

# Hellish Tormentors

Revelation 9:1–5

Our text this afternoon makes mention of the “bottomless pit.” This term apparently originated with William Tyndale, who used it in his 1534 translation of the New Testament. “The fyfte angell blewe and I sawe a stare fall from heven vnto the erth. And to him was geven the kaye of the bottomlesse pytt.”

A hundred-fifty years before Tyndale, in 1380, John Wycliffe had “the pit of deepness.” Rheims (1582) had “the pit of the bottomless depth.”

As noted in the NKJV, the Greek literally has “the shaft of the abyss,” a rendering used in several translations. The ESV has “the shaft of the bottomless pit.”

The word “shaft” calls to mind the work of coal miners. The deepest mine shaft I was able to discover is one in South Africa, which has a depth of 2991 meters—almost two miles underground. But that is still not *bottomless*. Bottomless means *without a bottom*. “Bottomless pit” is another word for hell. At the end of time those who reject Christ will be cast into the bottomless pit to be tormented night and day forever and ever.

The Greek word is ἄβυσσος (abyss, depth, underworld). The first time it occurs is in Genesis 1:2, which has “darkness was on the face of the deep (Heb. תְּהוֹמִים). In Revelation, the abyss is the furthest extreme from heaven. Genesis 49:25 says, “By the God of your father who will help you, and by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep [תְּהוֹמִים] that lies beneath.” Heaven above is furthest removed from the deep below. Heaven is the dwelling place of God where all the saints gather around the throne of the Lamb slain at the last day. The deep below is the dwelling place of Satan and his demons, who are in rebellion against God, together with all those who will not receive Christ as Lord and Savior. It is the place furthest removed from the comfortable presence of God. Those who do not want to worship Christ now will be confined to hell forever.

“The wicked shall be turned into hell [שְׁאוֹל], and all the nations [גוֹיִם] that forget God” (Ps. 9:17). “Nations” here are people associated by birth, not political subdivisions.

In Moses’ song in Exodus 15:5, speaking of the Egyptian armies that perished when the waters of the Red sea came crashing over them, we read, “The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone.” The armies of Pharaoh didn’t just sink into the depths of the Red Sea, they sank into the depths of hell.

I have three points this afternoon: (1) Coming out only by the permission of the Lord; (2) Thick as locusts; (3) Coming to torment, not to destroy. First,

## **1. Coming out only by the permission of the Lord**

“Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace” (9:1–2a).

Notice that the tormenters are let out of the bottomless pit. Who lets them out? The “star fallen from heaven to earth” is the devil. He is given the key to the bottomless pit, and he opens the door. But the one who gives him the key is Christ. In Revelation 1:18 we read, “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.” Christ has the keys of Hades (the temporary abode of the dead, which at the final day will be cast into the Lake of Fire, Rev. 21:8).

The key to the bottomless pit is “given”—that is, given by Christ’s authority. When the devil opens the shaft of the bottomless pit, smoke like the smoke of a great furnace billows out.

“And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit.”

Have you ever tried to warm yourself by a blazing campfire on a cold night. You position yourself next to the fire, warming yourself in the heat. Then the breeze changes, and suddenly the smoke is blowing right toward you. Breathing the particulate matter becomes uncomfortable, so you move to another side of the fire to avoid the smoke. No matter how hard you try, you cannot seem to get away from the smoke.

When the Lord cast the demons out of the demoniac of Gemara, they begged him not to command them to go to the abyss. “Jesus asked him, saying, ‘What is your name?’ And he said, ‘Legion,’ because many demons had entered him. And they begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss” (Luke 8:30–31). At the time of Augustus, a “legion” numbered about 6,000 soldiers, usually with approximately an equal number of auxiliary troops.<sup>1</sup>

“With the first Woe, the plagues become more intense.”<sup>2</sup> Here are hellish tormenters, coming out only by the permission of the Lord. This teaches that they can only act so far as they have permission, and can always be restrained and shut up again, at the good pleasure of the supreme Governor of the world.<sup>3</sup> Evil things happen to those who are in rebellion against God, and they happen with his permission.

John is “warning his readers that hell is about to break loose upon the Land of Israel; as with Tyre of old, the Abyss is being dredged up to cover the Land with its unclean spirits. Apostate Israel is to be cast out of God’s presence,

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<sup>1</sup> Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich lexicon, λεγιών (Logos Bible Software)

<sup>2</sup> David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, 244

<sup>3</sup> Benson commentary, Rev. 9:1

excommunicated from the Temple, and filled with demons. One of the central messages of Revelation is that the Church tabernacles in heaven; the corollary of this is that the false church tabernacles in hell.”<sup>4</sup>

Our Confession, summarizing Scripture, shows that those of mankind who are predestinated unto life, God saves in Christ, “*to the praise of his glorious grace.*” The rest of mankind God to pleased to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, “*to the praise of his glorious justice.*”<sup>5</sup> The salvation of the elect showcases God’s glorious *grace*; the damnation of the reprobate showcases God’s glorious *justice*. He is glorified in the ultimate disposition of every human person. Is it your heartfelt desire to glorify God and enjoy him forever?

Our second point is

## **2. Thick as locusts**

“Then out of the smoke *locusts* came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads” (Rev. 9:3–4).

“What all this means is exactly what Jesus prophesied during His earthly ministry: the Land which had received the benefits of His work and then rejected Him, would become glutted with demons from the Abyss. We should note here that the key is given to Satan, for it is God who sends the demons as a scourge upon His rebellious people.”<sup>6</sup>

In Matthew 12:41ff. Jesus had said,

“The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here. When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation.”

Chilton, summarizing Josephus’ historical account, explains what happened, and it is not pretty:

“Because of Israel’s rejection of the King of kings, the blessings they had received would turn into curses. Jerusalem had been ‘swept clean’ by Christ’s

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<sup>4</sup> Chilton

<sup>5</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 3, [https://opc.org/wcf.html#Chapter\\_03](https://opc.org/wcf.html#Chapter_03)

<sup>6</sup> Chilton, 245

ministry; now it would become “a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird” (18:2). The entire generation became increasingly demon-possessed; their progressive national insanity is apparent as one reads through the New Testament, and its horrifying final stages are depicted in the pages of Josephus’ *The Jewish War*: the loss of all ability to reason, the frenzied mobs attacking one another, the deluded multitudes following after the most transparently false prophets, the crazed and desperate chase after food, the mass murders, executions, and suicides, the fathers slaughtering their own families and the mothers eating their own children. Satan and the host of hell simply swarmed throughout the land of Israel and consumed the apostates.”<sup>7</sup>

Christ and Satan are in a struggle-to-the-death, both playing for keeps. The outcome is clear: Christ wins, but the struggle consumes those who reject Christ.

In the words of the apostle Peter, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith . . .” (1 Pet. 5:8).

How do we resist the devil? By putting on the whole armor of God, as Paul writes in Ephesians 6: “Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. . . . Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

Thank God for those words “that ye may be able”! Satan is not invincible. He is a defeated foe, and ordinary Christians can defeat him by the power of Christ.

### **3. Coming to torment, not to destroy**

Let’s take another look at verse 4: The locusts “were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.”

The first time we encounter locusts in the Bible is in Exodus 10: “Moses and Aaron came in to Pharaoh and said to him, ‘Thus says the Lord God of the Hebrews: “How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me. Or else, if you refuse to let My people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your territory. And they shall cover the face of the earth, so that no one will be able to see the earth; and they shall eat the residue of what is left, which remains to you from the hail, and they shall eat every

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<sup>7</sup> Chilton, 236

tree which grows up for you out of the field. They shall fill your houses, the houses of all your servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians—which neither your fathers nor your fathers’ fathers have seen, since the day that they were on the earth to this day.”””

What did the locusts do? They destroyed all the land—all the vegetation. But in the case of the judgment brought upon Israel in the Great Tribulation that was soon to take place, they were “commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.”

This is not the way locusts usually work! The demonic locusts would come for the specific purpose of tormenting the covenant breakers.

God doesn’t torment for no reason. Torment is an aspect of judgment and curse. God judges his enemies. The Bible clearly teaches God’s blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. This is both an Old Testament and New Testament teaching. It is seen in the blessings and curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. It is specified in the fifth commandment. It is summarized poetically in Psalm 1. It is repeated in Ephesians 6, as summarized in our Shorter Catechism,

“Q. 66. What is the reason annexed to the fifth commandment?

“A. The reason annexed to the fifth commandment is a promise of long life and prosperity (as far as it shall serve for God’s glory and their own good) to all such as keep this commandment.”

Torment is what the lake of fire is all about.

Rev. 14:10 – “The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be *tormented* with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb.”

Rev. 20:10 – “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be *tormented* day and night for ever and ever.”

We saw this this afternoon in Psalm 137.

“By flowing streams in Babylon, when we remembered Zion there, we sat down and we wept in grief; on willows there we hung our lyres. For there our captors called for songs, our cruel tormentors asked for mirth. They called for us to sing to them: ‘Come, sing us one of Zion’s songs!’ But how can we the LORD’s song sing, when we are in a foreign land? If I forget Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! O let my tongue to my palate cleave if I do not remember you, if I set not Jerusalem above my greatest, highest joy. Remember Edom’s sons, O LORD, who uttered in Jerusalem’s day, ‘O lay it bare, O lay it bare! Destroy down to the ground its base.’ O Babel’s daughter, doomed to die, blest be the one

repaying you. Blest he who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!”

Calvin comments: “It may seem to savor of cruelty, that [the Psalmist] should wish the tender and innocent infants to be dashed and mangled upon the stones, but he does not speak under the impulse of personal feeling, and only employs words which God had himself authorized, so that this is but the declaration of a just judgment, as when our Lord says, ‘With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again’ (Matt. 7:2).”<sup>8</sup>

As Babylon had cruelly tormented Israel, so now Babylon would get a taste of its own cruelty.

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). How much better to voluntarily submit to him, to receive him as Lord and Savior, to experience his blessing!

In a few moments we will sing “Jesus, the very thought of thee with sweetness fills my breast; but sweeter far thy face to see, and in thy presence rest. O Hope of every contrite heart, O Joy of all the meek, to those who fall, how kind thou art! How good to those who seek!”

Come to Christ, and experience his blessing eternally. Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> Calvin, Commentary on Ps. 137:8, spelling and formatting modernized