will they have? What will be the human characteristics of the demon-possessed locusts? How is this blackout similar or dissimilar to the preceding two in Joel 2:31 and Revelation 6:12? What is the significance of the locust king's Hebrew and Greek names?

REFLECT: Has the Lord ever turned the lights out on you? When? How? What did you learn? How long did it take you to learn it?

Under the judgment of the first trumpet, the trees and grass were devoured by hail, fire and blood. Next, the creatures in the sea and the ships were destroyed by the impact of a burning mass from outer space. When the third *shofar* blew, another missile from the heavens poisoned the fresh waters of the world. Then the energy-generating processes of the sun and stars had been reduced for a time.²⁶⁰ But now, the rising crescendo of judgments on the earth introduces the first woe.

The fifth angel sounded his *shofar*, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss (9:1). The events surrounding the fifth trumpet are given considerable explanation, implying that this is the most important step in God's progressive and ever increasing judgments upon the earth.²⁶¹ Once again the word *star* is used symbolically of an *angel*. Once again, it is a fallen *angel*. The *Abyss* is the temporary place of imprisonment for fallen angels, or *demons*. It is the place where demons begged repeatedly not to be thrown into by Yeshua (Luke 8:31). It is their temporary home because their final destination will be the Lake of Fire. Not all *demons* are imprisoned in the *Abyss* right now. However, those that are, will wait until the Great White Throne Judgment to hear their ultimate fate (20:11-15).

When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace (9:2). When the Abyss is opened, a thick black smoke will belch out like a great erupting volcano, covering the world with darkness. The sun and sky will then be blacked

out. This will be the third of **five blackouts in the end times** (Joel 2:31; Revelation 6:12, 9:2, 16:10-11; Matthew 24:29-30), and for the third time there will be a total cessation of light. It will resemble the scene from Sodom and Gomorrah when Lot looked back toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace (Genesis 19:28).

But it will not be the blackout that makes this **the first Woe** judgment. A great number of **demons** will be released for the first of two demonic invasions.²⁶² **And out of the smoke, demons, appearing as locusts came down upon the earth and were given power by God to sting like scorpions (9:3).** A preview to this kind of plague can be seen in Exodus 10:1-20 (see my commentary on Exodus Br - The Plague of Swarming Locusts). However, the description of **the locusts** later in 9:7-10 clearly shows that *these locusts* cannot be taken literally. They will not be like the short-horned grasshoppers that plagued Egypt. No, they are demons and come out of **the Abyss**, which is mentioned seven times in the book of Revelation (9:1, 9:2, 9:11, 11:7, 17:8, 20:1 and 20:3).

Tartarus is the deepest, darkest, most isolated part of **the Abyss in the heart of the earth** (Matthew 12:40). It is the maximum security of the **Hebrew** abode of the dead, Sh'ol, or the **Greek** equivalent of Hades, reserved for the worst of the worst of **the fallen angels**. During the three days that **His** body was physically in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea (John 19:38-42), **Messiah** went there to announce the victory that **He** had won on the cross. **He** was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also **He** went and preached to the spirits in prison (*Greek: Tartarus*) who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built (First Peter 3:18b-20a). Jude tells us that these **angels** will be kept in darkness, or *tartarus*, bound with everlasting chains until the Great White Throne Judgment (see my commentary on Jude Ak - The Angels Did Not Keep Their Positions of Authority). Therefore, **they** have been imprisoned there ever since the days of Noah (see my commentary on Genesis Ca - The Sons of God Married the Daughters of Men). This suggests that **the Abyss** is a preliminary place of confinement, and that *other demons* were released at the fifth trumpet to torment mankind with **their** sting.

As fearsome as this malignant swarm of **demons** will be, **they** will still be under **God's** control. **They** will not be ordinary locusts, **they** are selective and can follow commands (Joel 2:7-9). **They** do not destroy the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, already burned under the first trumpet judgment, because the earth's vegetation was to be spared for a time as it tried to reestablish its growth. The mission of the locust demons will be single.²⁶³ **They** were to hurt only those people who did not have the seal of God on their

foreheads (9:4), the 144,000 Jewish evangelists (7:3), or other **believers** saved during the Great Tribulation. **Ezekiel 9:4-6** illustrates the truth that **God** protects **His** people in the midst of judgment when **He** commanded an **angel** to go through Jerusalem and **put a mark on the foreheads of the redeemed**. Those who did not have that **mark** were subject to death when the city fell to the Babylonians.²⁶⁴ Thus, **believers** will be protected during the Tribulation, just as **ADONAI** sheltered Isra'el from the effects of the Egyptian plagues (**Exodus 8:22, 9:4, 10:23; Ephesians 1:13-14; Second Timothy 2:19**).

They were not given power by God to kill them (Job 1:12), but only to torture them for five months, or 150 days, the exact number of days of the judgment of the Flood (see my commentary on **Genesis Ch - The Chronology of the Flood**). That judgment also came from **deep within the earth (Genesis 7:11b)**. Normally, **John** does not reveal the duration of time for each of these judgments, but in this case the timing is given. There will be a limit as to how much destruction **the demons** will be allowed to render.²⁶⁵ **And the agony they suffer will be like the sting of a scorpion (9:5)**. Victims rarely die from **the sting of a scorpion**, but often turn black and blue and go into convulsions. The venom attacks the central nervous system. What could be worse than millions of **demon-possessed locusts** dive-bombing like mosquitoes.²⁶⁶ Therefore, those **unbelievers** will be tormented, but not killed.

During those days the lost will seek death, but will not find it (Job 3:21); they will long to die, but death will elude them (9:6). The demonic infestation will fly like **locusts**, run like **horses** and sting like **scorpions**. No wonder **unbelievers will seek death**. Normally the agony and discomfort of a **scorpion sting** lasts for several **days**. This time however, **their** unbearable pain will last for **five months**. Unable to escape the pain **they** will attempt to commit suicide, but will fail. **Death** will run from them. There will be no escape. **Guns** will misfire, **knives** will slip from **their** hands, and **poisons** will lose their potency. **They** will be forced to endure the torment. It will be hell on **earth**.

Mankind surely knew by this time that **Messiah** was in heaven, the raptured and martyred believers were also there, the holy angels had even been seen flying through the heavens, and they knew the wrath of **the Lamb** was directed at **them**. Yet **they** will continue to hate **God**, choosing Satan instead, and so **the Lord** will allow them to experience a little direct fellowship with **their** future roommates in the **Lake of Fire (20:15)**.

It is not unusual for **demons** or other angelic beings to have animal-like features. This was true of the **four living creatures**, or the **cherubim** in **4:6b**. But here the whole scene is one of unnatural and awesome cruelty.²⁶⁷ **John** seems to be searching for words capable of describing the agonizing sight to **his** readers, so **he** uses the word **like** to indicate that **he**

was using symbols to describe **the locusts**. His description is so straightforward and vivid that it is unnecessary to comment. **The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle (Joel 2:4a). On their heads they were something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like a woman's hair, and their teeth were like lion's teeth (Joel 1:6). They had breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings were like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle (Joel 2:4b-5). They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months (9:7-10).**

Once again **the Holy Spirit** points out that **these** were no ordinary locusts. The Word of God tells us in **Proverbs 30:27** that **locusts have no king, yet they advance together in ranks**. However, here we learn that *these* strange locusts will indeed have a king over them. Who will this king be? **He is the fallen angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is *Abaddon*, and in Greek, *Apollyon* (9:11)**. The description of the first woe ends with the identity of the fallen angel who opened **the Abyss**. His name in **Hebrew** is *Abaddon* and in **Greek** it is *Apollyon*. Both names mean destruction (**Job 26:6, 28:22; Psalm 88:11; Proverbs 15:11**), so **he** will lead the demons pictured here as **they destroy the people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads (9:4)**. Some think this is **Satan**, but his present domain is not in **the Abyss**, but in **the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12)**. He is **the ruler of the kingdom of the air (Ephesians 2:2)**.

The **five months** of agony will eventually come to an end. At that point, **mankind** will be eager for some kind of relief. However it will be short lived because **the first woe** will be past, but **two other woes are yet to come (9:12)**.

What is the purpose of reflecting on such troubling passages such as this? One reason is that their disturbing and troubling imagery are grounded in a spiritual reality that we all face. As believers, we have to acknowledge that we are in a very real battle against sin and evil. The call to follow **Jesus Christ** requires struggling against temptation and our own **sinful nature (Romans 7:18-20)**, as well as standing up to unrighteousness.

If we're honest, we will admit that it is often easier to dismiss this spiritual struggle. As long as we can maintain an outward calm and peacefulness, can't we let a few things slide? That's exactly what these visions from **Revelation** challenge. **John's** message about the deadly consequences of sin compels us to ask, "Am I really in this fight? Am I willing to take a few lumps if it means holding on to **Yeshua** and preparing myself for **His Kingdom**?"

It might help to consider an example from the lives of one of the fathers of the faith, Ignatius. He was once a soldier who fought earthly battles. In his book *Spiritual Exercises*, he used an analogy from those battles to describe the spiritual battle that every believer faces. He described the world as being divided between two armies; one flag being held up by **Satan** and the other by **Christ**. Each side actively sends out forces to patrol the world. One goes armed with nets and chains to ensnare souls, while the other uses the Word of **God** to free humanity from the snares of **the devil**. If we choose **Christ's** flag, Ignatius said, then we accept **Him as the commander of the army of the LORD (Joshua 5:14)**, and become wholehearted combatants on this battlefield. Today, remember that you are called to lift high the flag of **Christ** in your struggle against sin. Remember too, that victory can be yours as you cling to **Messiah**, your **commander-in-Chief**.

*Lord Jesus, I know You are at my side in spiritual combat. I ask You to keep me strong in resisting sin.*²⁶⁸