

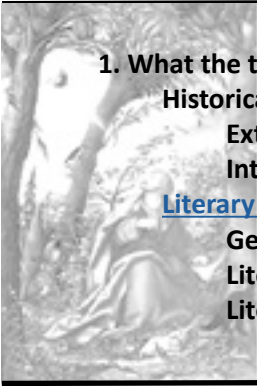


# THE REVELATION OF JOHN

## Bible Study 24

Text: Rev. 9:1-11

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1 Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀρνίου ἣν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς αὐτοῦ καὶ πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου ὅσα εἶδεν. 3 Μετὰ ταῦτα εὗρον τὸν πνεῦμα τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι οὐκ ἔβλεπον αὐτοὺς ἢ γεγραμμένα ἐπὶ τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ. 4 καὶ ἐλάλησεν ὁ πνεῦμα καὶ εἶπεν ἰσαχάρις τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς οἱ ἀκούοντες τὰς ῥήσεις τῆς προφητείας βιβλίου τούτου. 5 ἔειπεν ὁ πνεῦμα καὶ εἶπεν ἰσαχάρις τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς οἱ ἀκούοντες τὰς ῥήσεις τῆς προφητείας βιβλίου τούτου. 6 καὶ εἶπεν ὁ πνεῦμα καὶ εἶπεν ἰσαχάρις τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς οἱ ἀκούοντες τὰς ῥήσεις τῆς προφητείας βιβλίου τούτου. 7 καὶ εἶπεν ὁ πνεῦμα καὶ εἶπεν ἰσαχάρις τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς οἱ ἀκούοντες τὰς ῥήσεις τῆς προφητείας βιβλίου τούτου. 8 καὶ εἶπεν ὁ πνεῦμα καὶ εἶπεν ἰσαχάρις τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς οἱ ἀκούοντες τὰς ῥήσεις τῆς προφητείας βιβλίου τούτου. 9 καὶ εἶπεν ὁ πνεῦμα καὶ εἶπεν ἰσαχάρις τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς οἱ ἀκούοντες τὰς ῥήσεις τῆς προφητείας βιβλίου τούτου. 10 καὶ εἶπεν ὁ πνεῦμα καὶ εἶπεν ἰσαχάρις τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς οἱ ἀκούοντες τὰς ῥήσεις τῆς προφητείας βιβλίου τούτου. 11 καὶ εἶπεν ὁ πνεῦμα καὶ εἶπεν ἰσαχάρις τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς οἱ ἀκούοντες τὰς ῥήσεις τῆς προφητείας βιβλίου τούτου.

### QUICK LINKS

#### 1. What the text meant.

##### Historical Aspects:

External History

Internal History

##### Literary Aspects:

Genre

Literary Setting

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#### Exegesis of the Text:

A. [The Fifth Angel blows his trumpet, v. 1a](#)

B. [Hideous locusts emerge upon the earth, vv. 1b-11](#)

1) [Their authorization to harm is limited, vv. 1b-6](#)

2) [Their appearance is hideous, vv. 7-11](#)

#### 2. What the text means.

## Trumpet Five

#### Greek NT

9.1 Καὶ ὁ πέμπτος ἄγγελος ἐσάλπισεν· καὶ εἶδον ἀστέρα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ πεπτωκότα εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἡ κλεῖς τοῦ φρέατος τῆς ἀβύσσου 2 καὶ ἤνοιξεν τὸ φρέαρ τῆς ἀβύσσου, καὶ ἀνέβη καπνὸς ἐκ τοῦ φρέατος ὡς καπνὸς καμίνου μεγάλης, καὶ ἐσκοτώθη ὁ ἥλιος καὶ ὁ ἄηρ ἐκ τοῦ καπνοῦ τοῦ φρέατος. 3 καὶ ἐκ τοῦ καπνοῦ ἐξῆλθον ἀκρίδες εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ ἐδόθη αὐταῖς ἐξουσία ὡς ἔχουσιν ἐξουσίαν οἱ σκορπίοι τῆς γῆς. 4 καὶ ἐρρέθη αὐταῖς ἵνα μὴ ἀδικήσουσιν τὸν χόρτον τῆς γῆς οὐδὲ πᾶν χλωρὸν οὐδὲ πᾶν δένδρον, εἰ μὴ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους οἵτινες οὐκ ἔχουσιν τὴν σφραγίδα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων. 5 καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἵνα μὴ ἀποκτείνωσιν αὐτούς, ἀλλ' ἵνα βασανισθῶσιν μῆνας πέντε, καὶ ὁ βασανισμὸς αὐτῶν ὡς βασανισμὸς σκορπίου ὅταν παίσῃ ἄνθρωπον. 6 καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ζητήσουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸν θάνατον καὶ οὐ μὴ εὕρῃσουσιν αὐτόν, καὶ ἐπιθυμήσουσιν ἀποθανεῖν καὶ φεύγει ὁ θάνατος ἀπ' αὐτῶν.

7 Καὶ τὰ ὁμοιώματα τῶν ἀκρίδων ὅμοια ἵπποις

#### Gute Nachricht Bibel

9.1 Dann blies der fünfte Engel seine Posaune. Ich sah einen Stern, der vom Himmel auf die Erde gestürzt war. Dieser Stern erhielt die Schlüssel zu dem Schacht, der in den Abgrund führt. 2 Er öffnete den Schacht, da quoll Rauch daraus hervor wie aus einem großen Ofen und verdunkelte die Sonne und die Luft. 3 Aus dem Rauch kamen Heuschrecken auf die Erde, denen die Kraft von Skorpionen gegeben war. 4 Sie durften weder dem Gras noch den Bäumen noch anderen Pflanzen Schaden zufügen; sie sollten nur die Menschen quälen, die nicht mit dem Siegel Gottes auf der Stirn gekennzeichnet waren. 5 Es war ihnen verboten, diese Menschen zu töten; sie durften sie nur fünf Monate lang quälen. Die Menschen sollten solche Schmerzen leiden, wie wenn ein Skorpion sie gestochen hätte. 6 Während dieser fünf Monate werden die Menschen den Tod suchen, ihn aber nicht finden. Sie möchten dann gerne sterben, aber der Tod wird vor ihnen fliehen. 7 Die Heuschrecken sahen aus wie Pferde, die in die Schlacht ziehen. Auf ihren Köpfen trugen sie gold-

#### NRSV

9.1 And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit; 2 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. 3 Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given authority like the authority of scorpions of the earth. 4 They were told not to damage the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. 5 They were allowed to torture them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torture was like the torture of a scorpion when it stings someone. 6 And in those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will flee from them.

7 In appearance the locusts were like horses equipped for battle. On their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, 8 their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth;

#### NLT

9.1 Then the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. 2 When he opened it, smoke poured out as though from a huge furnace, and the sunlight and air were darkened by the smoke. 3 Then locusts came from the smoke and descended on the earth, and they were given power to sting like scorpions. 4 They were told not to hurt the grass or plants or trees but to attack all the people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. 5 They were told not to kill them but to torture them for five months with agony like the pain of scorpion stings. 6 In those days people will seek death but will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee away!

7 The locusts looked like horses armed for battle. They had gold crowns on their heads, and they had human faces. 8 Their hair was long like the hair of a woman, and their teeth were like the teeth of a lion.

ἠτοιμασμένοις εἰς πόλεμον, καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν ὡς στέφανοι ὄμοιοι χρυσοῦ, καὶ τὰ πρόσωπα αὐτῶν ὡς πρόσωπα ἀνθρώπων, 8 καὶ εἶχον τρίχας ὡς τρίχας γυναικῶν, καὶ οἱ ὀδόντες αὐτῶν ὡς λεόντων ἦσαν, 9 καὶ εἶχον θώρακας ὡς θώρακας σιδηροῦς, καὶ ἡ φωνὴ τῶν περὺγων αὐτῶν ὡς φωνὴ ἄρμάτων ἵππων πολλῶν τρεχόντων εἰς πόλεμον, 10 καὶ ἔχουσιν οὐράς ὁμοίας σκορπίοις καὶ κέντρα, καὶ ἐν ταῖς οὐραῖς αὐτῶν ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτῶν ἀδικῆσαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους μῆνας πέντε, 11 ἔχουσιν ἐπ' αὐτῶν βασιλέα τὸν ἄγγελον τῆς ἀβύσσου, ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἑβραϊστὶ Ἀβαδδὼν, καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἑλληνικῇ ὄνομα ἔχει Ἀπολλύων.

ene Kronen, und sie hatten Gesichter wie Menschen. 8 Ihr Haar war wie Frauenhaar und ihre Zähne wie Löwenzähne. 9 Ihre Brust war wie mit einem eisernen Panzer bedeckt. Ihre Flügel machten einen Lärm, als ob viele mit Pferden bespannte Wagen in die Schlacht rollten. 10 Sie hatten Schwänze und Stacheln wie Skorpione. In ihren Schwänzen steckte die Kraft, die Menschen fünf Monate lang zu quälen. 11 Der Engel, der für den Abgrund zuständig ist, herrscht als König über sie. Auf Hebräisch\* heißt sein Name Abaddon, auf Griechisch Apollyon (Zerstörer).

9 they had scales like iron breastplates, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. 10 They have tails like scorpions, with stingers, and in their tails is their power to harm people for five months. 11 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.

iron, and their wings roared like an army of chariots rushing into battle. 10 They had tails that stung like scorpions, with power to torture people. This power was given to them for five months. 11 Their king is the angel from the bottomless pit; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon -- the Destroyer.



## INTRODUCTION

In the 4+ 3 pattern that we have observed, trumpet five turns a slightly different direction both in structure and content. The introductory formula remains the same as the previous four trumpets: Καὶ ὁ πέμπτος ἄγγελος ἐσάλπισεν, [And the fifth trumpet blew](#). But as anticipated with the Καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἤκουσα, [And I saw, and I heard](#), now John moves from the opening statement to καὶ εἶδον ἀστέρα, [and I saw a star](#). But here a series of very bizarre actions take place. The star falls out of the sky to the earth, and with a key given to the star in heaven it opens the shaft of a bottomless pit. Smoke comes out in qualities to darken both the sun and the air. This is followed by a hoard of strange looking locusts who attack only the people who have not been sealed by God on earth (cf. 7:3). A rather detailed description of the locusts is given in 9:7-11 and concludes with identification of Abaddon / Apollyon, the angel of the bottomless pit, as their king.

The strangeness of this fifth trumpet alone is enough to motivate us to try to understanding what in the world is taking place. Here the weirdness of the apocalyptic images in Revelation increases dramatically. I can imagine what that Roman censor or censors must have thought, if they read this far into the document before deciding to let it pass through inspection.

But underneath this weird image is an important message about the wrath of God. One that we need to know.

### 1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

As is typically the case in this part of Revelation,

the literary aspects outweigh the historical aspects for impacting the interpretation of 9:1-11.

### Historical Aspects:

**External History.** In the history of the hand copying of this passage, the editors of *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev. ed.) did not consider any of the variations in the existing manuscripts to have a significant impact on the translation of the passage. Consequently, no variations are listed in the Text Apparatus of the fourth revised edition.

But in the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed.), the Text Apparatus contains 29 places where variations of wording exist in the copies of the text that exist still in our world.<sup>1</sup> As



#### <sup>1</sup>Offenbarung 9,2-3

\* κ 1611. 2053 M<sup>K</sup> ar vg<sup>mss</sup> syph sa<sup>mss</sup> bo (The phrase καὶ ἠνοιξεν τὸ φρέαρ τῆς ἀβύσσου is omitted in several mss)

\* 0207 (καπνὸς is omitted in this one ms)

\* καιομενης 2351 M<sup>K</sup> sy<sup>h\*\*</sup> (μεγάλης is replaced by one of these alternatives)

| μεγ. καιομ. 2053 gig sy<sup>ph</sup>

\* -τισθη κ M (alternative spelling to ἐσκοτώθη)

| txt A 0207. 1006. 1841 pc

\*<sup>1</sup> κ\* (h vg<sup>mss</sup>) (ἐκ is omitted)

\* απο 0207 (ἀπὸ inserted before τοῦ φρέατος)

\*<sup>1</sup> † αυτοις P115vid κ 046. 2329 pc (αὐταῖς replaced)

one can tell by examining these variations, the copyists were often puzzled by the depiction of the strange images in the passage and were unfamiliar with the spelling of many of the references. Consequently many efforts were made to ‘update’ the references by spelling changes and descriptive references. Also some grammar confusion is reflected in the variations, that

- 
- | txt A 0207 *M*
- Offenbarung 9,4**
- \* † αυτοις κ 046. 2329 pc (αὐταῖς replaced)
- | txt A *M*
- \* -σωσιν κ 0207 *M* (alternative spelling for ἀδικήσουσιν)
- | txt A 2329. 2351 pc
- \*<sup>1</sup> bis μηδε 0207. 1854. 2329 pc (alternative spelling for οὐδὲ)
- \* *M*<sup>A</sup> vg<sup>ms</sup> (τοῦ θεοῦ omitted in these mss)
- \* των μ. αυτων 1006. 1611. 1841. 2053. 2329. 2351 *M*<sup>K</sup> vg<sup>sw</sup>
- sy; Tyc Prim (τῶν μετώπων replaced by one of these alternatives)
- | του -που αυ. 0207
- | txt κ A P 1854 pc ar gig vgst
- Offenbarung 9,5**
- \* αυταις 0207 *M* (alternative spelling for αὐτοῖς)
- | txt κ A 1611. 2053 al
- \* -θωσιν P115<sup>vid</sup> 1006. 1611. 1841. 2351 *M*<sup>K</sup> (alternative spelling for βασιανισθήσονται)
- Offenbarung 9,6**
- \* ζητουςιν A<sup>vid</sup> *M*<sup>K</sup> bo (alternative spelling for ζητήσουσιν)
- \* ευρωσιν A 1006. 1841. 1854. 2053. 2344 *M*<sup>A</sup> (alternative spellings for εὐρήσουσιν)
- | ευρησωσιν 1 al
- \*<sup>1</sup> φευζεται 1854. 2329. 2351 *M*<sup>K</sup> lat bo (alternative for φεύγει)
- \* *M*<sup>K</sup> (ὁ θάνατος ἀπ’ αὐτῶν is transposed)
- Offenbarung 9,7**
- \* † ομοιοι κ 2344 (alternative spellings for ὅμοια)
- | ομοιωματα A pc
- | ομοιωμα 2351; (Tyc)
- | txt 0207 *M* lat
- \* χρυσοι 0207 *M*<sup>K</sup> (ὅμοιοι χρυσοῦ replaced with one of these alternatives)
- | χρυσοι ομ. χρυσω 2351
- Offenbarung 9,9**
- \* 0207. 1006. 1611 pc gig (ὡς θώρακας is omitted)
- Offenbarung 9,10**
- \* ομοιοις κ A pc (ὁμοίας replaced)
- \* 2-5 1 6-8 (1854) *M*<sup>A</sup> ar vg<sup>cl</sup> sy<sup>ph</sup> (the sequencing of , καὶ ἐν ταῖς οὐραῖς αὐτῶν ἢ ἐξουσία αὐτῶν is rearranged)
- | κ. εν. τ. ου. αυ. εξουσιαν εχουσιν του (2329) *M*<sup>K</sup> sy<sup>h</sup>
- | txt P<sup>47</sup>.115<sup>vid</sup> κ A P (0207). 1006. 1611. 1841. 2053. (2344, 2351) pc
- Offenbarung 9,11**
- \* και P 1854. 2351 al latt syph.h\*\* (καὶ is inserted before ἔχουσιν)
- \* εχουσαι P115<sup>vid</sup> *M*<sup>K</sup>; Tyc (ἔχουσιν is replaced)
- \* τον κ 0207 (τὸν inserted before βασιλέα)
- \* ῥ ον. (+ αυτω κ) P<sup>47</sup> κ 2344 pc lat (ὄνομα αὐτῶ is replaced)
- \* Βαττων P<sup>47</sup> (2053) (Ἀβαδδὼν is replaced by one of these alternatives)
- | Αβ(β)α(α)δ(δ)ων *M*<sup>K</sup>
- \* P<sup>47</sup> κ 2344 pc gig (ὄνομα ἔχει is transposed)
- [Eberhard Nestle et al., Universität Münster. Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 648–649.]

produced several alternative spellings of nouns, verbs, and pronouns. But these changes surface in isolated manuscripts or else in small groupings and do not reflect dominant pattern shifts. No significant meaning shift occurs in any of the variations.

Consequently we can confidently exegete the adopted reading of the text in full assurance that it represents the original wording.

**Internal History.** The one place marker that has some importance is the reference to the ἀκρίδες, translated usually as *locusts*. Coming from ἀκρίς, this word is used only four times in the NT: twice to refer to the food that John the Baptist ate (Mt. 3:4 // Mk. 1:6), and twice here in Revelation nine. These ‘apocalyptic’ locusts differ from those that John the Baptist ate in that they are really demons disguised as locusts.<sup>2</sup> Here we give attention to the earthly insects and in the exegesis section the special traits of the ‘apocalyptic’ locusts will be considered.

First, a distinction between grasshoppers and locusts needs to be made:<sup>3</sup> Although they look very

<sup>2</sup>καὶ ἐκ τοῦ καπνοῦ ἐξήλθον ἀκρίδες εἰς τὴν γῆν, ‘Out of the smoke emerged locusts upon the earth.’ These are demons in the guise of locusts, for their king is Abaddon, the angel of the abyss (v 11). This stands in tension with 12:7–12, which narrates the fall of the dragon (alias the devil and Satan) and his angels to the earth, and with 20:1–3, which describes the temporary imprisonment of Satan in the abyss; yet it is curiously concordant with the statements in 11:7 and 17:8 that the beast ascends from the abyss. An infestation of locusts constitutes the eighth plague of Exod 10:12–20 (cf. the other plague traditions in Pss 78:46; 105:34–35; Amos 4:9b; Ezekiel Exogoge 132–51; Artapanus [Eusebius Praep. evang. 9.27.32]; Jub. 48:5; Bib. Ant. 10:1; Wis 16:9 [though here the bites of the flies and locusts cause death]; Ant. 2.306; Philo Mos. 1.120–22). Locusts are also mentioned in lists of eschatological plagues that have no direct connection with the plagues of Exodus (3 Apoc. Bar. 16:3; Sib. Or. 5.454). Hermas refers to fiery locusts that came out of the mouth of the great beast he saw in a vision (Vis. 4.1.6).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 527.]

<sup>3</sup> “What’s the difference between the two bugs?

“Green grasshoppers and brown locusts are close cousins, both in the grasshopper family. But while grasshoppers hop like mad and can be abundant and pesky, locusts can fly. More significant, locusts have the unusual ability to be total loners or to enter what scientists euphemistically call ‘a gregarious state’ — this is the flying and swarming stage, the stuff of Biblical proportions.

“Desert locusts affect 20 percent of the world’s land surface, scientists say. Vast swarms containing billions of bugs periodically devastated parts of the United States back when the West was being settled. They continue to be a big problem in parts of Africa and China. Last November, swarms nearly 4 miles long (6 km) plagued Australia.

“What makes them so, um, gregarious?

“An increase in the chemical serotonin (which boosts moods in humans) in certain parts of a locust’s nervous system initiates the swarming behavior, according to a study published earlier this year in the journal *Science*.



similar, one major difference is the ability of locusts to fly in large swarms, while grasshoppers advance primarily by hopping. Although grasshoppers can do major damage to plants and crops in large concentrated numbers, the swarms of locusts in many parts of the modern world do much greater damage to plant life.<sup>4</sup> Also, one key distinction of certain species of grasshoppers, e.g., the short-horned grasshoppers, is that at a ‘swarming



phase’ in their life cycle they become locusts.<sup>5</sup> Second, is there a distinction in terminology between ‘grasshopper’ and ‘locust’ in ancient Hebrew and Greek? The answer is a qualified yes. The Greek word for locust found in the New Testament ἀκρίς is used in the LXX to translate almost a dozen different Hebrew words for locust. The primary word for grasshopper in

“It’s nature’s way of giving wing to a starved creature.  
 “Desert locusts live in barren regions that see rain only rarely. They eke out an existence alone when times are tough. When the rains come, they breed like crazy. Then things dry up, and hoards of locusts are forced to gather around dwindling patches of vegetation.

“The gregarious phase is a strategy born of desperation and driven by hunger, and swarming is a response to find pastures new,” said study team member Steve Rogers of Cambridge University.  
 “Rogers and his colleagues found that in the lab, solitary locusts could be made gregarious within 2 hours simply by tickling their hind legs to simulate the jostling they experience in the wild. Serotonin levels spiked three-fold.

“Once on the move, the epic swarms are all but inevitable. Here’s how that works:

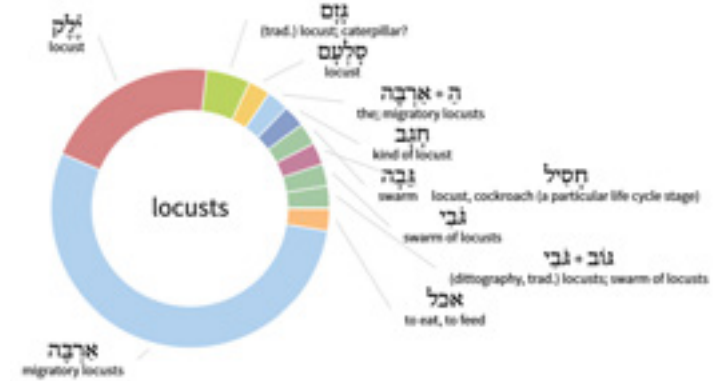
“Scientists discovered a few years back that at low densities, the insects were unorganized and went their separate ways. But when the group’s density increased, the bugs fell into an orderly line and began to follow the same direction.

“Such ‘collective motion,’ which spells doom for a crop, is common also among ants, birds and fish.

“The grasshoppers now invading Utah are born in cycles that run 7 to 10 years, scientists say, and the outbreak is nothing unusual for the natural world. What’s really new is that there are more suburbanites to complain about them now.”

[“Grasshoppers vs. Locusts: What Makes a Swarm?,” [live-science.com](http://live-science.com)]

<sup>4</sup>“An eyewitness of the plague of locusts which descended on Palestine in the spring of 1915 describes its progress as follows (L. Bauer 1926). Swarms of locusts flew overhead for five days, darkening the sky and leaving droppings everywhere. During this time, males and females mated. The females each then deposited clumps of 50–80 eggs in uncultivated ground, at a depth of 5–8 cm (2.0–3.1 in). After 30 to 40 days, the young locusts, each about 1 cm in length, began to hatch. Within another 5 to 6 weeks, they had grown to a length of 5 to 7 cm, their appetite increasing proportionately. Four distinct stages were recognizable. The first generation was pale yellow in color, their offspring at first black. Having shed this first skin, the young emerge green-yellow, with black and white dots and stripes. They change skin again, becoming red with black marbling in the wingtips. In this final stage, they are winged.” [Edwin Firmage, “Zoology (Fauna): Animal Profiles,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1150.]



Hebrew -- used only 6 times -- is חָבִיב, *hāgāb*, and is never used in the NT with a Greek equivalent showing up. The primary Hebrew word for swarming locusts is אֲרֵבָה, *’arbeh*, and is translated in the LXX as ἀκρίς. This LXX term is the only Greek word found in the NT and only the four



<sup>5</sup>“Locusts are the swarming phase of certain species of short-horned grasshoppers in the family Acrididae. These are species that can breed rapidly under suitable conditions and subsequently become gregarious and migratory when their populations become dense enough. They form bands as nymphs and swarms as adults. Both the bands and the swarms are nomadic and rapidly strip fields and greatly damage crops. The adults are powerful fliers; they can travel great distances, consuming practically all green material wherever the swarm settles.<sup>[1]</sup>

“The origin and apparent extinction of certain species of locust—some of which grew to 6 inches (15 cm) in length—are unclear.<sup>[2]</sup>

“Locusts are edible insects and are considered a delicacy in some countries. There have been references to their consumption as food throughout history<sup>[3]</sup> On swarming they are known to produce a toxin that renders them inedible and causes a skin reaction in sunlight.<sup>[4]</sup>”

[“Locust,” [wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org)]



## The Ten Plagues of Egypt



times mentioned above. This Hebrew term specified the locus plague upon Egypt in Exodus 10:12-15 as the eighth plague. It is this Israelite experience that clearly stands in the background of John's expansion of the idea of a plague of locusts in his apocalyptic vision.

John's targeted readers in the Roman province of Asia would have not had first hand experience with the destructiveness of swarming locusts. But they would have known about it through horrific tales of such insects having destroyed, from time to time, the wheat crops in Egypt upon which the Romans were so hugely dependent. John's continued dependency on the imagery found in the Old Testament here is entirely consistent with what we have discovered thus far in our study of Revelation. The uniqueness of the apocalyptic genre to Jewish religious life additionally pushes him toward this rich heritage of images and divine actions as a major source for his depiction of his vision.

### Literary Aspects:

Giving attention to the literary aspects of the passage becomes very important here to the interpretive process. The enhanced move into the larger world of the rather strange world of Jewish apocalyptic imagery increases the need to probe the background even deeper.

**Genre:** Of course, we continue in 9:1-11 with the blowing of fifth trumpet in heaven the basic apocalyptic vision that encompasses the entire document. Thus repetition from various perspectives is to be expected. Time markers most always turn into sequential markers with little or no temporal significance. The broad themes of God's wrath upon evil and His protection of His people will be developed in different ways as the central message of the entire document to John's targeted readers. Any message derived in modern times from Revelation must grow out of these two foundational themes, if they are to have legitimacy.

**Literary Setting:** The context of 9:1-11 is interesting. This is the fifth trumpet in the series of seven trumpets covering 8:2 through 11:18. But it is also the

first of three 'woes' that roughly cover the last three of the seven trumpets. Thus the 4 + 3 formula found first in the seven seals resurfaces in the seven trumpets in its own distinctive manner. These seven trumpets anticipate the seven bowls of wrath in 15:1-16:21. All three sets of seals, trumpets, and bowls flow out of the double vision in chapters four and five, where Christ as the slaughtered Lamb is given permission to disclose the divine will of God for humanity and His creation for all time. The foundational message of these chapters is twofold: God as a holy God holds evil people fully accountable for their sinful conduct and pours out temporal judgments upon them, but these are only an anticipation of the great Day of Final Judgment at the end of human history (20:1-15). Secondly, God through the Lamb provides deliverance for His people and protection of them through these terrible times of suffering. And this care of God is in anticipation of the complete deliverance awaiting them in heaven for all eternity (21:1-22:5).

Thus 9:1-11 comes as the first trumpet to disclose the unleashing of powers of supernatural darkness upon the earth to inflict severe harm to earth's inhabitants. As the first of three 'woes,' we discover in this trumpet a host of evil powers released upon the earth in the form of a swarm of locusts who actually are the demons under the guidance of their king Apollyon. They are hideous looking creatures (vv. 7-10) with the power to kill humans on the earth.



One side issue relates to verse twelve: Ἡ οὐαὶ ἡ μία ἀπῆλθεν· ἰδοὺ ἔρχεται ἔτι δύο οὐαὶ μετὰ ταῦτα. **The first woe has passed. There are still two woes to come.** The issue is whether verse twelve should be taken as climatic to the fifth trumpet or introductory to the sixth trumpet. Both understandings will be found in the modern commentaries, as well as the paragraph divisions in modern translations. Even different editions of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* take it differently, reflecting the difficulty of making a clear, firm decision. In truth, the statement comes as an intentional transitional state-

ment not so much meant as a transitional statement. Rather, John uses it to add the label of 'first woe' to the fifth trumpet, and then to signal that the sixth trumpet is also labeled the 'second woe.' This is followed later in 11:14 with "The second woe has passed. The third woe is coming very soon." But the third woe is not specifically identified, although probably it should be linked to 12:12, "Rejoice then, you heavens and those who dwell in

them! But woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you with great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!" This has some connection to the seventh trumpet in 11:14-19.

**Literary Structure:** The block diagram below in excessively literal English translation visually presents the internal arrangement of primary and secondary ideas of this passage.

9.1           And  
258           **the fifth angel blew;**  
                  and  
259           **I saw a star**  
  out of the sky  
                  having fallen  
  onto the earth,  
                  and  
260           **was given to him the key**  
  of the shaft of the abyss  
9.2           and  
261           **he open the shaft of the abyss**  
                  and  
262           **rose up smoke**  
                  out of the shaft  
                  like smoke of a large furnace  
                  and  
263           **became darkened the sun and the air**  
                  out of the smoke of the shaft.  
9.3           And  
                  out of the smoke  
264           **came locusts**  
                  onto the earth,  
                  and  
265           **was given to them authorization**  
                  as the scorpions of the earth have authorization.  
9.4           And  
266           **was told to them**  
  that they were not to harm the grass of the earth  
  neither every green thing  
  nor every tree,  
  except that they were to harm the men  
  /-----|  
  who do not possess the seal of God  
  upon their foreheads.  
9.5           And  
267           **was given to them**  
  that they were not to kill them  
  but  
  that they were to be tortured five months,  
                  and  
268           **their torture (was)**  
  like the torture of scorpions (is)  
  whenever they sting a man.  
9.6           and



scribes potential actions rather than asserting that they engaged in these things at this point in time. Everything in the Greek grammar is stated in the subjunctive and indirect imperative forms of verbs, rather than in direct commands to actions which in turn are carried out in the depiction. The carrying out of the actions awaits the sixth angel giving the heavenly signal (vv. 13-21).

What we encounter here is pure apocalyptic vision in its strangest form. The detailed description of these 'locusts' is completely 'other worldly' and piles up one gruesome detail on top of another. The 'cringe' factor on the part of the readers is calculated to reach new heights by John. For an evil world living in unrepenting rebellion against God, these creatures bringing torment and punishment are clearly supernatural and cannot be explained away by earthly explanations. They clearly signal in a gruesome manner the wrath of God being poured out on this evil world.

### Exegesis of the Text:

The arrangement of the exegesis of 9:1-11 thus needs to follow the natural organization of the scripture text itself. This we will attempt to do in the following outline.

#### A. The fifth angel blows his trumpet, v. 1a

Καὶ ὁ πέμπτος ἄγγελος ἐσάλπισεν·

*And the fifth angel blew his trumpet,*

In the series of seven trumpets, the first four are grouped together by a repetitive structure. The only part of that which is repeated in the fifth trumpet is the introductory phrase here. The contents of the action that follows the trumpet signal is described differently from the first four trumpets beginning in this fifth trumpet with καὶ εἶδον, *and I saw*. Additionally, this separation out of the last three trumpets from the first four is asserted directly in verse 12 with the declaration Ἡ οὐαὶ ἡ μία ἀπῆλθεν, *the first woe has passed*. Plus in 8:13 the three woes cried out by the eagle announces the coming of the last three angels with trumpets.<sup>6</sup> Also in the first four trumpets the action originated out of heaven toward the earth, while in the fifth and sixth trumpets the action arises out of the 'abyss' below the earth and comes to the surface of the earth. Thus we are in the 4 + 3 pattern that was the organizing structure of the seven seals previously.

The significance of this arrangement is developed

<sup>6</sup>**Rev. 8:13.** 13 Καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἤκουσα ἐνὸς ἀετοῦ πετομένου ἐν μεσουρανήματι λέγοντος φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· οὐαὶ οὐαὶ οὐαὶ τοῖς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐκ τῶν λοιπῶν φωνῶν τῆς σάλπιγγος τῶν τριῶν ἀγγέλων τῶν μελλόντων σαλπίζειν.

13 Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew in midheaven, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!"

from that of the seals with the wrath of God dominating the first four and the protection of God the second set of three. In the second set of three trumpets, the wrath of God continues strongly but the protection of God is seen in statements such as the prohibition of these demonic locusts harming those with the seal of God (v. 4), and additionally the limitation of the work of harming evil people to just 'five months' (vv. 5, 10). Just as the fifth seal described the 'sealing' of God's people on earth, the fifth trumpet prohibits them being harmed by the forces of evil that God authorizes to be done on everyone else on earth.<sup>7</sup>

#### B. Hideous locusts emerge upon the earth, vv. 1b-11

The first major section depicting the supernatural actions taking place once the angel gives the signal by blowing his trumpet centers on the emergence of a swarm of what John calls 'locusts.' How they emerge and the limits that God places on them are described first in vv. 1-6. In the second section the most detailed description of the apocalyptic nature of any of the special creatures described in Revelation thus far is given in vv. 7-11.

Clearly there stands in the background of the fifth trumpet the assertions found in Joel 2:1-14.<sup>8</sup> Several

<sup>7</sup>"The final three trumpets form a group of three woes announced in 8:13 by an eagle, who cries 'Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth.' The author subsequently inserts notices that the first and second woe have occurred (9:12; 11:14), but he does not explicitly mention when the third woe takes place (though it should certainly be identified with the woe of 12:12; cf. Vanni, *La struttura letteraria*, 131-32). This would then be the Satanic woe (11:14b-13:18; cf. Charles, 1:xxvii). Though the third woe may coincide with the sounding of the seventh trumpet (11:15-18), it is more likely that it encompasses all the plagues unleashed by the seven bowls (15:1-16:21). (5) The fifth trumpet causes a star to fall from heaven to earth (possibly Satan; cf. 12:9; probably an angelic messenger; cf. Comment on 9:1a); this star releases from the bottomless pit a plague of locusts who harm only those lacking God's seal (9:1-12; cf. the eighth plague of locusts in Exod 10:4-20; no counterpart in Rev 15-16). This locust plague, one of several terrible ordeals that people in the eastern Mediterranean could experience, is clearly modeled after Joel 2:1-14 (note the common motifs of the trumpet call, the comparison to an enormous army, the destruction of everything in their path). Since the angel of the abyss is their king (9:11), this must be an army of demons. (6) The sixth trumpet involves the release of the four angels bound at the Euphrates river (perhaps symbolizing four nations), who kill one-third of humankind (vv 13-19). This plague has no counterpart among the Exodus plagues. The effects are similar to the drying up of the Euphrates, the result of the sixth bowl plague, described in Rev 16:12. (7) The seventh trumpet is not narrated until 11:15-18." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 495.]

<sup>8</sup>**Joel 2:1-14.** 2 Ἰσαλλίσατε σάλπιγγι ἐν Σιών, κηρύξατε ἐν ὄρει ἁγίῳ μου, καὶ συγχυθήτωσαν πάντες οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν γῆν, διότι ἄρεστίς ἡμέρα κυρίου, ὅτι ἐγγύς, † 2 ἡμέρα σκότους καὶ γνόφου,



echoes of motifs from Joel provided building blocks for

ἡμέρα νεφέλης καὶ ομίχλης· ὡς ὄρθρος χυθήσεται ἐπὶ τὰ ὄρη λαὸς πολλὸς καὶ ἰσχυρός· ὅμοιος αὐτῷ οὐ γέγονεν ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος καὶ μετ' αὐτὸν οὐ προστεθήσεται ἕως ἐτῶν εἰς γενεὰς γενεῶν.† 3τὰ ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ πῦρ ἀναλίσκον, καὶ τὰ ὀπίσω αὐτοῦ ἀναπτομένη φλόξ· ὡς παράδεισος τρυφῆς ἢ γῆ πρὸ προσώπου αὐτοῦ, καὶ τὰ ὀπίσθεν αὐτοῦ πεδῖον ἀφανισμοῦ, καὶ ἀνασφζόμενος οὐκ ἔσται αὐτῷ.† 4ὡς ὄρασις ἵππων ἢ ὄψις αὐτῶν, καὶ ὡς ἵππεῖς οὕτως καταδιώζονται·† 5ὡς φωνὴ ἀρμάτων ἐπὶ τὰς κορυφὰς τῶν ὀρέων ἐξαλοῦνται καὶ ὡς φωνὴ φλογὸς πυρὸς κατεσθιούσης καλάμην καὶ ὡς λαὸς πολλὸς καὶ ἰσχυρὸς παρατασσόμενος εἰς πόλεμον.† 6πάντοτε προσώπου αὐτοῦ συντριβήσονται λαοὶ, πᾶν πρόσωπον ὡς πρόσκαυμα χύτρας.† 7ὡς μαχηταὶ δραμοῦνται καὶ ὡς ἄνδρες πολεμισταὶ ἀναβήσονται ἐπὶ τὰ τεῖχη, καὶ ἕκαστος ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ αὐτοῦ πορεύσεται, καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐκκλίνωσιν τὰς τρίβους αὐτῶν.† 8καὶ ἕκαστος ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἀφέξεται· καταβαρυνόμενοι ἐν τοῖς ὅπλοις αὐτῶν πορεύσονται καὶ ἐν τοῖς βέλεσιν αὐτῶν πεσοῦνται καὶ οὐ μὴ συντελεσθῶσιν.† 9τῆς πόλεως ἐπιλήμνονται καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν τευχῶν δραμοῦνται καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς οἰκίας ἀναβήσονται καὶ διὰ θυρίδων εἰσελεύσονται ὡς κλέπται.† 10πρὸ προσώπου αὐτῶν συγχυθήσεται ἡ γῆ καὶ σεισθήσεται ὁ οὐρανός, ὁ ἥλιος καὶ ἡ σελήνη συσκοτάσουσιν, καὶ τὰ ἄστρα δῦσουσιν τὸ φέγγος αὐτῶν.† 11καὶ κύριος δώσει φωνὴν αὐτοῦ πρὸ προσώπου δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, ὅτι πολλὴ ἔστιν σφόδρα ἡ παρεμβολὴ αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἰσχυρὰ ἔργα λόγων αὐτοῦ· διότι μεγάλη ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου, μεγάλη καὶ ἐπιφανὴς σφόδρα, καὶ τίς ἔσται ἱκανὸς αὐτῆ;† 12καὶ νῦν λέγει κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν Ἐπιστράφητε πρὸς με ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας ὑμῶν καὶ ἐν νηστεία καὶ ἐν κλαυθμῷ καὶ ἐν κοπετῷ.† 13καὶ διαρρηξάτε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν καὶ μὴ τὰ ἱμάτια ὑμῶν καὶ ἐπιστράφητε πρὸς κύριον τὸν θεὸν ὑμῶν, ὅτι ἐλεήμων καὶ οἰκτίρμων ἐστίν, μακρόθυμος καὶ πολυέλεος καὶ μετανοῶν ἐπὶ ταῖς κακίαις.†

2.1 Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near— 2 a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness spread upon the mountains a great and powerful army comes; their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them in ages to come. 3 Fire devours in front of them, and behind them a flame burns. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, but after them a desolate wilderness, and nothing escapes them. 4 They have the appearance of horses, and like war-horses they charge. 5 As with the rumbling of chariots, they leap on the tops of the mountains, like the crackling of a flame of fire devouring the stubble, like a powerful army drawn up for battle. 6 Before them peoples are in anguish, all faces grow pale. 7 Like warriors they charge, like soldiers they scale the wall. Each keeps to its own course, they do not swerve from their paths. 8 They do not jostle one another, each keeps to its own track; they burst through the weapons and are not halted. 9 They leap upon the city, they run upon the walls; they climb up into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief. 10 The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. 11 The Lord utters his voice at the head of his army; how vast is his host! Numberless are those who obey his command. Truly the day of the Lord is great; terrible indeed—who can endure it? 12 Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; 13 rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. 14 Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord, your God?

John's depiction here of the army of locusts. But John extends and expands the ideas of Joel substantially.

Additionally careful analysis uncovers a structural parallel between the fifth and sixth trumpets, that is important to the interpretation of both trumpet sections.

Rev 9:1–11 (Fifth Trumpet)

1. Nature of the plague (vv 1–6)

a. Abyss opened (v 2)

b. Purpose of plague (vv 4–5)

2. Description of locust army (vv 7–10)

a. Lethal nature of their tails (v 10)

Rev 9:13–19 (Sixth Trumpet)

1. Nature of the plague (vv 13–16)

a. Four angels released (vv 14–15a)

b. Purpose of plague (vv 15b–16)

2. Description of cavalry of 200 million (v 17)

a. Lethal nature of mouths and tails of horses (v 19)

Dauids is convinced by this that the fifth and sixth trumpets form a doublet in which the same essential reality is described from two perspectives.<sup>9</sup> The evidence certainly points this direction.

### 1) Their authorization to harm is limited, vv. 1b-6

1b καὶ εἶδον ἀστέρα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ πεπτωκότα εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἡ κλεῖς τοῦ φρέατος τῆς ἀβύσσου 2 καὶ ἤνοιξεν τὸ φρέαρ τῆς ἀβύσσου, καὶ ἀνέβη καπνὸς ἐκ τοῦ φρέατος ὡς καπνὸς καμίνου μεγάλης, καὶ ἐσκοτώθη ὁ ἥλιος καὶ ὁ ἀήρ ἐκ τοῦ καπνοῦ τοῦ φρέατος. 3 καὶ ἐκ τοῦ καπνοῦ ἐξῆλθον ἀκρίδες εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ ἐδόθη αὐταῖς ἐξουσία ὡς ἔχουσιν ἐξουσίαν οἱ σκορπίοι τῆς γῆς. 4 καὶ ἐρρέθη αὐταῖς ἵνα μὴ ἀδικήσουσιν τὸν χόρτον τῆς γῆς οὐδὲ πᾶν χλωρὸν οὐδὲ πᾶν δένδρον, εἰ μὴ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους οἵτινες οὐκ ἔχουσιν τὴν σφραγίδα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων. 5 καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἵνα μὴ ἀποκτείνωσιν αὐτούς, ἀλλ' ἵνα βασανισθῶσιν μῆνας πέντε, καὶ ὁ βασανισμὸς αὐτῶν ὡς βασανισμὸς σκορπίου ὅταν παίσῃ ἄνθρωπον. 6 καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ζητήσουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸν θάνατον καὶ οὐ μὴ εὐρήσουσιν αὐτόν, καὶ ἐπιθυμήσουσιν ἀποθανεῖν καὶ φεύγει ὁ θάνατος ἀπ' αὐτῶν.

1b and I saw a star that had fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit; 2 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. 3 Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given authority like the authority of scorpions of the earth. 4 They were told not to damage the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their

<sup>9</sup>David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 497.

foreheads. 5 They were allowed to torture them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torture was like the torture of a scorpion when it stings someone. 6 And in those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will flee from them.

The first thing that John sees after the fifth angel blows his trumpet is a falling star: καὶ εἶδον ἀστέρα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ πεπτωκότα εἰς τὴν γῆν, and I saw a star having fallen out of heaven to the earth. Note carefully John's words. He did not see the star fall out of the sky. But he did see it after it had fallen to the earth. Remember that John's apocalyptic visionary vantage point is standing in heaven and being able to look down to the earth.

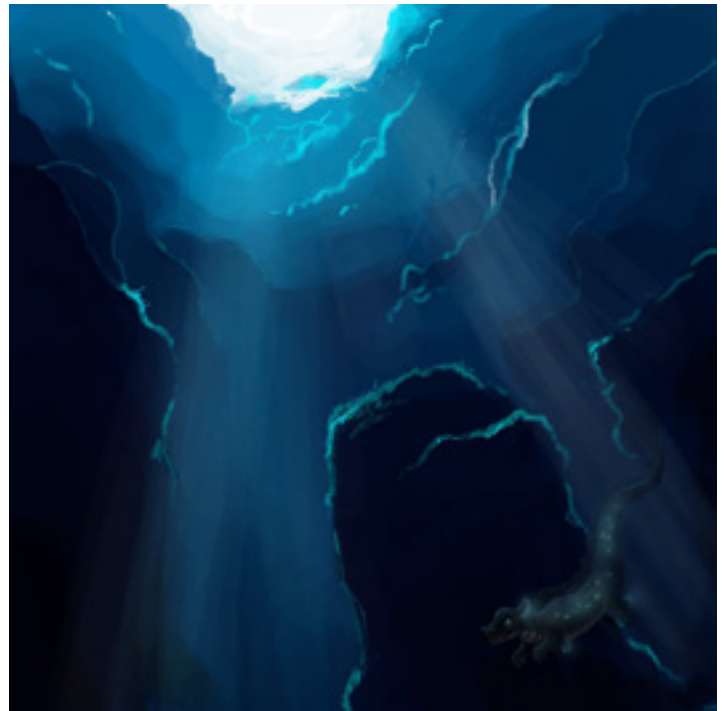
From the second point about this star, καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἡ κλεῖς τοῦ φρέατος τῆς ἀβύσσου, and to him was given the key of the shaft of the abyss, it becomes clear that this 'star' is a living creature of some kind, not just a material object.<sup>10</sup> The being given the key and his opening the door of the shaft of the abyss express au-

<sup>10</sup>John does not say that he actually saw the star fall; he says only that he saw the star after it had fallen. In 9:1b–2a it becomes obvious that the 'star' is a supernatural being, i.e., an angel. In early Jewish literature, stars can represent angelic beings (Judg 5:20; Job 38:7; Dan 8:10); in PGM I.74–75 a star is called an angel, and Platonists (among others) regarded stars as divine beings (Plato *Leges* 898D–899D; *Timaeus* 37B; 40A–B; Philo *Plant.* 12); see A. Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991). Falling stars often represent evil angelic beings or demons (1 Enoch 86:3; 88:1; 90:24; T. Sol. 20.14–17; Jude 13), or even Satan (1 Enoch 86:1; Apoc. El. 4:11; Luke 10:18; Rev 12:9; see Comment on 6:13). Here the fallen star should be understood as an angelic messenger (see 20:1) and not be identified with the angel of the abyss named Abaddon or Apollyon in 9:11 or Satan in 12:9. In 1 Enoch 86:1, Enoch sees a star falling from heaven, followed (v 3) by many stars, all obviously fallen angelic beings. For a discussion of the significance of falling stars in dreams in the ancient Near East (where the 'falling' of stars is generally considered a bad omen), see Oppenheim, *Interpretation*, 283–84; Artemidorus *Oneirocritica* 2.36; 5.23. In Ezekiel *Exagoge* 85, the stars represent the host of angelic beings: 'A multitude of stars fell before my knees and I counted them all. They paraded past me like a battalion of men' (Jacobson, *Exagoge*, 55). The falling star in Sib. Or. 5.155–61 has some parallels with Rev 9:1–2 (tr. Charlesworth, OTP 2:397):

A great star will come from heaven to the wondrous sea and will burn the deep sea and Babylon itself and the land of Italy, because of which many holy faithful Hebrews and a true people perished.

"In both Rev 9:1–2 and Sib. Or. 5.158–61 the star is a messenger of God sent to earth, though God is only indirectly responsible for the destruction caused by the release of the locusts in vv 3–11. There was a view in the Hellenistic world that 'none of the gods of heaven will ever quit heaven, and pass its boundary, and come down to earth' (Corp. Herm. 10.25). Manilius (*Astron.* 1.384–86; see 1.799) compares Augustus to a star that has fallen into the world."

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 525.]



thorization directly from God. Thus the best conclusion is that John saw an angel that had come down to earth and was depicted in this dramatic manner of a star that fell to the earth. Given the widespread cultural linkage of stars to angels, and also as fallen stars such angels were not good omens to those on earth, John used this familiar manner of description to signal the bad news this was going to mean for the inhabitants on earth.

This angelic star is authorized to open the shaft of the abyss: καὶ ἤνοιξεν τὸ φρέαρ τῆς ἀβύσσου, and he opened the shaft of the abyss. What is this? Clearly the answer to this question was well understood by John's targeted readers, although perhaps not nearly as clear to us today.<sup>11</sup> The noun φρέαρ literally means a well or

<sup>11</sup>"The two definite articles in the phrase 'the shaft of the abyss' indicate that the notion of a shaft to the abyss, as well as the concept of the abyss itself, was well known to the readers (Mussies, *Morphology*, 188). The term ἀβύσσος (= βυθός), with the prefixed alpha privative, means 'without depth,' i.e., 'fathomless, boundless,' and was used to refer to the infinite void or a subterranean region beneath the earth (in accordance with a three-level view of the universe). The term ἄβυσσος occurs seven times in Revelation (9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3). Five of these occur in two passages in which the three-level cosmology of Revelation is implied (9:1–11; 20:1–3). Here, in 9:1, a star (= angelic being) descends from heaven to earth and is given a key to the abyss, while in 20:1 an angel descends from heaven (to earth is implied) with a key to the abyss; both passages imply a three-level cosmos. This coheres with the cosmology, consisting of heaven, earth, and sea, found elsewhere in Revelation (10:6; 12:12; 14:7; 21:1; see Comment on 10:6), though the three realms of heaven, earth, and below the earth are mentioned in 15:3 (see Comment), and the four realms of heaven, earth, below the earth, and the sea are referred to in 15:13 (see Comment). In 9:1–11 the abyss is the dwelling place of locust-demons who can be released only when the shaft (φρέαρ) to the abyss is opened by someone entrusted with the key (the φρέαρ, 'shaft,'

cistern, but here only in the NT is used to refer to the shaft that goes down into the earth as an opening on the top of the ἄβυσσος, *bottomless pit*.

In the three level cosmology assumed here of heaven, earth, and abyss, the ἄβυσσος is the region understood to be located below the earth that stood between it and the heavens.<sup>12</sup> In the late first centu-

to the abyss is mentioned just four times in Revelation, all occurrences in 9:1–2). While the key to the abyss is mentioned again in 20:1, the notion of a shaft that could be locked and unlocked is implied rather than explicitly stated. In the other two references, in Rev 11:7 and 17:8, the abyss is the place from which the beast is said to ascend. PGM XIII.169–70, 481–83 indicates a belief in a supernatural being who rules over the abyss: ‘a god appeared, he was put in charge of the abyss’ (though here ‘abyss’ probably refers to the primeval or celestial ocean as a source of moisture for the cosmos). The term ἄβυσσος is used in the LXX as the usual translation for Hebrew תְּהוֹם *tēhôm*, ‘deep, primeval ocean, sea’ (KB, 1557–59), and in Greco-Jewish literature for the sea (Gen 1:2; 7:11; Job 28:14; 36:16; 41:22, 23; Eccl 1:3; 16:18) and for the depths of the earth (Ps 71:20; Deut 8:7; 1 Enoch 17:7, 8; T. Levi 3:9; Jos. As. 12:2; Pss. Sol. 17:19; Jub. 2:2, 16). It is sometimes synonymous with the underworld, which is the abode of the dead (Jos. As. 15:12; Ps 71:20; Rom 10:7; Diogenes Laertes 4.27 mentions ‘the abyss of Pluto’ = Hades) and the place where demons are imprisoned (Luke 8:31; 1 Enoch 18–21 [the term ἄβυσσος is used in the Greek version of 21:7]; Jub. 10:7 [the Greek fragment reads ‘to cast them into the abyss until the day of judgment’; see Denis, *Fragmenta*, 86], 9 [the Greek fragment reads ‘and the remaining nine parts were cast into the abyss’; Denis, *Fragmenta*, 87]).

“In Revelation the beast ascends from the abyss (11:7; 17:8), and it is also the abode of Satan (20:1–3), of the angel of the abyss, Abaddon or Apollyon (9:11), and of demons (9:1–10). In Tri. Trac. 89.25–28, the ‘pit of ignorance’ is a metaphorical interpretation of ‘the Outer Darkness,’ ‘Chaos,’ ‘Hades,’ and ‘the abyss,’ revealing that these four designations are regarded as synonymous. In his astrological reading of Revelation, Malina argues that the abyss referred to here is the ‘celestial Abyss,’ which was thought to be the counterpart of the ‘terrestrial Abyss’ (Revelation, 142–43), a conception found nowhere in ancient literature. Apart from the fact that he ignores the archaic three-tiered cosmology of Revelation (evident in Revelation, 2–5), he also combines several ancient opinions that are mutually contradictory. Malina cites Plutarch (*De genio Socr.* 590B–592E) as evidence for the view that the entrance to Hades (which he assumes is equivalent to the abyss) was located between Scorpio and Sagittarius, while Plutarch appears rather to have held that the region between the earth and the moon was ‘Hades’ (*De genio Socr.* 591A–C; *De facie* 942F).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 525–526.]

<sup>12</sup>**ἄβυσσος, οὐ, ἡ** (orig. adj., Aeschyl., *Hdt.*+; so also Dt 33:13. The fem. sg. is used freq. in LXX, w. art. or adj. Gen 1:2; Job 41:23; Ps 77:15; Am 7:4; also En passim; TestSol 2:8 BC; TestJob 33:6; TestLevi 3:9 v.l.; JosAs 12:3, 10; 4 Esdr 8:23 Fgm. c; ApcEsdr 4:21 p. 28, 24 Tdf.; Just. A I, 60, 9 [for ἄβυσσος Dt 32:22]; without art. or adj. LXX; Mel., P. 28, 614. Fem. pl. w. art. or adj. Ps 134:6; 148:7; Prov 8:24; TestLevi 3:9; without art. or adj. freq. LXX; Ps-Sol 17:19) lit. ‘deep hole’, hence: ‘immense depth’ (Diog. L. 4, 5, 27; Iambli., *Myst.* 6, 5 p. 245, 15 Parthey; Herm. Wr. 3, 1; 16, 5; PGM 1, 343; 3, 554; 4, 1148; 1350; 2835; 7, 261; 517; PWarr 21, 29; 31; LXX; En 21:7; Philo, *Op. M.* 29; SibOr 1, 223).

**1. an immensely deep space, depth, abyss, gener., contrasted**

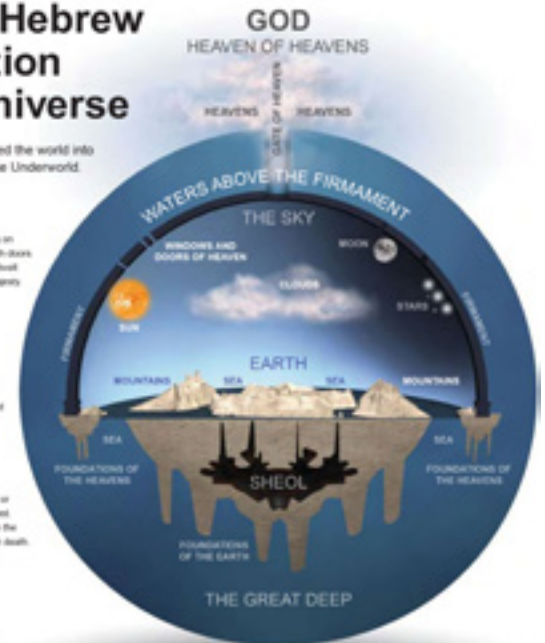
## Ancient Hebrew Conception of the Universe

The ancient Israelites divided the world into Heaven, Earth, Sea, and the Underworld.

They viewed the sky as a vast ceiling on foundations—perhaps mountains—with doors and windows that let in the rain. God dwelt above the sky, hidden in cloud and mystery.

The world was viewed as a disk floating on the waters, secured or raised by pillars. The earth was the only known domain—the water beyond it was considered unknowable.

The Underworld (Sheol) was a watery or dusty green from which no one returned. Regarded as a physical place beneath the earth, it could be reached only through death.



GRAPHIC BY WARELL MILLERSON. COPYRIGHT 2012 LOGOSBIBLE SOFTWARE

ry world of John with both Jewish and Greco-Roman perspectives, the significance of ἄβυσσος has to give some credence to all of these influences that would have not particularly shaped John’s perspective so much as it would have the thinking of his first readers who represented this wide diversity of background.

John’s perspective can be understood reasonably well from his use of the term ἄβυσσος just inside Revelation. All of two<sup>13</sup> of the nine uses of this term are found in this one document:

**9:1-2.** Καὶ ὁ πέμπτος ἄγγελος ἔσάλπισεν· καὶ εἶδον ἄστέρα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ πεπτωκότα εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ w. sky and earth (Did., Gen. 30, 8) 1 Cl 28:3 (pl. as Dt 8:7; Ps 32:7; 76:17 al.; TestLevi 3:9; Cat. Cod. Astr. VIII/2 p. 173, 29); Dg 7:2. Dark (Gen 1:2), hence unfathomable to the human eye 1 Cl 20:5, and discernible only by God 59:3 (Theoph. Ant. 1, 6, p. 70, 23; cp. Da 3:55 Theod.).

**2. a transcendent place associated with the dead and hostile powers, netherworld, abyss,** esp. the abode of the dead **Rom 10:7** (Ps 106:26) and of demons **Lk 8:31**; dungeon where the devil is kept **Rv 20:3**; abode of the θηρίον, the Antichrist **11:7; 17:8**; of Ἀβαδδὼν (q.v.), the angel of the underworld **9:11** (cp. PGM 13, 169 and s. Ael. Aristid. 38 p. 724 D. on Philip: ἀνὴρ ὑβριστῆς ἐκ τοῦ βαράθρου τ. γῆς ὀρμώμενος κακῆ μοίρα τ. Ἑλλήνων); φρέαρ τῆς ἅ. **9:1f**; capable of being sealed **9:1; 20:1, 3**.—JKroll, Gott u. Hölle 32; KSchneider, RAC I 60–62.—DELG. s.v. βυθός. M-M. TW. Sv.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 2.]

<sup>13</sup>**Luke 8:31.** καὶ παρεκάλουν αὐτὸν ἵνα μὴ ἐπιτάξῃ αὐτοῖς εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον ἀπελθεῖν.

They begged him not to order them to go back **into the abyss**. **Rom. 10:7.** ἡ· τίς καταβήσεται εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον; τοῦτ’ ἔστιν Χριστὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναγαγεῖν.

“or ‘Who will descend **into the abyss**?’ ” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἡ κλεῖς τοῦ φρέατος τῆς ἀβύσσου, 2 καὶ ἤνοιξεν τὸ φρέαρ τῆς ἀβύσσου, καὶ ἀνέβη καπνὸς ἐκ τοῦ φρέατος ὡς καπνὸς καμίνου μεγάλης, And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given **the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit**; 2 he opened **the shaft of the bottomless pit**, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace,

9:11. ἔχουσιν ἐπ’ αὐτῶν βασιλέα τὸν ἄγγελον τῆς ἀβύσσου, ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἑβραϊστὶ Ἀβαδδὼν, καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἑλληνικῇ ὄνομα ἔχει Ἀπολλύων. 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.

11:7. Καὶ ὅταν τελέσωσιν τὴν μαρτυρίαν αὐτῶν, τὸ θηρίον τὸ ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου ποιήσει μετ’ αὐτῶν πόλεμον καὶ νικήσει αὐτοὺς καὶ ἀποκτενεῖ αὐτούς. When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up **from the bottomless pit** will make war on them and conquer them and kill them,

17:8. Τὸ θηρίον ὃ εἶδες ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει, καὶ θαυμασθήσονται οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ὧν οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα ἐπὶ τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, βλέπόντων τὸ θηρίον ὅτι ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ παρέσται. The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to ascend **from the bottomless pit** and go to destruction. And the inhabitants of the earth, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will be amazed when they see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.

20:1-3. Καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἔχοντα τὴν κλεῖν τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ ἄλυσιν μεγάλην ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ. 2 καὶ ἐκράτησεν τὸν δράκοντα, ὃ ὄφεις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὃς ἐστὶν Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, καὶ ἔδησεν αὐτὸν χίλια ἔτη 3 καὶ ἔβαλεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον καὶ ἔκλεισεν καὶ ἐσφράγισεν ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ, ἵνα μὴ πλανήσῃ ἔτι τὰ ἔθνη ἄχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη. μετὰ ταῦτα δεῖ λυθῆναι αὐτὸν μικρὸν χρόνον. Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand **the key to the bottomless pit** and a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and threw him **into the pit**, and locked and sealed it over him, so that he would deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be let out for a little while.

From John’s use of ἄβυσσος inside Revelation it becomes clear that he sees the ἄβυσσος as “the place of imprisonment for disobedient spirits” along with Luke, while Paul sees the ἄβυσσος as the “realm of the dead.”<sup>14</sup> Both ideas have a deep root-age in the

Jewish religious soil of the first Christian century.<sup>15</sup> An important clue is the LXX use of ἄβυσσος to translate *דינה*, *tēhōm*.<sup>16</sup> This Hebrew word, actually an adjective meaning deep, is closely connected to the watery depths connected to creation in Gen. 1:2 (Ps. 104:6), the flood in Noah’s time etc. The Hebrew mind envisioned a watery depth of ocean completely on all four sides of the earth that were connected all the way across the underneath side of the earth.<sup>17</sup> It was al-

onment for disobedient spirits’ (Lk. 8:31; Rev. 9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3) and b. the ‘realm of the dead’ (Rom. 10:7).” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 1:9.]

<sup>15</sup>“ἡ ἄβυσσος (originally adj. to a γῆ which is to be filled up but is never completely covered == ‘unfathomably deep’) is used in later Greek to describe the depths of original time (Preis. Zaub., III, 554; IV, 2835; Corp. Herm., III, 1, XVI, 5), the primitive ocean (Test. Sol., II, 8, B. C. MacCown, 15\*), and the world of the dead (Diog. L. 4, 5, 27). In LXX it is mostly used for *דינה*, which in the OT describes the original flood or floods of water, and is once used in the plural to denote the realm of the dead (Ps. 71:20). In later Judaism *דינה* signified 1. the original flood;<sup>1</sup> 2 the depth of the earth, or interior of the earth, in which are corpses causing defilement;<sup>2</sup> and 3., under the influence of Persian and Hellenistic conceptions,<sup>3</sup> the place in which runaway spirits are confined (Jub. 5:6 ff.; Eth. En., 10:4 f.), 11 ff.; 18:11 ff. etc.; Jd. 6; 2 Pt. 2:4).” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 1:9.]

<sup>16</sup>“The term occurs at least 34 times in the LXX, where in 30 instances it renders Heb. *tēhōm* (or its plural); once for *mēsūlā*, depths (Job 41:23—LXX 41:22—Eng 41:31); once for *šūlā*, “depths” (Isa 44:27); and twice where the text is uncertain (Job 36:16; 41:24a—LXX 41:23a—Eng 41:32a).” [Herbert G. Grether, “Abyss, The,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 49.]

<sup>17</sup>“*דינה*: Bauer-Leander *Heb.* 473e, not to be derived from a vb., probably a primary noun, perhaps going back to general Semitic \**tihām(at)* sea; so as such it is not a loanword from Akkadian!; see THAT 2: 1026f (with bibliography); in BHeb. the subst. is both masc. and fem. (for instances see THAT 2: 1027), on which see also Michel Grundlegung 1: 77; with the exception of Is 63:13 and Ps 106:9 it never occurs with the article; cf. R. Meyer Gramm. §96, 2a; MHeb. *דינה* abyss, the deep (Dalman Wörterbuch 439a); DSS (Kuhn Konkordanz 230), cf. THAT 2: 1031; SamP. *tūm*; JArm., Samaritan *דינה*, EmpArm. *דינה* abyss, see A. Dupont-Sommer La stèle trilingue de Xanthos. Le texte araméen (CRAIBL, 1974) 132-143, 137 lines 2 and 3; Ebla *ti-’a-ma-tum* (Pettinato BA 39 (1976) 50); also *ti-’a-ma-tum/tihām-at-um*; see Pelio Franzaroli in Hans-Jörg Nissen and Joh. Renger (ed.) Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn (Berlin, 1982) 134; Ug. thm (Dietrich-Loretz-Sanmartin Texte 1, 23:30), pl. thmt, dual thmtm the deep, ocean (Gordon Textbook §19:2537; Aistleitner Wb. 2749; Gibson Myths2 159b); on the dual see especially Dietrich-Loretz-Sanmartin Texte 1, 100:3: *thmtm* parallel with *nhrm*; see also Fisher Parallels 1: passim for the subst. standing in parallelism to *thm*, *thmt* and *thmtm*, like *ars*, *ym*, *mdb*; *nhr*; *šmm*; Akk. *tiamtu(m)*, *tāmtu(m)* the deep, sea (AHw. 1353f); Syr. *tehōmā*, pl. *tehōmātā* (Brockelmann Lex. 816b); Arb. (as a geographical designation) *tihāmā* modern Tihama the coastal

<sup>14</sup>“A description of the underworld as a. the ‘place of impris-

plain along the south-western and southern shores of the Arabian Peninsula (Wehr-Cowan Dict. 98b).

“It should be remembered that JArm. and Syr. *tehōmā* must be loanwords from Hebrew; the word is found in Ugaritic in the same way that it is found in Hebrew, with *thm(t)* together with *ym* (i.e. \**yammu* ocean), and also in Ph.; for Arm. → BArm., also for instances from the other Arm. dialects, where the former word does not occur but *ym* is the most common sbst.; see also Jean-Hoftijzer Dictionnaire 107; Hoftijzer-Jongeling Dictionary 458, ym1; in Arb. the usual word is baḥr ocean, sea, large river (Wehr-Cowan Dict. 42b); OSArb. bḥr (Conti Rossini Chrest. 112a); Eth. bāḥīr (Dillmann Lex. 494); Tigr. baḥar (Litmann-H. Wb. 274a): pl. תְּהוֹמוֹת, תְּהוֹמַת, תְּהוֹמוֹת.

“For the bibliography see THAT 2: 1026-1031; Westermann BK 1/1: 145-147; Reymond L'eau 167ff, 182ff, 196ff; N.J. Tromp Primitive Conceptions of the Death and Nether World in the Old Testament (BiblOr. 21, 1961) 59f.

“—1. sg.: a) **primaeval ocean, primaeval flood:** α) as one of the prominent elements in creation (no creatio ex nihilo!) Gn 12 Ps 1046; on the difference between Heb. תְּהוֹם as a purely passive element as distinct from Tiamat in Enuma-Eliš cf. e.g. Otto Kaiser *Die mythische Bedeutung des Meeres in Aegypten, Ugarit und Israel* (BZAW 78; 1959) 114ff; Werner H. Schmidt *Die Schöpfungsgeschichte der Priesterschrift* (WMANT2; 1967) 80f, especially 805; O.H. Steck *Der Schöpfungsbericht der Priesterschrift* (FRLANT 115; 1975) 231, and see also 229939; Westermann BK 1/1: 146; THAT 2: 1030; —β) linked with the created world and integrated as an element within it Jb 3816 Pr 827.28, vs.28 תְּהוֹם (ע/ע) עֵינֹת.

“—b) **flood, deluge** (: KBL, where the following instances are to be added to those above (see a) and a translation corresponding to primaeval flood selected; but on this see Westermann loc. cit. 146, and especially THAT 2: 1028): Gn 4925 parallel with Dt 3313 (רִבְצַת תַּחַת תְּהוֹם) :: שְׁמַיִם, Ezk 2619 Jon 26 Hab 310, Ps 428 קוֹרָא יתְּשַׁבּ one flood calls to the other, Jb 2814 3830, 4124 יתְּשַׁבּ one would think the deep to be white-haired (NRSV), on which see Fohrer KAT 16: 530, Sir 1616 השמים ושמי וארץ הן השמים ותהום 4218.

“—c) **the deep**, see Reymond L'eau 168: תְּהוֹם רַבָּה Gn 711, מַעְיָנוֹת תְּהוֹם Gn 82 the springs of the great ocean :: הַשְּׁמַיִם אֲרָבֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם the windows of the heavens, תְּהוֹם the mighty waters of the deep Ezk 3115, תְּהוֹם רַבָּה Is 5110 Am 74 Ps 367.

“—2. pl.: —a) **primaeval flood** Ps 337 7717 7815 Pr 824.

“—b) the depths of the ocean Ps 7120 1356 Pr 320.

“—α) the waters of the ocean Ps 10726; β) the waters of the Sea of Reeds Ex 155.8 Is 6313 Ps 1069; γ) וּבְקָרַ עֵינֹת וְתֵהוֹמוֹת יֵצְאִים Ezk 2619 springs and floods which overwhelm the valleys and the hills (ZüB) Dt 87; δ) כָּל־תְּהוֹמוֹת all floods Ps 1487 (parallel with תְּנַיִנִים); but this probably belongs best to α because of the parallel terms.

“—3. expressions: a) as 1αα: with כֶּסֶה pi. Ps 1046; as β) with הִלֵּךְ hitp. Jb 3816; with תִּקַּק Pr 827; with עָזָן Pr 828 (cj. pi.).

“—b) as 1b: with אָמַר Jb 2814; with לִכְד hitp. Jb 3830; with נָתַן Hab 310; with סָבַב po. Jon 26; with עָלָה hif. Ezk 2619; with הִבֵּן Gn 4925 parallel with Dt 3313.

“—c) as 1c: with אָבַל Am 74; with בָּקַע nif. Gn 711; with חָרַב I hif. Is 5110; with סָכַר nif. Gn 82; with רוּם pil. Ezk 314.

“—d) as 2a: with הִיל polal Pr 824; with נָתַן (בְּאֲצִרוֹת) Ps 337; with רָגַז Ps 7714; with שָׁקָה hif. (פְּתֵהוֹמוֹת) Ps 7815.

“—e) as 2b: with בָּקַע nif. Pr 320; with עָלָה hif. (מֵן) Ps 7120.

“—f) as 2αα: with יָרַד (acc. of place) Ps 10726.

“—g) as 2cβ: with כֶּסֶה pi. Ex 155; with הִלֵּךְ hif. Is 6313 Ps 1069; with קָפַץ Ex 158.

ways a foreboding and mysterious place.<sup>18</sup> It came, on occasion, to be associated with Sheol, the realm of the dead. But not until the Babylonian exile and later do the associations with a demonic underworld surface at times in the late Jewish literature; e.g., Jub. 5:6 ff.; Eth. En., 10:4 f.

In the Greco-Roman background the idea mainly centered on ἄβυσσος as the primal deep, especially in the oceans with no understanding of how deep they might be. This in turn lent itself easily to understanding ἄβυσσος as also referring to the underworld where the dead were.<sup>19</sup> Additionally the association of ἄβυσσος

“—h) as 2c, see there.

“—j) as 2cδ: with II הָלַל pi. Ps 1487. פ”

[Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1999), 1690–1691.]

<sup>18</sup>“In the OT, ‘the abyss’ is not widely used in the English versions, although it is found in some of the more recent translations, rendering *tēhōm* (NAB, 11 times; NEB, 7 times; NJB, 6 times; and AB, once). NAB uses the word 3 times for ‘ābaddōn, ‘destruction’ (Job 31:12; Prov 15:11, 27:20). JPS uses it once for *ma’āmaqīm*, ‘depths’ (Isa 51:10, where it is parallel with *tēhōm*).

“The more usual English renderings of the words behind the LXX *abyssos* in the OT are ‘the deep,’ ‘the depths,’ and ‘deep.’ These terms, along with ‘the abyss,’ are used in the following senses which reflect meanings of Heb *tēhōm* and its synonyms: (1) the primordial ocean (e.g., Gen 1:2); (2) the (deep) sea (e.g., Jonah 2:6—Eng 2:5; Job 28:14, 38:16, 41:23—LXX 41:22—Eng 41:31); (3) the Red Sea (e.g., Ps 106:9—LXX 105:9; Isa 51:10, 63:13— with mythological overtones); (4) subterranean waters (e.g., Gen 7:11, 8:2; Prov 3:20; Ps 78:15—LXX 77:15); and (5) the depths of the earth, i.e., Sheol (Ps 71:20—LXX 70:20).

“In intertestamental literature, ‘the abyss’ carries a number of meanings: (1) the great deep under the earth, namely, that part of the universe set in opposition to the height of the heavens (Sir 1:3, 16:18, 24:5, 29, 42:18); (2) a poetic reference to the Red Sea where a personified wisdom delivered Israel (Wis 10:19); (3) the depths of the earth (Jub. 5:10); and (4) the abyss of fire, i.e., the place of torment for sinners and fallen angels (1 En. 10:13; 18:11).”

[Herbert G. Grether, “Abyss, The,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 49.]

<sup>19</sup>“*abyssos* is really an adj., meaning bottomless, unfathomable. Used by itself with the noun *gē* (earth) understood, it means a bottomless place, hence abyss. In late Gk. the word stood for the primal deep, the primal ocean, the realm of the dead, the underworld.

“It occurs about 25 times in the LXX, mostly to translate Heb. *tehīm*, the primal ocean (Gen. 1:2), deep waters (Ps. 42:7 [LXX 41:7]), the realm of the dead (Ps. 71:20 [LXX 70:20]). Rab. Judaism also maintained the meaning primal flood for *tehīm*. However, the word also stands for the interior of the earth, where bodies are found which cause uncleanness. The abyss also came to stand for the prison of fallen spirits (Eth. Enoch 10:4 ff.; 18:11 ff.; Jub. 5:6 ff.).”

[H. Bietenhard, “Hell, Abyss, Hades, Gehenna, Lower Regions,” ed. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 205.]

with ᾠδης, Hades, the god of the underworld, was strong and widespread.<sup>20</sup> Although in this cultural view Hades was not particularly a place of punishment, it was a place of death and gloom. Upon first hearing this word for the first time here in Revelation, a very negative image would have emerged in the minds of the Greek oriented readers of this text. And as John ‘fleshes out’ the details of his perspective on ἄβυσσος, the negative image intensifies for these readers.

Although ἄβυσσος could refer to the realm of the dead, Sheol in Hebrew, the NT writers prefer an alternative term, οἱ νεκροί, for this concept.<sup>21</sup> In the more positive tone the expression οἱ νεκροί most often shows up in phrases like ὃν ὁ θεὸς ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν, whom God raised from the dead (Acts 3:15).

Clearly in Revelation ἄβυσσος emphasizes the subterranean underworld where Satan and his demons originate from. As would have been clear to John’s Greek oriented readers especially, ἄβυσσος does not signal anything positive or good.

When the “star” opens the lid covering the shaft leading into the abyss,<sup>22</sup> the sense of something bad about to happen intensifies: καὶ ἤνοιξεν τὸ φρέαρ τῆς

<sup>20</sup>“In Greek religious thought Hades was the god of the underworld; but more commonly the term referred to his realm, the underworld, where the shades or the souls of the dead led a shadowy existence, hardly conscious and without memory of their former life. In early times it seems Hades was usually conceived as a place of sadness and gloom (but not punishment) indiscriminately for all the dead. However, as early as Homer the notion existed that some individuals experienced endless punishment in Hades, and later, especially through the influence of Orphic-Pythagorean ideas, belief in postmortem rewards and punishments in Hades became common. While Greek ideas about the afterlife probably did not influence the origins of Jewish expectations of retribution after death, later Jewish writers sometimes incorporated particular terms and concepts from the Greek and Roman Hades into their own pictures of the afterlife.” [Richard Bauckham, “Hades, Hell,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 14.]

<sup>21</sup>Cf. Mt. 8:22; 10:8; 11:5; 14:2; 17:9; 22:31-32; 23:27; 27:64; 28:7; Mk. 6:14; 9:9; 12:25-27; Lk. 7:22; 9:7, 60; 16:30-31; 20:35, 38; 24:5, 48; Jhn. 2:22; 5:21, 25; 12:1, 9, 17; 20:9; 21:14; 21:14; Acts 3:15; 4:2, 10; 5:10, 42; 13:30, 34; 17:3, 31-32; 23:6; 24:21; 26:8, 23; Rom. 1:4; 4:17, 24; 6:4, 9; 7:4; 8:11; 10:7 (Paul equates τὴν ἄβυσσον from Psalm quote to νεκρῶν), 9; 11:15; 14:9; 1 Cor. 15:12-13, 15-16, 20-21, 29, 32, 35, 52; 2 Cor. 1:9; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:20; 5:14; Phil. 3:11; Col. 1:18; 3:12; 1 Thess. 1:10; 4:16; 2 Tim. 2:8; 4:1; Heb. 11:19; 13:20; 1 Pet. 1:3, 21; 4:5-6; Rev. 1:5, 11:18; 14:13; 20:5, 12.

<sup>22</sup>“The shaft to the underworld, here specifically the region where demons dwell and the place from which the beast ascends (11:7; 17:8), is presented as if it were blocked by a door to which God alone holds the key. While this door can be locked (20:3) as well as unlocked (9:2a) by the one possessing the key (representing divine authority), the people of the world are protected as long as the door seals the realm of the earth from the subterranean abyss.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 526–527.]



ἀβύσσου, καὶ ἀνέβη καπνὸς ἐκ τοῦ φρέατος ὡς καπνὸς καμίνου μεγάλης, καὶ ἐσκοτώθη ὁ ἥλιος καὶ ὁ ἀήρ ἐκ τοῦ καπνοῦ τοῦ φρέατος. 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.

Coming up the shaft is a huge cloud of smoke that rises up into the air. Think volcano eruption here!<sup>23</sup> This cloud then darkens both the sun and the air above the earth. Interestingly in the ancient world, folks in the Mediterranean, especially in the eastern part, were accustomed to both volcano eruptions and swarms of locusts which both could and did darken the skies above them.<sup>24</sup> With these background images firmly rooted in the minds of John’s initial readers, no difficulty would have been present in grasping the essential image being painted here.

But the religious nature of this phenomena is John’s point. Clearly out of numerous similar images scattered through the OT, the idea of the judgment of God being unleashed upon the earth is the central point

<sup>23</sup>“In connection with the motifs that link 8:1–9:21 with the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79 (see Comments on 8:8–12; 9:2), it is perhaps worth noting that in the fanciful account found in Zonara’s epitome of Cassius Dio, giants were reportedly seen in the area, some of them flying through the air (66.22.2), and some people thought that the giants, who had been conquered in the Gigantomachy by Zeus and the Olympians and had been imprisoned in Tartarus by Zeus under several volcanoes in Italy and Greece (Apollodorus 1.6.1), were again rising in revolt, ‘for at that time many of their forms could be discerned in the smoke [πολλὰ γὰρ καὶ τότε εἶδωλα αὐτῶν ἐν τῷ καπνῷ διεφαίνετο]’ (66.23.1).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 527.]

<sup>24</sup>“Locust plagues reportedly could darken the sky and obliterate the sun (Philo Mos. 1.123). The eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79 (see Comment on 8:8a) resulted in the obliteration of the sun for several days (see Comment on 8:12; see Pliny Ep. 6.16.17; 6.20.15; Cassius Dio 66.22.4; 66.23.4–5).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 527.]

being made here.<sup>25</sup>

Here comes the surprise though: καὶ ἐκ τοῦ καπνοῦ ἐξήλθον ἀκρίδες εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ ἐδόθη αὐταῖς ἐξουσία ὡς ἔχουσιν ἐξουσίαν οἱ σκορπίοι τῆς γῆς. Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given authority like the authority of scorpions of the earth.

Not ashes nor fire falls down out of the clouds. Instead, creatures resembling locusts<sup>26</sup> began flying out of the cloud of smoke down to the earth. Here John directly calls them locusts: ἐξήλθον ἀκρίδες εἰς τὴν γῆν. But immediately also compares them to scorpions that crawl upon the earth: καὶ ἐδόθη αὐταῖς ἐξουσία ὡς ἔχουσιν ἐξουσίαν οἱ σκορπίοι τῆς γῆς. and they were given authority like the authority of scorpions of the earth. Subsequently his description of these critters, note vv. 7-11, make it clear that these are not normal locusts, but apocalyptic critters that actually are demons.

The ‘authority of scorpions’ represents judgment authority.<sup>27</sup> The sting of the scorpion is a ‘judgment’

<sup>25</sup>“The smoke darkens both the sun and the air. Darkening of the sun and other parts of the cosmos has already been seen to connote judgment (see on 6:12ff.; 8:12). The image is an allusion to the repeated expression ‘the sun will be darkened’ in Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15 (cf. Isa. 13:10), where it is a sign of judgment. Partly included is Exod. 10:15, where there were so many locusts ‘that the land was darkened’ (Targ. Pal. Exod. 10:5, 15 says that the sun was also darkened). Joel’s imagery is itself probably a development of Exod. 10:1–15 (see above on 9:7; Midr. Rab. Exod. 14.2 says that the darkness of Exod. 10:22 came from Hinnom, which is the nether world), which describes a judgment of the Egyptians’ hardness of heart in rejecting God’s word through Moses. There is no reason to think that the connotation of judgment has changed here, especially since ‘smoke of a furnace’ is always associated with judgment in the LXX (Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen. 19:28; cf. Exod. 19:18, which may also suggest divine wrath) and because “smoke” has the clear connotation of judgment later in this chapter (Rev. 9:17–20) and later in the Apocalypse (14:11; 18:9, 18; 19:3).” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 493–494.]

<sup>26</sup>“These are demons in the guise of locusts, for their king is Abaddon, the angel of the abyss (v 11). This stands in tension with 12:7–12, which narrates the fall of the dragon (alias the devil and Satan) and his angels to the earth, and with 20:1–3, which describes the temporary imprisonment of Satan in the abyss; yet it is curiously concordant with the statements in 11:7 and 17:8 that the beast ascends from the abyss. An infestation of locusts constitutes the eighth plague of Exod 10:12–20 (cf. the other plague traditions in Pss 78:46; 105:34–35; Amos 4:9b; Ezekiel Exogoge 132–51; Artapanus [Eusebius Praep. evang. 9.27.32]; Jub. 48:5; Bib. Ant. 10:1; Wis 16:9 [though here the bites of the flies and locusts cause death]; Ant. 2.306; Philo Mos. 1.120–22). Locusts are also mentioned in lists of eschatological plagues that have no direct connection with the plagues of Exodus (3 Apoc. Bar. 16:3; Sib. Or. 5.454). Hermas refers to fiery locusts that came out of the mouth of the great beast he saw in a vision (Vis. 4.1.6).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 527.]

<sup>27</sup>“Consequently, the picture in v 2 indicates that the judgment

upon the individual who got too close to the critter. These hideous looking ‘locusts’ will be able to ‘sting’ humans on the earth like scorpions.

Note that the ἐξουσία, more the sense of ‘authorization’ than of ‘authority,’ is not unlimited:<sup>28</sup> καὶ ἐρρέθη formerly limited to the demonic realm is being extended to the earthly realm. As a result of Christ’s death and resurrection, the devil and his legions have begun to be judged, and now the effect of their judgment is about to be unleashed on unbelieving humanity, who give their ultimate allegiance to the devil. An essentially identical pattern of widening judgment occurs in 12:7–12; 13:3–8; 16:10; and 17:8 (although in 12:12ff. the saints are also affected by the extension of judgment in the form of persecution and attempted deception).

“The precise form of judgment anticipated in 9:2 is explained beginning in v 3. It partly involves deception (vv 3–6), which is metaphorically anticipated by the darkness caused by the smoke. Throughout the NT, and especially in the Johannine corpus, darkness symbolizes spiritual blindness. The darkness connotes a mournful condition resulting from suffering (v 6; in Midr. Rab. Lam. 1.2, 23 the imagery of Joel 2:10 becomes a metaphor for Israel’s weeping because of suffering in exile).”

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 494.]

<sup>28</sup>“In vv 3–5, a series of statements is made using passive verbs (v 3, ἐδόθη, ‘was given’; v 4, ἐρρέθη, ‘were instructed’; v 5, ἐδόθη, ‘was given’). These verbs are in the passive of divine activity, which is a circumlocution used for avoiding the direct mention of the activity of God (Dalman, *Die Worte Jesu*, 183; BDR § 130; Joachim Jeremias, *Theology*, 9–14; N. Perrin, *Jesus*, 189). The agent of passive verbs is often specified with a noun clause introduced by ἐκ or ἀπό, even when a divine agent is in view (e.g., John 3:27, ἡ δεδομένον αὐτῷ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, ‘it was given to him by heaven [i.e., ‘God’]’; see John 6:65; T. Levi 2:2); διδόναι in the passive voice is sometimes accompanied by the adverb ἄνωθεν, ‘from above,’ as an alternate way of indicating divine agency (John 19:11; Gk. 1 Enoch 98:5[2x]). For other examples of διδόναι in the passive of divine activity, see Gk. 1 Enoch 25:4; 98:5 (ἐδόθη occurs three times in the Greek text, which is longer than the Ethiopic text); T. Levi 4:4; T. Sim. 6:6; T. Iss. 5:5, 8; Vit. Proph. 1:5(8). Ordinarily, Hebrew and Aramaic do not make frequent use of the passive voice; the impersonal plural is often preferred. While the passivum divinum, the passive of divine activity (a term coined by Joachim Jeremias), occurs frequently in the canonical Gospels (see Matt 5:4, παρακληθήσονται, ‘they will be comforted,’ i.e., ‘God will comfort them’; cf. Matt 5:6, 7, 9; Mark 2:5; Luke 22:16), according to Jeremias (*Eucharistic Words*, 202), it occurs only rarely in rabbinic literature. Jeremias thought that the primary setting of the passivum divinum was apocalyptic (Joachim Jeremias, *Theology*, 9–14), which might explain why it occurs frequently in Revelation. However, Macholz (ZNW 81 [1990] 247–53) has shown that the use of the passive as a way of avoiding the mention of God as the subject of various actions is widely found in later strata of the OT (Gen 42:22, 28; Num 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:6, 10, 13, 16, 18, 26; 2 Kgs 18:30 = Isa 36:15; Ps 18:4 = 2 Sam 22:4; Ps 130:4; Dan 9:9; Neh 9:17) and in early Jewish literature as well (Sir 44:16, 18; 45:24; 46:8; 49:7). The so-called passivum divinum is also used in nonreligious contexts when referring to rulers and may well have its origin as a passivum regium.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, Page 15

αὐταῖς ἵνα μὴ ἀδικήσουσιν τὸν χόρτον τῆς γῆς οὐδὲ πᾶν χλωρὸν οὐδὲ πᾶν δένδρον, εἰ μὴ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους οἵτινες οὐκ ἔχουσιν τὴν σφραγίδα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων. They were told not to damage the grass of the earth or any green growth or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

They could not inflict any damage on τὸν χόρτον τῆς γῆς οὐδὲ πᾶν χλωρὸν οὐδὲ πᾶν δένδρον, the grass of the earth nor any green plants nor any tree.<sup>29</sup> Remember that in the first trumpet (8:7) τὸ τρίτον τῆς γῆς κατεκάη καὶ τὸ τρίτον τῶν δένδρων κατεκάη καὶ πᾶς χόρτος χλωρὸς κατεκάη, a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up. Here nothing has yet been harmed, although in the first trumpet a third of these things were destroyed.<sup>30</sup> But in 7:2-3 the angel forbid the four angels to damage the earth, the seas, and trees. Once again we are reminded that we are dealing with the symbolism of apocalyptic imagery. Nothing has to be presented either logically or chronologically! Each of these glimpses into the wrath of God inflicted temporally upon the earth seeks to make its own point, and not

vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 527–528.]

<sup>29</sup>“This prohibition prevents precisely the kind of activity for which locust plagues were justly infamous (Deut 28:38, 42; 1 Kgs 8:37; 2 Chr 6:28; 7:13; Pss 78:46; 105:34–35; Joel 1:4; 2:25; Amos 4:9; 7:2; Nah 3:15; Philo Mos. 1.123; Praem. 128). An eyewitness account of such a famine from A.D. 499–500 is found in W. Wright, *The Chronicle of Ps.-Joshua the Stylite* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1882) chap. 38:

In the month of Adar of this year the locusts came upon us out of the ground, so that, because of their number, we imagined that not only had the eggs that were in the ground been hatched to our harm, but that the very air was vomiting them against us, and that they were descending from the sky upon us. When they were only able to crawl, they devoured and consumed all the Arab territory and all that of Rasain and Tella and Edessa. But after they were able to fly, the stretch of their radii was from the border of Assyria to the Western sea [the Mediterranean] and they went northwards as far as the boundary of the Ortaye. They ate up and desolated these districts and utterly consumed everything that was in them.

“The last locust plague in Jerusalem occurred in June 1915, when millions of locusts obscured the sun and ate every green thing in the vicinity (Whiting, NGM 38 [1915] 511–50).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 529–530.]

<sup>30</sup>“The speaker is not identified, but the ancient reader would assume that it is God (or an angelic agent of God), using the *passivum divinum*, the passive of divine activity, indicating that the scope of divine punishment is limited. The protection of the grass of the earth, however, is inconsistent with 8:7, where all the grass was burned up (Charles, 1:220). This passage (taken with 9:4b) is closely parallel to that in 7:3, where the angels who restrain the four winds (7:1), and are also said to have been empowered to destroy the earth and the sea (7:3), are told not to harm the earth, sea, or trees.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 528.]

necessarily in detailed correlation with any of the other glimpses. The staccato impact of John’s depictions must not be overlooked.

The target of these ‘locust’ like critters’ stinging is to be all humanity not having the seal of God on their foreheads: εἰ μὴ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους οἵτινες οὐκ ἔχουσιν τὴν σφραγίδα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. This sealing goes back to the fifth seal in 6:9-11 and in 7:1-3 especially. These are the ‘not yet martyrs’ left on the earth whom God promises to protect from His temporal judgments being inflicted upon evil people on the earth. Here we see another signal of their divine protection while yet serving God on the earth.<sup>31</sup>

And even upon the ‘not sealed’ humanity limits are imposed: καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἵνα μὴ ἀποκτείνωσιν αὐτούς, ἀλλ’ ἵνα βασανισθῶσιν μῆνας πέντε, καὶ ὁ βασανισμὸς αὐτῶν ὡς βασανισμὸς σκορπίου ὅταν παῖση ἄνθρωπον, They were allowed to torture them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torture was like the torture of a scorpion when it stings someone.

With echoes of Job having had restrictions on the limits of his sufferings, these locusts could inflict torment on their victims only for five months and could not kill them. This sets up a more severe torture in the sixth trumpet that includes the slaughter of one-third of the people on the earth (9:15, 18).<sup>32</sup> The limit to μῆνας

<sup>31</sup>“εἰ μὴ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους οἵτινες οὐκ ἔχουσι τὴν σφραγίδα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων, ‘except those people who do not have the seal of God upon their foreheads.’ This refers the reader back to 7:2–8 and makes it explicit that the purpose of sealing is that of protection. The motif of protection is central in the sealing episode in Ezek 9:3–8, as it is in Pss. Sol. 15:4–9 (tr. Sparks, AOT), a passage that expands on Ezek 9 and contrasts the mark of God with the mark of destruction:

He who performs these things shall never be shaken by evil:  
The flame of fire and the wrath against the unrighteous shall not touch him,  
When it goes forth from before the Lord against sinners,  
To destroy all the substance of sinners;  
For the mark of God [τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ θεοῦ] is upon the righteous for salvation.  
Famine and sword and death [λιμὸς καὶ ῥομφαία καὶ θάνατος; cf. Rev 6:8] shall be far from the righteous,  
For they shall flee from the holy as men pursued in war;  
But they shall pursue sinners and overtake them,  
And those who act lawlessly shall not escape the judgment of the Lord:  
As by enemies skilled in war shall they be overtaken,  
For the mark of destruction [τὸ γὰρ σημεῖον τῆς ἀπωλείας] is upon their forehead [ἐπὶ τοῦ μετώπου αὐτῶν].

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 530.]

<sup>32</sup>“In Job 2:6, God allows Satan to afflict Job, but not to the extent of actually killing him (the same motif is also picked up in T. Job 4.4; 20.3). This restriction leads to the intensified punishment connected with the sixth trumpet, namely, the slaughter of one-third of the people of the earth (9:15, 18).” [David E. Aune, *Reve-*



πέντε, five months, of stinging their victims is apparently symbolic, although the normal life cycle of a locust is approximately five months.<sup>33</sup> That is, this period of punishment is limited and not open ended.

But this limited punishment was not light or insignificant: 5b καὶ ὁ βασανισμὸς αὐτῶν ὡς βασανισμὸς σκορπίου ὅταν παῖση ἄνθρωπον. 6 καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ζητήσουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸν θάνατον καὶ οὐ μὴ εὐρήσουσιν αὐτόν, καὶ ἐπιθυμήσουσιν ἀποθανεῖν καὶ φεύγει ὁ θάνατος ἀπ’ αὐτῶν, 5b and their torture was like the torture of a scorpion when it stings someone. 6 And in those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will flee from them. If you have ever been stung by a scorpion, you know well that this is not a light or insignificant pain.<sup>34</sup>

Verse six is structured in a doublet pattern with two synonymous parallel segments.<sup>35</sup> The significance

*lation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 530.]

<sup>33</sup>“The number ‘five’ here is apparently symbolic. The number five is frequently used in contexts in which it obviously functions as a round number meaning ‘a few’ (1 Cor 14:19, ‘five words’; Matt 17:17–19 = Mark 6:38–41 = Luke 19:13–16, ‘five loaves’; Luke 12:6, ‘five sparrows’; Luke 12:52, ‘five in one family’; Jdt 7:30; 8:9, 15; Acts 20:6; 24:1, ‘five days later’; Lev 26:8 [cf. Isa 30:17], ‘five of you shall chase a hundred’; cf. Judg 18:2, 7, 14, 17; 1 Sam 17:40; see Kittel, “Fünffzahl,” 39ff.; Str-B, 3:461–62; Hemer, NIDNTT 2:689–90). The five-month period may reflect the life cycle of the locust; i.e., they are hatched in the spring and die at the end of summer (Charles, 1:243). The specific limitation of the plague to five months, however, suggests the possible symbolic significance of that number; i.e., it is a round number meaning ‘a few’ and indicates a limited period of tribulation.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 530.]

<sup>34</sup>“καὶ ὁ βασανισμὸς αὐτῶν ὡς βασανισμὸς σκορίου ὅταν παῖση ἄνθρωπον, ‘(their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a person).’ Scorpions belong to the Arachnida class (with spiders, ticks, and mites), and the sting they use to kill the insects on which they feed is very painful, though rarely fatal, to humans. Scorpions were common in the southern and eastern theaters of the Mediterranean world (particularly in the regions of the Nile and Mesopotamia), but they were also found in Greek areas (particularly Crete). In these regions scorpion amulets were popular apotropaic devices to ward off scorpions and other poisonous and painful insects, spiders, and snakes (Eitrem, SO 7 [1928] 70–73). Scorpions are one of nine instruments of destruction that God created to punish the wicked, according to Sir 39:30. Scorpions are a metaphor for punishment in 1 Kgs 12:11, 14 (cf. 2 Chr 10:11, 14). A boundary stone of Nebuchadrezzar I (twelfth century B.C.) depicts a scorpion-man with a bow and arrow (ISBE, rev. ed., 4:358).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 530–531.]

<sup>35</sup>“V 6 (here divided into 6a and 6b) consists of two parallel couplets, and each couplet is an instance of antithetical parallelism. The entire verse is either a short digression or an interpolation made by the author for the second edition of Revelation. V 6 is also distinguished from the context by the presence of three verbs in the future tense (the only other verbs in the future tense in 8:1–9:21

of this is emphasis with a double stress on the same essential point.

καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ζητήσουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸν θάνατον καὶ οὐ μὴ εὐρήσουσιν αὐτόν,<sup>36</sup>  
καὶ ἐπιθυμήσουσιν ἀποθανεῖν καὶ φεύγει ὁ θάνατος ἀπ’ αὐτῶν.<sup>37</sup>

And in those days people will seek death but will not find it;

they will long to die, but death will flee from them.

Although parallel expressions of such intense despair are found elsewhere, John here affirms the severity of the punishments inflicted by these locusts with scorpion tails singing people. Their ‘torture’ (ὁ βασανισμὸς, v. 5) from these critters will push them to the limits of endurance so that death will become more desirable than life. But death will not come from this βασανισμὸς.

John’s depiction thus far of their origin and work on earth is frightening enough. But he now provides a very detailed description of these creatures in vv. 7–11 that heightens significantly the dread and negative image of these locusts.

## 2) Their appearance is hideous, vv. 7–11

7 καὶ τὰ ὁμοιώματα τῶν ἀκρίδων ὅμοια

are the two future subjunctives in vv 4 and 5).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 531.]

<sup>36</sup>“A similar description of despair appears in Apoc. El. [P. Chester Beatty 2018] 9.1–7 (tr. Pietersma): ‘They will desire death but death will flee from them. They will climb onto rocks and jump down on them, and say, ‘Fall on us!’ And they will not die but death runs away from them’ (the last sentence is closely parallel to Rev 6:16). In his eyewitness report of the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79, Pliny the Younger reports that in the ensuing panic ‘People bewailed their own fate or that of their relatives, and there were some who prayed for death in their terror of dying’ (Ep. 6.20.14; LCL tr.; see Comments on 8:8–12).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 531.]

<sup>37</sup>This is an ancient commonplace that occurs in Judaism (Job 3:21; Sib. Or. 2.307–8; 8.353; 13.118; Apoc. El. 2:5, 32) as well as in Greco-Roman literature, e.g., Ovid Ibis 123–24, ‘May you have cause enough for death but no means of dying; may your life be forced to avoid the death it longs for’ (cf. Seneca Troad. 954; Cornelius Gallus Eleg. 1; Sophocles Electra 1007–8). The preference of death over life, in the apocalyptic context of a variety of reversals that will characterize the end, occurs in Asclepius 25 of the Corpus Hermeticum (Nock-Festugière, Herm.ès Trismégiste, 329): ‘Darkness will be preferred to light and death will be preferred to life [et mors vita utilior iudicabitur]’ (cf. the Coptic version in Asclepius 72.18 in J. M. Robinson, Nag Hammadi, 304). The desirability of death is discussed in Plato Apol. 40c, and some Greek writers (using a theme from consolation literature) refer to death as preferable to the troubles and suffering of life (Aeschylus Prom. 747–51; Sophocles Antig. 463–64; see Moran, Consolations, 31–39, and ).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 531.]

ἵπποις ἡτοιμασμένοις εἰς πόλεμον, καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν ὡς στέφανοι ὅμοιοι χρυσοῦ, καὶ τὰ πρόσωπα αὐτῶν ὡς πρόσωπα ἀνθρώπων, 8 καὶ εἶχον τρίχας ὡς τρίχας γυναικῶν, καὶ οἱ ὀδόντες αὐτῶν ὡς λεόντων ἦσαν, 9 καὶ εἶχον θώρακας ὡς θώρακας σιδηροῦς, καὶ ἡ φωνὴ τῶν πτερύγων αὐτῶν ὡς φωνὴ ἀρμάτων ἵππων πολλῶν τρεχόντων εἰς πόλεμον, 10 καὶ ἔχουσιν οὐράς ὁμοίας σκορπίοις καὶ κέντρα, καὶ ἐν ταῖς οὐραῖς αὐτῶν ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτῶν ἀδικῆσαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους μῆνας πέντε, 11 ἔχουσιν ἐπ’ αὐτῶν βασιλέα τὸν ἄγγελον τῆς ἀβύσσου, ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἑβραϊστὶ Ἀβαδδὼν, καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἑλληνικῇ ὄνομα ἔχει Ἀπολλύων.

7 In appearance the locusts were like horses equipped for battle. On their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, 8 their hair like women’s hair, and their teeth like lions’ teeth; 9 they had scales like iron breastplates, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. 10 They have tails like scorpions, with stingers, and in their tails is their power to harm people for five months. 11 They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon,<sup>38</sup> and in Greek he is called Apollyon.<sup>39</sup>

Who are these critters that cause so much torture on earth? Verses seven through eleven provide a depiction of them that may cause you to not want an answer to this question!



The introductory statement sets up the description, which incidentally is one single sentence in vv. 7-11: Καὶ τὰ ὁμοιώματα τῶν ἀκρίδων ὅμοια, **and the appearance of the locusts is like**. The use of noun ὁμοίωμα in the plural with the adjective ὅμοιος, -οία, -οιον in the neuter plural (the verb of being is implicit in this main clause) creates the emphatic idea **resemblance ... resembles**.

<sup>38</sup>That is, *Destruction*.

<sup>39</sup>That is, *Destroyer*.

The root stem word for both is ὅμος with the meaning of ‘common.’ That is, these locusts possess things in common with a wide variety of earthly creatures. These then are listed point by point. These ten traits are structured in two sections: traits a - g are periodically asserted using the imperfect verb plural εἶχον, they were having (vv. 8,9) and then, in traits h - j, the present verb plural ἔχουσιν, they have (vv. 10, 11). This signals in the second section traits used to do their injury to men on earth. The sequence of outward appearance begins with the body (a), moves to **the head** (b), with face (c), hair (d), and teeth (e). It returns to **the body** with external scales (f). Inserted in (g) is the sound they make with **their wings**. Finally **their tails** are compared to scorpions in (h) and (j). Lastly, their ruler in the abyss is identified (j).

Quite interesting is the dilemma that graphic artists face in trying to pull all of the traits into a single picture. Virtually none are able to succeed with getting all the traits together. Most will highlight one trait over the others. Using one of the better ones above, I will illustrate this under the exegesis of each trait.

**Καὶ τὰ ὁμοιώματα τῶν ἀκρίδων ὅμοια:**



a) ἵπποις ἡτοιμασμένοις εἰς πόλεμον, **horses prepared for war**. The comparison here of a swarm of locusts to a large military calvary reaches back to passages such as Jeremiah 51:27.<sup>40</sup> The devastation of invading armies on crops etc. lends itself to comparisons to swarms of locusts.<sup>41</sup> The potential for destruction here

<sup>40</sup>Jer. 51:27. (LXX 28:17) Ἄρατε σημεῖον ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, σαλπίζετε ἐν ἔθνεσιν σάλπιγγι, ἀγιάσατε ἐπ’ αὐτὴν ἔθνη, παραγγείλατε ἐπ’ αὐτὴν βασιλείαις Ἀραρατ παρ’ ἐμοῦ καὶ τοῖς Ἀσχαναζαίοις, ἐπιστήσατε ἐπ’ αὐτὴν βελοστάσεις, ἀναβιάσατε ἐπ’ αὐτὴν ἵππων ὡς ἀκρίδων πληθος.†

Raise a standard in the land, 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**.

<sup>41</sup>“On the image of horses arrayed for battle, see v 9a. Horses are specifically compared to ‘bristling locusts’ in Jer 51:27; im-

is highlighted.

b) **καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν ὡς στέφανοι ὄμοιοι χρυσοῦ,** and upon their heads something like crowns resembling gold. Here the depiction shifts to the head



with first a 'golden wreath' on it.<sup>42</sup> With the στέφανος as a symbol of victory, and it resembling gold, ὄμοιοι χρυσοῦ, John here appears to present the idea of invincibility by these creatures. This has similarities to

explicit is the comparison of a large cavalry and a locust plague. An invading enemy could devastate the crops and livestock and could therefore readily be compared to a plague of locusts (Judg 6:5; 7:12; Jer 15:27). Using locust imagery, an author can describe such an enemy cavalry as 'covering the land' (T. Mos. 3:1) and as 'devouring the land and all that fills it' (Jer 8:16), or a vast enemy army is compared in number to locusts (Judg 6:5; 7:12; Jer 46:23; 51:14; Joel 1–2; Amos 4:9; Nah 3:15–17; Jdt 2:20; Jos. J. W. 4.536; J. A. Thompson, JNES 14 [1955] 52–55; Andriach, VT 42 [1992] 438–39).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 531–532.]

<sup>42</sup>“Though the author has begun by describing the demonic beings that emerge from the shaft of the abyss as locusts (9:3a), in vv 7–9 they are described first in theriomorphic terms (i.e., they look like warhorses, v 7a), then in anthropomorphic terms (i.e., they wear something like gold wreaths on their heads, v 7b; their faces look human, v 7b; and they have disheveled hair, v 8a), after which the author resorts again to theriomorphic imagery in that they are described as having teeth like lions (v 8b). The mention of gold wreaths is a simile that may imply that the demon-locust horde is invincible.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 532.]

the rider on the white horse in the first seal (6:2), and the golden crown worn by the Son of Man in 14:14. John only compares what these locusts have on their head to a golden wreath, rather than asserts having one in the other two references. This becomes his way of underscoring the limited authority and limited time of 'victory' by these creatures.

c) **καὶ τὰ πρόσωπα αὐτῶν ὡς πρόσωπα ἀνθρώπων,** and their faces like men's faces. The faces of these crea-



tures resemble those of men. The human faces give them a look of reality that would have been present with an army invading and conquering a territory.

d) **καὶ εἶχον τρίχας ὡς τρίχας γυναικῶν,** and they were possessing hairs like women's hairs. The comparison to a woman's hair seems to point to the kind of hair often seen on a prostitute in the ancient world. In a long and disheveled condition it signaled uncleanness. Somewhat similar depictions surface in some of the Jewish apocalypses.<sup>43</sup> This long hair signaled re-

<sup>43</sup>“This probably means that their hair was long and possibly disheveled. Disheveled hair had several meanings in the OT: (1) as a sign of uncleanness for people with leprosy (Lev 13:45), (2) as a sign of mourning (Lev 10:6; 21:10), and (3) as part of the sacrificial protocol for a woman accused of adultery (Num 5:18). One of the demons who reportedly appeared before Solomon had disheveled hair (T. Sol. 13:1). Occasionally, the Jewish demon lilith is depicted with loose, disheveled hair in crude pictures on Aramaic incantation bowls (see Montgomery, Aramaic, 190). Apoc. Zeph. 4:4 describes the loose hair of the ugly angels who carry off the souls of the wicked and cast them into eternal punishment as similar to the hair of women. Similarly, in Apoc. Zeph. 6:8, the hair of the Accuser (i.e., Satan) is described: 'His hair was spread out like women's.' While both men and women could have long hair in the ancient world, in the Greek world both sexes could elaborately braid and bind their hair attractively (Blümner, Greeks, 64–77). Paul mentions that women normally have long hair (1 Cor 11:15; cf. Plutarch Quaest. Rom. 267B), which is perfectly appropriate, for in the first century A.D., women wore long hair and men had theirs cut (Plutarch Quaest. Rom. 267B). Paul also claims that it is degrading for men to wear their hair long (1 Cor 11:14; Ps.-Pho-



bellion and corruption as a fundamental trait of these creatures.

e) **καὶ οἱ ὀδόντες αὐτῶν ὡς λεόντων ἦσαν, and their teeth were like lions' teeth.** Here John describes their teeth as resembling the teeth of lions. Not only does Joel 1:6 stand in the background here, but lions' teeth were proverbially used in the ancient world to describe irresistible and fatal destruction.<sup>44</sup> The point is to

cylides 212). Jewish men could wear their hair long in fulfillment of the Nazirite vow (Num 6:1–12; Judg 13:5; 16:17; 1 Sam 1:11; Acts 18:18). Long hair was often regarded by the Greeks as a sign of effeminacy in a male (H. Herter, “Effeminatus,” RAC 4:629) or moral laxity in a female (Ps.-Phocylides 212). Fashions change, however, for Greek men once favored long hair (Herodotus 1.82; Plutarch Lysander 1; cf. Plato Phaedo 89B–C) though by the fifth century B.C., only Spartan men wore their hair long (Aristophanes Aves 1281–82; Philostratus Vita Apoll. 8.7). The Romans wore their hair long until the third century B.C., after which they considered long hair either barbaric or old fashioned (Juvenal 5.30). The Gauls wore their hair long, and as a result northern Gaul was called Gallia Comata, “long-haired Gaul.” Apollonius of Tyana, following the practice of philosophers, wore his hair disheveled (Philostratus Vita Apoll. 8.7). Parthian warriors wore their hair long (Plutarch Crassus 24.2), and many interpreters have understood the demonic locust army as mytho-poetic imagery for the Parthian threat (see Excursus 16A: Rome and Parthia).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 532.]

<sup>44</sup>“Like the teeth of a lion’ is a proverbial expression for something irresistibly and fatally destructive (Sir 21:2–3; cf. Job 4:10). This is an allusion to Joel 1:6, in which it is said that the nation invading Israel ‘has the teeth of a lion.’ In Ps 57:4 the psalmist compares his enemies with man-eating lions with teeth like spears and arrows (see Ps 58:6). The mention of teeth like lions apparently has nothing to do with how the demonic locusts harm people, which they explicitly are said to do with the scorpion-like tails (v 10).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical

stress the destructive capability of these locusts, rather to emphasize a means of destruction which instead was done with their scorpion like tails.

f) **καὶ εἶχον θώρακας ὡς θώρακας σιδηροῦς, and they were having scales like iron scales.** Although the



noun θώραξ can refer to the throat area of a locust with a protective covering, the military orientation of the usage here points more to the breastplates worn by soldiers in battle to protect the chest area of the body.<sup>45</sup> Given the nature of the depiction here, there may be an allusion to the mounted archers in the Parthian army that gave Rome one of its worst defeats in the first Christian century.

g) **καὶ ἡ φωνὴ τῶν πτερύγων αὐτῶν ὡς φωνὴ ἄρμάτων ἵππων πολλῶν τρεχόντων εἰς πόλεμον, and the noise of their wings were like a noise of chariots with many horses running into war.**

The sound made by this swarm of locusts with their wings was indeed terrifying and compared to the sound of running horses pulling chariots into battle. Again Joel 2:4–9 stand in the background here.<sup>46</sup> The psychologi-

Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 532–533.]

<sup>45</sup>“καὶ εἶχον θώρακας ὡς θώρακας σιδηροῦς, ‘They had thoraxes like iron breastplates.’ The Tg. Nah. 3:17 expands the Hebrew phrase מנור כארבה מנור *minnēzārāyik kā.arbeh*, ‘Your princes [?] are like grasshoppers,’ from Nah 3:17, to the Aramaic phrase כגובה מצלהב *hā. tassak mēšalhēbīn kēgōbā*, ‘Behold, your plates [?] gleam like the locust,’ comparing the ‘scaled armour of the Assyrian warriors and the scaled thoraces of the locusts’ (Gordon, VT 33 [1983] 338–39). Since Rev 9:7 compares locusts with horses, ‘the protective armour [προστερνίδιον] of the warhorse’ could be the meaning of the phrase in Rev 9:9, ‘breastplates like breastplates of iron.’ In ancient warfare, the *kataphracts* (ἢ κατάφρακτος ἵππος, ἵπποι κατάφρακτοι or simply οἱ κατάφρακτοι [Plutarch Crassus 21.6; 24.1–2; 25.4; Polybius 30.25.9; Athenaeus Deipn. 5.194–95) were heavily armored cavalry (both horse and rider) particularly favored by the Parthians, whose archers and armored cavalry caused the disastrous defeat of the Romans under Crassus at Carrhae in Mesopotamia in 54 B.C. (Ziegler, Parth., 32–34). For a discussion of possible allusions to the Parthians in Revelation, see Excursus 16A: Rome and Parthia.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 533.]

<sup>46</sup>“Joel 2:4–9 compares a swarm of locusts with a marauding army, and it is clear that John modeled 9:7–10 on this passage. According to Joel 2:4–5a, ‘Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, / and like warhorses they run. / As with the rumbling of chariots [LXX φωνὴ ἄρμάτων], / they leap on the tops of the mountains’ (RSV). 4 Kgdms 7:6, referring to the divine intervention that frustrates the Syrian king Ben-hadad’s siege of Sa-

cal impact of this would have been intense.

**h) καὶ ἔχουσιν οὐράς ὁμοίας σκορπίους καὶ κέντρα, and they have tails like scorpions and stingers.**

Here John returns to the first section where the tails of scorpions as their weapon of injury is first mentioned



(v. 5) and labeled the authority of the scorpion (v. 3). The shape of the tails resembled those of scorpions (οὐράς ὁμοίας σκορπίους) is important, but the main point comes with καὶ κέντρα, and stingers. It is with these attached to the end of the tail that the scorpions do their damage. And thus the locusts with similar shaped tails follow the same pattern.

**i) καὶ ἐν ταῖς οὐραῖς αὐτῶν ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτῶν ἀδικῆσαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους μῆνας πέντε, and in their tails is the authorization to them to injure men five months.**

Here John continues his emphasis upon the tails of the locusts, but moves toward emphasizing the limited authority of the locusts to do harm to mankind on the earth. Clearly their ability to harm is centered in their tails, rather than any other part of their body: ἐν ταῖς οὐραῖς αὐτῶν ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτῶν ἀδικῆσαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Their authorization to harm only men is here repeating what has already been mentioned in verse five. The limitation of that authorization to just five months also echoes verse five. John's repetition here in v. 10 calls attention to the capacity of these locusts to harm, not vegetation which normally locusts did, but human beings directly, which was not typical with swarms of locusts in the ancient world. This highlights again their divine appointed mission during this five month period.

**j) ἔχουσιν ἐπ' αὐτῶν βασιλέα τὸν ἄγγελον τῆς ἀβύσσου, ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἑβραϊστὶ Ἀβαδδῶν, καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἑλληνικῇ ὄνομα ἔχει Ἀπολλύων, they have over them a king, the angel of the abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he has the name Apollyon.**

Here John continues an emphasis upon the nature of these apocalyptic locusts in contrast to regular locusts. Once more (cf. v. 3) their place of origin is given as τῆς ἀβύσσου, the abyss. But this time the stress is upon maria, mentions the φωνὴν ἄρματος καὶ φωνὴν ἵππου καὶ φωνὴν δυνάμεως μεγάλης, 'the sound of chariot and the sound of a cavalry and the sound of a great force.' Swete (119) cites a parallel to ἀρμάτων ἵππων in 3 Kgdms 12:24b (part of an extensive Greek interpolation), ἦσαν αὐτῷ ἄρματα τριακόσια ἵππων, 'he had three hundred chariots with teams.'" [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 533.]

who exercises control over them while in this bottomless pit: ἔχουσιν ἐπ' αὐτῶν βασιλέα, they have over them a king. This ruler is then identified two ways: first as τὸν ἄγγελον τῆς ἀβύσσου, the angel of the abyss, and second by name, ὄνομα αὐτῷ. Interestingly, the name is given both in Hebrew, Ἑβραϊστὶ,<sup>47</sup> as Ἀβαδδῶν, Abaddon, and then in Greek, καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἑλληνικῇ ὄνομα ἔχει, as Ἀπολλύων, Apollyon.

That this creature functions as a βασιλέα, king / ruler, signals possession of power. Most of the references to a βασιλεύς inside Revelation are typical of 1:5 τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς, kings of the earth, referencing earthly rulers (cf. 1:5; 6:15; 10:11; 15:3; 16:12, 14; 17:2, 9, 12, 18; 18:3, 9; 19:18, 19, 21:24). That Christ has superior authority is clear from 1:5, ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς, the ruler of the kings of the earth; 17:14, ὅτι κύριος κυρίων ἐστὶν καὶ βασιλεύς βασιλέων, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings; 19:16, Βασιλεύς βασιλέων καὶ κύριος κυρίων, King of kings and Lord of lords. But this creature reigns not on the earth but over τῆς ἀβύσσου, the abyss, that is below the earth.

He is also identified as τὸν ἄγγελον τῆς ἀβύσσου, the angel over the abyss. The primary significance of ἄγγελος is to specify this creature as a supernatural being, rather than some earthly ruler. One of the main secular Greek definitions of ἄγγελος is as a spirit being who belongs to another world other than the material one. Is this a reference to Satan? Although a popular understanding, the reality is that Satan is described

<sup>47</sup>“The adverb Ἑβραϊ—στί, ‘in Hebrew,’ first occurs in the Greek translation of Sirach (praef.); in Revelation it occurs only here and in 16:16, and elsewhere in the NT only in the Fourth Gospel (John 5:2; 19:13, 17, 20; 20:6). The term occurs five times in other literary contexts in the first century A.D. (Ant. 10.8[2x]; 11.159; Heron Mech. De mens. 60.4; 61.4), and thereafter with increasing frequency (Herodian Partitiones 7.3; 31.5; Acts of Paul 5.13; Theophilus Ad Autolyicum 2.24; 3.19; Origen Contra Celsum 6.32; Comm. in Joan. 13.26.161; Ep. ad Afric. 11.61, 80). In a Greek letter from the Bar Kosiba period found in the “Cave of Letters” in Nahal Hever, the author says that he has written in Greek (Ἑλληνεστί) rather than in Hebrew (Ἑβραϊ—στί) for a reason that remains unclear because of a gap in the text (see B. Lifshitz, “Papyrus grecs du désert de Juda,” *Aegyptus* 42 [1962] 240, no. 1; SB 8 [1967] no. 9843; G. Howard and J. C. Shelton, “The Bar-Kochba Letters and Palestinian Greek,” *IEJ* 23 [1973] 101). Here the term means ‘in Hebrew,’ though it is also used for ‘in Aramaic’ (Ant. 10.8). In Greek texts, terms such as Αἰγυπτιστί, Ἑλληνιστί, Ἀβραϊ—στί, and Ἑβραϊ—στί are used particularly for distinguishing among Egyptian, Greek, and Hebrew names for the gods (Herodotus 2.46, 79, 156; Plato Tim. 21E; Plutarch De Iside 375F), and in magical texts there is a concern to write or chant the spell or the divine name in the proper language (PGM V.475; XIII.82, 84, 594, 596, 975–96; Daniel-Malomini, *Supplementum Magicum* II.70, 1–2 [comments]).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 533–534.]

very differently in Revelation than this. He is a dragon and a serpent in 12:9 and 20:2. In 12:9, he is ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας, ὁ ὄφης ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην, *the great dragon, the ancient serpent who is called Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the entire world*. Similarly in 20:2 he is τὸν δράκοντα, ὁ ὄφης ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὅς ἐστιν Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, *the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan*.

The phrase τὸν ἄγγελον τῆς ἀβύσσου, *angel of the abyss*, is only mentioned this one time in all of Revelation.<sup>48</sup> Further complicating the identity of τὸν ἄγγελον τῆς ἀβύσσου is the Hebrew name given by John (ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἐβραϊστί) to him, Ἀβαδδὼν. In Hebrew this is a place designation rather than a personal name.<sup>49</sup> Being

<sup>48</sup>“Though the star that had fallen from heaven mentioned in v 1 must be understood as an angel (cf. 20:1), it should not be identified with this particular angel. This angel is named only here in Revelation, and elsewhere in the OT and early Jewish literature is mentioned only in 4Q280 10 ii 7: אַבְדֹן מְלִיכָא דְאַבְדֹן [אבדון מלך] *[Cursed be you Angel] I of the Pit, and Spir[it of Aba]ddon*’ (Kobelski, *Melchizedek*, 43–44). While in 4Q280 and related texts these two titles are alternate ways of describing Belial, in Revelation it is not at all clear that the angel of the abyss is a designation for Satan, for he is carefully named elsewhere with a selection of aliases in two different contexts (12:9; 20:2), and neither Abaddon nor the angel of the abyss is mentioned again. The fact that ἄγγελον is articular here, however, suggests that the author expected the readers to be familiar with this figure, i.e., that the angel of the abyss is none other than Satan-Belial. Mart. Isa. 10:9 (tr. Charlesworth, OTP 2:173) refers to the descent of Christ ‘as far as the angel who (is) in Sheol, but you shall not go as far as Perdition [i.e., the final place of punishment].’ Abaddon (אֲבַדְדֹן, *ābaddōn*) is a Hebrew term for the kingdom of the dead (Prov 15:11; Job 26:6; 28:22; 31:12; Ps 88:12), used as a poetic parallel to Sheol (Job 26:6; Prov 15:11; 27:20; IQH 3:16–19), death (Job 28:22), the grave (Ps 88:11[MT 88:12]), and the abyss (4Q504 = 4QDibHama 7:8). Abaddon is personified as the place of destruction in Job 26:6; 28:22, and the conception of Abaddon as an angel appears to have originated as such a personification of the place of the dead (Olyan, *Thousands*, 74–75). Thus far Abaddon is known to occur in just one Aramaic text, Tg. Job (4Q157 or 11QtgJob) 31:12 (van der Ploeg and van der Woude, *Le Targum de Job*, 46–47; Beyer, *Texte*, 290, 504). In the LXX the Hebrew word אֲבַדְדֹן, *ābaddōn* is often translated ἀπόλεια, ‘destruction’ (Prov 15:11; Ps 87:12; Theod Job 26:6; 28:22). Similarly, the eschatological antagonist is called ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας, ‘the son of destruction’ (2 Thess 2:3), while the term ‘son of destruction’ is also used of those destined for destruction (John 17:12; Acts of Paul 1:1).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 534.]

<sup>49</sup>“In NT found only in Rev. 9:11. The name of an angel of the underworld, of the king of the scorpion centaurs who will plague men in the last days. The name is rendered → Ἀπολλύων ‘the Destroyer’ in Greek. It is part of the cryptic style of the Apocalypticist to use the Hebrew name in the Greek text.

The name is taken from the OT. In Job 26:6; 28:22; Prv. 15:11 and Ps. 88:12 אֲבַדְדֹן (the “place of destruction”, from אֲבַד) is used to describe the world of the dead (→ ἄδης);<sup>1</sup> LXX ἀπόλεια. The per-

sonification of אֲבַדְדֹן, found in Job 28:22, where אֲבַדְדֹן and תַּנְיָן are introduced as speakers, has given rise to the notion of an angel of hell who in Rev. 9:11 is identified with the prince of the underworld (Eth. En., 20, 2; Apc. Elias, Steindorff, 10, 7 ff.; 2 b. Sanh. 52a; b. Shab. 104a; b. Ar. 15b).<sup>3</sup>

the only use of Ἀβαδδὼν here in the entire NT, it is not possible to compare this use to other references inside the NT for an early Christian perspective.

In Job 28:22, מִטְבַּח is personified to speak as the angel of death:

ἡ ἀπόλεια καὶ ὁ θάνατος εἶπαν, Ἀκηκόαμεν δὲ αὐτῆς τὸ κλέος.

Abaddon and Death say, ‘We have heard a rumor of it with our ears.’

The Hebrew word Ἀβαδδὼν, spelled here in Greek but from the Hebrew מִטְבַּח, literally means place of destruction.<sup>50</sup> The Hebrew references in the OT are normally translated in the LXX as ἀπόλεια, and not as Ἀβαδδὼν. Plus ἄδης, *Hades*, taken from ἀπόλεια, translates the Hebrew לִיקְוֹ, *Sheol*, in Job 26:6 (LXX Theod. txt) and Prov. 15:11.

Additionally John provides what he terms as the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Ἀβαδδὼν as Ἀπολλύων, *Apollyon*. The absolutely intriguing aspect here is the Roman background. Ἀπολλύων is built off of the verb ἀπολλύναι (to destroy), and Ἀπολλύων is linked to the Greek god Apollo.<sup>51</sup> The Roman emper-

sonification of אֲבַדְדֹן, found in Job 28:22, where אֲבַדְדֹן and תַּנְיָן are introduced as speakers, has given rise to the notion of an angel of hell who in Rev. 9:11 is identified with the prince of the underworld (Eth. En., 20, 2; Apc. Elias, Steindorff, 10, 7 ff.; 2 b. Sanh. 52a; b. Shab. 104a; b. Ar. 15b).<sup>3</sup>

The Greek rendering of the name as Ἀπολλύων is influenced 1. by the LXX ἀπόλεια and 2. by the thought of Apollyon in his quality as the God of plague and the destroying angel; already in Aesch. Ag., 1082 the name of the God is derived from ἀπόλλυμι.

[Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 1:4.]

<sup>50</sup>Ἀβαδδὼν, ὁ indecl. (אֲבַדְדֹן Pr 15:11; Ps 87:12; Theod. Job 26:6; 28:22=ἀπόλεια LXX) Abaddon, name of the ruling angel in hell **Rev 9:11**, explained as Ἀπολλύων Destroyer (cp. אֲבַדְדֹן). This name for the ἄγγελος τῆς ἀβύσσου and its transl. are based on the OT passages above, in which ἀπόλεια is parallel to ἄδης=לִיקְוֹ Job 26:6 Theod.; Pr 15:11 and to τάφος Ps 87:12. In Theod. Job 28:22 it is personified, together with θάνατος; cp. the derivation of Apollo, source of plagues, from ἀπόλλυμι.—TW.

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1.]

<sup>51</sup>“The name ‘Apollyon’ is a formation from the Greek verb ἀπολλύναι, ‘to destroy,’ and means ‘destroyer.’ In Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 1080–82, the name of the god Apollo is etymologically linked to the verb ἀπολλύναι, which appears to reflect a widespread ancient view (see Euripides *Phaethon* [frag. 781, lines 11–12]; Archilochus frag. 30D; Plato *Cratylus* 404D–E, 405E; Menander *Peric.* 440; Macrobius 1.17.9; see Fraenkel, *Aeschylus* 3:492). It is possible that an allusion to Nero is intended, for Nero, identified with Belial in some early Jewish literature, claimed a special relationship to Apollo (see Bell, *NTS* 25 [1978] 98–99). Commodian, a late third-century Christian poet, used the name Apollyon for the king of the Goths who had crossed the Danube and whose invasion

or Nero claimed a special relationship with Apollo and was also identified with Belial, a Hebrew equivalent to Ἀπολλύων, in several Jewish texts.<sup>52</sup> That John intended this as an allusion to Nero is doubtful, but could have easily been taken this way in early Christian circles.

Perhaps with some more credibility is the LXX translation in Amos 7:1 that portrays the invading Assyrian army as a swarm of locusts under the leadership of one locust named Gog. This picks upon the Gog and Magog tradition in Ezekiel 38-39, which Revelation 20:8 uses and there Satan is the leader of Gog and Magog.<sup>53</sup> But such a link remains very uncertain.

The better option is to see this ἄγγελος τῆς ἀβύσσου in 9:11 as a supernatural being whose intention is destruction and the ruin of everything under his control. That he is Satan is highly doubtful, but his nature and orientation is clearly compatible with Satan.

Wow! These locusts are some kind of critters! Obviously from John's description they are expressions of supernatural powers that are used to pour out the wrath of God upon the earth. What seems to be in the background of this depiction at least partially is the description of a devastating swarm of locusts in the coming Day of the Lord in Joel chapters one and two.<sup>54</sup>

had stopped the persecution of Christians by the emperor Decius (Carmen apologeticum 810-11; Martin, Commodiani Carmina, 102-3).” [[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 535.]

<sup>52</sup>“Many commentators have seen in the name Apollyon a reference to the god Apollo, who may sometimes have been symbolized by a locust.<sup>80</sup> Apollo's name originated from the same Greek word that is behind Apollyon (ἀπόλλυμι, ‘destroy,’ as in Aeschylus, Agamemnon 1082). If there is such an allusion in mind here, then the point might be to show that the devil himself is behind Domitian and all other rulers who claimed to be an incarnation of Apollo. Augustus enjoyed playing the role of Apollo in private dinner plays, and Romans sometimes referred to Apollo as the “Tormentor” (Suetonius, Augustus 70).<sup>81</sup>” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 503-504.]

<sup>53</sup>“Whether or not this is a good or evil angel is perhaps not immediately obvious. But the LXX of Amos 7:1 portrays the army coming to invade Israel as ‘a swarm of locusts coming from the east,’ which is led by ‘one caterpillar, king Gog.’ This associates the locusts with the Gog and Magog tradition of Ezekiel 38-39, which is developed in Rev. 20:8, where Satan is the leader of Gog and Magog. This background suggests that the similar figure in Rev. 9:11 is likewise satanic; although the figure here is a punishing angel, the repeated references to ‘angels of punishment’ in Jewish apocalyptic writings do not specify whether they are good or evil (e.g., 1 En. 53:3; 56:1; 62:11; 63:1; 65:6 may imply the satanic nature of these angels).” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 503.]

<sup>54</sup>“The portrayal in vv 7-9 is based on Joel 1-2, which de-

Just as God's temporal judgments came upon ancient Israel, they continue to be unleashed upon evil people and will be until the very end of time. Sometimes the blindness of evil people hides the reality that their sufferings are an expression of God's wrath with how they are living in this world. Occasionally, however, their torments becomes clear that they come from beyond the natural world with a supernatural origin. Unquestionably as human history moves into its final stage prior to the end, that outpouring of divine wrath will intensify dramatically.

## 2. What does the text mean to us today?

How should we apply this text to our lives today. It comes as both warning and promise from God. The warning aspect centers on the dramatically hideous creatures being used as instruments of divine wrath upon evil on the earth. John piles up threatening feature after another in order to stress the severity of God's wrath. This is not something to take lightly! The phenomena coming out of the sky in the first four trumpets impacting the created order of things is augmented now with the depiction of supernatural evil beings having authorization from God to impose harm and injury upon evil people. Both in the fifth trumpet here and the following sixth trumpet this theme will be hammered in by John with very graphic language.

The tendency of Hollywood to take these images and re-contextualize them into modern settings is perhaps one of the greatest mistakes of our time. Hollywood then trivializes them as harmless fantasy to entertain and not to warn. This becomes cultural suicide!

The promise aspect is the limitation of power placed on these destructive creatures. The true people of God on earth cannot and will not be harmed by them.

scribes a plague of locusts devastating Israel's land (whether the description there is literal<sup>66</sup> or figurative for an invading army<sup>67</sup> is not crucial for the present purposes). Just as here a trumpet has signaled the coming of the locusts (Rev. 9:1), so also in Joel 2 the locust judgment is introduced and concluded with ‘sound the trumpet’ (2:1, 15).

“This judgment in Joel is itself modeled on the plague of locusts in Exodus 10 (note the clear allusions in Joel 1:2 and 2:2 [Exod. 10:6, 14]; 1:3 [Exod. 10:2]; 2:9 [Exod. 10:6]; 2:27 [Exod. 10:2; 8:18, 22]). It is natural, therefore, that John uses Joel to supplement the description from Exodus already alluded to in vv 3-5. The locust plague came as a judgment because of the Egyptians' hardness of heart and was not intended to induce repentance (Exod. 10:1-2, 20). Neither Joel nor John departs from this intention; although in Joel it appears that repentance is the purpose in 2:18-30 because of coming blessing on the nation, nevertheless 2:31-32 reveals that only a remnant in Israel was to be saved in the future.”

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 499.]

This does not mean exemption from physical suffering, but it does mean no spiritual damage to our lives and relationship to God is possible at all from these creatures. Plus, at this stage their power to harm is for only a brief period. This wrath of God is not continuing endlessly.

Over all, the people of God can and should rejoice that God has thrown His protective arms around them and their eternal destiny is sealed and unchangeable. Though the world around them begins to implode in upon itself in destruction, God's people will transcend this with a certain destiny in heaven with God for all eternity.

Praise be to our God!

