

Redeeming Judgment  
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Revelation 9:1-12

Down through the centuries people have had two completely opposite views of the nature of God. **What are those two views of God? What do YOU believe about that?** This morning we'll look at another very strange vision of how God will bring judgment to a sinful world before Jesus comes back to reign forever. It's part of the great tribulation.

The big idea: God is a God of judgment, and one day Jesus will come back and judge the world because of sin. Because of what He did on the cross, believers will be saved from that judgment by grace.

When we began this study in Revelation I said it would be a "survey" and not an in-depth study. You really see that this week as we skip from chapter five to chapter nine. I just can't leave you without a transition! So, let me catch us up on chapters six through eight.

- The lamb begins to open the seals in chapter six. The opening of each seal triggers an end-times event. These are the events of the tribulation. The first four seals reveal four horses of different colors:
  - o A white horse carrying the Antichrist
  - o A red horse bearing war
  - o A black horse bringing famine
  - o A pale horse carrying death and hades with permission to kill one-fourth of the people on earth.
- The fifth seal reveals the souls of the martyrs who died for their faith. They wait under the heavenly altar crying out for God to avenge their murders. He promises He will, but not yet. More martyrs must pay the price first.
- The sixth seal brings chaos to the earth. The sun becomes black; the moon red like blood; stars fall from the sky. The chaos will be so widespread and the tribulation so great, people will pray for the rocks to fall on them and kill them.
- Then between seals six and seven, God pauses to seal 144,000 Jews with His mark on their forehead. Another great worship service takes place as the Lamb wipes away every tear from the eyes of His people.
- The seventh seal introduces seven trumpets and seven judgments. In chapter eight, four of the trumpets blow and judgment takes place on the earth, in the seas, rivers, and in the heavens. Death and destruction touch every part of God's creation.
- That brings us to chapter nine. Let's read the first twelve verses and see what it SAYS; what we believe it MEANS; and how we should RESPOND to God's truth.

Revelation 9:1–12 (ESV)

And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. <sup>2</sup> He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. <sup>3</sup> Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the

earth. <sup>4</sup> They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone. <sup>6</sup> And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them.

<sup>7</sup> In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, <sup>8</sup> their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; <sup>9</sup> they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. <sup>10</sup> They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails. <sup>11</sup> They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.

<sup>12</sup> The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.

- I've said before, if you love science fiction you'll love studying Revelation.
- Before we look into these bizarre locusts. Look at verse two.
- A "fallen star is given a key to a "bottomless pit" or "abyss." **Who gave him the key? What does that tell us about who is in charge of these events?**
- When the "fallen star" unlocks and uncovers the shaft, smoke arose like smoke from a furnace and these strange locusts fly out of the smoky pit.
- **What would this lead you to believe about these locusts? What about the identity of the fallen star?**

The "Abyss" (*abyssos*) is the home of demons (cf. Luke 8:31; Rev. 9:11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3; in Rom. 10:7 it is translated "deep").<sup>1</sup>

Chuck Swindoll: Some understand the star in this passage to be Satan falling from heaven. However, it could simply be a high-ranking angel given authority over the abyss.<sup>2</sup> [Note: Scholars disagree on who the fallen star is.]

- **Where else in the Bible, had locusts been used as a form of God's judgment?**
- We're told that a swarm of locusts has a "shocking capacity for devastation. Locust swarms were greatly feared in biblical times and still are in many parts of the world."
- Locusts can destroy "...areas up to 1000 sq. km. (400 sq. mi.)" of landscape and crops. "It is easy to see why the locust is identified as one of biblical man's greatest calamities."<sup>3 4</sup> These aren't your normal locusts!
- The crops aren't what they're after. **What do verses four and five say about that?**
- Verse five: **What will these demonic locusts do? How were they restricted?**
- Let's look back at verses seven through ten and the description of these locusts.

Revelation 9:7–10 (NLT)

<sup>7</sup> The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. They had what looked like gold crowns on their heads, and their faces looked like human faces. <sup>8</sup> They had hair like women's hair and teeth like the teeth of a lion. <sup>9</sup> They wore armor made of iron, and their wings roared like an army of chariots rushing into battle. <sup>10</sup> They had tails that stung like scorpions, and for five months they had the power to torment people.

- There is much speculation about what this imagery means and what/who these locusts represent. Let's look at some commentary on this:

Wiersbe: *It is likely that these are demonic creatures, released from the pit to torment men. This judgment parallels the eighth plague of Egypt (Ex. 10:3–20). This is the first woe (of three in Revelation), and what a time of torture the population of the earth will endure! How much better it is to know Christ today and escape the wrath to come!*<sup>5</sup>

Swindoll: *Clearly, the “locusts” are spiritual, demonic creatures—not earthly members of the insect kingdom, but supernatural soldiers in the kingdom of darkness. John’s symbolic descriptions were meant to communicate ferocity, aggression, power, and intelligence. In fact, John also mentions that this army of wicked spirits will be led by a “king” (9:11). John identifies him by title and name: “the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon” (9:11; emphasis added). Both of these words mean “destroyer.”*<sup>6</sup>

Bible Knowledge Commentary on verse 11: *The demons had a ruler **over them** whose **Hebrew** name is **Abaddon** and whose **Greek** name is **Apollyon**. Both words mean “destroyer.” Though Satan is sometimes portrayed as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), here Satan and his demons are seen for what they really are, destroyers of people.*<sup>7</sup>

- Let me ask some questions. And we might get differing answers.
- **Are these creatures literal or symbolic?**
- **Is this a picture of the future, or something that has already happened?**

It depends on who you ask! Our Explore the Bible Leader’s Commentary gives us a good overview of some of the things about which sincere believers disagree:

*Chapters 6–9 belong to the long middle section of the book about which Bible students have differing interpretations...[for example] there’s the matter of when these events are thought to occur. According to some, John was describing events of his own times—the “preterist” [PREH tuhr ist] view. In this view, the locust plague of Revelation 9 may have referred to an invasion of Parthians from the east, the scourge of the Romans. Parthian warriors were said to have shot poison-tipped arrows and to have worn long flowing locks (see 9:8,10). Another perspective—the “futurist” view—holds that John was describing future events to be fulfilled only during the end time surrounding the glorious return of Jesus Christ. In this view, the locusts are thought of as satanically motivated (demonic) forces that have yet to arise against forces of good and God. Yet another view—the “historicist” view—interprets these chapters as a forecast of centuries of Christian history, from John’s time until the final consummation, during which God’s people will continually struggle with hostile opposition, although not without the divine promise of ultimate victory. Finally, some Bible students hold the “idealist” view. This view seeks to avoid looking for single, specific historical events as fulfillment of this part of Revelation. Rather, the imagery is to be understood as symbolic portrayals of the ongoing conflict of God (and His kingdom of righteousness) versus Satan (and his powers of evil). Again, Bible students agree to disagree!*

*For the purposes of this session, we do not need to choose one of these views over another. Instead, we will focus on a theme on which all of the views agree. That theme is an emphasis on God’s righteous judgment, which ultimately is meant to be an instrument*

of redemption. God's punishment of sin is terrible and certain, but Jesus rescues those who belong to Him from His judgment.<sup>8</sup>

Let's look at how you and I might respond to this passage:

- **How does this terrifying vision speak to you as a believer in Christ?**
- **How could this terrifying vision influence our daily walk as a believer?**
- **What does this vision remind us about how Satan works even today?**
- **How do these verses assure you that the Devil and his demonic forces are not beyond God's sovereign rule?**

So, What's the Takeaway?

Chuck Swindoll points out four important ways in which Revelation 9:1-12 informs our situation today:

1. First, we must remember that, although they are invisible, demons are real and aggressive
2. Second, we are reminded that demons are organized and committed to our destruction. 1 Peter 5:8: "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."
3. Third, we should be encouraged that, although these demons are powerful, they have limitations...even during the Tribulation these wicked angels can only do what they are allowed to do.
4. Finally, we must never forget that these aggressive and insidious creatures flee at the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Resist the devil in faith, resting in Christ and trusting that He alone can shut the mouth of the roaring lion and quench the flaming arrows of the evil one.<sup>9</sup>

In summary:

As a believer I need to be AWARE that demonic activity is real, and I need to be ENCOURAGED that Jesus is in control and His protection is available to all who trust in Him as Savior and Lord.

We've seen today that God is a God of both judgment and redemption. One day He will judge the world because of sin...that's a fact. However, if I'm a believer in Christ, I don't need to fear that day.

<sup>1</sup> Walvoord, J. F. (1985). Revelation. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 952). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>2</sup> Insights on Revelation (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Book 15) by Charles R. Swindoll

<sup>3</sup> G. L. Keown, "Locust," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 3.358

<sup>4</sup> Insights on Revelation (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Book 15) by Charles R. Swindoll

<sup>5</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe's expository outlines on the New Testament* (p. 822). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>6</sup> Insights on Revelation (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Book 15) by Charles R. Swindoll

<sup>7</sup> Walvoord, J. F. (1985). Revelation. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 953). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>8</sup> Explore the Bible | Leader Guide © 2015 LifeWay

<sup>9</sup> Insights on Revelation (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Book 15) by Charles R. Swindoll