

Faces of men, hair of women

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The locust plague of Revelation 9

There have been many attempts to interpret John's prophecy of a locust plague in Revelation 9, which he calls the "first woe." Various interpretations are summarized below.

Richard Challoner (1691-1781):

These may be devils in Antichrist's time, having the appearance of locusts, but large and monstrous, as here described. Or they may be real locusts, but of an extraordinary size and monstrous shape, such as were never before seen on earth, sent to torment those who have not the sign (or seal) of God on their foreheads. Some commentators by these locusts understand heretics, and especially those heretics, that sprung from Jews, and with them denied the divinity of Jesus Christ; as Theodotus, Praxeas, Noetus, Paul of Samosata, Sabellius, Arius, etc. These were great enemies of the Christian religion; they tormented and infected the souls of men, stinging them like scorpions, with the poison of their heresies. Others have explained these locusts, and other animals, mentioned in different places throughout this sacred and mystical book, in a most absurd, fanciful, and ridiculous manner; they make Abaddon the Pope, and the locusts to be friars mendicant, etc. Here it is thought proper, not to enter into any controversy upon that subject, as the inventors of these fancies have been already answered, and fully refuted by many controvertists: besides, those who might be imposed on by such chimerical writers, are in these days much better informed.

David Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*:

Because of Israel's rejection of the King of kings, their blessings turned into curses. Jerusalem (became) "a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird" (Revelation 18:2). The entire generation became increasingly demon-possessed; their progressive national insanity is apparent as one reads through the New Testament, and its horrifying final stages are depicted in the pages of Josephus' *The Jewish War* Satan's entire host of destroyers (was) let loose upon the Jewish nation.

Adam Clarke's Commentary: "The whole of this symbolical description of an overwhelming military force agrees very well with the troops of Mohammed."

James Burton Coffman, *James Burton Coffman's Commentaries*: "It is a spiritual plague which is depicted here. 'Such a spiritual malignity is, in truth, the source of the forces that are chewing up our world.' 'The locusts are symbols of wild ideas and false doctrines, which becloud men's mental faculties.'" Examples are "the Jim Jones cult, Communism, the emperor cult in Japan, the belief that Uncle Sam can take care of everybody from the cradle to the grave."

John N. Darby, *Synopsis of the New Testament*: "crowds of moral locusts with the sting of false doctrine in their tail. But it was not to destroy temporal prosperity on the earth, but to torment the ungodly Jews; not to kill, but to harass and vex them."

A. R. Faussett: "these *locusts from the abyss* refer to judgments about to fall on the ungodly immediately before Christ's second advent."

Arno Clement Gaebelein, *The Annotated Bible*:

The star which is seen fallen from heaven with the key of the pit of the abyss is Satan himself cast out of heaven. He unlocks the prison house of the fallen angels and the most awful satanic agencies come forth to begin their "dread" work of torment. The smoke first, symbolical of darkening; the locusts next, symbolical of these demon powers. Awful darkness prevails and the most diabolical delusions, producing fearful torments among apostate Israel and the inhabitants of the earth. It is the time of the strong delusion (2 Thess. 2:4-11) which has come.

John Gill, *Exposition of the Entire Bible*: the Saracens.

Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg, *The Revelation of St John*: a "hostile devastation" by some invading army.

H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on the book of Revelation*. Oakland, 1919. (p. 157-158): "Eddyism, Spiritism, and Theosophy" or the Mormons.

Alonso T. Jones, *Great nations of today*: the rise and work of the Mohammedans in the destruction of Eastern Rome.

Jack Kelley, *Revelation Times*: "They are clearly a demonic manifestation of some sort."

William Kelly, *Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (1871):

The locusts naturally point to countless swarms, devouring in specified limits, but more distinguished by the tormenting sting of false doctrine. The unsealed, the men of the earth, were the victims of the scourge, but the object was a conquering propagandism: not the extinction of prosperity, but rather the maintenance of it at the expense of the truth, and this for a limited period.

Gordon E. Ladd, *A commentary on the Revelation of John*: "the locusts are symbolic of demonic hosts."

Tim Lahey, the *Left Behind* books: “insectlike creatures with human faces and long hair, riding horses.”

Clarence Larkin, *The Book of Revelation: A Study of the Last Prophetic Book of Holy Scripture* (1919):



Infernal cherubims by Larkin

The LOCUSTS that John saw come out of the “Bottomless Pit” were a kind of “INFERNAL CHERUBIM.” That is, they were a combination of the HORSE, the MAN, the WOMAN, the LION, and the SCORPION, and the sound of their wings in flying was as the “sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.” Their size is not given, but they were doubtless much larger than ordinary locusts, but they were not like them, for ordinary locusts feed on vegetation, but these locusts were forbidden to hurt the grass, or the trees, or any green thing, but they were to afflict ONLY MEN, and they had human intelligence, for they afflicted only those men who had the “SEAL OF GOD” in their foreheads. These men they were not permitted to kill, but only torment, and that for only a limited period—FIVE MONTHS, the time limit of ordinary locusts, which is from May to September. The length of time is mentioned twice, and the character of the torment was like that which follows the STING OF A SCORPION, which causes excruciating pain that often causes the afflicted person to desire to die. So fearfully excruciating will be the anguish of those who shall be tormented by these “SCORPION LOCUSTS” that they will “seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, but death shall flee from them,” the inference being that the LOCUST or DEMON controlling them shall have power to prevent their death. The meaning then of this scourge of “SCORPION LOCUSTS” seems to be, that an Angel, the custodian of the “Pit,” will open the “Bottomless Pit,” and liberate a vast multitude of Demons who shall enter into and take possession of

the bodies of men, and so torment them that they shall desire to die and shall not be able.

Hal Lindsey, *Apocalypse Code*:

Stephen Sizer summarized Lindsey's views:

So, in Lindsey's inspired bible code, John's 'locusts' become helicopters, 'horses prepared for battle' are heavily armed attack helicopters, 'crowns of gold' are the helmets worn by pilots, and the 'sound of their wings' are the 'thunderous sound of many attack helicopters flying overhead."

Lindsey wrote in *There's A New World Coming, A Prophetic Odyssey* (Santa Ana, California, Vision House, 1973), p. 8:

How could this first-century man describe the scientific wonders of the latter twentieth century? He had to illustrate them with phenomena of the first century; for instance, a thermonuclear war looked to him like a giant volcanic eruption spewing fire and brimstone. Much of the symbolism John used was the result of a first century man being catapulted in God's time machine up to the end of the twentieth century, then returned to his own time and commanded to write what he had seen and heard. The only way that John could obey that instruction was to use phenomena with which he was familiar to illustrate the scientific and technical marvels that he predicts. Some writers have chosen to interpret each symbol quite literally. For example, a locust with the face of a man, the teeth of a lion, a breastplate of iron, a tail that can sting, and wings that make the sound of many chariots would have to be specially created by God to look just like that description. I personally tend to think that God might utilize in his judgments some modern devices of man which the Apostle John was at a loss for words to describe nineteen centuries ago! In the case just mentioned, the locusts might symbolize an advanced kind of helicopter. This is just one example of the fast-moving, contemporary, and often deductive manner in which I have chosen to approach the Book of Revelation. I realize I'll be accused by some of making wild speculations

John MacArthur wrote:

Something it must be something like the cloud of a worldwide atomic blast, Or something like a volcanic eruption that covers the whole world. A strange and panic generating blackness that fills the sky and stifles the world's breathing. And it blots out whatever is left of the sun and the moon and the stars and the sky. And then in the middle of it come something like locusts. And again that imagery is so profound because ordinary locusts plagues are unimaginable. But as bad as that is with real

insects, these are not real insects. We know that because real locusts don't have a scorpion sting and real locusts don't have heads with crowns and faces like the face of men and hair like the hair of women and teeth like the teeth of lions and breastplates like breastplates of iron. These are some kind of special locusts. What is fascinating about this is that that concept of locusts is, of course, taken from the blackness of the cloud and the devastation. These are demons. And God must create for them some form. Since Satan can't create anything, when they're finally released as spirit beings, God must give them some form, at least in the vision they had a form. And what they do is supernatural and it's just swarming, comprehensive desolation. These are locusts from hell and they're not insects. Suffering caused by these demons is compared to that of a scorpion sting. This insect as one writer says is one of the most irascible and malignant that lives and its sting is perhaps the most agonizing that any animal can inflict on the human body. In tropical countries small children frequently die from the sting of the scorpion. Interestingly the physiological response to a scorpion sting is similar to that which has been observed in many cases of demon possession.

Chuck Missler, *Revelation*: "demon hordes out of the pit."

Henry Madison Morris, *The Revelation Record*:

There seems no escaping the conclusion that these locusts from hell are, indeed, demonic spirits. Five months will be ample for men to experience this awful judgment. They will flee to the mountains, to the seas, to the deserts; they will bar the windows, cringe in cellars. But there is no escape. These are spirit beings and not even solid walls deny them access. In their fury, they swarm over the earth, penetrate fortresses, swooping on men and women wherever they can flee, and none escape.

Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation, The new international commentary on the New Testament* [Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997] states they are demonic locusts which are "of considerable size. Otherwise the description of hair, face, teeth, and the like would tend toward the comic."

John H. Ogwyn wrote:

When the fifth angel sounds his trumpet in Revelation 9:1-2, we find the great abyss opened and demonically inspired forces unleashed. Revelation 17:8 shows us that from this abyss the Beast power symbolically emerges. The forces that are unleashed are first compared to locusts, because John did not have the words to describe modern weapons of mass destruction. Notice that these "locusts" do not harm natural vegetation (which physical locusts would devour), but instead for five months cause incapacitating but not deadly pain rather like that of scorpions. This describes an attack by the European-led Beast power on the nations of the east, as mentioned in Daniel 11:44.

This surprise attack will provoke a massive Asian retaliation against Europe. This retaliation, signaled by the sixth angel blowing his trumpet, is pictured as spewing out fire, smoke and brimstone, and destroying one-third of humanity (Revelation 9:17-18). This description fits well with modern nuclear weapons and the devastation they can bring.

David C. Pack says:

The first two and the fifth and sixth trumpet plagues involve all-out warfare between the European Beast power and a large confederation of "the men of the east" (Russia and China and various bordering nations) For people to be painfully afflicted for five months could point to some form of chemical or biological warfare. Note from verse 4 that the weaponry referred to has no damaging effects on vegetation. This verse also shows that those who have the seal of God in their foreheads (those having God's Spirit) are protected from this woe. The "king" over the Beast power orchestrating these attacks is the "angel of the bottomless pit" (Rev. 9:11), known in Hebrew as Abaddon ("a destroying angel") and in Greek as Apollyon ("a destroyer"). Both names unmistakably point to Satan the devil.

Signer Pastorini:

The rise and progress of the Protestant Reformation. The star falling from heaven is Luther, who, renouncing his faith and vows, may be said to have fallen. When he opened the door of hell there issued forth a thick smoke, or a strong spirit of seduction which had been hatched in hell.

J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (p. 362): "marching armies that torment reprobate Jews."

Kim Riddlebarger, *Sermons on the Book of Revelation*: "These locusts are symbolic of the demonic forces of Satan."

James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*: "The locust-hybrids represent the evil side of humanity that undoes God's way of ordering this world the satanic locusts are emblematic of humanity's divided nature—a mixture of good and evil, the human and the demonic."

John F. Walvoord & Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (p. 952): "demons who appear in the form of locusts."

Ronald Weinland, who represents himself as one of the *Two Witnesses*:

The blast from the Fifth Trumpet will announce the emergence of a great political power and a great religious power on earth. The Biblical symbolisms contained in the description of the message from this trumpet blast are prophetically unique. Rather

than having readers become bogged down with an overwhelming amount of Biblical study that serves no purpose here, I will simply give an overview of the meaning and outcome. This trumpet will announce the first great “woe” on the earth. The prophetic description covers many overlapping, unfolding and interacting highlighted events in the final three and one-half years of man’s self-rule. The highlights of this Fifth Trumpet include: (1) the emergence of Satan and his large army of demons to great power (2) the emergence of great power wielded by the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope (3) the emergence of a fully-united European union of ten nations (4) the emergence of a colossal military might from this united European union and the destruction of several hundred million people by it (5) the protection of God’s elect and the torment and trying (testing) of those who have refused to repent in the environs of God’s scattered Church. All these events begin once the fifth trumpet is sounded: Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven to the earth, and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit, and there arose smoke out of the pit like the smoke from a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit. Out of the smoke there came locusts upon the earth, and they were given power like scorpions of the earth have power. (Revelation 9:1-3)

John Wesley’s Explanatory Notes: the Persians.

Other theories include “pastors,” “Protestantism,” “demonic beings,” “Muslims.”

Interpretations based on speculations are “private” interpretations. The apostle Peter said: “Knowing this first, that *no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.*” [2 Peter 1:20]

Locusts in Revelation 9 allude to the Israelites in the wilderness, after they came out of Egypt, but lacked the faith to enter the promised land. [Numbers 13:33] The experience of the Israelites in the wilderness, in the New Testament, was for the church’s example. [1 Cor. 10:1-11]

The *bottomless pit* in Revelation 9:1 is the location of Satan’s prison, [Rev. 20:1-3] from which he ascends. [Rev. 11:7] The smoke that comes out of it represents an attitude of “*holier than thou.*” [Isa. 65:1-5]

Pagan superstitions about death, and Plato’s doctrine of the immortality of the soul, were introduced into the church in the early centuries AD, and merged with the teaching of the Apostles, by church fathers such as Tertullian (c. 160 c. 220 AD), and later the idea of *infernal torment* of unbelievers was introduced, notably by Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD).

The sun, representing the gospel, is *darkened*, by the teachings about the soul that were imported from Greek philosophy, which obscured the truth of the gospel. The sun clothes the woman in heaven, who represents the church. [Rev. 12:1] Jesus spoke of the righteous who “*shine as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father.*” [Matt. 13:43]

They are not real locusts, but *people* who spread a flawed doctrine about the fate of unbelievers. Five months, or 150 days, was the duration of the flood waters that covered the earth, which

destroyed all those not saved in the ark of Noah. In the prophecy, only unbelievers are affected by the torment of the locusts. Their doctrine says that those who do not accept their religious beliefs will suffer unending infernal torment!

Rev. 9:6, "*And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them,*" alludes to the doctrine of infernal torment of unbelievers, according to which the souls of men are immortal, so are unable to die.

The locusts are "*like unto horses prepared unto battle.*" [vs. 7] In scripture, people with no understanding are compared with horses. [Psa. 32:9]

Their *faces of men*, and *hair as the hair of women*, pictures people whose doctrine dishonours Christ. Paul wrote: "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?" [1 Cor. 11:14] Paul said the head of every man is Christ; and a man praying of prophesying with long hair dishonours Christ. [1 Cor. 11:3-4]

Lion's teeth [vs. 8] picture a very ferocious attitude towards unbelievers. [2 Tim. 3:1-3]

Breastplates are associated with righteousness. [Eph. 6:14] The locusts' breastplates of iron defend them from truth, and reason. Cruel hearts are hard to reach.

"*And the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.*" Horses and chariots rushing to battle would make a loud, clattering sound, as chariot wheels rolled over stony ground. They generate lots of noise!

"*On their heads were as it were crowns like gold.*" Their *crowns like gold* suggest halos, shining circles above the heads of saints or medieval monarchs in religious paintings.

"*And they had tails like unto scorpions.*" [vs. 10] Scorpions are mentioned in connection with chastisement and punishment in scripture. Solomon's son Rehoboam said to the people of Israel, "My father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." [1 Kings 12:11]

Their *tails* represent "a prophet that teaches lies." Isaiah said, "the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail." [Isa. 9:15] The doctrine of the locusts distorts the gospel of Christ. Centuries of tradition and superstition have established the concept of unending infernal torment of unbelievers as biblical truth in the minds of many. Those views are not easily discarded.

Their king is *Abaddon*, which means *destroyer*, Job 26:6. These doctrines about the fate of unbelievers are common to both Muslims and Christians. It is the doctrine that "torments." The effect of the locust plague is that it tends to destroy the church, and obscures the gospel. It paints God as a cruel monster, a fiend.

The name *Apollyon* probably alludes to *Apollo Parnopius*, the Greek god of plagues. (*Parnopius* means "grasshopper.") Apollo was also a pagan god of prophecy.