

Dr. Maurice Rawlings, who has since passed away, was a cardiologist and a professor of medicine at the University of Tennessee. Rawlings was a devout atheist, who considered all religion to be ‘hocus-pocus’ and he saw death as nothing more than a painless extinction – until something happened that changed his life.

In 1977, he was giving a stress test to a man who was having chest pains, and in the middle of the test the man dropped dead in Rawlings’ office. Dr. Rawlings and several nurses began to work on him – he began chest compressions while a nurse began mouth-to-mouth. Several times, the patient would regain consciousness and then he would die again, and each time the patient was resuscitated he would scream, “I am in Hell!” Dr. Rawlings thought he meant he was in pain from the CPR but then the patient gave a strange command. “Don’t stop!” This shocked Dr. Rawlings who says that when most patients recover, they tell him to take his hands off them because he is hurting them from the CPR.

Dr. Rawlings went on to describe the man as having a terrified look on his face, worse than the expression typically seen in death. This patient had a grotesque grimace expressing sheer horror. His pupils were dilated, he was perspiring and trembling – and he looked as if his hair was “on end.” Then still another strange thing happened. The patient said, “Don’t you understand? I am in Hell. Each time you quit I go back to Hell! Don’t let me go back to Hell!”

This incident was so powerful that Dr. Rawlings would become a committed Christian and he wrote a book telling stories of these near-death experiences. He concluded by saying, “Now I feel assured that there is life after death, and not all of it is good.”

Dr. Rawlings described a patient who spiritually left this earth and went to Hell, but this morning, we are going to see just the opposite – Hell comes to the earth.

We are looking at the trumpet judgments, which were revealed when the seventh seal was broken by the Lord – and they are some of the final judgments during the Tribulation period. If you recall from last week, we studied the first four trumpet judgments where God targeted His creation, He targeted nature – more specifically, one third of the land and its vegetation, one third of the seas and its sea life, God targeted one third of fresh water and it became deadly, and He also targeted one third of the heavenly bodies such as the sun, the moon, and the stars.

These first four trumpet judgments directly targeted nature, and as we might imagine, they will indirectly impact people; however, the next judgments will be

very different because God will take direct aim at people who still refuse to repent and come to the Lord for salvation. In these next judgments, people are the targets.

Four angels have sounded their trumpets, and now we come to the fifth angel with his trumpet. So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Revelation 9** and we will begin with **verse 1**.

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.

As soon as the **fifth angel** blew his trumpet, the Apostle John sees another **star**, but this time the star is an intelligent being with the **key** to the **bottomless pit**. As you might expect, there are several views regarding the identity of this being, but from my point of view, there are only two real possibilities depending on how we interpret that word “**fallen**”. Some think this being, who has fallen from heaven, is Satan, and that could be the case if the word “fallen” refers to a rebellious state, but if the word “fallen” simply describes the condition of having come from heaven above to the earth below, then this **star** – this being is likely another high-ranking angel, and I think that is the case for two reasons: first, because it’s hard to imagine that God would entrust the key of the bottomless pit to Satan or to any rebellious angel for that matter, and secondly, we will see later in **Revelation 20:1-2**, that an angel, possibly this same angel, has the key to the abyss and locks Satan up. We read,

¹Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. ²And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;

I think these two passages refer to the exact same angel with the **key** to the **bottomless pit**, and the literal meaning of the bottomless pit is the “*shaft of the abyss*,” which appears to be a temporary place of confinement for demons – not all demons, but for some. Using terms of incarceration that we may be familiar with – we could say that the pit or the abyss is the county jail where confinement is temporary, whereas the lake of fire is confinement in prison on death row for life. Hopefully, that makes sense.

Now, in **verse 2**, John tells us what this angel does with the key. We read,

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.

Before we dig into this, it's worth noting that in this chapter, there are more uses of the words "**as**" and "**like**" than in any other chapter in the entire Bible. This shows how difficult it was for John to describe what he was witnessing, but it also reminds us to be very careful as we try to understand this chapter.

So, John tells us the **pit** is opened by the angel, and to follow John's description, it might help to imagine this pit – this abyss as something like a huge underground cavern. Then imagine a narrow shaft going up to the surface with a locked door at the top. Finally, picture the cavern filled with choking blue smoke created by a sulfurous, crude-oil burning furnace. **What would be the first thing to happen when the angel opened the pit?** Obviously, smoke would belch up from the shaft, **like the smoke from a great furnace**, obscuring the view of the sun and the sky – but the smoke is not the greatest concern because there is something hidden in the smoke.

Let's continue, beginning with **verse 3**.

³ Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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. ⁶ And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them.

In this passage, we learn that **locusts** come out of the smoke from the pit, but they are not the normal bugs. These are demons that assume some of the characteristics of locusts, but they are not permitted to destroy any plant life as locusts normally would. Instead, these locusts have power similar to **scorpions** – meaning they can torment like a scorpion, causing excruciating, and burning, and even debilitating pain to those they sting.

These demons are unleashed upon the earth like locusts – it's a time of demonic activity like the world has never seen; however, God has placed limitations upon them – they have boundaries they cannot cross. We are told these demons cannot **hurt** anyone who has been sealed by God – like the 144,000 Jews, and they are prohibited from killing anyone – they can only torment people for **five months**, and this torment is so terrible that people **will seek death**, they will try to die, but they will not be able to. We could take that to mean that suicide will somehow become impossible during these five months or that people will live in such agony

they will truly wish they were dead, or it could be both. Can you imagine the horrible agony being experienced here – longing to die, yet forced to remain alive to experience more?

Now, in the next five verses John describes these demons from head to tail, and it's important that we do not assume that what is made visible to John will be made visible to others. It's very possible that people will experience the torment of these demons but may never see their tormentors. That's something to think about, and with that said, let's pick up with John's description beginning with **verse 7**.

⁷The 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. ⁸They had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions. ⁹They had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle. ¹⁰They have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months. ¹¹They 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.

Once again, John is attempting to describe something that is almost indescribable to him, and quite frankly to us as well – and let me say, these are the kinds of passages that are prone to all sorts of wild speculation and excessive symbolism – and my response would be “*stop it.*” These are not military attack helicopters as some have suggested, but rather, this is God giving unrepentant people a small taste of Hell on earth, and consistent with that limited hellish experience, John is describing demons who are ferocious, and frightening, aggressive, and merciless in their torment of people.

For **five months** they wreak havoc, and this havoc is apparently coordinated because we are told they have a **king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.**

These demons have a leader, a **king**, and his name is **Abaddon** and **Apollyon** – and both names mean the same thing – *Destroyer*. These demons are in submission to this Destroyer, **but who is he?** Some believe this is Satan, but nowhere in Scripture is Satan referred to by either of these names, and secondly, Satan is not in the **pit** – at least not yet. This is likely one of Satan's high-ranking demons – a field general perhaps. Just as God's angels have their ranks, I suspect that Satan's demons have their ranks as well.

So, what we have read thus far is bad beyond belief, but it gets worse with the sixth angel and his trumpet. Let's pick up with **verse 12**.

¹² The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still 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 one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."

In this passage, we are told the sixth angel sounded his trumpet, then afterwards, a voice from the altar speaks and says to the sixth angel, **"Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."**

This is the first time an angel with a trumpet was also commanded to participate in the judgment – something the first five trumpet angels had not experienced. The sixth angel was commanded to release the four angels who are **bound** at the great river Euphrates.

Who are these four angels? I think we can assume they must be fallen angels – demons since God's holy angels are not bound.

Now, I'm not sure why these four fallen angels are bound at the Euphrates River, but maybe it's because that area is considered the cradle of civilization. It was where the garden of Eden was located; it was where Satan first tempted man; it is where the first sin was committed; it was where the first lie was told; it was where the first murder was committed; and it was where the first grave was dug. It was also where Satan had his first apparent victory, and so maybe that's the connection to this area.

Whatever the case, let's read on beginning with **verse 15**.

¹⁵ And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind.

¹⁶ The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. ¹⁷ And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone.

¹⁸ A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths. ¹⁹ For the

power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm.

These four fallen angels at the Euphrates River – **prepared** for this special assignment, were released so that they could lead in the killing of another **third** of the remaining population, which in today’s numbers would account for over two billion dead, and if you remember, we previously lost a quarter of the population during the fourth seal judgment.

Again, this is another one of those passages that is open to a lot of crazy speculation. Some have suggested that this army represents the Chinese army, who in the past, have claimed to have an army of **200 million** soldiers. Some say that John’s description in this passage points to futuristic weapons – again like tanks, and helicopters, and fighter jets, but I believe that staying true to these “Hell on earth” conditions, this is just another very large group of demons – an army demonic horseman unleashed to bring death and destruction upon the inhabitants of the world.

In verse 18, John writes, “A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths.”

There will be three plagues that come out of the mouths of these demonic horses, the plague of fire, of smoke, and of brimstone – all natural elements that God will use to bring judgment – similar to the elements God used to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.

Okay, now we come to one of the most shocking passages in the entire Bible. Let’s look at **verses 20 and 21.**

²⁰ The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; ²¹ and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts.

Here’s the shocking truth from this passage. In spite of their agony and torment, many people just won’t let go. In essence, John describes hard-core, stubborn unbelievers – who are giving into the very things that will ultimately destroy them – which really isn’t that new if you think about it. Today, people set their hearts on many other things – things that pull them away from God and from real life. They

are entertained by spiritual things (paranormal things), deceived by demons, their addictions have essentially become their idols of worship – and they are drawn towards anything and everything but God.

John tells us that during this time, there will be an increase in **murder**. If you remember back in **Chapter 7**, we were told about all the martyrs that John saw in heaven. It was a countless multitude that had been slaughtered by the Antichrist. The Antichrist will have his followers all over the world and they will support his agenda to wipe out all believers in Christ with murder.

There will also be an increase in **sorcery**. The Greek word used here for sorcery is *pharmakon*. We get our English word *pharmacy* from it, and I take this to mean that the use of drugs and alcohol will run rampant during this time. J. Vernon McGee believed that during the Great Tribulation, the use of drugs won't be controlled, suggesting that drugs will play a large part in the lives of the lost as they will resort to anything that will deaden their agony and their pain.

There will be an increase in **immorality**. The Greek word used here is *porneias*. We get our word *pornography* from it – and it's a broad word including all forms of immoral and sexual sin, the same type of behavior seen in Sodom and Gomorrah.

As hard as it is to believe, most people living during this awful time during the Tribulation period will become even more rebellious and hardened against God. Many will continue to reject God's grace and mercy and forgiveness and salvation through Jesus Christ, and instead they will choose to live without God. They will want nothing to do with God, and in the end – they will get their wish, for when they die, God could very well say, "*Well, since you wanted nothing to do with Me, I will give you what you wanted, and you will spend eternity without Me*" – and that's what Hell will be.

We have covered a lot of ground this morning in a short amount of time, and it may be easy to lose sight of the Lord in all of this agony and torment, so let me say something to you I have said to you before. The Tribulation period is a time of God's judgment and wrath upon the unrepentant inhabitants of the earth – but in my opinion, and this might sound completely crazy – consistent with God's nature, it's an act of His love to convince some people – obviously not all people, that Jesus is their Savior and they need to turn to God.

It's an act of love where God gives the lost a small taste of Hell, where for a limited period of time, they get to experience how they will be treated in Hell if they continue to reject God's grace and mercy and forgiveness and salvation.

Some will turn to Christ, but unfortunately, many others will reject Him, turning to other things – things that will ultimately lead to Hell.

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