

Stark Choices: Christ Who Offers Endless Life & The Devil, and the Destroyer from the Abyss, Who Offer Endless Death

Revelation 9

We open to what most Bible commentators over the centuries have called perhaps the most challenging chapter in the Bible, Revelation chapter 9. Before we dive in we need to step back and remember one of the most amazing features of this book: the role of the Gospel in relation to the horrors of the Tribulation.

An Invitation from God

The Bible closes with one of the greatest invitations of all, found in the final chapter, of the last book of the Bible. So, before the horrors of Rev. 9, listen to the offer of endless life from Jesus Christ to all who will listen:

Revelation 22:16-17 (NKJV) "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star." 17 And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

Simple Truths

This great invitation is filled with some powerful truths. If we were listing truths (like in the devotional method of Bible study) we could say:

1. Jesus sent the content of the Book of Revelation to His Church. When we study in the book of the Revelation, we are giving attention to what was sent by Jesus to us the saints in Christ's church through all ages.
2. Jesus Christ is unique: **He is the Root of David** (that means David came from Him, even though Jesus was born 1,000 years after David's life, so Jesus can do the impossible, and is thus Divine); **He is the Offspring of David** (that means Jesus is the Christ promised to rule over the people of Israel in a future Earthly way, as the Divine-Human descendant of David); **He is the Bright & Morning Star** (that means that He signals the dawning of a day that knows no night; and He is the One who offers endless new beginnings).
3. Salvation is offered to Anyone who is thirsty and will come.

So, the Bible closes with one of the greatest invitations of all, an amazing offer of endless life, given by God the Father, Son, and Spirit to any human that will hear and by faith respond. That's what can be found in the final chapter, of the last book of the Bible.

Now turn with me to perhaps the most vivid portrayal of death, evil, and destruction in all of God's Word, it is in Revelation 9.

Our theme this morning is the amazing contrast in the Stark Choices:

Christ Who Offers Endless Life & The Devil, and the Destroyer from the Abyss, Who Offer Endless Death

Now, please stand with me and listen to the entirety of this chapter, before we look at each part and the truths God has given to us.

Revelation 9:1-21 (NKJV) Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit. 2 And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit. 3 Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. 4 They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. 5 And they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months. Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. 6 In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them. 7 The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. 8 They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. 9 And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. 10 They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power was to hurt men five months. 11 And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon. 12 One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things. 13 Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, 14 saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." 15 So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind. 16 Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. 17 And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur

yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone. 18 By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed—by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths. 19 For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm. 20 But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. 21 And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Pray

Before we even try to unpack those 21 verses, may I remind you again of what Jesus said about this book?

Revelation 22:16a (NKJV) “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches.

The Events in Revelation are God’s Truth they are not Fictional

Truth can be far more fascinating than fiction. So much of entertainment of all forms, centers around fiction, because reality is often mundane and boring. As we get to Revelation 9, everything mundane or boring evaporates. Just to stay alive takes much of most people effort. Retrace in your minds what we have seen so far in Revelation chapters 6,7 & 8:

Just breathing will be hard as most of the world will have some form of respiratory damage from the smoke, ash, and violent weather changes.

Water deprivation, food scarcity, and the constant sights of death and destruction have all become familiar, common, and the “new normal” to the daily lives of earth’s survivors.

$1/4^{\text{th}} + 1/3^{\text{rd}} = 58\%$

Remember, God has already told us that $1/4^{\text{th}}$ of humanity has perished (that was in Rev. 6:8). Now God tells us that in Rev. 9:18 that $1/3^{\text{rd}}$ more will perish. If you add 25% + 33%, that makes just shy of 60%. That means death is staggeringly common.

But life this side of Hell will never get as unpleasant as we will see it becomes in this chapter. Again we must ask: what is the purpose of all this? Why would God share such a bleak, stark, and horrific record about the future?

One answer is clearly to show a contrast between two: Stark Choices between Christ & Satan. Remember how Jesus explained that He came to give abundant life (John 10:10); but the Devil came to kill, steal, and to destroy. That contrast is so evident here in Rev. 9.

God has always offered humans a way out of their sin. Here, again He does the same, and here again, humans refuse to repent.

A Summary of Revelation 9's Biblical Lessons

Now, before we unfold the truths in each of the 21 verses of this chapter, walk through the chapter as a whole with me. You can outline the chapter into these seven clear divisions:

LESSONS FROM THE DEMONS' LOCATION (9:1-2)

LESSONS FROM THE DEMONS' LAUNCH (9:3-6)

LESSONS FROM THE DEMONS' LOOKS (9:7-10)

LESSONS FROM THE DEMONS' LEADER (9:11-12)

BEWARE OF THE TERRIFYING POWER OF DEMONS (9:13-14)

BEWARE OF THE HORRIFYING POWER OF DEATH (9:15-19)

BEWARE OF THE HARDENING POWER OF SIN (9:20-21)

Now look at how much God has packed into these 21 verses. This is why we could study this book all our lives and never run out of new truths and blessings.

1. **LESSONS FROM THE DEMONS' LOCATION (9:1-2, NKJV)** Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit. 2 And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit.

Questions a good student of the Bible would ask:

- Who is the fifth angel and why does he sound?
- Who is the star that falls from Heaven to Earth (he is referred to as a person by the next words "to him")?
- Is there any reference to someone falling brightly and visibly from Heaven in other places in the Bible?
- Who has and can give out usage of the key to the bottomless pit? (Jesus in Rev. 1:17-18)
- What is the bottomless pit; and why was it originally designed by God? (remember Jesus saying that this place was prepared for the Devil and his

angels)

- Did demons in Christ's time ever refer to this abyss or bottomless pit? (they pleaded with Christ not to send them to the abyss)
- What is the purpose of alluding to this as being "like the smoke of a great furnace"? (note the similarity to Christ's descriptions of where the wicked will be cast after the final judgment, both are unquenchable fires)

2. **LESSONS FROM THE DEMONS' LAUNCH** (9:3–6, NKJV) Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. 4 They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. 5 And they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months. Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. 6 In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them.

Questions a good student of the Bible would ask:

- Why are those creatures of judgment in the form of locusts; and what kind of creatures are they?
- Why are they compared to scorpions three times?
- Why is the notation about "not harming plants & trees" significant?
- Who has, and what is the "seal of God on their foreheads"?
- Why torment not kill, and for five months?
- Why does God prevent the death of humans for five months?

3. **LESSONS FROM THE DEMONS' LOOKS** (9:7–10, NKJV) The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. 8 They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. 9 And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. 10 They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power was to hurt men five months.

Questions a good student of the Bible would ask:

- How can a locust be shaped like a horse? (Demons taking forms)
- Why is the word "like" used so many times in these verses? (We are beyond comprehension here)
- What do all these descriptions have in common (horses prepared for battle; crowns of something like gold; faces like men; hair like women; teeth like

lions; breastplates like iron; wings like chariots & horses running; tails like scorpions)?

- Why does God allow them to “hurt” people for 5 months? (A taste of Hell)

Isn't it amazing that when God allows us to see how when these invisible spirits (the demons), are released and allowed to embody themselves, they are so inescapably hideous and horrifying?

4. LESSONS FROM THE DEMONS' LEADER (9:11–12, NKJV) And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon. 12 One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things.

Questions a good student of the Bible would ask:

- Who is King over this horde of incarcerated monsters? (an demon captain of the highest level called the destroyer)
- What is the significance of a King named Abaddon & Apollyon? (they speak of a power for evil and destruction beyond what humans understand)
- Who did Jesus say came to kill, steal, and destroy? (the Devil in John 10:10)
- How are these three woes different than the four prior trumpets? (the first four are physical world ecology blows, these are spiritual world horrors from Hell)
- Are there levels or hierarchies of demons in Satan's kingdom? (yes, maybe even seven levels of fallen angels)
- Why would God even bring these gruesome details up, and specifically target them as being for the church of Christ to know (Revelation 22:16a “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches)?
- What would the message of five months of Hell on Earth mean to humans? (God is warning them of what they will face forever)

5. LESSONS FROM THE TERRIFYING POWER OF DEMONS (9:13–14, NKJV) Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, 14 saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.”

Questions a good student of the Bible would ask:

- What is significant about a voice from the altar before God? (it speaks of doom)
- What does that altar stand for or do, in front of God? (prayer)
- Why are four angels bound? (they are so evil and destructive that God had to limit their influence)

- Are any angels bound right now in 2013, and if so, why? (yes, the Bible explains this often)
- What angels would ever get “bound” and “released”? (those who were the worst offenders)
- What is the tie to the Euphrates River? (the boundary of the promised land near the cradle of life, near Eden)

6. LESSONS ABOUT THE HORRIFYING POWER OF DEATH (9:15–19, NKJV) So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind. 16 Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. 17 And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone. 18 By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed—by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths. 19 For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm.

Questions a good student of the Bible would ask:

- Why does God prepare things long ago, why does He wait, and why would God release them? (God has a perfect plan)
- Why the number of two hundred million? (equal to the entire known world’s population in John’s time)
- Are these animals or demons? (yes, demonic creatures)
- Why all these fearsome appearances? (to show the malignity of sin)
- How many would be a third of mankind in today’s terms? (2.3 billion people)
- What possible correlation is there between fire, smoke, brimstone and the bite of a serpent? (the Devil, the tempter in the Garden, the Lake of Fire, and pictures of God’s wrath against sin and sinners)

7. LESSONS ABOUT THE HARDENING POWER OF SIN (9:20–21, NKJV) But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. 21 And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Questions a good student of the Bible would ask:

- Why do some survive if these are supernatural monsters? (God’s mercy)
- What does God say is behind every idol? (demons)

- Why would humans turn to idols when God is so vividly present all through the world? (hardness of evil human hearts)
- How are demons worshipped, and is it possible for anyone to do that today? (yes through the occult, violence, sensuality, bloodshed, and false religions)
- Why does God use the word repent here twice? (that is His desire)

So in just 21 verses of the Bible we are introduced to demon monsters, caged up in the ultimate maximum-security prison, designed by God for the devil and his angels.

Then we hear that God allows all of humanity (except those sealed by the Spirit) to be horribly tormented by the creatures from the abyss prepared for the devil and his angels, which we know as Hell. Hell was prepared for the devil and his angels, not humans.

A Taste of Hell

So now just from the big picture we can see what God is doing. God gives unsaved people a sampler of Hell. He opens the bottomless pit. Because some people don't believe in Hell, God let's see and smell the smoke of this place of torment. Then God lets out some of the horrifying creatures that will forever dwell in that Bottomless Pit. Humans get to see and feel what eternal Hell will be like, but just for five months.

By the way in Biblical Numerology (the study of what significance various numbers have) the number five is called the "number of grace".

Think of this: God wants to deliver the ultimate warning. To maximize the warning God graciously limits the length of Hell's horrors to just enough for lost humans to get a taste.

He allows the present incarcerated fiends, who are the occupants of Hell: out for five months of "Hell on Earth".

And what is the result of God's gracious, sobering warning? People harden their hearts.

Marvelous Grace of Our Loving God

Makes me think of a great old hymn: marvelous Grace of our Loving Lord. We who have repented are the thankful recipients of God's amazing mercy and grace.

Please grab your hymnbook and turn with me to #