

PREFACE

We have cited the prophet Joel before to illustrate, as one heading in my Bible has it, God's "Terrible Visitation" during the end times. But in the second chapter of his prophecy we have an explicit reference to the events of the fifth trumpet, even to the description of the beings inflicting the earth. [Turn with me to Joel 2.](#)

Read Joel 2:3-11.

Even so, as we have noted at the end of Revelation Chapter Nine, the Lord God still invites people to repent, as Joel confirms.

Read Joel 2:12-13.

By my reckoning, the emergence of the "locusts" from the bottomless pit gives us the first appearance in the post-Rapture Eschaton of truly demonic beings. There is no way around it: even if one believes they are real locusts, their appearance reveals them as locusts quite literally from hell. But indeed from their description, their behavior, and their marching orders we conclude these are not insects at all.

Seiss: These horrible creatures have a certain degree of intelligence. Commands are addressed to them. They are able to distinguish between those who have the seal of the living God upon their foreheads and other people. They have a king whom they obey. Earthly locusts have no king (Prov. 30:27); but these have a king over them.

These are unnatural but thinking, reasoning beings: they receive and obey their orders not to harm or destroy any foliage, and not to do harm to anyone bearing the seal of God on their foreheads, and not to kill anyone. Furthermore, actual locusts do not have tails that sting men like the sting of a scorpion.

The occasional commentator will state that these locusts have riders (e.g., Seiss). I've scoured the text and I can find no reference at all to riders; under the sixth trumpet, yes, but not this one. All descriptions pertain to the beasts themselves. And all power and all instructions for the campaign are given and addressed to the locusts themselves, not anyone mounted upon them. So we are left with a plague of supernatural beings, or demons, with an appearance and behavior so bizarre, so frightful as to inhabit our worst nightmares.

Let us now examine the appearance and nature of these beings, paying close attention to what the text actually says.

v7

The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads appeared to be crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men.

Eight times in his description of the locusts John uses the Greek *hos*, translated “like” or “as.” This confirms that the apostle, for the benefit of readers of this revelation, is doing his best to paint a picture of thoroughly other-worldly, demonic design. Thus he cannot describe the *whole* of each, for it could not be compared to anything in the history of man. No one at all has ever seen or even thought of creatures like these. The best John can do is describe its *component parts* as “like” things with which the average person would be familiar.

The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle;

The nearest earthly being John can compare to the overall structure and look (perhaps even size?) of these monsters is the horse. Here we may have the first clue that these are something more than just demon-sized insects: Look at a picture of an earthly locust; the word “horse” does not spring to mind.

These were not just like horses, but like horses “prepared for battle.” That is, horses with a lot of stuff all over them, armored plates, etc.; typically for protection, but here perhaps for brutality.

and on their heads appeared to be crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men.

Here again we must not give into the easy mistake of shaping the description into a more palatable or sensible image. It does not say that there were riders wearing crowns who were human beings because they had the face of a man. No, the pronouns “their” and “they” in this passage always refer to the beasties; no rider is mentioned. Even on the heavenly, righteous side of things, created beings can have a bizarre, even hideous to our sensibilities, description. [Please turn back to Chapter Four](#). Beyond the Trinity itself, these are the created beings closest to the throne, probably the most holy of any created being in heaven. But listen to how they are described.

Read Revelation 4:6-8.

My guess is that if any one of us met those creatures on the street, outside the environs of heaven, we would be horrified, we'd run screaming from them. But not in the precincts of heaven. To my mind this plays a part in the resurrection, to the acquisition of new bodies suitable for heaven. At the resurrection—and perhaps even before, when at death our spirit is united with Christ prior to receiving our resurrection body—but certainly at the Resurrection, we are outfitted with tangible flesh suitable for a holy environment (just as the unregenerate are outfitted with flesh that will not be consumed in the lake of fire). And that new body for believers may certainly include a new *perception*, which allows us to recognize beauty, where once, in our corrupt earthly flesh, we would have seen only ugliness.

There appeared to be something the color of gold encircling—which is what the Greek *stephanoi* means—the heads of these creatures, as before (6:2) less a crown of royalty than an honorific, like the wreath given as a prize to the victor. Thus it could be something as simple as a gold-colored band. As to the faces, were they literally a human-like countenance, or an arrangement that, from a distance gave the *impression* of eyes and a nose and a mouth, much as people referred to “the man in the moon” from the arrangement of craters and such on the surface of the moon? Hard to say.

v8

They had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions.

Sidebar: It's funny what the book of the Revelation does to otherwise sensible scholars. It's amazing some of the things one reads. It seems to send them off into la-la land. Take, for example, the old but perfectly respectable commentator Adam Clarke (1800s), who writes in reference to “they had hair as the hair of women” this: “No razor passes upon their flesh. Their hair long, and their beards unshaven.” Really? Where in the world does it say anything about *beards*? Nothing. Where did he come up with that? Let's try very hard to stay with the text; what it says, not what it doesn't say.

More than one commentator passes along the tidbit that this refers to “the antennae of the locust,” because “There is said to be an Arabic proverb in which the antennae of locusts are compared to girls' hair” (Vincent). To be kind, I don't see it. Two stray antennae, no matter how tall or long they are, do not at all bring to mind the hair of women. Is it not possible that, since he described them in the previous verse as “like horses,” this refers to long, flowing manes, as some true horses have?

Since horse's teeth are larger than those of lions, I wonder if this remark might have more to do with the manner in which the mouth and teeth are used, rather than their size.

v9

They had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle.

As any properly outfitted war-horse, these are equipped with “breastplates like breastplates of iron,” which I take to mean a massive or heavy appearance (true iron would be too heavy). And supporting the view that these are *some* sort of locust, John points out that they have wings, and their sound “was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle.” Just as the prophet Joel said:

Their appearance is like the appearance of horses;
And like war horses, so they run.
With a noise as of chariots
They leap on the tops of the mountains,
Like the crackling of a flame of fire consuming the stubble,
Like a mighty people arranged for battle. (Joel 2:4-5)

Note: Joel's text is a “now—not yet” prophecy. The “now” is two-fold: an actual plague of locusts ([Chapter One](#)), from which he draws his imagery, and the Assyrian army's invasion of Judah; the “not yet” is the eschatological setting of our study.

v10

They have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months.

We will see that under the sixth trumpet the lethality of *those* beasts (again, horses, this time with riders) will be “...by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths.” They will have stinging tails as well, but only to “harm.” Here, under the fifth trumpet, the stinging tails will be the instrument, the body part, that inflicts the misery and torment during the five-month period—without any killing.

v11

They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.

Proverbs tells us that

The locusts have no king,
Yet all of them go out in ranks; (Proverbs 30:27)

These “locusts,” however, have a king over them. Curiously John gives his name in both Greek and Hebrew, perhaps to indicate that his administration—his work, his impact—will affect both Gentile and Jew. In the Greek his name is *Apollyon* (Ah-poh-LOO-ohn), and in the Hebrew, *Abaddon* (Ah-ba-DOHN). The Hebrew means “place of destruction” personified; the Greek means “destroyer”—essentially the same.

The Hebrew version, *Abaddon*, has a pedigree in the OT Wisdom literature.

Read Job 26:5-6.

The NIVs and KJVs use “Destruction” (as a proper noun) in place of *Abaddon*; the point of that passage in Job is to confirm God’s sovereignty over even the underworld. Nothing, not even there, is hidden from His sight or is outside His rule. The word is used several more times in Job, Psalms and Proverbs.

Read Psalm 88:10-12.

I have concluded that the fallen angel handed the key, who opens its gates to release the horde of “locusts,” is almost certainly Satan, and that the “angel of the abyss,” the king of the locusts (and anyone else in the pit), is an archangel of Satan, one of his archons (rulers).

The word and name “Destroyer” stands in marked contrast to its opposite: Christ Jesus, who is the Savior. Jesus saves; Satan and his minions destroy.

v12

The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things.

Back at the end of Chapter Eight, after the narrative for the first four trumpets, an eagle flying overhead offers a preview of things to come.

Read Revelation 8:13.

When Jesus, in Matthew 23, repeatedly exclaimed, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” He was either—or both—expressing grief over, or denouncing their behavior and philosophies. Here the same word (*ouai*, oo-WEH) declares a statement of empirical fact: distress *will* come upon you—three times.

Verse twelve in Chapter Nine announces that the first woe (the fifth trumpet) is now behind us—at least its execution—but there are two more woes waiting in the wings. Those will be the sixth trumpet and the seventh, which encompasses all the “bowls of wrath.”

In Revelation 11:14 a similar announcement is made that, “The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly.”

These are “woes” indeed; not just with their suffering, torment, and death, but in the disruption of the very nature of the tripartite intersection of God and Man and Satan. Believers at the time of the Rapture will not be experiencing this firsthand, but just imagine for a moment that you are someone left on earth after that dramatic moment. Set aside your spiritual condition; you are just someone who lived through things the way they used to be, and are now living through the changes taking place during the subsequent seven years of the Tribulation.

Before, before the Rapture, before the Tribulation, there was God in His heaven and Satan somewhere below, with Man in the middle. As someone dwelling on earth, you perceive—in an admittedly simplistic sense—God as goodness and love, and you perceive Satan as evil and hate. But for the most part this is all academic to you; both of these forces—good and evil—are extraneous to your daily life, more philosophical than pragmatic, more thought-experiment than having any practical application to your existence. If pressed, you can imagine these two as actual, living beings, but they are so far distant, so amorphous to your senses that neither occupy much space or time in your life.

As the period of the Tribulation (which, of course, you do not know by that name) begins and proceeds, things on earth begin to get uncomfortable; life becomes increasingly a struggle, with wars, food shortages, peculiar atmospheric effects and cataclysmic upheavals on the earth. An individual in the military-political sphere is making himself known, gathering supporters. Soon he has taken center stage—not just in one nation, but in all. He seems to have all the right answers for all the wrongs in the world. Then, after another series of strange insults to the natural world, you begin to realize that God in heaven may be something more complicated than just “goodness and love.”

It is apparent that most of the “bad” things happening on earth are being instigated from above—from God, or at least His domain in the heavens. The media are flooding the airwaves and the internet with blistering reports all about “The Wrath of God Has Come,” “Ancient Prophecies Fulfilled,” and “Get Out While You Can!” It would seem that your comfortable “God of love” has become a God of hate.

Then one terrible day you awake to skies filled with bizarre creatures released from the bowels of hell itself—horses that fly, or are they locusts with the faces of men? or scorpions with long, flowing hair? They cannot be defined, but fill the air like living pollution, darting here and there, anywhere they please, their long tails flashing like convulsive snakes, stinging painfully every person they touch. In fact, cities and countryside alike are littered with people writhing on the ground in agony, wishing only to die—please, *kill me*, anyone, *please* I can’t stand it!

But no one is permitted to die, and no one is permitted to kill.

No one needs to be told: these are demons, led by demons, created by the one demon worst of all, Satan.

His mask has been removed, and we now see him and his angels for what they truly are.

Destroyers.

John Walvoord: Such is the character of Satan and those who affiliate with him as wicked or fallen angels. Though in the modern world Satan often appears as an angel of light in the role of that which is good and religious, here the mask is stripped away and evil is seen in its true character. Satan and the demons are seen as the destroyers of the souls of men and as those who can only bring affliction. When divine restraint is released, as in this instance, the true character of the evil one is manifested immediately.

Desperate indeed will be the situation of those who know not Christ in these tragic hours preceding His return to judge the wicked world. The tribulation period unmasks human wickedness and also demonstrates the true character of Satan. In our modern day while Satan is still restricted it is easy to forget the great conflict which is raging between the forces of God and the forces of Satan ([referred to in Ephesians 6:12](#)).

In the great tribulation, and especially in the time of the fifth trumpet, with the release of the confined demons the full character of Satan will be starkly manifested. For the first time in history all those who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour will come under demonic possession and affliction. What is true in that hour is also true in some measure today, for there is no deliverance from the power of Satan nor from his affliction apart from salvation in Christ and the delivering power of God.