

When Hell Is Let Loose

Revelation 9

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A lot of people in America today believe that there is a real and literal heaven, but a very few believe in a real and literal hell. But Jesus spoke more about hell than any other person in the Bible. If you took all the references to hell and compiled them, and then you took the references that Jesus made, His would far outweigh all the references, because He doesn't want us to go there. God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

In chapter 9, we're going to literally see hell break loose on the earth.

Some people say, "Aw, there's no heaven. There's no hell. This earth is all there is; it is your heaven or hell. There is no afterlife." There is a bit of truth to that, because hell is going to come to earth. There will be full-force judgment to the wicked who are on the earth during this time of the tribulation.

To get us started on chapter 9, I want to back up one verse to Revelation 8:13. There actually is no break between chapters 8 and 9; it's one unit. It all flows in chronological order. In verse 13, John says, "I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, 'Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blast of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!'" Of those three angels that are yet to sound, which are the "woe, woe, woe" of the fifth, sixth and seventh trumpets, in this chapter we will look at two of the woes.

In chapter 8, we had the first four trumpets, and we saw the devastation on the earth—on the sea, in the rivers and in the heavens. But today we come to chapter 9, where we have two more trumpets, the fifth and the sixth trumpets. The seventh trumpet will be at the end of chapter 11.

But notice in chapter 8, verse 13, that there is a reference to "the inhabitants of the earth." That is not referring to everyone who lives on earth but to wicked people who live for earth. They are unbelievers, rejecters of God, haters of God, the unsaved, and they live for the world, the flesh and the devil. That's who the wrath is coming upon.

The Bible is absolutely clear that "God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ," 1 Thessalonians 5. So I believe the church will be "caught up" before this time on the earth, which is known as "the Day of the Lord" or "the Day of His fierce wrath" or "the Great tribulation." All hell will literally break loose upon the earth.

There are two main divisions in chapter 9. The first is the fifth trumpet or the first woe, where the army from the pit is mentioned, verses 1-12. In this section, there are four things I want you to note. The first is the unlocked pit, verses 1-2. The pit, or the "abyssos" is unlocked. John

said, "Then the fifth angel sounded." So this is the fifth trumpet and the first woe. "And I saw a star fallen from heaven..."—take note of that—"...to the earth. To him..."—so the star is personified; it's a person—"...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. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit."

Now remember that the book of Revelation is the grand central station of all Scripture; everything culminates in this book. So you draw from the Old and New Testaments, from all the Bible, to understand these passages.

First, notice the star that fell from heaven. What or who is this star that fell from heaven? I believe that this star is Satan. Notice verse 1 says, "To him was given the key to the bottomless pit."

You say, "Well, Pastor John, you tell us every week that we should take literally the things that we read in Revelation." But I said that unless it's a symbol. One of the indications of a symbol is that you have an inanimate object that is personified or given personality. So the personal pronoun "him" was used for the star. They use that pronoun for people—for a baseball star, a movie star or whatever it might be. This personal pronoun was used for the devil.

And the words "fallen from heaven" is actually used in the past tense, so it indicates something that happened in the past but is still true today. Even though it refers to the distant past—and you can read about that in Isaiah 14, in the classic passage where Satan is falling from heaven—we know that Satan still has access to the throne of God. He comes to the presence of God, and he can accuse us of our sins. He's called "the accuser of the brethren." And he accuses us day and night before the throne.

But we have a defense attorney, Jesus Christ. When Satan starts accusing me, I want Jesus Christ to defend me. Jesus says, "Father, they've trusted Me, they believe in Me, and they're my children." So He actually defends me in the court of heaven.

There will come a time, in Revelation 12:3-4, when Satan will fall from heaven again. That is when he is finally kicked out for the last time. So verse 1 can look back to the initial fall, and then verses 3-4 can look forward to a time in about the mid-tribulation period when Satan will be kicked out of heaven, when he will no longer have access to God. And because he is kicked out of heaven, he is furious and angry and brings hell to the earth.

Then notice, "To him was given the key." I believe that all through this chapter, the one, grand, central, mega theme is that God is in control. I'm glad He is. I'm glad that God sits on the throne, He's the one who holds the keys, He's the one who gives the key, He's the one who sets the time limits and He's the one who sets the parameters for this judgment. God is in control.

Now if I lived in this world today and didn't believe that God is in control, I would be distraught. But I'm so glad that Jesus sits on the throne. I believe that Jesus is the one who gave the devil the key to this bottomless pit.

In Revelation 1:18, Jesus said, "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." Jesus actually said that He holds the keys of hell and death. So Jesus gives to the devil the right and the opportunity to open this pit.

So we have a star, the key and the bottomless pit. What an interesting thing.

The Bible indicates that demons are fallen angels, and that there are some demons that are not allowed to roam the earth and tempt or bother people. They are so wicked, so fierce, so bad that they are locked up. They are waiting for the day of judgment. Satan is going to join them in another place of hell called "Gehenna" or "the lake of fire." But at this time, they are in this bottomless pit.

It's interesting when Jesus delivered the man of Gadara from his demons, which were called Legion, they actually said to Jesus, "Do not cast us into the pit." They didn't want to go to this place of incarceration. So He allowed them to go into the herd of swine or pigs, and the pigs ran violently down the hill and were drowned in the Sea of Galilee.

Jude 6 says, "And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for judgment of the great day." They are kept in chains waiting for judgment at the end of time.

In 2 Peter 2:4, Peter tells us that there are angels that are incarcerated in this prison. "For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment...." So these are wicked angels.

The word "bottomless pit" is the Greek word "abyssos," or we get our word "abyss" from it. So somewhere in the world is this deep shaft where God has incarcerated these demon spirits, which is a frightening thought. But thank God He holds the keys to it, so these demons can't come out to afflict people.

Try to imagine if we opened all the prisons and all the jails in all the United States, releasing all the violent criminals all at once. That's not so far from the truth right now. What are we thinking?!

Can you imagine Satan opening up the abyss, the abyssos, and these wicked demons come flying out? For five months they are given power to torture men and women on the earth. That's a frightening thought. But that is exactly what this passage is about: this pit that is opened.

It's demonic darkness, verse 2. As the pit was opened, "the 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."

All of this indicates that the rapture has already taken place. The church is "the light of the

world” and “the salt of the earth.” Right now the Holy Spirit is holding back Satan until this time that we’re reading about. I believe He is working through the church. Then the church is “caught up,” the restraining force is released and all hell breaks loose on planet earth.

Notice secondly, in verses 3-6, the unleashed power. “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.”

Back in chapter 7, we saw the 144,000 who were sealed by God. God knows those who are His, so He gives them the key, He sets the time limits and God tells them who they can afflict—not those who have “the seal of God on their foreheads.”

“And they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months.” So God sets the time limit. “Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man.”

I’ve never been stung by a scorpion. I don’t like bugs and insects. Years ago I twice found scorpions in our new home when we moved in. We were out in an open area, and these scorpions came in. I had to get my wife to get rid of them. And I was in the Philippines years ago and I saw a coconut weevil. It was a big, black, Darth-Vader like bug. That thing just flew away. I thought, Let’s go hide! That thing can fly! Oh, no; it’s airborne!

I don’t believe these are actual locusts or grasshoppers; they’re demons. Demons can manifest themselves in different ways, shapes and forms. But what a frightening thought of what is going on here! They were able to torment mankind for five months.

Verse 6 says, “In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them.” This shows the pain and torment. It is said that when you’re stung by a scorpion, it affects the nervous system; you feel like your whole body is on fire. Grown men are known to writhe in pain, grind their teeth and foam at the mouth when they are stung. It’s not always fatal, but mostly children die from the sting. These stings are very, very painful.

So death takes a holiday; “men will seek death and will not find it.” Sometimes you think of death as a blessing, as it relieves your pain. But that won’t happen here. They are tormented by these demonic-type creatures that come from the abyssos or the pit.

Thank God that in the world today, the Holy Spirit is restraining evil. But once the church is taken out of the world and the light of the world and the salt of the earth is removed, evil will come upon the earth.

As a footnote, if you’re a Christian, you don’t have to be afraid of demons. The Bible says, “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” Some Christians are so worried that they may become demon possessed. But you are a child of God. You have been sealed by God. You are protected by God. You don’t need to fear demonic powers. But keep your eyes on God and stay in fellowship with Him. Walk in obedience to Him, because demons are real. They are

powerful beings who want to destroy your life.

During this time, people try to commit suicide, but it doesn't work. They are tortured for a period of five months.

They thirdly, from verses 7-10, we see the unveiled appearance. The Bible is graphic in the description of these demons. It says, "The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle." Notice the word "like." That's an indication that a symbolism is being used. They weren't actual horses; they were "like" horses. Many times when prophets had visions, they saw angels as horses pulling fiery chariots. So horses are often in visions of the Bible. "On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth." That's pretty scary.

I was listening to Pastor Skip Heitzig teach on this verse, and he said it reminded him of a teacher he had in elementary school. (Sorry; I couldn't resist that.) Yeah, I remember a few who kind of looked like that.

But what a frightening picture this is. Actually there are eight characteristics describing their appearance. It says, "And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots..."—so it was terrifying and demoralizing—"...with many horses running into battle. They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power was to hurt men five months." So they were wearing a crown as a headdress they were attractive but seductive—they had hair like a woman's; they were ferocious—they had teeth like a lion's; they were strong with their breastplates; they had wings; and they were terrifying and demoralizing.

I realize that a lot of commentators on this passage like to draw correlations to modern warfare. If you read Hal Lindsay's excellent book, *There's A New World Coming*, written back in the '70s on Revelation, he talks about tanks and Cobra helicopters. It could be that John was looking forward to modern warfare and tried to describe it with ancient language. But I think it's better to see that as they come out of the pit, it's actually demonic hoards and demonic darkness that is unleashed on the earth.

Now notice fourthly, in verses 11-12, the unmasked prince over this pit or abyssos. "And they had as king over them..." One of the reasons I don't believe they were actual locusts is because Proverbs 30:27 says that "The locusts have no king." These "locusts" had a king over them. This king is "...the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon." Both of these names mean "destroyer." I believe that this king over the abyssos is none other than Satan, the destroyer."

"One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things." So "woe, woe, woe"; this is the first woe. The pit is opened, demons come out, and for five months, death takes a holiday and men are attacked by these demons.

But, again, I believe the church will be "caught up" before this time of trouble upon planet earth.

Jesus said, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

If you're not a Christian, if you haven't been born again, you're actually under the influence of Satan. You're actually a child of the devil. People don't like to hear that. Jesus said, "You are of your father, the devil." That doesn't mean that you murder people, kill, lie and steal, but you're not a child of God.

The Bible does not teach the universal fatherhood of God. By creation we were all made by God, and we're made in the image of God. But we need to be redeemed in order to become children of God.

Now the second main division is in verses 13-21. We have the sixth trumpet, the army from the river. So there are two armies that are opened up: the one from the pit, verses 1-12; and the army from the river Euphrates, verses 13-21. This second army is the second woe.

I want you to notice three things in this section. First, we see the demons that are released, in verses 13-14. "Then the sixth angel sounded: and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar..."—we got that altar back in chapter 8, verse 3, where the incense was offered up for the prayers of the saints—"...which is before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.'" The fact that these four angels have to be loosed indicates that they were bound. They are bound at the river Euphrates.

The river Euphrates is very significant in Bible history. The Garden of Eden was in the Mesopotamian Valley where the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers come together and then flow into the Persian Gulf. The Euphrates starts north of Turkey, flows through Syria, through modern Iraq and then to the Persian Gulf. This is where man began, and this is where man will end. This is where Adam and Eve sinned and brought the curse on planet earth. This is also where Cain slew his brother, Abel. This is where the tower of Babel was built. This is where Nimrod started the first false religious system. And when we get to Revelation 17-18, we'll see God destroy the religious and commercial systems of Babylon, which is in the world today. This is energized by Satan himself.

Then we see that death returns, verses 15-19. Remember that death had taken a holiday. But now the four angels are loosed. "So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year were released...." In the Greek, some translations would better translate this "the hour and the day and the month and the year." They were released to do what? "...to kill a third of mankind."

Now notice that they were "prepared." Over and over we have this inference that God prepared them. God kept them bound. But He would release them at the point in time when He could use them to serve His purposes, because God is sovereign and God is in control. So even though all hell is breaking loose on earth, God is the one who is controlling things from heaven.

God has a calendar. He is in control and He knows what He's doing.

When Job was being attacked by the devil, the devil first had to get God's permission. I like that. I believe that nothing can come to the child of God but what God permits to happen. It will serve His purpose, for His glory and for our good. And we can rest in that; God is in control.

Now notice this issue here. Verses 15-19 show that death does return. Notice these angels are able to kill one-third of the earth's population. Notice the army: "Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them." That's 200 million in this army. In chapter 16, we'll see that the Euphrates will be dried up so that the kings of the east might come over. It's believed that perhaps China and other eastern nations, like Japan, will come over to start war in the Middle East. So Revelation 9, when these demons are released at the Euphrates river, is prior to Revelation 16.

If you calculate the number of people who have already been killed during the tribulation up to this point, and now you add another one-third of mankind is killed, that means that by this time, half of the earth's population has been decimated.

The earth's population right now is 7 billion 830 million and a few more thousand. So that means that the earth's population goes down to about 3.6 billion. They're just wiped out in a matter of months. So they basically go out and slay mankind. Billions of people die on planet earth.

Verse 17, "And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like..."—catch that—"...the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone." Again, some like to attach modern warfare equipment to these verses like attack helicopters, planes, ships and tanks. But these are demons that are coming out of the river Euphrates.

"Fire, smoke and brimstone" in the King James translation refers to sulphur. When God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, fire and brimstone, or sulphur, and judgment from God came upon them.

Verse 18, "By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed—by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths." How frightening. "For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like..."—here it is again—"...serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm."

When you read these verses, you think, I want to get saved! I want to get raptured! I want to go to heaven! I don't want to be around during this time!

But the thing that is the most frightening to me is verses 20-21, the defiance of the unrepentant. So we have the demons released, death returns and then you see the defiance and the unrepentance of those who are on the earth who haven't yet been killed. "But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent..." So they weren't killed by

the plagues, they saw the wrath of God, they knew it was divine intervention, a demonic attack, yet they wouldn't repent "...of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk." These idols are not the true and living God. "And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts."

These verses, 20-21, are a wrap-up on the first two woes. The first woe was the armies from the pit. The second woe was the armies from the Euphrates River.

But notice that man is still unrepentant. Those who were not killed are still resisting God, running from God and turning from God. They're unrepentant sinners. It shows the hard heart of man.

Notice their sins. They worshipped devils; this is Satan worship. They worshipped idols of gold. In the Bible, there is a parallel between worshipping idols; in Corinthians, Paul says that it's the same thing as worshipping devils or demons. It's the demonic influence in idolatry.

So these people break the first of the Ten Commandments in the Decalogue: "You shall have no other gods before Me." And the second commandment is, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." They break the first two commandments of the Ten Commandments.

I suggest that this is the root of man's problem: they reject the true and living God, so they substitute God for an idol. Or they become materialistic in their view of life; they worship "gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood." They believe there's nothing outside of the physical world.

So when you reject God, God must be replaced with some material object. You worship your money, your house, your car, your power, your position or your intellect. You substitute the true and living God for a god of your own making. But the sad thing is that these gods can't see, hear or walk. That means they can't save you.

At a time like this, you can't call out to your gold and say, "Gold, help me! Gold, save me!" They might say, "No problem. I can handle the tribulation; I have a Visa card. All is well." I don't think so. The Bible says, "For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

Then notice the sins that are being committed by them: "And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts." These are the top sins of the day.

Homicide is on the rise again today. So why are we defunding police departments when murder is on the rise? Crime is on the increase. Life becomes cheap when Christianity lacks influence. If you go to certain countries of the world, life is cheap because of a lack of Christian influence. We, in America, are devaluing life when we kill in the womb and even when the baby comes out of the womb. That's euthanasia and infanticide, and I'm afraid they are with us to

stay because of the lack of Christian influence. When God goes and the Bible goes, life goes; they devalue life. So murder or homicide is on the rise; they are killing one another.

Then notice secondly, there is sorcery. The word “sorcery” is the Greek word “pharmakeia.” We get our word “pharmacy” or “drugs” from it. It’s the idea of witchcraft related to drugs. So murder and drugs are on the increase.

The third is “sexual immorality” or “fornication,” in the King James translation. It’s there. What happened to the word “fornication”? It disappeared from our vocabulary. “Fornication” is the Greek word “porneia.” We get our word “pornographic” from it. The etymology or origin of the word is “to sell one’s body.”

Just this past week in the United States, a huge drug-smuggling sex ring was busted. Lots of people were arrested. Sex trafficking is on the rise and on the increase in our day and age. It will escalate during the tribulation.

But in another sense, those of us who have been around since prior to the ‘60s and we saw the sexual revolution take place in the ‘60s, we don’t believe in fornication, which is sex outside of marriage or premarital sex. We don’t believe in adultery, which is extramarital sex, and we don’t believe in homosexuality. We’ve basically eliminated that, and it has become hate speech if you speak against it. The very sermon I’m preaching now could in a short time get me arrested and thrown into prison. It would certainly be taken off social media.

But this is what God’s Word teaches.

These sins will escalate: fornication, sexual immorality. The Bible says that in the last days, men will be “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” They will be “without affection,” which is family love. They aren’t going to value the family that God has designed.

Then notice last, but not least, “thefts” and robbery. That’s so prevalent today. In Judges 21:25, it tells us that “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” Isn’t that what’s happening today?

Now let me give you a wrap-up. We learned, number one in this chapter, that God is sovereignly in control. You can take that to the bank. God sits on the throne and rules from heaven. Satan cannot do anything except what God allows him to do under His plan and His purpose.

The Protestant reformer, Martin Luther, came under great demonic and Satanic attack because of the role he played in the Reformation period. It is said that one day Satan came to Martin Luther and said, “Let me come into your heart; I want to discuss something very important with you.”

Luther classically responded and said, “I don’t have the keys to the door. Ask God; He’s got them.”

I like that. I've always said that when Satan knocks on the door, let Jesus answer it. Satan will run. The Bible says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

God is sovereign; God is in control.

Secondly, we learned that God is holy and will judge sin. He is righteous. There is such a thing as the righteous wrath of God. "The soul who sins shall die."

Thirdly, we learned that God is merciful and will forgive sin. He has provided salvation in the Person of His Son. When Jesus died on the Cross, He paid the penalty for our sins. When He was about to die He said, "It is finished" or "paid in full." "Then bowing His head, He gave up His spirit." He gave Himself for our sins. So if you believe in Christ, trust in Christ and receive Christ by faith, you can be forgiven.

Now notice that twice, in verses 20 and 21, it says that they "did not repent." "They did not repent of their murders, or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts." These are unrepentant sinners.

I read this quote by William Barclay. He said, "The most terrible situation in life is when the almighty God is powerless to gain entry into the citadel of the human heart. For God has given men the terrible responsibility of being able to lock their hearts against Him."

That's frightening; that men can be on the earth during this awful time during demonic activity with God's wrath being poured out and yet they lock the door of their hearts against God.

That's why Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." He didn't say, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. And if you don't open the door, I'm going to kick it down." No; He said He would just keep knocking.

But there may come a day when He stops knocking, and you don't hear His voice.

That's why the Bible says, "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." Don't put it off. Don't wait.

If you don't know if you're a Christian, if you don't know if you've been born again or if your sins are forgiven, don't go today unrepentant. Don't go without opening the door of your heart and inviting Christ to come in.

If God has spoken to you through this message today, and you're not sure you're a child of God—maybe you don't know that if you died today, you would go to heaven, you've never really trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—I would like to lead you in a prayer right now inviting Christ to come into your heart and to be your Savior.

So as I pray this prayer, I want you to repeat it out loud, right where you are, after me. Make it

from your heart, inviting Christ to come in and be your Lord and Savior. Let's pray.

"Dear Lord Jesus, I'm sorry for my sin. I pray that You'll forgive me and come into my heart and make me Your child. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit, and help me to live for you all the days of my life. I believe in You. I receive You as my Lord and Savior. In Jesus' name. Amen."

If you prayed that prayer and you meant it, God heard that prayer and God will and does forgive your sins.

We'd like to help you get started growing in your walk and relationship with Jesus Christ. God bless you.

If you just prayed with Pastor John to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, we are so excited for you, and we'd like to send you a Bible and some resources to get you started in your relationship with the Lord. Simply click on the Contact link at the top of the page and tell us something like, "I prayed to accept Christ." We'll get your Bible and resources mailed out to you right away.

God bless you and welcome to the family of God.