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## Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation

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### Revelation 9:1-11: The Fifth Trumpet

**General idea:** The Fifth Angel now blows his trumpet, and sets in motion more judgment as a star falls from the sky, strikes the earth, and causes a great chasm to be formed. It is a bottomless pit and the angel holds the key to this foreboding shaft that leads to the furnace of judgment where no sunlight comes—only darkness and smoke. This shaft is so powerful that when it is opened, the smoke from it darkens the sky, and the entirety of the earth sees it. Suddenly, locusts come from the furnace and descend upon the peoples of earth with devastation and judgment. They have been given power to strike, yet are directed not to harm too much, sparing the vegetation and most of the peoples. They seek out the peoples whose heart and will do not seek Christ and who refuse to accept His forgiveness and grace. These are the evil peoples who live to and for themselves and evoke evil and sufferings upon others. It is their judgment and they are deserving of it. But, God's ever-abounding grace and love spare most of these too. So, they are tortured, while offerings of grace are offered, but not taken. They seek anything, even death, but not the love and grace of our Lord. There are malevolent and immoral, and do not care.

The eagle, the bird of prey, and its messages of woes from previous verses are now accomplished, as "Apollyon" led them. This is the *Destroyer*, who is the angel of the Abyss (which is the place of absolute devastation, death, desolation, and destruction), perhaps Satan himself. His mission is to supervise the devastation of his minions, the locusts, as they swarm over the earth.

**Vs. 1-6:** In this passage, the Fifth Trumpet is blown and the Plague of Locusts is released. These locusts are a horrific army armed for battle; they are foreboding and strike terror upon the people, merely by their presence. The "bottomless pit" lets loose demonic creatures on the rampage who are literally "hell bent" to kill, but only allowed to torture. Their stay and their devastation are monitored and controlled, so they will inflict only the least amount of harm, allowing for God's redemptive work to continue, even though it has been ignored. This passage is reminiscent of Joel and the plagues of Egypt (Ex. 10:13-15; Joel, chapters 2-3).

- *The fifth angel.* He sets off a plague of locusts, of devastation, perhaps commanded by demonic forces. This can be taken literally, as a plague of locusts can cause severe devastation. Locusts, in ancient times and in many parts of the world today, mean starvation for people if they come in sufficient numbers (Rev. 13:1-10). Ancient Jewish literature speaks of imprisoned, evil angels waiting their chance to unleash their revenge, inflicting chaos and mayhem.

- *A star.* Ancient cultures saw stars as divinities or angels; thus, this could refer to a mighty angel. This is the “star” of Rev. 8:10, referring to a cosmic disturbance, an Angel or servant, or an instrument of God (Rev. 20:1).
- *Abyss/bottomless pit* means “very deep” (the Greek Septuagint translation of the Old Testament word for *bottomless*). Jewish tradition saw this as a literal, subterranean place, used for the imprisonment of evil demons and Satan, which was actually on the earth. Angels were assigned to guard it and were given *keys* to it. Now, with our better understanding of science and biblical interpretation, most scholars see this as an extra dimension or residence, the exact locale we cannot fathom. This is where Dante got his “Inferno” and where we get our cultural view of hell (1 Enoch). John is using this vibrant imagery not to be a literal place we can see, but rather to show that hell, as well as demons, are real. (Gen. 1:2; 7:11; Prov. 8:28; Luke 8:31; Rev. 20:1).
- *Smoke rose.* John uses this imagery to make his point more powerfully.
- *The sun and sky were darkened.* This is a reference to a significant astronomical or supernatural event in the form of Old Testament judgment language (Psalm 18:6-19; Isa. 13:10; 24:23; 34:4; Jer. 4:20-28; Ezek. 32:7-8; Joel 3:14; Zech. 14:6; Matt. 24:29-51). The question is not *if* or *when*, as many of us obsess over. Rather, it shows He will come and we had better be prepared with our attitude and mindsets! This is a most frightening prediction (Ex. 9:21-23)!
- *Locusts* refer to a terrible invasion of some sort by demons, peoples, nature, or all of the above; this is a metaphor for the *elements* and *behavior of nature* that God controls and directs (Psalm 148:1-12; Zech. 6:5). It is a prophesy from Joel, too, of the desolation that will come with the “day of the Lord.” Perhaps it is literal insects, which have terrorized farmers of all times; they eat everything and leave nothing in the wake of their desolation. They do not bother people directly, but their effect certainly does. This would strike terror to John’s readers (who lived in an agrarian society) more profoundly than an invading army of men, as the threat of a locust “invasion” was always at hand. This is reminiscent of the eighth plague in Egypt and Joel’s prediction. Locusts sometimes move in vast swarms and can easily strip away all the crops. It is reported that from 1866 to 1869, in the country of Algiers on the Mediterranean Sea, over 200,000 people died from the result of famine from a locust plague. More recently, in June of 1993, locusts were devouring the harvests of Ethiopia, Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia, and Djibouti. (Exodus 10:1-20; Joel 1:2-2:27).
- *Were given power.* *God is still in control*, and sets limits upon them.
- *Scorpions* refer to a spider-like insect with a poisonous barb in its tail. This is

a symbol of a sometimes-used instrument of God's judgment. Its sting can severely injure or kill a large man (1 Kings 12:11; 2 Chron. 10:14).

- *They were told not to harm the grass.* A statement of comfort and of God's grace. Even in the greatest sufferings, it is not as bad as it can or should be.
- *Did not have the seal of God.* Refers to those who are immoral and depraved and who refuse to accept what Christ has done or to lead honest and proper lives. Wickedness caused by such people is reciprocal, as it is self-defeating, not only tormenting others, but harming themselves too. These were the people in the locust's targets. Sometimes, God allows those who are wicked to suffer in this life, as we would like to see, but their real judgment is still to come. We can take comfort as they only attack those who are wicked and who refuse God's grace (Rev. 20:11-15).
- *Torture.* Do not worry; this does not concern the "servants of God," just as God's protection of the Israelites from His judgment upon Egypt (Ex. 8:22; 9:4, 26; 10:23; 11:7; Rev. 7:3).
- *Five months.* Refers to limiting; whatever happens, it will not last long. Locusts eat their fill in a few days and then move on. It is interesting to note that the life cycle of a typical locust is about five months.
- *Sting of a scorpion.* Referred to the most intense pain an ancient person could conceive of.
- *Men will seek death.* Denotes that the sufferings they receive will cause them to seek death as relief (Jer. 8:3; Hosea 10:8; Luke 23:30).
- *Death will elude them.* God will not allow relief to those who refuse Him. Their pain cannot be squelched, and it is further complicated in that they can do nothing about it, although they would be able to do by receiving Christ's free offer (Phil. 1:23-24).

The image here is of the armies of hell that will come in some way, shape, or form, by invading armies, pestilence, or supernatural activities. Their mission is to invoke fear; they seek souls to themselves, souls who do not desire God, that would rather die and spend their eternity in hell with their cohorts in the realm of demons. This is not a pretty picture, but a warning that we must take our lives and our duty to Know Him and make Christ known in our lives seriously. Moreover, in context, it is the warning to take on our duty to run His Church His way, and point others to His Way.

**Vs. 7-11:** This is not just about God's judgment, but also another picture of His grace, as, again, most (two-thirds) are spared. Do not feel sorry for these people who are being tortured, for they are absolutely evil. These people would rather

commit suicide and spend eternity in Hell rather than repent. They desperately want to continue their sins of immorality, thievery, murder, occult practices, and debauchery rather than seek what is good and uplifting.

- *Horses prepared for battle.* Refers to invasions; many horses, from a distance, look like a plague of locusts (Jer. 51:14-27; Joel 2:4).
- *Crowns of gold.* Refers to the military exploits and accomplishments which we call “medals” today.
- *Human faces.* Refers to nightmares and the heinous images on ancient Mediterranean zodiacs. This may also refer to their cleverness and cunning. We may expect force while they use tricks to deceive people.
- *Women’s hair.* Refers to the long hair that, in these times, the Barbarians and the Parthian invaders had. This may also refer to the long antennae of a locust. What is evil and destructive can also be appealing to some. The warning here is to be careful what you wish for.
- *Lions’ teeth.* Refers to the ferocity, brutality, and merciless nature of a lion, which would give emphasis to the destructive nature of these events (Joel 1:6).
- *Breastplates of iron.* This was the armor of a Roman soldier, a coat of “mail” that was made of pieces of metal braided over one another on top of leather that protected their torso. Perhaps, it refers to the demonic or supernatural power they have and that from a human perspective, they are unstoppable (unless people repent). It is interesting to note that many kinds of locusts have an exoskeleton resembling scaled armor.
- *Thundering of many horses/noise of the chariots.* Refers to the utter fear and intensity of the torment, as the family’s and clan’s way of life is destroyed when an invading army or locusts come; or, at the very least, is never the same again (Jer. 8:16; Joel 2:5).
- *Tails and stings like scorpions.* The scorpion’s weapon is in its tail; in ancient terms, this meant “archers” who shoot arrows that people greatly feared and that were unstoppable. The Parthian archers wiped out many legions of Roman soldiers.
- *Abaddon/Apollyon* means “destruction” and referred to their dwelling at the lowest depths of the earth where the territory of the dead lay. This is also the Greek root for the god Apollo, whose representation is a locust. This is the name given to the *king* of the locust’s plague, represented by this angel. It means “Destroyer” and is typically given as a name and description of Satan. It is his role to oversee destruction, yet he and his cohorts are limited to what

they can do. This may refer to Satan himself or one of his lieutenants. This was also one of the code words used for the emperor, Nero, and then again for the emperor Domitian by the Early Church. Most of the various views see this as Satan (Ex. 12:12; Num. 33:4; Job 26:6; 28:22; 31:12; 28:22; 31:12; Psalm 88:11; Prov. 15:11; 26:6; 27:20; Rev. 2:18).

Do you know how powerful God is? What about in your life? This passage is not just about doom and gloom, it is about getting our priorities straight as is the Joel passage John borrows it from. It is His power and His love to which we bow. The bottom line is, God calls us to repent! Have you? Really, in every aspect of your innermost thoughts and ways? There is nothing our Lord Jesus Christ does not know, nothing that is inaccessible to Him, including the secrets in the recesses of our innermost personal being (1 Sam. 16:7; Job 26:6; Psalm 139:8; Prov. 15:11). Thus, we must allow His conviction and our accountability to others to examine who we are and who we ought to be. If we are in a self-indulgent life-style, with the desire to live and do as we please, we are headed for trouble. We may be Christians, sealed by His grace, but do we serve Him as we “run” our personal lives and His Church? God wants us to “hear this word,” not bow to our self-indulgent mindsets, so we can have our personal aspirations of control in surrender to Him, allowing His Lordship to be manifested in all parts of our lives (Isa. 28:7-8; Am. 4:1).

Real repentance will entail full, genuine confession, restitution, and the will to turn to Christ, not just as Savior, but also as Lord.

**The Preterist view:** They see this passage as the days of the Roman conquest and destruction of Jerusalem and then the resulting spread of death and disease as the outcome. The “star” represents the leaders of this and the unbelief and apostasy of the Jews that caused it. “Five months” represents the May to September siege of Jerusalem. The “locusts” are seen as demons being let loose or being influencers of the siege, and the *kink* is Satan himself as the influencer. “Seek death” is seen as the application of Luke 23:27-30 and the desire to die during the Roman’s heinous activities. Women’s “long hair” is seen as transvestitism, brothels, or the women being violated. And, Apollyon is seen as the Roman Emperor who gave charge to the siege.

**The Futurist view:** They see this passage as a literal and supernatural plague by demons that God allows Satan to set loose just before Christ’s Second Coming. The “star” represents the “third trumpet” of Revelation 8:10. Most in this camp say this is a future Pope, and his corruption of adding apostasy to the Church. Others see this as the rise of cult groups since the 1900s, and still others see it as a comet or as Satan himself. The “Abyss” is seen as *hell* or another house for demons. The “locusts” represent demons or people who are possessed by them, and their effects on people during the tribulation. “Seek death” is seen as people unable to exercise their will because of demonic activity. Others see this as the effects of a foreign invasion; some have said it is

helicopters, and “torment” is nerve gas. In the 80s, it was seen as Russia; now it is terrorists. What will it be next? (My money is on poodles!) The “deceptions” of the locusts are taken literally, as many believe they are helicopters or some military machine. Very probable perhaps; however this is not what the text tells us.

**The Idealist view:** They see this passage as God’s judgment by the effects of nature that are distressing and relentless in damage, while we are powerless to stop it. Some see this as the internal decay of Rome that led to its downfall, or the decay of correct doctrine. The “star” represents Satan and the “locusts” represent demonic influences on the world and the Church. The “smoke” is the influence of evil clouding people’s minds, causing them to forsake righteousness. The “torment” is the loss of joy and peace as a result. “Seek death” is seen as an extra punishment or more intense torment, as there is no relief.

**The Historicist view:** They see this passage as the Islamic attacks of the seventh and eighth centuries, which came like plagues and locusts, killing and destroying countless people at their pleasure. The “star” represents a symbol for a prince who has been corrupted by Muslims, or is Mohammed, or perhaps Boniface, the third Bishop of Rome who deceived the Church and caused widespread spiritual damage. The “locusts” represent the *Saracens* led by Mohammed who are the now Muslim Arab’s attack against Eastern Rome and its consequential terrors from 612 to 763 A.D. The Arabs came like locusts and killed like a plague. Mohammed gave the command not to tear down fruit producing trees, good crops, or to destroy goods his people could use, while other invaders ordered the “slash and burn” of it all. Those who do not have “the seal” are the corrupt church officials who either helped the invaders or sympathized with them. “Five months” represents the time of Mohammed and his “Mohammedan” reign, which was 150 years that amounts to ten times 5 months. The Catholics see the “star” as Martin Luther and the “locusts” as the Reformation. The “crowns” are seen as Islamic turbans and “long hair” as the hair of the Muslim invaders similar to that of modern Sikhs. “Breastplates of iron” is seen as the armor of the invaders, and the “stings of the tails” is seen as their fighting style of slashing rearward.

**The Essential Inductive Questions** (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?

8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

**Additional Questions:**

1. Have you ever prayed for something bad to happen to someone who did something bad to you? How, and why? Do you feel sorry for these people who are being tortured?
2. What do you think the “locusts” represent? What would you do if “the sun and sky were darkened” and such locusts came and descended upon the peoples of earth with devastation and judgment?
3. Why would God give Satan the power to strike people? Why would God, after giving such power, place limits on and govern him so he would not cause too much harm?
4. Do you think these plagues would strike terror upon people just by their presence, or would they be rationalized away and ignored?
5. What do you think “Apollyon” and the “Abyss” are? Why does he spare the vegetation and most of the peoples? Why does he seek out the people whose heart and will do not seek Christ and who refuse to accept His forgiveness and grace? What do you think the *criteria* would be?
6. Do you think that hell and demons are real and influential? Why do Secularists and some Christians feel otherwise?
7. Why would people who do not desire God wish for suicide—to die, and spend their eternity in hell with their cohorts in the realm of demons rather than seek Christ?
8. When these times come, do you think most Christians will expect just brute force? How would the Church respond if it were less about force and more about the use of tricks to deceive people? What would this look like?
9. Have you undergone a great change, a complete turn, that has changed your heart and mind? Perhaps from being a non-Christian to a Christian? What about going from being a weak, unfaithful, or worldly Christian to a mature and faithful Christian?
10. What needs to take place so that you experience deeper results from the acknowledgment of what Christ has done in you? What can you do to make the commitment and resolve to constantly, and with diligence, examine your actions and attitudes and allow the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the good



advice and counsel of others make you a better follower of Christ?

11. What can you and your church do to be better prepared, with attitude and mindset, in regarding God as a God of grace *and* of judgment? What can be done to better communicate this to your congregation?
12. Do you truly have a real, heartfelt interest in knowing and serving Christ as Lord? If not, what is in the way? What needs to happen for you to grow in this much needed area in your life?

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