

# The Locust Out of the Abyss

By Rev. J. Kortering

“And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit. And there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth; and unto them was given power as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man. And in those days shall men seek death and shall not find it and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them, And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto the battle: and on their heads were as the faces of men. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron: and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running unto battle. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails; and their power was to hurt men five months. And they had a king over them which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but on the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon. One woe is past and behold there come two woes more hereafter.” Rev. 9:1-12.

Little wonder that the eagle (this is the proper translation, not “angel”) flies through the midst of heaven crying, “Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!” Revelation 8:13. This trilogy of woes introduces us to the narrative recorded above, that of the fifth trumpet. An eagle in Scripture is a harbinger of dreadful things. Consider, “Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat.” Habakkuk 1:8. See also Deut. 8:49 and Matt. 24:28. The cry from the eagles indicates that there is a terrible woe in the offing.

Even a casual reading of the fifth trumpet indicates to us that the content is terrible. This is doubly true if we place the fifth trumpet in its proper setting. We must bear in mind that the six seals have already been broken. Their content has been revealed and is recorded for us in the sixth chapter of Revelation. These included the four horsemen who ride throughout history bringing suffering and destruction in their wake. The fifth seal revealed the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God and they cry from under the altar, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” The sixth seal unfolded a terrible destruction of heavenly bodies, “And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together.” Rev. 6:14. The seventh seal in turn became the seven trumpets. The first four of these trumpets had to do with fiery destruction upon the vegetation of the earth, and the seas and open waters, the inland waterways, and the moon and stars, Rev. 8:1-12. In each instance the trumpets that were sounded brought about one third destruction upon that directly affected. Against this background the fifth trumpet is about to be sounded by the angel, and the ensuing results make one tremble exceedingly.

Bearing in mind that John was beholding a vision, we observe with him that a star has already fallen. (He doesn't see it fall.) This star, obviously representing Satan, received a key from God who is sitting upon the throne and with it he opens the bottomless pit. This results in releasing of terrible smoke and hordes of locusts which are described in the most weird fashion. They are led by one, Abaddon or Apollyon, who serves as their captain.

Quite naturally we are intrigued by this strange display called the fifth trumpet. We must remind ourselves that our interest, however, must not be merely intellectual curiosity, rather we desire to know what things must yet transpire that we may be found watching for our Lord's return and thus have our lamps lit.

As soon as the “star” or Satan opened the door of the “bottomless pit” terrible black smoke belched forth. Out of this smoke arose “locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given the power as the scorpions of the earth have power” Rev. 9:3. These locusts were not ordinary locusts, they had general appearance of locusts, particularly as this applies to their number, they came as a great horde. Ordinarily grasshoppers would consume the green herb and

not be a direct threat to human life. With these however, it is quite different; they are commanded not to eat the grass nor the green thing, rather they have power as the scorpions and that is the terrible stinger in its tail. Noteworthy here is the fact that they must not kill men with this power, a scorpions sting was not usually fatal but painful, and so they must hurt men in such a way that they will wish that they were dead, but cannot die. As we view this scene, we notice at once that the impression is given that we have a great number of dangerous creatures that are released from the pit. This impression is blazed upon the consciousness of anyone who has encountered the plague of locusts. Scripture mentions this repeatedly as e.g. Joel 1:7-12, Joel 2:10-11, Jeremiah 46:23, Nahum 3:7, Amos 7:1-2 and Exodus 10:4-15. "He hath laid my vine waste and barked my fig tree; he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away; the branches thereof are made white." Joel 1:7

We must attempt to answer the most important question, who are these creatures, who are represented by the locusts? In order to come to a convincing conclusion we must consider the following elements: from whence do they come, what is their power, how do they stand related to one another, how does their description indicate to us their real character?

According to the original Greek, this "bottomless pit" is actually a "shaft of the abyss." This description does not refer to hell as it will be after the judgment, for this is described in Revelation 20:14-15, as a "lake of fire." Rather it applies to the place of the demons prior to the final judgment of Jesus Christ when He will sit upon the great white throne. This is confirmed by Luke 8:31, "and they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep." According to John in Revelation 20:1, 3; Satan is bound within this "bottomless pit" for 1,000 years. This also confirms what we find recorded in our text under consideration, Satan is fallen from heaven. This is described for us in Luke 10:18, "And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning falling from heaven." When Satan was fallen from heaven, he was cast into the bottomless pit. This does not imply that he is now entirely limited to and confined to this pit. It only means that he cannot unite the nations of the world into one empire until the end of the 1,000 years is come. He does have access to his own evil spirits and he goes to and fro about the earth as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. When Satan was cast out of heaven upon the ascension of Christ into heaven, Revelation 12:9, he proceeded to this abyss and forthwith released from his pit all his hellish cohorts. This is revealed in our text by the smoke and thick darkness that proceeds upon the opening of this pit. All that comes forth from this place is terrible corruption that hides and obscures the light of the sun, the light of God. Here we have a revelation of the spiritual corruption that ferments within this pit. The smoke represents moral decay, naked lies, corruption in every form imaginable. The locusts are advocates of such filth. We have here every demonic influence upon society and human life.

We should interject at this point the assuring note recorded in this text, "and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit" vs.1. We must observe that these locusts are different from the natural grasshopper in that they are organized. In fact we can observe a general rank or position. There is one that is king over them, vs. 11, and His name is Abaddon (Hebrew) and Apollyon (Greek). Both have the meaning "destroyer." This leader is under the direct command of the one who opened the pit, the fallen star, who is Satan. These hordes of locusts are the cohorts of Satan and they come forth in order to stir up trouble on the earth. Scripture elsewhere refers to these ranks of evil spirits, c.f., Ephesians 2:2, "prince of the power of the air," or Ephesians 1:21, "principality, power, might, and dominion" in reference to the angel world. The assuring note however, is that Satan has no power over his cohorts except he receives the key to the bottomless pit. Here also we have confirmed for us that God is the absolute Sovereign, even over the wicked fallen angels. Satan cannot release his hellish locusts except by the direct control and power of God through Jesus Christ. The evil spirits have no power except as it is given them by Christ.

Under this control of God, Satan gives command to Apollyon and through him to all the evil spirits of the abyss to come forth and attack evil men. We must observe carefully that his interest is not in attacking the church, rather "those men which have not the seal of Gods in their foreheads" vs. 4. This does not mean that evil spirits have no interest in the church, see Revelation 12:15-17, rather the point of view of this text is the relationship of Satan to his cohorts as they attack the wicked. This must go on for five months or for the normal period of time in which locusts would make their annual attack upon the crops, i.e., their allotted time.

It is interesting to see that Satan's attack upon the world of wicked men is for the expressed purpose of making them his willing servants and thus be able to do with them what he pleases. We are somewhat inclined to forget that the devil must continually deal with the reprobate wicked to make them his stooges. He does this through these hordes

of evil spirits that must go forth and “torment five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion when he striketh a man. And in those days shall men seek death and shall not find it and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them” vs. 5, 6. We must notice at once that this attack is not physical, producing pain in the body as such, rather it is spiritual and brings havoc and distress as the result of the terrible advance of sin and death.

To accomplish this, Satan sends forth Apollyon and his hordes in a deceiving manner. They assume the appearance of something to enjoy, but from the back it has a stinger in its tail that causes men to suffer misery and even wish to die. We should observe carefully that these locusts appear in a very strange form. In general they are locusts that appear like horses prepared for battle. We observe from Scripture that the horse was a great animal known to men for its power and agility in battle, see Job 39:19ff, and yet it was designated by God as a vain thing, Psalm 33:17. Here then these evil spirits deceive by giving the impression of power. They claim that if we only follow the philosophy of the world with its approach to government and science we will pursue the way of power and victory. Is this not apparent in our day as the populous is disillusioned by diplomacy and by Scientism. Add to this a further description, “on their heads were as it were ‘crowns of gold’” vs.7. This indicates that what these evil spirits seek to accomplish is to convince men that by going the way of Satan, man will realize a rule in this world of great splendor, of universal peace, similar to the golden empire of Nebuchadnezzar, see Daniel 3:1-7. We can see how far this evil spirit has ensnared the minds of the world today. Is not the Great Society the epitome of this crown of gold? Still more, “their faces were as the faces of men” vs. 7. This indicates that all the world boasts in human achievements. The philosophy of men without Christ is called Humanism, the greatness of man is deified. One must be blind not to see how this permeates the thinking of depraved man today. If there are any problems, man must solve them, if there will be peace man must work for it, if there is going to be a great tomorrow man will have to lay the foundation today. Man is capable, man is willing, man must do it now! The evil spirits from the abyss corrupt the mind of man so he places self in place of God.

The approach of these subtle spirits is not only through government and philosophy, but also pleasure. These locusts have “hair of women, teeth as lions, breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings as chariots of many horses running to battle.” In order to win the affections of men, they come with the appeal to the human lusts. The hair of women speaks of the evil spirits catering to man’s depraved nature and offering the pleasures of sin. Today this assumes the form of “free love” and the “new morality” in which sin is justified and condoned under the pretense of human enrichment. Along with this lust comes also the appearance of strength. The lion’s teeth represent the power of this lust as it seeks to devour our neighbors’ possessions, a getting rich. All this is presented as a reliable force, the breastplate of iron, it appears secure and impregnable. It seems to be the best way, government offers security in their social programs, men find pleasure in eating and drinking, willingly give of themselves to the rule of others so they can enjoy these things more. Everyone gets on the bandwagon, it is the accepted way of life, the noise is that of a great army running to battle. The cliché of our day is “everyone is doing it” and this slogan is out of the pit. The devil wants us to believe this lie. The swarms of locusts overwhelm human life and influence on every level.

Yet appearance is deceitful. From the front it seems to be great to go along with the devil and his cohorts. Yet from the back the consequences of following him in his ways are terrible. On his tail is a stinger which hurts men and makes them want to die, but they cannot.

How evident this is already in our day. Where is the gold that glitters on the crown of America? Our riches have brought forth civil uprisings, crime, suicide, drugs, all which tell us that man is building his castle on sinking sand. Free love sounds so enticing, but it leaves in its wake divorces, broken homes, empty lives and bottles filled with tears. Man invents the big bomb and boasts of scientific achievements, yet you hear them cry out in fear of doom, what will happen to us if other unleash atomic bombs upon our heads? Amidst all the boasting of human achievements and greedy satisfying of human lusts there is such unrest that men no longer find hope for the future, you hear one after another cry out that life this way is vain. This is getting worse by the day. The locusts out of the abyss are stinging the masses of our day. The way of the flesh and godless men appears so wonderful, but in reality it is so deadly. The reason is obvious, God’s curse is upon the house of the wicked.

Let’s learn from this that man without God is a fool. God forbid that we ever envy the world or follow after its ways. The goals, the dress, the songs, the pleasures, the philosophy, the science, the government is under the influence of the locusts from the abyss. It is vanity and can bring one nothing but despair. The devil knows this all

too well. His interest is not to redeem man, rather he seeks to gain revenge against God by deceiving mankind and thus bringing them through Apollyon, the Destroyer, to such oblivion. Thus he receives the key from God to fulfill God's purpose with the wicked: the development of sin and the destruction of the wicked in the way of their sins that He may be known eternally as the God of justice.

Thank God the elect are sealed, being redeemed by Jesus Christ, and placed under His care. Even the locusts out of the abyss shall not destroy the church. The wicked shall be brought to naught, they shall be shown by God that the rejection of God is kicking against the pricks and brings self-destruction. The church finds her joy in rejecting the lie of the devil and walking in the way of faith following our Lord Jesus Christ Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.