

Revelation

*Part Twenty-Four
Hell Breaking Loose
(Revelation 9:1-12)*

With Study Questions

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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 (Revelation 9:1-12).

Introduction

This past Monday (January 24th, 2022) a local newspaper ran a story with the headline: **“‘Drag¹ Night’ celebrates, educates kids on the art of drag performing.”** A twelve-year old child, who a year-and-a-half ago came out as omnisexual, organized the event for the benefit of classmates and their families. Several local schools were involved and supportive.

It is odd that I feel I must tread lightly here. I don't want to broadcast a spirit of personal superiority or a disposition of malice. The underlying theme of Christians and Christianity should be one of love, compassion and a desire to win the souls of the lost. At the same time, allowing and supporting children in this type of sexual confusion is patently unbiblical (Deuteronomy 22:5). Even in the road of more conventional and biblical sexuality, ten-and-a-half seems young to allow children to begin carving out a lifelong road. Jesus was exceedingly severe when it came to the corruption of children (Matthew 18:6).

For years, in that same newspaper, I wrote op-ed pieces addressing cultural, moral and political trends from a biblical perspective. I was routinely assailed for including in those articles a concern I had for how this ethical trajectory would affect our children. It wasn't that long ago that what our culture is doing with this twelve-year-old would have been deemed abusive, even criminal. But I am quite certain that a major swath of our current culture would view me as antiquated, and culturally backwards, for questioning the value of a drag-night for kids.

What in the world is going on?

I open with this because we need to understand the context and consequences of a society that has chosen to reject the truth; all the time asking ourselves to what extent we have done the same. In this chapter we see judgment falling upon an apostate people, people who have willfully and continuously rejected the love, wisdom, and sacrifice of Christ. To them Christ was not a rock to be built upon but a stone to be stumbled over.

But it is not as if their rejection of Christ left them in a position of moral, spiritual and cultural neutrality. The end of this chapter gives us a glimpse of the spiritual and moral make-up of those under this judgment. They worshiped demons...

¹ Entertainment in which performers caricature or challenge gender stereotypes (as by dressing in clothing that is stereotypical of another gender, by using exaggeratedly gendered mannerisms, or by combining elements of stereotypically male and female dress) and often wear elaborate or outrageous costumes.

...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 (Revelation 9:20, 21).

As we actively seek to extract the Triune God from our affairs as a people, we simultaneously seem to be scratching our heads at the ascension of violent crimes perpetrated upon the innocent, massive clusters of conspiratorial theft, and an abject rejection of the biblical model of what constitutes a healthy, thriving, well-adjusted family. The math is not complicated.

We have spent a bit of time investigating the dark religious and political climate into which Jesus was born lived. The epithets leveled against that generation are numerous. Another one should get our attention in light of this chapter.

When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. ⁴⁴ Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds *it* empty, swept, and put in order. ⁴⁵ Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation (Matthew 12:43-45).

Jesus has become famous for removing demons (Matthew 4:24). Yet the last state of Israel would be worse than the first. We often think of this passage in terms of individuals. But Jesus is speaking of a seven-fold increase of demonic darkness which would come upon **"this wicked generation."** In light of these words, let us begin our examination.

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 (Revelation 9:1,2).

We are reading of the judgments of God which brought the Old Covenant to a close while, at the same time, preserving His church by halting their persecutors and oppressors (Israel and Rome). These judgment prophecies are conveyed via a scroll with seven seals (Revelation 5-8) then seven trumpets (Revelation 8-11). We are at the fifth trumpet and all hell is breaking loose.

There are many guesses as to who this **“star”** is that has **“fallen from heaven to the earth.”** Some say Nero, or an angel, or an evil spirit, or Satan, or a good angel, etc. Some answers may be better than others, but we are not specifically told at this juncture so we’ll leave that be. What we do know is that during the ministry of Jesus, when the seventy-two reported the subjugation of demons, Jesus responded:

And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven (Luke 10:18).

Similarly, in Revelation 12, we will read that the **“dragon”** (Satan),

...drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born (Revelation 12:4).

It would appear that there are times when there is an increased activity of darkness upon the land. This **“fallen star”**, who is likely some kind of evil entity is given a key. Similar to Satan’s activity with Job, he has a derivative authority. The same events that Satan, or Satan’s demons and people, mean for evil, God means for good, or in this case, judgment.

This **“bottomless pit”** or **“abyss”** *abyssou*, is the abode of demons. It is the place the demons begged Jesus not to be sent (Luke 8:31). The image might be compared to a live volcano that is held back from eruption by a small opening, or shaft. The shaft has been uncapped. And, once again, we see this symbolically communicated by a **“darkened”** sky. Acts records Peter indicating that this day had come.

And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;²⁰ the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood,

before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day (Acts 2:19, 20. See also Joel 2:10).

People are fond of claiming spirituality. Upon even the slightest investigation it becomes clear that such a statement means nothing. Being spiritual while rejecting Christ lands us in the not-so-subtle depot of self-deification. That is to say, "I am spiritual, and in my spirit world I am god." Deeper inquiry would lead us to conclude that being spiritual can be worse than nothing. Revelation 9:1, 2 speak of something very evil and also very spiritual. Undefined spirituality may very well be demonic.

We are then informed of the cast coming out of smoke from the abyss, and what they are tasked with.

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 (Revelation 9:3-12).

Similar to what we saw in chapter eight, there is an allusion to the plagues that fell upon Egypt. The eighth plague was locusts. But clearly, as the description is given (crowns, faces of men, women's hair, lion's teeth, etc.), these are not literal locusts. So, what are they?

Here is where the creativity of the commentators stretches beyond the borders of soundness. The chapter becomes a blank canvas itching for the brushes of creativity and sensationalism. Some say the locusts are the Islamic empire, or Satanic activity within a culture, or the darkness in the inner soul, or hellish spirits, or forces of corruption. Perhaps the most popular contemporary book written on the subject offers that these may mutant locusts (genetically altered, no doubt) or devices of war (specifically, cobra helicopters), with the torment coming from nerve gas.

Here is yet another exegetical decision. That is, how are we doing to read our Bibles? I would submit that if we allow our Bibles to tell us what our Bibles mean, the confusion regarding the locusts would lessen. In the account of Gideon we read,

And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the people of the East lay along the valley like locusts in abundance, and their camels were without number, as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance (Judges 7:12).

We see similar language used in reference to the heathen armies throughout the Old Testament.

Set up a standard on the earth; blow the trumpet among the nations; prepare the nations for war against her; summon against her the kingdoms, Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz; appoint a marshal against her; bring up horses like bristling locusts (Jeremiah 51:27).

See Joel's description of the armies of Assyria:

For a nation has come up against my land, powerful and beyond number; its teeth are lions' teeth, and it has the fangs of a lioness (Joel 1:6).

The obvious army referenced in Revelation 9 would be the army of Rome. The temple would be destroyed, as Jesus taught, and a time of terror would accompany that activity. Approximately forty years (one generation) prior to all of this horror, Jesus had a lesson which anticipated this event.

And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. ²⁸ But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ ³⁰ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ ³¹ For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry (Luke 23:27-31)?’

But prior to this, Jesus also gave counsel to those who would hear Him, who trusted in Him.

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. ²¹ Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her (Luke 21:20, 21).

This would be the means by which Jesus would seal His own from this judgment. And these devastations would only fall upon **“those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads” (Revelation 9:4)** beckoning back to chapter seven (7:3).

At this juncture it might be asked if we learn anything regarding the final judgment from a chapter like this. Most certainly. We learn that there is a God who judges evil. We learn that the means by which we stand in that judgment is by having the seal of God on our foreheads (to believe in Him). And there is an a fortiori principle which must be applied. That is, if God judges this way through the armies of men, how much more terrifying His direct judgment. God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). We must not seek to enter His presence unless clothed in Christ.

Again, it would be too time-consuming to go into minute detail regarding all that is written here (some commentaries push 1000 pages). That the locusts don't eat the grass is another way of revealing that these are not literal locusts, which would go after the grass first. Also, the focus of judgment is on people here rather than terrain.

The five months (generally the lifespan of a locust) where there would be no killing but only torment (like a scorpion sting) may be addressing the period leading up to the greater judgment. History tells us that Gessius Florus, the procurator of Judea, tormented the citizens of Jerusalem for a five-month period, beginning in May of 66, which began the Jewish War.

That men would “**seek death and not find it**” tells us just how horrible this event was. At the same time, as we see at the end of this chapter, none of this led them to repentance (Revelation 9:20). Let us never underestimate the hardness of the human heart and its need for divine intervention.

It’s almost odd how the names Abaddon (destruction in Hebrew) and Apollyon (destroyer in Greek) are added. He is said to be a “**king over them.**” I am generally not given to conspiracies. They’re difficult to pull off and difficult to prove. But what we need to realize is that evil is not random. There is a mind behind evil—a madness to be sure—but a mind, nonetheless. And it is remarkable what a spiritual destroyer can do.

The Jewish historian Josephus chronicled the destruction of Jerusalem in *The Jewish War*, and it reads as if a commentary on Revelation. But there is one excerpt from work that bears reading in light of what these evil spirits can accomplish in those who are open to them and closed to Christ. Of the behavior during the era, he wrote:

With their insatiable hunger for loot, they ransacked the houses of the wealthy, murdered men and violated women for sport; they drank their spoils with blood, and from mere satiety they shamelessly gave themselves up to effeminate practices, plaiting their hair and putting on women’s clothes, drenching themselves with perfumes and painting their eyelids to make themselves attractive. They copied not merely the dress, but also the passions of women, devising in their excess of licentiousness unlawful pleasures in which they wallowed as in a brothel. Thus they entirely polluted the city with their foul practices. Yet though they wore women’s faces, their hands were murderous. They would approach with mincing steps, then suddenly become fighting men, and,

whipping out their swords from under their dyed cloaks, they would run through every passerby.²

There is a trajectory that the godly are to take, it's called by John, walking **"in the light" (1 John 1:7)**. There is also a direction called walking **"in darkness" (1 John 1:6)**. Apart from the word of God, making a distinction between light and darkness becomes a muddled affair. Good will be called evil and evil will be called good (Isaiah 5:20).

The eternal and objective means by which we know the difference is found in the immutability of God's word. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle of God's word (Matthew 5:18; 24:35). We are not to be thrown off course by the threats of man, nor the glitter of his world (Matthew 13:20-22). The churches receiving this letter are called to overcome, persevere and stay the course, governed by the words of Christ and clothed in the righteousness of Christ. We are called to the same faith and faithfulness.

² Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War*, iv.ix.10.

Questions for Study

1. How is it that morality within a culture can change so rapidly (pages 2-4).
2. Discuss the generation in which Jesus lived and His lesson on the seven wicked spirits. How does the speak to the message contained in Revelation (page 4)?
3. What does the fallen star in Revelation 9:2, 3 tell us about the role of spirituality in the lives of people and cultures (pages 4, 5)?
4. What do the locusts in this chapter represent (pages 6, 7)?
5. Did Jesus talk about what was going to happen to the citizens of Jerusalem? What did He say (pages 7, 8)?
6. What does it mean to be sealed by God (page 8)?
7. How are the faithful called to respond to the difficulties and temptations by which they are surrounded (pages 9, 10)?